

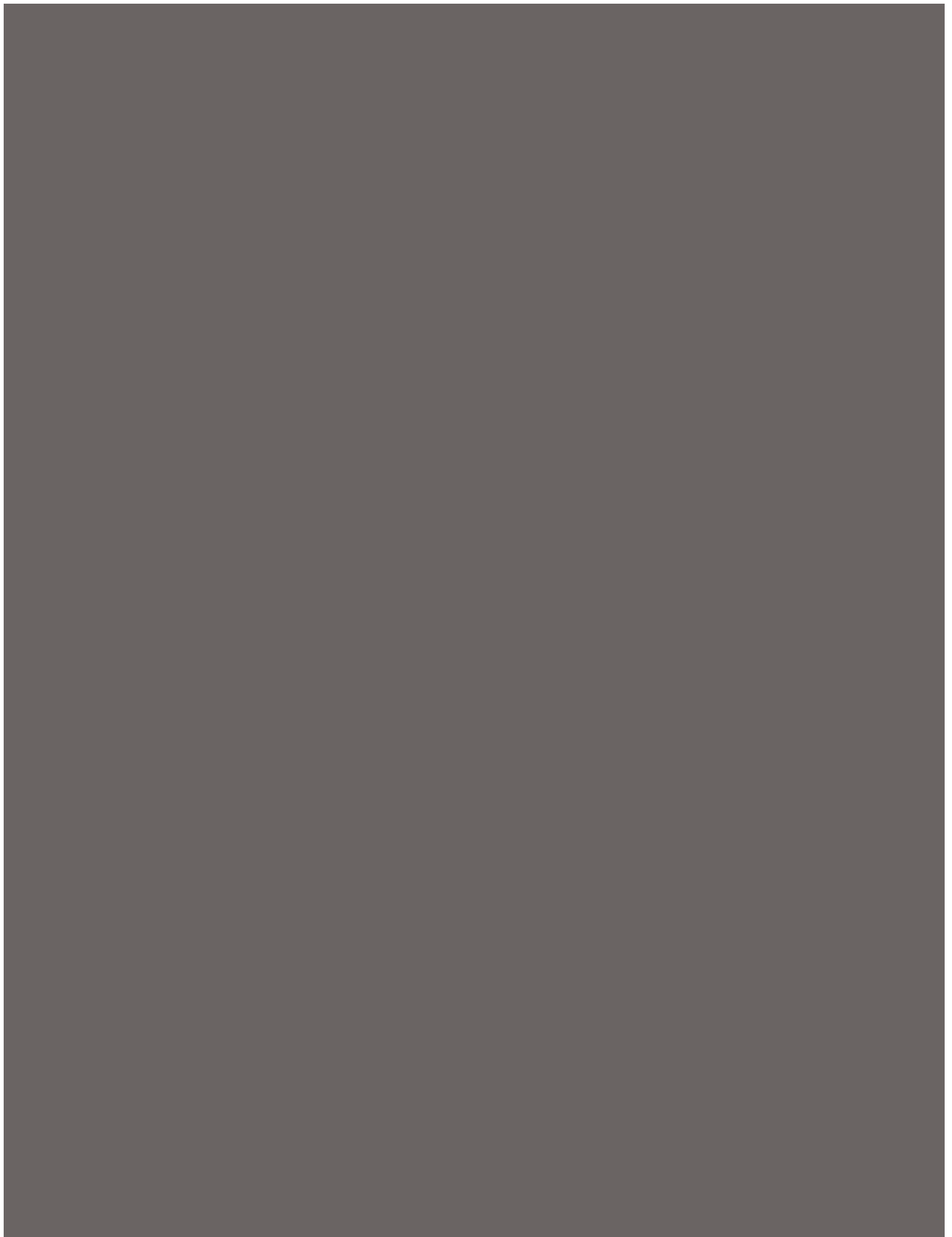


USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



USAID MESSAGE MANUAL

MARCH 2019



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INTRODUCTION

In March 2019, the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) issued this revised version of the message manual to continue to streamline and improve communications across the Agency. This version includes updates to our overall core messages and our message framework. It also includes key information on our branding and storytelling resources. LPA continues to conduct trainings both in Washington, D.C. and overseas on priority messaging.

We invite you to use this message manual in your ongoing communications efforts, and to contribute to it as a living resource for all USAID and partner communicators.

OVERVIEW

To overcome the increasingly complex challenges that hold us back—including instability, fragility, violence and environmental threats—we have to employ a more expansive, sustainable approach to international development. We must protect the progress we're making toward a shared future by supporting resilient, democratic societies that provide for the safety, health and well-being of their people.

