

PROGRAM CYCLE

How-To Note: Planning and Conducting Site Visits



This resource describes practical steps and effective practices for planning and conducting a site visit.

Introduction

This How-To Note supplements USAID's [Automated Directives System \(ADS\) 201.3.4.10](#). It lists Agency requirements for programmatic site visits, identifies practical steps and effective practices for planning and conducting a site visit, and recommends follow-up actions once a site visit has taken place. This How-To Note is intended as a resource for Missions and Washington Operating Units (OUs). The primary audience is Contracting Officer's Representatives and Agreement Officer's Representatives (CORs/AORs). However, the guidance may also be relevant for any USAID staff member with delegated authority to conduct a site visit, such as an Activity Manager. This document may also serve as a helpful reference for other Mission or Washington OU staff, such as Project Managers, Program Office staff, Support Office staff, Monitoring and Evaluation points of contact (M&E POCs), and Learning Advisors.

Background

Site visits are an essential and required component of a Mission's performance management. Moreover, site visits offer a unique opportunity to learn about an activity's implementation context, to expand understanding of how stakeholder communities experience USAID's support, and to strengthen collaboration with implementing partners. To that end, continual contact with implementing partners is the essence of active portfolio management.¹

Site visits are used to assess whether the activity is on track for achieving its goals and can serve a number of important purposes, such as performance monitoring, data verification, learning to inform design and implementation, and checking compliance against Agency requirements. Site visits also play an important role in a Mission's efforts to generate and share new learning, enhance strategic collaboration and stakeholder engagement, and better understand implementation, assumptions, and theories of change to manage adaptively.

How-To Notes provide guidelines and practical advice to USAID staff and partners related to the Program Cycle. This note was produced by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL).

¹ [Active Portfolio-Management](#), Administrator Mark Green's Executive Message, December 21, 2018.

Site visits enable Missions and Washington OUs to gather information to help assess *whether, how, and to what degree* an intervention(s) is achieving its intended results and contributing to development aims. Site visits are also an opportunity to identify any unintended consequences of an activity, whether positive or negative, or explore system or contextual factors that might affect activity implementation. A programmatic site visit is an opportunity to learn from implementation, to better understand the local context, and identify what is not already known about the activity. Applying Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) principles and approaches when planning and conducting a site visit can help ensure the site visit is more collaborative among Mission staff, implementing partners, and other stakeholders, and can help generate and share learning that can subsequently be used to inform implementation, other programming decisions, and other project and activity designs.

Considerations When Activities Are Part of a Project

Site visits are a required task for CORs/AORs as part of their responsibilities in managing activities. Activities are expected to be planned and implemented as part of a project.² While a Project Manager may not have direct authority over the CORs/AORs at the Mission, it is important for CORs/AORs to work with Project Managers to consider how the activity contributes to overall project outcomes, and how activity performance is affected by or impacts other activities within the same project.

As long as the primary activity-related requirements for a site visit are met, the Mission might wish to consider ensuring the following illustrative actions are part of planning or conducting a site visit to support project-related needs:

- Ensure that the COR/AOR understands the role of the activity to be visited as it relates to other activities and the project as a whole.
- Discuss the site visit with other CORs/AORs and the Project Manager to ensure that the site visit does not adversely affect the implementation or oversight of other activities, and to surface questions at the project level that may be addressed with evidence and learning generated by the site visit.
- Consider joint site visits when activities are strongly connected (for instance, different components of the same value chain, location, or implementing partner). Joint site visits promote learning and sharing across activities and assist the Project Manager and the other CORs/AORs to assess broader performance, as well as provide some economies of scale.

Agency Requirements for Site Visits

1. Per [ADS 201.3.4.10](#), “for each activity, Missions and Washington OUs...must perform site visits to provide activity oversight, inspect implementation progress and deliverables, verify monitoring data, and learn from activity implementation.”
2. The minimum number and frequency of site visits should be informed by each Mission and activity’s context, and should be determined by the Mission Director or his/her designate. This must be documented in the Mission Order³ that covers ADS 201 performance monitoring requirements. The Mission Order should include: expected minimum number of site visits over the course of an activity and how to document exceptions, types of information that should be documented in a site visit report, processes for site visit report submission and records management, site visit report use, and learning.^{4 5}
3. CORs/AORs must write a brief report highlighting the findings from a site visit, and file the report in the official award file using the Agency Secure Image and Storage Tracking system (ASIST).^{6 7}

² [ADS 201.3.3.14 - Project Implementation](#)

³ Reference Agency Notice, [Revision of Program Cycle Mission Orders to Align with Revised ADS 201](#).

