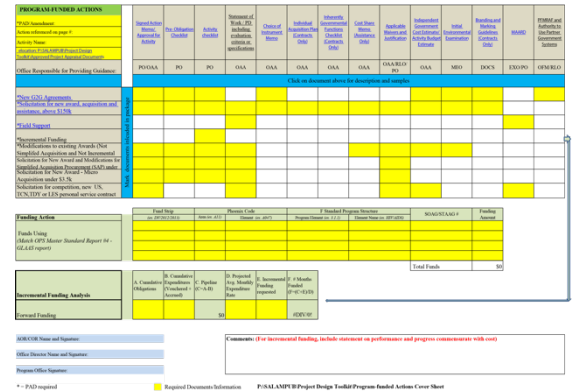


This Case Story was submitted to the 2016 CLA Case Competition. The competition was open to individuals and organizations affiliated with USAID and gave participants an opportunity to promote their work and contribute to good practice that advances our understanding of collaborating, learning, and adapting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

USAID/Tanzania’s Path-Breaking Program Funded Action Coversheet

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Preview of Coversheet. USAID/Tanzania.

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

Three years ago, USAID Tanzania was “slogging through the swamp of Program Office (PO) approvals,” engaged in and enraged by a seemingly non-transparent set of processes to apply program funds to implementation actions. In the true spirit of the program cycle reforms that called for Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting (CLA), the Mission conducted a Mission Management Assessment in 2013 that verified the widely held view that PO processes were cumbersome, non-transparent, and delayed actions to achieve results. Based on this assessment, the mission director empowered the staff to prioritize their needs and they overwhelmingly demanded streamlining across the Mission. The PO responded by conducting a customer service survey to get specific feedback from the Mission on how its roles and responsibilities could be better fulfilled and its processes streamlined. Of greatest concern were the PO clearance processes considered to be opaque, unpredictable, and slow. And the most critical process was securing access to and approval to use program funding for implementation actions to achieve development results. To resolve this problem, the PO developed the Program Funded Action Cover Sheet by applying a “one-stop shop” concept to its most criticized and critical function.

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

The main challenge identified when PO conducted its customer service survey was the cumbersome and opaque clearance process, rife with uncertainties, for all program-funded actions. This resulted in delays in reviewing and clearing those actions needed to achieve results. As part of streamlining, the PO designed a new Program Funded Action Cover Sheet, which served as a “one-stop shop.” This document became part of the larger project design toolkit designed within USAID/Tanzania to help move from strategy to concept to implementation. The design and testing of the cover sheet was a collaborative effort involving the Office of Financial Management (OFM) and the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA) with PO taking a leading role. After designing the cover sheet in collaboration with OFM and OAA, PO tested its use with technical office partners and customers to get their buy-in and feedback. PO conducted orientation and training sessions with technical teams, which then started to use the cover sheet.

PO solicited feedback across the Mission and continually developed new features. The sheet’s most important and popular feature was hyperlinks to relevant and constantly updated supporting documentation such as project and activity checklists, initial environmental examinations, and project appraisal documents. The hyperlinks enabled users to quickly and effectively connect their requested action to its project authorization and other key documentation. Updated funding information was also linked and provided for each action built into the cover sheet.

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

Based on CLA principles, the cover sheet was designed iteratively as a “one-stop shop” for program funding action approval. It is a single electronic document bringing together all the required paperwork for processing program-funded actions. It is transparent, easy, efficient, and effective. Previously, pre-Global Acquisition and Assistance System (GLAAS) actions had 12 approval documents; now there is only one.

The cover sheet has unique features for clarity in submission of complete documentation:

- Cells for required documents are highlighted in yellow. White cells mean a document is optional.
- Hyperlinks to electronic templates and samples of all required documents (e.g., approved initial environment examination) are included.
- Includes a project appraisal document/project appraisal document amendment page citation for each action to ensure each action submitted for clearance is part of an authorized project and activity.
- Features are continually edited, deleted, and added through collaborative development (between and within PO, OAA, OFM, and the technical offices).

Cover Sheet Funding Section

- The PO recognized the need for this section because of issues with managing the Mission’s program budget and because of simultaneous development and roll-out of OPS Master, a management tool and database for integrated financial planning and portfolio management in USAID Missions.



