USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Driving Beneficial and Transformational Change

USAID'S PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR
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FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

At the Partnerships Incubator, as our staffing and mission grew in Year 3, so did our aspirations. We are positive disruptors, driving beneficial, transformational change on behalf of USAID and its partners. We do this in a variety of ways, from providing direct support to Missions and their partners to conducting outreach and communications with the broader partner ecosystem through our work on the **WorkwithUSAID.org** platform. But the Incubator's impact derives from more than our programmed activities—it also stems from our attitude, which is one of fearless determination, committed advocacy, purposeful flexibility, and focused innovation on behalf of the Agency and its localization objectives.

During Year 3, the Incubator's work achieved a unique prominence and influence among our counterparts at USAID and within the global development community. With our finger on the pulse of the Agency, we proactively supported Agency objectives. In particular, the launch of the WorkwithUSAID.org platform last November as part of Administrator Samantha Power's "**A New Vision for Global Development**" speech was a powerful moment in which our foresight, and that of our committed USAID counterparts, coalesced with the Agency's vision and its localization goals.

While I am proud of what we have built together, I am even more excited about the potential of this website platform to evolve and serve pressing and critical needs in the partner community through the new features we are preparing for Year 4. We plan to transition the website from WorkwithUSAID.org to WorkwithUSAID.gov in 2023, signifying the Agency's full adoption and uptake of the site's welcoming and engaging partner-focused approach.

> The Partnerships Incubator empowers organizations that build tomorrow in their communities and is leading the way in localization efforts for USAID.
>
> ~DONNA VINCENT ROA, PROJECT DIRECTOR

FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

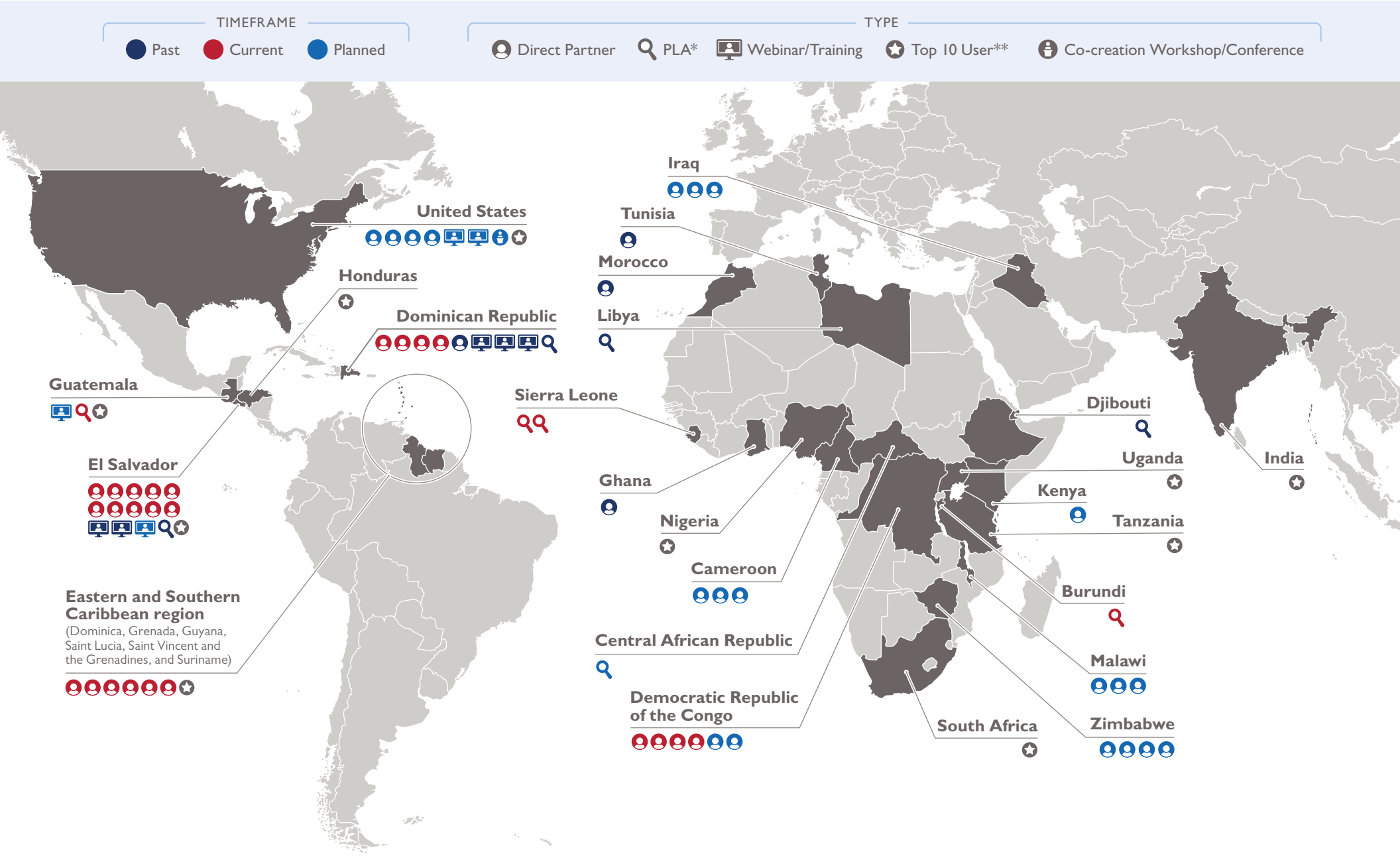
In addition to this ecosystem-wide support for the partner community, the Incubator's more-targeted, direct work with partners and Missions has grown exponentially within the past six months, both in number of activities and in scope and influence. During Year 3, we provided direct capacity-strengthening support to 22 partners and direct assistance to nine USAID Missions. Each service delivery is fine-tuned to the needs of the situation, but we are intentional about the way every engagement informs the design and implementation of future efforts. This forward-looking perspective fueled the dramatic expansion we experienced this fiscal year.

Our deliberate focus on understanding the experience of others is why, in Year 3, we began augmenting our staffing in "pods" that learn from one another and can be replicated in response to the growing demand of our services by USAID headquarters and Missions. Our work, which is guided by the Agency's needs through Mission buy-ins, represents, according to our Contracting Officer's Representative, the "most functional work happening at USAID."

The visibility and reputation of Incubator activities within the Agency remains extremely high, both in terms of impact and professionalism. As we enter Year 4, we are honored to work with our trusted USAID colleagues, in both headquarters and Missions, using our exciting and impactful process of disruptive innovation to make waves for partnership and truly transform the Agency's approach to engaging local development partners.

