

DRAFT – Transitioning Responsibly Through USAID Transition Award Processes

SAS+ Recommendations for Implementers

Introduction

The aim of this resource is to provide both evidence-informed good practice as well as an overview of USAID policy for implementing transition award processes. It is intended to be a resource for organizations that are seeking to design, plan for, or implement a USAID transition award process, either as a prime recipient receiving an initial award, or as a subrecipient that is receiving capacity strengthening under an initial award, with the intent to apply as prime recipient of a future transition award. It was developed by the Stopping As Success (SAS+) consortium.¹

First, this resource answers key questions about transition award processes. It then outlines how to set up a strong foundation of an initial award in the application process. Next, it covers good practice across the two stages of a transition award process: the initial award and the transition award. The conclusion is followed by two annexes: additional resources and a transition plan template.

The SAS+ team is releasing this resource as a draft version, and welcome feedback through June 30, 2024. We are especially interested in hearing from people who have gone through transition award processes as we continue refining this resource based on good practice across a variety of transitions and contexts. We will plan to release a final version of this resource by September 2024. Please share your feedback in [this form](#) or directly with SAS+ team members Grace Boone (gboone@cdacollaborative.org) and Michael Robinson (mrobinson@sfcg.org).

[Stopping As Success: Transitioning to Locally Led Development](#) (SAS+) is a four-year cooperative agreement (2021-2025), funded under the [Local Works Program](#) of the Bureau of Development, Democracy and Innovation (DDI) in the [Local, Faith, and Transformative Partnerships Hub](#) (USAID/DDI/LFT Hub). SAS+ is implemented by CDA Collaborative Learning, Peace Direct, and Search for Common Ground. The goal of the program is to generate learning about how to facilitate development transitions from international to local actors at the organizational, project, and activity level.

From 2021-2025, SAS+ is accompanying and learning alongside organizations and partnerships going through a transition to local leadership. Specifically, SAS+ has partnered directly with three USAID Missions, two of which were actively implementing transition awards, and has met with or presented in events to many other Missions or Operating Units (OUs). Through these engagements and learning with USAID and prime and subrecipient organizations, SAS+ has identified key considerations and processes that can support a successful transition award process.

The cooperative agreement leverages the learning outcomes of the original Stopping As Success (SAS) program (2017-2020), including the evidence base of [19 original case studies](#) and [25+ corresponding tools and resources](#).

¹ SAS+ is a consortium of international organizations who have their own definitions, concepts, and evidence on transitions that are separate from USAID. However, for this resource, we have used language and definitions specific to USAID in order to support implementing partners' quick and efficient uptake of this resource in transition award processes. For more on SAS+ ethos, language and definitions, see: <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/frequently-asked-questions/>.

Answers to Key Questions About Transition Award Processes

- ★ **What are transition awards?** According to USAID's ADS 303mbb "[Process for transition awards,](#)" a [Mandatory Reference](#), "a transition award is an assistance award to a local entity or locally established partner (collectively referred to as local subrecipients) that is or has been a subrecipient under a USAID assistance award." Additionally, the local subrecipient cannot have previously received a direct award from USAID, making a transition award a means of engaging new local organizations as potential prime award recipients. A transition award can be structured regardless of the sector of the initial award activity and be effective across the humanitarian assistance, development, and peacebuilding (HDP) nexus². The transition award process includes both the initial award and transition award.

