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USAID SOLICITATION AND USE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS BY CONTRACTORS

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Note: The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily the views and opinions of USAID or Chemonics.

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Cover photo: The Nigeria Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) project team planning for the annual work plan. (Credit: USAID/Nigeria SACE project)

ACRONYMS

APEA	Applied Political Economy Analysis
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
CO	Contracting Officer
COP	Chief of Party
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
ENRM	Environmental and Natural Resource Management
FSN	Foreign Service National
FSO	Foreign Service Officer
IP	Implementing Partner
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
RFI	Request for Information
RFP	Request for Proposal
TEC	Technical Evaluation Committee
TWP	Thinking and Working Politically
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a retrospective analysis of the implementation of political economy analyses (PEAs) that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) solicited for development projects. A PEA is a qualitative field research methodology 1) to understand the underlying reasons why things work the way they do and 2) to identify the incentives and interests that impact actors' behavior in a relevant system.¹ PEAs are a common tool for thinking and working politically (TWP), an approach to significantly improve development impact by understanding and responding to political dynamics. This report does not focus on PEAs conducted by USAID Missions to inform planning efforts, PEAs conducted through assistance awards, or PEAs conducted by contractors that were not contractually required. The purpose of this research is to inform the work of USAID and its contractors on using PEA as a tool for TWP to increase development programs' impact. The report's findings are based on a quantitative analysis of 226 USAID solicitations; nearly 50 interviews with USAID contracting officer representatives (CORs), USAID/Washington staff, chiefs of party (COPs), and other TWP practitioners; and an analysis of seven PEAs. The interviewees considered their experience conducting PEAs throughout their careers, as well as 17 recent PEAs that were required in requests for proposals (RFPs). The five main questions explored in this research and the study's key findings are detailed below.

KEY FINDINGS

1. How often does PEA appear in RFPs, and in what sectors and regions?

Of 226 USAID RFPs analyzed from 2018 to 2020, 17.3% required the contractor to do a PEA. The rate was higher for certain sectors — such as Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) and Environmental and Natural Resource Management (ENRM) at 45% and 50% of RFPs respectively — although PEAs appeared in RFPs across sectors. Solicitations required PEAs more frequently in some regions, with higher rates of incorporation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC; 43%) and Asia (30%).

2. Under what conditions does PEA appear in RFPs?

As identified in the quantitative analysis of RFPs and verified in qualitative interviews, PEAs were more common in sectors that have traditionally focused on politics (DRG and ENRM). PEA was especially common in specific Missions, as well, notably Colombia, Philippines, and Mexico. The USAID Colombia Mission was one of the first to pilot PEA in 2014 with the support of the DRG Center. DRG Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) from USAID/Colombia participated in this PEA exercise, with the support of the USAID/Colombia DRG Foreign Service Officers (FSOs). DRG RFPs from that Mission have since included a PEA requirement.

¹See USAID, 2018.

There were fewer common conditions that determined PEA use, such as particular USAID/Washington staff's advocating for it on activity design teams; this happened on several occasions. In one instance of all 226 analyzed RFPs, the contractor advocated for PEA during the comment period (USAID sometimes includes a request for information [RFI] during solicitation preparation). The pathways that led to PEA inclusion in RFPs, however, often brought challenges — e.g., lack of buy-in and understanding from USAID/Mission staff about PEA use — that decreased its effectiveness.

3. How are PEAs executed?

The research identified several trends in the execution of contractor-led PEAs that related to the motivation, content, timing, and staffing of the PEA. Interviews showed that the motivation for doing 80% of PEAs was to interpret the political environment (e.g., political actors and their priorities, how to work with a government) or political events (e.g., what an election means for the project). These PEAs focused on key actors, ways of working, and policy agendas, instead of on a deeper question in official USAID PEA guidance: Why do things work the way that they do? Of seven reviewed PEAs, only three followed the official USAID *Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis* guidance, focusing on the 'why' question and applying the recommended four analytical elements: 1) foundational factors, 2) rules of the game, 3) the here and now, and 4) dynamics.

All interviewees noted that the PEA was to take place during the activity's first year (the inception phase); in all but one case, however, there was no time or flexibility to influence program design. This was partly due to the PEA process' length, which was extended because of contractors' and USAID's confusion about the process and often took up to six months to complete. This disconnect between the PEA and programmatic decisions was exacerbated by the common requirement to submit Year 1 work plans within 45 to 60 days from award.

In terms of staffing, contractor-led PEAs tended to include the contractor project team in the PEA process to effectively internalize team learning as opposed to subcontracting the learning effort. The study, however, found no clear relationship between staffing patterns and the quality or use of the PEA as determined by the COR and COP.

Finally, a considerable number of PEAs (at least 45%) focused on the subnational level and were valued for providing basic contextual information. It became clear from interviews that a subnational PEA was useful because contractor staff often lacked extensive experience in each activity locations. Most PEA reports, reported interviewees, comprised dozens of pages, while three were quite short or mainly verbal. One team chose not to draft a long PEA document because of the potential reputational and personal risks related to subject-matter sensitivity; it chose a series of presentations and conversations with the project team and USAID.

4. How are PEAs used?

Overall, contractors' COPs valued PEAs. In no case did the COP state that the PEA was a waste of time or resources. The majority of CORs felt the same way, though five CORs (25% of those interviewed) thought the PEA was not useful. In each case, the CORs who had a negative experience with their PEA did not have previous experience with PEA and had not advocated to include PEA in the RFP. Their critique was that PEAs were expensive; time-consuming; and yielded little useful new insight.

Contractor-led PEAs were used primarily for immediate and tangible purposes. First, they informed methods of work: with whom to work in government and how to communicate with them. Second, they informed short-term programmatic decisions. Of 17 recent PEAs that interviewees discussed, it was only in three that the analysis informed strategic decisions, such as the strategies to support civil society in a specific context. Some COPs and CORs argued that, even in cases where new insights were not discovered, writing down the staff's knowledge was helpful for decision-making and stakeholder engagement.

Many PEA advocates argue that using PEA will lead to an overall TWP approach. While this was not a research focus, the findings indicated that doing a PEA did not necessarily lead to TWP incorporation. Instead, where enabling conditions (see #5, next) were strong, research indicated that PEA helped to shape ongoing political learning and adaptation in particular ways. The connection between PEA and TWP depends on the working definition of TWP; over this definition, there is much confusion.²

5. What are the enabling conditions under which PEAs are more useful?

CORs and COPs described in interviews several conditions that enhanced the impact of PEAs. The conditions fell under two categories: 1) key personnel and 2) activity conditions. Regarding personnel, a USAID design team, Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC), and a COR — all of whom prioritize an understanding of politics in programming — helped to increase the likelihood of including conditions for effective PEA implementation in the activity. These conditions included elevating learning to an official, contractual objective or an intermediary result in the contract's results framework; selecting a contractor team that values politics; emphasizing adaptation in the solicitation; and others. As well, a strong, trusting relationship between the USAID contracting officer (CO), USAID COR, and the COP provided flexibility and learning for effective implementation. A contractor team with leadership that understands the importance of politics or has experience with PEA also helped to ensure a smooth PEA process and use of PEA findings.