To do this, we leverage the biggest hearts and brightest minds and remain agile; integrate innovation, science and technology; and focus like never before on measuring and delivering results to ensure that everyone benefits from progress. By building a stronger, more secure world, we are advancing global security and prosperity for all.

Our communication efforts increase awareness and clarity about USAID's work and how it advances American interests.

They reinforce USAID's position as the world's premier international development agency and catalytic actor driving development results.

In all our communication products we should better tell the USAID story to engage audiences.

OUR MISSION

Our mission statement represents the goals and aspirations of USAID, its many partners and the people we assist around the world:

On behalf of the American people, we promote and demonstrate democratic values abroad, and advance a free, peaceful and prosperous world. In support of America's foreign policy, USAID leads the U.S. Government's international development and disaster assistance through partnerships and investments that save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance and help people emerge from humanitarian crises and progress beyond assistance.



We provide development assistance to help partner countries on their own development journey to self-reliance. Over the long run, our goal is to have countries go from being recipients, to partners, to donors.

WHAT DOES “OUR” MEAN IN THE MISSION STATEMENT?

The word “our” recognizes the common interest of both Americans and people from around the world. It is used to express a shared interest in progress and a common humanity. The sentiment was well-stated by President John F. Kennedy: “Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet, we all breathe the same air, we all cherish our children’s futures and we are all mortal.”

OUR AUDIENCES

As an Agency rooted in collaboration, partnership and shared knowledge, we need the support and participation of multiple stakeholders. We need to ensure each of our stakeholders feel a level of ownership or personal stake in our shared work and progress; they must be assured of the importance and value of their contributions to our mission.

USAID STAFF: This is our team. Our core message must be understood and effectively communicated by these key ambassadors, both in the field and at headquarters.

WASHINGTON POLICYMAKERS: These influencers make decisions and propose policies based on the economic, national security and political benefits of our development efforts. Policymakers include Congress, the White House, other U.S. Government agencies and think tanks.

DONOR NATIONS: The United States is the largest bilateral donor in the world. But we cannot solve the world's challenges on our own. We need to work in partnership with other donors and encourage more countries to become effective donors.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC: In order to effectively communicate to the broader public, we need to communicate especially with those who have the ability to move forward key programmatic objectives. In times of crises related to humanitarian aid, we often focus our communications on diaspora communities with family, friends and loved ones in impacted areas.

OUR HOST COUNTRY AUDIENCES: Communications in the field often reach unique audiences. Some of these audiences include:

- USAID program recipients, youth, women of childbearing age, parents and health care providers.
- Local, regional and national government officials.
- Tribal, religious and community leaders.
- Journalists and bloggers writing about development issues.
- NGOs, private sector partners and others in the development community.

THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY: This includes international, national and local NGOs in the regions where USAID does its work, as well as faith-based organizations.

PRIVATE SECTOR: USAID is undertaking a major cultural and operational transformation to expand private sector engagement Agency-wide. Through the new Private Sector Engagement Policy, USAID has issued a call to action and mandate to work hand-in-hand with the private sector to design and deliver our development and humanitarian programs in all sectors. This policy signals an intentional shift toward enterprise-driven development as a more sustainable way to empower people, communities and countries on their journey to self-reliance.

MESSAGE FRAMEWORK

To maximize messaging resonance, we must devise tailored communications that speak directly to each of our audiences in a way that consistently reinforces the significance of their participation. You can describe this participation through the three lenses of “what,” “how” and “why.”

