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DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM COUNTRY ASSESSMENT (DECA) TOOLKIT

A How-To Guide for USAID Missions

JANUARY 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FIGURES AND TABLES

ACRONYMS

AAR	after-action review		ITR/T	USAID Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub/Technology Division
AI	artificial intelligence		ITU	International Telecommunication Union
CDCS	USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy		LOE	level of effort
CII	critical internet infrastructure		MIS	management information system
DECA	Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment		MNO	mobile network operator
DDI	USAID Bureau for Democracy, Development, and Innovation		MSME	micro, small, and medium enterprise
DFS	digital financial services		NGO	non-governmental organization
DO	Development Objective		OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
DOC	Development Outreach and Communications		OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
5G	fifth generation		OFM	Office of Financial Management
GSB	Government Services Bus		PDD	project development document
HRIA	human rights impact assessment		POC	point of contact
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers		RLO	Resident Legal Officer
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights		SOO	Statement of Objectives
			SOW	Statement of Work
ICT	information and communications technology		STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
IGF	Internet Governance Forum		TVWS	TV white space
iNGO	international non-governmental organizations		UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IR	Intermediate Result		UTRAMS	Unified Technical Request and Mission Support
ISP	internet service provider		USG	U.S. Government
			WTO	World Trade Organization

About this Toolkit

The Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment (DECA) Toolkit is a step-by-step guide designed to help USAID Missions conduct high-quality research that will directly inform Mission strategic and programmatic decisions for digital development interventions.

The DECA is the flagship initiative of the USAID Digital Strategy. It identifies opportunities and risks in a country's digital ecosystem to help the development, design, and implementation of USAID's strategies, projects, and activities. The DECA informs USAID Missions and other key decision-makers about how to better understand, work with, and support a country's digital ecosystem. This Toolkit is designed to provide Mission staff with the tools and information needed to conduct this assessment. Mission engagement is critical to ensuring a successful product. As broad research technical capacity is critical to cover the breadth of the DECA research framework, technical assistance through USAID's Innovation, Technology and Research Hub (ITR) in the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI) can be requested to fill any gaps.

Based on experience with the initial DECA pilots, the Digital Strategy Team recommends that USAID Missions work with an external Research Team to conduct a DECA. This Toolkit uses acquisition as a basis for obtaining an external Research Team and conducting a DECA using an external Research Team. It is important to engage and work with your cognizant Contracting Officer (CO) as early in the process as possible. The CO will help you craft your requirements for the Research Team and the DECA into a procurement modality. To that end, this Toolkit does not replace a Statement of Objectives (SOO), Statement of Work (SOW), Performance Work Statement, or other statement of requirements or description of the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the DECA. Mission staff can draw on the material in this Toolkit when crafting the requirements for an external Research Team to conduct a DECA; this document is a guide and not a template that can be copied and used in any specific statement of requirements.

This Toolkit is not intended to make recommendations about the design, procurement, or operation of U.S. Federal Information Systems. As explained in Section 1 (Introduction), the DECA is intended to enhance USAID Missions' understanding of the country-level digital environment in which they work. Missions should contact the Bureau for Management/Office of the Chief Information Officer (M/CIO) for any questions about USAID's internal information technology (IT) systems.

This Toolkit was developed based on lessons learned during four pilot DECAs conducted in partnership with USAID Missions in Colombia, Kenya, Nepal, and Serbia between winter 2019 and fall 2020. In preparation for introducing and promulgating the DECA across the Agency, the Digital Strategy team carried out in-person and virtual assessments and tested and refined research processes and tools. The resulting best practices are detailed in this Toolkit.

ROADMAP FOR THE TOOLKIT

Section 1

Introduction provides an overview of the DECA purpose and process.

Section 2:

Step-by-step guide to managing a DECA describes the Mission's recommended role and responsibilities throughout the DECA, providing guidance on how to plan for, procure, and manage a DECA.

Section 3:

Research guide provides direction for executing a DECA, including guidelines, best practices, and templates for each DECA phase: planning and desk research, interviews, analysis, and report writing.

