



**USAID**  
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# USAID Education Policy: Program Cycle Implementation and Operational Guidance



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**IMAGE**

Children participate in early grade reading program in Bangladesh. Credit: Kate Maloney/USAID

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# I. Introduction and Overview

## A. Overview

The USAID Education Policy, effective November 2018, guides Agency-wide investments in education and is the primary source of direction for all education programming. The policy outlines key principles and priority areas that are critical to supporting countries on their journey to self-reliance. It applies to all USAID education programming, regardless of the funding account, directive, or program area, and regardless of the managing operating unit, office, or team. USAID's Education Policy reinforces the goals outlined in the U.S. Government Strategy for International Basic Education (FY 2019-2023). This document provides guidance on implementing the USAID Education Policy throughout the program cycle.

## B. Purpose

This document is a reference for USAID operating units to guide implementation of the USAID Education Policy throughout the program cycle. It provides information on operational aspects of the policy, including key considerations throughout the program cycle, Agency-level monitoring and reporting, budget and funding parameters, and other areas. This guidance and information will assist Missions in practically applying the principles outlined in the USAID Education Policy:

- Prioritize country-focus and ownership
- Focus investments on measurably and sustainably improving outcomes
- Strengthen systems and develop capacity in local institutions
- Work in partnership and leverage resources
- Drive decision-making and investments using evidence and data
- Promote equity and inclusion

The guidance also sets expectation for results and progress reporting related to the priority areas in the Policy:

- Children and youth, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, have increased access to quality education that is safe, relevant, and promotes social well-being



- Children and youth gain literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success
- Youth gain the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society
- Higher education institutions have the capacity to be central actors in development by conducting and applying research, delivering quality education, and engaging with communities

### **C. Timeline for Policy Implementation**

This guidance is effective as of the issuance of the USAID Education Policy in November 2018, and it will be in effect as long as this policy is active. This guidance will be periodically updated based on feedback. USAID will publicly report on the results and progress under this policy on an annual basis, with a focus on measurable learning and educational outcomes.

Operating units are expected to apply the USAID Education Policy as they develop or revise their strategies, design and implement new projects and activities, and plan for and report on their education portfolios. The policy and this guidance can and should be used by operating units at any stage of the program cycle. Implementation of the policy is expected to be an ongoing process, rather than one that requires operating units to stop current programming and design new activities through a hard pivot; changes should be made as Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) are developed or revised, and as development objectives flow into project and activity designs. Within the budget and performance planning and reporting cycle, policy implementation will begin with the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Operational Plan (OP) and Performance Plan and Report (PPR).

## II. Organizational Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation of this policy will require coordination and collaboration among USAID operating units (Missions, Regional Bureaus, Functional Bureaus, independent offices) and staff of all specializations (including technical, program, procurement, legal, budget) and hiring mechanisms. Each plays a part in ensuring that USAID's education programming improves learning and educational outcomes around the world.

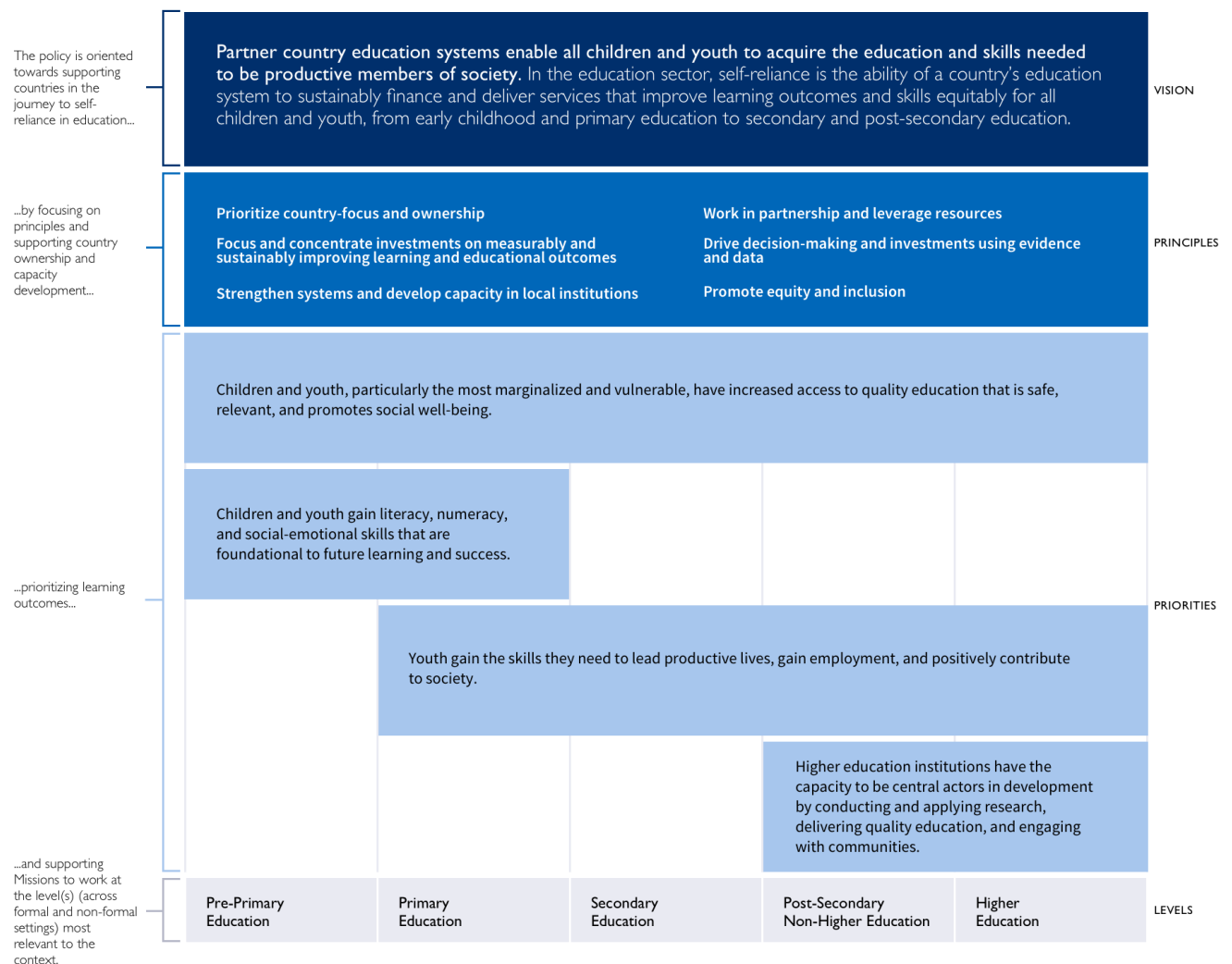
The roles and responsibilities for implementing this policy are aligned with those described in [ADS 101 Agency Programs and Functions](#) and [ADS Chapter 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy](#). Those descriptions are not repeated here, though there are specific roles in implementing this policy that are outlined below:

- **All Missions and operating units with education programming**, regardless of the program area or account funding the programming, are responsible for effectively designing and implementing their portfolios, focusing on measurable results of education programming, and evaluating education projects and activities to meet country development goals in alignment with the USAID Education Policy. They are also responsible for continuing to provide data through existing reporting processes to enable USAID to present a consolidated report to external stakeholders on USAID's overall education investments.
- The **Office of Education in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3/ED)** is the principal operating unit responsible for implementation of the USAID Education Policy, including providing technical assistance and support, monitoring implementation, supporting Mission-level and sector-wide learning and knowledge exchange, and reporting results on education programs worldwide.
- **Regional Bureau education advisors** are responsible for day-to-day country backstopping and support to Missions. They will coordinate closely with the Office of Education on technical assistance and support required by Missions.

