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Research & Reference Services

Strategic Plan

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Mission Statement

Research and Reference Services (R&RS) provides access to and analysis of international economic and social development experience for use in bringing about positive change in the developing world. R&RS staff are experienced international development and information professionals who help individuals and organizations actively involved in development policy and practice.

R&RS works in partnership with its clients, meeting their needs to keep abreast of the activities of international development organizations; to connect with experts; to know about alternatives, models, and emerging issues; and, to know whether the facts substantiate a hypothesis.

R&RS selects, analyzes, synthesizes, and disseminates development knowledge, using both advanced technologies and wide reaching personal information networks.

R&RS manages a unique collection of resources on development experience and advises others on efficient management and effective use of information in development.

R&RS is committed to excellence in service, innovation in approach, and integrity in action.

R&RS has been a project of the Academy for Educational Development since 1985.

Introduction

Research and Reference Services (R&RS) is an information service supporting the development assistance program of the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.). The Academy for Educational Development (AED) has operated R&RS since 1985, under contracts to the Office of Development Information (DI), Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE).

R&RS began with a staff of twelve. By 1992, staff levels had reached 50, due to an increasing demand for specialized services as well as standard information services. In order to support this growth, R&RS underwent a major reorganization in early 1992, securing necessary support services and strengthening lines of management and supervision.

During the reorganization, R&RS recognized the need for strategic planning to provide guidance to this fast-changing project. Over the next seven months, R&RS undertook a formal strategic planning process in which the staff studied R&RS's internal operations, external environment, and the information needs and habits of its A.I.D. clientele.

Methodology

Data collection, mission statement development, and goal setting were the three major phases of the strategic planning process. All staff participated in each phase. A representative nine-member team analyzed the results of each phase, prioritized issues, and set the project's goals. A Chicago-based consultant with strategic planning experience guided the process, which was coordinated by the R&RS Senior Advisor for Planning, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance. The personnel, schedule, and resources are listed in Appendices I, II, and III.

Collecting data on A.I.D. client's information needs and habits enabled R&RS to develop principles to guide future A.I.D. information service programs. Data examined included internal operations, the external organizational environment, competitors in the information field, R&RS stakeholders' expectations and needs, trends and survey results, and current mandates, such as the DI Strategic Plan 1990-1995, the R&RS 1990 Technical Proposal, and the A.I.D. Mission Statement.

Mission statement development focused the staff on shared values and operating principles. The strategic planning team developed the R&RS mission statement. Each project unit created its own mission statement, articulating each unit's contribution to R&RS. The unit mission statements are in Appendix IV.

Issues that emerged during these phases formed the basis of five goals. The final action plan is the staff working document, outlining responsibilities and timeframes for accomplishing the goals.

Major Findings of R&RS Strategic Planning

This section describes the strategic planning process and its major findings. Included here are a brief description of the study, resources used, and the results, followed by R&RS strengths, internal issues, and opportunities.

Statistical Reporting, Trends, and the Study

Inconsistent data capture methods have made statistical reporting of R&RS activities difficult. Only in-depth research requests have been consistently recorded throughout the project. Other service activities such as interlibrary loan, document delivery, book circulation, ready reference, and dissemination of reference tools such as *Topical Updates* and *Current Contents Bulletins* have been recorded independently. To date, no system has been developed that successfully integrates data for all R&RS activities.

Nonetheless, available data show that the annual total of R&RS service events grew 70 percent over five years, from about 11,500 in 1986 to about 19,600 in 1990. Thereafter, annual totals began to drop, although in-depth research requests held steady at about 2,800 per year. In 1992, service events totaled about 13,000.

Several factors may be responsible for the steady numbers of research requests from 1989 onward, including A.I.D.'s preoccupation with its 1990-91 reorganization. A.I.D. also experienced a sharp decrease in new project starts, but numbers of research requests remained unaffected, indicating R&RS's success in providing information analysis support to A.I.D. activities other than project design. R&RS reference and document delivery services have increased until they now represent nearly 80 percent of all R&RS service events.

