![USAID - FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE]

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

USAID's first ever <u>Digital Strategy</u> outlines a path to strengthen open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in all partner countries. USAID is committed to disability-inclusive development that makes accessible digital technology more universal.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

It is critical that digital technologies are accessible for a wide array of persons with disabilities as it increases the ease with which new technologies can be used by everyone. Digital accessibility occurs when a digital medium such as a website, application or electronic tool can be utilized and understood by users with disabilities. An image online can become more accessible, for example, by adding "alt text" for users with visual disabilities. Ensuring accessibility is even more important during pandemics and other crises. Technology provides key and timely information and planning platforms to keep communities safe, and mitigates long-term effects impacting their ability to recover from challenges. New digital ecosystems can empower persons to access services they weren't able to access previously, engage more effectively with others in their community, and pursue economic and education opportunities that might have been out of reach. While digital transformation has the power to create a more inclusive society for marginalized groups, it also comes with the risk of increasing disparities if those same groups aren't given equitable access. USAID endeavors to integrate the <u>inclusion of persons with disabilities</u> throughout its work.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DESIGNING ACCESSIBLE DIGITAL INTERVENTIONS

- **Can your digital intervention use a universal design approach?** <u>Universal design</u> ensures that a broad range of users have access to a digital tool. A broad example of universal design is working to make a digital technology multimodal such as embedding text in image-based content, which allows a screen reader to interpret the content for users with visual disabilities. Universal design considers all types of users to ensure that your digital tool includes a variety of accessibility features.

- **Nothing about us, without us.** It is a good practice to involve disability advocacy organizations in digital design processes and strategies. Persons with disabilities know whether your digital tool is accessible to them or what would make it so. It is also important to consider <u>communication strategies</u> when promoting digital interventions.

- **Work with existing accessibility features in different digital formats.** Existing virtual platforms often have a variety of <u>accessibility features that promote inclusion and accessibility</u>. Every common social media platform also has accessibility tools. Be sure to make use of <u>existing accessibility mechanisms</u> while designing new technologies.

Similarly, there are risks and opportunities that can arise during a response to a global pandemic that need to be considered. Examples of risks and opportunities related to digital accessibility can include:

RISKS:

Widening the accessibility digital divide. The urgency of the pandemic, and other crisis and conflict situations often drive the need to communicate information efficiently and innovations in technology often emerge as a result. While this is positive, accessibility considerations are often forgotten at a time when they are most needed. Digital exclusion is a serious risk if technology is not designed to be universally accessible from the beginning of the design process. Lack of access is intersectional to other common inequities. If digital products aren't accessible to persons with disabilities, it likely means that other marginalized groups will struggle to use them. This is so because disability is intersectional to other identities. It's why USAID adheres to a universal design approach, especially in education. The idea is that universal, accessible design ends up helping all children.

Exclusion of persons with disabilities from data collection, analysis, and output. It is important that new technologies have open feedback channels on their accessibility features to ensure that they are not exacerbating the exclusion of any marginalized groups. When designing monitoring and evaluation tools for new digital technologies, accessibility indicators should be included.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Considering accessibility in technology design can make your design more universally accessible. When more individuals can use your technology, it has greater impact and is more likely to achieve positive results.

A greater need for new technologies creates more accessibility opportunities. The urgent need that pandemics and other emergencies create for effective communication and learning technologies is an opportunity to think more universally about how to most effectively reach everyone in a community. There is both a space to create entirely new accessible digital technologies and to make existing technology more accessible.

Leverage the private sector and government focus on reaching last-mile populations through digital platforms. Consider how to work with mobile network operators, local Internet service providers, and other digital technology companies, such as app developers, to demonstrate the business case for accessible connectivity and digital tools. Many existing apps and digital platforms already have a variety of accessibility features and the private sector can be a resource developing new accessibility digital tools.

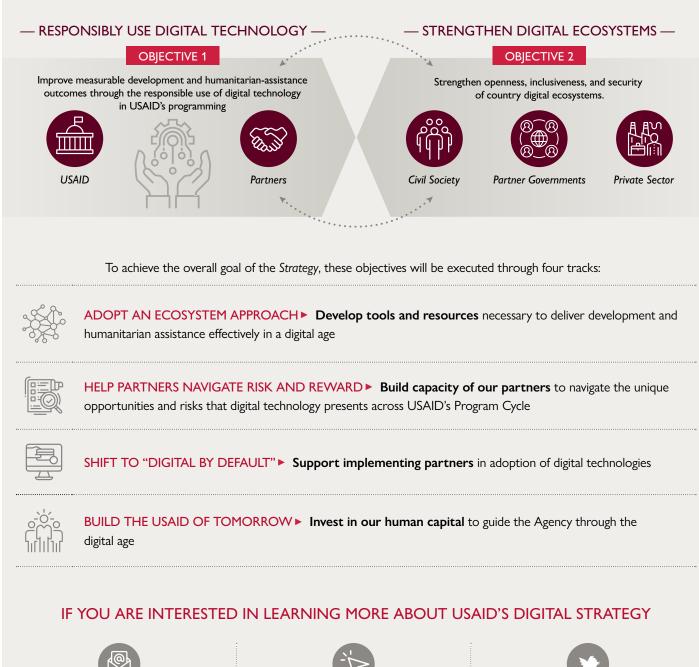Resources and contact information

For more information on digital data collection, please contact digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.

USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-2024

STRATEGY GOAL

To achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes and increase self-reliance in emerging market countries. The Strategy centers around two core, mutually reinforcing objectives:

— RESPONSIBLY USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY —

OBJECTIVE 1

Improve measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology in USAID's programming

USAID

Partners

— STRENGTHEN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS —

OBJECTIVE 2

Strengthen openness, inclusiveness, and security of country digital ecosystems.

Civil Society

Partner Governments

Private Sector

To achieve the overall goal of the *Strategy*, these objectives will be executed through four tracks:

ADOPT AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH ▶ **Develop tools and resources** necessary to deliver development and humanitarian assistance effectively in a digital age

HELP PARTNERS NAVIGATE RISK AND REWARD ▶ **Build capacity of our partners** to navigate the unique opportunities and risks that digital technology presents across USAID's Program Cycle

SHIFT TO "DIGITAL BY DEFAULT" ▶ **Support implementing partners** in adoption of digital technologies

BUILD THE USAID OF TOMORROW ▶ **Invest in our human capital** to guide the Agency through the digital age

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT USAID'S DIGITAL STRATEGY

– EMAIL –
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– VISIT –
usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy

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