Appendices A through F provide links to the Digital Ecosystem Framework, published DECA reports, and the DECA templates. It also includes a digital ecosystem glossary and illustrations of the DECA timeline.

TIPS AND TRICKS:

- Each subsection opens with a box detailing the purpose, relevant team members and their roles, and timing in each subsection. Use these boxes to understand what is needed to execute each task.

- Each subsection closes with a box listing relevant resources/templates and a description of how and when to use them. Use these boxes to easily access resources.

- Call-out boxes throughout the Toolkit share quick tips and tricks. Use these boxes as small reminders.

KEY:

EMAIL/PHONE TOUCHPOINTS
(Mission, technical reviewers, interviewees)

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL DECAS

QUICK TIPS

CAUTION

SECTION 1:
Introduction

Source: Melinda Donnelly for USAID/Oceans

1.1 BACKGROUND: USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY

Digital technology is becoming more accessible and has brought the promise of enormous benefits from digitalization. These tools and services can advance freedom and transparency, generate shared prosperity, strengthen inclusion, and inspire innovation. They also present significant risks to privacy and security through surveillance, censorship, and other forms of digital repression.

USAID'S Digital Strategy 2020–2024 charts an agency-wide vision for development and humanitarian assistance in the world's rapidly evolving digital landscape. The Strategy's goal is to achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian assistance outcomes.

To carry out this vision, USAID's Digital Strategy has two mutually reinforcing objectives: 1) improve measurable development and humanitarian assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology in USAID's programming and 2) strengthen the openness, inclusiveness, and security of country-level digital ecosystems. One of the Digital Strategy's flagship initiatives is the Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment (DECA), which is primarily focused on Objective 2.

— RESPONSIBLY USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY —

OBJECTIVE 1

Improve measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology in USAID's programming

USAID   Partners

— STRENGTHEN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS —

OBJECTIVE 2

Strengthen openness, inclusiveness, and security of country digital ecosystems.

Civil Society   Partner Governments   Private Sector

1.2 WHY THE DECA MATTERS

The rapid development and adoption of digital technology are transforming how people worldwide access information, goods, and services. Digital development is quickly becoming a necessary part of development, more broadly. Therefore, USAID Missions must understand the potential opportunities and risks associated with digital technologies or risk unintended consequences in programming. The DECA provides Missions with a basic understanding of how the digital revolution is playing out in their partner country.

The DECA is designed to educate Mission staff and inform strategy, programming, and processes. It introduces digital-centric topics like digital connectivity, internet freedom, and digital trade while also highlighting technology considerations for more traditional USAID sectors like gender, workforce development, literacy, and governance.

Digital investments can have a multiplier effect on USAID programs. They can also expose USAID programs and participants to significant risks. Mission staff must understand both the opportunities and risks that exist in a partner country ecosystem to make informed decisions.

The DECA also introduces Missions to actors in the ecosystem and raises awareness of other stakeholders' existing efforts. This creates opportunities for new partnerships and collaborations, which can amplify USAID's work.

1.3 DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT IS A DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM? USAID's Digital Strategy explains that a digital ecosystem comprises stakeholders, systems, and an enabling environment that, together, empower people and communities to use digital technology to access services, engage with each other, and pursue economic opportunities. Building on this concept, the Agency created a framework that refines the ecosystem into a practical structure for development practitioners. USAID frames a country's digital ecosystem around **three pillars**, each with various subtopics, as outlined in **FIGURE 1**. For deeper dives on each topic, click on the header link. For more information about the digital ecosystem, see **APPENDIX A**.

