

Learning About Learning: Lessons on Implementing a KM and Learning Project from the USAID KDMD Project

Resources

What we mean by Resources:

Resources for knowledge management (KM) and learning are no different than the resources required for any project – people, money, infrastructure, information, and tools that support project activities. The distinction lays in the transparent, iterative use of those resources and the efficiencies created by employing KM and learning techniques.

How it works:

From the beginning of any project, the Statement of Work or Statement of Objectives will prescribe the contractually obligated resources and project leadership needs to work together to determine how those resources will be used most effectively through a work planning process. Since resources can be subject to change and dependent on the needs and requirements of the project, leadership should conduct ongoing consultations about the use of available funds, level of effort, and systems interactions for better planning and implementation of project deliverables.

Part of KM and learning means that there must be transparency and a willingness to course correct when indicators and feedback require shifts in initial planning, so consistent discussions about resources will help to make these decisions and ensure that the most appropriate assets are being used at the right time. Indeed, forging ahead with the wrong approach will waste resources and cost more in the long run.

An effective KM and learning project also involves documenting best practices and incorporating lessons (wins and losses). Over time, activities, new experiences, and opportunities may tend to “piggyback” off of one another, thus creating efficiencies and saving resources. The beauty of employing a knowledge and learning approach to resource allocation is that as critical decisions are made in a transparent, collaborative fashion and processes and lessons are discussed, documented, and improved upon, the tendency to reinvent the wheel is reduced, allowing for growth and maximizing investments.

Why it matters:

Planning, implementation, and (in particular) learning is simply not possible without the appropriate resources to create quality products and activities and to support growth and evolution over time. By using resources effectively, KM and learning projects can maximize investments and ensure that goals are achieved in the most cost-efficient, streamlined ways.

What it looks like:

The marketplace for technology is fluid, and KDMD made an early—and unexpected—course correction to move away from a previous platform that had been used to develop Microlinks in 2004. In early 2007, two open source technologies were analyzed—Drupal and Plone—to determine if they were viable replacements, but they were deemed too immature. However, after receiving a week of training and testing the proprietary upgrade in Fall 2008, it became clear that the technology would not meet USAID’s requirements. Therefore, Drupal was re-evaluated in Spring 2009 and determined to be better suited to KDMD’s needs. Based on this experience, KDMD transitioned its resources to employ Drupal across the KDMD-managed KDID family of sites.

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