

INSIGHTS INTO WORKING WITH USAID

INVEST was designed to connect USAID with the technical expertise it needs, on-demand. Using a streamlined procurement process and network approach, we make it easier for USAID to identify and engage the right firms for the job – and for the private sector to navigate partnership opportunities. We interviewed 25 INVEST partners for the Voices from the Partner Network series, capturing their insights on everything from working with USAID for the first time to creating impact. Since many firms in the network are new to partnering with – and writing proposals for – USAID, we selected the following excerpts that members may find useful in navigating the process. You can find the full Voices from the Partner Network series [here](#).

THE BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH USAID

“Having the backing of USAID and INVEST has assisted in our discussions and helped to encourage some financial institutions who previously were only investing in the private equity space to pilot investing in the earliest stage of venture capital space with us in our [Harvest II] growth fund.”

- Alison Collier, [Endeavor South Africa](#)

"We're relatively small. We're specialized. We don't always get to work with large public donors, so we appreciated INVEST's streamlined procurement process. It was key for a company like ours to be able to participate and engage directly with USAID and bring forward our specialized set of skills.”

- Dr. Serena Guarnaschelli, [KOIS](#)

NAVIGATING USAID

“To get up to speed on working with USAID, new partners should read the Private Sector Engagement Strategy which has been an incredibly useful document in shaping our thinking in how we would go about in developing a methodological approach [to our work] to achieving the objectives that are outlined there. If you're working with a Mission, check out the Country Development Cooperation Strategy. That really gives huge insight into the focus areas and ongoing activities that Mission is concerned with. It's a really nice document that bring you somewhat up to speed with much of the activities on the ground and approach, and outline of what they'd like to achieve.”

- Marc Dunnink, [Genesis Analytics](#)

“First, be patient. USAID is a big place. It operates inside of a regulated environment, so the timescale on which USAID makes decisions is different than the timescale on which a [private sector] company tends to make decisions. Second, be fully disclosed about what you're trying to accomplish and the timescale that you need to operate on so that USAID can factor that into their decisions. Third, and most important, look for the shared value. Your company has a mission, business strategy, and objectives that it's trying to accomplish, and so does USAID. USAID is very disclosed about that. It's on their website. You can read about it in the different strategies and documents it puts out. Looking for how your commercial interests overlap with their mission and interests is vital.”

- Jasper Siegfried, [Lion's Head Global Partners](#)

“We know the regulated environment in which USAID must work very well. So, as a result, we know how to be innovative while also being compliant. We also bring a set of tools and methods borrowed from the private sector—things like lean startup, human centered design, agile software development, shared value, collective impact, and we've rolled all these different theories that work well in other environments, and wrapped them up in a set of tools and checklists and step-by-step approaches that can really be highly modular and highly adapted to the specific environments in which USAID is trying to work.”

- Richard Crespin, [CollaborateUp](#)

CREATING IMPACT

“My advice to new firms [to USAID] is that you should bring your best ideas from the private sector. Bring your pipeline of opportunities from the private sector and provide proposals that USAID can assess; and really understand the impact that you have, the standards that you're bringing to those markets, the partnerships between the U.S. sector and our partners in developing countries, and show how you can close on those transaction so that their investment into you into your firm, into your decision is going to yield the greatest impact that they're looking for. We [MiDA Advisors] started with a grant from USAID to work with U.S. pension funds, foundations, and endowments because they are long-term investors, and they invest with scale. By mobilizing them to invest into Africa's infrastructure and private equity, we can create impact and help them further diversify. Now, we're part of the INVEST network, and as a subcontractor with INVEST, we are working on some very fascinating instruments in financial markets.”

- Ameryic Saha, [MiDA Advisors](#)

"I think USAID really values working with high-performance, highly passionate teams that are well-aligned from a value perspective and have a high degree of cadence in terms of keeping accountable and delivering on projects within the right amount of time. But my advice would be to work systematically through the process. Be transparent in the status of the company and where you aim to grow. And find common ground with USAID in the impact that you hope to deliver; not only to meet the KPIs that you've set out but to learn in the process and to create a two-way street of learning.”

- Julia Price, [Linea Capital](#)

“Think about balancing near and long-term objectives and KPIs, or balancing patience and quick wins. It's important to get those quick wins in the bag and add value, immediately build traction, demonstrate that to the market and the stakeholders who are around. At the same time, I think it's really important to build in that foresight to understand what it is that we are really trying to achieve in the long term. What is the sustainable positive impact that we want to make to the populations around us?”

- Reza Fazel, [Open Capital Advisors](#)

LOCAL MARKET KNOWLEDGE

“We know what it takes to create impact on the ground because we started in the same place as many of the entrepreneurs that we’re now supporting. We know that we need to ensure what entrepreneurs hear from us is consistent with the goals and intentions of USAID, which requires open and frequent communication with the client.”

- Mukund Prasad, [Intellectap](#)

“Local expertise is required for successful implementation. We know the economic landscape and the characteristics of local SMEs, which makes us well-positioned to provide technical assistance.”

- Giovanni Roncucci, [Roncucci & Partners](#)

“We encourage investors, we encourage the development community, we encourage as many stakeholders as possible to get out and start meeting with the business community. Do field trips. If you're based in East Africa [for example], make sure you do a field trip with local investment firms. You can sit through seminars and read blogs and reports and books about blended finance, about gender lens invention, about all these things, but I think the best thing that the development professionals can do is to get out and see what's happening with businesses and investors.”

- Laura Davis, [RENEW](#)

UTILIZING PARTNERSHIPS

“A firm [new to USAID] should submit a proposal that transparently represents its ability to service the project, identify gaps where you wouldn’t be able to meet those requirements, and fill that with partnerships. We’ve found that collaborating with partners that have complimentary skillsets and expertise really heads off that comprehensive solution to USAID. So, collaboration is the key.”

- Richa Natarajan, [Unitus Capital](#)

"What helped us do our job well was our rich network of partners across the [South and Southeast Asia] region. It makes a difference when a partner or firm has geographic expertise and local experience. It brings a necessary level of understanding."

- Mukund Prasad, [Intellectap](#)

After 65 years working in the accounting business and serving customers across North America and Europe, Dopkins & Company, a Buffalo-based accounting firm, tried its hand at working with USAID in Colombia.

“Our partnership with RSM, the global accounting firm, and their presence in and across Colombia allowed us to overcome the gaps in knowledge we needed in our assessment of the Colombian context.”

- Joseph Heim, [Dopkins & Company](#)