### III. Getting Started

In using this guidance, Missions and operating units must determine where they are in the program cycle (e.g. design of a new CDCS, project, or activity or mid-project implementation). In instances where Missions are embarking on the design of a new CDCS or project, the guidance should be sequentially integrated throughout the cycle, and the Mission should determine what part, or parts, of the education sector the interventions will target. In instances where Missions are implementing under an extended CDCS and ongoing project, this guidance should be used to inform modifications and innovations that are appropriate to the local context and Mission priorities.

Figure 1. At a Glance: USAID's Education Policy



The policy recognizes that needs exist at all levels of education in each partner country and that overall need will almost always surpass the availability of USAID resources. Missions must ensure that limited resources are being programmed in strategic areas that are most likely to improve learning outcomes and support countries in their journey to self-reliance through human capital formation.

Based on extensive in-country experience and global evidence, the majority of the need for assistance in the education sector will be in the pre-primary and primary sub-sectors—particularly the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy. However, missions, partner governments, and sector coordinating bodies may want to prioritize education interventions that are in addition to or beyond these areas depending on local needs and opportunities. In these instances, based on a combination of assessments, analyses, and policy directives that are linked to the CDCS and other priorities, Missions can program appropriately to meet the needs of the country context. The first questions that Missions must ask are: Based on available data, analysis, and Mission resources, what will be the most effective and sustainable intervention? If the education system is not producing strong learning outcomes in foundational skills in the early years, what sustainability is there to interventions in later years?

For this reason, it is critical that Missions thoughtfully consider addressing the foundational levels of education and the sequencing of skills development *before* embarking on new, expanded, or pilot activities in other areas. The sections below present key considerations, based on the program cycle, to help operating units design the most appropriate and effective education programming in alignment with the principles and priorities of the policy.



## IV. Key Considerations Throughout the Program Cycle

This section outlines the key considerations and expectations for the USAID Education Policy throughout the various phases of the USAID Program Cycle as defined in ADS 201.<sup>1</sup> This guidance does not repeat existing requirements in ADS 201, nor does it establish new requirements. Instead, it provides education-specific guidance and information to assist Missions in applying the principles in the policy to existing program cycle requirements. The content is organized directly around ADS 201 sections and sub-sections. The principles and priorities outlined in the USAID Education Policy inform this guidance and should drive decision-making throughout the program cycle.

Figure 2. USAID Program Cycle



*NOTE: The depth of information and resources needed to comprehensively address and support high quality strategy development, project design, activity design, monitoring, and evaluation in education programming is beyond the scope of this program cycle guidance. In particular, project design, activity design, monitoring, and evaluation require specific approaches and evidence related to the objectives and purpose of the project or activity. This section contains general information that applies regardless of the objectives of a country strategy, project, or activity. See the "Good Practice Documents and Technical Resources" section for further resources and links to more in-depth information on technical topics.*

<sup>1</sup> See [ADS Chapter 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy](#).

## A. Country/Regional Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process through which USAID determines the best approach in a given country or region based on U.S. development priorities, individual country and/or regional priorities, and USAID's comparative advantage and available foreign assistance resources, among other factors. The Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) defines a Mission's strategic approach to achieving results, and outlines why choices were made and how results in particular sectors contribute to the Mission's overarching goal and development objectives.

### Preparation for the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (ADS 201.3.2.9)

ADS 201 requires that USAID country strategies be grounded in evidence and analysis. Missions must consider which analyses are needed to inform their strategic planning process, including any countrywide, sector-specific, sub-sector, or demographic analyses. Missions should draw evidence from third-party assessments and evaluations from government sources, civil society,<sup>2</sup> the private sector, and other donors to complement Mission-led assessments and evaluations. This includes a donor landscape analysis to identify other donors active in the country and their program areas.

Assessments can help Missions identify gaps and barriers in the system that may be affecting learning and educational outcomes, and where USAID resources should be best targeted. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the capacity of the education system in the partner country, Missions should consider conducting a thorough diagnostic of the systems<sup>3</sup> and how learning and educational outcomes are affected.<sup>4</sup> Accelerating measurable learning and educational outcomes is complex, and depends on improvements in resources invested at the classroom level, in policy

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<sup>2</sup> See the [People's Action for Learning Network \(PAL Network\)](#) for information on home-level, citizen-led assessments of basic reading and numeracy competencies of children.

<sup>3</sup> See the [USAID Local Systems Framework](#), which describes USAID's overarching approach to transforming innovations and reforms into sustained development. See the [5Rs Framework in the Program Cycle](#) for a technical note on a practical methodology for supporting sustainability and local ownership in projects and activities through ongoing attention to local actors and local systems. This framework is useful across all phases of the program cycle.

<sup>4</sup> See [Doing Reform Differently: Combining Rigor and Practicality in Implementation and Evaluation of System Reforms \(Crouch and DeStefano, 2017\)](#). See also the [Systems Approach for Better Education Results \(SABER\)](#) and the Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines [Volume 1: Sector-Wide Analysis With An Emphasis on Primary and Secondary Education](#) and [Volume 2: Sub-Sector Specific Analyses](#) (UNESCO, 2014).

development and implementation, and in the capacity of institutions that manage and contribute to education systems.

The most effective assessments provide data on learning outcomes and skills acquisition,<sup>5</sup> learning environments, systems functions, and the degree to which marginalized and vulnerable groups benefit from instructional opportunities offered to their peers. These may include assessing and analyzing: education policies; the political economy;<sup>6</sup> financing and resources; teacher attendance, incentives, and barriers to quality instruction and learning; student attendance, incentives, and barriers to access and learning; access to books and materials both in learning environments and in the community; the enabling environment for private and non-state schools and education providers; community support for education; and the national, school, and classroom-level assessment systems and utilization of results. Inclusion and equity assessments pinpoint specific aspects of marginalization and opportunities to address them in project and activity design.<sup>7</sup>

In crisis- and conflict-affected environments, it is critical to analyze the two-way interaction between the education system and the conflict or crisis to ensure any USAID investments avoid doing harm and are conflict-sensitive. Conflict assessments can integrate topics and questions to help Missions better understand the dynamics and relationship between education and conflict—including how education inequalities and issues can act as drivers of conflict, and how education can build connections among people and promote peace.<sup>8</sup>

Cross-sectoral assessments should also be considered at this stage. Youth assessments, for example, can be used to gain a better understanding of the knowledge, perceptions, and experiences regarding youth development needs by engaging youth and other key

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<sup>5</sup> See resources like the [Principles of Good Practice in Learning Assessment \(UNESCO, 2017\)](#) and the [Early Grade Reading Assessment \(EGRA\) Toolkit \(USAID, 2016\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> See [Thinking and Working Politically Through Applied Political Economy Analysis \(USAID, 2018\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> The READ Act defines **marginalized and vulnerable** children to include “girls, children affected by or emerging from armed conflict or humanitarian crises, children with disabilities, children in remote or rural areas (including those who lack access to safe water and sanitation), religious or ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS, child laborers, married adolescents, and victims of trafficking.” Relevant analyses should be conducted.

<sup>8</sup> See the [USAID Conflict Assessment Framework \(USAID, 2012\)](#) and [Rapid Education and Risk Assessment Toolkit \(USAID\)](#).

stakeholders.<sup>9</sup> Youth assessments benefit multiple sectors, including education, economic growth, democracy, governance, agriculture, and health. Gender analyses are mandated by ADS 201 and ADS 205 at the CDCS stage and should include information on learning and educational outcomes. Missions should also consider an analysis of higher education institutions to identify opportunities to engage these institutions across programming in any sector. This analysis may identify local higher education institutions that can serve as implementing partners, research institutions, or beneficiaries.

