

Better Practices for PEPFAR Teams

The Namibia COP 2011 Planning Process

My big picture hopes for COP '11 were many... stakeholder alignment, alignment with the national strategic framework and partnership framework, transparency in process, joint planning and inter-agency reviews, evidence-based programming, cost efficiencies and cost realism, and overall strategic planning [for the next five years]... and an understanding of how COP '11 fits into those strategies. Overall, my hopes were met.

-PEPFAR Namibia Team Member

Each year, PEPFAR teams around the world engage in COP planning, adjusting their processes to suit the needs of their own specific resources and environments. This year, the PEPFAR team in Namibia took the COP process a step further, leveraging their work to achieve three important goals not required by OGAC: increasing inter-agency teamwork; ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the team's portfolio by all team members, over half of whom had arrived in the past year; and strengthening country ownership and alignment with the government's National Strategic Framework (NSF). Improving inter-agency collaboration and spreading portfolio knowledge, they reasoned, would help the team make better-informed decisions in the short-term, while building a stronger foundation for increased productivity in the future.

We present the approach taken by the PEPFAR team in Namibia as an example of how comprehensive COP planning can be employed to achieve a variety of mission goals. While the specific strategies employed in Namibia may not be appropriate for every environment, we believe that some of the steps, ideas and principles used in that country may be adapted for other contexts. Given the important work being done by PEPFAR teams around the world, we hope the Namibia example will inspire others to share their own experiences with TeamSTAR, so that we can continue to facilitate the exchange of better practices being developed in the field.

COP '11 Overview

Two primary goals of the PEPFAR team in Namibia during the COP '11 process were to raise the team's awareness of the entire USG portfolio, and to increase interagency coordination within a team composed of many new members and marked in the past by high levels of distrust. Specifically, PEPFAR leadership believed that a transparent COP process would help to remedy some of the unilateral planning that occurred in the past by facilitating cooperation among participating agencies, thereby identifying and eliminating redundancies between different agencies' programs. The team also believed that a true interagency planning process could enable PEPFAR Namibia to develop a "more strategic document," which would be evidence-based, "driven by technical staff," informed by stakeholder goals and partnership frameworks, and "in the best interest of Namibia."

Although Namibia's experience proved difficult and resource-intensive, team members agreed that, in the end, it was worth the effort. As one team member commented, "we put on the one-USG hat." Others reflected that "we now have a great structure for the COP" for use in future years, and that "transferring that process to [other endeavors] will be helpful." Given that several government ministries wound up endorsing the COP in Namibia, one member boasted that the "process really involved all the partners." In short, COP '11 increased the efficiency,



effectiveness and country-ownership of programs in Namibia, and despite complications, its participants considered it a great success.

COP '11 Step-By-Step

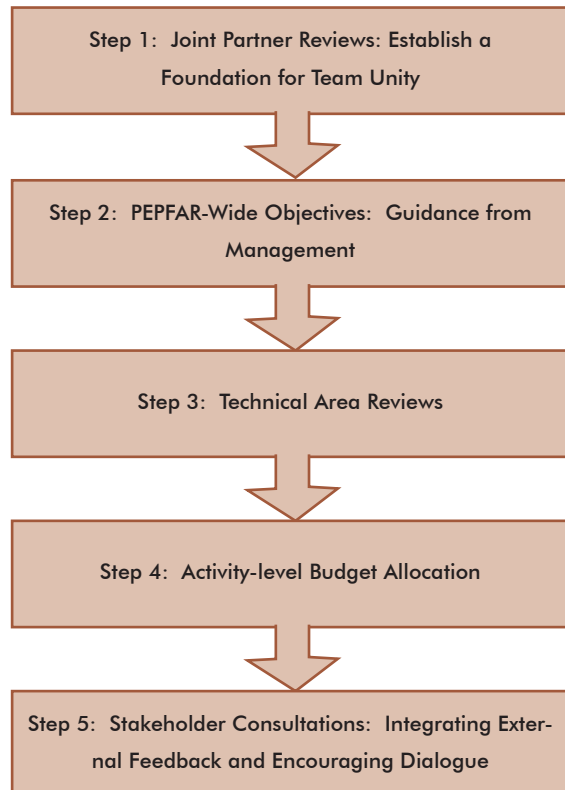
So how did PEPFAR Namibia do it? Below is an outline of the steps employed by PEPFAR leadership, based on first-person interviews with participants in the field.

