

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

STREAMLINING OF AUTOMATED DIRECTIVES SYSTEM (ADS) CHAPTER 201

OCTOBER 28, 2020

OVERVIEW

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Acting Administrator John Barsa has streamlined Chapter 201 of our ADS, Program Cycle Operational Policy, to shift our emphasis from bureaucracy to the real work of supporting development progress. The reformed policy responds to calls from the field to streamline the Agency's processes for designing and implementing projects. It also harmonizes, rationalizes and streamlines the design of activities, and our guidance for monitoring, evaluation, collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA). These changes build on revisions to ADS Chapter 201 earlier this year to improve strategic planning, in addition to integrating the Journey to Self-Reliance throughout USAID's Program Cycle.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

The Design and Implementation of Projects

- **Projects are Optional.** USAID's Missions determine whether a project approach is the most effective means to advance results in their *Country Development Cooperation Strategies* (CDCSs).
- **The New Project Document—When Used—is Short and Concise.** The new Project Development Document (PDD) is a short template (maximum 10-15 pages) that facilitates decision-making.
- **The PDD is a Conceptual Framework, not an Authorization Document.** Missions and other Operating Units approve activities through stand-alone Activity Approval Memoranda (AAMs) with reference to the project that they support, where applicable.
- **The Project-Design Process Is Simpler.** The Phase-One planning stage ideally occurs through a meeting with written minutes. Missions also decide whether to pursue a rigorous, upfront design, or a more iterative process in which they fill in details over time.
- **Missions Have More Discretion to Determine When to Conduct Mandatory Analyses.** For example, Missions may conduct analyses of environment and climate risk during the design of an activity when they often know more information.
- **We Have Eliminated the Onerous Amendment Processes.** Instead, Project Teams should update or revalidate PDDs at least once a year, ideally in connection with their regular portfolio reviews.

The Design and Implementation of Activities

- **The Policy Establishes a Simple, Two-Phase Design Process for Activities.** Phase One, Activity-Design Planning, can occur through a meeting with written minutes. Guidance for Phase Two, Activity Design, differs depending on the type of mechanism (acquisition and assistance [A&A], an agreement with a partner government, etc.).
- **Missions and Other Operating Units (OUs) Use AAMs to Approve All Activities.** These memoranda authorize teams to proceed with releasing a solicitation or, in some cases, finalizing an agreement. They also document how the activity supports a larger project and/or CDCS, as applicable.
- **AAM Amendments are Not Required to Execute Changes.** While OUs might decide to clear certain types of changes, this is not required. The policy clarifies that for A&A mechanisms, final authority to modify an agreement rests with the Contracting/Agreement Officer.
- **The A&A Design-to-Procurement Process is Mapped in One, User-Friendly Reference.** [Mandatory Reference ADS 201mba](#) integrates the requirements of the ADS 200 and 300 series of Chapters in a handy, step-by-step guide for a smoother design-to-procurement process.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and CLA

- **The Policy Streamlines the Performance Management Plan (PMP).** ADS Chapter 201 integrates the content of PMPs into one cohesive plan. Performance indicators are only required for Intermediate Results (IRs). OUs may submit Performance Indicator Reference Sheets after the approval of a PMP.
- **Revisions Eliminate the Need for Duplicative Content in Monitoring Evaluation, and Learning (MEL).** The PMP may refer to existing documents/ databases instead of duplicating them in the plan itself. The PMP should reflect any project-level priorities for monitoring, evaluation, and CLA. Stand-alone Project MEL Plans no longer exist.
- **Evaluation Requirements are No Longer Tied to Projects.** Instead, OUs must conduct 1) at least one evaluation per IR; 2) at least one evaluation for activities for which the Total Estimated Cost/Total Estimated Amount is at or above \$20 million; and, 3) an impact evaluation of any new, untested approach. One evaluation can fulfill more than one requirement.
- **New Guidance on Activity MEL Plans Harmonizes Requirements, Supports Implementation.** The revised guidance addresses data-management requirements governed by statute and [ADS Chapter 579](#), and ensures OUs collect feedback from beneficiaries and use it to improve implementation. It also includes recommendations for integrating risk-management into Activity MEL Plans.

DOCUMENTS

- [ADS 201, Program Cycle Operational Policy](#)
 - ◆ [Additional Help: Project Development Document \(PDD\)](#)
 - ◆ [ADS 201mai, Activity Approval Memorandum \(AAM\)](#)
 - ◆ [ADS 201mba, Process for Designing Activities for Acquisition and Assistance \(A&A\) Mechanisms](#)
 - ◆ [Additional Help to ADS 201: List of Pre-Obligation Requirements for New Activities](#)
 - ◆ [ADS 201mad, Summary Checklist of Legal Requirements for Obligating Funds into Development Objective Assistance Agreements \(DOAGs\)](#)