Within activity conditions, four characteristics emerged as important for supporting PEA. The first was a long inception period; during this time, the PEA could inform the activity's approach. Second was the TEC's preference that the contractor have PEA

² See Laws, Ed and Marquette, Heather. 2018. Thinking and Working Politically: Reviewing the Evidence on the Integration of Politics Into the Development Practice over the Past Decade. TWP Community of Practice paper.

experience or at least an appreciation for the importance of politics. Third was flexibility in contract deliverables (i.e., the immediate outputs).³ Finally, USAID explicitly placed high value on learning and adaptation in some solicitations. In two of 226 analyzed RFPs, USAID elevated learning to an objective. This appeared to ensure that the contractor dedicated time and resources to learning and using that learning.

IMPLICATIONS: COMPLEX ISSUES

The findings above led to three complex issues for PEA practitioners in USAID, contractors, and implementing partners (IPs) to consider because of their implications for the effective execution and use of PEAs.

COMPLEX ISSUE 1. SHOULD PEA PRACTITIONERS FOCUS PEA ON THE PARTICULAR QUESTION OF WHY OR EMBRACE A VARIETY OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS?

The findings point to a tension in the practice of conducting PEAs. On one hand, there is great interest among interviewed CORs and COPs in the political questions of Who, What, and How (i.e., Who are the main actors? What are their policy priorities? How do formal and informal processes work?) to explore for effective program implementation. On the other hand, PEA guidance and many PEA practitioners are focused on the explanatory power of PEA through the Why question — “Why do things work the way they do?” — that can help programming focus on the right issues (including root causes) and the critical stakeholders of a development challenge. There are a number of “everyday PEA” responses to this tension: embracing a more explanatory PEA using the official guidance; a rapid approach to answering the Who, What, and How questions; and a rapid iterative approach to answering the Why question. PEA advisors may adapt PEA guidance to outline these options and considerations more clearly to approach political learning differently.

COMPLEX ISSUE 2. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE TO STRENGTHEN THE ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR PEA (AND, THEREFORE, TWP)?

This report has found enabling conditions to make PEA more effective, particularly regarding personnel and activity conditions. Personnel, at varying levels, largely determine activity conditions, i.e., the degree to which TWP is integrated into project design and staff. Several ideas emerged from this research to develop TWP and enabling conditions for effective PEA. The overarching idea is that PEA advocates may benefit from a cohesive strategy for influencing USAID Missions and IPs (including contractors) to establish TWP-enabling conditions. Three steps may be included in such a strategy:

1. *Conduct a PEA-inspired study of USAID and IPs.* The research identified the importance of USAID decision-makers and contractor leaders to assert the value of learning about politics and adaptive management. An understanding of these individuals’

³ It is possible that recent moves toward results-based, flexible contracts would enable the uptake of PEA, but these contracts did not appear in our sample.

behavior and the factors that explain whether they value learning about politics and adaptive management would contribute insights for a more cohesive TWP strategy.

2. *Leverage existing initiatives.* Collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) and localization allow adaptive management to emerge and for project teams and USAID to integrate PEA that enhances learning and strategic iteration to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives. While USAID guidance links CLA and localization to PEA, further integration and support may advance TWP and provide a wider variety of specific tools and approaches.
3. *Develop a strategy to build support for TWP by improving implementation and gathering evidence.* Enhanced engagement from USAID/Washington, USAID Missions, and contractor staff can improve TWP execution. TWP advisors can then gather evidence of improved implementation and communicate it to key stakeholders to continue increasing the number of TWP champions in key positions.

COMPLEX ISSUE 3. HOW CAN WE ENSURE LEARNING ABOUT POLITICS ACROSS TEAM AND ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES?

IPs (including contractors) worldwide are generating PEAs and other political knowledge in a variety of sectors. There also are a large number of decision-makers from IPs and USAID that can benefit from this knowledge but who do not have access to it. This report identified for actions that may improve knowledge management:

1. *Develop guidance for sharing PEA learning across organizations.* IPs have proprietary knowledge, privacy, and reputational concerns. At the same time, their PEA practitioners and USAID advisors may benefit from developing guidelines collaboratively to share PEA knowledge.
2. *Invest in national project staff.* National IP staff often move from one USAID-funded project to the next and have a nuanced understanding of the political dynamics where they live and work. They could, then, be the focus for deeper, long-term, country-specific PEA skills development.
3. *Engage Mission staff, especially FSNs.* This study's findings suggest that contractor-led PEAs may benefit from engaging Mission staff — FSNs in particular — early and often in the TWP process. The process will involve them in the learning and benefit from their knowledge. Contractor-led PEA offers an opportunity for Mission staff to engage in the learning process, even briefly.
4. *Share political learning across countries and regions.* It would be valuable to hold learning events to share with IPs the political learning from PEAs. TWP practitioners could help to share this information, e.g., through a learning contract across regions and topics to support PEA research and dissemination across IP networks.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to inform the work of USAID and contractors on PEA as a tool for TWP to increase development programs' impact.

According to informal measures, the use of PEA — and, to a lesser extent, TWP — appears to be increasing among USAID and its contractors. As a response, contractors are commissioning this work and developing their own capacity to conduct PEA. Despite this increased interest in PEA, notable, yet limited, research has been conducted on how USAID uses PEA.⁴ This report is an attempt to further such research.

After presenting the methodology, the report focuses on five questions:

1. How often does PEA appear in Requests for Proposals (RFPs)? (Section 3)
2. Under what conditions does PEA appear in RFPs? (Sections 3 and 4)
3. How are PEAs executed? (Section 5)
4. How are PEAs used? (Section 6)
5. What are the enabling conditions under which PEAs are useful? (Section 7)

The report concludes with key implications to improve PEA use (Section 8). This report uses specific definitions of TWP and PEA (see boxes), as well as definitions of key terms and stakeholders in USAID's PEA process (see box, next page).

DEFINING TWP

According to the TWP Community of Practice Secretariat, TWP is an approach to significantly improve development impact by understanding and responding to political dynamics. TWP has three core principles: 1) strong political analysis, insight, and understanding; 2) detailed appreciation of and response to the local context; 3) and flexibility and adaptability in program design and implementation.

DEFINING PEA

According to the official USAID PEA guide, PEA is an analytical approach to help understand the underlying reasons why things work the way they do and to identify the incentives and constraints that impact the behavior of actors in a relevant system. PEAs are tools to support a more politically informed approach to working, known as TWP.

⁴ See USAID, 2020; McGregor, et al., 2020; PACT, 2019.

KEY TERMS AND STAKEHOLDERS FOR USAID

- IP: USAID partner that is selected to implement a USAID-designed program (also “contractor”).
- CO: U.S. government’s authorized agent. Deals with contractors. Has sole authority to solicit proposals; negotiate, award, administer, modify, or terminate contracts; and make related determinations and findings on behalf of the U.S. government.
- COR: Performs a variety of duties, including serving as the technical liaison between the CO and the contractor.
- COP: Leads the implementation, management, and technical direction of a contractor-implemented USAID program.
- RFP: An official solicitation for acquisition awards (contracts) that details what the agency requires for a specific project or activity and how it will evaluate bids.
- Request for Assistance: An official solicitation for assistance awards (grants) that details what the agency requires for a specific project or activity and how it will evaluate bids.
- USAID Design Team: Designs a particular project for USAID, often comprising USAID/Mission FSNs, FSOs, and USAID/Washington staff.
- USAID TEC: Evaluates proposals submitted by IPs. Comprises USAID staff.