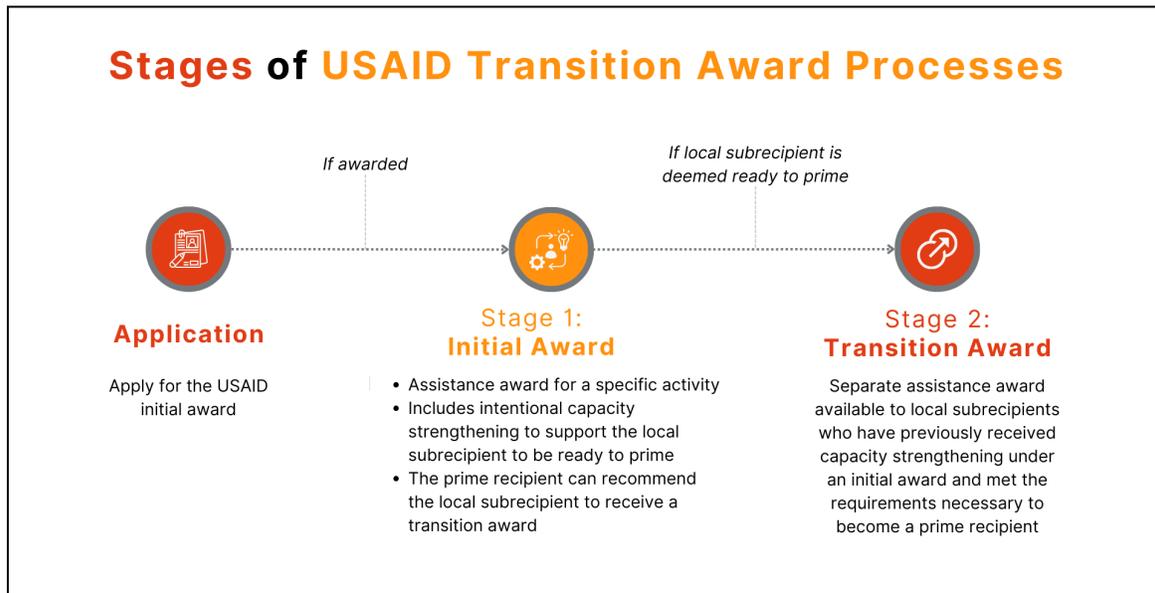
- ★ **What is the purpose of a transition award process?** According to ADS 303mbb, "[Process for transition awards,](#)" a [Mandatory Reference](#), transition awards are meant to "increase local engagement, promote self-reliance, foster, and strengthen local sustainability, and enhance the quality of the Agency's relationship with local partners." SAS+ believes that shared clarity on the purpose of the transition award process is essential for there to be relevant and concerted transition thinking, including how capacity strengthening and inclusive decision-making can promote local leadership and sustainable impact.
 - For local organizations, the transition award process is an opportunity to build relationships, strengthen capacity, and improve readiness to prime a USAID direct assistance award.
 - For prime recipients receiving the initial award, the transition award process creates space to shift power and support locally led development by bringing in new local organizations as subrecipients and supporting capacity strengthening efforts to improve their potential to serve as a prime recipient on a USAID award. The transition award process also offers the ability for international organizations to redefine their role in local systems to be a supporting, convening, and facilitating local leadership rather than a leading implementer.

- ★ **What are the stages of a transition award process?** There are two primary stages of a transition award process: the initial award and the transition award, as illustrated below.
 - The initial award is an assistance award (cooperative agreement or grant) for a specific activity with an added requirement of capacity strengthening of local subrecipient(s). Based on the meeting of capacity strengthening criteria, the prime recipient is able to recommend to USAID that the local subrecipient be considered for a prime role in a transition award.
 - The transition award is a new, separate assistance award issued, based on available funding and a programmatic need as identified by USAID, to the local subrecipient that has met the capacity strengthening criteria under the initial

² The HDP nexus aims to promote coordination and break down silos between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming in order holistically address the needs and vulnerabilities of communities. The HDP nexus (or the 'Triple Nexus') seeks structural shifts in aid in order to change how programming is financed and planned in order to meet both the immediate needs of a person or community as well as provide the longer-term investment in systemic inequality or injustice. For specific programmatic considerations on HDP coherence for USAID implementing partners, see:

<https://www.resiliencelinks.org/building-resilience/reports/programming-considerations-hdp-coherence>.

award. The local organization, now the prime recipient of the transition award, may not issue subawards to the initial award recipient.³



When planning to apply for a initial award

If a notice of funding opportunity includes a transition award process then the potential applicant should read the ADS 303mbb [“Process for transition awards,” a Mandatory Reference](#). This may involve meeting with staff involved in the proposal process to familiarize them with the nature of this distinct award process. SAS+ recommends the prime and subrecipients discuss and define capacity strengthening needs to prepare the subrecipient to become a potential prime recipient of a transition award. SAS+ believes it is imperative that all parties must remain committed to supporting the local subrecipient's readiness to prime.⁴ Ultimately, USAID decides if the local subrecipient will receive a transition award.

Whenever possible, the applicant should work with the proposed subrecipient during the application process for the initial award. Not only are local organizations better placed to design activities tailored for the local context, it may be a more compelling submission to USAID if the applicant and potential subrecipient are able to demonstrate that they have collaborated on the application process, discussed the transition award process, and have jointly identified areas of capacity strengthening. This will likely show how both applicant and potential subrecipient are genuinely committed to supporting the subrecipient's readiness to prime. SAS+ also encourages prime recipients to work to ensure full and fair cost recovery for subrecipients either through the de minimis rate⁵, an established indirect cost rate, or direct costing. By ensuring all costs are covered, subrecipients are able to invest in their organizational capacity and sustainability.

