

Better Practices for PEPFAR Teams

Joint Partner Performance Reviews: A Better Practice from PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire

[Joint performance partner reviews] give us the opportunity to sit down, with each agency bringing its area of strength to the table for discussion. Project Managers and technical staff in both agencies come together as one team to look at the partners' performance. There's an opportunity to make shifts, changes, and modifications that serve the overall benefit of USG instead of only the funding agency. We make decisions together in terms of steps forward. We send feedback to that partner not just from the funding agency; rather it comes from PEPFAR. We look at burn rate, what's in the pipeline, and we ensure partners know we are tracking their spending. The process provides us with an evidence base, so we can make more informed decisions during the COP about funding allocations.

-PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire team member

A common challenge among PEPFAR teams is to ensure that Program Managers (PMs) and Technical Advisors (TAs) are communicating complementary messages to their Implementing Partners (IPs). Inconsistent, or even contradictory, messages from different PEPFAR agency partners can confuse a project and place unnecessary stress on both the PEPFAR team members and IP staff.

To help resolve such conflicts, several PEPFAR teams have expressed a desire to coordinate IP performance reviews in-country. Such coordination would allow PEPFAR teams to speak with one voice in providing partner feedback, and to develop a common understanding of partner performance for future funding decisions. Conducting joint reviews of partner performance is one potentially powerful way to resolve these issues.

A primary goal of the TeamSTAR project is to facilitate the exchange of the good practices and lessons that are being learned by the PEPFAR teams. Our unique vantage point working as neutral consultants to multiple teams in the field allows us to see what is being tried by various teams and to serve as a mechanism for sharing some evolving "better practices."

A practical method for conducting "Joint Partner Performance Reviews," or JPPRs, was developed this year by the PEPFAR team in Cote d'Ivoire. Our hope in sharing this emerging better practice is that your team will learn from the experiences of PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire. We also hope that you will be inspired to share your own experiences in JPPRs and other ways of achieving the PEPFAR goals so TeamSTAR can continue to facilitate the exchange of better practices that are being developed and used in the field.

What is involved in JPPRs?

PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire manages more than forty IPs and a yearly budget of \$120 million. In early 2010, weaknesses in project oversight were evident and the newly created Inter-Agency Management and Implementation Team (MIT) led by the agency heads for CDC and USAID, decided that the team would conduct joint reviews of partner performance. Despite resistance from staff in both agencies due to the increased time commitment required by the process, the team soon settled into a regular process that ultimately ensures a bi-annual review of each partner.

The team conducts two performance reviews per week; typically, this includes one CDC partner



and one USAID partner. Over time, the availability of staff and partners has become the most important factor in scheduling the reviews. Small projects are occasionally clustered into subject areas (for instance, nutrition or prevention), and each review takes an average of 1-1.5 hour to complete, although reviews for new projects have lasted up to 3 hours. Based on the team's initial experiences, PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire decided to invite partners to participate in second-round reviews, to be held at partner offices.

Why JPPRs?

A driving force behind the introduction of JPPRs in Cote d'Ivoire was the recognition that both the CDC and USAID perspectives needed to be included in the performance evaluation process. By synthesizing input from multiple PEPFAR agencies, including the State Department and DOD, JPPRs were designed to make the performance reviews more reflective of partner progress from a variety of viewpoints.

A second motivation was the team's desire to better understand and influence ongoing programs, identifying weaknesses earlier so corrective action could be taken, with the additional goal of designing improved programs for the future, and ensuring future budget allocations were based on evidence.

Keeping more attuned to current projects, in fact, was "one of the whole points of doing these – [JPPRs] force us to sit and focus." The plan has worked: the self-enforced "timeouts" required by the JPPR process have successfully given the Cote d'Ivoire team a chance to examine quarterly reports, projected activities, and financial data in a methodical and collaborative manner. As a result, the process has created a feedback loop that has enabled improved communication between the entire PEPFAR team and partners, and allowed ongoing and new project design to "get better and better."

A third factor prompting the introduction of JPPRs in Cote d'Ivoire was the need to join forces to

overcome an imbalance in staffing resources. As one USAID staff member noted, "if we're going to run a \$50 million... program, we have to have help. Instead of fighting each other, we needed to work together with the other agencies for the benefit of USAID partners and beneficiaries." The collaboration of multiple agencies via JPPRs has assisted the team in effectively tackling a heavy workload.