Other service event totals declined due to administrative changes such as charging contractors for interlibrary loan services. Understaffing caused a decline in dissemination of current awareness products. As mentioned above, changes and inconsistencies in recording service events have made data capture inaccurate.

A survey of randomly selected A.I.D. direct-hire staff in Washington and in the Missions identified the kinds of information A.I.D. staff value, service attributes they value, and their perceptions of R&RS. Previously gathered survey data, service feedback forms, and project statistics also were used. A summary of the most significant conclusions follows.

Study Results: Information Need and Use in A.I.D.

Though the study revealed much satisfaction with R&RS, half of all respondents knew little or nothing about R&RS services.

Conclusion: R&RS communications and promotion functions must be strengthened. Current publications, briefings by R&RS staff, and A.I.D. management interventions are not sufficient to project an accurate information service image.

Where dissatisfaction with R&RS service existed, it was because too much information was provided, or the information was inappropriate to the situation, or expected works were not included.

Conclusion: R&RS staff must be thoroughly trained to draw out the requester's real information need, analyze the request, and manage the requester's expectations.

Sixty percent of A.I.D. professional staff call themselves generalists and managers.

Conclusion: R&RS must be able to provide research and data in a form relevant to management decision-making needs within the A.I.D. organizational culture.

A.I.D. staff indicated that they are most likely to come to R&RS when they need information for designing a new strategy or project, or become involved in a new sector, country, or A.I.D. initiative. They value information that supports their current course of action or redirects it more productively, or alerts them to emerging trends, policies and attitudes.

Conclusion: R&RS must develop methods for reading the signals that new A.I.D. initiatives are on the horizon, and develop products and services to meet these situations.

Information considered most essential is A.I.D. policy/program information, project information, experiential information, and official communications or instructions. Information sharing tends to be oral and informal.

Conclusion: R&RS participation in and access to the A.I.D. organizational culture is critical. R&RS should further develop its oral communication channels with A.I.D. for more comprehensive dissemination of information.

A.I.D. staff rated relevance, speed of delivery, accuracy, and succinctness to be the most valued information service attributes. Completeness of information was rated of "medium" importance.

Conclusion: R&RS staff must be encouraged to maintain an ongoing dialogue with requesters to ensure that the information provided is relevant to the requester's situation. R&RS must combine appropriate information with the speedy service on which A.I.D. has come to rely.

A.I.D. staff identified lack of time to locate or obtain information, and uncertainty as to where to obtain it as the two perceived barriers to obtaining information.

Conclusion: R&RS must emphasize in its communications to A.I.D. that R&RS can save A.I.D. staff time because R&RS knows where to obtain appropriate information.

The public—including academics, contractors, and the staff of other development organizations—forms a secondary, though significant, portion of the R&RS user community that receives reference services through the A.I.D. Development Information Center.

Conclusion: The DIC must take advantage of its position as an access point to development information to obtain information from other development and donor organizations.

R&RS Strengths, Internal Issues, and Opportunities

R&RS Strengths

A.I.D. client survey data, A.I.D. management interviews, and R&RS staff self-study exercises established agreement on R&RS's principal strengths.

- An intelligent, energetic staff of professionals in information and development who understand A.I.D.'s complex environment.
- A creative staff who apply innovative approaches to solving problems.
- Personalized information services that produce targeted, objective, decision-oriented products.
- Access to appropriate information resources, using current technologies and wide professional networks.

R&RS Internal Issues

R&RS identified key issues that must be addressed to adequately support its strengths.

- Because R&RS's chief strength is its staff, R&RS must undertake a human resources development program that addresses complex problems in recruitment, orientation, continuing education, and staff incentives.
- Current computer systems, communications, and data management do not support R&RS activities. R&RS must assume a greater role in analyzing its needs and providing its own technical support for reliable and efficient data sharing, unconstrained communication, and accurate reporting.
- R&RS must strengthen its communications and promotion functions to boldly and accurately project its full range of services, encouraging A.I.D. to turn to R&RS first to meet information needs.

Opportunities

Image

DI and R&RS can both benefit from a distinct, clear image for R&RS. If R&RS is more clearly distinguished from other parts of CDIE as the information broker for knowledge applied to development, DI will be seen as providing a complete program of complementary services including data management, information retrieval and dissemination, and research and analysis.