⁴ Washington Operating Units may have their own policies or procedures that cover site visit requirements.

⁵ [Active Portfolio-Management](#), Administrator Mark Green’s Executive Message, December 21, 2018.

⁶ [ADS 502.3.4.3 - Converting Paper Records to Electronic](#)

Agency-wide Recommendations

1. The Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning recommends that a COR/AOR conduct a site visit at least once every six months, or more frequently for poor performing activities. More frequent site visits should be made to activities with audit or evaluation findings that point to moderate or high risk for waste, fraud, or abuse.
2. Expectations for conducting site visits should be found in the COR/AOR (or their designate) designation letter, which should reference the ADS 201 requirement and the relevant Mission Order guidance. The designation letter should be shared with the implementing partner.

Site Visits: The Basics

WHAT IS A USAID SITE VISIT?

Site visits are an essential and required component of a Mission's performance management.⁸ For the purposes of this guidance, programmatic site visits are conducted by CORs/AORs, or any USAID staff with delegated authority, visiting a USAID-funded activity site or an implementing partner's in-country office for the purposes of monitoring, oversight, and learning from activity implementation.

Examples of what is considered a site visit (please note this list is not exhaustive):

- Visiting a location (such as a school or clinic) implementing an activity supported by USAID and monitoring its performance, engaging its stakeholders, and assessing its context according to the Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan and the Mission's overall CLA Plan.
- Observing a training or other event funded within a USAID activity, and monitoring its implementation progress to learn from and manage activity performance.
- Conducting a field portfolio review with the implementing partner and other stakeholders to draw from evidence and experience, to learn and share from activity implementation as to what works, what doesn't, and why, and to apply this learning to activity implementation or across activities and projects.
- Surveying a construction site to check contractor performance against scheduled/reported performance and to ensure construction and environmental requirements, such as the Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP), are met.
- Visiting an implementing partner's local office to review the system where activity data is collected and stored.

Examples of what is not considered a site visit (please note this list is not exhaustive):

- Routine COR/AOR meetings with the implementing partner.
- Visiting a site without a purpose in mind and without documenting findings in a site visit report.

Planning a Site Visit

Proper planning is a critical step for getting the most relevant and useful information from a site visit. Additionally, planning a site visit in advance creates a space to strengthen collaboration with and among partners and engage stakeholder communities. To help facilitate site visit preparation, this section includes recommendations that cover the most important elements of planning an effective visit. While determining the purpose of a site visit is a critical first step, planning a site visit is typically an iterative process and the elements listed below are not chronological steps to take, but important to factor into plans prior to conducting the site visit.

⁷ [ADS 302: USAID Direct Contracting](#)

⁸ [Active Portfolio-Management](#), Administrator Mark Green's Executive Message, December 21, 2018.

DETERMINE THE PURPOSE(S)

Effective site visits begin with well-defined goals and objectives, and should be determined based on the current status of activity implementation. To facilitate determining the purpose, refer to the award documents, activity work plan, MEL plans and the Mission's overall CLA plan, and recent progress reports, which could help narrow the focus for the upcoming site visit. Being specific and intentional about identifying the purpose enables the site visit team to collect, review, and synthesize the most relevant information prior to the site visit, and helps give the team focus when at the activity implementation site.