Climate risk screening of education programming at the CDCS level should identify what risks, if any, must be addressed and where climate risk mitigation plans must be integrated at the project and activity level.

### **Initial Consultations and Parameters Setting (ADS 201.3.2.9(A))**

In this phase, USAID Missions and Washington operating units should seek consensus on which priorities of the USAID Education Policy are most critical for USAID and the country to jointly pursue. Knowledge and insights gained through prior implementation, analyses, and assessments should inform dialogue regarding the relevance of the four priority areas defined in the USAID Education Policy to the country context.

This phase also requires identifying resource parameters. There are and will continue to be limited financial resources available for programming. Small financial investments in education programming—total portfolios below \$2 million annually—should not be undertaken unless there is a clear and compelling rationale that such an investment will result in significant partner country-led policy reforms or the generation of novel evidence from the evaluation of an innovative pilot activity. Missions that are not able, or not willing, to invest in supporting long-term education reforms in partner countries should analyze the trade-offs of investing in the education sector given the low likelihood of sustained impact without sufficient resources.

Resource considerations also include human resources—Missions must plan and staff their offices with sufficient, experienced education specialists to effectively design and manage existing, expanding, or new education portfolios and engage with partner

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<sup>9</sup> See the [Youth Compass: A Strategic Guide to Strengthen Youth Activities \(USAID, 2017\)](#).

country counterparts on policy issues. Human resources are as important as financial resources to effectively support education reforms.

Programming should build on established foundations and carry forward the momentum needed to achieve significant impact at large-scale, particularly in the areas where the Agency has capacity and expertise. Over the course of implementing the [USAID Education Strategy 2011-2018](#), USAID built considerable capacity in the areas of primary grade reading, education in conflict and crisis, youth workforce development, and higher education. Future programming should build on these capacities, as appropriate, and make use of USAID's comparative advantage in these areas.

### **Results Framework Development (ADS 201.3.2.9(B))**

In developing their country strategies, USAID Missions should work with partner country stakeholders to establish a common vision and understanding of the challenges, goals, and metrics for success. Missions must make clear that the primary purpose of USAID programming in the education sector is to achieve sustained improvements in learning and educational outcomes. The four priority areas defined in the USAID Education Policy should serve as a starting point for this dialogue, and Missions should identify linkages between these priorities and national development strategies and education sector plans.<sup>10</sup> The results of initial consultations and resource parameter considerations are critical to determine specific learning and educational outcomes that can be sustainably improved, and the types of activities that can be supported.

The country context and the overarching goal of the country strategy will affect how education-related objectives are reflected in the CDCS results frameworks. In some cases, an entire development objective may be focused on education. In others, education-related objectives may be intermediate results or sub-intermediate results in one or more broader, multi-sector development objectives. Regardless of the eventual construction of the framework, the specific learning and educational outcomes that the Mission will support should be clearly identified. An explicit theory of change should link these outcomes to the overarching goal of the country strategy.

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<sup>10</sup> See the "Key Documents" sections of the country pages at <https://www.globalpartnership.org/about-us/developing-countries>.

### **Full CDCS Preparation, Review, and Approval (ADS 201.3.2.9(C))**

Key learning and educational outcomes must be formally integrated in the final CDCS through performance indicators. Regardless of how education is integrated into the CDCS results framework (as a standalone development objective; integrated as an intermediate result or sub-intermediate result; etc.) the specific learning and educational outcomes must be clearly identified. These indicators should be captured in the Results Framework Indicator Annex and subsequent Performance Management Plan (PMP).

## **B. Project Design and Implementation**

Project design is the process by which USAID defines how it will operationalize the results outlined in a CDCS or another strategic framework. The strategic planning process defines the approach, and the project design process outlines its execution.

### **Project Design Planning (ADS 201.3.3.12)**

ADS 201 requires that Missions develop a plan for engaging local actors as part of project design. Engaging with local actors should include education stakeholders such as local, regional, and/or national government or ministry representatives, civil society organizations, teachers' organizations, parents and caregivers, academia, private sector firms and associations, other donors, and, when possible, children and youth.<sup>11</sup>

ADS 201 also requires a plan for conducting analyses. At this stage, Missions should seek to conduct more in-depth analyses, whether using the same data gathered during CDCS development or collecting and analyzing additional data. Analyses of the education system will provide information on opportunities for lasting change, leverage points, and challenges that must be taken into consideration. This might include information on delivery systems (i.e. how do teachers, books and materials, and resources reach classrooms), language abilities and use (i.e. which languages do teachers/instructors and students use and understand), teacher ability and training, class sizes, and the availability of knowledgeable mentors and or coaches either within or outside of the formal system. At this point of the program cycle, it is also important to review past evaluations and ensure that lessons learned are incorporated into the design, in order to build on previous investments and accomplishments.

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<sup>11</sup> See the USAID Private Sector Engagement Policy and [Measuring Shared Value: How to Unlock Value by Linking Social and Business Results](#).



## Assessments and Analyses to Fit the Context and Project Purpose<sup>12</sup>

Available assessments for early and foundational learning include: [International Development and Early Learning Assessment \(IDELA\)](#); [Early Grade Reading Assessments \(EGRA\)](#); [Early Grade Mathematics Assessments \(EGMA\)](#); Literacy Landscape Analyses; and sub-national, national, or regional assessments of student abilities in reading, mathematics, and social-emotional skills.

In conflict and crisis-affected contexts, USAID's [Rapid Education and Risk Analysis \(RERA\) Toolkit](#) provides guidance on how to better understand the dynamic system of multiple contextual risks and assets that interact with the education system. When designing education projects, USAID Missions should consider how education systems are affected by contextual risks, such as violence, insecurity, natural hazards, and health pandemics, and how these risks influence each other. In stable settings, other types of system-level diagnostics could be utilized to inform the Project Appraisal Document (PAD) development.

For youth workforce development, a [labor market assessment](#) should be done at the outset of a project or activity and, ideally, at other intervals during implementation to update labor market information. The labor market assessment should analyze stakeholders within a workforce system in a target country and at subnational levels, including youth, government, families, education and training providers, and the private sector.

Private sector engagement is a key consideration for the project design phase.<sup>13</sup> USAID has numerous options to collaborate with the private sector including: public-private partnerships; de-risking and incentivizing investments and mobilization of capital; and developing multi-stakeholder alliances. The [Private Sector Engagement Resource Guide](#) contains a variety of tools and information useable at all phases of the program cycle.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that many of these tools are applicable throughout the program cycle.

<sup>13</sup> See the [How-to Guide: Integrating Private Sector Engagement Into the Project Design Process](#).

### **Project Design (ADS 201.3.3.13)**

Education project designs must consider: 1) how the activities under the project will work together and complement one another in the context of the education system; and 2) how the project will support the achievement of measurable, sustained improvements in learning and education outcomes. The degree to which individual activities under a project work on direct service delivery at the classroom level or focus on institutional or system-level capacity development will differ. However, projects as a whole must lead to measurable and sustainable improvements in learning and educational outcomes. Where possible, operating units and Missions should consider collaborations across sectors in order to maximize learning outcomes.

It is imperative that the project be bound by a theory of change that articulates how component activities will support sustained improvements in learning and educational outcomes. The theory of change underpinning project and activity design should be based on the best evidence possible. At the same time, projects and activities must consider the strengths and weakness of the evidence supporting the theory of change. When evidence is less robust or based on data from another context, the focus should be on experimentation to build evidence around the theory of change, and programs should have the flexibility to adapt in response to this evidence. When project design is based on robust locally tested evidence, the focus can shift from experimentation to implementation of proven models and approaches to scale.

