

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

### Processes

#### *What we mean by Processes:*

Knowledge management and learning processes are the series of steps taken from the initial planning to the final implementation of activities towards a goal that allow for learning, reflection, and growth.

#### *Why it matters:*

These processes create an environment in which teams and stakeholders can continuously learn and grow in an iterative manner that ultimately speeds innovation and the evolution of goals into a comprehensive agenda.

#### *How it works:*

There are a series of tools and activities that used routinely, become processes by which projects can learn and manage knowledge – both internally and externally. Most importantly, teams should find the processes that work best in their context, those steps that people respond to and easily integrate into their workflow. When the benefits of these processes are demonstrated and used to improve routines and impact, there is a sense of shared enthusiasm and the team and stakeholders buy-in and contribute readily. As with any learning activity, these processes should be monitored over time and changed or adapted to accommodate new realities.

#### *What it looks like:*

Over the course of the KDMD Project, the team conducted 79 After-Action Reviews (AARs), both internally and externally. These mini-assessments provided a snapshot of how activities were going, what could be improved, what needed to change, and what was working in order to inform future implementation. At times this was a formal process, but often they were informal brainstorming sessions. Lessons were captured and shared across the team for quick adoption. What resulted was an immediate ability to course correct, try new things, and track progress towards goals.

#### *Learn More:*

Some processes to consider include:

- Meetings (Team, Portfolio, and Program) – although meetings can be time consuming, holding semi-regular check-ins with the whole team and individual, focused components of larger teams provides an opportunity to share information and ideas and make sure that everyone is on the same page.
- Office Hours – office hours provide a specific time for team members to talk with program leadership (such as the COR) to discuss the status of activities, request approvals, present challenges, and build relationships.

- KSLam – Knowledge Sharing and Learning in the Morning (KSLam) is a KDMD trademark that could be replicated by any project. Essentially, KSLams are an opportunity for team members to present an interesting or innovative topic for group discussion.
- Retreats – annual retreats provide the entire team an occasion to regroup and evaluate goals, build team cohesion, and consider approaches for achieving desired outcomes.
- Wiki – a team wiki provides a central place to share knowledge and “how-tos” on project specific activities and resources.
- After Action Reviews (AARs) – an assessment conducted after a project or major activity that allows team members and leaders to discover (learn) what happened and why, reassess direction, and review both successes and challenges.
- Testing and Capturing over time – project management systems (ie: Basecamp) can store progress on specific activities and provide historical data on files, messages, to dos, comments, etc that help inform a project’s evolution.
- Reports – monthly analytics, semi-annual reports, final reports, and learning and impact reports are all examples of documents that track progress over time and are generally required by most projects. A strong learning team will make these reports living documents and integrate lessons and new ideas on a continual basis as opposed to a “checking the box” exercise.