Donna Vincent Roa, PhD, CDPM®
Project Director
USAID's Partnerships Incubator

INCUBATOR INFLUENCE AROUND THE WORLD



*Partner Landscape Assessment

**Top 10 locations of users accessing WorkwithUSAID.org

OBJECTIVE 1

Amplify USAID's external communication efforts to help diversify and strengthen its partner base

At the Partnerships Incubator, we believe "communication is connection." Throughout Year 3, the goals of streamlining and improving the partner experience continued to guide our work, whether it was through the development of timely and engaging content for the WorkwithUSAID.org platform, through our support for the active Work with USAID LinkedIn group, or through our customer service response in the AskZara account. Above all, we strove to communicate in plain language and to ensure a welcoming, empathetic, and inspiring customer experience that demonstrates how much the expertise and perspectives of all organizations in the USAID ecosystem are valued.

LAUNCHING WORKWITHUSAID.ORG TO EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCALIZATION

On November 4, 2021, USAID Administrator Power announced the launch of the **WorkwithUSAID.org** website in a speech entitled "A New Vision for Global Development" at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. As a result of this highly public launch, the site has become a key element of the localization efforts underway at the Agency and has been identified as a pillar of the Agency's designation as a High-Impact Service Provider (HISP) by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The WorkwithUSAID.org site has received nearly 1.5 million page views from more than 147,000 individual users. User activity includes more than 31,000 link clicks and more than 8,000 file downloads, indicating that users are frequently accessing valuable partnership resources. In addition, with more than 200 curated tools in the resource library in varying formats, the website offers easily digestible information covering comprehensive topics ranging from USAID basics to project closeout.

This site is changing how development partnerships are forged and opening doors for partners who previously were not included, such as many local and nontraditional organizations.

> To make it easier for America's vibrant small businesses, NGOs, faith-based organizations, minority-serving institutions, diaspora groups, and foundations to partner with USAID **today we are also launching WorkwithUSAID.org**. That site is our **new welcome mat**, a one-stop shop that lets any organization know **exactly how to pursue USAID partnerships**, including offering, for example, online courses that will help you bid for our awards.
>
> ~USAID ADMINISTRATOR SAMANTHA POWER, NOVEMBER 4, 2021
> GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Photo credit: Georgetown University

WHAT USERS ARE SAYING ABOUT WorkwithUSAID.org

The WorkwithUSAID.org concept is one that will enable different organizations big or small to access resources, information, and funding directly. This was not the case before and I am really excited to get to explore all the available resources on WorkwithUSAID.org.

~ANONYMOUS SURVEY RESPONSE

The WorkwithUSAID.org website has shortcuts to USAID information that helps me understand the partnership process.

~PARTNER INTERVIEW

It's good to see WorkwithUSAID.org taking action on feedback given so that organizations wishing to partner will be fully supported and have all the information they need.

~LINKEDIN COMMENT

I love the idea of giving partners an opportunity to be listed and advertised.

~ANONYMOUS SURVEY RESPONSE

The website's friendly and navigable UX/UI directly connects local partners to the Agency's work and opportunities.

~TWITTER COMMENT

Using the WorkwithUSAID.org Partner Directory and resources, we were able to establish a successful partnership with Fundamelher in El Salvador and craft a concept note for a grant challenge. I frequently visit the WorkwithUSAID.org site and follow the LinkedIn group to continue our quest to support USAID and to partner with a prime contractor.

~PARTNER INTERVIEW

I don't feel overwhelmed when I visit WorkwithUSAID.org. I feel guided. The resources are great…

~ANONYMOUS SURVEY RESPONSE

I was exceedingly impressed with how you set up the organizational assessment, with immediate results and recommendations for needed improvement action, accompanied with directions to resources.

~PARTNER EMAIL

SHARING PERSPECTIVES THAT EDUCATE, ENCOURAGE, AND INSPIRE

One of the Incubator's major objectives with regard to WorkwithUSAID.org is to create a collaborative space for knowledge sharing and resources for partnership success. Knowledge sharing on the site largely takes place in the **News & Insights** blog, which has received more than 97,000 views on 93 blog articles. Over the past year, blog articles covered partner tips, best practices, funding opportunities, events, success stories, and expert insights. The Incubator continues to add value to the site by enhancing its role as a "meeting place" for a dialogue on lowering barriers to partnership and localization.

In collaboration with our colleagues in USAID's Management Bureau Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA), the Incubator regularly engaged with Missions, Bureaus, and Operating Units (M/B/OUs) throughout the Agency on partnership stories, and the site is becoming a sought-after channel to share news about localization and the partnership process. Features like the Local, Faith, and Transformative Partnerships (LFT) Hub's "**Localization & Inclusive Development**" series demonstrate Agency interest and enthusiasm across a variety of offices to feature their partner outreach efforts on WorkwithUSAID.org.

The Incubator team highlighted voices from throughout the partner community and in Year 3 featured diverse content including question-and-answer articles with Mission staff, insights into new approaches to localization, guest blogs from partners, and articles about the partner journey. Partners commented on the utility and encouragement they find in the site's content: "Love the stories on the blog that bring to light how other organizations have been successful in cracking the USAID code.... These kinds of stories give hope."

> The Committee [on Appropriations] commends USAID's launch of the Work with USAID website that helps lower barriers faced by nontraditional partners in working with USAID and supports the USAID Administrator's initiative on locally led development.
>
> ~2023 **STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS APPROPRIATIONS BILL**, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JULY 2022

FINE-TUNING CONTENT, FEATURES, AND OUTREACH TO SUPPORT PARTNER NEEDS

The Incubator's enhanced Google Analytics practices yielded insights into the most-effective content among our community. In particular, site analytics revealed a strong interest in practical, tip-based guidance and "official" USAID voices. We developed content streams based on this information to continue to drive site traffic. With 93 blog posts published in Year 3, we are keeping the site's content fresh and relevant, and calls to action in each blog post help drive traffic to other features of the site as well. The primary channel for sharing our content remains M/OAA's highly active Work with USAID LinkedIn group, which grew in Year 3 from around 6,000 members in September 2021 to around 45,000 members in September 2022, a 650 percent increase. Content is also shared in M/OAA's newsletter, as well as its Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Through evaluating site analytics and user survey responses, the Incubator has been guided and inspired to develop and brainstorm new features for the site, including the funding tab in the navigation bar, which was added shortly after the site's launch. Other planned features include a funding feed from SAM.gov and Grants.gov, a Partnership Pathways tool, and a sub-opportunities page. We plan to make these features available to users of the site in Year 4.

PROVIDING RESPONSIVE SUPPORT TO PARTNERS

During Year 3, the Incubator processed more than 8,700 Partner Directory profile submissions and responded to more than 700 AskZara messages. We developed a strong collaborative process with M/OAA on the evaluation of Partner Directory submissions, with M/OAA taking on the partner vetting (terrorism check) portion of the submission evaluation and the Incubator team reviewing submission quality.

For reviewing directory submissions, the Incubator developed a process supported by staff across the Incubator, including those whose primary job functions are not related to the website. To enable this collaboration, our Web & Communications team trained staff members who review profiles when they have availability in their schedules. The total workload for review of Partner Directory submissions is approximately 130 hours of staff time per month. The unique internal collaboration we facilitated enables us to maintain the flow of reviews, and a "utility player" mentality of pitching in to support project-wide needs remains a hallmark of Incubator operations.