A single site visit may address a number of purposes; however, not every site visit will be designed to monitor or review all aspects of activity implementation and performance, or take advantage of all opportunities for learning and stakeholder engagement. As it relates to reporting, it is acceptable to report only on the aspects reviewed during the specific visit. Common purposes may include, but are not limited to:

- **Performance Monitoring:** Performance monitoring is the ongoing and systematic collection of performance indicator data and other quantitative or qualitative information to reveal whether implementation is on track and whether expected results are being achieved. Site visits with a focus on performance monitoring enable the COR/AOR to (1) observe whether the activity is being implemented in accordance with the work plan, (2) inspect deliverables, and (3) determine whether there are any implementation delays or challenges that might affect the activity progress. The COR/AOR should take this opportunity to ask the partner, stakeholders, and beneficiaries to reflect on performance and context and whether there are any observations or concerns beyond what the performance monitoring data capture that should be discussed.
- **Context Monitoring:**⁹ Site visits enable USAID to collect information about local conditions that may directly affect implementation and performance (such as non-USAID activities operating within the same sector as USAID activities), or external factors that may indirectly affect implementation and performance (such as economic, social, political, or environmental conditions), which can then be used to inform management actions about activity implementation, including when and how USAID needs to engage with other donors working in the same context. A site visit focused on context monitoring could include meeting with local stakeholders (e.g., non-governmental organizations [NGOs], local authorities, host government institutions, project staff, or even non-beneficiaries) to inquire about upcoming community events or decisions that may affect activity progress. Also see "Stakeholder Engagement" under "[Additional Factors to Consider](#)" below.
- **Data Verification:** Site visits are an important component of USAID's oversight and quality assurance processes during the life of the activity. During a site visit, the COR/AOR and, when applicable, the Mission/Project M&E POC and Learning Advisor, may verify activity monitoring indicator data collected and stored by the implementing partner. This may include reviewing primary data records for performance monitoring that are stored on-site, observing physical locations, and talking to beneficiaries. For example, a site visit to a local clinic that benefits from USAID programming may include verifying that the clinic received medications as reported by the implementing partner. CORs/AORs may also choose to include a Data Quality Assessment (DQA) as a part of a site visit. A DQA is USAID's process for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of indicator data according to five standards of data quality and determining the extent to which such data may be used to influence management decisions.¹⁰
- **Learning to Inform Design and Implementation:** Site visits are an opportunity to generate and share new learning; enhance strategic collaboration and stakeholder engagement; better understand implementation, assumptions and theories of change to inform project and activity

⁹ During the desk review prior to a site visit, the site visit team should reference the Activity MEL Plan for a list of identified context indicators to track during implementation. For more information, please see [USAID's How-To Note on the Activity MEL Plan](#).

¹⁰ For more information on DQAs, see [How to Conduct a Data Quality Assessment](#).

designs; and to better manage adaptively. A site visit for the purpose of learning can help strengthen a collaborative partnership with the implementing partner, and provide an opportunity for partners to share their lessons learned, best practices, successes, and concerns. When planning a site visit, consider what USAID and the implementing partner need to know about critical assumptions, changes in the operational context, and what has been learned as a result of implementation that was not previously known. Also, consider planning for what knowledge sharing events or practices, such as learning events or sharing the site visit report with other relevant offices, can take place following a site visit to help inform adaptations to current interventions, other project and activity designs, or other development efforts.

- **Monitor Compliance with Award Terms:** Site visits enable the Agency to track compliance with regulations by partner organizations. As a condition of receiving federal awards, implementing partners agree to comply with laws, regulations, and the provisions of grant agreements and contracts, and to maintain internal control to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with these requirements.¹¹ Site visits provide an opportunity for the COR/AOR, in partnership with financial management office staff, to identify deficiencies and potential vulnerabilities in management and internal control systems, and to work collaboratively with implementing partners to address them.

The COR/AOR should note any performance problem pertaining to schedule, cost, quality and/or non-compliance. Additionally, the COR/AOR should bring any significant performance issues to the immediate attention of the Office of Acquisition and Assistance and the Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer (CO/AO) to discuss resolution and potential impact to the activity or project. Any appearance of fraud, waste, abuse, or violations of human trafficking must immediately be reported to the activity CO/AO and the [Office of Inspector General's hotline](#).

Below are examples of key compliance areas to assess during a site visit, which are also subject to audit by the Office of the Inspector General. (For a brief explanation of each area, please see [Annex I](#).)