SECTION 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two public pieces regarding the execution and use of PEA among USAID contractors. These comprise a report by RTI International that reviews the PEA use in programming across sectors, and another by Pact that reviews PEA use in human rights programming.

McGregor, et. al. (2020), analyzed the use of nine PEAs in RTI activities. They found that PEAs were useful to identify several factors, including beneficiary needs, stakeholders for engagement, and potential risks to programming. They also found that the method of PEA implementation, particularly project staff engagement, impacted PEA quality. The lens of gender equity and social inclusion enriched PEA findings. As well, related to enabling conditions, it is necessary to have flexibility during implementation to adapt for the PEA to have impact; some activities, however, have limited flexibility because of contractual restrictions or staff's (USAID's and the contractor's) aversion to flexibility.

In its analysis of 10 PEA experiences in human rights, PACT (2019) made six observations about factors that make PEA more effective:

1. Project staff should be involved in the PEA. This echoes a finding in the RTI study.
2. If consultants complete the PEAs, their knowledge of a subject is less important than their PEA experience.
3. PEAs should be completed as an ongoing iterative process.
4. The process is more important than the product.
5. The PEA team should receive specific guidance on gender equity and social inclusion.
6. The PEA is used mainly for decisions about targeting (geography, groups), areas of work, stakeholders to engage, and others.

There are a number of studies on TWP and PEA from academics and organizations (Booth and Unsworth, 2014; Laws and Marquette, 2018; Teskey, 2022; Fritz, et. al., 2014). Several of these identify similar enabling conditions to those found in this study. For example, in their literature review of TWP research, Laws and Marquette (2018) identified “recurring factors” that contributed to the success of a TWP approach: having politically smart project leaders, allowing local actors to take the lead, adopting an iterative problem-solving approach, using a stepwise learning process, brokering relationships with major interest groups, receiving flexible and strategic funding from donors, having long-term commitments from donors, maintaining staffing continuity, and experiencing a supportive donor agency.

SECTION 3

METHODOLOGY

This research applied a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. To quantitatively analyze the RFPs noted in Section 3, the research team downloaded 226 RFPs⁵ dated 2018 to 2020 from USAID. The team searched for keywords “political economy analysis” and “thinking and working politically.” With few exceptions, the appearance of PEA meant that the contractor was required to complete a PEA during the activity. The team then constructed a database to include these keywords with basic RFP information, such as region, country, sector, and year.⁶

For the qualitative analysis described in Sections 4 through 7, the research team conducted nearly 50 semi-structured interviews with four sets of stakeholders and read a sampling of seven PEAs. The interviewees reflected on recent experience conducting 17 required PEAs; many interviewees had previous experience conducting PEAs, and this also informed their responses. The team interviewed USAID staff in Washington, D.C., and included experts from technical sectors at USAID and several DRG Center colleagues. The team then interviewed CORs for the majority of activities where the RFP required PEAs (51%).⁷ Then they interviewed associated COPs for the contractors.⁸ These interviews were complemented by several expert interviews, primarily colleagues from the TWP Community of Practice in Washington, D.C., who have ample PEA experience. See Table I for the number of interviewees per group.

TABLE I. INTERVIEW BREAKDOWN

Interviewee Group	Number of Interviewees
USAID DC	13
USAID CORs	20 (of 39 ⁹)
Contractor COPs	10 (of 17 ¹⁰)
Other experts	5

⁵ The team downloaded 285 solicitations; 59 of these were erroneous or did not contain required information. Afterwards, we found 15 NOFOs in the sample; they are included here, despite their technically not being RFPs. The RFP sample included 30 IDIQ contracts, as well.

⁶ Please note that, because Chemonics downloaded the data, the sector and regional information differs slightly from that commonly found in USAID.

⁷ When contacting the CORs, we discovered that some activities that required PEAs in the RFP decided not to do it, while others had not yet executed the PEA. Several did not respond to our communication.

⁸ When we were speaking with the CORs, we discovered that three activities were in the process of completing their PEAs, so we did not follow up with these.

⁹ Our keyword search detected 39 PEAs solicited in RFPs. We spoke with 20 CORs. We tracked down 33 CORs; 23 responded to our communication; three decided not to do a PEA.

¹⁰ Of the 20 CORs interviewed, 17 had completed their PEA. Of these, we tracked down 10 COPs.

The study faced a number of limitations in its methodology. First, it only looked at implementer-led PEA that was required in the RFP; these do not represent PEAs conducted by USAID for planning efforts or PEAs conducted by contractors that were not required in the RFP. It also does not cover PEAs under assistance agreements, which are funded as grants and not contracts, aside from 15 NOFOs identified during review. Second, the research's empirical information relied primarily on interviews with two sets of stakeholders for each activity: CORs and COPs, though team members often attended the interviews. The authors did not visit these teams or attend any activities, so the findings rely on the team's perception of the information; findings are not independent observations. In this sense, the study is not an evaluation. Third, some stakeholders did not provide full responses, which presents the possibility of response bias. In each section, we will highlight the relevant limitations to the study. Finally, it is worth noting that the pandemic was an unusual time that changed the use of PEA in a variety of ways, some of which are not clear. These unique circumstances may have affected the results.¹¹

¹¹ For instance, considering international travel difficulties, the use of international consultants may have declined.

SECTION 4

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RFPs

The analysis shows that from 2018 to 2020, 39 of 226 (17.3%) RFPs mention PEA/TWP.¹² DRG and ENRM are the two sectors that lead in requiring PEA/TWP. Nineteen DRG RFPs required PEA/TWP, the top position in terms of absolute numbers. As a percentage of the total number of RFPs, ENRM surpassed DRG with 50% compared to 45% respectively, followed by Peace, Stability, and Transition and Economic Growth with 12% each (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. ENRM AND DRG RFPs ARE THE LEADING SECTORS FOR PEA/TWP

	PEA/TWP	Total	Percent
Environment and Natural Resources	7	14	50%
Democracy and Governance	19	42	45%
Economic Growth and Trade	6	49	12%
Peace, Stability, and Transition	3	26	12%
Agriculture and Food Security	1	17	6%
Education and Youth	1	17	6%
Health	1	25	4%
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	0	4	0%
Supply Chain Solutions	0	13	0%
Water, Energy, and Sustainable Cities	0	17	0%
TOTAL	39	226	17.3%

Source: Authors' analysis of their RFP database.

The Asia region led in the number of RFPs with PEA/TWP; LAC leads in the percentage of RFPs. The total PEA/TWP mentions in Asia is 13; LAC has nine. As a percentage of the total, LAC is first among the regions, with 43% of RFPs using PEA/TWP; Asia follows with 30% (see Table 3, next page).

¹² In only one case was thinking and working politically required and not political economy analysis.

TABLE 3. RFPS FROM ASIA AND LAC LEAD IN THE USE OF PEA/TWP

	PEA/TWP	Total	Percent
Latin America and Caribbean	9	21	43%
Asia	13	43	30%
West and Central Africa plus Haiti	5	22	23%
Middle East and North Africa	3	26	12%
Europe and Eurasia	4	38	11%
East and Southern Africa	2	24	8%
Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan	1	14	7%
Global Health Division	1	24	4%
Supply Chain Management	0	13	0%
TOTAL	39	226	16%

Source: Authors' analysis of their RFP database.