"Even if we have different philosophies, we need each other. Instead of fighting each other we needed to work together for benefit of partners and beneficiaries"

Preparation for JPPRs

While specifics vary by project and PM, the partner review process in Cote d'Ivoire is generally initiated by the scheduling of sessions over a 6-month period with agreed dates by IPs and PEPFAR staff. Prior to a JPPR, the assigned PM works with the IP to gather relevant financial, technical, and programmatic information (see the appended Interagency Partner Performance Monitoring form). This information can include measurements of impact on specific PEPFAR indicators, examples of collaboration with host country officials, and burn rates. At this preliminary stage, PMs often solicit and receive input from Technical Advisors (TAs), especially if a TA has been heavily involved in the program, or if the work is particularly technical in nature.

Utilizing the Interagency Partner Performance Monitoring form, the PM then circulates a draft partner evaluation to all team members prior to meetings. Draft evaluations may include impressions of program highlights, main challenges, key follow-up actions from the last review, and an initial performance rating. Depending on the size of the project, a PM can spend up to three days in this preparation phase.

During review meetings, the PM walks team members through his or her initial draft of the partner

evaluation. Participants then discuss the initial draft until they reach a consensus and “rate” the IP’s work for that review period, after which the feedback and recommendations are forwarded to the partners.

The agreed-upon feedback is then written up and sent to the IP within one-week period.

For some partners, it has been clear during a review, that a follow-up meeting would be needed to deal with specific issues raised during the evaluation. The Agency Head for that project usually takes the lead on setting up and holding this meeting.

The process is still evolving. Recently, the team changed the evaluation scoring to reflect more gradations in level of performance, shifting from 3 to now 6 possible “grades”. Discussion is still ongoing as to the best time period for each review, as the PEPFAR and agency calendar lead to many possibilities. Since the first “round” has been done, the team currently looks at the “time since the last review” as the 2nd round review period.

Benefits of JPPRs

Incorporates Interagency Perspectives.

One of the JPPR’s greatest benefits is that it incorporates multiple internal perspectives into the decision making process. In fact, Cote d’Ivoire PEPFAR team members demonstrate the valuable input their interagency colleagues provide by actively soliciting their opinions as part of the review process, and by adjusting their scores to reflect new information gleaned from other agencies. As one PM explained:

“In some cases, the PM does [the] initial scoring that they come to [the] meeting with. But half the time the PM comes to meeting and says ‘I don’t feel like I have enough information to score, I have to hear [more] input from the TA. Or I might have put ‘strong’ [in one category] and then I hear from the TA and then... change my rating.”

Cote d’Ivoire PEPFAR members can recount nu-

merous episodes of technical staff changing their ratings based on input from managerial staff, and vice versa. By including different agency representatives in meetings, team members are able to better understand and utilize information that might otherwise be unclear to individual parties or agencies.

Integrates Partner Perspectives and Foster Better Partnership with IPs.

JPPRs not only incorporate a variety of internal perspectives, they enable the team to better build working relationships with IPs. Although Cote d’Ivoire’s initial reviews included only participating USG agencies, the team has since revised its process to include partner input and presence in a second round of meetings. The Cote d’Ivoire team now asks IPs to complete the Interagency Partner Performance Monitoring forms prior to a meeting that includes both the USG agencies and the IPs. As one team member reflected:

“The outcome [of including partners in these meetings] is that they see how PEPFAR sees them, and the process gives the partner the opportunity to let us know if we’re being [totally unrealistic]... we can say what we perceive, and they can bring in extenuating circumstances.”

By giving IPs a “chance to explain things,” the picture becomes more complete – and the partnership with contractors and grantees becomes more realistic and productive.

Unites Agencies for One-Team Approach to Funding.

As one senior team member commented, JPPRs give the group

“an opportunity to make shifts, changes, and modifications that serve the overall benefit of the USG, instead of the one agency that happens to be the funding agency.”

This “one-team” approach can be especially beneficial when it comes to PEPFAR funding, since JPPRs can give all participants a more holistic view of

the issues and priorities that may be competing for USG resources. As another team member noted:

"Having an entire team that understands the country's needs and partners' performances helps us with making the case [during the COP] for whom to give more or less funding."

By continually discussing program priorities and individual projects throughout the year, JPPRs enable teams to identify issues and reconcile differences in a timely manner".

Unites Agencies for One-Team Approach to Representation.

Before JPPRs, IPs in Cote d'Ivoire sometimes received conflicting information from various USG agencies involved in particular projects. One team member recounts a particularly confusing situation in which a contractor was contacted by "about three different advisors... at different times, telling them different things."

