

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

Services

What we mean by Services:

Knowledge Management (KM) and learning services involve a spectrum of activities that together build a dynamic practice that integrates knowledge generation, capture, sharing, and application. These services often include events, websites, trainings, and M&E which can be approached individually but when connected demonstrate a mature, comprehensive KM and learning system.

How it works:

Typically, new clients are initially interested in one or two unique KM and learning services, such as trainings or web development. Through a strategic work planning process, goals and audiences are defined in a manner that generates a bigger picture approach. After all, the assumed solution is not always the most appropriate option for achieving specific goals. Lessons and best practices from across the services should be drawn upon to support ideas and make recommendations that align with these intentions. Once stakeholders see how the services can work together to maximize their vision, the process becomes intuitive and more and more opportunities arise.

For KM and learning services to thrive, a number of critical factors need to be in place. The project should foster a culture that supports innovation, research, and collaboration. In such a context, the team is willing to try new things, has a long-term vision, is transparent through regular check in meetings, maintains open and trusting relationships, and is clear around roles, responsibilities, and outcomes. Once established, these factors enable the team to determine the most appropriate array of services and make recommendations that achieve goals in a strategic, engaging manner.

Why it matters:

Taken individually, each service has value. When combined, efforts are maximized to create a seamless KM and learning system that strengthens overall development objectives. This contributes to the knowledge cycle whereby new ideas and information are constantly being generated and used to inform future efforts.

Ultimately, these services intend to change the overall industry, not a single project or agency.

What it looks like:

Under the KDMD Project, several USAID operating units bought in based on their interest in developing a website to share information with other international development practitioners. During the discovery process, however, it became obvious that the actual goal included a larger agenda such as engaging these stakeholders and increasing their participation in the work of the Agency. Web development is a critical KM and learning service, but without the integration of other services it can be stagnant and limited. In correlation with online and in-person events, trainings, social media engagement and other communications efforts, communities of practice, etc, these larger goals can be met more comprehensively, thus leading to more significant impact.

Learn More:

When providing KM and learning services, one of the first steps is to scope activities from a knowledge and learning perspective. During this process, the partners determine the development objectives and suggest options for delivery. Engaging the right people in the rationale and structure of this approach brings it to life, and providing examples will facilitate understanding. Further steps entail thinking about growth; wherein individual services and activities evolve into a more mature KM and learning system. In order to ensure a continuity of services the partners need to build trust, communicate about their work, and document lessons (on a wiki or other knowledge sharing platform).

Caution should be exercised in regards to lack of synergy, poor timing, and disjointed objectives. Project teams should think of ways to coordinate with other implementing partners in order to maximize their various activities, as is often accomplished through MOUs and agreements outlining standards of performance. For that to happen, a team should expose ideas and be open to new opportunities. Timing services properly is crucial in order to avoid hasty jobs of poor quality.



An infographic developed by the KDMD Project to clarify key services.

Examples:

In order to create a comprehensive KM and learning project, an organization needs to think about the larger learning strategy as opposed to any unique and strictly traditional KM or learning service. For example, under AMAP (KDMD's predecessor project) task orders focused on services such as training and web development. As a follow-on project, KDMD was designed to be more comprehensive and adaptive to emerging practices.

Working closely with partners and drawing on a diverse skill set, KDMD had the opportunity to provide better integrated KM and learning services such as brownbags, brainstorming sessions, course development, debates, events, online exchanges, focus groups, research, roundtables, trainings, web development,

after-action reviews (AARs), assessment reports for learning and impact (ARLIs), communities of practice, database development and management, interviews (ie: video interviews, exit interviews), newsletters, webinars, screencasts, graphic design, Twitter chats, learning networks, and many other activities to support program goals in creative ways.