



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

TOWARDS A MORE DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE WORKFORCE AT USAID

Key messages

Development co-operation is only as good as the people who underpin it. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) acknowledges the need for a more diverse, inclusive, equitable and accessible workforce. It is taking a broad range of steps to meet this and related objectives.

Keywords

[Human resources](#) | [Institutional arrangement](#) | [Policy and guidance](#)

Key partner

[United States](#)

Challenge

Development co-operation is only as good as the people who underpin it. A diverse, flexible and performing workforce allows members to analyse context, formulate and influence policies, build relationships, and continually improve internal systems. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) faces some challenges in advancing a diverse, inclusive and equitable workforce. For example, according to a [2020 US Government Accountability Office report](#), the odds of promotion in the civil service were 31-41% lower for racial or ethnic minorities than for whites in early and mid-career, and similar patterns were observed in the Foreign Service.

Approach

USAID is taking steps to develop a more diverse, inclusive, equitable and accessible workforce, reinforce operational and administrative roles, and increase the number and contribution of foreign service nationals:

- **Strong policy commitment and leadership.** USAID Administrator Samantha Power approved a strategic plan for enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) and continues to emphasise the importance of creating a workplace free from discrimination, harassment and retaliation.

The newly established [Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility](#), led by the agency's first chief diversity officer and reporting directly to the USAID Administrator, ensures implementation of the strategic DEIA and Equity Action plans.

- **Review of hiring strategies and paid positions.** To diversify its candidate pool, USAID is engaging with minority-serving universities and institutions, adding posts with work-study opportunities, offering more paid internships, and considering how it might relax requirements around medical clearances, graduate-level degrees and overseas experience. The agency also is increasing support for programmes that specifically target under-represented groups such as the Workforce Recruitment Program for persons with disabilities and the Donald M. Payne International Development Fellowship Program.
- **Capacity and continuous skill development.** Respectful, Inclusive and Safe Environments (RISE), launched as a pilot in 2018, is a now well-established, cross-disciplinary learning platform for advancing a more respectful, inclusive and safe workplace culture and environment. Foreign Service hiring managers and promotion board members are required to complete training on unconscious bias. The New Field Leaders Seminar for all new mission directors and deputy directors now includes a mandatory two-day DEIA training component.
- **Well-supported country systems.** USAID recognises that DEIA is contextual and varies from place to place. In Kenya, a DEIA regional advisor works with mission leadership and staff to identify issues around equity and inclusion such as gaps and barriers to recruitment and hiring. Progress is supported through biweekly calls between the DEIA headquarters office and USAID posts. A new DEIA Council Toolkit puts the power and resources into the hands of USAID staff as they work to implement and accelerate change.
- **Improved data analysis.** USAID recently completed an analysis of Foreign Service promotions that includes data on gender and racial or ethnic group. It is also conducting a pay equity analysis and developing a DEIA climate survey that will collect expanded demographic data to help USAID better analyse how staff perceive its DEIA efforts.

Results

- Some **progress has been made in terms of the overall proportion of racial and ethnic minorities** in USAID's full-time permanent career workforce, which increased from 33% in FY 2002 to 37% in FY 2018.
- More than 14 dedicated DEIA advisors in Washington and at missions are **helping to change the internal culture by showcasing and welcoming DEIA** among locally employed staff and creating opportunities and events to build cultural bridges between the United States and the host country.
- **Since June 2021, more than 6 000 USAID staff have participated in a RISE training, event or seminar**, among them more than 360 senior leaders and nearly half of all USAID leaders posted overseas. The RISE platform trains approximately 250 people a week and continues to expand, and 80% of overseas posts have completed a five-day workshop on intercultural competence and DEIA.

Lessons learnt

- There is a **continuous need to identify barriers to equity** to enhance processes and improve USAID's internal and external culture, both in headquarters and in posts.
- USAID needs to **invest more in internal and external professional development programmes** to help staff advance to senior leadership levels.
- A **DEIA research agenda is required** to help the agency build the necessary evidence base for making improvements that institutionalise DEIA principles across the employment life cycle.
- **DEIA data collection and analyses need to be expanded and improved** upon to enable more strategic leadership decisions.
- USAID should work with other federal government entities to **collect LGBTQI+ data and other unreported DEIA data** so it can better address the needs of all employees and partners to the extent permissible by law.

Further information

Government of the United States (2022), *OECD DAC Peer Review: Self-Assessment – United States of America*, [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/AR\(2022\)1/7/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/AR(2022)1/7/en/pdf).

US Government Accountability Office (2020), *USAID: Mixed Progress in Increasing Diversity, and Actions Needed to Consistently Meet EEO Requirements*, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-477>.

USAID, *DEIA Achievements*, <https://www.usaid.gov/equity/deia-achievements>.

OECD resources

OECD (2022), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: United States 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6da3a74e-en>.

OECD (2020), *Development Insights: DAC peer learning brief on building, buying and borrowing skills*, [https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC\(2020\)48&docLanguage=En&ga=2.235103619.348384749.1662329357-785394802.1653296305](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC(2020)48&docLanguage=En&ga=2.235103619.348384749.1662329357-785394802.1653296305).

OECD, "People and skills", *Development Co-operation Fundamentals*, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1099_1099375-k4lg16xg9j&title=People-and-skills.

To learn more about the United States' development co-operation, see:

OECD, "United States", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/45472e20-en>.

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