

Announcement
Establishment of CO Forum
September 24, 2002

I'm pleased to announce the establishment of a website that will serve as the Contracting Officers Forum (CO Forum) for professionals in our field to share information and best practices, trouble-shot and innovate in dealing with our day-to-day challenges.

The website, located at <http://forum.usaid.net/forums/co>, is internal to USAID. Contract specialists can automatically become members of this Forum by visiting the website and registering with an "@usaid.gov" e-mail address.

Once in the CO Forum you will find these functionalities:

- Place for topical discussions (issues, new ideas, information exchanges)
- Archives of discussions, including a summary or abstract for future reference.
- Place to share files, including comments, samples, best practices, etc.
- E-mail notification of messages on "watch topics," if desired by the member.
- Live chat discussions
- Directory of members with limited information on position & post.
- Facilitators to assure discussion is meaningful and adequately archived for future reference.
- Tracking of visitors and responses.

Why do we need such a forum? There is a pressing need for contract specialists to collaborate more effectively with their colleagues. More specifically, we are faced with the following challenges:

- Shortage and turnover of COs and contract negotiators;
- Need to mentor NEPs and new FSNs ;
- Sharing of quality examples with informal peer review;
- Finding a balance between standardization and improvisation;
- Trouble-shooting, especially on urgent actions;
- Interpretation and implication of latest policy changes;
- Peer review of best practices;
- Cross-fertilization;
- Sharing of training materials;
- Peer recognition;
- Support informal learning among practitioners;
- Building organizational memory.

In short, we want to develop a community of contracting professionals in USAID who are willing to support each other in sharing their knowledge.

We encourage you to participate. Obtaining membership is easy, automated and completely voluntary. Once inside the CO Forum, you can pose a question to the Forum, or research your issue in archived files or responses. As the community establishes itself, you can rely on others to provide useful and timely input to your questions. You can also provide your insights and suggests to issues raised by others. Keep in mind as you use the Forum that it does not substitute for consultation with OP/Policy, GC or your RLA.

The Forum is sustained by its members. It's run by the rank-and-file. Nobody is assigned specifically to the Forum to make it work. Success depends on us. You may participate on a frequent and regular basis, or simply monitor the site for useful ideas or interesting discussions. The focus of the Forum will be to serve as a source of valuable knowledge.

We generally know each other, being a relatively small and specialized community within USAID. Such familiarity should create a comfort level that invites candid discussions. Like a neighborhood café, or the office cafeteria, the Forum should become a place where you have the freedom to ask for candid advice, share opinions and try your half-baked ideas without repercussion. It's a place where you can visit to hear about the latest policy, exchange technical gossip or just chat about your favorite contracting stories. As a community member you can offer advice or view suggestions from others with no obligation to take it.

The site has a number of facilitators who will help assure that the discussion is productive and appropriate. They include Jim Dunlap, John May, Tom Stephens, Anne Quinlan, Diane Howard and Mike Walsh.

The Forum is open and ready to serve our CO community.