STEP 1 – Joint Partner Reviews: Establishing a Foundation for Team Unity

Technical staff in Namibia began the COP '11 process by conducting joint partner reviews, including site visits of several implementing partners. Emphasis was placed on key activities, where the most significant funding was being focused, and ensuring that USG review activities did not replace or duplicate the government's process for program assessments. Team leaders invited a cross-section of technical staff to listen in on partner presentations and to ask questions, thereby validating as a group what was working well – and where gaps remained in existing programming. The reviews provided an initial opportunity for many interagency team members to begin working together, and “alerted us to the process of looking at each other's work and progress” in the light of overall mission goals.

STEP 2 – PEPFAR-Wide Objectives: Guidance from Management

Before technical staff could propose new programming models based on their joint partner reviews, PEPFAR management had to present clear guidance on the priorities and desired allocation of available resources. As part of this process, the PEPFAR Management Team (PMT) established general funding levels for activities in areas such as treatment, prevention, care and support, systems strengthening, and strategic information. The PMT also discussed and decided upon general guiding principles for the COP '11 process, such as supporting coordination with the government, minimizing drops in coverage for vulnerable beneficiaries, and addressing systems strengthening.



STEP 3 – Technical Area Reviews

Once clear guidance had been established, Interagency Technical Teams (ITTs, often called Thematic Working Groups, or TWGs) held a retreat to conduct Technical Area Reviews (TARs) in each of the five program areas. The objective of each TAR was to examine how existing funds were being invested, and if/how to shift 2011 funds to ensure that future activities remained consistent with the NSF. An interactive, plenary session allowed individual ITT teams to receive feedback on their notional portfolios and budget allocations from their interagency colleagues, and discussions of each program area helped to create a shared understanding of the full USG portfolio. Team members appreciated the opportunity to hear, engage, and learn from their colleagues. After the plenary session, ITTs regrouped in order to make final programming decisions on programming, striving for consensus whenever possible and allocating one vote per agency when necessary. The team established and implemented

measures to establish and record technical discussions and decisions that could be referenced in the future as necessary.

As one ITT member commented, the reviews “oriented the entire team to the entire COP, not just their section.” As a result, the TARs and accompanying documentation “got people thinking... [together] and thinking strategically” as they continued to forge a single voice with which they could discuss programming internally and with other stakeholders.

Guiding questions for TAR discussions:

What is in Namibia’s best interest?

What is the USG’s comparative advantage in helping address the need?

What are USG strategic priorities and overall strategic direction?

STEP 4 – Budget Presentations to the PMT

The budget code allocation process was designed to be a participatory interchange between each ITT and members of other technical teams, and culminated in detailed presentations on budget narratives to the PMT. Given the PMT’s understanding of the overall goals and strategy of the country team, management designed the process as a participatory interchange between ITT experts and members of other technical teams. The presentations gave management, as well as other technical teams, the opportunity to pose clarifying questions and to ask for elaboration. Despite rigorous questioning, the vast majority of ITT suggestions proposed in Namibia were approved, an outcome several participants credited to the technical expertise of the ITTs and the interactive process that had led to the budget proposals in the first place.

STEP 5 – Stakeholder Consultations: Encouraging External Feedback

With provisional activities and budgets in hand, PEPFAR Namibia staff invited external stakeholders to attend presentations on the proposed COP

’11 allocations, and to participate in follow-on consultations with USG participants. The goals of stakeholder consultations were to:

1. Increase each external stakeholder’s involvement and ownership in programmatic decisions
2. Ensure the alignment of PEPFAR investments and budgets with Namibia’s strategic priorities
3. Provide a forum for dialog about critical issues facing the country

The team held three separate sets of consultations for Namibian government officials, donors, and members of civil society (including implementing partners). Attendees were given information about each presentation in advance, and given the opportunity to ask questions and to provide feedback at each session. According to one ITT member, “it was important to really sit down and consider what we [could do]... on the basis of what we heard from stakeholders.” By bringing together representatives from the host government, civil society, and other donor agencies, external stakeholders could contribute their “first-hand information of what’s happening” to the USG representatives responsible for programming decisions. As a result, the stakeholder consultations served as one important step in inviting and remaining responsive to continuing dialog between the PEPFAR team and others outside the USG. As several participants pointed out, such consultations were a vital component of the COP ’11 process.