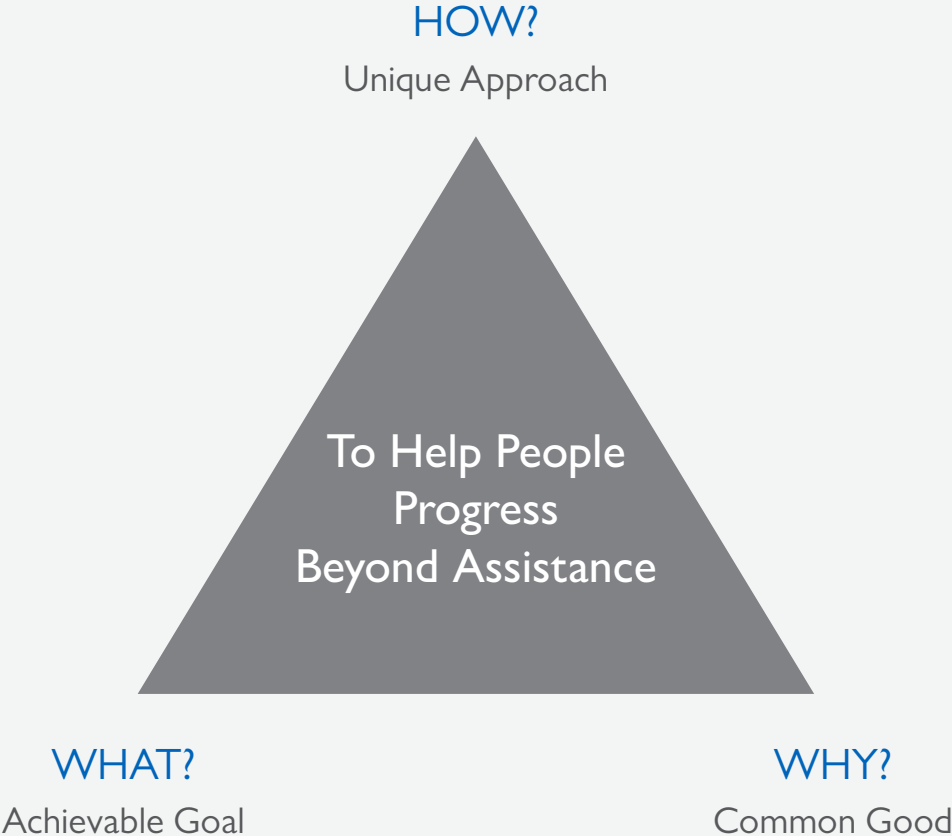
WHAT: This is our Achievable Goal. This is a clear articulation of our Agency’s programmatic objectives. It is where we explain in clear, understandable language what we are trying to achieve and, ideally, by when. It is also where we provide the context and persuasive argument for our work. Here are some tips:

- Be focused on outcome as opposed to process (lives saved, people fed, laws changed).
- Include a larger goal when possible (establishing 60 million sustainable power connections in Africa by 2030).
- Provide evidence on why our goal is obtainable (we have already saved 4.6 million children since 2008).

HOW: This is defined as our unique approach. It is an explanation of what USAID does to meet goals and how our approach is different than what others may be doing. Our approach should demonstrate our value added to the overall work of development. It may take many forms, including our focus on: inclusive growth, results and accountability, resilience and partnership.

WHY: Why we do our work can be expressed by common good. Our work benefits people around the world, including those in the United States. Central to the common good is our Agency’s focus on inclusive growth and ensuring that no one is left behind. Broadly, the common good includes messages such as: It is the right thing to do; it is good for local and global economies; it protects all of us and our shared resources; and shared progress and shared future.

MESSAGE TRIANGLE



At the center of our communications framework is our mission, expressed by our core message and supported by the three cornerstones of the message triangle. The three cornerstone messages of the triangle explain the “what,” “how” and “why” of our work. This construction is designed to allow us to tell a clear and compelling story of our collective efforts and to engage our audiences in our work.

TOPLINE AGENCY MESSAGES

Our goal is to speak as one USAID. In all of our communications, we should explain and champion our mission. Our core message explains what USAID is and how we do our work around the world. By drawing our audiences back to a common mission, we help them to understand why USAID should matter to them. This messaging can and should be adapted based on key audiences.

USAID is a catalytic actor driving development results. We provide development assistance to help partner countries on their own development journey to self-reliance. We look at ways to help lift lives and build communities.

ACHIEVABLE GOAL (WHAT): The purpose of foreign aid is to end the need for its existence. Our goal is to have countries go from being recipients, to partners, to donors.

UNIQUE APPROACH (HOW): By building a better, safer world we promote the dignity and freedom of people everywhere and we advance our collective security and prosperity. We do that by:

- Promoting Global Health
- Supporting Global Stability
- Providing Humanitarian Assistance
- Catalyzing Innovation and Partnership
- Empowering Women and Girls

COMMON GOOD (WHY):

- Promote a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience
- Advance U.S. national security and economic prosperity
- Demonstrate American generosity

DON'T FORGET THE WHO: THE HUMAN STORY

Research has repeatedly shown that humans are inspired to care about a topic when they can make an emotional connection with that issue. We do this by telling stories that “humanize” the work of USAID, its staff and—most importantly—its recipients.

There are many ways to reach beyond the program elements that fill our fact sheets in our narrative stories, videos and other communications. One commonality is focusing on the “humanity”—the universal, relatable, human emotions and experiences—in every story you tell. Going beyond the data points and focusing on the personal stories ultimately helps us communicate with even greater impact about the difference our work makes around the world.