Introducing JPPRs allowed PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire to "send feedback to that partner not just from the funding agency, but from PEPFAR" as a whole, and helped "hammer out misunderstandings" prior to contact with IPs. As another team member noted,

"it's better to put all of this [information] together and present the same view to partners. There is a common purpose and view, and sense that [we need JPPRs to help this coordination]."

Responses to the process from IPs have been mostly positive - with IPs "even sending thank you notes."

Provides Ongoing Learning.

In the past, some PEPFAR team members designed new programs and initiatives, but didn't have the opportunity to see how their decisions played out during implementation. Because JPPRs allow team members to interact with programs at all stages throughout a program's life cycle, JPPRs in Cote

Advice for Others

"It works here because we have both agencies working on just about every activity. So we are all concerned with how they are performing. It might not work if others aren't doing implementation together. If they are working separately, they might not be interested in sitting down to listen to how their partners are doing."

"You can't really see a separate USAID/PEPFAR and CDC/PEPFAR. There is really only PEPFAR."

d'Ivoire enable team members to "actually see decisions we made [come to fruition]." One team member explained the usefulness of including IPs in the JPPR process this way:

"In reviewing with partners, we're able to see how much change is necessary from what we originally advised... or even how confusing some of the goals and recommendations and decisions we gave were to begin with!"

Not only do JPPRs provide continuous learning in the service of new program design, they also facilitate midcourse corrections and improvements to ongoing activities.

JPPRs also facilitate internal learning about PEPFAR processes and programs.

For instance, the vigorous attention to programmatic goals and accomplishments has proven especially effective in bringing new employees up to speed, particularly since presentations and draft reviews require extensive knowledge about partner performance. The one-team approach allows deeper, more accelerated learning for technical and managerial staff, as each hears about the concerns of the other.

According to the Project Management Branch Chief, "there's no better way to really know projects than this!" JPPRs also serve as a valuable tool for cross-agency learning about administrative processes. As one team member observed:

"[JPPRs] give people with less experience who don't know how all the mechanisms work a chance to understand what are the strong/weak points of using certain funding mechanisms.... These are not easy to get to know... people have learned a lot [since we've been doing JPPRs] about each others' constraints."

Conclusion

Cote d'Ivoire PEPFAR has found that JPPRs leverage the strengths of a united PEPFAR team, resulting in examined, joint-funding decisions based on common assessments of partner's performance. The opportunity to thoroughly review programs and make critical decisions surrounding success in an intentional, multi-perspective manner has benefited internal processes and procedures, and allowed the organization to become more focused on internal learning and innovation. In addition, interactions with IPs in Cote d'Ivoire have become more streamlined and productive, with external conversations more focused on intended performance.

It is clear, the process requires committed leadership from all concerned agencies and the understanding among staff that participation in the process is expected, and not optional. Although it's taken time, PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire now dedicates Tuesday afternoons to partner reviews, and recent COP decisions have been much facilitated since we now have more information on which to make informed decisions.

Ingredients for Success

1. Commitment to collaboration from the top: Cote d'Ivoire's PEPFAR leadership set an effective tone for collaboration by asserting that JPPRs are important to them.
2. Mutual respect: This also flows from the top down. Agency heads demonstrate the importance of respect for each others' technical perspectives by coming to agreement on a variety of difficult issues at the highest levels. This sense of respect permeates across the team, and builds a sense of mutual respect and ownership.
3. Openness to new opinions: As one team member in Cote d'Ivoire commented, "most people will accept a good argument" because of the "mutual respect among partners." JPPRs can involve contentious issues, so it's important that everyone come to discussions willing to acknowledge, understand and accept new perspectives.
4. Recognized interdependence: the Cote d'Ivoire Program has significant staffing shortages. As one member put it "we really don't have a choice - there aren't enough US-AID PMs to do the work. If we are going to run this program, we need help. We realize we need each other."
5. PM's rigorous knowledge of programs: For JPPRs to work, PMs must know their activities inside and out. The team cites better and more preparation by PMs prior to team meetings as instrumental in minimizing the amount of time the entire group must gather.
6. Time commitment: "In the beginning, there was a lot of resistance," one team member remembered. Some "said we have no time, we already have too many meetings. While we didn't want more meetings, these are some of the most useful meetings we hold."
7. Proximity and co-location: The Cote d'Ivoire PEPFAR team shares space in the Embassy, which they believe contributes to the natural feeling of belonging to one team.