Special Projects

R&RS uses its infrastructure to deliver specialized services to A.I.D. offices. Strategic planning has enabled R&RS to develop criteria for providing specialized services, based on its project strengths and mission. Criteria also include a clear scope of work, clear delineation of responsibilities to all parties, adequate physical infrastructure support, and onsite staff participation in Rosslyn staff activities for maximum support and performance. The Special Projects Criteria are listed in Appendix V.

Central America Regional Information Clearinghouse (RIC)

The Regional Information Clearinghouse just launched for A.I.D.'s Regional Office for Central America and Panama (ROCAP) is R&RS's first opportunity to create a model of information management and dissemination for overseas A.I.D. programs. R&RS will use lessons from this model to create in-country information services in other geographic regions.

Information as a Sector in Development

The World Bank, the International Development Research Centre of Canada, and academic information science researchers are studying information as an economic sector. With its extensive experience in using information to enhance development, R&RS must create a substantive role for itself in these discussions, helping to define this new thinking in the A.I.D. context.

Relationships with Other Donors

R&RS has the opportunity to help A.I.D. improve its coordination of information on the development activities of other donors. R&RS can help A.I.D. strengthen its information exchange agreements with other donors, and facilitate and enhance work DI has already begun in gathering project data from international development donors for inclusion on a CD-ROM.

CD-DIS

Now that A.I.D. staff have their own access to the A.I.D. Development Information System (DIS) through the CD-ROM version, CD-DIS, R&RS can provide additional assistance in educating A.I.D. staff in the benefits and use of CD-DIS, and how R&RS can provide analytical services beyond simple access to A.I.D. documents. R&RS must continue to help maintain the integrity of the DIS--and CD-DIS--through its active program of acquiring A.I.D. documents.

Strategic Direction

Research and Reference Services will strengthen its capacity to operate as a full service information organization supporting international economic and social development programs with quality products and services.

Near-Term Goals

Through strategic planning, R&RS identified five goals for the near term. R&RS believes that by achieving these goals it will help strengthen A.I.D.'s unique model of information service delivery in development.

- Goal 1. R&RS will implement a human resources development plan that ensures the staff's ability to provide excellence in service and remain a dynamic force in A.I.D.
- Goal 2. R&RS will ensure its continued ability to anticipate and respond to A.I.D.'s complex environment with timeliness and innovation.
- Goal 3. R&RS will project a bold, active, and compelling information service image to A.I.D.
- Goal 4. R&RS will create and maintain a request management system that supports the project's need for tracking, quality assurance, and accurate statistical reporting.
- Goal 5. R&RS will strengthen its relationships with other bilateral and multi-lateral donors, development research institutions, and organizations to improve A.I.D.'s access to information on development activity worldwide.

The R&RS action plan is already underway supporting staff, improving skills, and enhancing products and services. R&RS is confident that the strategic planning process has laid the groundwork for practicable ways to further improve its excellence in service.

Appendix I: Personnel

Consultant: Julie A.C. Virgo, PhD
The Carroll Group
73 East Elm St. #11A
Chicago, IL 60611

R&RS Strategic Planning Team

Manager: Jeanne Tifft, Senior Advisor for Planning,
Evaluation, & Technical Assistance

Linda Leonard, Project Director
Mark Bidus, Research Manager (until resignation)
Kaaren Christopherson, Project Services Manager
Michele Wozniak-Schimpp, Research Supervisor
John Butsch, D.I.C. Coordinator
Anne Langhaug, Bureau Liaison Supervisor
Dana Wichterterman, Special Projects representative
Lauren Wright, Communications representative
Kenneth Rogers, Operations Manager

Academy for Educational Development

Judy Brace, Vice President,
Development Information Services

R&RS Units:

Operations Unit
Administration
Systems Support

Project Services

Development Information Center
Communications and Promotion
Human Resources Development

Research and Special Projects

Rosslyn Sectoral Research Unit
Onsite Analysts (Bureau Liaisons)
Africa Bureau Information Center
Center for Trade and Investment Services
Women in Development
Capital Projects

