

Activity Approval Memorandum (AAM)

Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 201

Full Revision Date: 10/28/2020

Responsible Office: PPL/SPP

File Name: 201mai\_102820

**I. Overview**

According to [**Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 201.3.4**](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/201), Operating Units (OUs) of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) must approve new activities through an Activity Approval Memorandum (AAM). OUs may approve a single activity or multiple, complementary activities (*e.g.*, under a project) through this memorandum.

**Annex 1** provides an illustrative AAM template that OUs may customize to meet their needs. Alternatively, OUs may develop their own templates as long as they conform with the AAM functions described in **Section II** below. In all cases, OUs should ensure that their AAM guidance is streamlined and efficient to minimize lead times.

Unless determined otherwise, a Mission Director, Assistant Administrator, or Director of an Independent Office is responsible for approving the AAM. These officials may delegate this authority to the extent appropriate (*e.g.*, to an Office Director or Project Manager for AAMs below a certain threshold).

# **II. Functions of the AAM**

The AAM has several functions:

1. Depending on the mechanism type, the AAM typically authorizes the OU to proceed with releasing a solicitation or finalizing an agreement.
2. The AAM provides a way for senior management to review and approve an Activity Description for the proposed activity. Depending on the mechanism (contract, grant, cooperative agreement, etc.), the Activity Description could be a Statement of Work (SOW), Statement of Objectives (SOO) Program Description (PD), Concept Note that emerges from a co-creation process, or language the OU will incorporate into an agreement, among other examples. For assistance awards, OUs also may opt to approve an earlier Concept Paper in lieu of an SOW or PD.
3. For USAID’s field Missions, the AAM documents how the activity will advance results set forth in a Project Development Document (PDD) and/or Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), as applicable.
4. The AAM confirms that the OU has satisfied, or will satisfy, the core pre-obligation requirements listed in the illustrative AAM below before obligating funds. These requirements reflect general provisions based in statute, regulation, or other type of legal authority.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**ANNEX 1: AAM TEMPLATE**



Month DD, YYYY

**ACTION MEMO FOR MISSION DIRECTOR/ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR/INDEPENDENT OFFICE DIRECTOR/OTHER WITH DELEGATED AUTHORITY [FULL NAME]**

**FROM:** [Full Name], Director, [Technical] Office

**SUBJECT:** Activity Approval Memo for the [Name] Activity

**Recommendation**

That you approve the [“Name”] activity described below and in the accompanying documentation. The purpose of this activity would be to [insert purpose, no more than one sentence].

This activity would be a [type of mechanism; *e.g.*, contract, grant, cooperative agreement] awarded through [type of solicitation process; *e.g.*, full-and-open competition]. The total estimated contribution from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to the [Name] activity would be [$XX], with an expected life of [number] years, beginning on or around [expected start date]. [Name of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] would fund the activity by using [funding type or account].The [Name of Unit within Name of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] would manage the funds. [Office] expects an initial obligation of [$XX] for this award by using funds from Fiscal Year (FY) [20XX] in FY [20XX].

Approve\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Background/Discussion**

*This section should be no more than one page and address the following:*

1. *The core development problem the activity would address;*
2. *How the OU identified the design need and, if applicable, how it would build on past activities, including whether this activity would be a follow-on;*
3. *How the OU’s Design Team conducted the analytic design process, including the sources of evidence used.*

**Summary Activity Description**

*This section should summarize key elements of the Activity Description. Generally, this section should be no more than one paragraph.*

**Linkages**

*This section should include the following:*

* *For Missions, one short paragraph about how the proposed activity would advance results set forth in a Project Development Document (PDD) and/or Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), as applicable.*
* *For Missions and Washington OUs, one short paragraph about how the activity would support the Agency’s key Strategies* *or policies, such as the Journey to Self-Reliance, USAID’s* [*Acquisition and Assistance Strategy*](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/AA-Strategy-02-04-19.pdf)*, and the* [*New Partnerships Initiative*](https://www.usaid.gov/npi)*.*

**Management**

*This section should identify the primary office that would manage the activity, and if possible, the Contracting/Agreement Officer’s Representative (COR/AOR) (by position, title) who would have overall responsibility for day-to-day oversight of the activity.*