Projects are expected to be designed based on clear evidence of logical pathways to achieving measurable learning and education outcomes. In addition, project monitoring and evaluation plans must specify how these outcomes will be measured. Approaches to measuring learning and education outcomes can vary according to project design decisions. For example, when building evidence for a theory of change through local service delivery, it may be appropriate to use an impact evaluation to measure outcomes. When designing a project at national scale based on a proven theory of change, it may be appropriate to work with the national assessment system to generate data on learning outcomes.

## **C. Activity Design and Implementation**

Activity design is the process by which USAID defines how it will implement an activity contributing to a project. An activity can be an implementing mechanism such as a

contract, direct agreement with the partner country government, cooperative agreement, or grant.<sup>14</sup> It also refers to actions undertaken directly by USAID staff, such as policy dialogue or capacity development.

### **Review and Conduct or Supplement Analysis (ADS 201.3.4.5(1))**

See the “Good Practice Documents and Technical Resources” section for further resources on analyses. Missions should consider co-design and co-creation options at this time, as appropriate and feasible.<sup>15</sup>

### **Confirm the Selection of Instrument (ADS 201.3.4.5(2))**

USAID has the authority to enter into grants, contracts, and a variety of other mechanisms to advance the mission of the Agency and accomplish its education objectives. USAID has no preference for acquisition instruments over assistance instruments or vice versa. The full breadth of potential implementing mechanisms should be explored, including those that allow for longer activity timelines.<sup>16</sup>

Education programming requires adaptive management to ensure that activities can adjust in response to new information and changing contexts. USAID’s work takes place in contexts that are often unstable and in transition, particularly in crisis and conflict-affected environments. Even in more stable contexts, circumstances evolve and may affect programming in unpredictable ways. Operating units should strongly consider using approaches to acquisition and assistance that promote intentional learning and flexibility in project and activity design,<sup>17</sup> minimize the obstacles to modifying programming, and create incentives for adaptive management. The ability to adapt during activity implementation must be balanced with considerations of fidelity of implementation—the degree to which an intervention or program is delivered as designed/intended.

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<sup>14</sup> The [Education Sector Public Solicitation Inventory](#) on ProgramNet provides a list of publicly available education-related USAID solicitations from 2006 to present. It includes a range of solicitation for both acquisition and assistance. Note that this simple list does not distinguish between high quality, exemplary solicitations and program descriptions and those that might be rethought and reframed if given a second opportunity.

<sup>15</sup> See [Successes and Challenges of Project Co-Creation](#) for lessons from USAID/Guatemala on co-designing an education activity.

<sup>16</sup> See the [Implementing Mechanism Matrix](#).

<sup>17</sup> See [Adaptive Approaches to Acquisition and Assistance \(USAID 2017\)](#) and [Procuring and Managing Adaptively: 5 Case Studies of Adaptive Mechanisms](#), and the [Adaptive Management \(CLA Toolkit\)](#). Note that these resources are only available on the USAID intranet.

### **Draft the Activity Description (ADS 201.3.4.5(3))**

The use of evidence is critically important in activity design. It is common to design an activity based on evidence that is partial, outdated, or generated in a different context; in these cases, activity design should include a testing phase to ensure the intervention works as anticipated. Testing effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions can provide data for scale up, as well as a foundation for sustainability by host governments, private actors, or other donors.

Embedding research into an activity design can help both inform implementation and generate evidence relevant to the broader sector. The evidence summaries and systematic reviews in Annex 1 are a starting point and should serve as complements to contextually specific evidence generated in-country and other relevant evidence. Activities that work closely with national stakeholders such as government agencies, local research organizations, universities, the private sector, and local NGOs can support the development and implementation of shared research agendas with the potential to lead to locally grown innovations and strengthen local systems and capacity to test interventions and use data for decision-making.

In order to achieve the long-term objective of ending the need for foreign assistance, operating units must take smart and disciplined programmatic risks. The USAID Risk-Appetite Statement provides guidance on determining how the degree of risk and return should be calculated.<sup>18</sup>

## **D. Monitoring**

Monitoring is the ongoing and systematic tracking of information relevant to USAID strategies, projects, and activities. The USAID monitoring toolkit is a foundational resource for Missions and partners, and includes the latest USAID guidance, tools, and templates for monitoring strategies, projects, and activities.<sup>19</sup>

Relevant monitoring data and information on education programming gathered at the country strategy stage and project and activity levels must be provided through the

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<sup>18</sup> See [USAID Risk-Appetite Statement](#).

<sup>19</sup> See the [Monitoring Toolkit at USAID Learning Lab](#).

Performance Plan and Report (PPR) and other reporting processes to support Agency policy-level decision-making, resource allocation, and communication with Congress and external stakeholders. Additional information regarding requirements of the PPR and other reporting processes is available in the Planning and Reporting section of this document.

In addition to collecting data on PPR indicators, it is essential that Missions ensure appropriate monitoring and documentation of activity implementation and adaptation, intervention delivery (duration, intensity, etc.) at the beneficiary level, activity outputs, and cost data. Missions should collect and make good use of information on the cost of interventions to ensure programs are able to be sustained by partner countries without USAID's support. USAID has produced [Cost Reporting Guidance for Education Programs](#) to help with data collection and reporting. Monitoring should provide data on both how well activities are reaching different beneficiary populations, including marginalized groups such as learners with disabilities, and the actual delivery of the intervention among distinct beneficiary groups. This data is instrumental to periodically review the assumptions underlying theories of change and interpret evaluation findings.

Monitoring is critical to knowing the fidelity of implementation. Routine context monitoring and feedback loops are effective tools for informing management and adaptation. This is particularly relevant in fragile and conflict-affected context. Monitoring should be embedded in partner country education systems, and local ownership should be promoted through joint planning, data collection, and the use of data at the field level. Strengthening the capacity of partner countries and education stakeholders to routinely gather, analyze, and use education data is an essential part of any education intervention. This should include the capacity of partner countries to collect data on learning and education outcomes and ensure the transparency and availability of those data and evaluations.

## **E. Evaluation**

Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of information about the characteristics and outcomes of strategies, projects, and activities to generate knowledge to improve effectiveness. Evaluations should be timed to inform decisions

about current and future programming.<sup>20</sup> Rigorous evaluations of education programs and activities strengthen accountability, ensure transparency, and feed into evidence-based theories of change. The USAID Evaluation Toolkit is a resource for Missions and partners with the latest guidance, tools, and templates for evaluating USAID strategies, programs, projects, and activities.<sup>21</sup> Additional [evaluation quality assessment tools](#) can be used to ensure partners know how to implement best practices in the evaluation science.

To promote learning and improve implementation, evaluation teams must work closely with implementation teams and employ robust, context-informed methodologies. The context, key learning questions, timeframe, and available budget all play an important role in informing the type of evaluation conducted. The following is a list of common evaluation approaches, which may be employed as appropriate to strengthen implementation, support adaptation, and generate long-term learning across the education sector.

