

This Case Story was submitted to the 2016 CLA Case Competition. The competition was open to individuals and organizations affiliated with USAID and gave participants an opportunity to promote their work and contribute to good practice that advances our understanding of collaborating, learning, and adapting in action.

Better Bureaus for Business Partnerships: Collaborating Across USAID to Improve the Development Impact of Private Sector Partnerships

Nicole Cavino

U.S. Global Development Lab



Global Partnerships Practitioners Forum 2016. *Paul Morse.*

What is the general context in which the story takes place?

In 2010, USAID Forward set the ambitious goal of leveraging private sector resources and financial capital to increase the agency's development impact. In the following years, USAID took on a number of initiatives—including Feed the Future, Power Africa, and the Young African Leaders Initiative—that relied heavily on the active involvement of the private sector. This year, the Sustainable Development Goals prioritize engagement with nontraditional development actors to further development impact.

What was the main challenge or opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?

In this context, building partnerships with the private sector is an approach that being adopted throughout USAID. Agency staff across technical and regional bureaus are identifying new opportunities and engaging with businesses for development impact, but many still find themselves operating in isolation, facing a range of shared challenges and developing creative solutions that may go unshared.

The U.S. Global Development Lab's Center for Transformational Partnerships (CTP) has built a private sector engagement (PSE) community of practice that is a resource to USAID staff working on and interested in collaborating, learning, and adapting new and innovative approaches to private sector engagement. By engaging in robust dialogue and offering a breadth of advisory services to technical and regional experts across the Agency, CTP aims to expand and strengthen this community of practice, build capacity to engage the private sector, and bolster agency programming toward greater, more lasting development impact.

Describe the CLA approach or activity, explaining how the activity integrated collaborating, learning, adapting culture, processes, and/or resources as applicable.

The PSE community of practice is a series of CLA activities threaded together and aimed at building capacity across USAID to better engage business in development.

It starts small. CTP tracks and notes more than 1,000 individuals and their work to incorporate and engage the private sector so we can identify and leverage their "PSE readiness." We use this data to capture and analyze the staff members trained and engaged in PSE activities and using CTP advisory services, such as PSE assessments. We evaluate that data against the reported partnerships data, allowing us to understand where we are having the greatest impact and adjust and improve our work.

CTP engages with this community through CLA activities, including direct, limited engagements, such as phone calls for information or semi-regular email outreach highlighting innovative and interesting new PSE activities and approaches from across USAID. Other activities go deeper: CTP hosts quarterly all-agency calls featuring experts from across USAID's bureaus and missions — not just the Global Development Lab or CTP — to discuss how they are engaging the private sector in new and interesting ways. Speakers are encouraged to discuss their PSE challenges and successes, ensuring that best practices and lessons learned are exchanged and shared widely.

CTP offers a five-day in-person training course to enable and empower staff to consider and undertake PSE in their work. In the development and delivery of this training, we engage other parts of the agency — the Development Credit Authority, the Office of Private Capital and Microenterprise, the Office of the General Counsel, and other operating units. Their unique perspectives inform the structure of the course, while their in-depth experience allows them to



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



deliver dynamic, relevant training sessions in USAID missions and at headquarters. CTP's training team has integrated adult learning best practices into the course design by including icebreakers, hands-on activities, role playing, videos, Q&A sessions, and guest panels.

CTP's CLA activities require time and are tailored to varying levels of expertise. Beginners need a space to acquire a baseline of information, while experts require a place where they can troubleshoot, connect, and learn about emerging practices in their field. CTP's Private Sector Engagement Forum (PSEF), held biennially since 2009, provides this space. The 2015 event attracted more than 120 PSE practitioners from throughout the agency, with more than one-third of the participants attending from USAID missions. An additional 50 percent came from bureaus other than the Global Development Lab, including representatives from the Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Middle East regional bureaus, as well as the Bureaus for Global Health; Food Security; Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance; and E3. In addition to these USAID participants, PSEF included more than 30 private sector representatives and external experts who shared their experiences, opinions, and outside perspectives on working with USAID.

The planning is inclusive, designed from beginning to end to incorporate private sector practices and experiences from across USAID and to foster collaboration and in-depth learning. The registration process used crowd-sourcing to ensure that topics and speakers focused on learning, adapting, and sharing. Roughly 80 unique staff members from across USAID were engaged as speakers or content contributors; 62 (more than 77 percent) were from teams outside the Global Development Lab and CTP. In one unique Learning Lab-inspired session, PSEF featured a [peer assist](#), in which participants could troubleshoot specific PSE challenges with colleagues.

With the U.S. Department of State, Concordia, and the PeaceTech Lab, CTP was also a partner for Global Partnerships Week, a celebration and showcase of the critical role of public-private partnerships in promoting diplomacy and development worldwide. As part of the week, CTP co-hosts the global Partnerships Practitioners Forum, which in 2016 convened more than 260 participants and 60 speakers to discuss, explore, and share experiences with new and innovative approaches to partnerships.

Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources, implementation challenges or obstacles, and enabling factors)?

Each of our CLA activities has faced its own unique challenges. Managing a community of practice of more than 1,000 members, and the data around it, can be complex, mundane, and daunting. However, data ensure that we understand the PSE community and helps us evaluate and learn from our work, adapting and adjusting formats, speakers, and content for our events, training programs, calls, and knowledge exchanges.

With each training delivery, for example, we reflect and then integrate new ideas and approaches into our materials and presentations for richer content and more effective delivery. And, over nearly a year of planning, we ensure that PSEF adapts and evolves to improve with each delivery—from logistics and space utilization to content delivery, speakers, and session formats.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



It has also been challenging to sustain the community of practice through frequent institutional changes at USAID. From the Global Development Alliance (GDA) Secretariat to the Office of Development Partners, to Innovative Development through Entrepreneurship Acceleration, and now the U.S. Global Development Lab, CTP has always prioritized partnerships, but institutional change is difficult and can hinder consistent messaging, approaches, and engagement at various points. Through our evolution, we have taken different approaches to engaging the rest of the agency, some more successful than others, but we have now gained unprecedented reach and institutionalization of the PSE approach by building on the successes and learning from the failures of our earlier work.

For example, our work to facilitate capacity building across the agency and convene a robust community of practice is very different from our original work, nearly 10 years ago. Then, as the GDA team, we were *the* experts in building partnerships with the private sector. We encouraged and rewarded the use of partnerships for development by staff, partners, and stakeholders through initiatives like our incentive fund, which was a pool of funds that missions could leverage to support innovative partnerships. Now, we are encouraging more widespread ownership that is more diffuse and enables us to provide critical support and coordination to all of our missions, bureaus, and operating units. Partnerships and PSE are ingrained as part of our work across the agency, and innovative and transformational models, pilots, and strategies are contributing to sustainable, long-term impact.

With your initial challenge/opportunity in mind, what have been the most significant outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?

We track the more than 1,000 USAID staff who are current members of the community of practice, linking each person with how they have engaged through all-agency calls, training, PSEF, Global Partnerships Week, and other means. We are also constantly adding, adjusting, and leveraging this community of practice for our work.

Our work reaches across the agency; for example, 193 staff participated in our quarterly all-agency calls in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015. Following each call, we send an email to participants to share materials, including the audio recording and PowerPoint files, which are also posted on our internal Pages site. Through Constant Contact, we track open and click rates and capture the information our community finds most compelling. Of the 1,047 people to whom we sent the most recent email, more than 55 percent opened the email and more than 12 percent clicked on a link — strong performance for this type of outreach.

The FY 2015 five-day training saw participation from 256 people in nine country missions, across every region and headquarters. We conduct participant evaluations during the training, with each session consistently rating highly, at 4 or above on a 1 to 5 scale. Furthermore, we have recently developed and launched a survey to follow up with participants six months after the training to understand which materials, sessions, speakers, and topics have proven most helpful in their work and what might be improved.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



The 120 USAID staff members who attended PSEF built on their already strong foundations in PSE. The forum covered advanced themes in partnerships, and evaluations ranked the sessions predominantly as 4s and 5s on a 1 to 5 scale. In FY 2015, our efforts have resulted in approximately 360 partnerships being reported across 90 operating units, leveraging more than \$6.4 billion from non-U.S. government partners.

What were the most important lessons learned?

We have learned that expanding a community of practice across the agency, building capacity in private sector engagement, and bolstering USAID programming toward greater, lasting development impact requires making connections. These connections allow the individuals who make up the USAID institution to feel part of the great PSE movement and share their challenges and creative solutions. We have also found that effectively sharing that information requires a wide variety of engagements — from simple emails and conference calls to global forums — to allow for the different ways that people connect and share.

Creating collaborative community of practice engagements, where people can learn and support each other as they adapt, is a process that depends on remaining very organized and goal-focused, but also willing to let things grow organically. We have recognized that we cannot script, word for word, what our guest speakers will say on our calls or in training sessions. For instance, we rehearse for our agency calls and create a run-of-show, prepare speakers in advance, and provide four to five staff members to manage the flow of the call while it is happening, while taking live questions for the speakers. When we ask people for their thoughts, we are sometimes met with silence, or we find that we have not anticipated or do not agree with their responses. But that is part of being collaborative, and we adapt and build a framework that facilitates this kind of honest and open dialogue about the challenges, benefits, and successes of PSE and partnerships.

The success of our community of practice also depends on a team of people at CTP being committed to facilitating knowledge sharing and discussion and being willing to adjust our talking points, messaging, and materials when others offer a better approach.

The CLA Case Competition is managed by USAID LEARN, a Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) mechanism implemented by Dexis Consulting Group and its partner, Engility Corporation.