**Pre-Obligation Requirements**

*The AAM package must confirm that the OU has satisfied, or will satisfy, the core pre-obligation requirements—as shown herein—before obligating funds. These requirements reflect general provisions based in statute, regulation, or other type of legal authority. OUs may address these requirements through short narratives, as shown below. Alternatively, OUs may opt to attach a checklist as an annex to this memorandum to confirm they have satisfied, or will satisfy, these requirements.*

*Note: OUs may document their compliance with other pre-obligation requirements in this memorandum, or through a simple checklist separate from the AAM (see* [***Additional Help: List of Pre-Obligation Requirements for New Activities***](https://programnet.usaid.gov/resource/list-pre-obligation-requirements-new-activities)*).*

*See illustrative language below:*

*\*\*\**

The status of the pre-obligation requirements for the [Name] activity appears below. [Name of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] will obligate no funds for this activity until it has satisfied all applicable pre-obligation requirements and documented this compliance in its records.

Budget: [Name of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] completed [a/n Independent Government Cost-Estimate (IGCE)/ Budget] that provides a reasonably firm estimate of the cost of this proposed activity to the U.S. Government.

Congressional Notification: Congressional Notification # XX, which expired without objection on [Date], notified the use of funding from [FY XXX] for this activity.

Funding Availability: The table below reflects the current funding available for the [Name] activity. Funds from [FY 20XX] in the amount of [$XX] are expected to be available for the initial year of implementation.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Fiscal Year 20[XX]** | **Fiscal Year 20[XX]** | **Fiscal Year 20[XX]** | **Fiscal Year 20[XX]** | **Fiscal Year 20[XX]** |
| [Funding Type/ Account] | [$XX] | [$XX] | [$XX] |  |  |
| [Funding Type/ Account] | [$XX] | [$XX] | [$XX] |  |  |
| Total | [$XX] | [$XX] | [$XX] |  |  |

Gender Analysis: [Name of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] completed the mandatory gender analysis described in [Chapter 205](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/205) of the Automated Directives System (ADS) as part of the design process for [Name] [project/activity], and incorporated the key findings of the analysis into the design as appropriate. [*Include a couple examples of key findings and how the OU incorporated them into the design and/or solicitation as applicable. Remember that an OU may use a third-party or previously completed analysis to satisfy this requirement.*]

Environmental Compliance: *This sub-section must state the current status of the environmental-compliance assessment(s) that cover this activity per ADS* [*Chapters 204*](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/204) *and* [*201.3.4.5*](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/201)*, and* [*Part 216 of Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations*](https://www.usaid.gov/environmental-procedures/laws-regulations-policies/22-cfr-216) *(CFR). Statements could be to the effect of the following, depending on the unique circumstances of the activity:*

*If the Agency has approved a threshold determination or Request for Categorical Exemption:*

* The Agency has approved [a/n Initial Environmental Examination (IEE)/Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE)/Environmental Assessment (EA)] for this activity, with concurrence from the Bureau/Independent Office Environmental Officer. *If applicable:* The threshold determination was [*fill in determination*]. *If the threshold decision was a Negative Determination with Conditions or a Positive Determination:* The [COR/AOR], in consultation with the Mission Environmental Officer (MEO), will oversee the implementation of the requirements in the [IEE/EA]. In addition, the MEO shall approve a Plan for Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring (EMMP) before major programmatic implementation begins.

*If there was not sufficient information on which to complete a meaningful environmental review during the process of designing a project or activity, the OU will define the activity further during the solicitation process:*

* The Agency has deferred a threshold determination for this activity, with concurrence from the Bureau/Independent Office Environmental Officer, until the pre-award stage. Until the Agency approves a threshold determination, [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] shall make no award. The Planner will work with the Mission Environmental Officer (MEO) to complete all environmental-compliance documentation in a timely manner. The designated [COR/AOR] will oversee the implementation of these requirements, as applicable.

*If there was not sufficient information upon which to complete a meaningful review during the process of designing the project or activity, and the OU will define the activity further post-award:*

* The Agency has deferred a threshold determination for this activity, with concurrence from the Bureau/Independent Office Environmental Officer, until the post-award stage. Until the Agency approves a threshold decision, major implementation may not occur. The designated [COR/AOR] will work with the Mission Environmental Officer (MEO) to complete all environmental-compliance documentation in a timely manner. The [COR/AOR] will oversee the implementation of these requirements, as applicable.