The team also streamlined its customer service response in the AskZara account by adopting Freshdesk, a customer service management site that enables standardized responses and delegation among team members. Common inquiries to the AskZara account include requests for assistance with organizational accounts (password resets, change of account ownership, etc.), requests for jobs or financial support, and requests for guest blog submissions. Implementing improved processes for both the Partner Directory and the AskZara account reflects our awareness that responsiveness is a key driver of a welcoming user experience.

OBJECTIVE 2

Expand USAID's capacity for partnerships

The Incubator supports M/B/OUs with a broad range of services designed to expand the Agency's ability to reach a greater pool of new, local, and nontraditional partners. Our ability to provide such support is predicated on the foundational work we did in Years 1 and 2 of the project, when we established processes, structure, and resources. While foundational, the framework we constructed is not rigid but allows the Incubator the flexibility to pivot and adjust as requests are made before and during project implementation. Thanks to this approach, during the past year, the Incubator was able to guide M/B/OUs into taking a fresh, objective look at the possibilities, constraints, and risks involved in engaging new partners and identifying practical solutions.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF LOCALIZATION

Language barriers remain a key obstacle to advancing localization, a challenge of which USAID is very much aware. In Year 3, the Incubator made progress in addressing this significant barrier by signing a contract with BoostEvents (formerly known as VoiceBoxer) to provide simultaneous interpretation services. This service has been a game-changer for our direct-support provision to local partners in terms of efficiency and workflow. A local Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) partner in the Latin America and Caribbean region shared, "Our M&E team has already told me that the new [simultaneous interpretation] platform is spectacular! They are delighted."

In addition, recognizing the need to provide the valuable resources on WorkwithUSAID.org to a broader set of partners, the Incubator continued to build out language resources on the website. The **Start Here** document is now available in seven languages (Arabic, Burmese, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese). The team also is working together with M/OAA on translating and posting the Pre-Engagement Assessment and has posted Spanish and Vietnamese thus far. A [redacted] buy-in from M/OAA for translated materials, that was obligated in September 2022, will further contribute to the foreign language materials we are able to develop and share with the international partner community.

STRATEGICALLY COMMUNICATING LOCALIZATION PRIORITIES

For most of Year 3, the Partnerships Incubator provided robust advisory and technical support that enabled the Agency to strategically communicate its localization priorities to internal and external audiences. We placed an Incubator staff member in the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (USAID/DDI) as the sole individual in the Agency focused full-time on localization messaging support.

Other achievements in this area included supporting the Localization Capacity Strengthening (LCS) team, including drafting the Executive Message for the LCS Policy release; promoting several high-profile localization-related webinars; creating a communications plan for the Centroamérica Local initiative; and supporting engagement with external localization stakeholders, particularly consultations with the Skoll and Hilton Foundations to shape the summer 2022 convening of Global South actors.

In August, the Incubator's support to USAID localization communications culminated in the release of an Executive Notice announcing the Localization Vision, a Localization Playbook, and a 40-page localization frequently asked questions (FAQs) set—all shared via the official launch of the MyUSAID Localization Hub as a "go-to" resource for all Agency leadership and staff. The work of the Incubator staff member assigned to this effort demonstrated an effective model for how the Incubator can provide flexible, long-term Bureau and Mission surge support through a highly experienced subject-matter expert.

ADVANCING USAID'S DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY EFFORTS WITH PARTNERS

The Incubator's ability to build high-performing teams and create resources to deliver outstanding services has been crucial to our success. Just as important has been our continuous focus on establishing customer-centric approaches and flexibility to meet the Agency's ever-changing requests. Toward the end of Year 3, the Incubator expanded our innovative approach to service delivery by supporting USAID's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA).

The Incubator consulted with the DEIA team to plan assistance that would support U.S.-based Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) in partnering with and engaging with USAID more substantively. MSIs can play an important role in responding to gaps and constraints USAID is experiencing in expanding its partner base under the New Partnerships Initiative (NPI). MSIs can also help USAID diversify its workforce, a key goal for the Agency. The Incubator plans to provide technical assistance and capacity-strengthening services to enhance the readiness of a competitively selected group of MSIs to potentially implement and manage USAID awards. The activity will also include a complementary component to reach and engage a wider MSI audience through a series of workshops or webinars that address questions and challenges these institutions commonly have when seeking to partner with USAID.

HONING OUR ABILITY TO ADAPT

Thanks to the Incubator's mantra of "be prepared, flexible, and poised to pivot," we supported two Bureaus as they explored new approaches to engaging local partners. BHA's Office of Global Policy, Partnerships, Programs, and Communications (G3PC) committed to supporting local partners through several of its geographic teams in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, but it did not know the needs of the teams or its partners at the time that it engaged the Incubator.

The nature of humanitarian and emergency response work is unpredictable, and USAID's expectations of local partners can be overwhelming for small organizations. The Incubator's flexibility meant we could guide conversations with each of the geographic teams to determine the most appropriate support provision for BHA and its partners. Entering Year 4, we anticipate completing one partner landscape and supporting 19 local organizations for the BHA teams.

In an effort similar to our work with G3PC, the Incubator supported USAID's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (FBNP) in their collaboration with Faiths4Vaccines and faith-based organizations addressing COVID-19 misinformation and vaccine hesitancy. Based on our past performance and reputation for pivoting to meet client needs, the FBNP team was confident that the Incubator could support its work even before it had selected target Missions or developed scopes of work.

MOBILIZING LOCALIZATION AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH A GUIDE SERIES

USAID's LFT Hub provides technical support to Missions and other Operating Units to aid them in reaching their localization and DEIA goals. In line with this effort, the Incubator developed three guides this year outlining practices that address barriers to localization or support inclusive development.

The Incubator collaborated with the LFT Hub to complete a guide on Accountability and Feedback Plans. The guide seeks to improve the work of USAID and its partners by integrating local voices, including constituent (beneficiary) feedback, into activity planning and implementation. The six-page designed guide was followed by an extensive partner landscape guide and a much shorter guide on the topic of refinement periods within new awards. The primary audience for the guides are USAID staff who are working with, or seeking to work with, nontraditional and local partners for project implementation.

OBJECTIVE 3

Help partner organizations work with USAID

At the heart of the Agency's new partnership effort is the goal of creating transformational and enduring impact. To tap the full marketplace of ideas that can create such a future, we must make new, local, and nontraditional partners aware of development program opportunities, and they must be able to participate viably in the competitive process that results in USAID awards.

The Incubator, in Year 3, worked with individual organizations, selected by Missions, to elevate their business capabilities so they would be more likely to survive and thrive. In addition, the Incubator delivered focused procurement outreach support to Missions to aid in targeting local stakeholders and put in place the necessary foundation to better prepare all interested organizations—everywhere in the world—to compete for awards.