TIPS:

- Find the “hero” in every story you want to tell. Often the most compelling way to communicate about the good work we are doing is to find an individual recipient or an implementing partner with a compelling personal story. Focus your narrative on those things that make us human — dreams realized, alliances built and hardships overcome — and ask questions in a way that helps you capture those answers. Engagement with a cause is not about numbers. It’s emotional and it’s with individuals.
- Simplicity is an art. The most compelling stories are not necessarily the most complicated or loaded with detail. In fact, excessive detail can slay a good story. And, in case it’s not obvious: no jargon, no technical speak and no acronyms, unless absolutely necessary.
- Know what you want to say. It may seem obvious, but if you can’t easily summarize your story, you probably don’t have a compelling story to tell.
- Always keep your audience in mind. Remember your goal, your audience and what they will respond to. Audiences should be able to see themselves/relate to the “hero.”
- It’s important to show there is a possibility of hope. Do not focus only on negative aspects. Development work can be powerful and inspirational. Don’t be afraid to let some emotion shine through. Emotion inspires action.

COMMUNICATIONS IN THE FIELD

Communications coming from missions and programs operating overseas are unique to the environments in which they operate. They are most often tied to promoting the mission's key country strategies as defined in the Country Development Cooperation Strategy. Or, they may be tied to specific program goals.

The message framework is designed to be adaptive. It lays out the basic framing for USAID's communications and is a tool to help refine your messages. Think about how to craft communications that incorporate umbrella messages (Agency and mission), while ensuring that messages relate to host-country audiences. How does my target audience think about this focus area? How might I frame it so that they identify? What is the humanizing element? How can I position our mission as unique in this space?

Importantly, messaging from Washington may often focus on 'Advancing American Security and Prosperity.' In the field, messaging should also focus on the impact of USAID's work on recipients and how USAID works in partnership with host governments to benefit those communities and societies.

TIP:

- Research shows that audiences identify with people and NOT organizations. As a result, we should lead with the issues we are trying to solve and the impact we hope to make. This means that USAID is not the main character in all stories. Please see stories.usaid.gov for examples of how this plays out in our video projects.

OUR BRANDING

Branding enhances the visibility and value of U.S. assistance while informing recipients that our aid comes from the American people. Federal law and USAID regulations require that USAID-funded projects are identified overseas as “American Aid.” USAID policy requires marking aid with USAID’s logo, including the tagline “From the American People.”

Proper execution of USAID branding is paramount to our success as an Agency. It ensures that our host country government partners and recipients understand that our aid is coming “From the American People.” Branding is everyone’s responsibility.

Additional information and helpful resources can be found at [usaid.gov/branding](https://www.usaid.gov/branding).





VISUAL ASSETS

A single photo or short video can humanize USAID’s work while conveying the impact our projects have on the people we serve.

People understand images much faster than text and remember visuals longer. Photos and videos can authenticate a story, engage the viewer and symbolize an issue. They can establish an emotional connection that helps viewers care about an issue.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD IMAGE

Select uncluttered, documentary-style, color photos of recipients—preferably looking at the camera. Show emotion and the personal impact of USAID’s work. Choose photos that convey rapport and respect for the person photographed. The background and environment can provide context to help tell the story. Look for action portraits or mood. Where possible, include natural USAID branding embedded in the scene. If you need to show a sign, building or other object, include a person in the foreground.



PHOTO: MORGANA WINGARD FOR USAID



PHOTO: KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA FOR USAID



PHOTO: DOUGLAS GRITZMACHER FOR USAID



PHOTO: MORGANA WINGARD FOR USAID

WHAT TO AVOID

Avoid posed or staged images. Don't publish stagnant photos of meetings and panel discussions. Avoid cluttered backgrounds. Avoid photo collages or using multiple small photos — it's more effective to use one large photo. Avoid black+white and duotone images because they distance the viewer from the subject. Avoid gratuitous images of poverty or despair. Avoid retouching a photo if that could be misleading or change its meaning, damaging USAID's credibility. And finally, don't use stock photography to represent our work overseas.



PHOTO: LOGODEP



PHOTO: USAID



PHOTO: USAID

WHAT MAKES A GOOD VIDEO

USAID defines a well-produced video as a story that translates a multi-faceted program or development concept into an accessible and engaging journey for the viewer. The most effective video stories produced at USAID are short (less than three minutes in length) and let the recipients and heroes tell their stories through their own voices.