- ✓ Environmental Compliance
- ✓ Commodity Management
- ✓ Branding and Marking
- ✓ Health Funding-related Requirements
- ✓ Gender Equality and Female Empowerment
- ✓ Disability and Inclusion
- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Other Acquisition or Assistance Standard Provisions
- ✓ Terms Specific to the USAID Mission or to the Award for the Activity

Follow-up on Previous Site Visit Recommendations: There will be instances when it will be necessary to schedule a site visit to validate whether the implementing partner is following up on recommended actions arising from a previous site visit or other relevant performance monitoring activity. If this is the purpose of the site visit, it is best to communicate the goals/objectives with the implementing partner to ensure they have ample time to address previously identified issues and to gather the necessary information that might be discussed. Previous site visit recommendations could also be based on new learning from implementation and the changing context, or better understanding of the dynamics among the local actors and decisions to manage adaptively as a result. Follow up from these types of recommendations are important to further gauge what is working, what is not working, and why, to inform additional adaptations.

¹¹ For more information, see [2 CFR Part 200, Appendix XI, Compliance Supplement](#), page I-6.

IDENTIFY THE SITE VISIT TEAM

Site visits provide an opportunity to engage and promote collaboration across the Mission. Depending on the purpose, and if appropriate for the visit and the type of activity being monitored, in addition to the COR/AOR, the site visit team configuration could include the CO/AO, the Mission's M&E POC, Learning Advisor or Learning POC, the Financial Management Officer/Financial Analyst, the Project Manager, the Mission Environmental Officer, Gender Advisor, Development Outreach and Communication (DOC) Specialist, Mission leadership, and/or other staff from USAID or other United States Government (USG) agencies.

PLAN THE VISIT

After the site visit purpose(s) and team are formulated, a planning meeting can help clarify:

- Who else should participate (e.g., the implementing partner(s), beneficiaries, local institutions, external technical experts, etc.), and at what point during the process they should be involved.
- Whether the Mission has the required expertise and/or knowledge to fairly assess the activity's progress. If not, is short-term technical assistance available locally? Within USAID/Washington? Within the region?
- The appropriate site visit methodology (e.g., observations, interviews, document reviews, data quality assessments, roundtable discussions, informal discussions for relationship management, etc.).¹²

For site visit methodological considerations in non-permissive environments (NPEs), please refer to the NPE section below.

- What knowledge sharing the site visit team plans to do post-site visit with the Mission, implementing partner, or others, to ensure adequate capture and organization of information gathered during the site visit.
- Site visit resource requirements (e.g., budget, logistics, equipment, etc.).

Select the Site(s)

There are a number of factors to consider when selecting an activity site(s) to visit: staff availability, geographic location, weather and climate patterns, implementing partner and stakeholder availability, and security, to name a few. There may be instances when it will be necessary to show up at a site unannounced. However, it is best practice to work with the implementing partner to choose the most appropriate site for the site visit team to accomplish the stated objective and purpose. For example, if the objective is to check on the overall progress of activity implementation, the site visit team might choose a couple of different sites to capture the breadth of activity performance. If the objective is to talk with local educators about an education activity, the timing should be driven by teacher availability. Geographic location and weather might also dictate where/when a site visit will take place. If it is an activity focused on boosting crop production, poor weather conditions in one part of the country may inform the site selection.

Schedule the Site Visit

Decisions about when to schedule a site visit should be informed by the site visit purpose, resource and staff availability, and logistics, and should be coordinated with the implementing partner to avoid any scheduling conflicts. Moreover, site visits should be scheduled when useful opportunities arise that align with the overall purpose, such as when a training is being provided. To minimize the risk of activity disruption and to identify opportunities for joint travel, Missions may also choose to maintain a centralized site visit schedule. This will also help prevent sites from overexposure, either in general or during specific timeframes. (Consult with the appropriate officials in the Mission as it relates to appropriate resources [i.e., implementing partner-provided transportation] for the site visit.)

¹² See Monitoring Toolkit Resource: [Data Collection Methods and Tools for Performance Monitoring](#).

Additional Factors to Consider When Planning and Scheduling a Site Visit Security: The safety and security of the site visit team is paramount. Each Embassy has a regularly updated travel policy based on security concerns that everyone falling under Chief of Mission authority must follow. Be sure to comply with security protocols and consult the travel policy before scheduling a site visit. If travel concerns remain an issue, consult with the Regional Security Officer (RSO).

