



USAID | **AFGHANISTAN**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Women in Government (WIG) Internship Program

PRELIMINARY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DECEMBER 13, 2012

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Per USAID's request, the Women in Government (WIG) Performance and Impact Advisor developed the following preliminary needs assessment for the WIG Internship Program (hereafter referred to as the 'Program'). This initial assessment will guide the decision making and planning required to recruit, graduate and place a target of 100 interns in the Program's forthcoming cycle.

The Advisor's preliminary assessment is based on her observations in preparation for the development of the Program's "Lift and Carry" Operating Guidelines. This was intended to document Program processes and products for USAID's use in implementing similar programs in other parts of the world, and to assist the Program's expansion under the upcoming Afghanistan *Women in Transition (WIT)* Program. Following USAID's decision to discontinue work on this document, the Advisor was requested to provide a needs assessment with short-term recommendations for improvements to the current Program. This assessment is informed by the Advisor's initial Program review and findings from a one-day Program Performance Workshop she facilitated for the WIG Program Team on November 27, 2012. If USAID wishes to expand on this initial needs assessment further data collection would be required.

This preliminary assessment includes **19** identified programmatic needs with corresponding recommendations organized into the following three Program categories:

- 1) **Management:** Program leadership responsible for strategy, direction and oversight.
- 2) **Administration:** Administrators responsible for coordination among leadership and all field operations.
- 3) **Operations:** Staff responsible for all primary intern interactions, including supervision and training.

Based on the Advisor's preliminary review, a new organizational chart (org chart) is also proposed in this document and the roles of WIG Internship Program staff are mapped to the three categories above. Recommendations are provided in order of urgency, with "Immediate" referring to an action recommended within 1-4 weeks of the reading of this report, and "Intermediate" referring to an action recommended within 5-8 weeks of the reading of this report.

1) Management

Immediate Needs

NEED #1: Improved Team Leadership and New Organizational Structure

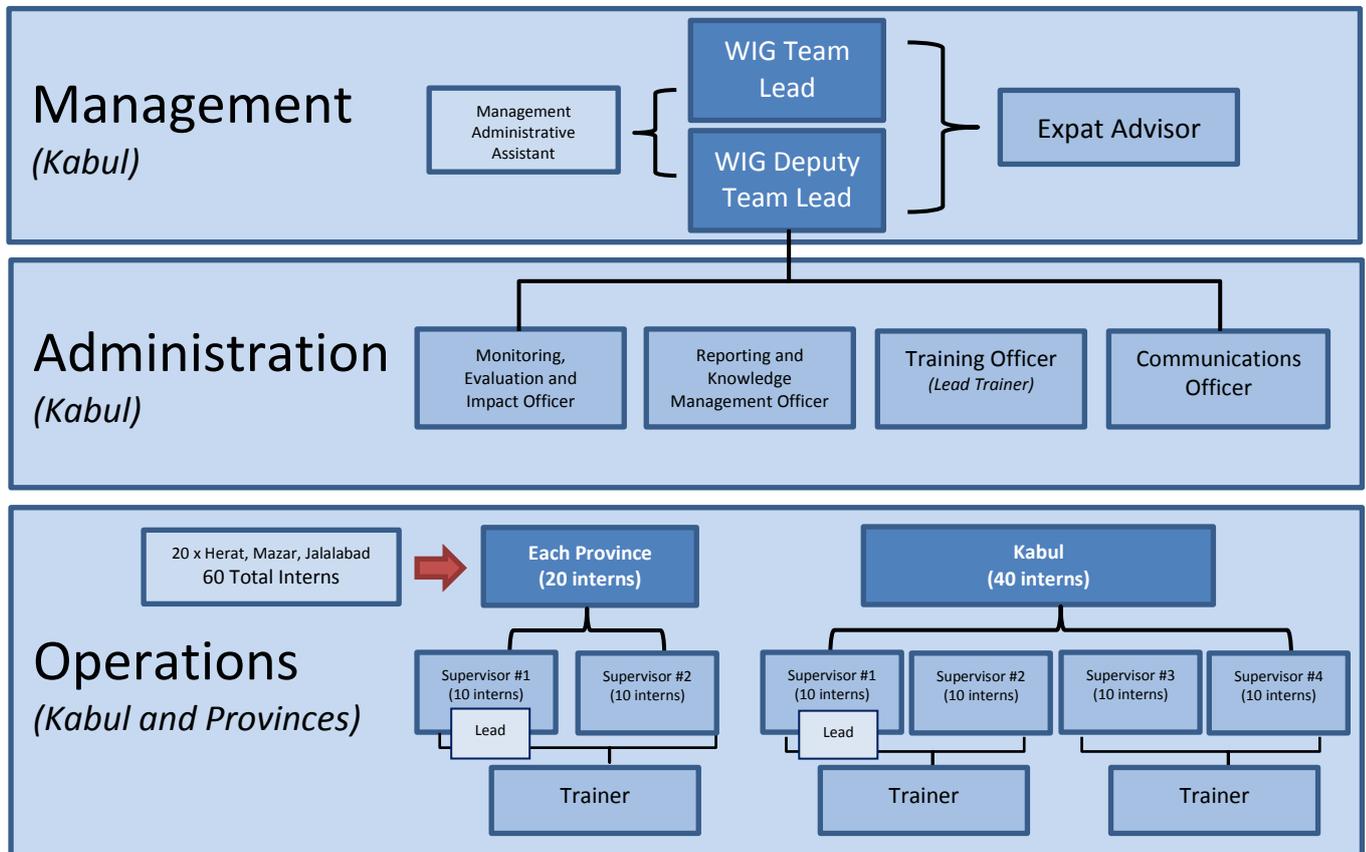
Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Recent transitions in Program management have created vacancies that require two visionary, forward-thinking leaders: a Program Lead and Deputy Lead. These roles should be supported by an Expat Advisor.
- Current Program processes are formal and informal, some documented and others not. Each Program unit in the Provinces operates differently and maintains their own understanding of how to escalate issues and how their role fits into the broader team structure.
- Staff have absorbed ad hoc responsibilities that they don't have the skills and capacity for, creating inefficiencies and a reactive, rather than proactive, environment where innovation is stifled.