STANDARDIZING TOOLS TO DRIVE EFFICIENCIES

To prepare for and support this expansion in scale, the Incubator created a catalog of service delivery blueprints and toolkits. Service delivery blueprints are intended to standardize and create a foundation for Incubator service delivery upon which any consultant, working with any partner, in any country can assist that partner in achieving greater success as a highly capable organization. Each blueprint contains a compendium of curated resources organized by key topics within each of the capacity-strengthening service areas the Incubator offers. Blueprints are not intended to replace the knowledge, expertise, or experience of a consultant but rather to augment it.

PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR SERVICE BLUEPRINTS

PARTNERSHIP READINESS

- Compliance Training
- Financial Management
- How to Partner with USAID
- Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting
- Proposal and Concept Paper Writing

PARTNER SUSTAINABILITY

- Business Model Strengthening
- Gender Assessments / Considerations
- Market Research and Analysis
- Media Training and Presentation Coaching
- Organizational Capacity Building
- Partner Identification and Partnerships
- Public Relations and Communications
- Human Resources Management and Professional Development

USAID LOCAL PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

- Co-creation Platforms
- Partner Landscape Analysis

SCALING SUPPORT DELIVERY

While Years 1 and 2 focused primarily on building service delivery systems and processes, Year 3 marked a substantial increase in the number of partners, Missions, and Bureaus with whom the Incubator worked. The Incubator provided capacity-strengthening services to four partner organizations during Years 1 and 2.

In Year 3, the Incubator supported, and continues to serve, more than 40 additional partners at the direction of 10 different M/B/OUs. In Year 3, the Incubator began work on five additional partner landscapes to assist the Missions in Sierra Leone, Guatemala, and Burundi, and the BHA geographic team in the Central African Republic to identify new and nontraditional organizations that could be potential viable partners.

Drawing from our experience delivering partner landscape analyses and assessments, the Incubator created a Partner Landscape Toolkit. This toolkit incorporates Incubator best practices to provide guidance and templates to support future consultant teams as they identify local and nontraditional partners that were previously unknown to a Mission (an analysis) or provide prioritized recommendations about which organizations the Mission can work with and their capacity-strengthening needs (an assessment).

With service blueprints and the Partner Landscape Toolkit, the Incubator is prepared for fast-start service delivery and consistency in service quality. Additionally, these resources and tools put the Incubator in a position to respond to a variety of rapid-response requests and support needs outside the traditional partner capacity-strengthening activities, such as a partner informational webinar series available to wide audiences. For example, based on early work on the compliance service blueprint, the Incubator was able to quickly turn around an ad hoc request for what became a Compliance Quick Reference Guide that is publicly available on WorkwithUSAID.org. The Partner Landscape Toolkit provides step-by-step guidance to consultant teams, along with sample messaging and communications and useful project planning and final report templates that streamline delivery and avoid "re-inventing the wheel," reducing activity startup time.

Source: Incubator's Partner Landscape Toolkit

ACCELERATING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS FOR USAID/DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Partnerships Incubator supports partner organizations through a diverse suite of capacity-strengthening services. In Year 3, the Incubator launched a comprehensive capacity strengthening initiative to five local partners in the Dominican Republic: three local President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) partners and two local Youth, Education, and Security (YES) Office partners. The Incubator built on its partner landscape and rapid capacity-assessment activities in Year 2 to mobilize both individualized and cohort-based support to these Dominican partners.

All partners shared USAID compliance gaps, so the Incubator was able to streamline its support by enrolling partners in a virtual course on USAID Rules and Regulations, hosted by Humentum. Next, the Incubator selected a Dominican Republic–based vendor to conduct thorough compliance reviews with three of the partners, providing the organizations with a roadmap for addressing gaps prioritized by urgency and effort. The Incubator offered an on-call help desk to partners to answer organization-specific questions that arise when addressing the identified gaps. Through this three-step approach, the Incubator offered practical, individualized support as follow-up to classroom teaching to efficiently strengthen the compliance capabilities of these partners.

The Incubator facilitated capacity strengthening with the five local Dominican partners as the organizations sought to transition from subcontractors to prime contractors. The same local vendor who conducted compliance reviews of the five partners was competitively contracted by the Incubator to deliver a suite of customized services to the cohort. The partner needs assessment conducted in Year 2 identified unique partner support priorities, including technical report writing, finance and budget, workforce and talent management, and new business development.

The Incubator supported service delivery that combined in-person workshops with in-depth consultations to review policies and procedures. The support also brought a practical component: by coaching partners through new business development opportunities and strengthening their operational systems, the local support provider was able to identify opportunities to diversify partner revenue within the Dominican context. The 360-degree support to local partners, delivered by a vendor well-versed in the local context, improved the cohort's readiness to work with USAID and the partners' viability as development organizations.

ELEVATING PARTNER IMAGE

In addition to the expertise of short-term technical consultants, the Incubator's core team contains a wealth of in-house expertise. This allows us to deploy staff as tactical subject matter experts when needed for rapid response. For example, Incubator members with expertise in developing brand identities and building communications strategies delivered support to two members of the Dominican Republic cohort. Incubator support included development of a logo design, brand guidelines, business cards, letterhead, social media graphics, and website elements. For both partners, the Incubator's team also developed websites through an easy-to-transfer platform, key messaging to focus their communications, and social media plans to revitalize their images.

ADOPLAFAM
Asociación Dominicana de Planificación Familiar

Este Amor
GRUPO DE APOYO ESTE AMOR

FROM PROJECT TURNAROUND TO EXPANSION

When the Incubator was tasked with supporting a project in need of immediate turnaround, the team went further than expected to put in place sustainable systems that also addressed long-term viability. One Dominican Republic partner, Universidad ISA, received support to accelerate its Higher Education Project (HEP-DR) team toward achieving its goals and objectives. The Incubator's Project Director assisted the Universidad ISA team with selecting a Chief of Party in only three weeks and addressed challenges related to team workflow, dynamics, and communications. Incubator staff provided mentoring and coaching to the newly selected Chief of Party and helped the team get back on track to complete a set of high-priority objectives and activities, as well as coaching them to improve overall team dynamics and communications flows.

The Incubator also selected—and trained the team in the use of—a digital recruitment platform to complement and add efficiency and transparency to the university's recruitment process. The HEP-DR team emphasized that Incubator support helped put in place processes that enabled the efficient hiring of four new team members and data gathering on staff satisfaction. Universidad ISA adopted several of these processes and templates for its other workstreams. The Incubator plans to use lessons learned from this experience to complete similar work with a local partner in need of urgent project turnaround assistance in Kenya in Year 4.

> Universidad ISA and USAID have different working cultures. [The Incubator's] support was critical to helping us align on communications channels, information management, and results achievement such that both organizations could accomplish their goals for the project.
>
> ~CHIEF OF PARTY, HEP-DR

EMPOWERING LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS WITH USAID/EASTERN AND SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN

In Year 3, the Incubator launched support to a partner cohort of six multilateral, regional institutions in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean region. Cohort members support regional initiatives such as a common market, regional integration, disaster recovery and resilience, research, and policy development. This cohort represents a unique opportunity for the Incubator to expand its usual portfolio of services supporting smaller NGO partners with few staff or systems to supporting large, regional organizations characterized by complex structures.