- Agile evaluation methodologies, such as rapid feedback mechanisms, are useful for quickly generating context-specific evidence to inform investment decisions. When paired with cost reporting, rapid testing of intervention modalities can produce cost-effectiveness estimates and unit cost information critical to optimizing value for money and laying the foundation for scaling up and/or sustaining activity results.
- Routine evaluations of how well activities reach and benefit the most marginalized and vulnerable can inform collaboration with local stakeholders, adaptation as needed, and improvements in education programming for all.
- Impact evaluations measure the change in a development outcome that is directly attributable to the evaluated intervention. They require a rigorous counterfactual and must be planned and procured at the same time as the evaluated activity or project. Impact evaluations can be useful for comparing effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different approaches and for measuring the value added of different intervention components.
- Mid-term reviews and performance evaluations answer process and

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<sup>20</sup> See the [USAID Evaluation Policy](#).

<sup>21</sup> See [Evaluation Toolkit on USAID Learning Lab](#).



output-related questions. They can be conducted at any time during a project or activity implementation and require fewer resources and time than impact evaluations. Performance evaluations are particularly useful for exploring the interaction between the context and intervention that contribute to its success or failure. They also document unintended consequences of an intervention. While not designed to answer questions about attributable results of interventions, quantitative performance evaluations can provide estimates of an activity's contribution toward the measured change in a development outcome.

- While many evaluations focus on the effect of the intervention during and shortly after its implementation, there is much to learn about the long-term impact of intervention outcomes. Activities that underwent well-designed impact evaluations are the best candidates for ex-post evaluations—evaluations conducted well after activity completion with an emphasis on the longer-term effect of the intervention.<sup>22</sup>

Other types of evaluation approaches, such as developmental evaluation, and methods such as appreciative inquiry may be best suited for answering specific questions. With all types of evaluations, attention to quality of design and implementation of evaluations is essential. Per guidance in ADS 201, all reports from evaluations of education project and activities, including all annexes to the report, must be made publicly available by being submitted to the [Development Experience Clearinghouse](#) within three months of the conclusion of the evaluation (see [ADS 540](#) for requirements for material submitted to the DEC).

## **F. Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)**

Strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management link all components of the program cycle. CLA helps ensure that programming is coordinated, grounded in evidence and best practice, adjusted to remain relevant and effective throughout implementation, and informs future programming.<sup>23</sup> The [CLA Toolkit](#) includes curated tools and resources.

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<sup>22</sup> See the [Evaluation of Sustained Outcomes in Basic Education: Synthesis Report](#) for an example of ex-post evaluation of USAID education programming.

<sup>23</sup> See examples of CLA in education programming in the [case studies section](#) of the CLA Toolkit; there are cases from [Afghanistan](#), [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Guatemala](#), [Lebanon](#), [Nigeria](#), [Uganda](#), and more.

## V. Good Practice Documents and Technical Resources

The information, evidence, and guidance needed to effectively promote good education practices cannot be properly summarized in this guidance. More specific, in-depth information on technical topics will come in the form of “good practice” documents. These include documents labeled as how-to notes, technical notes, and toolkits that cover a range of technical or functional areas.

[EducationLinks](#) is a publicly available, online platform for education practitioners and policymakers to find the latest USAID programming guidance and global evidence in the field of international education. This platform was designed to consolidate the technical content related to USAID-funded education programming and will coordinate knowledge sharing across U.S. Government agencies. The site complements the [Development Experience Clearinghouse \(DEC\)](#), USAID’s official online document repository (the use of which is required by [ADS 540](#) and integrated into procurement documents). EducationLinks provides a curated and specific platform for education-related content and resources—it is USAID’s main public-facing global knowledge portal for education.

The [ProgramNet Education](#) site provides an internal, USAID-only platform for USAID staff to access internal learning opportunities and resources related to the program cycle. It contains resources that are not able to be shared publicly. Additionally, the [YouthPower](#) site is a public platform for cross-sectoral research, evaluations, and other resources on innovative approaches for youth programming.

USAID-relevant good practice documents can be accessed through searching and browsing [EducationLinks](#), [ProgramNet](#), [YouthPower](#), and the [DEC](#). A select number of good practice documents that are foundational to USAID education programming and the program cycle are listed below, though staff should note that they represent a small fraction of the information and resources that are available for support in implementing the USAID Education Policy.

Table 1.

<p><i>Pre-Primary Education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Early Literacy: Policy and Practice in the Pre-School Years</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">An Introduction to Developmentally Appropriate Practice</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Instructional Strategies for Kindergarten and the Primary Grades</a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Primary Education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Reading Programs that Work</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Lessons in Reading Reform</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Multilingual Education: Why It's Important and How to Implement It</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Toolkit: Second Edition</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Fundamentals of Whole System Reform</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Comprehensive Approach to Integrated Programming in Literacy and Numeracy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Universal Design for Learning to Help All Children Read: Promoting Literacy for Learners with Disabilities (Toolkit)</a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Secondary Education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Innovative Secondary Education for Skills Enhancement</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Skills at Scale: Transferable Skills in Secondary and Vocational Education in Africa</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Project-Based Learning: Equipping Youth with Agripreneurship by Linking Secondary Agricultural Education to Communities</a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Higher Education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Building Capacity in Higher Education Topic Guide</a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Youth Workforce Development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Guide to Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessments</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Interactive Labor Market Assessment Guide</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Measuring Skills in International Youth Development Programs</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Guiding Principles for Building Soft and Life Skills among Adolescents and Young Adults</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Youth Workforce Development 101 Fact Sheet</a></li> </ul>

<p><i>Equity and Inclusion</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Measuring School-Related Gender-Based Violence</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">How-To Note: Disability Inclusive Education</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in Learning Materials</a></li> <li>• How-To Note: Gender Integration in Education Programming (forthcoming)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Education in Crisis and Conflict</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Checklist on Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Rapid Education and Risk Analysis Toolkit</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Safe Learning Environments Toolkit</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">INEE Guidance Note on Conflict Sensitive Education</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Safe Healing and Learning Spaces Toolkit</a></li> <li>• Education and Humanitarian Development Coherence White Paper (forthcoming)</li> <li>• <a href="#">How-to Note: Programming Education within Countering Violent Extremism Programs</a> (internal)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Education Finance</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Role of Digital Financial Services in Accelerating USAID Education Goals</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">SABER School Finance Reports Library</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Government-to-Government (G2G) Education Toolkit</a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Research, Evaluation, and Data</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">USAID Cost Reporting Guidance for Education Programs</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Assessing the Quality of Education Evaluations Tool</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Evaluation Design Report Template for Education Programs</a></li> </ul>

## VI. Performance, Planning, and Reporting

### A. Performance Plans and Reports (PPR)

The [Performance Plan and Report \(PPR\)](#) is an annual data call for performance information to all operating units in USAID and the Department of State that implement foreign assistance programs.

#### Key Issue Narratives

Operating units should capture relevant results and progress in the Key Issue Narratives for:

- ES.1 Basic Education
- ES.2 Higher Education
- Higher Education Institution Engagement

In addition to the education-focused narratives, there are a number of other narratives that are useful for examining specific topics or areas of emphasis in all program areas, including education:

- Gender Equality/Women's Empowerment
- Inclusive Development: Participation of People with Disabilities
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Science, Technology, and Innovation
- Youth Development

For these key issues, education programs and results should feed into the broader narrative, highlighting the education sector results related to the key issue topic. This allows for more information to be conveyed on education programs through these key issue lenses than through the education-focused narratives alone.

#### Indicators

Operating units are required to set targets and report on results annually through PPRs. To the extent possible, the use of standard indicators is encouraged. Standard indicators can and should include outcome indicators and output indicators, such as number of

beneficiaries reached. Activity managers are encouraged to develop and report on customized indicators to track progress as needed.