Non-Permissive Environments: A NPE refers to an environment or context (at the national and/or sub-national level) characterized by uncertainty, instability, inaccessibility and/or insecurity, and in which USAID's ability to safely and effectively operate is constrained. In NPEs where site visits cannot be performed by USAID staff, the COR/AOR should select other data verification methods, such as third-party or remote monitoring.¹³ In some NPEs, site visits are possible but need to take a different form. For example, there is information that USAID may need to know but partners in a NPE may not want to put in writing or have recorded in any formal or typical fashion. In these cases, the COR/AOR should consider alternative ways of monitoring, such as verbal discussions that are considered more informal in nature, or capturing and sharing the learning in ways that don't compromise the partner or stakeholders.

Stakeholder Engagement and Relationship Management: Site visits provide important opportunities for Mission staff to strengthen and leverage relationships with and among stakeholders, including implementing partners, the private sector, the host country government, and other local actors. When planning a site visit, consider ways to collaborate effectively with, and to support learning from and among, local actors to gather general feedback on their experience with USAID-funded activities, and to inform analysis about the local context and development challenges, strategic planning and/or project and activity design. Where possible, engage stakeholder communities in the terms that are most relevant to their perspectives to broaden the site visit team's understanding of the context and development efforts. There may also be times when Mission staff are in transition and a COR/AOR needs to hand a relationship off to an important point of contact or group of points of contact in the field (for instance, local government officials), and that relationship handoff could also be a purpose for the visit.

Taking Part in a Special Event or High-level Visit:¹⁴ Taking part in special events, like a ribbon cutting or a high-level visit, are unique opportunities that can also be leveraged to perform site visits. Arranging a site visit during an activity special event or high-level visit is not only a time- and cost-saving measure, but it also creates a space to include Mission staff and stakeholders who otherwise would not have been able to participate. However, simply attending the event does not meet the standard of a site visit unless the COR/AOR is able to take stock of the activity implementation for performance monitoring, oversight, and/or learning purposes. Additionally, special events can often create distorting factors that could result in an inaccurate reflection of the overall activity performance. If combining a site visit with attendance to a special event or high-level visit, be purposeful in seeking out a site(s) that will be representative of the activity's day-to-day implementation.

Regarding Unannounced Site Visits: Note that the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) section 42.402 requires that USG officials give advance notice to contractors before any site visits can be performed. No such requirement is noted for grants or cooperative agreements. CORs/AORs should balance the need for seeing an activity in its usual state with respect for the activities and persons being visited. Furthermore, while "surprise" site visits may serve some purpose, site visits are not meant to be audits.

¹³ For more information about monitoring USAID's activities in non-permissive environments, please reference the Agency's [Fact Sheet](#) and Discussion Note on "[Managing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Platforms](#)."

¹⁴ High-level visits will not be the focus of this resource. For more information, please reference [ADS Chapter 555. Congressional Delegations](#).

DEVELOP A SITE VISIT AGENDA

To help lay the groundwork for a successful site visit, consider developing a schedule that identifies day-of activities. Knowing what to expect will make the visit more focused and productive both for the site visit team and the implementing partner, and will help ensure the right information is captured or exchanged. When developing an agenda, be sure to estimate the amount of time it will take to get to/from the site location, and time for lunch and other needed breaks. Additionally, build in time to listen, observe, process, and debrief with the implementing partner during the site visit. Finally, be sure to maintain some flexibility in the schedule; site visits, even well-planned ones, are by their very nature fluid and the schedule may change once at the activity site. The site visit schedule should be flexible enough to allow for unexpected setbacks, such as transportation delays, and/or opportunities, such as an additional part of an event or impromptu meetings with local actors.

PRE-SITE VISIT PREPARATION

This section will provide a list of recommended actions that will be essential for preparing the team for a productive site visit.