→ **Recommendation:** Establish a fully-staffed team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, led by a Program Lead and Deputy Lead, based on the proposed org chart below. The objective should be to create a team ready and able to recruit, graduate and place 100 interns.

WIG Internship Program – Proposed Team Org Chart

**Required for the optimal recruitment, graduation and placement of 100 Interns*



NEED #2: Clearly Defined Team Roles and Responsibilities

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- The Program team has recently seen the addition of new staff to support the growth in intern recruitment. These roles did not come with a formal job description, performance metrics or job aides to provide each staff member with clarity and expectations to effectively carry out their duties and work.
- Program staff, particularly those in Kabul, have been subject to a reactive leadership approach. Daily work activities are often informed by phone calls from Program management describing the day's priorities and asking them to "respond" quickly to seemingly ad hoc assignments. These assignments are given to staff often without context or connection to a bigger picture. As a result, staff are not clear on their routine responsibilities, lack consistency in their functions and are not provided a clear understanding of how their individual contributions are critical for the Program's overall success.
- In the other three provinces where the Program is active (Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad), staff are less subject to the ad hoc requests of Kabul-based management unless specific requests and/or site visits are conducted by USAID. Currently, the provincial Program units are comprised of only one resource; the Intern Supervisor. This resource plays multiple roles and assumes multiple responsibilities, which includes supervisor, trainer, reporter and stakeholder liaison. These numerous roles and responsibilities are more than these solo resources can handle and forces them create their own ad hoc processes to get the job done.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop clear job descriptions explaining the responsibilities and performance metrics for each member of the WIG team. USAID, EGGI leadership and Expat Advisor should work closely and create WIG Management job descriptions. Upon hire, the WIG Team Lead and Deputy

Lead should work closely with the Expat Advisor to create job descriptions for administrative and operations personnel.

NEED #3: Vision-Setting and Program Objectives

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Multiple claims have been made to describe the Program's impact in marketing material and communications. The language includes "women's empowerment," "gender equality" and "economic development." However, in reality, Program objectives are not clearly defined and documented by both Program staff and USAID alike.
- To date, the team's focus has been on quantity and simply getting interns through the Program, without assessing changes and the impact it is having on the individual, institutional and societal levels. Reasons for this include the varied interpretations of what the Program is capable of achieving amid other donor assistance programs, in addition to political and socio-cultural constraints in Afghanistan.
- Unlike what is conveyed in the Program's official name, graduates are not just hired into government. Aside from Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and parastatal organizations, interns are also placed in donor organizations. Upon graduation, they are ultimately employed by GIROA, parastatal, donor and private sector organizations.
- The Civil Service Commission (CSC) decree for hiring civil servants recently mandated all ministerial hiring be processed through the CSC. However, this guidance is evolving. The lack of direction makes Program objectives, the intended impact and scope unclear.