The Incubator conducted fact-finding discussions to explore the structure of all six multilateral organizations and carried out partner needs assessments with a team of local and remote consultants. The assessments identified priorities for capacity development support in areas such as financial management, information technology, and recruiting practices. As the Incubator looks ahead to service delivery, we are building on proven successes and lessons learned from our previous experience with similar activities in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador.

As part of the Eastern and Southern Caribbean project, the Incubator was invited to consider a range of prospective support areas for the administrative body of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM Secretariat), one of the six regional partners being assessed for support. CARICOM is a large multilateral organization with membership comprised of 15 states and five associate members, with a mandate to improve the lives of the region's citizens across economic and social spheres. This organization is an example of a new type of partner organization that can benefit from the Incubator's support. The Incubator is conducting a series of exploratory discussions with the Secretariat and external stakeholders to determine areas of assistance to be prioritized in close coordination with the Mission.

LEADING PARTNER LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENTS IN SIERRA LEONE

To advance its localization efforts, USAID/Sierra Leone requested the Incubator's support in preparing two partner landscape assessments to identify and assess local partners with which the Mission can collaborate in the democracy and governance and health sectors. Assessments show the organizations' readiness to be a prime partner or sub-partner or to act as a "local capacity development support" partner with the ability to develop the capacity of other organizations. The latter aspect of the assessment is informed by the Incubator's experience in the Dominican Republic, where the Incubator developed a consortium roadmap report for the Mission.

The report proposed a four-phase roadmap to establish a long-term, sustainable facility providing capacity-building support to local organizations, initiated by USAID/Dominican Republic but owned and led by local civil society organizations. This was part of the Incubator's vision to promote an innovative and replicable approach that could be adopted by other USAID Missions over time to emphasize locally led development.

EXPANDING INDIGENOUS-LED AND HIGH-CAPACITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH USAID/GUATEMALA

The Partnerships Incubator is working in collaboration with USAID/Guatemala to conduct a partner landscape assessment to evaluate NGOs, civil society organizations, and faith-based organizations with which USAID could collaborate, with a particular focus on Indigenous-led organizations.

Utilizing the toolkits, templates, and experience gained from previous landscape assessments, the Partnerships Incubator is applying a proven methodology and customized tools refined in its first two years to identify local or locally established organizations that align with the Mission's objectives and country strategy. As a result of the Incubator's partner landscape assessment, the Guatemala Mission will be better informed in its design of potential outreach activities to new partners. The Incubator built a robust team of all native Spanish speakers with extensive experience and networks in Guatemala to participate in this project.

As exemplified by the USAID/Guatemala partner landscape, the Incubator continues to engage with Missions around the world to deliver projects with great success, and our business-agility approach drives innovation across our programs and operations. The creation of toolkits and use of technology allows us to continuously improve processes and operations and deploy next-gen projects on a global scale.

HELPING USAID/BURUNDI REACH LOCAL PARTNERS

The Partnerships Incubator was tasked by USAID/Burundi to conduct a partner landscape assessment to identify and assess local or nontraditional partners in Burundi with whom the Mission could implement future projects. Leveraging past experience from El Salvador, the Incubator recommended that the Mission conduct a public outreach campaign, in French, that would allow partners to make themselves known to USAID. Unlike outreach in El Salvador, which identified more than 900 local organizations (many of them previously unknown) through a social media and newspaper print campaign, outreach in Burundi is intended to be conducted primarily over the radio to reach local partners operating in remote, rural areas.

To implement the outreach and assessment, the Partnerships Incubator assembled a robust team of French-speaking local and remote consultants with a vast range of experience leading and working on previous partner assessment studies. The ability to assemble strong consulting teams by leveraging an existing curated roster of consultants, combined with an effective hiring process, yields high-performing teams across all of our projects globally.

ESTABLISHING A PIPELINE OF EMPOWERED LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS EL SALVADOR

Since April 2022, USAID/El Salvador has engaged the Partnerships Incubator on one of its landmark localization initiatives—a capacity-strengthening effort for 10 local organizations in El Salvador spanning the nonprofit and social enterprise sectors. With the ultimate goal of creating better development implementers and stronger potential USAID partners, the Incubator was given 15 months to assess these organizations' needs, develop customized training plans, and implement capacity-strengthening services.

To execute the project, the Incubator deployed a consultant team that was purposefully assembled to ensure bilingual capability, local knowledge, and subject-matter expertise. Drawing on the existing tools and resources from past capacity-strengthening efforts the Incubator has undertaken, the team was able to leverage established resources and best practices to increase efficiencies throughout this process. The El Salvador engagement served as another example of how the Incubator specializes in creating balanced and high-performing teams of international and local specialists with diverse but complementary strengths.

DELIVERING PARTNER TOOLS THROUGH TRAINING MODULES

In Year 3, the Incubator finalized the "How to Work with USAID" **training module series** on USAID.gov to provide accessible and actionable resources that can help organizations prepare to work with USAID. Each module includes a narrated slide presentation, a transcript for accessibility purposes, and a quick reference guide. The objective of the 13-module series is to empower organizations with clear, relevant information that allows them to take the next steps toward partnership with USAID. In our third project year, 9,540 users accessed training modules on USAID.gov and WorkwithUSAID.org. During Year 3, we began steady promotion of the modules on the Work with USAID LinkedIn group. We included links to the training modules in the library of WorkwithUSAID.org, and a blog post highlighting the series was posted on the News & Insights blog.

The teams completed and published the following training modules in Year 3:

- Registering to Work with USAID
- Preparing for the Non-U.S. Organization Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS)
- Financial Reporting