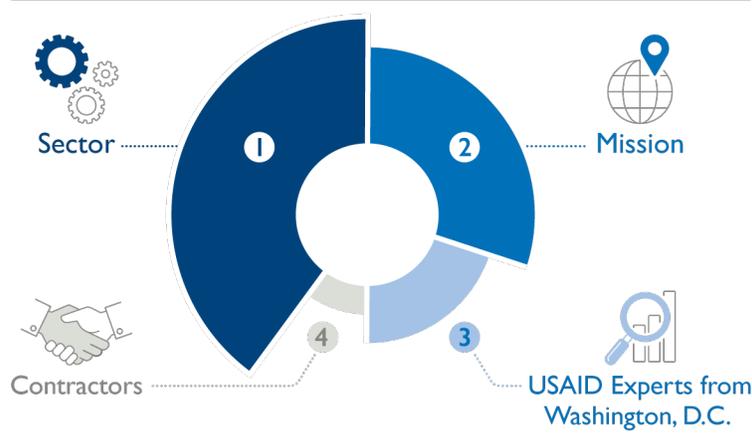
In general, sectors drove the use of PEA. Annex B provides a breakdown of statistics within regions, showing that, for the most part, DRG and ENRM in Asia and LAC dominate in the use of PEA.

SECTION 5

UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS DO RFPs INCLUDE PEAs?

To understand the conditions under which PEA was required in an RFP, the research team interviewed members of USAID design teams — the teams designated to design a particular project for USAID; often comprising USAID/Mission FSNs, FSOs, and USAID/Washington staff. Interviewees were asked who included a PEA in the solicitation and their motivation for doing so. By interviewing 20 CORs (of 29 in the list), the study identified several patterns.

DIAGRAM I. ACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PEA USE IN RFPs



There are four principal groups that influence the use of PEA in RFPs. First, PEA was clearly prominent in particular sectors, regardless of the Mission (see Diagram I, 1. Sector). As identified in the quantitative analysis, DRG and ENRM were two sectors that strongly emphasize PEA use. Our qualitative interviews with USAID/Washington staff identified a possible explanation for PEA use in these sectors: both have a history of focusing on politics and power. As interviewees described, DRG is seen as the political home at USAID. ENRM in USAID, on the other hand, focuses on power and decision-making in relation to natural resource management. For example, since 2002, ENRM has had an initiative and analytical framework entitled Nature, Power, and Politics.

Second, certain Missions led in the use of PEA in RFPs. Three showed strong and consistent efforts: Colombia, the Philippines, and Mexico. In 2014, the USAID/Colombia Mission was one of the first Missions for PEA at the DRG Center. DRG FSNs from the Mission participated in this PEA exercise, with the support of USAID/Colombia DRG FSOs. They did field work in several regions of Colombia and conducted interviews. Since then, DRG RFPs from the Mission routinely include a requirement for executing a

PEA.¹³ One interviewee described the process of getting buy-in for PEAs in the Colombia Mission: “Without an FSO pressing the issue and creating the space for FSNs to participate [in the PEA], it’s hard for them to make the argument to Mission leadership It was really important for [FSOs] to do the sausage-making.” He described the PEA experience: “The FSNs themselves were trained on conducting conversational interviews and then would go and conduct the interviews and then we would meet together to debate the findings. Those conversations were really difficult, but it helped engrain PEAs into the Mission staff’s approach to programming.” Because the Philippines and Mexico USAID/Mission staff were not interviewed for this study, it is not clear why they adopted PEAs to a larger extent than other Missions.

Third, USAID experts from Washington, D.C., occasionally promoted the inclusion of PEA in RFPs. These experts visited Missions to help them design a new project by providing technical advice based on their sectoral expertise. At times, these experts chose to include PEA in the activity design. In the interviews, two CORs appreciated this advice; in two other cases, however, the CORs were critical of the decision to include PEA. The latter two CORs had no experience with PEA and felt unable to properly support the PEA once the contractor executed it. In the end, they did not see the PEA as a success. One interviewee stated, “A colleague from Washington recommended the PEA. It wasn’t me, and I wasn’t super familiar with how to utilize it effectively.”

Fourth, in one case, the contractors were responsible for including PEA in an RFP during the RFI process. At the RFI stage, at least three contractors observed that, considering the complexity of working with the government, the contractor should do a PEA to better understand its actors, priorities, and dynamics. With this understanding, the contractor could develop mutual areas of cooperation and work in a productively. Although the PEA was included in the eventual contract, it was not complete during the research stage of this report, so it is unclear whether they succeeded.

¹³ Not all activities in Colombia or other leading Missions, however, use PEA in RFPs; instead, specific sectors — such as DRG and ENRM — within those Missions do.

SECTION 6

HOW ARE PEAs EXECUTED?

To understand how the PEAs were executed, the study focused on four areas: 1) the **motivations** for conducting PEAs, 2) the **timing** of PEA in the activity cycle, 3) the **staffing** of PEAs, and 4) the **content** of the PEAs.

THE MOTIVATIONS FOR CONDUCTING PEAs

The motivations for requiring a PEA may be grouped into two categories: to prepare the contractor for the political context and to inform strategy with context.

Of CORs who understood the design process, 80% observed that the design team included PEA in the RFP to advise the contractor on specific political¹⁴ context aspects. In these cases, the design team knew that the government was a challenge because of unpredictable politics and a strong influence on development efforts in the country.

Specific difficulties included a tense relationship between the government and USAID (or USAID DRG), frequent changes in government leadership, unofficial decision-makers who were not immediately apparent, and changes in unofficial approval processes. In one example, an activity launched around the time of a national election in a country; the project team needed to figure out how to work with the incoming government. In this example, the focus of the PEA was to identify and describe powerful individuals in the government, their policy priorities, and the best ways to collaborate with them (such as communication and networking). In another example, the PEA did not seek to interpret only the political environment, but also a new organization. The government had established a department in the activity's focus area; the PEA, therefore, sought to understand the political environment and how to work with the new department. One USAID COR stated, "This was a time where we really didn't know what was going on. The government consolidated all decision-making authority for approving government support from USAID through one new department. That means that the national planning department has a lot more power. At the time, we didn't know what this new department was and what it meant for the project."

Under the second, less common, category, the motivation for a PEA was to inform the larger, complicated strategic decisions on complex contextual factors. For example, a blend of PEA and technical analysis identified disaster relief policies and coalitions that a USAID activity should support. In another example, the PEA work aimed to develop ideas to promote local civil society that mobilized the population in support of democratic reform.¹⁵ Finally, a land-reform project found in its PEA that the government

¹⁴ The term "political" has different definitions. For this research, it is broad and relates to power and decision-making. It therefore includes organizations, powerful individuals, community decision-making, etc.

¹⁵ The two motivations for PEAs were not mutually exclusive. Most PEAs of the second motivation also served the first motivation. The same was not true in the reverse.

had little interest in pursuing reform; the private sector and its leverage, however, could be a catalyst to advocate for that reform (see box). The team shifted the program's strategy, informing the approach to the follow-on project to support business associations and their advocacy for land reform.