³ This coordination may not be appropriate for every case, and there are instances where transition awards aren't granted or are granted long after an initial award takes place. However, SAS+ has found that this intentional planning does enable for greater mutuality and partnership, closing the loop on the transition process.

⁴ For more on this, see Principle 7 of USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/LCS-Policy-2022-10-17.pdf>

⁵ The US Government's 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 200 has more guidance on the de minimis rate: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200?toc=1>

Developing a strong foundation

First and foremost, the transition award process begins with relationships. It is critical for the initial award prime and local subrecipient⁶ to start from a place of mutual respect and trust, and to co-develop the vision for the transition together. With a strong foundation, and adaptable and responsive processes, transitions can be an opportunity for transformation. In order to see this transformation realized, it is critical to have clarity on the process, roles, and shared expectations for each organization.

It is important for all organizations, including USAID, to have a shared understanding of what readiness to prime means and looks like⁷. This should be discussed in the technical kickoff call and subsequently during transition planning. Transition planning is most effective when all staff involved in the transition take part in identifying the roles and relationships, communication norms, shared vision of transition, pause and reflect moments, capacity strengthening criteria stated in the initial award, and indicators of success, along with harmonizing this thinking with the project's work plan and capacity strengthening activities.

Initial award recipients will be required, per the terms of the award, to strengthen the capacity of the local subrecipient(s). To ensure this effort aligns with the goal of supporting locally led development, the prime recipient should work collaboratively with the local subrecipient in creating a capacity strengthening plan that aligns with the intent to get the subrecipient ready to become a prime of a transition award. SAS+ also recommends the prime and subrecipients work intentionally with USAID to co-develop and support an inclusive vision of transition. The prime should also engage the subrecipient in joint planning, learning and reflection, [mutual capacity strengthening](#), and design and decision-making processes so that the local subrecipient can demonstrate their ability to meet the criteria required to receive a transition award. Here are some options to do this effectively as a team:

- Have a **kick off meeting** where USAID, the initial award prime, and subrecipient set expectations and discuss the intended timeline for the transition award process, clarifying roles and responsibilities. When possible within the scope of an initial award, and of interest to all parties, SAS+ recommends the subrecipient take on leadership opportunities on technical aspects of the activity, operations, and management. For example, the subrecipient can eventually lead all activities in a certain geographical area under an initial award, while the prime awardee provides guidance, mentoring/coaching, and quality assurance.
- **Formalize expectations and commitments** within the prime recipient-local subrecipient partnership, including how to give feedback and make adjustments to the capacity strengthening plan if necessary, as well as any additional timelines or financial commitments named in the subaward.⁸ In drafting the subaward agreement, SAS+ recommends naming the shared expectations and commitments and developing a process to reflect on and update them over the course of the subaward.

⁶ Transition awards may involve multiple local subrecipients on the award, but there is only one local subrecipient who will be prepared to transition into the prime in the transition award. In these cases, it's useful to involve all implementing partners in planning, and to emphasize the role of the local subrecipient in decision-making.

⁷ [The Growth of Pakachere](#) and [The Path to Prime Partnership](#) by the Pan American Social Marketing Organization are inspirational success stories that illustrate various parameters important to transitioning to a local prime.

⁸ This can refer to instances where the initial award and the transition award are planned with a period of overlap, in which case the local subrecipient would end their role in the initial award and transition into the prime recipient of the transition award after the completion of capacity strengthening, a recommendation from the initial award recipient, and decision on the transition award from USAID.

- Prioritize and develop a **process and timeline for drafting a transition plan**⁹ amidst program start-up.¹⁰ A transition plan will document the vision, process, decision-making structure and adaptation plan that prime and subrecipients will go through to support sustainable and effective implementation. In transition award processes there is usually a predetermined point in the project where the subrecipient will aim to have met the capacity strengthening criteria defined in the initial award. In support of this, SAS+ has seen prime and subrecipients develop a shared vision¹¹ for the capacity strengthening and transition processes, and then “work backwards” to map out how they are going to meet the vision in the designated time. This process includes detailing out activities and roles, and aligning the capacity strengthening plan with the transition planning process. All of this planning can be reflected in the [transition planning document](#), which is a living document and should be updated frequently based on progress, challenges, and necessary adaptations.
- **Consider power dynamics and maintain communication** with relevant communities or external entities in line with the values underlying the transition. Communicating the shift in power towards locally led development supported by transition award processes with target communities and other relevant actors can, for example, prevent perceptions that the initial award prime is seeking to replicate their organizational approach through a local organization as a form of neo-colonialism, or perceptions that the transition award prime would be less credible than the initial award prime. For these reasons, SAS+ recommends [communicating transitions](#) within prime and subrecipient organizations, along with the target community(ies) and other relevant entities, including clearly identifying why it is happening, what it means for them, and how (if relevant) they could be involved. In this communication, prime and subrecipients of an initial award should avoid any implication that a transition award will occur unless it has already been issued by USAID, since this could negatively impact the local subrecipient’s reputation if they do not meet initial award capacity strengthening criteria.