Recommended Actions:

1. **Read** background documentation about the activity and site. Prior to a site visit, the COR/AOR should carefully review relevant documentation, including the activity work plan, award documentation, environmental documents, e.g., the EMMP, and when relevant Activity and Project MEL plans, the Mission's overall CLA plan, Performance Plans and Reports, branding and marking plan, progress reports submitted by the implementing partner, and any other relevant information. To promote continuity, learning, and accountability, it will also be useful to read previous site visit reports, which could include useful information about how the activity is progressing and performing.
2. **Seek information from various sources, including other Mission staff**, on the local culture, language, and customs before departing for a site (e.g., appropriate dress, how to greet/interact, whether a language interpreter will be needed). Social customs often vary from one region to the next, and awareness of these differences can facilitate the success of a site visit in ways that can enhance relationships, learning, and collaboration.
3. **Download and print** (or have available on a tablet) a copy of the Mission's Site Visit Report template, if available, or a list of questions relevant to the purpose of the site visit. Review the template or questions prior to the site visit to understand in advance what information and data will need to be collected for each of the required sections.
4. **Reach out** to Mission staff (e.g., technical experts, CO/AO, Program Office, Mission Environmental Officer, or other support offices) who may be able to contribute expertise needed for a successful site visit. Additionally, if available, set up a time to speak with NGOs, local government officials, and beneficiaries, as they may be able to provide valuable information about the activity's progress or context.
5. **Finalize** any key logistical information, including making sure that the proper travel approvals and budget have been secured through the Mission's RSO and Executive Officer.
6. **Set up** a time to review the site visit objectives, schedule, and key logistical information with the implementing partner and the site visit team. Also, be sure to review the anticipated knowledge sharing approaches that will take place post-site visit (i.e., is there anything the site visit team should be doing in the course of the visit beyond what is already mentioned to capture input that will make post-visit sharing easier?).

DURING A SITE VISIT

Site visits enable USAID to verify information about activity performance. They also serve as an opportunity to identify new information or learning that could be shared within the Mission and/or with other development partners, and to establish, strengthen, manage, and transition key field relationships. Regular, well-planned and executed site visits can also facilitate communication with partners; provide an opportunity for partners to share their lessons learned, best practices, successes, and concerns; and mitigate tensions. Below is a list of possible actions to take while performing a site visit.

Recommended Actions:

1. **Brief** the implementing partner on the goals, objectives, and expectations for the visit, and give them an opportunity to share their impressions of the activity's progress and/or identify challenges. Be sure to ask open-ended questions that could lead to greater insight into the activity's performance.
2. **Focus on the purpose and goals** of the site visit while also keeping an eye out for the unexpected or unintended results (positive or negative) of the activity. A lot of the value in conducting a site visit may come from being exposed to or being made aware of an activity's unintended consequences or unexpected challenges.
3. **Meet with and solicit feedback** from beneficiaries and other stakeholders, including local NGO and government officials, about their observations and interactions with the activity. Engaging stakeholder communities facilitates collaborative relationship building and helps broaden the Mission's understanding of the activity's context and development efforts.
4. **Collaborate** with implementing partner(s) and other stakeholders to generate new learning about what is working, what is not working, and why.
5. **Consider what is known** about critical assumptions, changes in the operational context, and what has been learned as a result of implementation that was not previously known, and develop a method to elicit that information from stakeholder communities in the terms that are most relevant to their perspectives.
6. **Document what was observed and learned**, and which stakeholders were engaged. Be sure to capture observations either by using the Mission's site visit template or a notepad. Note any learning that should be shared, adaptations that should be undertaken, and/or implementation delays or issues that might be worth discussing with the implementing partner or that might merit reaching out to the CO/AO or the Mission's Resident Legal Officer.
7. **Seek out and capture stories that demonstrate the activity's success.** Take photos for possible use for both the Mission and USAID publications when it is culturally accepted, appropriate, and with the subject's informed consent. Note that in some countries there are child protection laws that require parents to authorize photographs of children. In these cases, a parent, teacher, or principal should sign a consent form on the child's behalf. There will also be instances where pictures of vulnerable people may put them at risk of further discrimination or harm, or instances when subjects do not want to be photographed. *Exercise judgment and ask permission.* For questions related to Agency guidelines, cultural attitudes towards photography, and informed consent from people being photographed, consult with the Mission DOC Specialist.
8. **Schedule an exit-briefing** with the implementing partner to discuss findings, provide feedback, and identify follow-up actions, including sharing learning with others who can use it, and following through on necessary adaptations. An exit-briefing, as is the case throughout planning and conducting a site visit, is an opportunity to collaboratively share observations, synthesize learning, solve problems or challenges, and agree on potential adaptations with the partner. Also, the site visit team may want to ask if the implementing partner would like to add anything beyond what was already discussed, as there may be information about the activity that the implementing partner feels is vital (e.g., what are the activity's most significant opportunities, concerns, or vulnerabilities).