Technical Assistance

Appendix II: Strategic Planning Schedule

- May 20 - June 2:** Data and materials collection
Organizational mandates
Past performance data
- May 27:** SPTEAM meeting: process and desired outcome
- June 3:** SPTEAM facilitated meeting with Julie Virgo:
SWOT exercises
- June 17:** R&RS staff meeting: Introduction and orientation
- June 18 - July 1:** Unit SWOT exercises, held with:

Development Information Center
Rosslyn Sectoral Research
Onsite Bureau Analysts
Communications and Promotion
Human Resources Development
- July 8:** SPTEAM meeting: Review SWOT
(Weaknesses/Opportunities)
- July 27:** SPTEAM meeting: Review SWOT
(Threats/Strengths)
- August - September:** Develop user survey instruments;
conduct telephone and telefax survey

August 18:	SPTEAM facilitated meeting with Julie Virgo: Mission statement development
November 12:	R&RS Staff meeting: Orientation to unit mission statement exercises
November 16:	SPTEAM meeting: Criteria for R&RS Special Projects
November - December:	Unit level mission statement development exercises
December 1:	Senior management meeting: Review of survey results
December 7:	SPTEAM meeting: Review of mission statement drafts
December 14:	SPTEAM meeting with Julie Virgo: Strategic issues and goals
December 22:	SPTEAM: Review of Strategic issues and goals; action plans
December:	Draft, review, and complete plan
January 1993:	Edit, print, and publish plan

Appendix III: Literature and Resources

Methodological References

Bryson, John M.

*Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations:
A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement.*
New York: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991.

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A Manual on the Evaluation of Information Centers and Services.
NATO, Advisory Group for Aerospace Research and Development
(AGARD), 1991.

Steiner, George A.

*Strategic Planning: What Every Manager Must Know, A Step-by-Step
Guide.* New York : The Free Press, 1979.

Taylor, Robert S.

Value Added Processes in Information Systems. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex
Publishing Corp., 1986.

R&RS Mandates

Research and Reference Services proposal. AED, 1990.

Development Information Program Strategic Plan 1991-1995. CDIE/DI, April 1991.

Center for Development Information and Evaluation functional statement, 1991.

Agency for International Development Mission Statement, 1990.

User Data Sources

Telephone and telefax survey of randomly selected A.I.D. professional staff.

Follow-up survey of selected A.I.D. users of R&RS services.

Interviews with CDIE and A.I.D. managers who know R&RS well.

Request feedback forms returned between 1989 and 1992.

Requests and Responses reader survey, 1991.

R&RS request statistics 1985 - 1992.

The Survey Data Analysis included with the internal version of this Strategic Plan provides all data tables, analysis, and conclusions regarding these sources APPENDIX IV: Criteria for Special Projects.

Appendix IV: Unit Mission Statements

Project Operations

We are the indispensable project support team of AED and subcontractor staff.

We take pride in filling the immediate and long term operational needs for the R&RS project, including administration, systems hardware and software, and other appropriate technologies, which enable the R&RS staff to carry out their mission.

We process all the administrative functions for the entire R&RS project and for the AED headquarters administrative, accounting, and contracts departments. We facilitate solving administrative and systems technology problems for R&RS project staff.

We do this by empowering users with skills to use the appropriate state-of-the-art computing technologies; we develop, implement, and evaluate efficient and succinct procedures for meeting the administrative needs of R&RS; and we establish and implement effective communication channels within R&RS and between R&RS, subcontractors, and AED.

We bring a collegial approach to our work, and we are committed to providing timely, responsive, and efficient service with a smile.

Project Services:

A.I.D. Development Information Center (DIC)

The A.I.D. Development Information Center (DIC) is staffed by a team of professionals who manage and provide a wide range of development information resources to A.I.D. staff, contractors, and others who seek information on international development. We are guided by a commitment to professionalism and service.

The DIC provides ready reference and document delivery services and is a practical and reliable point of contact for information about A.I.D. programs and projects. Our collection of resources is extensive and unique, with supporting technical services that keep it up-to-date and accessible.