TIMING OF PEA EXECUTION

In all but one case, the timing of the PEA was intended for the inception phase in Year 1 of the activity. While many hoped that the PEA could be finished before a more concrete activity design was done, this happened only in two cases. In one of these, the COR and his USAID team advocated to the CO to allow a full year for learning before the more active work plan was put together. In the other case, the activity approach resembled an Office of Transition Initiatives activity, with an elevated level of flexibility and many small grants given.

In all other cases that had a formal PEA (some PEAs were informal, with no dedicated researcher or little to no documentation), the PEA took at least four months to complete, but closer to five or six months, and the results were too late to inform the Year 1 work plan. The lack of synchronization meant that the connection between findings and program implementation was tenuous (see box). The timing also impacted the quality of the report: COPs often stated that the team struggled to prioritize the research above other high-priority deliverables at startup.

The time required to conduct the PEA greatly increased because of the confusion about PEA. Interviews with CORs and COPs demonstrated a frequent frustration with PEA, mostly regarding its purpose, the questions to include, the process, and how it will be used. Regarding confusion on applying the results, one interviewee said (in regard to

“We’re engaging with the government on changing the [land reform] policy, but if there’s low appetite, what can we do? We can shift to working with the private sector to create business associations and help them push for reform. Another way is to work with businesses to introduce more energy-efficient irrigation systems, and that can be the link to the legislative change. While we’re still interested in pushing forward legislative reform, we’re looking at options that we can invest in if the government isn’t interested. We’re also investing in pilots on tariffs and hard infrastructure and efficient management to show the impacts it can have on business and then use that information to try and continue advocating for reform.”

— COR, USAID agriculture activity, interview

“It was a bit of connecting the cart before the horse, or maybe even connecting it to a different horse. If I were to do it again, it would be great to have more space and time to do the APEA [Applied PEA] just before work planning. I’m not sure how this feeds into program design, because your work plan and MEL plan need to be delivered within 45 days after the contract award, but it takes four to five months to conduct the APEA.”

— COP, justice activity, interview

contractor-led PEAs), “Missions [and contractors] struggle with applying findings. We can find it difficult to apply the results because the findings are often broad, whereas our programs are meant to achieve specific targets. The landscape level PEAs are not valuable. We need PEAs that are specific to the needs of the individual project, but that’s not common.” Another interviewee observed, “I believe it’s useful. I believe we need to be trained. It’s new, so I don’t feel like I’m getting the most of it. [It] would be great to learn more so we can give the proper guidance.”

In one case, a PEA was conducted in Year 4 of the activity to inform future strategy. This PEA identified the importance of particular forms of land reform and possible coalitions to support policy change. There are debates that emerged in interviews, however, about this timing for a PEA. Critics of strategy-focused PEAs that are completed by implementers to inform follow-on activities worry that they might unfairly privilege the current contractor. Supporters claim that, considering the busy schedule of designing an activity and the limited time in the inception phase, the best time for an in-depth PEA is toward the end of an activity.

STAFFING OF PEAs

TWP practitioners often debate the best staffing approaches for the PEA team. The main options are internal staff or external consultants, and national or international experts (or a mix of these).

TABLE 4. A VARIETY OF STAFFING APPROACHES TO THE CONTRACTOR PEA TEAM¹⁶

PEA Team	Number
Internal to contractor	6
External lead national consultant	4
External lead international consultant	5
No participation of contractor project staff	3
Unknown staffing	2
Total sample	17

The team found no clear relationship between the staffing and the perceived (from the perspective of the interviewees) quality or use of the PEA. Each staffing pattern appeared in the sample of PEAs; at least one PEA was considered successful using each staffing pattern and at least one PEA that was not considered successful.

One practice that was quite common among the contractor-led PEAs is the inclusion — to varying degrees — of the project team in the PEA process. The study found that, in the limited sample of 17 activities with PEAs, in all but three cases, the contractor project staff was involved in the PEA. This practice was valued because it allowed the team to participate in the learning process. This reinforced the idea that learning is integral to their work and taught them research concepts and skills that promote

¹⁶ Five PEAs had not yet been completed, so this number is less than the 20 total CORs interviewed.

ongoing learning. Involvement included training from international experts on concepts related to PEAs and in the research design process, though less often in the interview process. In contrast, USAID Mission staff are only occasionally directly involved in the research for USAID-led PEAs because of their workload, inability to take time away from the office, and a culture of outsourcing analytical work. (This assessment comes from the authors' experience, because USAID-led PEAs were not included in this study.)

CONTENT OF PEAs

The content of the contractor-led PEAs showed some interesting trends. First, as shown in the motivation description above and based on interviews and the reading of seven PEAs, contractors tended to ask the broad questions of Who and How, rather than the Why that is the focus of the PEA framework. In other words, Who are the main actors? What is their policy agenda? How does that overlap with the activity? What are the best ways to collaborate with them to get things done (e.g., With Whom should we communicate? What is the approval processes?)?

Second, according to the study's review of a limited sample of seven PEAs¹⁷ three followed the official USAID framework, using the questions that appear in the guidance. The analysis of these PEAs looked for the Why question and an analysis of PEA elements. Considering the priority questions described in interviews, the limited use of the official USAID framework was not surprising, because the framework focuses on answering the Why question. In other words, the analysis did not seek to explain political behavior in a search for causal relationships. Most PEAs were, instead, descriptive, covering the questions above. It is unclear whether the PEA authors actually read the official USAID PEA guide and what they learned if/when if they did.

A considerable number of PEAs (at least 45% of the 17 recent PEAs discussed in interviews) also focused on the subnational level and were valued for providing basic contextual information. During the conversations, it became clear that a subnational PEA was useful because contractor staff did not have extensive experience in each activity location. Subnational contexts tend to vary, and the contractor staff — who may be familiar with one or two locations outside of the capital — have much to learn about these variations. In contrast, national staff (and, sometimes, international staff) of a contractor were quite familiar with the national government in the capital because of work experience and their residence at that location.

The form of PEA reporting showed some variation. Most PEA reports, reported interviewees, comprised dozens of pages, while three were quite short or mainly verbal. One team chose not to draft a long PEA document because, if the document was leaked, they might be subject to reputational and personal risks because of subject-matter sensitivity; it chose to keep minimal documentation and held presentations and conversations with the project team and USAID.

¹⁷ Seven PEAs represent 70% of the COPs interviewed and 41% of the activities in our sample where a PEA was completed in the end.

SECTION 7

HOW ARE PEAs USED?

Overall, contractor COPs valued PEAs. No COP stated that the PEA was a waste of time and resources. The majority of CORs felt the same way, although five CORs (25% of those interviewed) thought the PEA was not useful. In each case, the CORs who had a negative PEA experience had no previous PEA experience and had not pushed to include PEA in the RFP. Their critique was that PEAs were expensive, time consuming, and yielded little new insight. One interviewee stated, “I’m not convinced that it was helpful. In terms of the staff/USAID, it’s a great learning tool, but sometimes it seems that the challenges are obvious (low capacity, low literacy in municipal government); I would question whether some of these things may not be obvious, but maybe it’s a misunderstanding on my part.” Another interviewee stated, “The office has been so short-staffed and funds have changed so much that we haven’t had the time to breathe. The PEA is additive, so we really haven’t had any time to do it.”