Operating units are required to set targets and measure results on learning and educational outcomes associated with their programming. They then must share their data on learning and educational outcomes with USAID/Washington through the PPR process. Missions with relevant programming must set targets and report on results for all applicable standard indicators in annual PPRs. Operating units should collect and report on standard indicators and their disaggregates, including by sex, if programming produces data that contributes to the measurement of a standard indicator. Customized indicators, particularly those related to learning outcomes, should also be reported in the PPR. Complete reporting of both types of indicators is essential to ensure that data from the PPR captures the full scale of USAID programmatic results and achievements. This is important for Agency-level monitoring, as well to inform public and Congressional reporting. It also reduces the need for ad hoc data calls.

Missions should ensure all contracts and awards with education programming include applicable standard indicators. During implementation, Missions should work with implementing partners to ensure activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans contain all applicable standard indicators, including education programming funded through other sources of funding. When utilizing a CLA approach, particularly in fluid contexts, targets or indicators should be revised as appropriate.

In the Standard Foreign Assistance Master Indicator List (MIL), there are a range of education-related standard indicators (under ES.1 Basic Education, ES.2 Higher Education, EG.6 Workforce Development, and other program areas) that are relevant to the priority areas in the policy. These indicators are captured in the table below. USAID staff can access the full Indicator References Sheets with complete definitions, disaggregates and other information at <https://pages.usaid.gov/F/ppr>.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Note that <https://www.state.gov/f/indicators/> is a publicly available link. Staff should use the internal link, as some updates to the public site may lag behind updates made internally.



Table 2.

	Priority Area			
	Access, Particularly for Marginalized and Vulnerable	Foundational Skills and Early Learning	Youth Education and Skills Development	Higher Education
<b>Learning and Skills Outcomes</b>				
ES.1-1 - Percent of learners who attain a minimum grade-level proficiency in reading at the end of grade 2 with USG assistance		x		
ES.1-2 - Percent of learners attaining minimum grade-level proficiency in reading at the end of primary school (or grade 6, whichever comes sooner) with USG assistance		x	x	
EG.6-2 - Number of individuals with improved skills following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs		x	x	x
<b>Employment and Earnings</b>				
EG.6-4 - Number of individuals with new employment following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs			x	x
EG.6-5 - Number of individuals with increased earnings following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs			x	x
<b>Learners and Students Reached</b>				
ES.1-3 - Number of learners in primary schools and/or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance	x	x	x	
ES.1-4 - Number of learners in secondary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with	x		x	

USG education assistance				
ES.1-5 - Number of learners reached in reading programs/interventions at the primary level	x	x		
EG.6-3 - Number of individuals who complete USG-assisted workforce development programs	x	x	x	
YOUTH 3 - Percentage of participants in USG-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources who are youth (15-29)	x		x	x
<b>Access to Higher Education</b>				
ES.2-2 - Number of individuals attending tertiary education institutions with USG scholarship or financial assistance	x		x	x
EG.3.2-2 - Number of individuals who have received USG-supported degree-granting non-nutrition-related food security training			x	x
HL.9-4 - Number of individuals [degree-seeking trainees] receiving nutrition-related professional training through USG-supported programs			x	x
<b>Teachers</b>				
ES.1-6 - Number of primary or secondary educators who complete professional development activities with USG support	x	x	x	x
ES.1-7 - Number of primary school educators who complete professional development activities on implementing evidence-based reading instruction with USG assistance		x		x
ES.1-8 - Number of primary or secondary school educators who complete professional development	x	x	x	x

activities on teaching students with special educational needs with USG assistance				
ES.1-9 - Number of primary or secondary school educators who complete professional development activities on peace education, conflict sensitivity, or conflict transformation with USG assistance	x	x	x	x
<b>Teaching and Learning Materials</b>				
ES.1-10 - Number of primary or secondary textbooks and other teaching and learning materials provided with USG assistance		x	x	
ES.1-11 - Number of primary school classrooms that receive a complete set of essential reading instructional materials with USG assistance		x		
<b>Management and Capacity Development</b>				
ES.1-12 - Number of education administrators/officials who complete professional development activities with USG support	x	x	x	
ES.2-1 - Number of host country tertiary education institutions receiving capacity development support with USG assistance				x
CBLD-8a - Number of USG-assisted organizations [research and educational] with increased performance improvement	x	x	x	x
<b>Parent and Community Engagement</b>				
ES.1-13 - Number of parent teacher associations (PTAs) or community governance structures engaged in primary or secondary education supported with USG assistance	x	x	x	

<b>Infrastructure</b>				
ES.1-14 - Number of primary or secondary classrooms built or repaired with USG assistance	x			
HL.8.1-4 - Number of institutional settings [schools] gaining access to basic drinking water services as a result of USG assistance	x			x
HL.8.2-4 - Number of basic sanitation facilities provided in institutional settings [schools] as a result of USG assistance	x			x
<b>Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation</b>				
EG.3.2-7 - Number of technologies, practices, and approaches under various phases of research, development, and uptake as a result of USG assistance				x
STIR-12 - Number of peer-reviewed scientific publications resulting from USG support to research and implementation programs				x

Note that some of the education-related standard indicators are subsets of other indicators. In these cases, Missions are expected to report on both indicators, rather than picking one to report on. For example, if a Mission reports on ES.1-5 “Number of learners reached in reading programs at the primary level with USG assistance,” they should, in addition, report on ES.1-3 “Number of learners in primary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance,” regardless of whether or not the number of beneficiaries reported for each are identical.

Programs of any funding source *can* and *should* contribute to standard indicators. All education-related programs and results, regardless of whether they are funded through the basic education or higher education program areas and directives, should be considered when reporting.

## **Measuring Learning Outcomes**

To address the Congressional expectation of improvement of learning and educational outcomes as a specific, measured objective, all operating units with education portfolios must measure and report on learning and educational outcomes.

At present, USAID has standard indicators in place to support measurement and reporting on primary grades reading outcomes (ES.1-1, ES.1-2), Workforce Skills Development (EG.6-2), and Workforce Employment and Earnings Outcomes (EG.6-4, EG.6-5). USAID/Washington will develop the resources and standard indicators necessary for measuring and reporting additional allowable learning and educational outcomes.

Within the constraints discussed in this guidance and in line with the priority areas in the policy, Missions have the flexibility to identify the outcomes their programs will target. Missions also have the flexibility to identify methodologies for measuring learning outcomes that are valid and appropriate to the country context and development objectives. Missions should consider methodologies that reinforce country capacity to sustainably measure learning outcomes consistent with global measurement standards, as well as methodologies that USAID has strong experience and capacity to support.

## **B. USAID Development Data**

Data, and the information derived from data, are assets for USAID, its partners, the academic and scientific communities, and the public at large. The value of data used in strategic planning, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of USAID's programs is enhanced when data is made available throughout the Agency and to other interested stakeholders, in accordance with proper protection and redaction allowable by law.

For USAID education programming, the expectation is that all assessments and sampling, assumptions, designs and protocols; data collection instruments; training manuals; reports; quantitative and qualitative code books; and raw data sets, that are properly cleaned to remove personally identifiable information (PII), will be submitted to the Development Data Library (DDL) in accordance with guidelines articulated in ADS

579 and recommended practices for the sector.<sup>25</sup> The presumption is that data will be made public as allowable by law. It is the responsibility of Missions to communicate this U.S. Government policy with country partners.

### **C. Sectoral Learning and Reporting**

USAID/Washington will reinforce and build upon Mission-driven monitoring, evaluation, learning, and reporting through efforts such as systematic analyses, reporting on learning and educational outcomes associated with programming, continuous assessment of the quality and findings of educational intervention evaluations, aggregate and targeted analyses of activity cost information, and the pursuit of sectoral learning agendas. These efforts will improve the body of education sector data and evidence, pioneering innovative approaches to our work.