→ **Recommendation:** Convene EGGI leadership and the Program team to clearly define the Program vision and objectives. Ensure the Program is aligned with the USAID Forward's women's empowerment goals and that revamped Program vision and objectives are realistic, measurable and sustainable. To establish realistic targets for Program impact, Program Lead and Deputy Lead must engage representatives from influential institutions with understanding of women's empowerment goals, such as the Civil Service Commission (CSC), Ministry of Women's Affairs, and Ministry of Finance who are aware of the way forward for women's advancement.

NEED #4: Weekly WIG Staff Meeting (Teleconference)

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Under the Program team's prior leadership, team meetings were held in Kabul irregularly, informally and in-person without compulsory attendance from provincial staff. This denied the staff a forum for discussing programmatic challenges and issues, gaining comprehensive Program awareness, and acquiring guidance and direction for tasks.
- The EGGI Deputy Chief of Party has taken over as the interim Team Lead until a permanent Team Lead is hired. While he is making progress in correcting these issues, he needs to return to his DCOP responsibilities and cannot remain in this role for long. A permanent process of regular coordination needs to be implemented immediately.

→ **Recommendation:** Conduct recurring weekly staff meetings on a pre-determined date and time via teleconference and/or Skype. This will allow provincial units to participate and to minimize travel requirements for Kabul-based staff who would otherwise take time away from intern sites to attend meetings in-person. The Program Lead and Deputy Lead should develop each week's meeting agenda by identifying priority topics after gathering team input. The agenda should be disseminated, at minimum, 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

NEED #5: Weekly EGGI Program Leadership Meeting

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- As a central initiative of EGGI, the Program team requires improved engagement and coordination with the Chief of Party and Deputy Chief of Party. To date, critical decisions concerning counterpart buy-in, intern retention and logistics have been made without the Program team proactively soliciting the support of EGGI leadership. When crises emerge, the team walks into the Chief of Party's office unannounced, seeking feedback reactively and immediately. While Program issues and challenges have been reported in weekly and

monthly EGGI reports, the high volume of Program activity and limited format of these reports make these ineffective means of communicating problems and issues upward.

→ **Recommendation:** Meet with EGGI leadership weekly to proactively discuss matters and solicit Chief of Party/Deputy of Chief of Party guidance. This will allow for improved Program management and performance monitoring. Attendees from the Program team should include the Program Lead and Deputy Lead, with members from Program Administration in attendance when relevant. A formal meeting agenda should be circulated, at minimum, 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

Intermediate Needs

NEED #6: Monthly WIG Staff All-Hands Workshop (Kabul, in-person)

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Current Program processes are formal and informal, some documented and others not.
- With the team currently geographically dispersed across Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad, telephone and email are the primary means for management to communicate with staff. Despite the recent addition of three Intern Supervisors, the staff has met in-person on very few occasions and this process has excluded provincial Intern Supervisors. These provincial Intern Supervisors are the ones who have developed many of the Program's best practices.
- The team is comprised of staff with varying levels of Program management experience, ranging from just a few months to many years. Some of the more experienced practitioners are in fact based outside Kabul, where in addition to intern recruitment and supervision, they are single-handedly led counterpart engagement and training curriculum development.
- While all Program staff are currently copied in the recurring weekly and monthly reports to allow transparency and knowledge transfer, this is insufficient for the geographically dispersed team to stay fully updated. There is also no formal mechanism for the Program team to discuss what is reported (and also what is not reported).

→ **Recommendation:** Convene a monthly in-person two-day All-Hands Workshop to monitor and track Program performance, discuss best practices, identify issues and enable an ongoing knowledge exchange. Dedicate half of the first day to a management and administrative meeting with all in attendance. Commit the remaining 1.5 days to a team Workshop led by an objective, third-party facilitator to assist the team in generating ideas for process and product improvements based on specific discussion topics. The facilitator should be the Program Expat Advisor who develops the Workshop agenda, materials and leads the incorporation of key outcomes into Program improvements. An All-Hands Workshop also provides an opportunity for project leadership to connect with all Program staff live and in-person.