Local organizations that are subrecipients in the initial award should be included in decision-making processes throughout the duration of the activity to support a smooth transition to their role as prime recipient of the transition award. When applying for transition award processes, it is important for the local subrecipient to have a long-term strategy and vision for sustainability that they are working towards after the award. To help facilitate this, and to get ahead of questions relevant for the subaward program description, SAS+ recommends the subrecipient, and prime recipient as applicable, spend time¹² reflecting on the questions below:

- Why are we entering into this transition award process? What is our goal as a subrecipient under the initial award? What about it feels exciting and hopeful? What is potentially concerning? Within the areas of concern, where might we leverage our position and power to make more room for our leadership?
- What, if any, relationship currently exists between the prime and subrecipient? Where does the relationship feel healthy and sustainable? What elements of the relationship are difficult, or even potentially problematic?

⁹ Importantly, transition plans often are not required by USAID. Therefore, this guidance is based solely on good practice from SAS+ evidence and research. We have seen it be a very important management and partnership tool and would strongly recommend teams take this step to support a responsible transition. Additionally, some organizations add transition planning to their capacity strengthening plans.

¹⁰ See [Annex B](#) for a Transition Plan Template that includes process guidance.

¹¹ A shared vision of transition is typically generated by reflecting on what teams would like to see from the transition, how they will collaborate, what their role will be and how it will change during the award.

¹² Ideally, these questions would be discussed with all parties involved. However, since this takes place before receiving the award, and thus without guaranteed funding, it may not be feasible for all parties to dedicate sufficient time together to discuss and reflect on these questions.

- With those relationship dynamics, which of the difficult elements can we address? What would help secure a sustainable relationship (such as clearly defined partnership principles in the subaward agreement, a conversation on values, etc.)?
- What are the roles we currently play in this transition award process? What, if anything, would we like to shift to have more equitable decision-making and vision-setting?
- From [LLD checklist facilitation guide](#): How locally led is this part of the process? Are there barriers or opportunities to consider? What would 'success' for this part of program development look like? How could bringing more local leadership into this process move us closer to achieving this vision of success?
- As the prime recipient of the initial award, have we co-developed initial capacity strengthening and transition plans with our approved local subrecipient, outlining how we're proposing to measure the subrecipient's achievement of the capacity strengthening criteria to qualify them to apply for a transition award? Have we adequately resourced the subrecipient and capacity strengthening processes to get them across the line? How will we monitor progress made towards achieving capacity strengthening objectives to ensure they are meeting the local subrecipient's needs?

Stage 1: The initial award

Under the initial award, one of the key goals is to identify and support meeting capacity strengthening needs of the local subrecipient, so that they are able and well-positioned to apply for a transition award from USAID. Part of the planning in this stage should consider the possibility of meeting capacity strengthening criteria before the award's end-date, and what that means for the local subrecipient's role in the remainder of the initial award. including identifying the best role for the initial prime partner to play in the transition award stage.

Initial Award Start-Up

After USAID has awarded the initial award, the prime recipient should prioritize inclusive design¹³ of core project documents¹⁴ among the recipient, subrecipient(s), and USAID. This will involve recognizing power dynamics between a prime recipient and subrecipients, and in doing so, developing processes that will build relationships, and encourage mutual accountability and decision-making. Having the local subrecipient in meetings between the prime and USAID, when appropriate and possible, allows for greater power sharing and clarity of expectations for when the transition occurs. Doing so also provides greater opportunity for local leadership to be promoted throughout the entire award, and not only after the transition. This also entails understanding the role the initial prime recipient will play after the transition.

SAS+ has learned that transitions benefit from a continued partnership after the formal transition of ownership or responsibility has taken place. However, per ADS 303mbb, the prime recipient of the initial award cannot become a subrecipient under the transition award. This is to ensure that the transition award recipient is capable of performance without reliance on the initial award recipient. To prevent this becoming a complete exit,¹⁵ partners should communicate with USAID and ensure there is a plan for continued partnership. While it is not guaranteed that the subrecipient will achieve the capacity strengthening criteria and go through the USAID

¹³ USAID's Locally Led Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning page is a helpful resource for setting up inclusive processes: <https://usaidealarninglab.org/learning-at-usaid/locally-led-monitoring-evaluation-and-learning>

¹⁴ "Core project documents" here refers to work plans, the activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan, a capacity assessment and strengthening plan, a transition plan, and can include a communications plan as well.

