2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Fostering Collaboration: Enhancing Guidance Documents with CLA

Name:

Samantha Levine-Finley and Nora Hurd

Organization:

USAID RFS and the FTF KDLT Activity

Summary:

The Feed the Future Knowledge, Data, Learning, and Training (KDLT) mechanism was asked by the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) to help co-design and lead a process to update 22 Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) Activity Design Guidance documents (ADGs). This set the stage for a highly collaborative activity between RFS subject matter experts, key RFS activity leads and several members of the KDLT mechanism. Challenges such as limited resources, strict timelines, and managing complex multi-stakeholder processes were present. To address these challenges, KDLT employed several Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approaches.

KDLT's CLA approaches with RFS focused on continuous learning and improvement, and knowledge management (KM). KDLT implemented streamlined KM processes, created templates and instructions for consistency, and fostered collaboration through coordinated meetings and feedback sessions. KDLT also developed a KM repository to assist future iterations of the ADGs.

Given the project's shifting expectations, multiple stakeholders, and dynamic timelines, KDLT felt it crucial to employ adaptive approaches. KDLT saw strong internal collaboration, adaptive management, and flexibility as necessary to overcome obstacles and keep the project on track. To mitigate limited resources, KDLT worked closely with RFS activity managers to make accurate scoping decisions, set clear timelines, and prioritize tasks. Effective communication, detailed project planning, and constant updates helped navigate the project's complexity. KDLT used practical instructions, reminder mechanisms, and clear communication channels to maintain clarity and alignment.

Creation of 22 GFSS ADGs that aligned with best practices and clarified concepts in the revised GFSS resulted from applying CLA, as well as a KM repository that would aid future iterations.

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 KDLT contract supports USAID's Resilience and Food Security Bureau in learning, knowledge management, training and capacity building. USAID's RFS requested that KDLT assist with updating 22 GFSS guidance documents. The ADGs support Missions in designing and implementing Feed the Future activities that align with the GFSS. The GFSS is a whole-of-government strategy to promote global food security, resilience, and nutrition. The first GFSS launched in 2016 and expired at the end of September 2021. As part of the effort to update and implement the refreshed GFSS for 2022 – 2026, USAID needed to update the ADGs provided to Missions.

The RFS and KDLT team faced multiple challenges, including the lack of documentation of the previous ADG development process, limited resources, a strict timeline, and managing numerous stakeholders within and outside of USAID. Of the 22 guidance documents, more than half needed to be written from scratch to reflect the new and updated concepts, priorities, and language in the revised GFSS. KDLT used multiple CLA approaches to provide crucial support and innovative solutions. KDLT created streamlined KM processes, trackers, and documentation to allow for effective project management throughout the effort. KDLT created templates and instructions to ensure consistency across the ADGs and adopted collaborative approaches through coordinated meetings with lead ADG drafters and USAID stakeholders to foster collaboration and feedback. KDLT created and executed internal and external dissemination plans to ensure wide distribution and usage of the finalized guidances. Further, KDLT created a KM repository that documented these processes and templates to assist those involved in future iterations of the guidance documents.

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

Continuous Learning & Improvement

Knowledge Management

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

KDLT and RFS pursued continuous learning and improvement as a key goal of the CLA approach. KDLT leveraged project management tools, engaged in reflective practices, and gathered continuous feedback to identify practices that needed improvement and adjusted processes based on feedback. CLA approaches were critical to the success of the project, given that expectations, stakeholders, and timelines changed over time. Several weeks into the process, a new step of consulting other U.S. government agencies was added to the review stage, which increased the complexity of the process. Early on, the plan focused on having groups of ADGs completed by certain dates; however, the reality of staff ' s limited bandwidth to gather data, collaborate with others, draft the documents, and move them through the review process made it impossible to prescribe specific deadlines. Instead, KDLT worked with RFS to tailor timelines for each individual ADG and associated subject matter lead. As such, the process needed to involve strong internal collaboration, relationships, and adaptive management.

