

Pursuant to Executive Order 14091 (February 16, 2023) on
"Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

2023 Equity Action Plan Summary

U.S. Agency for International Development

Delivering equity through USAID

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is dedicated to saving lives; reducing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition; strengthening democratic governance; defending human rights; and building resilience. USAID envisions a world where all people are valued, have equitable access to opportunities, and are included, respected, and safe in their societies. USAID's efforts to embed and advance equity are essential to fostering more respectful, inclusive, and safe environments across our workplaces and programming.

New strategies to advance equity

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USAID identified five strategies in its 2023 Equity Action Plan through outreach and engagement with the public, including small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs) and associations, Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), current and potential program partners, and local organizations in the United States and around the world. USAID will continue to engage the public on these action areas, its progress, and next steps throughout the year and beyond.

1. Reduce barriers to the USAID partnership process through the WorkwithUSAID platform. *In 2022, USAID conducted its first-ever Partnering Experience survey which provided feedback from various organizations on their partnership experience with USAID as well as their experience using the WorkwithUSAID platform. Results showed 44% of prospective partners do not understand how to apply for funding, while an additional 24% who have applied unsuccessfully expressed confusion around the Agency's processes. To address these barriers and others, USAID will:*

- Continue disseminating a monthly newsletter (current distribution list has nearly 130,000 subscribers) highlighting tips for partners as well as new enhancements on the [WorkwithUSAID](#) website, such as the latest website features, upcoming events, and resource blogs for potential partners.
- Launch a live-feed of USAID funding opportunities pulled directly from SAM.gov and Grants.gov into one place on WorkwithUSAID to make it much easier for prospective partners to find relevant opportunities.

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- Translate the entire WorkwithUSAID platform into French, Spanish, and Arabic – allowing for greater access and understanding of USAID’s partnership opportunities and processes by local entities.

2. Enhance accountability measures and nondiscrimination protections for program participants and employees of contractors and recipients. *Current USAID policy regarding nondiscrimination protections for employees of contractors or recipients contains only hortatory (“strongly encourages”) language and does not create any mandatory requirements for our implementing partners. There are multiple civil rights statutes and USAID-specific regulations, however, that do prohibit recipients subject to U.S. law to from discriminating against program participants on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, and disability status. To address these barriers and others, USAID will:*

- Conduct a soft launch of a Social, Economic, and Environmental Accountability Mechanism (SEE-AM) that allows program participants to notify USAID of adverse social, economic, or environmental impacts caused by USAID-funded activities to test the efficacy of the draft standard operating procedures and operational policy before a formal launch in summer 2024.
- Develop and disseminate the “Know Your Protections” document to strategically communicate existing protections to program participants.
- Revise USAID’s operational policy to include a new Social Impact Risk Initial Screening which will assist in identifying where new activity designs could benefit from additional assessments to better understand their social impact and mitigate risks.

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- Strengthen award requirements on nondiscrimination protections for employees of implementing partners (subject to applicable U.S. law) through the rulemaking process.
- Sufficiently staff and fund the Agency's External Civil Rights Program to ensure full compliance with requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

3. Reduce barriers for USAID awards including barriers in USAID's acquisition and assistance processes that negatively affect partners' ability to work with USAID. *As part of the agency's equity 2021 assessment in response to Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, qualitative and quantitative data was collected from internal and external stakeholders, agency policies, and agency reports. Further, the first annual USAID Partnering Experience Survey was released in 2022 with the aim to better understand the challenges encountered by partners seeking to work with the agency. Insights from the agency's 2021 assessment, combined with feedback from the 2022 partner survey, highlighted how some of the federal government's excessively burdensome procurement processes create barriers for small and historically underrepresented organizations, impeding their competitive pursuit of award opportunities. To address these barriers and others, USAID will:*

- Adapt Acquisition & Assistance (A&A) training, tools, and resources and enhance guidance to staff to refrain from adding burdensome requirements that exceed the minimum required by regulation, such as limiting requests for partner reporting under assistance programs to what is strictly required under 2 CFR.