¹⁵ SAS+ defines exit as an organizational withdrawal or programmatic close-down without a transfer of responsibility and ownership to a local entity, and with no continued relationship with former local partners.

application process in order to begin implementing the transition award before the initial award has ended, SAS+ has seen examples where there has been overlap which, in large part, is due to the dedicated transition planning that has happened from the start of the award.

The initial award prime recipient should prioritize the subaward process to allow the local subrecipient to be heavily involved in the start-up, including clarifying roles and responsibilities. SAS+ has partnered with Missions and primes who have had significant delays in finalizing a subaward, preventing the subrecipient from being involved in the initial drafting of the transition plan. This led to significant delays in the inception phase as the prime and subrecipient needed to dedicate time to establish a shared vision, reflect that in work planning, and build trust within the team. To avoid certain delays in signing a subaward between the initial prime and subrecipient, they can sign an MOU and NDA, if needed and aligned with the prime's internal procedures, to begin the project planning and capacity strengthening activities. In cases where there is a delayed start, the prime recipient can work with USAID to see if it is possible to extend the inception/design phase to ensure that when the local subrecipient is onboarded, they have an opportunity to share their vision and influence the planning.

Perhaps most importantly, ensure there is ample time built into the program start-up to build strong relationships, develop partnership principles and ways of working¹⁶, and set pause, reflection, and adaptation processes that allows the team to give feedback and make changes to ensure the transition is reflective of shared vision and values. This might seem simple but [SAS+'s research](#) exemplifies how strong relationships support responsible transitions. Some ideas on how to do this include:

- A **kick-off meeting** to develop shared values and principles and to determine ways of working (such as decision-making structures, knowledge management, feedback processes, etc.). Use this meeting to develop a partnership principles document as a way to hold the team accountable to one another.
- **Biannual transition check-ins** to reflect on shared values and principles and to give honest feedback on the relationship between the prime and subrecipient, and ways of working to date. Use these meetings as a way to adapt as needed.
- **Quarterly no-meeting week** to provide the team an opportunity for some “breathing room” to think big about the transition process and tap into creativity through professional development opportunities or restorative rest.

Prioritizing transition planning amidst program start-up

Although the prime recipient will be responsible for building capacity of the local subrecipient as part of the transition award process, the prime will also have programmatic activities to implement. During this time, in order to maintain focus on the transition process itself, SAS+ recommends to prioritize the following:

- **Transition champions:** Identify transition champions who will be dedicated to supporting the capacity strengthening and transition plans, including reviewing and adapting these plans as necessary. Transition champions can be staff within the prime and subrecipient organizations with experience in implementing a transition award process, or a dedicated focal point within each organization that maintains focus on the capacity strengthening and transition priorities and milestones, while balancing the day-to-day program activities. Transition champions should be in touch with each other

¹⁶ SAS+ has supported several Missions engaged in transition awards where partnership principles and ways of working have been articulated, such as having a jointly-owned, systematic process for strengthening capacities, contextualizing technical tools used in program implementation, having a healthy work culture, developing strong community relationships, and including the local subrecipient in all calls between USAID and the prime.

to ensure there is coherence between activities, capacity strengthening goals, and the long-term vision of the transition award process.

- **Working groups:** The capacity strengthening and transition plans will include many different work streams. It is useful to form dedicated working groups for each work stream in order to advance the various priorities of the initial award. These groups should have a facilitator (who schedules meetings and sets the agenda) and include members whose role overlaps with the work stream. It's important to ensure these groups have representation from both the prime and subrecipient.
- **Dedicated meetings:** Depending on the need, it is useful to have biweekly or monthly meetings in order to share the progress on and troubleshoot problems. These meetings should include at least one representative from the prime and subrecipient, a dedicated facilitator, and agreed upon agenda.

Capacity Strengthening Criteria

Capacity strengthening criteria for the local subrecipient is identified in the terms of the initial award and it is, therefore, critical that the initial award prime recipient be familiar with, share with, and ideally, co-develop with the local subrecipient to be well-positioned to prime a transition award. The prime recipient should collaborate with the local subrecipient in assessing capacity opportunities and priorities, carrying out targeted, tailored, and quality capacity strengthening, tracking progress, and keeping USAID informed so that USAID can determine if criteria have been sufficiently met. The local subrecipient should be well-aware of expectations and criteria necessary to demonstrate progress towards the ability to prime to USAID.