FIGURE 1: Elements of a digital ecosystem
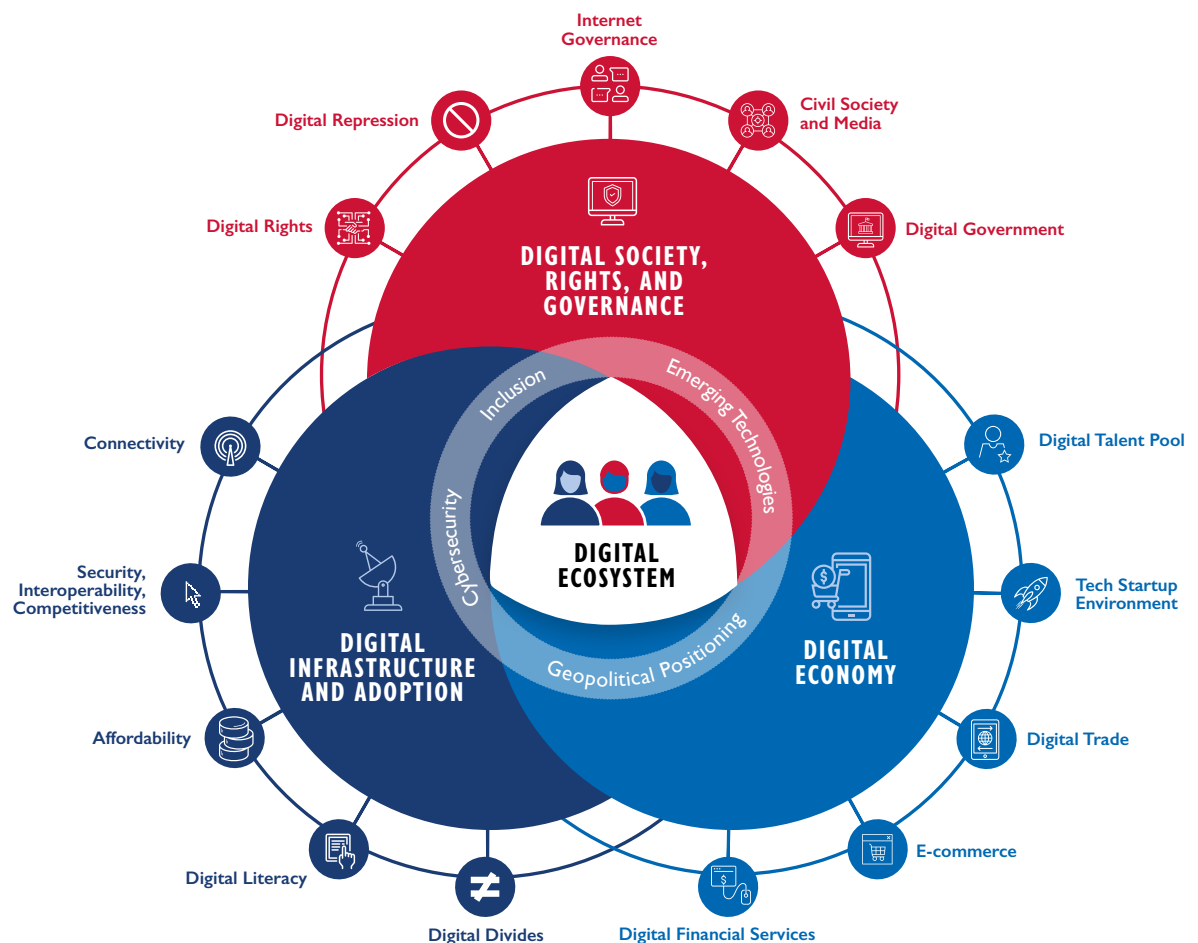
PILLAR TOPIC: BRIEF DEFINITION

Pillar I: Digital Infrastructure and Adoption:

Connectivity Infrastructure Foundational infrastructure like fiber-optic cables and towers.

Security, Interoperability, and Competitiveness Conditions for a healthy telecommunications market.

Affordability The costs of digital access.

Digital Literacy The ability to access, manage, understand, and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and platforms for participation in economic, social, and political life.

Digital Divides Disparities in access and use, related to gender, race, ethnicity, economic status, refugee status, geography, disability, sexual orientation, age, or other factors.

Pillar II: Digital Society, Rights, and Governance:

Digital Rights Fundamental human rights online.

Digital Repression The use of technology to violate human rights.

Internet Governance The development and application of principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the internet.