NEED #7: Program Performance Management Plan

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Program performance is currently only measured by three output indicators embedded in the EGGI PMP:
 1. Number of new interns placed in internships with GIRoA (by ministry, province, and private sector/government);
 2. Number of interns who obtain full-time jobs; and
 3. Number of interns who graduate from the WIG program.
- The indicators emphasize quantity over quality and do not reflect programmatic impact based on other potential measures, such as the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired and applied toward the betterment of Afghanistan and its institutions as a result of the internship.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop a WIG Performance Management Plan (PMP) that supports the overall EGGI PMP, yet specifically identifies all Program performance indicators at the output, outcome and impact levels. Ensure that the indicators complement USAID's performance objectives

as explained in the Country Development Coordination Strategy for Afghanistan and the Mission PMP. Identify and explain new programmatic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools, the purpose of each tool, its use, its frequency, by whom (*Please refer to NEED#10 for more detail*) and the data analysis plan so findings are routinely applied to make Program improvements. Distribute the PMP and incorporate feedback from the Program team before finalizing, explaining that it supports program performance monitoring, results management and learning. PMP development and implementation should be the responsibility of the proposed Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Officer who will use it to drive Program impact.

2) Administration

Immediate Needs

NEED #8: Civil Service Commission (CSC) Coordination and Alignment

Current Challenges:

- As of the writing of this report, GIRoA institutions can no longer directly hire civil servants at grades 4, 5 and 6, which are the equivalent entry levels for Program graduates. This policy has been mandated by the CSC and applies to Ministries at the national and sub-national levels. Ministries are instructed to send their vacancies to the CSC Civil Service Management Department and applicants are to receive application forms directly from the CSC Appointments Board.
- To qualify and apply for a civil service vacancy announcement, candidates must pass the Civil Service Entrance Exam and interview. The exam is only conducted during Hoot (the month of February and March) of each year according to the current plan. If successful in the exam, candidates will then be under a probationary period whilst completing a six month training program administered by the Civil Service Institute before the candidate is officially hired.
- The CSC Provincial Directorate in Herat recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Program Intern Supervisor to support placing interns in Ministries at the local sub-national level. The Directorate agreed to identify ministerial placement needs, introduce interns and facilitate intern selection based on criteria established by the CSC Institute. As with the CSC decree that currently remains unclear, this MoU is pending until CSC guidelines are formally established.

→ **Recommendation:** Align Program recruiting cycle and intern graduation schedule to the CSC exam timeline set for Hoot. Prepare interns for successfully passing the CSC Entrance Exam by:

1. Identifying intern's placement and future employment preferences based on individual interests and background;
2. Working closely with the CSC Appointments Board and Gender Unit to identify Exam requirements and content;
3. Developing customized Exam training curriculum to prepare interns for Exam during their enrollment in the Program.

→ **Recommendation:** Engage and work closely with current Intern Supervisors in Herat, Mazar and Jalalabad to engage CSC provincial directorates and review the degree to which the new policy has "trickled-down;" amend recruitment and placement plans accordingly.

→ **Recommendation:** Demonstrate USAID and EGGI's commitment to working together to advance the Program with the CSC. Work with them to develop a revised Program recruitment plan. Propose all interns be recorded in the CSC database so Program completion certificates can be issued by the CSC and count toward credit for additional points in the Entrance Exam and/or interview. Acquire buy-in and commitment from CSC headquarters to empower provincial directorates to sign MoUs and eventually support direct placement of interns in sub-national ministries.

Intermediate Needs

NEED #9: Revised Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation (AME) Tools

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- AME tools are ineffective and not aligned to a broader plan (Please refer to NEED#8 for more detail) that can keep the Program team accountable for their timely use and review of the findings. To track intern performance and Program impact, the team currently administers a self-assessment to interns at three intervals: 1) Before their placement (pre-Program questionnaire); 2) At the 3-month mark (mid-Program questionnaire); 3) After Program completion (post-Program questionnaire). Self-assessment questions are repetitive, unclear and encourage the interns to guess and/or bias their responses because question wording is confusing for many and encourages them to “report a change.”
- Regardless of whether Program staff review the findings of the self-assessment and whether training assessments are unclear; some staff simply enter the results into a spreadsheet without interpreting the findings because they do not have the skills and/or time to analyze data. In the absence of a Program PMP that is clearly communicated to staff, the existing tools have become little more than a “process” to be implemented. The only dataset that is rigorously reviewed is the “Counterpart Needs Assessment” which determines how many interns each institution is seeking through the Program.

→ **Recommendation:** Revise and develop Program AME tools to carefully address Program performance monitoring needs and link the purpose of each assessment tool with its broader use by the Program team. Explain the role of each tool, how to analyze the data and incorporate findings into process and product improvements.

