

## How USAID Is Addressing Partnership Challenges for Local Organizations

Jan 25, 2024

Tips & Guidance



Arjun Tasker, Bianca Ontiveros, and Paul Burford



*Panel discussion at AidEx 2023 moderated by USAID's Paul Burford.*

*Paul Burford is Deputy Director of USAID's Local, Faith, and Transformative Partnerships (LFT) Hub. Arjun Tasker is the New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) Lead. Bianca Ontiveros is the Web & Communications Manager for USAID's Partnerships Incubator.*

Each year, USAID staff attend [AidEx](#), an event dedicated to connecting members of the global development and humanitarian community. The 2,800+ conference attendees represent organizations that are often on the front lines of advancing progress in food

security, health, sanitation, and human dignity while responding to and building back from natural disasters, civil wars, and other humanitarian challenges. Participating in AidEx each year grants USAID staff the chance to meet with and learn from others; articulate our priorities; and identify fresh opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

While USAID has accelerated localization in our development work, humanitarian and disaster response organizations inhabit a unique space, where programming decisions can come at short notice, frequently drawing upon trusted networks and partners due to the dynamic nature of humanitarian challenges. Humanitarian partnerships, therefore, often look different from our development partnerships. At the 2023 AidEx conference in Geneva, Switzerland, we had the opportunity to listen to representatives from a variety of organizations and to hear about the challenges they have faced working with USAID. Those conversations contribute to a shared understanding of both the partnership barriers and the opportunities for local organizations to work alongside USAID in times of crisis.

### **How is USAID Working with Local Organizations?**

USAID's mission is to provide global development and humanitarian assistance, achieving this by issuing [contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements](#). Samantha Power has reiterated and reinforced the Agency's ongoing commitment to more locally led development since becoming Administrator in 2021. The Administrator outlined a bold [vision](#) for localization, setting a goal for the Agency to direct at least 25 percent of all program funds to local partners. Additionally, in the next five years, fifty percent of our programming will place local communities in the lead to set priorities, codesign projects, drive implementation, or evaluate the impact of our programs.

Local actors and local knowledge play important roles in USAID's approach to humanitarian assistance. Local responders and organizations know their communities, the needs, and the landscape, which is vital to ensuring the effectiveness of aid.

*“When disaster strikes, the local community is the first to respond,” shared an attendee at a USAID panel discussion.*

USAID's localization efforts support these organizations and bolster their sustainability to ensure longer-term resilience so that they are positioned to act when needed.

### **How Does USAID Approach Co-Creation and Capacity Strengthening with Local Partners?**

While walking through the lively AidEx booths, we repeatedly heard from local organizations that they want to collaborate more with donors and contribute to decision-making at all phases of the program cycle, especially through co-creating activities during the design phase. AidEx attendees stressed that when they are excluded, they often find that the resulting programs are not sustainable and efforts to resolve crises become less achievable.

When USAID published the reference sheet that it is piloting in FY 2023 for determining what activities “count” as being locally led, co-creation with local partners was identified as a key practice, as was local capacity strengthening.

The latter, is built on the Agency's 2022 rollout of its first-ever [Local Capacity Strengthening \(LCS\) policy](#), which articulates the Agency's commitment to investing in the capacities and priorities of local actors, as defined by those local actors. By listening to our local partners' priorities, we can achieve results that are more effective, equitable, and sustainable. As our colleague Amy McQuade

described in a [recent blog post](#), “The Agency’s Local Capacity Strengthening Policy is helping us forge stronger, more equitable local partnerships so that we are better prepared to respond when the inevitable happens.”

## How Can Partners Connect with USAID?

Local organizations are telling us that they want to get the job done right, not just get it done, and this requires building relationships with USAID, and their prime partners if they are a sub.

*“When we talk about localization, partner relationships need to be strategic, not transactional,” shared an attendee at a USAID panel discussion.*

Effectively and equitably implementing a local project requires donors to build trust with local communities and local partners. As Ivica Vasev of USAID/North Macedonia stressed in a [recent blog](#), “If we want to have real partnerships with local communities and organizations, we need to be willing to trust more and work as allies with local partners as they navigate USAID’s unique system, processes, and regulations.”

The challenge for local partners becomes, who should they talk to? As a baseline, organizations can reach out to USAID’s [IndustryLiaison@usaid.gov](mailto:IndustryLiaison@usaid.gov) email to ask questions and get connected with the appropriate USAID Mission, Operating Unit, or Bureau. They may also explore the [Mission directory](#) to find local contact information, such as social media accounts. We also encourage organizations to sign up for our [Work with USAID newsletter](#); follow Work with USAID on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#); and join our [LinkedIn group](#).

## What is USAID Doing to Welcome New Partners?

As an Agency, we are well aware that the process of becoming a USAID partner can seem overwhelming, and—not only that—most of the resources available for support are currently only available in English. We are working toward improving the flow of information and streamlining the access to tools and translations.

We have a great opportunity at events like AidEx to introduce potential partners to what is available. We can interact with them face-to-face and introduce them to [WorkwithUSAID.gov](#), plugging them into available resources that assist with capacity strengthening, preparing for funding, and the requirements of the Agency. The platform is a free resource hub with a curated [Resource Library](#) of more than 300 multilanguage tools and templates dedicated to capacity strengthening. The resources are available in varying formats and cover a wide range of topics, such as USAID policies, co-creation, capacity strengthening, and financial management.

Beyond learning opportunities, the [Partner Directory](#) provides a networking platform by showcasing more than 5,000 organizations around the world that are eager to work with USAID and other funding partners. All organizations have the opportunity to feature their operating location, sectors, organization type, and describe the services they provide. This is a great entry point to partnership with minimal effort. Organizations can search the directory for a potential partner using filters and interact with them directly through the in-site emailing feature. Additionally, we’ve streamlined funding between partners through the [Sub-Opportunities](#) portal. The page shares opportunities being offered by USAID’s prime implementing partners, who may seek subcontractors or subawardees.

Additionally, the website has a [Pre-Engagement Assessment](#) to help organizations evaluate their strengths and knowledge gaps, generating a customized report with recommended tools and resources. Of course, these only scratch the surface of what we are working on, such as fully translating this website and providing additional translated resources; however, this is a big step forward for the Agency in providing easy access to relevant resources for local partners.

USAID is prioritizing the partner experience and seeks to strengthen its efforts toward localization and working with local partners. By taking action now to build relationships, strengthen capacity, and forge partnerships with local organizations at events like AidEx, we will all be better positioned to collaborate to address urgent crises in the future.

*We encourage you to get plugged into [WorkwithUSAID.gov](#) as a first stop in connecting with USAID. Explore the [Resource Library](#), [Partner Directory](#), [funding tab](#), and more to help your organization strengthen its capacity and find partnership opportunities.*

Share this article with your network!

Share 