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Interagency Partner Performance Monitoring

Date of Performance Review	
Prime Partner Name	
Project Title	
Award Number	
Project Period/LOP	
Budget Period	
FY08 Budget	
FY09 Budget	
FY10 Budget	
Other Funding Sources (by donor and amount)	
Activity Project Manager	

Prime Partner Type Mark appropriate box.	Faith Based Organization	Own Agency	
	Multilateral Organization	Private Contractor	
	Non-Governmental Organization	Parastatal	
	Other USG Agency	University (Local/U.S.)	
	Host Country Government Agency	Community Based Organization	

<p>Project Overview</p> <p>(Brief background, expected outcomes, challenges, role in overall PEPFAR / national program) (200 words max.)</p>	
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List of Sub-partners: Please indicate if: FBO; MO; NGO; US-A; HCG-A; O-A; PC; PST; Univ; CBO				

Geographic Coverage: Check the boxes next to the region/s in which the partner works.				

PEPFAR Funding Agency: Mark appropriate box.	USAID (US Agency of International Development)	CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)	
	DOD (US Department of Defense)	DOS (Department of State)	
	HHS (US Department of Health and Human Services)	NIH (National Institutes of Health)	

Program Area: Check the boxes next to the relevant program areas for this partner.				
PMTCT		Pediatric Care and Support		OVC
Sexual Prevention: AB		Adult Treatment		Laboratory Infrastructure
Sexual Prevention: Condoms and Other		Pediatric Treatment		ARV Drugs (HTXD)
Biomedical Prevention: Injection Safety		TB/HIV		Strategic Information
Biomedical Prevention: Blood Safety		Counseling and Testing		Health Systems Strengthening
Adult Care and Support				

Performance Monitoring	
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NOA or other Contractual Restrictions:	Status		
	Lifted	Not Lifted	Comments

Planned Deliverables for the period	Completed?		
	Yes	No	Comments

Reporting and Data Quality	Instruction: Write your answer beside each question. Choose one: Yes (Y), No (N), or Not Applicable (NA).
Date of last report submission:	
Does the partner have a documented protocol for data management?	
Does the partner routinely collect and analyze performance data?	
Date of last onsite performance verification/data assessment:	
Date of last data audit	
Program areas covered by data assessment/audit:	
Did the partner use reported data for decision making/activity adjustment?	
Comments: [Your comments are mandatory for questions that you answered No (N) or Not Applicable (NA).]	

Technical Approach	Instruction: Write beside each question your answer. Choose one: Yes (Y), No (N) and Not Applicable (NA).
Are the partner's technical approaches consistent with national guidelines and PEPFAR program guidance?	
Has the partner made satisfactory efforts to increase program sustainability (e.g. through down referral, staff absorption, human or institutional capacity development, securing other funding)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Community <input type="checkbox"/> Facility <input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Region <input type="checkbox"/> National

Which levels of the health system/health service delivery network does the partner's approach address directly? (Check all that apply)	
Does the partner collaborate effectively with host government and/or other partners?	
Has the partner strengthened linkages between services?	
List below the program areas in which the partner's approaches are strongest and weakest and provide comments.	
Strongest program areas:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Weakest program areas:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Comments: [Your comments are mandatory for questions that you answered No (N) or Not Applicable (NA). This part is optional for questions that you answered Yes (Y). This part is not to exceed 200 words]	

Program Management	Instruction: Write your answer beside each question. Specify date or choose one: Yes (Y), No (N), or Not Applicable (NA).
Date of last site visit to Prime Partner by Project/Activity Manager:	
Date of last site visit to sub-partner(s) by Project/Activity Manager:	
Date of last site visit to Prime Partner by Technical Advisor:	
Date of last site visit to sub-partner(s) by Technical Advisor:	
Are the partner's programmatic goals attainable during the grant/contract/cooperative agreement period?	
Is the partner's implementation plan realistic and achievable?	
Are the partner's activities consistent with its work plan?	
Could the partner benefit from additional TA? (If so, please describe proposed TA below)	
Comments: [Your comments are mandatory for questions that you answered No (N) or Not Applicable (NA). This part is optional for questions that you answered Yes (Y).	

Financial Performance	
Time period (e.g. April 2009-March 2010)	
Did the partner submit the required financial report?	
Expenditures for partner's activities (in USD):	
Expenditures for sub-grants (in USD):	
Total expenditures this period (in USD):	
Planned expenditures this period (in USD):	
Average monthly burn rate:	
Number of months of funding available:	
Number of months remaining in budget period/year:	
Comments:	

Performance Highlights	1. 2. 3.
Problems/Challenges Requiring Attention (including expected delays, management issues and GoCI related issues if any)	1. 2. 3. 4.
Key Actions/Follow-Up (indicate responsible)	1. 2. 3. 4.