STEP 6 – Finalizing the Plan

Following the stakeholder consultations, PEPFAR members convened one last time to distill key messages and incorporate program guidance into their notional budgets. Stakeholders were provided written feedback on how the issues they raised would be addressed – or why their concerns could not be incorporated into COP at that time. PEPFAR staff presented the final proposal to the newly-formed Partnership Framework Steering Committee, which was comprised of government officials and civil society representatives who officially endorsed the plan.

Elements of Success

Several core principles guided the work of the Namibia team throughout the COP '11 process. Hallmarks of their success are outlined below.

A Shared Commitment to Collaboration, Consensus, and Teamwork

A consistent, shared approach to teamwork is vital to any extended planning process. This is particularly true for PEPFAR teams, which bring together diverse agencies and individuals with varied professional backgrounds and customs. In Namibia, the ambassador set the tone for COP '11 as the "CEO of the whole-of-government" team. Specifically, she asserted that all decision making would be done on a collaborative basis, and that all USG members would remain engaged and involved throughout the process. Agency heads adopted and further set a tone of openness toward sharing information, questioning, and cooperation. These qualities remained an enduring aspiration of the team as the process developed. In fact, participants repeatedly cited the "willingness of the team to compromise for the common good and to move process forward" as one of their guiding principles.

Transparency

To ensure that COP '11 involved "a real inter-agency team" and to increase country ownership, management insisted on a high degree of transparency with both internal and external observers. Internally, transparency helped PEPFAR managers to earn trust and encourage cooperation amongst various agencies, and was seen as a fundamental quality of the team. As one manager remarked, "we wanted [a] more open process... [particularly] around budget matters." Another agreed that, "everyone... [needed] to have access to information, so they could contribute." As a result, many budget details were shared and discussed with the Namibian government to order to build and strengthen partnerships.

Elements of Success

- 1. A Shared Commitment to Collaboration, Consensus, and Teamwork**
- 2. Transparency**
- 3. Clear Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships between Management and Staff**
- 4. Stakeholder Involvement**

Clear Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships between Management and Staff

Another hallmark of COP '11 in Namibia was the effort made by the PMT to empower technical experts throughout the process. Decisions and expertise of the ITTs were respected and adhered to whenever possible by PEPFAR management. According to several managers, the PMT's greatest accomplishment was its ability to "ratify the important work that had been done at the technical level." By delegating authority to the ITTs, the PMT also freed itself to focus on defining a strategic direction for the team, helping the group to identify and bridge critical gaps, and respond to the requirements of both OGAC and the host government in a timely manner. As one senior team member commented, "the PMT gave direction, and the ITTs gave options and scenarios to allow management to make informed decisions." This delineation of authority and accountability allowed all team members' expertise and hard work to be respected and utilized.

Stakeholder Involvement

From the beginning, leaders of PEPFAR Namibia made it clear that they wanted to submit a COP that benefitted from the approval not only of the

participating PEPFAR agencies, but from the host government, partner donors, and civil society stakeholders. As one seasoned team member recalled, “obviously we had guidelines from OGAC [that we needed] to respect, but the... [final product] needed to be aligned to the needs of the Namibian people,” and in particular with the country’s National Strategic Framework (NSF).

Lessons Learned

Commitment from senior leadership is vital.

Senior leadership in Namibia was unambiguously committed to the elements of success outlined above. Their clear and continuing support for the principles of collaboration and consensus throughout the year helped to maximize the team’s ability to achieve its goals. When the new DCM arrived, for instance, she appropriately exerted “clear pressure to be looked at as a team player.” Leadership’s interest and investment in the COP process were also apparent in the presence of the embassy’s front office at various activities and meetings, including government consultations and feedback sessions. Finally, leadership reinforced its commitment to the agreed-upon process by supporting the final decisions of the ITT and PMT.

Invest significant resources in the process... and start early.

Relationships, buy-in, and consensus-building take time and money, especially in the interagency context of PEPFAR. Several team members commented that countries considering a collaborative approach to planning “need to be prepared to spend resources on team-building and facilitation,” and that it “takes a lot... to do it right.” Establishing a culture of cooperation does not happen overnight. Participants in Namibia advise other countries to begin planning early, especially when it comes to gathering information before decision-making meetings, such as the data-intensive TARs. Early preparation is particularly critical when it comes to gathering information before decision-making meetings, such as the data-intensive TARs.