Civil Society and Media Organizations working to expose digital repression and advocate for digital rights.

Digital Government Online delivery of government services, management of government processes, and engagement with the public.
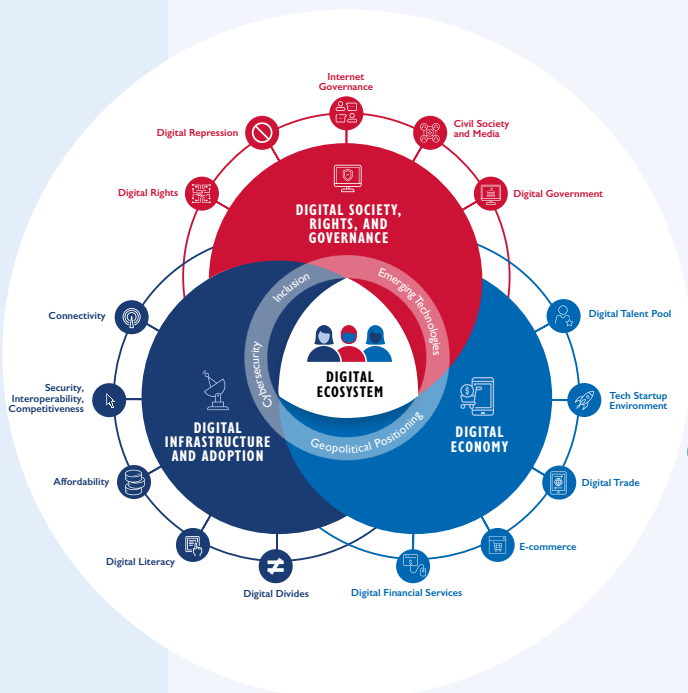
Pillar III: Digital Economy:

Digital Financial Services Using money online, through digital payments, savings, and other tools.

Digital Trade Delivery of products and services over the internet.

E-commerce Sale and purchase of physical goods using the internet.

Tech Startup Environment New businesses focused on technology-driven innovation and rapid growth.

Digital Talent Pool Training and equipping workers for a future-focused digital economy.

Cross-cutting Topics:

Inclusion Equitable access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded, marginalized, or vulnerable. This topic goes beyond digital divides in connectivity access to include considerations such as the unique impacts of digital repression on marginalized or vulnerable populations and barriers to full participation in the digital workforce.

Cybersecurity How people, systems, and technology protect information kept in digital formats from being taken, damaged, modified, or exploited. This also includes exploring the cyber harms that necessitate cybersecurity.

Emerging Technologies Includes artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, Internet of Things (IoT), drones, robotics, and blockchain.

Geopolitical Positioning How the country's digital evolution is being shaped by international relationships, particularly the global spread of technology-enabled authoritarianism.

1.4 WHAT IS A DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM COUNTRY ASSESSMENT (DECA)?

The DECA, a flagship initiative of the Digital Strategy, informs the development, design, and implementation of USAID's strategies, projects, and activities. It is intended to identify how USAID Missions can understand, work with, and support a country's digital ecosystem. The DECA is about a five- to six-month long research process led by a Mission with three phases: desk research and planning; interviews; and analysis and report writing. The integration of Mission priorities and feedback is key throughout all DECA phases. This Toolkit is based on lessons learned from four pilot assessments in Colombia, Kenya, Nepal, and Serbia. The timelines described below are estimates, and country-specific conditions may require modifications.

FIGURE 2: The DECA process

PHASE 1
Desk Research and Planning
5 weeks

PHASE 2
Interviews
(in-person or virtual)
2-7 weeks

PHASE 3
Analysis and Report Writing
10-15 weeks

USAID Mission Priorities
Mission DECA Team shares Mission priorities and regular feedback with the Research Team throughout

Note: For more detailed timelines, please see the DECA process graphic in Appendix E.

Phase 1 `5 weeks` Desk research and planning lays the foundation for the DECA. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to equip the Research Team with information on country context and new and emerging trends across the digital ecosystem before beginning interviews. The desk research also helps uncover potential interviewees, and can provide Missions with general information about trends in the partner country.