WHAT TO AVOID

When a story can be told through the voice of recipients, do not layer technical expert interviews or unnecessary voiceovers into pieces. Video stories are short teasers that are intended to build interest in our work and compel viewers to return to our digital mediums to learn more. To extend the marketability of a video piece to as many external outlets and stakeholders as possible, avoid creating videos for events or anniversaries.



WORDS MATTER

We all know that the words you choose matter. Below are a few practical tips to consider before you start typing.

USE PLAIN LANGUAGE: Using plain language is not just good practice, it's also the law! The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires the Federal Government to write in a “clear, concise, well-organized” manner that follows the best practices of plain language writing. So what is plain language? It's communications that your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it.

CLEAR WRITING: IT'S NOT THAT 'SIMPLE': Though we certainly want your writing to be clear, don't confuse clear writing for just simplifying. Producing writing at the appropriate level of detail that makes it interesting for a general audience does not necessarily mean “simplifying.” It means being able to distill our technical work into prose that draws people in. So no jargon or technical speak, and keep acronyms to a bare minimum.

ABOUT JARGON: There is nothing that will turn your reader off more quickly than needlessly technical writing, and that includes overuse of acronyms (often “inside baseball”) and “aid-speak.” Translate technical jargon such as “capacity building” to “training” or other words that everyone understands. For example: “*in spite of their invaluable contribution to economic growth, farmers in developing countries often lack the technical resources, human capacity and financial backing to respond to agricultural development challenges*” should become “*in spite of their invaluable contribution to economic growth, farmers in developing countries often lack the money, tools and skills to succeed.*”

ONE VOICE: We are one Agency with one mission, and must use one voice in most of our official communications unless there is a specific reason not to. This means you should probably not be distinguishing your program or office. It is a USAID program, not a “Global Health” or “OFDA” program. Please see the USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide for additional information.



PHOTO: MORGANA WINGARD FOR USAID

KEY CHANNELS

At USAID, we use a variety of communications platforms to tell the story of our development work around the globe to different audiences.

SOCIAL MEDIA: USAID maintains an extensive social media network, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Additional channels are added as warranted. USAID has hundreds of social media channels dedicated to communicating our messages to audiences in the United States and around the world. While each of our digital platforms have different areas of focus and audiences, our social media content should draw back to our common mission and focus on the recipients. It should also always reflect best practices to increase engagement with our messages.

To help your content stand out from your clutter, feature statistics and compelling visuals such as photos or videos. Use an existing hashtag where possible but understand the culture of a hashtag before using it. Be conversational, ask questions and tag others where appropriate. Retweet and share others' content, especially content from your USAID colleagues.

Remember, every time you tweet or post on Facebook, you are speaking on the record for the Agency. Monitor current events and breaking news. Be aware of holidays, and national and international events. Keep the tone positive and conversational.

MEDIA: USAID frequently encourages the press to tell our story.

STORYTELLING HUB: USAID's multimedia platform includes professionally produced stories; documentary-style short films; responsive design for mobile, tablet or PC; and shareable buttons to connect to social media. The stories are about individual recipients to build empathy in the American public, while raising awareness of USAID's work.

WEEKLY MESSAGE: Our weekly email message is a digest of USAID's current public affairs priorities—including updates, new content and information about upcoming events.

MEDIUM: This external blogging platform connects with Twitter and Facebook, making it possible for new audiences to discover USAID content through recommendations or tags. Posts are often written in the first person and have an engaging, casual tone.

EXPOSURE: This external photo blogging platform allows USAID to highlight work in the field with professionally produced still images and a short narrative of less than 500 words; most submissions are produced by bureau or mission communicators.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: USAID staff are an important internal audience. Tools to reach them include Agency Notices, newsletters, internal videos and My.USAID.gov.

KEY CAMPAIGNS AND INITIATIVES: To break through a crowded communications environment, LPA often produces special campaigns/initiatives around key priorities. A campaign is a well-messaged (and often researched) integrated communications strategy that leverages multiple platforms, both proactively and reactively, for maximum reach and engagement to key audiences. These platforms include traditional press and a range of digital distribution channels, events and social media, and often involve creative and compelling storytelling tactics to humanize the message. Campaigns generally have a key “rallying cry” or tag as well as distinct design elements to distinguish them from day-to-day communications efforts. Campaigns can and should be adapted, as appropriate, for use by missions in communicating to host-country audiences. Campaigns are often time-bound, meaning they have distinct launch and end points.



PHOTO: MORGANA WINGARD FOR USAID