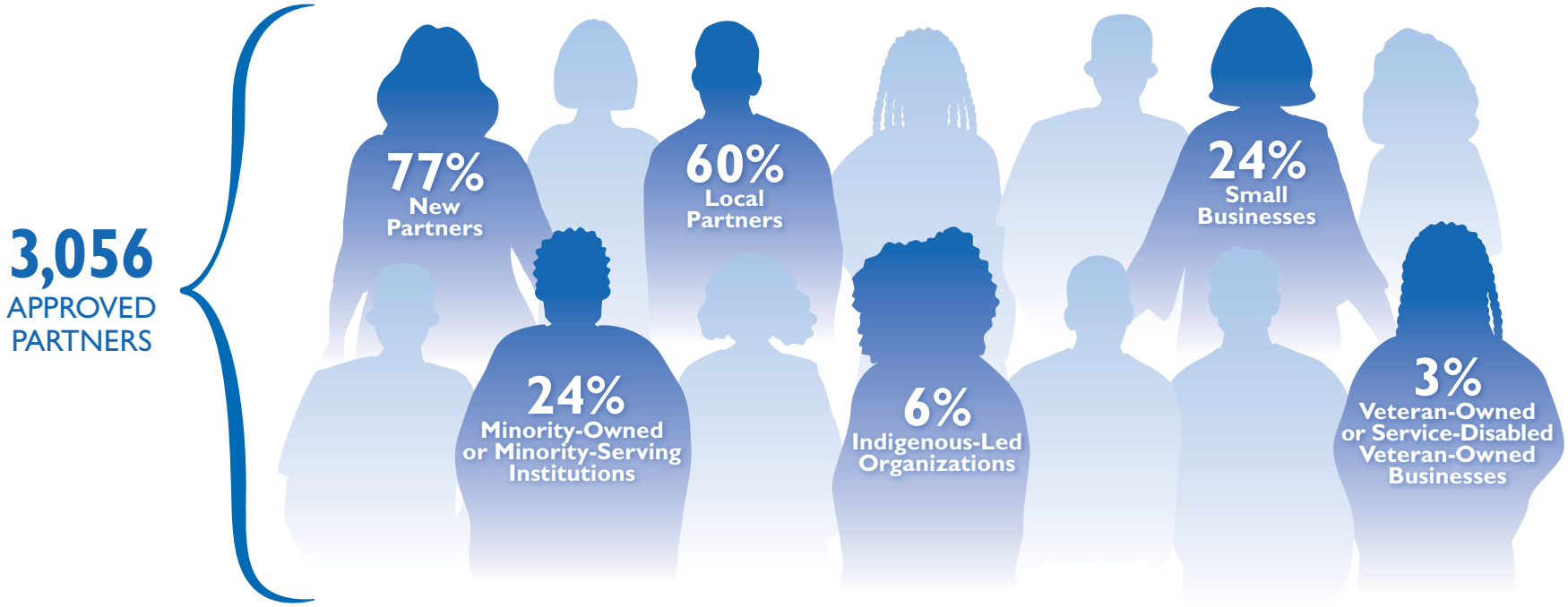
GUIDING PARTNERS THROUGH THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

The Registering to Work with USAID training module proved to be an especially complex product, requiring the creation of three separate sub-modules to walk partners step by step through distinct stages of the registration process: Login.gov, NATO Commercial and Government Entity (NCAGE), and System for Award Management (SAM). The module also required an update in April when the General Services Administration replaced the DUNS number with the new Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). This change required the Incubator to pivot to understand the new process, revise the original training module, and explain the new process in simple and clear language to the partner community. The module serves as a resource to support partners undertaking the registration process.

ADVANCING LOCALIZATION BY PROVIDING A HUB FOR INFORMATION AND NETWORKING

The Incubator keeps the Agency's goals of localization and partner expansion at the forefront of what we do. More than 3,000 potential and established partner organizations joined the WorkwithUSAID.org Partner Directory and nearly 1,800 are locally led organizations, representing nearly 60 percent of directory listings. Of the total approved partner organizations in the directory, 77 percent self-identify as "new partners." We discovered that, of those new partners, more than 960 identify as minority-owned or minority-serving institutions, more than 240 identify as Indigenous-led, and more than 150 identify as veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned businesses. The directory's search and export features enable USAID Missions and prime partners to filter and identify local and nontraditional partners working in their countries and sectors.

WORKWITHUSAID.ORG PARTNER DIRECTORY CHARACTERISTICS



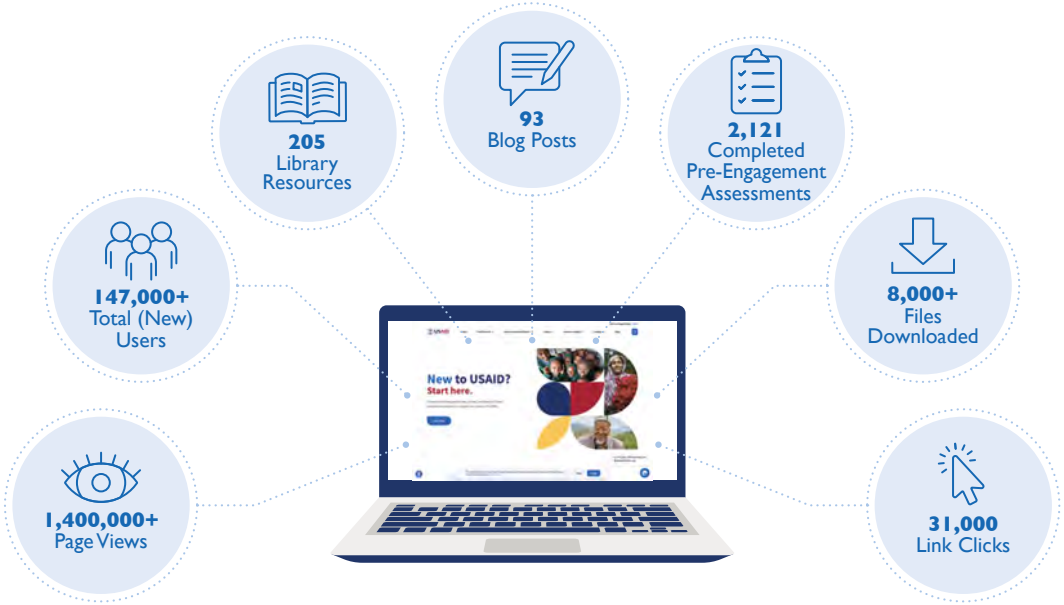
INCREASING WEBSITE VISIBILITY THROUGH OPTIMIZATION

During Year 3, we refined our search engine optimization (SEO) practices and Google Analytics capabilities to better direct the content and resources on WorkwithUSAID.org toward the partner community whom the site intends to serve. By building out the SEO plan, we improved search engine results placement (SERP) in Google search from an average placement or position of 40–60 to 17 with the higher placement indicating that our efforts yielded positive results. The implementation of these practices included extensive keyword research, file naming practices, and accessibility integration.

Through Google Analytics insights, the Incubator identified the most-downloaded resources, top-performing content, top countries visiting the site, and top browser languages accessing the site. These valuable datasets can inform future enhancements and content published throughout the site. As we continue to work closely with the Agency, we look forward to using these insights to develop new features, such as translated resources, a sub-opportunities page, a funding feed, and a Partnership Pathways tool.

In addition to the site's high visitation and activity metrics, WorkwithUSAID.org consistently receives above-average metrics in number of sessions per user, pages per session, and average session duration, as well as a low bounce rate. These metrics indicate a clear connection between a well-designed website and a positive user experience.

WORKWITHUSAID.ORG BY THE NUMBERS



PAVING THE WAY TO TRANSITION FROM .ORG TO .GOV

USAID plans to transition the WorkwithUSAID.org site from a .org site to a .gov domain, ensuring its sustainability as an ongoing partner resource hub hosted by the Agency. The Incubator is facilitating this transition by providing website documentation to the Chief Information Officer's office. The transition of the site is a welcome prospect, as it could enable continuity of the site after the end of the Incubator's contract in 2023. The Agency's full adoption of the site can also expand its reach and influence as a platform for the entire partner ecosystem. As a part of this transition, the Incubator has worked closely with M/OAA to ensure the necessary documentation and paperwork is completed so the transition process can remain on track.

