

DG OFFICERS' WORKSHOP PANEL LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES ON MISSION CLOSE OUT

A panel of DG Officers with experience in close-out Missions offered the following recommendations to other Missions that will face closing out their programs in the future at the DG Officers' workshop in Sophia in June 2007:

1. Missions should start close-out planning early – at least five years before the planned end date – and coordinate phase out plans with other donors and partners. Close-out Missions should ensure that other donors understand the close-out plan and timetable and should attempt to hand key components of Governing Justly and Democratically (GJD) assistance over to other donors.
2. A well thought through close-out or graduation plan allows Missions to focus on achieving key strategic objectives (SOs) by slowly decreasing the number of SOs and funded projects and closing the program gradually instead of trying to manage all activities up to the very end of the program.
3. If possible, Missions should schedule the close-out date in coordination with other departing donors in order to create a phased exodus that does not leave partners without any transitional funding or alternatives. It can be especially damaging for NGO programs when many donors end their programs and leave the country at the same time. Missions should be open and transparent about their close-out or graduation plan, sharing information with all staff members, implementers, and other partners to help them to be better prepared for change.
4. Missions should create and encourage incentives (e.g., post-USAID job training, severance pay) for staff, including for project implementing partner staff, to help persuade those staff to stay until the close-out date. If this is not done, staff will begin to search for and take other jobs well before the end date, potentially compromising project management in the last year of the activity. Utilizing the skills and talents of host country nationals in key personnel positions with USAID's implementing partners can be particularly useful, since it helps build indigenous capacity and becomes part of USAID's legacy.
5. Missions should develop media messages and public relations activities that emphasize what USAID is leaving behind as a more permanent legacy (e.g., the Croatia Mission's video on USAID assistance and the Bulgaria Mission's Assessment Report Booklet do this) as opposed to information about Mission activities or more isolated project success stories.
6. Missions should design final programs and contracting mechanisms to be supportive of key objectives and to be flexible in order to respond to late-breaking opportunities and needs. One good example of such a mechanism is a participant training program, which could be made accessible to all Mission technical offices.
7. Missions should also design final programs to require partners to fund an increasing share of project costs in order to encourage them to diversify their sources of funding.
8. Missions should create and support legacy mechanisms on a regional or national level, such as foundations (e.g., the Black Sea Trust, the Croatian National Foundation for Civil Society Development, and the Romanian Resource Center for Public Participation) to provide support to partners (such as advocacy NGOs) and issues (e.g., corruption) that may experience difficulty with obtaining local financing.

9. Missions should consider providing special grants to key NGOs for institution building. For example, the Romania Mission selected 12 key civil society organization (CSO) partners and provided 1-1.5-year sustainability grants that permitted those groups to do long-term planning and positioning for their organizations. The Croatia Mission also selected six CSO/legacy partners on which to focus special attention in order to ensure sustainability.