NEED #10: Needs-Based Training

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Current curriculum does not reflect the specific knowledge, skills and abilities interns require to be trained and effective in future roles within GIRoA. While a training needs assessment is given to all interns as part of the aforementioned self-assessment, currently only the provincial Intern Supervisors in Herat and Mazar carefully review findings to develop needs-based curriculum for their interns.
- Curriculum is largely standardized and developed by supervisors who have no technical background and limited experience in the subjects being taught. This negatively impacts both the development of the learning curriculum and training delivery.
- In the self-assessment questionnaire, interns rate their individual competencies without an accurate measure of how they truly perform in a given category. Program staff do not have a reliable baseline for which to compare the intern results. The self-assessment is reported to be too long, complicated and containing difficult terminology. There is no real diagnostic assessment of their performance. Currently capacity is “assessed” by asking simple questions that can ask them to verify their self-confidence levels and familiarity with the Microsoft Office Suite (for example).

→ **Recommendation:** Balance needs-based training curriculum with content and requirements of the CSC Entrance Exam. Develop training curriculum that fills intern competency gaps based on the self-assessment findings. Current AME questions should measure the skills the interns seek to develop by the end of the Program. Training should be aligned to the needs of both interns and placement institutions in order for interns to be positioned for success.

→ **Recommendation:** Training needs assessment questions should be designed in a manner that require the interns to propose solutions to hypothetical scenarios. This way, Program staff can more accurately measure their competences. This would replace the current procedure whereby interns subjectively rate themselves.

NEED #11: Communications Strategy and Marketing Guidelines

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- The recent addition of a WIG Communications and Coordination Officer reflects the increasing emphasis on Program marketing and the demonstration of impact to stakeholders. Currently, communication activities are ad hoc and reactive to the needs of media outlets and USAID priorities. There is no uniform Communications Strategy to map stakeholder information needs and priorities to Program objectives. Little consideration has been given to what messages will effectively resonate with the Program's potential target audiences.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop a Program Communications Strategy that complements the Mission Communications Strategy by incorporating key Mission messages and aligning messages to Program objectives. The Program Communications Strategy should ensure consistency in Program communications and media preferred by Program stakeholders to demonstrate the Program's impact. Messages should differentiate the Program from similar donor gender and internship initiatives.

3) Operations

Immediate Needs

NEED #12: Criteria-Based Intern Recruitment

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- The identification and selection of Program candidates is not currently based on any formal criteria or candidate rating system.
- Identifying and recruiting committed interns continues to be a challenge when: a) the donor environment offers numerous advancement options for women; 2) socio-cultural and environmental conditions require interns to seek flexibility in a Program that does bind them to irreversible commitments.
- Interns have cited personal and socio-cultural reasons for requesting leave, such as marriage and study abroad plans. Such personal requests make it challenging to establish intern's commitment to the Program due to GIROA Family Law and Humanity Law.

→ **Recommendation:** Establish criteria and conditions to recruit and hire interns that include the following: a) Education and age demographics that support CSC Entrance Exam requirements (e.g., graduates of public and registered private higher and semi-higher education institutions who are 30 years of age and younger); b) Incorporation of an Agreed-to Leave Clause that explains the ramifications of dropping out of the Program (e.g., no re-entry for a one-year period).

NEED #13: Intern Salary Market Assessment

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- GIROA salaries for grades 4-6 tashkeel positions vary between ministries. Interns can be disincentivized by formal offers from GIROA institutions whose compensation levels are not competitive enough or do not meet their expectations.

→ **Recommendation:** Conduct a market salary assessment to evaluate the GIROA pay scales and enable benchmarking. Apply the necessary changes to the Program compensation package in order to manage intern salary expectations and better align benefits with the market.

NEED #14: One Intern Supervisor for Every Ten Interns

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Intern Supervisors are each currently managing twenty interns, a number that has proven difficult to oversee given the amount of performance monitoring, counterpart engagement, required site visits and geographic dispersal of the interns. USAID has emphasized increasing

the number of interns. To ensure the quantity of the interns' experience as well as their quantity, emphasis should be placed on reducing the ratio of interns to supervisors.

→ **Recommendation:** Increase the number of supervisors. Assuming a forthcoming 100 intern recruitment cycle, one Intern Supervisor should be assigned no more than ten interns to allow for nuanced performance monitoring, oversight, individual attention and coaching, and quality counterpart interaction.