INCORPORATING DIVERSE PARTNER VOICES

The Incubator re-engaged the Partner Advisory Council (PAC) in Year 3. The PAC plays an essential role in supporting the Incubator's efforts to understand partner needs and develop relevant and useful services and resources. We invited all council members to share their areas of interest and preferred level of engagement. The Incubator held a quarterly update meeting in mid-June, to share updates about recent activities, and to highlight potential areas of engagement.

Several council members participated in a focus group discussion to help inform a technical service blueprint on partner identification for use by consultants providing capacity-strengthening services to partners. The Incubator intends to further engage council members in the expansion of WorkwithUSAID.org and as guest blog writers. Beyond that, the Incubator invites council participation in envisioning the sustainability of the Incubator's impact beyond the life of the project.

INCUBATOR OPERATIONS

The Finance & Operations unit is responsible for the financial and operational stewardship of the project, including financial reporting, budgeting, payment process, personnel recruitment, task order issuance, and procurement actions. The Finance & Operations team enables the smooth and seamless functioning of the Incubator as a whole, providing support for the resourcing and compliance framework of all Incubator activities.

DRIVING PROJECT IMPACT THROUGH OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

At the beginning of Year 3, the Incubator's work with partners, Missions, and USAID/Washington was slowly reduced to meet the available funds, as there was uncertainty about the additional obligations from buy-in funds. However, in January 2022, at the start of Quarter 2, the Incubator received an approved ceiling increase from USAID. With this news, Kaizen and the Incubator's Finance & Operations team worked together to prepare numerous budgets to accommodate the escalation of the project.

Over the course of Year 3, a key challenge for the Incubator was securing the buy-ins to allow the Incubator to program funds under the ceiling increase. During Quarter 2, many of these buy-ins were just beginning to take shape, and our efforts during this time centered on laying the groundwork for an expansion of our activities expected in the remainder of the fiscal year. In Quarter 2, the Incubator received obligated funds from USAID/El Salvador, USAID's Office of Locally Led Development Initiatives, and one of BHA's Disaster Assistance Response Teams (BHA/DART). The Finance & Operations team provided support to the BHA/DART partner on compliance, finances, and budgeting in Quarter 2.

Moving into the third and fourth quarters of the year of project implementation, the Incubator experienced ramped-up demand for services to USAID/Washington, as well as USAID Missions overseas, under its buy-in services. We received more obligated buy-in funds during Quarter 3 from USAID/Eastern and Southern Caribbean, USAID/Guatemala, and BHA's G3PC. And, in Quarter 4, we received additional obligated buy-in funds from USAID's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; BHA's team in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; USAID/Burundi; the Office of the Chief Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Officer; USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance; USAID/Kenya; and USAID/Sierra Leone. The total amount obligated during Year 3 was [redacted]

As the Incubator's work with partners, Missions, and USAID/Washington increased over the course of Year 3, we put in place contractual mechanisms to support these expanded activities. The Incubator signed contracts with Big Blue Communications, TM Design, and WeUsThem (graphic design and communication); Daniel Goncalves and MIEW (Phase 2 design and website development support); and Entrena for partner capacity-building in the Dominican Republic. The Incubator also signed a contract with BoostEvents for simultaneous interpretation services.

As a result of the increased demand we experienced for Incubator services, the Incubator's Finance & Operations team supported a robust recruitment campaign to accommodate the associated technical support needs, and this hiring created a spike in level of effort (LOE) utilization from August 2022 onward. In Year 3, the Finance & Operations unit facilitated the hiring of 32 consultants to meet the increased need for work and demand for specific skill sets. This spike is expected to continue into Year 4, as additional hires are underway.

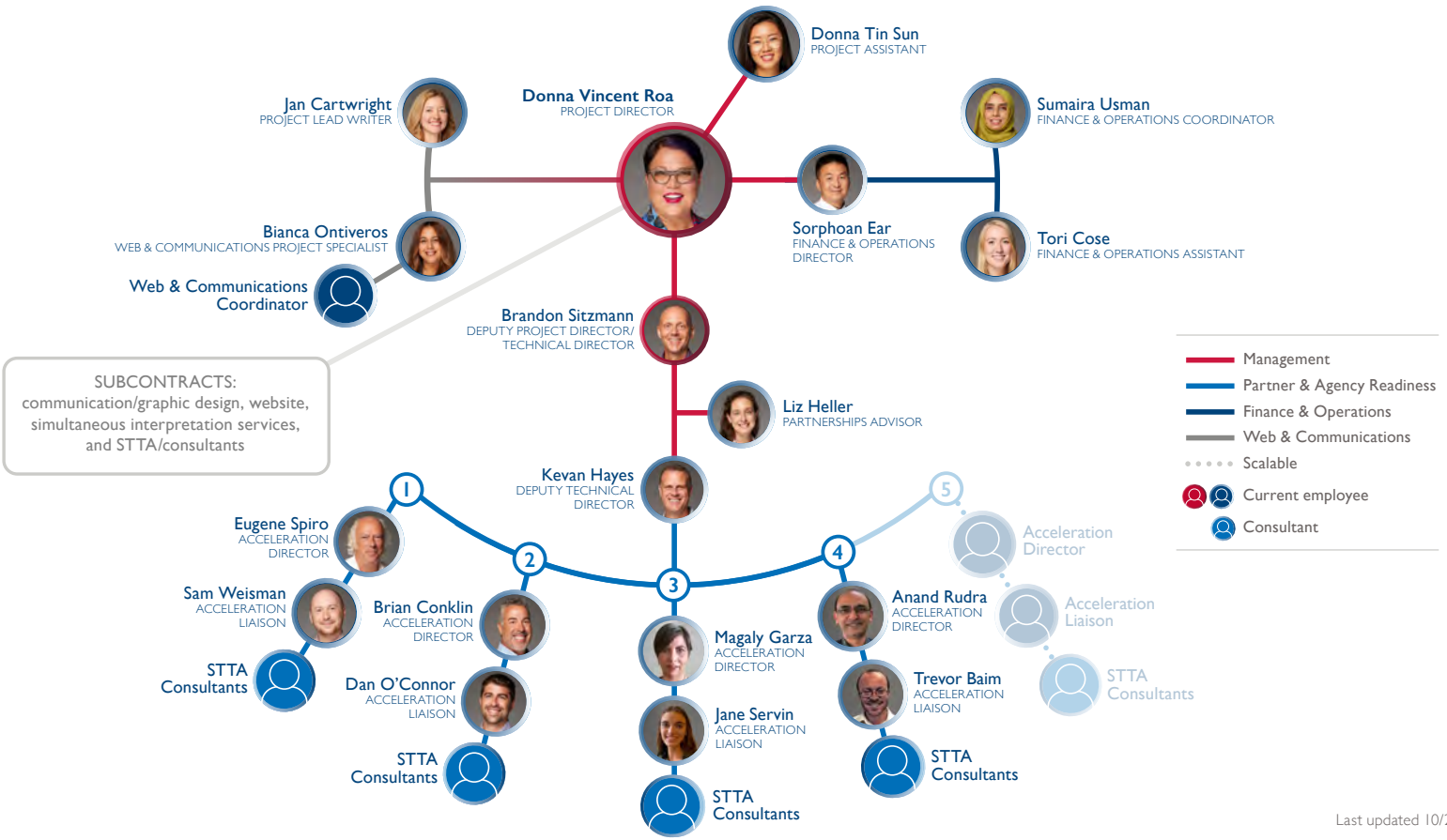
THE TEAM

The Partnerships Incubator team in Year 3 comprised 17 full-time staff members and 34 short-term technical assistance consultants, including locally based experts. Additional hires are in progress.

