



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-2024

DIGITAL RESEARCH AND LEARNING AGENDA

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USAID'S DIGITAL STRATEGY CHARTS AN AGENCY-WIDE APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT in a rapidly evolving digital age. The Strategy seeks 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.

Under the Digital Strategy, USAID established a Digital Research and Learning Agenda to ensure that the Agency is continually adapting to changes in the digital sphere and to enable staff and partners to better understand and respond to digital opportunities or risks in the digital ecosystem.

THE CHALLENGE

As digital ecosystems evolve and change at a rapid pace, it is critical that development actors take an intentional, forward-looking approach to research and learning. Both within USAID and with our partners across the development community, we must strengthen our practice of capturing evidence, integrating learning, and surveying emerging trends to inform new best practices.

USAID'S ROLE

As part of the Agency-wide Digital Strategy, USAID's Digital Research and Learning Agenda (DRLA) will ensure the Agency and its development partners are routinely identifying and answering pressing digital development research questions.

- ▶ First, USAID will study how digital technologies are used in the development context, building evidence and identifying gaps. This effort will entail conducting surveys of published literature, evaluating existing and past programs, and consulting with development experts on key knowledge gaps. In addition, USAID will work with other Digital Strategy initiatives—as well as activity managers using digital technologies throughout the Agency—to design research questions around knowledge gaps and methodologies for answering those questions.
- ▶ Second, the Agency will apply this newly consolidated knowledge to our work, simultaneously testing and evaluating interventions, processes, and policies as they are developed to inform programming. For instance, having identified knowledge gaps about best practices for procuring digital technologies across contexts, the Agency will conduct implementation research to understand the costs and benefits of different approaches, and translate the implications of these analyses into guidance for development practitioners.
- ▶ Third, USAID will create learning partnerships to coordinate and synergize research initiatives. This effort could include influencing the direction of research through interagency working groups, thought leadership in multilateral fora, or discussions with other donors to prioritize particular areas of research. Key features of this effort will be to influence our development partners to incorporate research into their regular programming, and to shape the direction of the digital research enterprise to have a keener focus on low and middle income country contexts.



BUILD EVIDENCE ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Identify knowledge gaps in programmatic investments in digital tools, systems, and platforms in the development context



APPLY FINDINGS AND EVALUATE RESULTS

Test digital technology interventions, processes, and policies with feedback loops to inform development programming



DEVELOP LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

Coordinate and enhance research efforts across academia, implementing partners, governments, and other thought-leaders



UPDATE BEST PRACTICES FOR EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Integrate learnings to address the challenges of emerging technologies and the social, political, and economic trends they bring about

- ▶ Finally, the Agency and development partners will integrate lessons learned to understand and address the impact and repercussions of emerging technologies. Using its compendium of evidence about digital technologies in development historically, USAID can better predict the social, economic, and political effects of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, internet-of-things, blockchain, and digital identity. For example, this effort would include using previous research on community engagement practices for digital technologies to inform programming around how emerging technologies should (or should not) be rolled out in different contexts—and how they can be developed and deployed responsibly.

The DRLA will both contribute to, and be informed by, the Agency learning agenda. In particular, the DRLA is highly aligned with efforts to identify and address priority questions; facilitate uptake of evidence and learning into policy, guidance, and programming; and disseminate learning throughout the Agency and broader development community to reinforce transparency and accountability. Recently, the Agency has developed new guidance concerning cost-effectiveness, analytic rigor, and evidence-based decision-making; as a research- and evidence-based initiative, the DRLA is highly aligned with and will implement this guidance for the Agency's digital development programming.

In collaboration with its development partners—actors from private, academic, governmental, and non-governmental institutions—the Agency will use the DRLA to gather evidence, test interventions, coordinate and enhance research, and continually adapt best practices for existing and emerging digital technologies.

GET INVOLVED

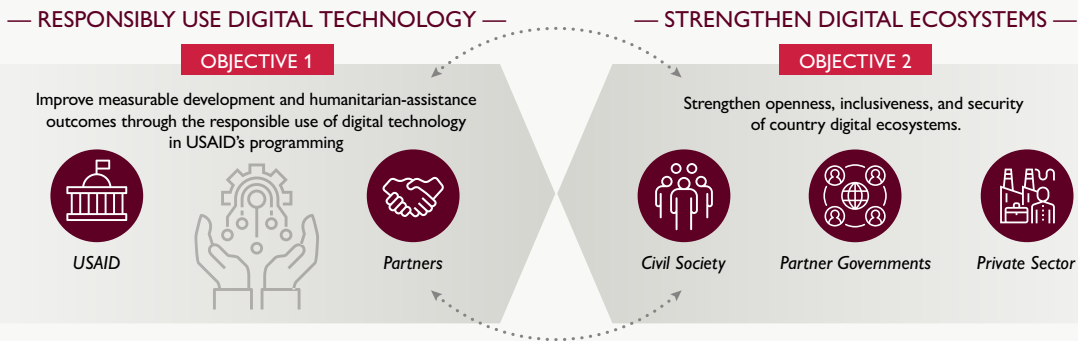
If you are interested in getting involved in the DRLA please contact digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov

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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:



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

 <p>ADOPT AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH</p> <p>Develop tools and resources necessary to deliver development and humanitarian assistance effectively in a digital age</p>	 <p>HELP PARTNERS NAVIGATE RISK AND REWARD</p> <p>Build capacity of our partners to navigate the unique opportunities and risks that digital technology presents across USAID's Program Cycle</p>	 <p>SHIFT TO "DIGITAL BY DEFAULT"</p> <p>Support implementing partners in adoption of digital operations</p>	 <p>BUILD THE USAID OF TOMORROW</p> <p>Invest in our human capital to guide the Agency through the digital age</p>
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