USAID will produce a publicly available report annually on the results and progress made related to the priorities of the USAID Education Policy, focused on learning and educational outcomes:

- Children, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, have increased access to quality education that's safe, relevant, and promotes social well-being
- Children and youth gain literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success
- Youth gain the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society
- Higher education institutions have the capacity to be central actors in development by conducting and applying research, delivering quality education, and engaging with communities

The report will be based on data and narrative information extracted from the PPRs and OPs of all operating units on program implementation, budget allocations, and performance results for all education programming across the Agency. Information from evaluation reports and analyses of other data sources will be used in the development of public reports. USAID will use third party, national-level education indicators to better track and understand overall country progress in the path to self-reliance in education.

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<sup>25</sup> The requirement to submit data to the Development Data Library replaces an earlier requirement to submit data to the Secondary Analysis and Results Tracking (SART) data system.

## VII. Budget Planning

This policy applies to all USAID education programming, regardless of the funding account, directive, or program area. The Foreign Assistance budget is built through distinct phases that must be completed before funds can be obligated: Mission Resource Request (MRR); Bureau Resource Request (BRR); USAID Development Budget; Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Submission; Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ); Congressional Appropriations; 653(a) Report; and Operational Plans (OP). Operating units seeking to implement education programs must engage in the budget process to request and be allocated funding sufficient to support substantive activities. Missions and operating units must recognize their resource parameters and constraints and plan accordingly. The principle in the policy of focusing on sustainable results is particularly applicable to resource request and allocation decisions.

Funding for education programming is mainly comprised of direct allocations under the ES.1 Basic Education and ES.2 Higher Education program areas in the Foreign Assistance Framework.<sup>26</sup> There are multiple other program areas (such as DR.4 Civil Society; EG.3 Agriculture; EG.6 Workforce Development; ES.5 Social Assistance; or HL.1 HIV/AIDS) that may be used to directly fund or to complement education-related activities.<sup>27</sup> All education investments should adhere to the principles of the policy and align with its priorities.

### A. Attributing Funding to Congressional Directives for Education

#### Overview of Education Directives

There are two main legislative drivers for USAID's education programming: (1) Section 105 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended by the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development (READ) Act ([PL 115-56](#)), which authorizes and provides a definition of basic education and a sense of Congressional priorities for education programming; and (2) the basic education and higher education directives in annual appropriations bills, the annual funding legislation that provides legal authority for agencies to spend funds. Annual appropriations often include directives on the amount

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<sup>26</sup> See the full SPSPD program areas, program elements, and their definitions at <https://www.state.gov/f/releases/other/255986.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Note that other sectoral directives (e.g. democracy, water) and sector-specific accounts (e.g. Global Health Programs) have their own sets of parameters and guidance that must be followed.



of USAID funding to be spent on education, as well as specific directives on how and where to program education funds. Congressional committee reports and statements of managers provide further detail of Congressional intent regarding the use of education funds.<sup>28</sup>

This section provides the parameters for implementing the basic education and higher education directives and offers guidance on permissible and non-permissible uses of education-directed funds. These parameters were determined in consultation with Congressional committees and staff responsible for drafting the directive provisions in appropriations legislation.<sup>29</sup> This guidance applies to the use of *all* funds attributed to education directives—regardless of account, program area, or the alignment or non-alignment of projects and activities with the overall objectives set forth in any current, active Agency-level USAID education policy.

### **Guiding Principle for Attribution of Funds Directed for Education**

**The intent of Congress and USAID is that education-directed funds must be used for programs that assist countries to achieve measurable improvements in learning and educational outcomes.**

Funds directed for education must not be used for programs that do not have the improvement of learning and educational outcomes as a specific, measured objective.<sup>30</sup> The justification for use of education-directed funds rests solely on the expected impact of the activity on learning and educational outcomes. The impact of an education program on other goals is not relevant in justifying the use of education-directed funds.

Activities that support improved learning and education outcomes can take a variety of forms: improving teacher training; purchasing and distributing teaching and learning materials; policy dialogue and reform support; conducting learning assessments; constructing or rehabilitating education facilities; integrating technologies into systems or classrooms; supporting capacity development in ministries, universities, and other

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<sup>28</sup> Appropriations bills and committee reports are available at [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov).

<sup>29</sup> Note that this guidance replaces and supersedes the [Clarification of the Basic Education Congressional Earmark](#) guidance note that was issued in 2009. It applies to all education-directed funds available to the Agency, regardless of the year in which they were appropriated.

<sup>30</sup> The justification for use of education directed funds rests on the expected educational impact of the activity. The impact of an activity on other goals — health, economic growth, agriculture, democracy and governance, etc. — is not relevant to justifying the use of directed education funds. These intersections should be considered in the development of integrated programming, but they cannot justify the use of education directed funds for an activity that is expected to have no impact on educational outcomes.

partner country organizations; and many more. This guidance does not seek to overly restrict the use of directed funds based on categories or types of activities, but rather allows Missions to use the most relevant evidence regarding effective interventions to measurably improve learning and educational outcomes.

### **Tracking Congressional Directives for Education in the Budget**

Directives for basic education are mainly tracked through direct allocations to ES.1 Basic Education in the Standard Program Structure and Definitions (SPSD), all subcategories of which are attributed to the basic education directive. Directives for higher education are mainly tracked through direct allocations to ES.2 Higher Education in the SPSD, all subcategories of which are attributed to the higher education directive.

There are multiple other program areas (e.g. DR.4 Civil Society; EG.3 Agriculture; EG.6 Workforce Development; or ES.5 Social Assistance) that may directly fund or complement education-related activities. The “Basic Education Directive” and “Higher Education Directive” Key Issues can be used throughout the budget process to identify areas where an activity meets the definition for ES.1 Basic Education or ES.2 Higher Education (i.e., used for measurable learning and educational outcomes) as well as another program area in the SPSD, thus allowing for funding allocated to non-education program areas to be attributed to the basic education or higher education directives.<sup>31</sup>

### **Basic Education Directive Definition**

Funding attributed to the basic education directive must align with the categories of activities and definitions provided in the Standard Program Structure and Definitions (SPSD) and in the READ Act.

- Program Area ES.1: Basic Education
  - Program Element ES.1.1: Pre-Primary Education
  - Program Element ES.1.2: Primary Education
  - Program Element ES.1.3: Lower Secondary Education
  - Program Element ES.1.4: Learning for Out-of-School Youth
  - Program Element ES.1.5: Literacy and Numeracy for Youth and Adults

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<sup>31</sup> Again, note that other sectoral directives (e.g. democracy, water) and sector-specific accounts (e.g. Global Health Programs) have their own sets of parameters and guidance that must be followed.

- Program Element ES.1.6: Upper Secondary Education
- Program Element ES.1.7: Education Systems
- Program Element ES.1.8: Host Country Strategic Information Capacity

In addition to the SPSD areas above, the activity areas listed below—which come directly from the READ Act—may be attributed to the basic education directive.

**Definition of Basic Education from the READ Act:**

BASIC EDUCATION. The term “basic education” includes:

- Measurable improvements in literacy, numeracy, and other basic skills development that prepare an individual to be an active, productive member of society and the workforce;
- Workforce development, vocational training, and digital literacy informed by real market needs and opportunities and that results in measurable improvements in employment;
- Programs and activities designed to demonstrably improve:
  - a. Early childhood, pre-primary education, primary education, and secondary education, which can be delivered in formal or non-formal education settings;
  - b. Learning for out-of-school youth and adults;
- Capacity building for teachers, administrators, counselors, and youth workers that results in measurable improvements in student literacy, numeracy, or employment.