According to COPs and CORs, contractors mainly used PEAs to inform simple programming decisions and working methods. One decision related to prioritizing work areas that overlapped with critical stakeholders’ interests in the government. In other words, the PEA would identify the priorities of important government counterparts — either by asking them directly, asking knowledgeable third parties, or observing their actions — and see where these priorities overlap with the activity scope. This overlap would suggest a new activity work area. Second, in cases of subnational governments, the PEA could identify specific locations where the activity should work. Criteria for this decision included an overlap of priorities (similar to the previous point) or an easier work location (such as where a reform-minded executive had been elected, or senior officials had a track record of reform). In one example, a similar use of PEA was applied to the private sector. The PEA sought to determine which private sector partner was genuinely interested in reform. One interviewee stated, “PEA is one of my favorite instruments, and it’s proven to be truly valuable, both for the Mission and for the contractors. It helps us understand our different stakeholders, their interests, and sensitivities, especially in new areas we’re going to work or more sensitive areas.”

Contractors secondarily used PEAs to discover methods of working with the government. These PEAs revealed who’s who in the government: who is responsible for an action, who is informally making that decision. PEAs also detailed government processes; this informed tactics, such as in communication: the form to take with decision-makers, timing, methods, and other details. In another case, the activity goal was clearly political: to build capacity of civil society organizations to advocate to the government. This PEA analyzed effective ways to influence the government, also identifying civil society organizations’ needs.

The third, though less common, way that contractors used PEAs was to make complex strategic decisions. Interviewees reported that three of the 17 recent PEAs identified new work areas. In one example that was based on the Office of Transition Initiatives

model, the implementer conducted frequent, short local analyses on which to base its projects. The analyses helped when the activity pivoted to focus on building civil society.

PEAs also were used in several practical ways, though some interviewees argued against these. Several COPs valued PEAs for their ability to compile extensive background information in one place. Others thought this was a waste of time; one COP said, “That’s what Wikipedia is for.” Some COPs praised the PEA for gathering information on one document that could serve as a basis for discussion between the contractor and USAID. Others thought that the PEA process should not be formal and that producing a long, formatted document takes too much time and resources.

Many advocates for PEA argue that it will lead to an overall approach of TWP. While this was not a principal research focus, the conclusion was that doing a PEA did not necessarily lead to the strong incorporation of TWP. Instead, where the enabling conditions were strong, the study found that PEAs helped to shape ongoing political learning and adaptation in particular ways. Although the methodology was limited, the authors of this report asked COPs about the use of PEA, exploring the ways that it may be associated with TWP (decisions to adapt the activity, in particular). COPs often were not directly involved in the PEA, but they provided their views of how the PEA may have changed the activity’s TWP approach. This connection between PEA and TWP, of course, depends on the working definition of TWP; about this, there is confusion.¹⁸

The interviews yielded observations on this connection with some elements of TWP. First, there were four of 20 CORs interviewed in which there was ongoing, structured political learning happening, but ongoing learning was already planned. So these PEAs did not trigger future learning, but the baseline PEA informed and shaped future learning, including what questions needed answers. Second, adaptive management was a critical condition for a successful PEA (see Section 8), but this adaptiveness was already determined by the activity’s flexibility level. These PEAs seemed to inform project adaptations. This may indicate that the PEA led to a level of working politically, though more often for targeted tactical decisions: which government entity to work with and how to engage them, in contrast to the two projects that used PEA findings to inform strategic questions. Finally, it was difficult to find evidence on the scope of actors and stakeholders engaged by the activity, but the study found few examples that the PEA pushed the team beyond the usual suspects. Instead, in 14 of 17 cases, the PEA helped the activity communicate with the usual suspects (high-level government officials) and sometimes with other relevant senior officials. For example, a PEA on a public financial management activity directed the team to engage specific senior government officials to advance the agenda. The findings show little evidence that PEA drove a deep incorporation of TWP at the project management level; there may have been impacts on an individual level, however, especially among staff who conducted the PEAs.

¹⁸ See Laws, Ed, and Marquette, Heather. 2018. Thinking and Working Politically: Reviewing the Evidence on the Integration of Politics Into the Development Practice over the Past Decade. TWP Community of Practice paper.

SECTION 8

WHAT ARE THE ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE PEA?

This study found that the enabling conditions that give a PEA greater influence on an activity may be divided into two categories: 1) the personnel involved on the USAID and contractor sides, and 2) their relationship. The second category includes activity conditions, which often appear in the contract terms. These categories often cluster, with USAID personnel making upstream decisions that determine activity conditions.

ELEMENTS OF THE PERSONNEL THAT ENABLE EFFECTIVE PEAs

The enabling conditions category of personnel includes three elements:

1. *The TEC and the design team made critical upstream decisions about the activity regarding learning about politics and adaptation.* When these teams saw the essential value of these elements, they could encode it into the DNA of the activity through a techniques described below (elevating learning to an objective, selecting a COP or contractor team that values politics, emphasizing adaptation in the solicitation, and others). In addition, the COR's and CO's personalities and comfort with flexible programming during implementation can impact the project's ability to adapt. One interviewee noted, "Individual personalities determine flexibility. Program officers and COs are driving CLA because they have to sign off on the adaptations. A clearly articulated approach to adaptive management from the technical office helps, but even if people want to take this approach, they need to know how and have a flexible personality and not everybody does." Another interviewee stated, "If the implementer says that something really has shifted and they need to pivot, then it depends on the COR, how much flexibility is written into the contract, and the mechanism, etc. This is where there's a lot of variation in COR deciding whether or not to be flexible."
2. *A trusting relationship between USAID and the contractor — and the CO-COR-COP relationship in particular — determined the level of adaptation with which USAID was comfortable.* Trust helped USAID and contractors to move away from a predesigned activity with fixed deliverables and inspired an open sharing of disappointing results, information on difficult contexts, and the ability to adapt the activity. An interviewee stated, "In programs that have been really effective with TWP, it really only works for two to three years where the embassy has developed a relationship with the team leader, and they've developed sufficient trust to delegate decision-making. If there's no trust, it's not going to work. I think it goes program by program and post by post. The one major thing is trust in the team leader. That's the most important thing, and that can evolve over time."

3. *The contractor team, particularly the COP, focused on politics.* When the COP expressed appreciation for the role of politics in their activity or had PEA experience, the PEA appeared to run more smoothly and have a deeper influence on the activity. In cases in which the COP had no experience, there were large upfront time costs and logistical challenges in executing the PEA. The COP's experience and views derived partly from the emphasis on politics, USAID's adaptation and learning in the solicitation, and in the hiring process for the contractor project team.