Examples of capacity strengthening criteria that USAID may include in the initial award terms include that the local subrecipient:

- has demonstrated technical and management experience;
- has demonstrated an ability to maintain relationships with stakeholders;
- has well-defined indicators of success and the ability to monitor its own program performance in a cost-effective and efficient manner;
- has the necessary staff with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to carry out a program; and
- can address other general areas that would indicate potential success in managing specific technical program areas.¹⁷

Prime Accountability to Local Capacity Strengthening

It is important to ensure that the prime is planning and implementing tailored, collaborative and impactful capacity strengthening activities. This includes resourcing activities appropriately, planning them alongside the subrecipient to ensure they are relevant and complementary, and setting objectives in order to report on progress accurately. This “downward” accountability to the subrecipient is as critical, if not more so, than the “upward” accountability to USAID, as the subrecipient will continue to work in their communities long after the award is finished.

A critical mistake that the initial award prime recipient should avoid is assuming capacity strengthening will happen through a “learning-by-doing” approach, rather than targeted, specific capacity strengthening support. Principle 7, Practice mutuality with local partners, of the [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#) is a helpful reference point.

¹⁷ Additional sample criteria can be found in USAID’s ADS 303mbb “Process for transition awards,” a Mandatory Reference, under “initial award Requirements (pages 3-4).

SAS+ recommends that the prime and subrecipient revisit capacity strengthening criteria as part of regular program reflection and adaptation to allow for greater power-sharing in the achievement of this criteria. This is especially important for local subrecipients to identify adequate opportunities to build and demonstrate these capacities, which will put them in a better position to be recommended by the initial award recipient to receive a transition award. While the final decision rests solely with USAID, SAS+ has seen that consistent collaboration, reflection, and, when necessary, adaptation around these criteria allow for mutuality within the process.

Capacity Strengthening Resources and Processes

The initial award provides space for the local subrecipient to identify the resources and tools needed to strengthen capacities¹⁸ and meet the criteria necessary to be recommended to receive a transition award. Consider ways to leverage the prime and subrecipient's existing capacities and strengths that can support progress towards this goal of transition and ensure a manageable, inclusive process. Options to support this include:

- For the initial prime and the local subrecipient, use the [Guide to Distinguishing Tools Used for Local Capacity Strengthening](#) as a starting point to identify which tool categories are most useful for performance measurement, capacity action planning, and risk mitigation. This provides an opportunity for the subrecipient to identify areas where they want to strengthen their capacities and what support from the prime is needed or could look like. Once needs are defined, this comprehensive guide can support next steps: [Capacity Development Resources](#). Notably, prime and subrecipients should ensure that there are longer-term processes that track, measure, and analyze the progress made by the local subrecipient. This is also important to be able to identify how capacity strengthening support might need to adapt in order to best leverage the subrecipient's strengths and support their areas for growth.¹⁹
- Use a framework, rather than an assessment tool, that is useful in crafting a process rooted in the local subrecipient's needs, and grounded in systems thinking and ongoing adaptation and learning.²⁰ See the [Organizational Capacity: An Enhanced Framework](#) as an example.
- As the local subrecipient, contract local providers and consultants directly to facilitate capacity strengthening work. In addition to being able to identify and tailor capacity strengthening, the local subrecipient will also get hands-on experience managing workflows and contracts.
- An additional consideration to support [mutual capacity strengthening](#) is for the prime and subrecipients to reflect on goals for learning and capacity strengthening relevant for the prime recipient. This could include knowledge of the local system the project is taking place within, understanding the fit of certain programmatic or MEL approaches given the local context, etc.

¹⁸ USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy shares the Agency's approach to strengthening local partner's capacity. It is a helpful resource to understand how the Agency is defining capacity strengthening and implementing the policy: <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-capacity-strengthening>.

¹⁹ The SAS+ [Mutual Capacity Strengthening Guidelines for Transitions to Local Ownership](#) resource provides useful guidance for what capacity support is helpful before, during, and after the transition and how relationships and expectations differ throughout the transition.

²⁰ USAID Learning Lab released a "Guide to Distinguishing Tools Used for Local Capacity Strengthening" that can support IPs in choosing the appropriate tools given their context. https://usaidelearninglab.org/resources/guide-distinguishing-tools-used-local-capacity-strengthening?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Preparing for the Transition Award

Before a transition award starts, the initial award prime recipient can take intentional steps to support the subrecipients' transition to prime. These include:

- **Recommend to USAID that the subrecipient is ready to become prime.** The initial prime is an important intermediary between the subrecipient and USAID, and therefore can advocate for the subrecipients' transition to prime once they have met the capacity strengthening criteria and formally begin the transition process. Once recommended, it is between USAID and the sub to develop the transition award.
- As a part of capacity strengthening, **support the subrecipient to navigate any final USAID requirements to become prime**, such as capacity assessments, pre-award requirements, and/or risk assessments as determined by the USAID Mission/OU.
- If the local organization is awarded prime recipient of a Fixed Amount Award, **structure the capacity strengthening activities in order to meet the requirements** in the mandatory USAID pre-award "[Fixed Amount Award Entity Eligibility Checklist](#)". The prime and subrecipient can co-create the milestones in Fixed Amount Awards and ensure a capacity milestone is included to help meet the partnership's capacity strengthening goals.
- **Continue to provide the subrecipient programmatic work under the initial award until USAID awards a transition award.** This will avoid service disruptions for local communities, maintain important relationships, continue to build trust between implementers and local stakeholders, as well as support consistency in the program partnership.²¹

It is important to note that while the ultimate goal of a transition award process is to allow more local organizations to be able to apply as the prime recipient to a USAID assistance award, a transition award is never guaranteed. When the subrecipient on the initial award submits an application for a direct award based on a new programmatic need, USAID will review the application and communicate directly with the organization as to whether an award will be made.

If USAID does not make a direct award, the prime and local subrecipient on the initial award may seek to identify opportunities for the local subrecipient to continue to support the programmatic objectives of the initial award. In this case, the prime and subrecipient may be interested in identifying opportunities to advance the local subrecipient's leadership over remaining activities. Planning for these opportunities should be in line with the local subrecipient's expectations and paired with considerations of workload and the funding allocated under the initial award.

Stage 2: The Transition Award

The transition award stage is when the local subrecipient on an initial award becomes the prime recipient on a new, direct assistance award that is awarded based on a new programmatic need. This transition takes place based upon USAID's assessment of the local subrecipient's capacity and readiness to serve as a prime based on predetermined capacity strengthening criteria²², and a pre-award risk assessment.

²¹ This is important when the transition award either takes place in the same geographic location(s) or has a related programmatic focus to the initial award. This is not the case for all transition awards.

²² Ideally capacity strengthening criteria will be developed during Stage 1. For examples as well as resources and processes, see the [capacity strengthening sections](#) above.

NUPAS as an optional pre-award survey tool

USAID may choose to use the Non-U.S. Organization Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS) tool, found in ADS 303sam, to determine whether an organization has sufficient systems in place to effectively implement an assistance award. The Agreement Officer (AO) must determine if NUPAS or if a similar detailed analysis will be used in accordance with locally established or award-specific criteria that achieves the same objectives as the NUPAS will be used. A NUPAS is not pass or fail, and is entirely up to the AO's discretion. Whether or not an AO chooses to conduct a NUPAS rather than another analysis process is typically based on the level of newness of a partner and the type of the award. Cooperative agreements typically always include a NUPAS, whereas a fixed award might not since another eligibility checklist would be included.²³

Critically, if USAID deems the subrecipient ready to prime, the transition award will be a separate award based on a new programmatic need.²⁴ One way SAS+ has seen teams work creatively to ensure there are not service disruptions for the activity or significant gaps in staffing is to run both awards (the original award and the new transition award) concurrently for a period of time.²⁵ For example, if the transition happens in year 3 of a 5 year award, the awards could run concurrently for one or two years, and the prime partner of the initial award could have a capacity strengthening role in the transition award to support the new prime's organizational sustainability.

After a transition award begins

Communication should remain a key priority throughout the award, and that may include sharing updates with the initial award prime recipient to maintain an informal relationship and continue to share the progress made by each organization. Additionally, revisiting the conversation of why the transition has taken place for staff of the transition award prime recipient can be important for staff to reflect on their growth and new responsibilities in their role as prime recipient. Likewise, when there is an overlap in the target community between the initial award and transition award, keeping them informed throughout the transition award process supports continued relationship and trust building with the transition award prime recipient.

Conclusion

Transition award processes are a unique opportunity for local organizations to receive targeted capacity strengthening support that also helps them demonstrate readiness to prime to USAID. For international organizations, transition award processes give space to live into their values of locally led development. It is important for the prime and subrecipient to prioritize the transition amidst programmatic activities, and this resource can help organizations do so.

²³ See USAID's page on [preparing for a NUPAS pre-award survey](#) for more information.

²⁴ Each time a USAID award is designed, the programmatic need has to be defined. Given that a transition award is a separate and new award, the new programmatic need has to be defined by the Activity Planner, whether or not it is correlated to the initial award, and ideally makes a case for why the local subrecipient is better suited to carry forward similar work.

²⁵ This timing is dependent upon USAID's determination of the local subrecipient's readiness to prime and the programmatic need for a transition award.

The SAS+ team is collecting feedback on this draft resource through June 30, 2024. Please share your feedback in [this form](#) or directly with SAS+ members Grace Boone (gboone@cdacollaborative.org) and Michael Robinson (mrobinson@sfcg.org).

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Annex A: Additional Resources

- BOND, Becoming locally led as an anti-racist practice: a guide, <https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/becoming-locally-led-as-an-anti-racist-practice-a-guide/>
- INTRAC, Exiting / transitioning from international partnerships: a toolkit for small NGOs: <https://intrac-1.gitbook.io/exit-and-transition/>
- Stopping As Success, Guidelines for Joint Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening Before, During, and After Transition, <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/resources/guidelines-for-joint-learning/>
- Stopping As Success, USAID Mission Checklist for Sustainable Transitions, <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/resources/usaids-mission-checklist/>
- SAS+ Learning Hub, <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/sas-learning-hub/>
- USAID Learning Lab, Locally Led Development Spectrum and Checklist, <https://usaidlearninglab.org/resources/locally-led-development-spectrum-and-checklist-to-ol>

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Annex B: Transition Plan Template

Purpose

Transition plans have proven really helpful for organizations, teams, and activities to ensure a sustainable transition. In transition award processes, a transition plan complements the AMELP, programmatic work plan and capacity strengthening plan, and ensures that the teams prioritize the transition amidst programmatic priorities. Transition plans should include capacity strengthening activities specific to the transition process as well as agreed upon criteria for readiness to prime.

Overview

The Transition Plan Template can be adapted based on the teams' needs. The outline below covers the purpose of the transition, background on the organizations, the teams' vision for a successful transition with priorities and activities necessary to meet that vision, as well as a section on learning and adaptation.

Outline

A. Purpose

In this section, include:

- Why a transition is important to the team's values and shared vision.

B. Background

In this section, include:

- An overview of the activity and prime and subrecipient organizations.
- Anticipated timeline for the capacity strengthening criteria to be met.
- An overview of what has been done to date to contribute to the transition.

C. Transition plan

In this section, include:

- The team's (the initial prime and the local subrecipient) shared vision for a successful transition
- Priorities for a successful transition, which can include:
 - Roles and responsibilities of the prime and subrecipient, factoring in how those roles may change, and identifying transition champions within the prime and subrecipient organizations who focus on implementing, and adapting as necessary, this transition plan and the implications it has for other planned activities.
 - Communication norms, such as the frequency of touchpoints beyond day-to-day implementation (i.e. pause and reflect moments, progress reports, capacity assessments, etc.), as well as the primary modes of communication (in-person, email or messaging platforms like WhatsApp, video calls, etc.).
 - Identifying transition champions outside of the implementing partners, such as donor connections, community members, local government, and other relevant

- stakeholders involved either in the transition or the work that the local organization will take on post-transition.
 - Capacity strengthening criteria and indicators of success for the initial award. This should be integrated into your AMELP and activities, including regular reflection on learning and adaptation needs (see Section D below).
- Key activities to ensure a successful transition with target dates and leads identified (see the tables below to support this planning). This process is meant to align the work plan, capacity strengthening plan, and transition plan.

Priority #1: Title

In this section, provide a brief overview of why this priority is included and how it will contribute to a successful transition.

| Activities to achieve the 1st step | Lead | Support | Priority | Estimated completion date |
|------------------------------------|------|---------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Priority #2: Title

In this section, provide a brief overview of why this priority is included and how it will contribute to a successful transition.

| Activities to achieve the 2nd step | Lead | Support | Priority | Estimated completion date |
|------------------------------------|------|---------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

D. Learning and adapting the transition plan

In this section, include:

- How the team will pause, reflect and adapt the transition plan based on learning between now and the project’s end date.
- Anticipated timeline for meeting capacity strengthening criteria when the local subrecipient can seek available opportunities as a prime recipient of a transition award. As a part of this process, SAS+ has found it useful to consider the [USAID Locally Led Development Spectrum and Checklist](#) in setting up regular reflection meetings. To best support adaptive learning, SAS+ recommends reflection includes discussion of outcomes at a programmatic level (e.g. implementation of key activities with corresponding data collection), as well as at a partnership level (e.g. communication and collaboration across organizations involved in the transition, how roles have or may need to shift to accomplish a responsible transition, discussions of power dynamics, etc.).