**Higher Education Directive Definition**

Funding attributed to the higher education directive must align with the categories of activities and definitions provided in the SPSD.

- Program Area ES.2 Higher Education
  - Program Element ES.2.1: Engaging Higher Education Institutions in Research and Development
  - Program Element ES.2.2: Access to Tertiary Education and Professional Development to Strengthen Higher Education

- Program Element ES.2.3: Host Country Strategic Information Capacity
- Program Element ES.2.4: Engaging Tertiary Institutions in Workforce Development
- Program Element ES.2.5: Systemic Reform of Tertiary Institutions
- Program Element ES.2.6: Access to Higher Education Opportunities

### **Attributions with Special Considerations**

The following types of activities are specifically addressed in this guidance because they are the subject of frequently asked questions and/or specific direction from Congress.

#### ***i. Youth Workforce Development Programs***

Youth workforce development includes a range of interventions to assist individuals in acquiring knowledge and developing skills and behaviors to find jobs, establish viable self-employment ventures, and/or stay employed and productive in a changing economy, including through creation of policies, programs, and systems that respond to labor market demands in the formal and informal sectors.

Youth workforce development programs may be funded from a range of accounts and program areas, not all of which are attributable to education directives. When using funds attributed to education directives, operating units must adhere to the following guidance:

- Funds may be attributed to the basic education directive if they support youth workforce development activities to improve skills—particularly literacy, numeracy, social-emotional and soft skills, technical skills, and other transferable skills—for youth and adults at or below the secondary school level and for out-of-school youth and adults with less than a secondary school level, or equivalent, educational attainment. This includes capacity development support to institutions and organizations that provide these services.
- Funds may be attributed to the higher education directive if they support youth workforce development activities to improve skills—particularly technical skills, industry-specific skills, and social-emotional and soft skills—for youth and adults at or above the post-secondary school and tertiary levels or their equivalents. This includes capacity development support to institutions and organizations that provide these services.

Additionally, the table below provides a rough guide to selecting the most appropriate directive attribution—between basic education and higher education—based on the education level for intended programming and the educational attainment of the target population(s). For example, funding for youth workforce development activities targeting populations who have attained upper secondary education (i.e. graduated secondary school or equivalent) would be more appropriately attributed to the higher education directive, not the basic education directive.

Table 3.

<b>Education Programming Level<sup>32</sup></b>	<b>Basic Education</b>	<b>Higher Education</b>
Less than primary education (ISCED Level 0)	✓	
Primary education (ISCED Level 1)	✓	
Lower secondary education (ISCED Level 2)	✓	
Upper secondary education (ISCED Level 3)	✓	
Post-secondary non-higher education (ISCED Level 4)		✓
Higher education (ISCED Levels 5-8)		✓

Operating units should use this guidance and their best judgment to determine whether education-directed funds are appropriate to use for workforce development programming, and if so, which directive is most appropriate.

### ***ii. School Feeding Programs***

The United Nations World Food Programme’s [The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2013](#) report defines school feeding as “the provision of food to schoolchildren.” School feeding programs “can be classified into two main groups based on their modalities: 1) in-school feeding, where children are fed in school; and 2) take-home rations, where families are given food if their children attend school. In-school feeding can, in turn, be divided into two common categories: 1) programmes that provide meals; and 2) programmes that provide high-energy biscuits or snacks.”

<sup>32</sup> See [International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\) 2011](#) for more information on education levels.

Funds may be attributed to the basic education directive only if they support activities that provide pre-primary, primary, or secondary school feeding/meals where the activities a) are combined with other interventions directly focused on measurably improving learning and other educational outcomes, b) include measurement of educational outcomes, and c) are clearly identified in the regular notification procedures of the Congressional Committees on Appropriations. School feeding programming must be coordinated with U.S. Department of Agriculture programming and USAID Food For Peace programming, as appropriate.

It is critical to identify the theory of change that explains how a school feeding program contributes to education and learning outcomes in a specific country context. Evidence suggests that when malnutrition and food insecurity are low and school attendance is high, school feeding programs will have little or no impact on education outcomes; conversely, in settings where malnutrition and food insecurity is high and school attendance is low, school feeding programs can positively affect attendance and learning outcomes.<sup>33</sup> Within a single country, different regions may have different levels of need.

### ***iii. Teacher Education and Professional Development***

Funding for initial teacher education and professional development for teachers working in pre-primary through secondary levels should usually be attributed to the basic education directive. For initial teacher education and preparation taking place in post-secondary or higher education institutions, funding attributions may be made to the basic education directive, the higher education directive, or both. If funding is to be attributed to the higher education directive, then the activities must strengthen the capacity of these higher education institutions.

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<sup>33</sup> While there is evidence that school feeding programs in general consistently result in positive outcomes for energy intake, micronutrient status, school enrollment, and attendance, there is less conclusive evidence regarding the effects of school feeding on growth, cognition, and academic achievement. A systematic review ([Snilstveit, et al. 2016](#)) found school-feeding programs to be promising for improving enrollment as well as learning. See also a summary from the Center for Global Development on recent research on this topic ([Sandefur, 2017](#)).

## **B. Operational Plans (OP)**

The purpose of the [Operational Plan \(OP\)](#) is to provide a comprehensive picture of how an operating unit will use its foreign assistance funding to achieve foreign assistance goals and to establish how the proposed funding plan and programming supports operating units, Agency, and U.S. Government policy priorities.

### **Implementing Mechanisms (IM)**

Implementing mechanism narratives should contain sufficient detail on the activity to easily understand the link between the activity and learning and educational outcomes. While not every individual activity in a portfolio is expected to reach learners/students as direct beneficiaries (some will do this more so than others), every activity must be grounded in a theory of change that articulates the connection between the activity and expected improvements in learning and educational outcomes. The portfolio as a whole should clearly demonstrate a strong connection to these outcomes, and the IM narratives should reflect this.

### **Key Issue Narratives**

Operating units should specify how their education portfolios integrate the principles in the USAID Education Policy and relate to its priorities (regardless of the program area or account used to fund programs). This information should be explicit in the Key Issue Narratives for:

- ES.1 Basic Education
- ES.2 Higher Education
- Higher Education Institution Engagement

In addition to the education-focused narratives, there are a number of other narratives that are particularly useful in examining specific topics or areas of emphasis in all program areas, including education:

- Gender Equality/Women's Empowerment
- Inclusive Development: Participation of People with Disabilities
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Science, Technology, and Innovation
- Youth Development



For these key issues, programs and results should feed into the broader narrative, highlighting the education programs related to the key issue topic. This allows for more information to be conveyed on education programming through these key issue lenses than through the education-focused narratives alone.

## Annex I: Evidence Summaries and Systematic Reviews

The use of evidence is critically important in both project and activity design. The following list is a small snapshot of relevant systematic and summary reviews, as well as topic-specific reviews, that provide evidence on how countries improve their education systems and improve learning and other educational outcomes. Sustained improvements in education will vary and evolve depending on the country context and technical, political, and financial issues in the country. These studies are a starting point and should serve as complements to context-specific evidence generated in-country, and other relevant evidence.

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- Krishnaratne, Shari, Howard White, and Ella Carpenter, "[Quality Education for All Children? What Works in Education in Developing Countries](#)," International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2013.
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- International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, "[Primary and Secondary Education Evidence Gap Map](#)," 2018.
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- Riddell, Abby, Miguel Niño-Zarazúa, "[The Effectiveness of Foreign Aid to Education: What Can Be Learned?](#)," International Journal of Educational Development, Volume 48, Pages 23-36, 2016.
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