Climate-Risk Assessment: *This sub-section must state the current status of the climate-risk assessment that covers the activity according to ADS* [*201.3.4.5*](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/201) *and ADS* [*201mal*](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/201mal)*, and* [*Executive Order 13677*](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/23/executive-order-climate-resilient-international-development)*. Statements could be to the effect of the following, depending on the unique circumstances of the activity:*

*If the OU completed a climate-risk assessment during the design of the project or activity:*

* [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] completed the mandatory climate-risk assessment as part of the process of designing [Name] [project/activity]. The assessment identified [low, moderate, and/or high] climate-related risks associated with this activity. *If the assessment identified moderate or high risks:* This assessment was part of the approved [insert environmental-compliance document (*e.g.*, Initial Environmental Examination [IEE])], and [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] [has integrated/will integrate] measures to manage climate risk into the [Scope of Work; Environmental-Mitigation and Monitoring Plan; or Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan, *etc*.]. The designated [COR/AOR] will oversee the implementation of the requirements. *If the assessment identified low risks:* [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] included the assessment in the approved [insert environmental-compliance document (*e.g.*, IEE)], uploaded into the [Agency Secure Image and Storage Tracking System](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/Agency_Secure_Image_and_Storage_Tracking_System_ASIST_PIA_Summary_April_24_2017.pdf) (ASIST). As the assessment identified low risks, no additional measures to mitigate climate risk are required.

*If there was not sufficient information upon which to complete a meaningful assessment during the process of designing the project or activity, the OU will define the activity further during the solicitation process or post-award:*

* [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] has deferred the mandatory climate-risk assessment, with concurrence from the Bureau/Independent Office Environmental Officer, until [the pre-award stage or the post-award stage]. Until [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] approves an assessment, [an award may not be made/major implementation may not occur]. The [Planner/COR/AOR] will work with the Climate Integration Lead to complete the assessment in a timely manner. The [COR/AOR] will oversee the implementation of these requirements, as applicable.

*If a climate-risk assessment is not required because the CDCS-level risk-screening (or for Washington, a higher-level climate-risk assessment) did not identify any moderate or high risks for the relevant Development Objective (DO), Intermediate Result (IR) and/or sector:*

* An activity-level climate-risk assessment is not required because the [CDCS] did not identify any moderate or high risks for the [name] [Development Objective (DO)/Intermediate Result (IR)/sector]. [NAME of Mission/Bureau/Independent Office] documented this determination in the approved [insert environmental-compliance document (*e.g.*, IEE)].

**Authority**

According to [ADS 103](http://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/100/103), as [Mission Director/Assistant Administrator/Independent Office Director] for [[USAID/Country]/[Washington Bureau or Independent Office]], you have delegated authority for all aspects related to “program implementation” and “strategic planning” for [Mission/Bureau/Independent Office]. Therefore, you have the authority to approve this Action Memorandum.

Attachments:

Tab 1—Activity Description (*e.g.*, an SOW, SOO, PD, Concept Note, language to

incorporate into an agreement, etc*.*)

**CLEARANCE PAGE FOR ACTIVITY APPROVAL MEMO for the [Name] activity**

**Drafter**: [Full Name], [Office/Title], [Phone Number]

*The list of clearances prior to Mission Director/Assistant Administrator/designee approval is at each OU’s discretion. However, it’s highly recommended that this list be efficient or streamlined to facilitate the activity’s expeditious review and approval.*

**Clearances Clearance Status Date**

[Technical Office]:[JDoe]

[Program Office]:[JDoe]

[OAA]:[JDoe]

[RLO/GC]:[JDoe]

[DMD/DAA]:[JDoe]

**If applicable, Info-Copy**

[OFM]:[JDoe]

1. OUs may document their compliance with other pre-obligation requirements through a simple checklist separate from the AAM (see [**Additional Help: List of Pre-Obligation Requirements for New Activities**](https://programnet.usaid.gov/resource/list-pre-obligation-requirements-new-activities)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)