The good news is that significant up-front expenditures can facilitate lower expenses and streamlined processes in subsequent years. As one manager commented, “if you go back to documentation we developed... the [same type of]... intensity of interaction won’t be needed next time. It was a one-time piece of work, and now we can go off those documents and discussions.”

Engage an impartial, firm, and knowledgeable facilitator.

Effective facilitators can have tremendous impact on an interagency team’s ability to achieve its goals. The Namibian experience, for example, demonstrates the vital role a coordinator can play in organizing a collaborative and consultative process, and facilitating movement toward a timely product. While the role of facilitator is typically played by the PEPFAR coordinator, in some cases, the supplemental use of external consultants can also be instrumental in helping a team establish operating guidelines, design processes, reinforce agreements, and train internal team members. In choosing a facilitator, team members in Namibia emphasized the importance of neutrality, familiarity with the program and its participants, and an ability to balance flexibility with focus in guiding the team to its goals.

Involve stakeholders early, and give them concrete information on how their feedback is being addressed.

Team members agreed that soliciting involvement from government, civil society, and donors into the COP ’11 process resulted in important outcomes for the final product. Several members observed, for instance, that the COP ’11 process helped increase stakeholder engagement by building on existing relationships with the government. Because the team began to identify some of the proposed elements for the Partnership Framework implementation Plan, one member noted that the foundation for productive collaborative interactions with the government was also strengthened as a result of the process. In fact, although a

measure of internal clarity was required before the introduction of external inputs in Namibia, several participants noted that the earlier integration of stakeholders would have further helped to establish credibility, buy-in and cooperation.

In addition to inviting external input, participants emphasized the need to provide feedback to stakeholders on how their contributions were being utilized. "Some partners were really skeptical as to whether or not we would address issues [they raised]. I think with the feedback we have we managed to... [show] that we did address some issues." Careful and accurate documentation of the dialogue between USG officials and stakeholders is crucial for the integrity of the process, and for the accompanying relationships. Actions taken on stakeholder suggestions, as well as areas where action is not taken, should be communicated together with accompanying rationales.

Establish and adhere to group norms.

The fact that the group understood and adhered to the ambassador's expectations regarding collaboration and consensus was a pivotal factor in PEPFAR Namibia's success. At the onset of the COP '11 process, the team worked together to establish common behavioral norms (see appendix) and set up a buddy system to hold members accountable. As a result, Technical Area Reviews, Notional Budgets, and Stakeholder Consultations were intentionally designed to facilitate a collective approach. As one manager reflected, "sharing



projects, not only large activities but sub-activities, going through the whole process of prioritizing and identifying gaps and talking with others... it brought about a USG mindset" that permeated for the COP process and set the stage for future interactions.

Provide extensive documentation in advance of the sessions, and comprehensive, instant documentation throughout the process.

Extensive and accessible documentation in advance of and during decision-making sessions, as well as the requisite administrative assistance to keep paperwork up to date, was a particularly important ingredient in team Namibia's success. As one ITT member reflected, team members had "past budgets... secretarial support and logistical support... anything we needed" at their fingertips, and "the fact that we didn't have to do [the administrative and support] work ourselves and could concentrate on the process" made a true and critical difference. Having a well-functioning support system allowed team members to access information on past programming and decisions, and reference real-time documentation throughout the COP process. During the TARs, for example, the EPCO team consultants and internal team members provided immediate, hard copy documentation of all of the groups' outputs to the rest of the group, together with additional supporting materials. As each group made and presented budget decisions, programmatic decision-points were updated by the EPCO team in real-time on two large PowerPoint screens.

Everyone had role to play, and as a result, all individuals were allowed to move forward... the process was very iterative: ITTs gave advice, and the PMT could give advice.

– Team member

In Namibia, having ample background materials on hand and documenting emerging outcomes helped to facilitate total team engagement, streamline deliberations, and enhance evidence-based decision making. Instant documentation also served as an objective record of decisions, and helped participants to trust the fact that past decisions would be honored by the group.

Apply and refine skills in decision-making and communication.