After a Site Visit

Once the site visit team has returned to the Mission, the process of drafting the site visit report, reviewing and sharing information collected and new learning generated from the visit begins. Below is a list of possible actions once a site visit has taken place.

Recommended Actions:

1. **Draft and Upload the Site Visit Report to ASIST:**¹⁵ As stated in the “Agency Requirements” section of this How-To Note, a summary report must be uploaded and stored in ASIST following the completion of a site visit. The site visit report, the format of which may vary from one Mission to the next, should contain a brief explanation of both positive and negative findings, and required follow-up actions, as well as supporting documentation.¹⁶ To promote learning across different technical offices, Missions might also consider how best to manage their knowledge and other observations from site visits. For instance, some Missions have created a central repository (i.e., a shared folder managed by the Program Office or within each Technical Office) to store site visit reports for ease of access and use. If for any reason a site visit cannot be performed, this should be noted and added to the COR/AOR file on ASIST as well.
2. **Summarize and Share Findings and Lessons Learned:** Findings from a site visit may serve diverse purposes, for example informing Mission portfolio reviews, reporting, planning and design, outreach and communication, COR’s annual Contractor Performance Assessment Reports¹⁷, and they also support key learning activities and adaptive management. To promote collaboration across the Mission, key findings and lessons learned should be shared with the site visit team, technical and support offices, the Mission’s Environmental and/or Gender Officers, and if possible, stakeholders external to the Mission. Additionally, consider sharing the report with the Project Manager and other members of the Project Team, who could benefit from key observations made during the site visit, to inform Project-level learning. Furthermore, USAID can connect various implementers, ensuring that best practices and lessons learned are shared and applied across activities and projects.
3. **Track Follow-up Actions and Recommendations:** In collaboration with the implementing partner, the site visit team should identify opportunities and agree upon priority actions to help ensure implementation remains on track. In other cases, there may be a number of reasons activities are not achieving the results spelled out in the Activity Work Plan (e.g., competing priorities, budget constraints, challenges in the operating context, and other factors). Following a site visit where the activity is not achieving expected results, determine whether there is a problem with implementation versus something to learn and perhaps a need to adapt to evolving contexts. If there is a problem with implementation, work with the implementing partner to develop concrete, time-delineated follow-up actions and recommendations which will help ensure that proper steps are being taken to get the activity back on track. These recommendations should be documented and included in the final site visit report. Adaptations and the thinking underlying these recommendations should be documented to support learning, as well as continuity in the event of a change of COR/AOR.

¹⁵ For more information about ASIST, please visit M/OAA’s [Internal ASIST Pages](#). (NOTE: This is for internal usage only.)

¹⁶ While there is no required format for site visit reports, Missions are encouraged to develop and use a site visit template.

¹⁷ See Agency Notice 0401 on [Enhancing the Reliability of Contractor Performance Assessments](#).

Summary

Regularly-scheduled, well-planned, and documented site visits enhance collaboration, stakeholder engagement and relationship management, and learning between and among USAID, implementing partners, and other stakeholders, which enhances the Agency's ability to manage adaptively to achieve better development outcomes. By following the recommendations made in this How-To Note, Agency staff can better define what constitutes a site visit, why USAID performs site visits, and how to plan for, execute, and follow-up on a site visit.

For additional materials, please visit:

- [ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Policy](#)
- [ADS Chapter 204: Environmental Procedures](#)
- [ADS Chapter 205: Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle](#)
- [ADS Chapter 302: USAID Direct Contracting](#)
- [ADS Chapter 303: Grants and Cooperative Agreements](#)
- [Mandatory Reference for ADS 303: USAID Implementation of Construction Activities](#)
- [ADS Chapter 350: Grants to Foreign Governments](#)
- [How-To Note: Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan](#)
- [How-To Note: How to Conduct a Data Quality Assessment](#)
- [Incorporating CLA into Activity Management](#)
- [Performance Monitoring Mission Order Template \(USAID Staff Only\)](#)
- [USAID's Monitoring Toolkit](#)