KDLT launched the CLA approach by convening key stakeholders (RFS management, USAID staff, and technical experts, as well as external partners in the federal interagency), to establish a shared understanding of the project ' s goals, objectives, and timelines. This kickoff set the stage for ongoing engagement, feedback loops, and technical reviews. KDLT initiated regular meetings, with a running shared agenda with lead drafters and internal stakeholders. The shared agenda served as the basis for meetings and ensured that the needed actions were accomplished, and next steps identified. RFS also consulted with Mission staff, the primary audience for the ADGs, through Key Informant Interviews, a survey, and Focus Group Discussions to better understand their priorities and needs. This data helped to inform the content, format, and design of the ADGs. Throughout the drafting process, KDLT fostered a culture of collaboration with shared Google Sheet trackers, templates, instructions, and meeting notes to promote open, transparent, and ongoing dialogue among various stakeholders and ensure all stakeholders had visibility on the process and required steps. KDLT also worked with RFS to create visual flow charts of the drafting, multi-phase review, and four-stage clearance process. These visuals were shared with lead drafters, as well as their approving officials and leadership, to improve clarity and help each person understand their roles and the relevant timelines.

KDLT also supported collaboration and learning between lead drafters, given the interconnected nature of the guidance document topics. KDLT created a KM repository of documents, guides, and examples that lead drafters could access throughout the process, and also shared the ADGs with other drafters as they were completed to help build stronger technical connections between the guidance documents. The team also offered 1:1 drafting support for lead drafters as requested. Lead drafters provided regular feedback so that KDLT could adaptively manage the process and adjust processes. Adopting a systematic approach to KM was key throughout KDLT ' s work. From the beginning of the project KDLT ensured capturing, sharing, and generating knowledge, and building a KM depository that could be shared with all needed participants. KDLT created templates and instructions for all stages of the work to ensure efficiency and consistency, including templates for email communications, clearance processes, and dissemination plans that could easily be repurposed for multiple occasions. Knowing that updating these documents would likely recur in 2027, KDLT facilitated an after action review (AAR—pause and reflect) with RFS and lead drafters, and left behind a repository of processes, templates, guidances, and a standard operating procedure (SOP) that future process managers could use during the next iteration.

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

Through meaningful collaboration, learning, and adapting, KDLT and RFS created 22 GFSS ADGs that align with the best practices, clarify concepts, and recommend programming principles in the revised GFSS. The ADGs provide key resources for Missions and implementing partners to build efficient activities and achieve development objectives. RFS wants Missions to see the guidance documents as relevant and practical and refer to them before and during activity design processes to ensure alignment with the strategy.

KDLT and RFS ensured that Missions could easily access the ADGs via Agrilinks.org and FeedtheFuture.gov. RFS also held presentations to Missions and shared materials via emails and social media posts. Between February and May 2023, the guidance documents had more than 2,000 views on Agrilinks. Furthermore, KDLT and RFS created a five-year dissemination plan that ensures impactful internal and external distribution of the guidances over the next years. RFS expects that this wide dissemination strategy will result in greater organizational effectiveness based on robust, aligned Feed the Future activity designs.

It is also expected that the processes, templates, KM best practices, documentation, and collaboration that RFS and KDLT developed will lay a solid and effective foundation for improved organizational effectiveness for multiple other multi-phased and complex projects that involve various stakeholders, such as writing and updating Feed the Future GFSS Country Plans that serve as a framework for the designed activities (informed by referencing the ADGs).

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?**

Limited resources presented a significant challenge and required KDLT to make accurate scoping decisions, explore alternative solutions, and set clear timelines. The tight timeline posed a challenge, as all 22, 10-page guidances were aimed to be published within six months. KDLT was transparent about the timeline to manage expectations and foster understanding among team members and stakeholders. Having a core KDLT and RFS team that met on a weekly basis enabled a smooth process and efficient collaboration. KDLT embraced flexibility, allowing for adjustments without compromising the project's objectives. KDLT mitigated the impact of resource constraints by conducting an assessment of available resources and prioritizing to ensure that goals were met within the given constraints; ensuring a shared understanding of the time limitations and sending regular reminders; and leveraging existing resources and creating editable templates. To manage the multi-phased nature of the project, KDLT developed a detailed Gantt chart that outlined timelines, assigned responsibilities, and defined tasks for each stage. Effective communication and constant updates were essential to ensure that everyone understood their roles and responsibilities. Setting reminders and maintaining regular check-ins helped keep the project on track. Advice for others: Develop a detailed project plan that includes all the steps, responsibilities, and expectations; provide a visual representation of the timeline for easier communication to stakeholders; identify preferred communication channels; ask about potential derailers; and use familiar tools and document formats. Communicate constantly to maintain clarity and alignment: Build recurring meetings into the project schedule, send out agendas beforehand, and communicate the goals and needed preparation. Minimize overwork with practical instructions: Write clear instructions for each step. For example, KDLT encouraged reviewers to only focus on essential revisions, minimizing unnecessary changes, and expediting the feedback process.