- It shows from the beginning exactly how much money would be obligated/sub-obligated, and which specific funds will be used.
- More documents can be added for new awards. OAA and PO noticed that some documents tended to be missing for new awards. When an action was requested at the last minute, organizing all these documents took time. Including these in the cover sheet ensures all required documentation is complete.
- Some documents were no longer required as part of a streamlining effort, particularly for incremental funding actions. Now, incremental funding requires only one supporting document along with the cover sheet. CLA was critical to making such a change.

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

In order to ensure that the cover sheet would be relevant for and accepted by the Mission, PO used a customer service approach by undertaking surveys and interviews, and then marketing the tool and continually refining it. PO oriented the Mission on how to use the cover sheet effectively and was ready to help staff whenever difficulties arose. Each technical office was assigned a PO backstop to provide technical support and guidance in all project design-related actions and use of the cover sheet.

On the other hand, many offices in the Mission collaborated in the cover sheet design, testing, utilization, and redesign. Feedback from the technical offices helped PO to refine the tool and include more features that were missing.

The cover sheet has now become a living document as the culture of customer service feeds CLA applied to its design and use. This year, we expect to conduct another customer service survey to get further feedback from the Mission on how we can improve our services to them. Furthermore:

- We keep updating the templates and samples to include better examples in the project design toolkit.
- We have developed a document that highlights common mistakes made when submitting documents to PO on program-funded actions. Presented in a “frequently asked questions” format, the document was shared with the Mission and helped reduce the timeline for clearing files.
- We have been piloting e-clearances through Huddle since January 2016, a process that emerged from the cover sheet experience.
- Other Missions have requested guidance documents on how to adapt e-clearance through Huddle for their own use. We are working with another Mission in Africa to extend lessons learned on experimenting with e-clearance on Huddle.

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

Since we applied CLA and started to use the cover sheet, there is significant improvement in the clearance timeline for all program-funded actions. This is to increased clarity and



reducing/consolidating paperwork from 12 documents into just one (i.e., the “one-stop shop”). Both PO staff and the rest of the Mission appreciate these changes.

PO team members have positive feedback about the speed/ease with which they are able to complete actions:

- “It’s transparent. Easy to understand. [The cover sheet] brought clarity, agility, and satisfaction to our customers, in getting funding for important program actions.”
- “Things are moving faster—technical offices are finding it convenient and they say so explicitly.”
- “The Health Team was very grateful at the start of the e-clearance, especially those submitting incremental funding actions.”
- “Incremental funding is much easier; personnel actions are easier.”

As the cover sheet streamlines everyone’s work, project results delivery can start more quickly, which means more efficient and effective development work on the ground.

Originally, PO was collecting data to quantify the timeline for clearing actions, and had targets in mind for how long actions on the list should take. Though it tracked the time it took to complete actions, PO realized that the data being collected were not helpful because the time of getting documents up to standard included a lot of PO level of effort that increased the time it took to clear files. Furthermore, it was too difficult to manually track the data across the process. Despite this, the data did help PO identify why certain actions were taking longer. As a result, PO took steps to correct the processes that led to those errors and created the “common issues” document, and files are now coming to PO more complete and correct. As PO migrated to e-clearance for the cover sheet files, the electronic system (Huddle) collects data on timelines, which will make future data analysis possible.

What were the most important lessons learned?

PO staff have the following statements on important lessons learned:

- “When there is something new, don’t be afraid. As you implement, you will learn how to do it better. At the start, Mission offices were reluctant to use the cover sheet. Later on, they started to use it and appreciated it. Don’t fear change.”
- “PO really is a service office. PO’s service is not counting or buying or writing a contract: It’s making sure that what the Mission wants to spend money on makes sense in achieving the Mission’s strategy and that PO can be as supportive and assured that the Mission is using its funding to achieve program results.”
- “Whatever product we are designing, we should think ‘win-win’ ... thinking that any product that we’ll be selling to the Mission must reduce time for them, and even should be easier for PO to process.”
- “Learning is a process: You’ll never say, ‘That’s it’ ... We will continue learning, we will continue improving—to make it more clear, faster. It’s not the end of it!”
- “The cover sheet standardized and clarified on one page the requirements for program and contract actions. Electronic submission to the Program Office permits advanced preview by Program Office staff to make or seek corrections that has reduced delays in document clearance.”