NEED #15: Intern Supervisor Reporting and Timesheet Validation (Bi-Weekly)

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Intern Supervisors currently utilize a draft, unfinished template to monitor and report on intern performance. This template was originally created by the prior Program managers and was not vetted by Intern Supervisors to ensure the requested data can be populated with accurate and useful information. Currently, these forms and timesheets provide limited value to Program management decisions. Because of their heavy workload and limited time, current Program managers have not carefully reviewed these supervisor forms to identify areas of value or improvement.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop an Intern Supervisor reporting template that supervisors can use to populate intern performance information. Design the form together with input from Intern Supervisors to ensure all template categories are actionable and data can be collected. As part of the reporting process, Intern Supervisors should cross-check intern timesheets bi-weekly with Counterpart Supervisors prior to processing as final. To minimize burden on counterparts, validate timesheet data via a concise, standardized email. Apply a 360° assessment process to incorporate intern performance feedback from counterparts, peers, interns and supervisors prior to submitting intern performance forms on a bi-weekly basis.

NEED #16: Training the Trainer

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Curriculum development and training delivery is inconsistent when comparing Kabul to the other three provinces. In Kabul, training has been developed based on general development areas that most interns indicate a need for (to varying degrees). In Herat and Mazar, training is developed and delivered by Intern Supervisors who incidentally also have a background in training. Using the open source internet and their own past curriculum in university, these supervisors have designed their own informal training courses and materials. Due to the limited opportunity to transfer knowledge and share best practices, this material is not uniform and has not been used by all supervisors. Unsupervised use of content taken off the internet may also violate copyright laws of the countries and authors who originally developed the training material.

→ **Recommendation:** The proposed WIG Training Officer should establish guidelines and criteria for the development of needs-based training curriculum that also complements the CSC requirements. The Training Officer will train all five field trainers and work with them to develop and implement uniform training materials across all four provinces.

Intermediate Needs

NEED #17: Intranet and Virtual Knowledge Management for Current Interns and Alumni

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Interns do not have access to documented Program processes, requirements, FAQs, nor the ability to connect with each other or Program alumni. Questions, which include often-repeated requests on how to resolve paycheck discrepancies and how to deal with IT issues, are left up to supervisors to resolve. This responsibility adds to the supervisor workload and adversely impacts their ability to be responsive to both interns and counterparts.

- The use of social media to engage and coordinate with past and current interns is not effective because of the security and privacy concerns interns have for communications in an open source environment. Many interns are reluctant to disclose their internship participation and experiences due to socio-cultural customs that dictate restraint and modesty in an open forum.

→ **Recommendation:** Build, pilot, and deploy a password-protected Program intranet site that provides tools and basic information for interns, including FAQs. Include step-by-step guidance that offers straightforward solutions to common laptop, AirCard and mobile phone problems. Serving as the equivalent of a “Virtual Help Desk”, this will ultimately reduce the current burden on Program Supervisors and EGGI administrative staff.

NEED #18: Intern Upward Feedback

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Aside from their mid-Program self-assessment, interns do not have a formal mechanism to report observations, challenges and opportunities to Program management. Without this mechanism, interns are less likely to volunteer and step outside the bounds of the Program to share candid feedback. Should interns find issues in the workplace, with their peers and/or supervisors, it is critical they have a channel to provide anonymous and confidential (if desired) upward feedback.

→ **Recommendation:** The Program Expat Advisor should collect upward feedback about internship experience, supervisors and the Program directly from interns. Achieve this by conducting informal interviews, distributing questionnaires and holding a quarterly Workshop with a representative sample of interns placed in various ministries. When collecting feedback, interns will be treated as the professionals they are and not students.

NEED #19: Counterpart Feedback

Rationale and Current Challenges:

- Intern Supervisors are currently not subject to a proactive and formal review from counterpart institutions. While Intern Supervisors do solicit the feedback from counterparts when writing an intern’s review, no official process exists that encourages counterparts to contribute and reflect on how effective an intern is in their organization. Some counterparts have indicated that time constraints do not allow them to be actively involved. This can be addressed through the implementation of a formal feedback process.
- Counterpart institutions are not involved in the preliminary aptitude test given to interns to determine their qualifications and readiness for the Program. Counterpart involvement would help ensure questions reflect the requirements and real-time scenarios faced during the internship.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop a formal feedback mechanism for counterpart input into intern performance, Program opportunities and challenges. Provide best practices for Intern Supervisor engagement and relationship management with Counterpart Supervisors. Include all inputs, including counterpart feedback, into continuous Program improvements and content for review during WIG Program Management Advisory Committee meetings.