In Year 3, due to the dramatic expansion of our work through the buy-ins described in the preceding section, we began intentionally staffing up our Partner & Agency Readiness unit, utilizing an innovative, replicable "pod" structure as shown in our organizational chart. This pod structure provides a model through which we can rapidly expand Incubator services and incorporate knowledge-sharing processes to increase efficiencies among the pods. During Year 3, we put in place three fully staffed pods, and we began the hiring process for staffing a fourth pod.

The Partnerships Incubator has continued our relationship with The Washington Center to provide opportunities for young professionals through our associate program, now in its third year. During Year 3, two associates participated in themed presentations and discussions as Incubator team members. By combining direct work on Incubator projects with opportunities to be mentored, the associate program helps these individuals develop critical skills and knowledge that can inform their future careers in the field of international development.

PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR STAFF



Last updated 10/21/2022

ADMINISTRATION

In Year 3, USAID issued nine contract modifications to the Partnerships Incubator project that provided for incremental funding and the ceiling increase, and the Agency also approved the Incubator's third budget realignment. The modifications reflect a refined approach to project implementation and address new priorities.

STATUS OF FUNDS

TOTAL CONTRACT CEILING	[redacted]	
OBLIGATED FUNDS	[redacted]	[redacted]
FUNDS USED AS OF 08/31/2022	[redacted]	[redacted]
FUNDS AVAILABLE	[redacted]	[redacted]

INDICATORS

Intently focused on delivering with excellence, we monitor and evaluate our work by tracking nine indicators that reflect key Incubator deliverables and services. Our robust monitoring and evaluation efforts help us measure our progress toward objectives identified in our program management plan.

PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR YEAR 3 INDICATORS

The Partnerships Incubator supports the implementation of USAID's New Partnerships Initiative by collaborating with USAID M/B/OUs to empower new, nontraditional, and local partners. To monitor and report on progress and performance toward this goal, we track nine indicators covering three objectives and associated activities described in the program management plan. These indicators reflect key deliverables and services provided to the Agency and to new and nontraditional partners.

The Incubator revised its indicator definitions in January 2022, and data were measured against the updated indicators beginning in Quarter 2. The updated indicator definitions primarily sought to better identify the types of communication products delivered by the Incubator. For example, Indicator 1.1 was previously written as: "Number of communications products produced by the Partnerships Incubator." The updated indicator 1.a is now as follows: "Number of Incubator-produced storytelling and news items posted by the Incubator to public content platforms." This updated description captures a more specific product count and narrows the range of communications products that can be reported in this line item.

Deliverables and service achievements in areas related to M/B/OU engagement, training resources, and communication strategy and products show the Incubator is meeting or surpassing targets as demonstrated by active data capture and reporting against performance indicators. Indicator 2.b is the only item which the Incubator did not meet our targets during Year 3. Several partner identification activities, such as the partner landscape analyses in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, wrapped up in August and September 2021, just prior to the start of Year 3. Several similar activities started up with USAID counterparts in Burundi and Guatemala in September 2022. Therefore, a significant number of additional partners will be identified in Year 4 and reported on in subsequent reports. We expect our overall life-of-project target for this indicator to be greatly surpassed.

The table on page 34 shows progress against each performance indicator for the period October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022.

2021-2022 INDICATORS

The table below shows progress against each performance indicator for the period October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. The Incubator introduced some modifications to some of the indicators for its third year and started data collection in line with modified indicators in the second quarter of 2022.

INDICATOR	TYPE OF INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE(S)	FREQUENCY	BASELINE OCTOBER 1, 2021	TARGET FOR YEAR 3	PROGRESS FOR YEAR 3[1]
OBJECTIVE 1: Amplify USAID's external communication efforts to help diversify and strengthen its partner base						
1.a. Number of Incubator-produced storytelling and news items posted by the Incubator to public content platforms	Output	Communications Unit products tracking sheet, websites (.gov and .org)	Monthly	0	24	52
OBJECTIVE 2: Expand USAID's capacity for partnerships						
2.a. Number of work products completed for M/B/OUs	Output	Readiness Unit services tracking sheet	Quarterly	0	20	45[2]
2.b. Number of potential new and underutilized partners (NUPs) identified through landscape or similar analyses upon request by M/B/OUs	Output	Readiness Unit services tracking sheet	Annually	0	80	0
OBJECTIVE 3: Help partner organizations work with USAID						
3.a. Number of visitors to all WorkwithUSAID.org sites	Output	Web analytics	Monthly	0	1,000	151,600
3.b. Number of partners with approved profiles on WorkwithUSAID.org	Output	Web analytics, profile validation, and approval log	Quarterly	0	350	3,056
3.c. Percent of registered partners that completed the Pre-Engagement Assessment	Output	Completed pre-engagement organizational assessments	Quarterly	0	15%	23.76%
3.d. Number of users that accessed training modules (on USAID.gov and WorkwithUSAID.org)	Output	Web analytics	Monthly	0	1,500	9,540
3.e. Number of partners that accessed library (Incubator-curated) resources on WorkwithUSAID.org	Output	Web analytics	Monthly	0	450	54,231[3]
3.f. Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance (per M/B/OU request)[4]	Outcome	Survey	Annually	0	90%	Data expected to be reported in Year 4

1 Metrics on progress cover the period October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, because modified Year 3 indicators came on line in the second quarter of Year 3.
2 The year-end total is adjusted in-line with the revised indicator definition.
3 These are numbers of page views (not numbers of partners). We identified this discrepancy in the data reported and the indicator title and definition. To remain consistent with the previously reported data, we continued reporting numbers of page views for the remainder of FY 2022. Beginning in FY 2023, we plan to revise the indicator title and definition in consultation with the COR and adjust future reporting accordingly.
4 Data for this indicator is reported annually after final delivery of technical assistance to organizations. The indicator is similar to the Agency's standard F-indicator CBLD-9 and will be informed by self-reported pre- and post-service surveys to organizations supported by the Partnerships Incubator.

CONTACT: