

USAID donor policy and ADS-style program cycle guidance (seed summary)

Purpose

This seed reference is designed to improve retrieval for USAID-like Results Based Management and program cycle drafting in GrantFlow evaluation runs. It is not an official USAID document and should be replaced by official ADS guidance for production use.

Key USAID drafting concepts

- Development Objective (DO): a strategic change objective at the program level.
- Intermediate Result (IR): a measurable change that contributes to a DO.
- Output: tangible deliverables and immediate products supporting IR achievement
- Critical assumptions: external conditions required for the causal logic to hold.
- Indicators: performance measures with baseline, target, frequency, and data source.

Practical USAID-aligned design expectations

- The Theory of Change should show a clear results hierarchy from outputs to IRs to DO-level change.
- Each IR should have a plausible causal pathway and implementing activities that explain how outputs are generated.
- Assumptions and risks should be explicit, especially for governance reform, behavior change, and institutional adoption interventions.
- Monitoring and evaluation should distinguish between output indicators (delivery) and outcome indicators (behavior, practice, institutional change).
- Baselines and targets should be feasible within the period of performance.

USAID governance and capacity strengthening heuristics

- Include institutional ownership and focal points.
- Include sequencing: diagnostics, capacity development, pilot application, learning, institutionalization.
- Include sustainability through embedded procedures, training-of-trainers, and agency-level SOPs.
- Include safeguards for ethics, privacy, inclusion, and human oversight in digital/AI use cases.

Checklist for draft review

1. At least one Development Objective is present.
2. Each DO has intermediate results.
3. Each IR has outputs.
4. Critical assumptions are listed.
5. Indicators are mapped to key result levels.
6. Risks and mitigation actions are identified.
7. Sustainability/institutionalization is addressed.

Example USAID-style governance chain

- DO: Participating government institutions improve service quality and operational effectiveness.
- IR1: Civil servants improve practical competencies in responsible AI and digital workflow design.
- IR2: Agencies adopt governance guidance and operating procedures for safe AI-enabled workflows.
- IR3: Pilot units demonstrate service/process improvements and learning loops.
- Outputs: diagnostics completed, training cohorts delivered, SOPs drafted, pilot reviews conducted.