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- Continue integrating small businesses, including SDBs, more widely into agency policies for planning and foreign assistance programming, including in USAID's [Automated Development Series \(ADS\) 200: Development Policy](#). Offer established training for Agency planners on how to conduct meaningful market research to identify qualified SDBs on a recurring basis. Continue Agency outreach and engagement with SDB associations and resource partners to educate on how to work with USAID. Create a community of practice with similarly situated Agencies to help identify SDB sources and continuously detect, assess, and address barriers and challenges.
- Implement the MSI Partnership Initiative, which matches interested institutions with USAID to increase MSI community members' access to USAID programs and initiatives, such as foreign assistance programming, career and internship opportunities, and research initiatives.

4. Advance effective and equitable U.S. foreign assistance that meaningfully integrates inclusive development and the perspectives and experiences of women and girls in all their diversity, and improve outcomes in gender equality and for marginalized populations. Currently, only 14 countries in the world offer full equal legal rights for women. At the current rate of change, it will take 131 years to reach gender parity globally, and only 4% of global bilateral aid is dedicated to gender equality as a principal objective. While USAID Missions continue to identify opportunities to integrate gender equality and inclusive development in policy and programming, there are a number of barriers to equity that remain. To address these barriers and others, USAID will:

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- Launch a new flagship mechanism including the Gender Leadership, Equity, and Advancement for Development (LEAD), to provide support to USAID Missions and Bureaus on gender integration across the program cycle, including gender analysis technical assistance and sector-specific technical assistance.
- Increase Gender Advisor efforts, in alignment with [USAID policy on Integrating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle](#) requirements and encourage use of Standard Position Descriptions.
- Roll out new tools including USAID's first-ever gender equality marker and activity-level gender analysis toolkit to support USAID Missions and Bureaus in integrating gender equality into foreign assistance programming.

5. Strengthen USAID's approaches to policy, programming, and learning to more effectively advance racial and ethnic equity and support for underserved communities in partner countries.

Internal program assessments and an agency policy review identified gaps in USAID's ability to address racial and ethnic inequity due to a lack of institutionalized policies, guidance, and tools. Findings from the report indicated that local knowledge does not adequately inform USAID planning, programming, and learning. To address these barriers and others, USAID will:

- Scale up implementation of Inclusive Development Assessments (IDAs), a tool that guides in-country interviews and research to help identify populations that are marginalized and excluded from access to public services such as health, education, transportation, and or economic opportunities and that concludes with specific recommendations for USAID to increase inclusion of marginalized groups in their development programs and policies.

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- Enhance existing inclusive development infrastructure to include supporting the creation of Inclusive Development Advisor positions in the USAID Missions and providing training and technical assistance to increase expertise for supporting racial and ethnic equity in programming.
- Provide technical and advisory services to strengthen the organizational and evaluation capacity of local evaluation and research organizations, to better incorporate local and Indigenous knowledge, particularly from racial and ethnic underserved communities, into evidence collection and use.

What USAID accomplished

Below is a sampling of USAID's progress delivering on equity and racial justice since its first Equity Action Plan in 2022.

- **Approved more than 4,700 partner profiles in the *WorkwithUSAID.gov Partner Directory*.**
More than 1,600 have completed the pre-engagement assessment, increasing the visibility of their work, connecting them with others in the development community, and assessing whether or not they are ready to respond to a USAID solicitation.
- **Published the updated [A&A Strategy and Implementation Plan](#).**
The Plan includes a simplified and reduced pre-award risk survey for local organizations seeking USAID funding and a Renewal Award Guide and Template to train A&A staff to use a mechanism that leverages practices from collaborating, learning, and adapting, and responds to adjustments in dynamic operating environments. For example, USAID issued reminders to prime contractors about the requirement of reporting data against their small business subcontracting plan and to improve the accuracy of data they submit.
- **Launched the [Racial and Ethnic Equity Initiative](#).**
This initiative is a knowledge base of operational and best practices that have successfully advanced social inclusion and racial equity in foreign assistance programming.

What USAID accomplished

- ***Established an External Civil Rights Division in the USAID Office of Civil Rights.***

The new Division will receive and address complaints and ensure the Agency complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

- ***Developed a new method to track the extent to which USAID's foreign assistance programming is locally led.***

USAID identified 14 high priority “good practices” that create space for local actors to exercise leadership over foreign assistance programming, including priority setting, activity design, implementation, or defining and measuring results.