ELEMENTS OF THE ACTIVITY CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE EFFECTIVE PEAS

Within activity conditions, the second category of enabling conditions, four characteristics emerged as important for supporting PEA:

1. *A long inception period for the activity allowed time for the PEA to inform the approach before serious actions were taken in the activity.* As mentioned above, when the PEA is required in the first year, it often was completed in conjunction with the first year Annual Work Plan, as well as with the logistical tasks associated with getting the activity off the ground. The frenetic pace and multiplicity of urgent priorities was not conducive to a learning exercise that will help to design the project. While it is uncommon, one project was able to extend the inception period so that the entire first year was dedicated primarily to learning, establishing learning systems, and designing the activity.
2. *The TEC required the contractor to have PEA experience or at least an appreciation for the importance of politics.* One TEC member claimed that a primary factor in their contractor selection was the contractor's demonstrated PEA experience and clear approach to learning.
3. *USAID and the contractor allowed for flexibility in contract deliverables (i.e., immediate output).¹⁹* The most restrictive contract in the sample was structured so that payments were made for specific deliverables, so many changes required a contract revision. The contractor found that USAID was hesitant to change deliverables. As a result, the contractor thought that few changes were possible, limiting the PEA usefulness (see box).
4. *USAID placed value on learning and adaptation in the solicitation.* In two RFPs, learning was elevated to an activity objective. This appeared to be effective at ensuring that the contractor dedicated a time and resources to learning and using that learning.

“There was really limited impact of the PEA because of the structure of the contract. It was very strict with very little space to adapt based on what we learned. The timing was also tough because of the strict fixed price deliverables.”

— Chief of party, USAID activity

¹⁹ It is quite possible that the recent moves toward results-based, flexible contracts would enable the uptake of PEA, but these contracts did not appear in our sample.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVED PEA IMPLEMENTATION

The findings detailed above led to three complex issues for PEA practitioners in USAID, contractors, and IPs to consider, because these issues have strong implications for effective PEA implementation. It is important to note that because of the methodological limitations of this study, these implications are not definitive, but instead simply ideas that were sparked from the analysis of the data.

COMPLEX ISSUE 1. SHOULD PEA PRACTITIONERS FOCUS PEA ON THE PARTICULAR QUESTION OF WHY OR EMBRACE A VARIETY OF POLITICAL ANALYSES?

The findings of this report point to a tension in the practice of conducting PEAs. On one hand, there is great interest among interviewed CORs and COPs in the political questions of Who, What, and How (i.e., Who are the main actors? What are their policy priorities? How do formal and informal processes work?) to engage for effective program implementation. The interviews and the reading of seven PEAs reveals these topics to be the focus; when COPs were asked about how they used the PEA, the answers to these questions yielded immediate benefits.

On the other hand, PEA guidance and many PEA practitioners are focused primarily on the Why question — Why do things work the way they do? — which can help to ensure that programming focuses on the right issues (including the root causes) and the critical stakeholders of a development challenge. The USAID PEA methodology is built around this approach. Based on the interviews and reading of the PEAs, this study found that the Why question did not feature very prominently. This was because many challenges detailed above — including the time and resources required to answer these deeper questions, as well as the Why question — often revealed broader strategic issues that the contractor had only limited authority to influence, rather than revealing tactical decisions within their influence.

There are a number of ways to address this tension. PEA practitioners could raise awareness of a PEA approach that follows official USAID guidance, the importance of the Why question, and addressing the Why in PEAs as much as possible. Another option is to embrace a variety of questions (including Who, What, How) and provide tools to address them, including revising the existing PEA guidance. Alternatively, PEA practitioners could prioritize rapid and iterative approaches to answering Why, such as everyday PEA.

Each of these approaches may be appropriate in different contexts. A PEA using official USAID guidance may be effective when the enabling conditions are strongest, i.e., there is significant buy-in from project and donor leadership, flexibility to adapt based on learning, and time and resources to invest in research. A rapid approach that focuses on

Who, What, and How may be appropriate when there is limited flexibility to adapt a project's approach and limited resources. An iterative approach to Why — such as everyday PEA, systems mapping, or social network analysis — may be appropriate when it is clear that Why is critical for program design, there is space for adaptability, but limited time and resources to invest in an explanatory PEA that follows official USAID guidance. PEA practitioners may want to adapt official PEA guidance to outline these options and the considerations more clearly for using different approaches to political learning.

COMPLEX ISSUE 2. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE TO STRENGTHEN THE ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR PEA (AND, THEREFORE, TWP)?

This report has found certain enabling conditions for making a PEA more effective (see Section 7), particularly personnel and activity conditions. Personnel at varying levels largely determine activity conditions (i.e., the degree to which TWP is integrated into project design and implementation is driven by personnel on USAID's design team, TEC, COR, COP, etc.).

A first observation from this research and the authors' professional experiences is that USAID Missions (design team, TEC, COR, etc.) have a strong influence over contractors. As a result, if USAID clearly prioritizes political learning and politically aware contractor leadership, the contractor will likely be responsive. However, establishing these conditions (such as locally led development and adaptive management) requires a variety of upstream systemic changes at USAID and often depends on the views of the USAID design team, TEC, and COR.

Several ideas emerged from this research to further develop TWP and the enabling conditions for effective PEA. The main implication is that PEA advocates may benefit from a cohesive strategy for influencing USAID Missions and IPs to establish TWP-enabling conditions. What follows are three steps that may be included in this strategy:

1. *Conduct a PEA-inspired study of USAID and IPs.* This study has identified the importance of USAID decision-makers and contractor leaders in asserting the value of learning about politics and adaptive management. A deeper understanding of these individuals' behavior and what factors explain whether they appear to value learning about politics and adaptive management may help create a cohesive strategy.
2. *Leverage existing initiatives.* CLA and localization offer an opportunity for more adaptive management to emerge. It also allows project teams and USAID to better integrate PEA to enhance this learning and ongoing strategic iteration to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives. While USAID guidance already links CLA and localization to PEA, further integration and support may advance TWP and provide these initiatives with a more specific and a wider variety of tools and approaches.
3. *Develop a strategy to build support for and improve the implementation of a TWP approach across Missions and IPs.* The ideas below, based on this study's findings, function as a starting point for a potential strategy.

TWP ENGAGEMENT

Further engagement from USAID/Washington, USAID/Mission, and contractor staff throughout the project lifecycle may effectively integrate the TWP process. It also may ensure sufficient team buy-in for TWP, effective implementation, and evidence gathering and dissemination after implementation. This engagement can come in many forms.

In exceptional cases where Mission staff have strong demand for TWP, USAID/Washington staff could be involved in the TWP process at the Mission level. This may include 1) engaging Mission staff before designing an RFP so that FSOs and FSNs have a strong understanding of and buy-in for a TWP approach (this could also include PEAs; see below); 2) integrating TWP throughout the RFP design phase rather than including a one-off PEA exercise; 3) engaging during proposal evaluation to identify IPs that will think and work politically; 4) assisting during TWP implementation (in whatever shape) to help the COR and FSN staff effectively engage in the process; and 5) supporting the adaptation of programming and building in TWP beyond an initial PEA.

The Colombia Mission showed that if USAID/Mission staff — especially FSNs — are directly involved in PEAs, they can establish the importance of politics and using PEA in adaptations (more so than through traditional training). Experiencing the PEA process — even just a few days of conducting interviews with a PEA expert and debating what the findings mean for programming — can influence the Mission staff's buy-in for TWP. This process can also move FSN staff to encourage TWP through future activities.

