2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

CLA for A Successful Joint Outreach and Recruitment

Name:

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Organization:

The American University in Cairo (AUC)

Summary:

The USAID Egyptian Pioneers, launched in November 2022, aims to build a more inclusive and capable Egyptian workforce while contributing to climate goals such as environment and energy. The American University in Cairo (AUC) is administering the program in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR). Since its inception, the program has been harmonizing its efforts with current USAID activities to benefit from the knowledge solicited and build on the lessons learned and best practices from these Activities to reach the optimal results.

The program is adopting the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach, which is a set of systematic and intentional practices that help improve development effectiveness. The CLA approach for the USAID Egyptian Pioneers incorporates learning and mitigation strategies for all the challenges and risks that may encounter the inclusive recruitment of the first cohort of students from all over Egypt and with all segments of the population represented.

Collaboration between the USAID Egyptian Pioneers and the USAID Scholars Activity was particularly crucial, as both activities will be recruiting scholarship cohorts in 2023 and 2024 and will need to ensure complementary rather than competitive approach. Current undergraduate scholarship activities also maintain close communication and coordination to share lessons learned and synchronize approaches when unexpected challenges arise, including with shared public university partners.

USAID Egyptian Pioneers and USAID Egyptian Scholars Activity are working together to recruit 250 students in joint efforts building on lessons learned from previous cohorts awarded by the USAID Scholars Activity. The outreach campaign and the Online application were launched, and more than 991 applications were received during the first three weeks from across the country. 732 students signed up for the information webinars that were conducted jointly to answer all the inquiries from interested candidates.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

The outreach and recruitment process of the scholarship students is an intricate process that requires knowledge and understanding of all the fine details and steps to reach the most deserving and talented students that this type of program is targeting. The scholarship selection process is based on specific selection criteria: financial need, high academic achievement, community involvement, and leadership potential. USAID Egyptian Pioneers and USAID Scholars Activity are jointly recruiting scholarship cohorts in FY 2023 and are ensuring complementary rather than competitiveness between the two projects. Both programs collaborated to recruit 250 students in joint efforts building on lessons learned from previous cohorts recruited and awarded by the USAID Scholars Activity.

The adapted methodology was the outcome of series of learning meetings and workshops attended to share the learning gained through experience from previous recruitment processes of the previous cohorts. This strategic collaboration between the two projects was built with a profound commitment to improve and enhance diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the process.

Following the announcement of the scholarships and the launch of the Online application, joint information webinars were conducted. Both teams from the USAID Egyptian Pioneers and USAID Scholarship Activity facilitated the webinars, presented the scholarship opportunities and answered all the questions posed by the attendees. Student Ambassadors from the USAID Scholars Activity participated in the Online webinars with their experience as scholarship students. USAID/Egypt Facebook Live, TV and radio shows were promoting the scholarships offered by both programs to reach the targeted segments of the Egyptian community.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Internal Collaboration

Continuous Learning & Improvement

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

The USAID Egyptian Pioneers employed the CLA approach from the start to introduce an enhanced package of tools for outreach and recruitment activities that would cover Egypt's governorates and enhance the inclusion of the different segments of the population. It was recognized that the situation requires the two project teams to work collaboratively, complementing all the efforts exerted on that front rather than working competitively. Additionally, the collaborative approach was successfully adapted to achieve results solicited by the previous USAID-funded sister projects administered by the American University in Cairo and other implementers.

Before the actual start of the operations, the USAID Egyptian Pioneers and USAID Scholar Activity teams conducted desktop research to map out the universities and majors that serve Egypt's priority sectors and effectively respond to the fast-paced and growing crisis of climate change through climate mitigation and adaptation. The results of the desktop research were shared between both projects w to start planning for the respective cohorts distribution and matching with universities and programs that correspond with Egypt Priority sectors and sub-sectors. Then the two projects designed the outline for the outreach and recruitment plan to share it with the service provider for discussion and implementation. This is being done through a chain of meetings with thorough discussions to determine the best selection criteria for the selection of students primarily based on financial need and how well they fit into the program.

To ensure the inclusiveness of all segments of the targeted Egyptian Youth, learning sessions were conducted to share the knowledge and skills of the different team members involved in the process. The results of these sessions were used to adapt the management of the outreach and recruitment process. The recruitment process is a crucial aspect of ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusiveness among the students.

USAID Egyptian Pioneers and USAID Scholars Activity started deploying a network of current scholarship students and alumni of previous programs to help with the outreach process and act as Ambassadors to the applicants who seek information about the program. Answering their frequently asked questions and sharing their personal experiences about the program.

USAID Egyptian Pioneers' collaborative focus and co-location with the USAID Scholars Activity have led to the facilitation of sharing of expertise, knowledge, and resources, between the two project teams. By creating this space of collaboration and knowledge sharing between the two projects, the whole process was tapping into a range of skill sets and resources, that reflected diverse perspectives and broad buy-in. Team members from all technical areas and expertise with similar tasks contributed to the refinement of the process and added innovative ideas and concepts. Together, they tested assumptions and built consensus around critical problems, barriers, and potential solutions. Both teams have merged and formed one consolidated team with diverse expertise in different aspects of the recruitment process. They harnessed all their technical knowledge and expertise for enhanced results and outcomes.

4. **RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.**

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

B. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Collaboration with a sister project like USAID Scholars activity was very significant for the USAID Egyptian Pioneers technical team decision-making process. The safe learning space the teams managed to create was vibrant with multitudes of lessons learned and best practices. Pausing and reflecting for both teams was a priority at this stage of the program cycle. This was crucial to reflect on the new learning and knowledge and adapt management accordingly. Before that, USAID Egyptian Pioneers implemented an intra-organizational collaboration which was characterized by information exchange among the Activities dealing with similar categories of beneficiaries and working under a similar mandate. The entire learning journey was implemented in a strategic way to enhance the organizational effectiveness and the efficient use of its resources. It is a work in progress to reach successful collaborations among USAID-funded projects. The USAID Egyptian Pioneers program has "pioneered" the endeavor of successful collaborations among USAID-funded projects and will continue to build on its outcomes. This collaboration was a great opportunity to demonstrate knowledge, experience and skills that contributed to enhancing productivity and building trusting relationships among the teams.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

The American University in Cairo (AUC), has modeled the highest standards of an organizational environment that supports collaborating, learning, and adapting efforts. AUC is fostering trust among team members which led to building a culture of continuous learning and improvement. This approach was instrumental and successful in overcoming major challenges faced by the project team members. This strategic collaboration between USAID Egyptian Pioneers and the USAID Scholars Activity was done on a strong foundation that allowed this coherence and harmony to overcome challenges and achieve results. There are some anticipated challenges to the outreach and recruitment activities which will be dealt with as they arise. The mitigation strategies are already in place and are built on lessons learned derived from recruiting the previous cohorts of the USAID Scholars Activity. Some of these challenges are validating the financial information in the application, given the new drastic changes taking place nowadays due to the inflation and the devaluation of the Egyptian Pound. Also, reaching out to the most talented and deserving students with a disability where USAID Egyptians Pioneers invested some considerable efforts in reaching out externally to organizations specialized in this area to explore potential collaboration to ensure inclusiveness and equity. The project also reached out to another USAID project working in the field of women to Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment women and girls have equal rights and access to resources and services, and societies thrive. The USAID Egyptian Pioneers is well underway on its CLA journey which will always remain a methodology and an approach that guides all its endeavors to provide the best services.