ANNEX I: Monitor Compliance with Award Terms

- ✓ **Environmental Compliance:**¹⁸ All USAID projects are required to meet established environmental regulations, and to monitor and mitigate any potential negative effects on the environment. The COR/AOR, in consultation with the Mission Environmental Officer, must allocate adequate resources from the activity's budget for effective mitigation and monitoring to ensure compliance with [22 CFR 216](#) throughout the life of an activity, and conduct the appropriate number of site visits and ensure adequate follow up. For activities that have environmental mitigation measures, the COR/AOR should verify that these are being carried out correctly.
- ✓ **Commodity Management:**¹⁹ Site visits are opportunities to spot check USAID-purchased commodities or equipment used for USAID activities. Take time to review expenditure data to verify whether the resources made available by USAID in the form of commodities are being utilized for their intended purpose and are properly marked per the terms of the agreement/contract.
- ✓ **Branding and Marking:**²⁰ Proper branding and marking helps ensure assistance programs are more visible and better known in the countries where USAID works. During site visits, review the approved branding and marking plan in the final award, whether acquisition, assistance, or government-to-government (G2G), to ensure that all items are appropriately branded or marked consistent with USAID policy guidelines. (NOTE: The Agency has different branding policies and marking requirements for [Acquisition Awards](#) and for [Assistance Awards](#)). For questions or clarifications about branding and marking, please consult the Mission DOC Specialist.
- ✓ **Health Funding-related Requirements:** USAID is committed to improving global health and confronting global health challenges through improving the quality, availability, and use of essential health services. Site visits enable USAID to assess both the effectiveness of USAID's global health programs and the implementing partner's compliance with statutory and policy requirements.²¹
- ✓ **Gender Equality and Female Empowerment:**²² Gender equality and female empowerment are core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. Site visits enable USAID to assess to what extent gender is being effectively taken into account in activity implementation, in accordance with the terms of the award, and how to work with implementing partners to ensure compliance with Agency requirements.
- ✓ **Disability and Inclusion:**²³ The goal of inclusive development at USAID is to ensure that all people benefit from and have access to development assistance. Conducting periodic site visits to activities that work with marginalized groups enables the Agency to validate that Missions' planned and programmed disability inclusion efforts are working as anticipated.
- ✓ **Construction:**²⁴ Construction activities, guided by the professional experience of Agency engineers, are key to building locally appropriate, sustainable infrastructure that supports USAID's development goals, including economic growth and access to quality education and healthcare. The COR/AOR should monitor the performance of construction risk management

¹⁸ For more information about USAID's environment considerations, please reference [ADS Chapter 204: Environment Procedures](#) and [22 CFR 216: Agency Environmental Procedures](#).

¹⁹ For more information, please reference USAID ADS 312, [Eligibility of Commodities](#).

²⁰ For more information, please reference [ADS Chapter 320: Branding and Marking](#).

²¹ For more information, visit USAID's [Global Health Legislative and Policy Requirements](#) page.

²² For more information, reference ADS 205.3.7: [Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle](#).

²³ For more information, please find the [Disability Inclusive Development](#) on USAID Pages (this link is only available internally).

²⁴ For more information, please reference [USAID Implementation of Construction Activities](#).

and mitigation measures throughout activity implementation, including and especially during site visits. While Missions/Washington OUs have third-party engineering firms oversee actual construction, site visits during key milestones (e.g., ground breaking, opening ceremonies, or other events) can be valuable opportunities to assess activity progress, validate milestone completion, and check on construction safety, overall environmental conditions, and general quality of the construction.²⁵

- ✓ **Other Acquisition or Assistance Standard Provisions:** Site visits can also be an opportunity to ensure compliance with relevant terms from USAID's [AIDAR](#) for contracts or USAID's [standard provisions](#) for NGOs holding grants or cooperative agreements.
- ✓ **Terms Specific to the USAID Mission or to the Award for the Activity:** Some countries have additional provisions or clauses common to all their awards and some awards may have specific requirements.

²⁵ For more information about construction activity management, please see [the Construction page on ProgramNet](#) (this link is only available internally) and [USAID Implementation of Construction Activities](#).