IPs could also engage USAID colleagues throughout the PEA process (and, more broadly, TWP) to build trust with their counterparts, especially the COR, and to create space for future adaptations. This may include inviting the COR or other Mission staff to PEA/TWP training, sharing preliminary findings throughout the process, and more. The key to building trust and effective engagement is consistent and frequent communication of ongoing learning. IPs also can make convincing arguments for a TWP approach during the RFI process, as this study found in one case, that leads to the Mission's incorporating TWP into the RFP. As well, PEA practitioners can effectively engage with USAID/Washington and USAID/Mission staff to instill good TWP habits in programming by elevating case studies, holding events and workshops with partners, and more.

It is possible that this increased engagement will lead to more effective implementation of TWP approaches, and, therefore, build an evidence base and collective learning (see below) that will further bolster support for the use of TWP (assuming the evidence shows increased impact from incorporating TWP approaches).

EVIDENCE AND CASE STUDIES

As referenced earlier, a key challenge to broader adoption of TWP is a lack of evidence of TWP's impact on reaching desired outcomes. A possible solution includes a systematic method to collect examples for broader dissemination. An option for this is to create a TWP case competition: In a template created by TWP advisors, Mission and contractor staff write four- to five-page case studies on their TWP use and its

programming impact. This will decentralize writing so it is not USAID/Washington dependent and will provide illustrative examples for easy access in a database. By increasing the number of notable examples through further engagement (described above) and incentivizing the creation of case studies based on those examples, TWP practitioners can make strong arguments for broader adoption, assuming strong messaging and communication of these examples (see below). Rigorous evidence of the TWP approach’s impact will be important. It may be advantageous for TWP practitioners to strategically invest, as possible, in rigorous analysis of impact beyond case studies (such as impact evaluations) to bolster the TWP evidence base.

MESSAGING AND COMMUNICATION

Once the evidence exists for TWP use, it must be effectively communicated with USAID/Washington, USAID/Mission, and IP staff to increase support and TWP incorporation. It will be important not to rely only on data, but to use engaging stories to share the data. This could be done by working on a communication strategy that targets influential actors, including USAID CORs and AORs, frequent COPs, specific USAID/Washington staff, and more. If the TWP Case Competition is created (because it is under consideration), it may be advantageous for all IPs and USAID staff to access the case studies, creating a decentralized platform for leaders to share their stories and build their own networks of TWP champions. Once this material is communicated and support is built, the virtuous cycle can continue in which USAID/Washington engages more teams, generates and communicates more evidence, and increases the number of supporters (see Diagram 2 for a very simplified model of this cycle).

DIAGRAM 2. SIMPLIFIED MODEL OF A TEAM-ENGAGEMENT CYCLE



COMPLEX ISSUE 3. HOW TO ENSURE LEARNING ABOUT POLITICS ACROSS TEAM AND ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES?

IPs from around the world are generating PEAs and other political knowledge in a variety of sectors. There also are many IP and USAID decision-makers who can benefit from this knowledge but do not have access. These decision-makers may be focused on everything from country-level strategies, activity design, proposal development or activity adaptation; each of these requires an understanding of politics.

The report suggests the following actions to improve political knowledge management:

DEVELOP GUIDANCE FOR SHARING PEA LEARNING

PEAs and related political knowledge should be shared widely. There are, however, proprietary knowledge, privacy, and reputational concerns. PEA practitioners may benefit from developing guidelines for sharing PEA knowledge and present examples of how the addressed these concerns. Simple steps — identifying and protecting proprietary information and establishing privacy standards — may facilitate this sharing.

INVEST IN NATIONAL PROJECT STAFF

National IP staff often move between USAID-funded projects and retain a nuanced understanding of the political dynamics where they live and work; this knowledge could be the focus of deep, long-term, country-specific TWP skills development. This proved to be a major benefit of contractor-led PEAs that had extensive participation from the IP team. Providing this capacity development intentionally while learning from and adapting based on national IP staff's knowledge may yield long-term benefits.

ENGAGE MISSION STAFF, ESPECIALLY FSNS

The report indicates that contractor-led PEAs may benefit by engaging Mission staff, FSNS in particular, early and often in the TWP process to benefit from their knowledge and involve them in the learning exercise. FSNS are probably the most constant individuals through each project cycle step, and they tend to remain in their jobs for extended periods. Missions, however, frequently outsource learning, which makes FSNS' direct participation in research difficult. The contractor-led PEA allows for Mission staff to engage in learning, even briefly. Beyond the COR, wider FSN engagement may be beneficial, because FSNS often have a complex understanding of the local political environment and so are an incredible asset for this type of analysis.

SHARE LEARNING ACROSS COUNTRIES AND REGIONS

Much political knowledge developed in a PEA applies to other in-country activities or similar regional activities. Sharing this knowledge among IPs is a low-cost, efficient way to develop a knowledge foundation. More immediately, simple PEA learning events for IPs would be valuable. TWP practitioners could share this information, e.g., through a learning contract across regions and topics to support basic PEA research and share across IP networks.

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Annex B. RFP Mentions of PEA/TWP in LAC, Asia, and DRG Overall

TABLE B1. PEA/TWP IS CONCENTRATED IN TWO SECTORS IN LAC RFPs

Practice Area	PEA/TWP	Total	Percent
Agriculture and Food Security	0	2	0%
Democracy and Governance	7	12	58%
Economic Growth and Trade	0	1	0%
Education and Youth	0	1	0%
Environment and Natural Resources	2	3	67%
Gender	0	1	0%
Peace, Stability, and Transition	0	1	0%
TOTAL	9	21	43%

Source: Authors' analysis of their RFP database.

The two sectors driving the use of PEA/TWP in LAC are DRG and ENRM. Of the nine RFPs with PEA/TWP, seven are DRG, and two are ENRM. However, not all LAC DRG activities have PEA/TWP: just seven of 13. Nearly all seven DRG projects would be considered governance projects.

TABLE B2. PEA/TWP IS FOUND IN A VARIETY OF SECTORS IN ASIA RFPs

Practice Area	PEA/TWP	Total	Percent
Agriculture and Food Security	0	1	0%
Democracy and Governance	5	9	56%
Economic Growth and Trade	2	12	17%
Education and Youth	1	2	50%
Environment and Natural Resources	3	5	60%
Peace, Stability, and Transition	2	4	50%
Water, Energy, and Sustainable Cities	0	9	0%
TOTAL	13	43	30%

Source: Authors' analysis of their RFP database.

In Asia, the use of PEA/TWP is more dispersed among sectors, though it is still led by DRG. There, along with DRG; Economic Growth; Education and Youth; ENRM; and Peace, Stability, and Transition use PEA/TWP.

TABLE B3. PEA/TWP IN DG RFPs

Region	PEA/TWP	Total	Percent
Asia	5	9	45%
East and Southern Africa	0	3	0%
Europe and Eurasia	2	12	17%
Latin America and Caribbean	7	12	54%
Middle East and North Africa	2	3	50%
West and Central Africa plus Haiti	3	3	100%
TOTAL	19	42	40%

DRG RFP use of PEA/TWP varies across regions, with LAC leading in number, but West and Central Africa plus Haiti with the highest portion. The table above shows PEA/TWP use across DG projects across regions. LAC has the highest number of DRG RFPs with PEA/TWP at seven, while all DRG RFPs in West and Central Africa plus Haiti RFPs include PEA/TWP.

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