The DIC uses the most advanced technologies to acquire, process, and disseminate development information. We maintain contacts with A.I.D. staff and contractors worldwide, with other development organizations and professionals, and with commercial and academic information sources. We promote the availability of our resources to current and potential users and encourage A.I.D. staff and contractors to contribute to the knowledge base.

Communications and Promotion

We are creative people with the vision and technical skills to serve R&RS by articulating its capabilities and value, using our comprehensive view of R&RS and its relationships. In exercising this distinctive competence, we are committed to quality communications that help R&RS realize its full potential.

Communications and Promotion creates and manages the R&RS image, and its strategy for marketing and promoting its capabilities to specific client groups. We fill the R&RS need to actively and boldly project itself as the information resource and collaborator in the development process.

We create and implement an R&RS communications plan, which establishes structure and standards to provide R&RS staff guidance and tools for projecting a consistent R&RS image to their clientele. Moreover, Communications and Promotion identifies, segments, and prioritizes client groups and devises appropriate promotional methods for reaching these groups. We advise R&RS units on their product development by helping them focus on how their products meet known client information needs.

We design and produce the publications for which R&RS is contractually responsible, and make them effective communication and promotional tools. We manage the dissemination of all R&RS products that require multiple distribution. To further promote R&RS, we design and produce high quality and well-thought-out promotional literature that successfully highlights R&RS capabilities and their value to different client information needs.

Human Resources Development

Recognizing that the chief strength of the Research and Reference Services project (R&RS) is its staff, Human Resources Development (HRD) is the steward of staff skills and abilities by attending to staff needs in professional development, enabling the project to better serve its clients. HRD is characterized by service to the project, respect for the individual, and recognition of achievement.

HRD assists supervisors to assess, enhance, and direct staff skills by creating a comprehensive HRD program that takes into account the idiosyncracies of a project whose needs are constantly changing. This HRD program includes: a recruitment plan that addresses the project's need for a staff with diverse backgrounds, knowledge, and skills; a training scheme that addresses the project's need to maintain effective staff performance and the individual's need for professional development; an evaluation program that enables staff and their supervisors to regularly assess progress toward mastery of knowledge and skills and identify training needs; and, a scheme that helps supervisors develop criteria and appropriate means of recognizing excellence in staff performance.

Research and Special Projects

Rossllyn Research Unit

We are a multi-disciplinary team of development professionals who link field experiences, research and development planning, and policy formulation. We provide customized, sector-specific research and analysis to enable practitioners and policy makers to make more informed decisions and produce better development results.

We meet the need for access to relevant development experience and current knowledge. We achieve this through:

- Thorough investigation to discover existing information and identify gaps;
- Objective review and analysis tailored to the client's situation;
- Clear synthesis and presentation of findings;
- Collaborative client relationships; and,
- Timely identification of sector development trends.

We abide by the principles of objectivity, thoroughness, and responsiveness in our work. Our distinctive competence lies in our commitment to collaboration in using our sectoral knowledge to support common development objectives.

Onsite Information Analysts

Onsite Information Analysts promote and deliver all Research and Reference Services to specific client groups working in development organizations. We provide targeted information, analysis, and liaison with R&RS and other development groups, in furtherance of the clients' development goals.

We respond to our clients' need for a trusted, available resource having intimate knowledge of their work in development and able to respond quickly and accurately to a variety of information needs.

We do this by maintaining ongoing personal and organizational relationships, and by drawing together our own knowledge and experience of development regions and sectors, the human and technical information resources of R&RS, and the clients' own organizational information resources.

In doing our work, we are guided by these principles:

- Dedication to the client's best interest
- Excellence in service
- Innovation in approach
- Integrity in action

Our distinctive competence is the intuitive understanding and anticipation of our clients' information needs that we achieve through our presence and close working relationships.

Onsite Information Analysts have been a part of the Research and Reference Services since 1990.

Africa Bureau Information Center

The Africa Bureau Information Center staff is a team of skilled research and communication professionals, with expertise and experience in African affairs, who provide information and publication services to the A.I.D. Africa Bureau staff, contractors, and advisors, and to African non-governmental organizations and institutions working in the area of democracy and governance.

