

DT Global US Sub-Partner Engagement Best Practices

This guidance document outlines recommended practices for engaging with subcontractors and subgrantees (subs), with particular emphasis on small businesses (SBs) and local organizations. These best practices aim to foster strong, sustainable partnerships that extend beyond a single bid, recognizing the unique challenges and limited resources smaller organizations often face. While these best practices may need to be adapted to specific circumstances, they provide a strong foundation for effective collaboration and should be adhered to whenever feasible.

1. Set clear and realistic expectations early.

Establishing and communicating expectations with sub-partners at the outset provides a strong foundation for collaboration—aligning roles, responsibilities, and resources to foster an effective and equitable partnership.

- **Be clear about intent.** Clearly communicate whether a discussion is exploratory or intended to lead to a partnership. Avoid committing prematurely unless confident of the need and fit.
- **Honor commitments.** Once a decision to engage a sub-partner is made (e.g., through a Pre-Teaming Agreement), maintain that commitment unless unavoidable circumstances arise.
- **Specify our vision for the partner's scope and budget.** Define the subcontractor's scope and budget early in discussions. While it won't be possible to devise a full budget at this stage, work with your Cost and Pricing (C&P) Lead to try and identify a budget ceiling which can be shared up front to align expectations and deter unrealistic requests.
- **Clearly define the partner's expected proposal development contributions.** Specify timelines for inputs, deliverables (e.g., narratives, budgets, technical inputs), and engagement levels. Recognize that smaller, local organizations may have limited capacity. Offer tailored guidance, resources, and support as needed to help them meet our expectations without undue strain. Aim to match responsibilities to the subcontractor's capacity and role, fostering a supportive and equitable proposal development environment.
- **Carefully consider any request for exclusive commitment.** Local partners should generally not be pushed to be exclusive on any proposal (in fact, USAID directly encourages them not to be). It may not make business sense for SB partners (who often need to win work in their sector to survive, and where exclusivity lowers their percentage chance to win) to commit to only one team. For more guidance on exclusivity discussions, please see an upcoming memo which will further detail these decision points.

2. Actively collaborate with partners during proposal development.

Engage sub-partners as active contributors during the proposal process, recognizing their expertise and unique value.

- **Engage consistently.** Maintain regular communication with sub-partners after signing a Pre Teaming Agreement—especially during long pre-solicitation periods. Regular check-ins help reinforce the partner's role in the team and ensure alignment.
- **Invite active contribution to drafts.** As appropriate, involve sub-partners in drafting relevant sections of the proposal where they bring unique expertise or perspectives (such as technical narratives, staffing plans, or budgets). Encourage their input as subject matter experts to ensure their work is accurately represented.
- **Enable participation in proposal reviews.** As appropriate, include sub-partners in proposal reviews (e.g., color team reviews or red team discussions), to ensure their feedback strengthens the proposal's technical accuracy and responsiveness to donor priorities.
- **Collaborate on recruitment.** Leverage sub-partners' local networks and expertise to identify and recommend candidates for Key Personnel or long-term staff roles. Recognize their contributions as integral to building a competitive proposal team.

3. Manage proposals transparently.

Ensure clarity, transparency, and fairness in how sub-partners are engaged throughout the proposal process.

- **Share information timely.** Promptly distribute proposal materials and sub-partner packets to provide them with ample time to prepare their response. Include clear instructions and timelines to streamline their contributions.
- **Issue appropriate work assignments.** Align proposal responsibilities with the sub-partner's assigned role and capacity. Avoid overburdening sub-partners with tasks beyond their scope or expertise, unless exceptional circumstances warrant it.
- **Collaborate on budget adjustments.** If adjustments to the sub-partner's budget become necessary, inform them as soon as possible. Clearly communicate the required reduction amount and rationale and engage the sub-partner in identifying how and where the budget can be modified, ensuring that their priorities and constraints are considered.
- **Share relevant proposal sections after submission.** Ensure that the sub-partner understands how they and their role on the project are represented. Additionally, share the final sections of the cost volume specific to the sub-partner (e.g., sub's budget, cost notes). This practice promotes transparency and trust while allowing for feedback to inform future improvements.
- **Document partner role(s) as part of the handover memo.** Clearly define the sub-partner's responsibilities and contributions in the proposal handover memo to ensure a seamless transition and proper alignment with post-award responsibilities.
- **Recognize partner contributions after submission.** This is particularly important if they played a significant role. Aspects can include sending a thank-you note, specifically mentioning the partner's input during team debriefs, or sharing any positive feedback received from stakeholders.
- **Ask for feedback.** Solicit the sub-partner's opinions about their experience with the proposal development process and share any recommendations for improvement with the wider BD team.

4. Maintain engagement after submission and during the transition to award.

Proactively communicating and thoughtfully engaging with sub-partners after proposal submission is critical to fostering trust and strengthening the partnership (regardless of the award outcome). These practices ensure transparency, recognize contributions, and lay the groundwork for future collaboration.

- **Communicate consistently during the award decision period.** Regularly follow up with sub-partners during the waiting period for award decisions. Provide updates (new information, timelines, or developments) and ask the partner what they may be hearing.
- **Provide timely notification of decisions.** Promptly tell partners about award an outcome, whether it is a win or loss. For wins, ensure communication adheres to any embargo requirements, and for losses, provide clear and constructive feedback where possible.
- **Share post-award debriefs:** Summarize what worked well, challenges encountered, and feedback from the funder or proposal evaluators. Use this opportunity to highlight the sub-partner's contributions and identify areas for future collaboration.
- **Recognize and Express Appreciation:** Send personalized thank-you notes or other forms of acknowledgment to sub-partners who played significant roles in the proposal process, reinforcing the value of their contributions and encouraging continued collaboration. If the proposal was successful and the sub-partner had a large role in the bid, seek to engage them in post-award celebrations.
- **Effectively hand over to Startup Teams and PMUs.** Ensure a smooth transition of sub-partner roles to implementation teams by addressing three key elements:
 - Confirm that startup team leaders and the PMU Director have reviewed the handover memo, proposal, and sub-partner Teaming Agreement and budget.
 - Facilitate a meeting with the startup team and PMU to discuss sub-partner roles and expectations
 - Effectively transition ongoing communications with sub-partners to the PMU, ensuring they are well-positioned to maintain strong relationships moving forward.

For instructions on choice of sub-contract agreement, indirect rates, and partner organizational capacity, please confer with your C&P colleague on the capture/bid.