OVERALL PARTNER RATING:	<input type="checkbox"/> STRONG PERFORMER: has met or exceed targets set for the quarter, coherent technical approach, data management system in place, clear evidence of capacity building, efficient use of funds, good relationship with host country government and other partners <input type="checkbox"/> MODERATE PERFORMER: has met at least 75% of targets set for the quarter, technical approach characterized by some gaps or weaknesses, efforts to build capacity underway, more or less efficient use of funds, relationship with host country government and other partners is acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> POOR PERFORMER: has met less than 75% of targets set for the quarter, poor technical approach characterized by lack of focus, fragmentation or severe inefficiencies, no efforts to build capacity, non efficient use of funds, poor or non-existent relationship with host country government and other partners
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REVIEW NOTES:

This part will be filled out by Project Manager or Activity Manager in collaboration with other Technical Advisers. This part should record comments and recommendations made by the review team and serve as aide-memoire for the next performance monitoring review.

SAMPLE Feedback Letter to NGO

Dear [Implementing Partner],

As you are aware, the semi-annual Performance Review of [IP's] Cote d'Ivoire activity was held by the PEPFAR CI team at the U.S. Embassy on May 12, 2010. The review exercise is part of our routine internal monitoring of PEPFAR partners and their performance. The PEPFAR team considers 2 partners' programs per week, rates their performance, and provides feedback to the partners as quickly as possible after the Review. There are three possible ratings: poor (met less than 75% of targets), moderate (met at least 75%), or strong performer (met or exceeded all targets for the period under review). The period and targets we considered for this Review was October 2009-September 2010 [IP's] one-year cost extension period).

I am pleased to tell you that based on your accomplishments, the PEPFAR team assigned a rating of "between Strong and Moderate" – a rating that you and your team can be proud of. You have already exceeded 4 of your 2010 targets (no. of individuals trained in testing and counseling; no. of eligible adults and children provided with a minimum of one-care service; no. of eligible adults and children provided with a minimum of one preventive or support service; and, number of eligible OVC served). Moreover, your results to date for 3 other targets indicate that if you and your sub-partners maintain your current level of effort and momentum, you will most likely meet those goals by September 2010 (no. of targeted population reached with individual/small group preventive interventions; no. of targeted population reached through interventions focused on abstinence or fidelity; no. of targeted population reached with interventions focused on condoms and other methods of prevention).

In 3 areas you fell short of meeting targets due to the insufficient numbers of persons trained (training on abstinence and fidelity [AB]; on condoms and other methods of prevention [OP]; in testing and counseling [T&C] services provided). We note that you not only have recognized the need to accelerate AB and OP training but also you are making plans to do so. We also realize that resolution of the latter case (T&C) depends on the Ministry of Health's validation of the T&C training modules. In this regard, both PEPFAR and NGO X should use its respective good offices to encourage the Ministry to speed up the process.

We appreciate that you provided us financial information on your grant, and noted with satisfaction that over 60% of your funds are allocated to sub-partners to enable them to implement their HIV/AIDS prevention, and/or care, support and treatment activities in 7 different areas of the country. Of your planned deliverables for the Jan.-March 2010 period, we noted with approval that you completed all except one undertaking (the KAP study which was delayed due to personnel changes at the Ministry of Health). We would like to have further discussions with you and your team to learn more about your intended work and/or accomplishments with MARPs (most at-risk populations) and condom service outlets. During one of our next routine project monitoring meetings with you, we would also like to learn more about your methodologies for identifying and addressing capacity-building needs of your sub-partners.

In closing I take this opportunity to congratulate you and your team for meeting/staying on track with most of your OVC and AB targets, and for completing all planned deliverables except one (which was mainly due to circumstances outside of your control). The professionalism and teamwork demonstrated by your hard-working staff are exemplary, as is the recent initiative you took to carry out an internal assessment of your own operations. We were equally impressed with the way in which you proceeded to quickly resolve any perceived gaps. We applaud you for presenting a very balanced picture of your achievements and for correctly identifying the challenges that lie ahead: improving data collection by the sub-partners, and reaching not only training but services provided goals. We look forward to our continued partnership under PEPFAR Cote d'Ivoire. If you have any questions about these comments or the PEPFAR review process in general, do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

[Activity Manager]