Knowing they would be facing difficult, interagency challenges as part of the COP '11 process, PEPFAR Namibia stacked the cards to its advantage by training team members in communication, decision making, and collaborative action before the COP process had even begun. Fostering a common skill set among team members via joint training workshops and activities enabled the team to implement a complex interagency process, despite competing priorities and agendas.

As the Namibia example shows, participants' abilities to access such common skills in the heat of debate can serve as a tremendous asset. Groups attempting to interact as a "one USG" team must develop language and skills sets that allow them to think, speak, and act collaboratively, strategically, creatively, and with emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

The experiences of team Namibia demonstrate the power of collaborative, evidence-based decision making, and show how respect and empowerment of technical and managerial staff can transform results. The process undertaken during COP '11 also exhibits how communication – both internal and with external stakeholders – remains at the heart of any successful planning process.

If readers take no other lesson from the Namibia experience, they should at least take this: USG team members will maximize their professional effectiveness if they engage in continuous interagency dialog, "helping build trust and camaraderie by... leading with each other." Internal staff should proactively work together and with partners to determine the most effective, user-friendly means of achieving collaboration. Leadership, management, technical staff, and facilitators all have critical roles to play in "constantly reminding the team to think 'one USG,'" and encouraging the collaborative mentality – both internally, and with government and other stakeholders – so critical to success. In the end, positive communication engenders respect in any environment, and establishing clear norms and engaging in dialog can help to make all agencies, representatives, and stakeholders feel respected – and that they matter.

Behavioral Norms

- Everyone should freely offer his or her ideas
- Listen attentively with an open mind to hear and understand different opinions
- Be clear and concise when presenting issues or perspectives
- Avoiding personalizing technical discussions
- Speak to the subject at hand; do not digress onto side topics
- Accept conflict as a reality and work collectively to manage it through different strategies including compromise
- Take responsibility for individual and collective actions
- Allow everyone a chance for giving his or her voice before deciding the issue in consensus decision-making (reaching a decision that everyone can endorse and support)
- Be prepared to let go of your preferred position in consensus decision-making

Namibia COP '11 Process: Timeline (Example)

Spring 2010

EPCO and combined ITTs:

- Discussed what worked well in COP 10, what needs improvements
- Determined Guiding principles for COP 11
- Developed preliminary COP timeline, later approved by PEPFAR Management Team
- Formed workgroup of EPCO Deputy Coordinator and USG agency representatives
- Participated in skill-building sessions on decision-making and collaboration
- Emphasized themes of advance planning, clarity of roles and responsibilities

Early Summer 2010

Combined ITTs:

- Conducted joint site visits and program evaluations of selected PEPFAR implementing partners

Late Summer 2010

Agency Heads, the PMT, the Combined ITT, the Full Country team or some combination

- o Established the overall strategic vision and priorities

PMTs:

- Established notational budgets and general guidance for the ITT budget deliberations in five program areas: Treatment, Prevention, Care and Support, Systems Strengthening, Strategic Information

Technical Area Reviews (TAR)

- Designed by ad-hoc working group of PMT and ITT members, TeamSTAR consultants, EPCO coordinator, OGAC country lead
- Primary focus areas:
 - Taking stock of current activities to create a shared understanding for the full USG portfolio
 - Identifying programmatic gaps and potential responsive strategies
 - Identifying proposed new activities
 - Sharing data on HRH issues
 - Setting criteria for guiding budget deliberations
- Also included:
 - Context setting via reference of the Aide Memoir Document and other materials
 - Review of team-building and decision-making skills sessions

PMT Review

- Majority of technical recommendations by each of five ITT groups accepted

Fall 2010

Stakeholder Consultations

- Purpose:
 - To conduct in-depth policy and technical discussions to support the development and finalization of COP 2011 and PFIP
- Goals:
 - Ensure alignment of PEPFAR investments and budget with Namibia's strategic priorities
 - Increase Namibian involvement and ownership in programmatic decisions shaping PEPFAR investments and budget
 - Dialogue about critical issues
- Process
 - Information on proposed programming distributed to government officials, donors, and civil society partners in advance of stakeholder meetings
 - 2 groups of stakeholders assembled: government, and civil society/donors
 - USG team members facilitated small group discussions soliciting feedback from stakeholders on proposed programs

Stakeholder Debriefing

- Key themes identified
- Each ITT formulated written responses to why, or why not, feedback integrated into final COP 11 program

PMT and Agency Heads endorse the COP