Our clients need to know the trends and progress towards democracy and governance being made in Africa according to the Africa Bureau's criteria; what's being done elsewhere in A.I.D. and the donor community to promote democracy and governance; and what are the most significant findings of A.I.D.-funded research in Africa.

To meet these needs, we identify, access, compile, publish, and disseminate information on current African political, social, and economic issues as well as information about A.I.D.-sponsored and other activities in democracy and governance in Africa. We also provide technical publication services to Africa Bureau offices to facilitate the dissemination of research findings. Throughout, we maintain informal communication and connections with our clients that allow us to locate gaps in their information flow, develop insights into their information needs, and identify salient issues and new opportunities to support democracy and governance in Africa.

- Our approach is creative, pragmatic, and flexible.
- Our publications are attractive and informative.
- Our services are comprehensive, accurate, objective, and reliable.
- Our distinctive competence is our expertise in African affairs, democracy, and governance, together with our first-hand knowledge of the clients, players, and resources in these fields.

The Africa Bureau Information Center has been a special project of Research and Reference Services since October 1991.

Center for Trade & Investment Services Contract Staff

CTIS/C is a team of trade and investment specialists with private sector experience, skills, and perspective, acting as a central contact point at A.I.D. for people with business interest in the developing world.

Our understanding of the information needs of the private sector and our knowledge of information resources of the public sector, combined with our ability to create appropriate linkages between the two, forms the basis of our distinctive competence.

CTIS/C assists the clients of PRE/CTIS and its staff by identifying and disseminating commercially relevant information from A.I.D., as well as external sources.

Together with the PRE/CTIS staff, we respond to the need to increase U.S. private sector participation in economic development of A.I.D.-assisted countries via expanded trade and investment. We respond to the need for A.I.D. and its information resources to become more accessible to the private sector and the need of PRE/CTIS to enhance its ability to assist the private sector.

Our guiding values:

1. Concern for client

- Courteous and willing approach
- Understanding client needs

2. Resourcefulness

- Building bridges between private and public sector
- Using state-of-the-art technology
- Establishing networks of trade and investment expertise
- Adding to the CTIS institutional knowledge base

3. Excellence in Service

- Timeliness
- Relevance
- Accuracy

CTIS/C has been a special project of the Research and Reference Services project since July 1992.

Planning, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance

The Planning, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance Unit is staffed by a senior international information consultant who advises on methods of information user analysis, information management, and information dissemination in a development context.

This service meets the need of the Research and Reference Services project to understand its clients as well as possible, and the need of information organizations in developing countries to improve management of their own information to support the development process.

The service is committed to superior quality, absolute clarity, and total relevance, of advice given and deliverables provided.

The service is delivered by:

- Surveying and analyzing current and possible client groups
- Managing both planning and evaluation processes for the R&RS project
- Conducting presentations that convey information abstractions in tangible terms relevant to the client situation
- Bringing innovative yet appropriate methods to information management and dissemination in developing country contexts

The distinctive competence of this unit is its view of information as itself a sector in development as well as a component activity in development programs in any sector or region.

The Planning, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance Unit was created in the R&RS reorganization of March 1992.

Appendix V: Criteria for Special Projects

R&RS will henceforward evaluate proposed Special Projects against the following criteria:

- The intersection of information with a development process is clearly apparent, and it fits R&RS Mission Statement;
- The proposed project presents a chance to establish an R&RS presence either in an area of project strength or in a new area (region or sector) that will increase project depth;
- The proposed scope of work clearly articulates the client's expectations, service priorities, approval channels, deliverables, appropriate budget structure, reporting relationships, and accountability;
- The risk of failure can be managed by clear allocation of responsibilities to R&RS and the client;
- The onsite Special Project staff is appropriately located in the client organization such that a comprehensive understanding of its mission and program is possible;
- The onsite Special Project staff is permitted appropriate access to the client group's formal and information communication channels and regular communication with R&RS management and operations; and
- The onsite Special Project staff are provided adequate office space, telephone, and data transmission lines.