Phase 2 `2–7 weeks` Interviews build on the desk research through conversations with stakeholders across the digital ecosystem. Interviews can happen either in-person or virtually. In addition to collecting information, interviews can be a tool for building relationships between the Mission and potential future partners and collaborators.

Phase 3 `10-15 weeks` Analysis and report writing tie together the desk research and interview results into an action-oriented deliverable for the Mission. The main focus during this phase is on connecting research findings with Mission priorities and developing a set of recommendations to help the Mission engage effectively across the digital ecosystem.

Using DECA recommendations

During the pilot assessments, Missions took a variety of approaches to acting on the DECA results. Follow-up steps can include conducting a facilitated Mission-wide workshop to prioritize recommendations and connect them to existing workstreams, designating specific staff to coordinate digital efforts at the Mission, and establishing a cross-sectoral digital working group. The best approach to operationalizing DECA recommendations will depend on the Mission's size and portfolio, as well as on the ecosystem context.

RELATED ASSESSMENTS

USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) conducts a number of related assessments that are complementary to the DECA assessment. Below are a few examples:

- The **DRG Media Assessment Tool (MAT)** contains a comprehensive module on Media and Information Literacy. The DECA provides an overview of the digital media landscape and doesn't delve into detailed issues around media and information literacy that are covered in the MAT. For more information, contact the Civil Society and Media Team.

- If DECA findings point to a deeper need to think and work politically around digital issues, consider a **Political Economy Analysis (PEA).** The goal of a PEA is to help uncover *why* things work the way they do, at the level of an entire country, a sector, or a specific problem or issue. The PEA approach emphasizes the role of power, competing interests of different actors, and the formal and informal "rules of the game."

- The **DRG Strategic Assessment Framework (SAF)** provides a high-level political analysis of a country, develops a DRG strategy, and helps inform integrated development approaches. While the DECA is well-suited to document digital repression tactics, the more comprehensive DRG-SAF can help in developing a holistic DRG strategy that incorporates DECA findings.

- The **DRG Center's Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)** is designed to assess the overall state of civil society and explore linkages between civil society, government, and the private sector. The DECA focuses on the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) that engage with digital rights issues; the CSAT can help put their work in the context of a broader civil society landscape and a cohesive Mission strategy for engagement.

USAID's Center for Economics and Market Development has developed the Systems Analytic Framework for the Digital Economy (SAF-DE), which can be used for deep dives into specific digital economy issues. The DECA and SAF-DE have significant topical overlap, but differ in scope. While the DECA is designed to give a broad, holistic overview of the digital ecosystem, SAF-DE is designed to be a more narrow, focused assessment with possible topic areas including services liberalization, trade logistics, private commercial law, and small and medium-sized enterprise preparedness. The SAF-DE is currently offered through the Digital Economy and Market Development (DEMD) activity, which supports USAID in tackling challenges related to the digital economy, trade capacity building, private sector development, and a business-enabling environment.

SECTION 2:
Step-by-step guide to managing a DECA

Source: Sotheavy At for DAI

This section of the Toolkit describes how a Mission's role and responsibilities might work throughout the DECA. As digital ecosystems are a relatively new development area for USAID, strong Mission engagement is needed to align DECA research with Mission priorities. Engagement with the DECA also provides an important professional development opportunity for Mission staff to learn about the intersection between their technical area and digital ecosystem opportunities and risks.

This guide recommends that the Mission work with an external research team to conduct the DECA, and establish a Mission DECA Team that will provide oversight, guidance, and critical inputs. Mission DECA Team members should read this section in its entirety, including the key resources (especially Getting in the DECA Mindset).

This section provides a detailed step-by-step outline for the Mission's role in the DECA as follows:

STEP 1
Select Mission staff to form a DECA team

STEP 2
Determine timing

STEP 3
Hire the external DECA Research Team

STEP 4
Manage the DECA

STEP 5
Implement DECA recommendations

STEP 6
Plan for follow-up

KEY RESOURCES FOR USAID MISSIONS
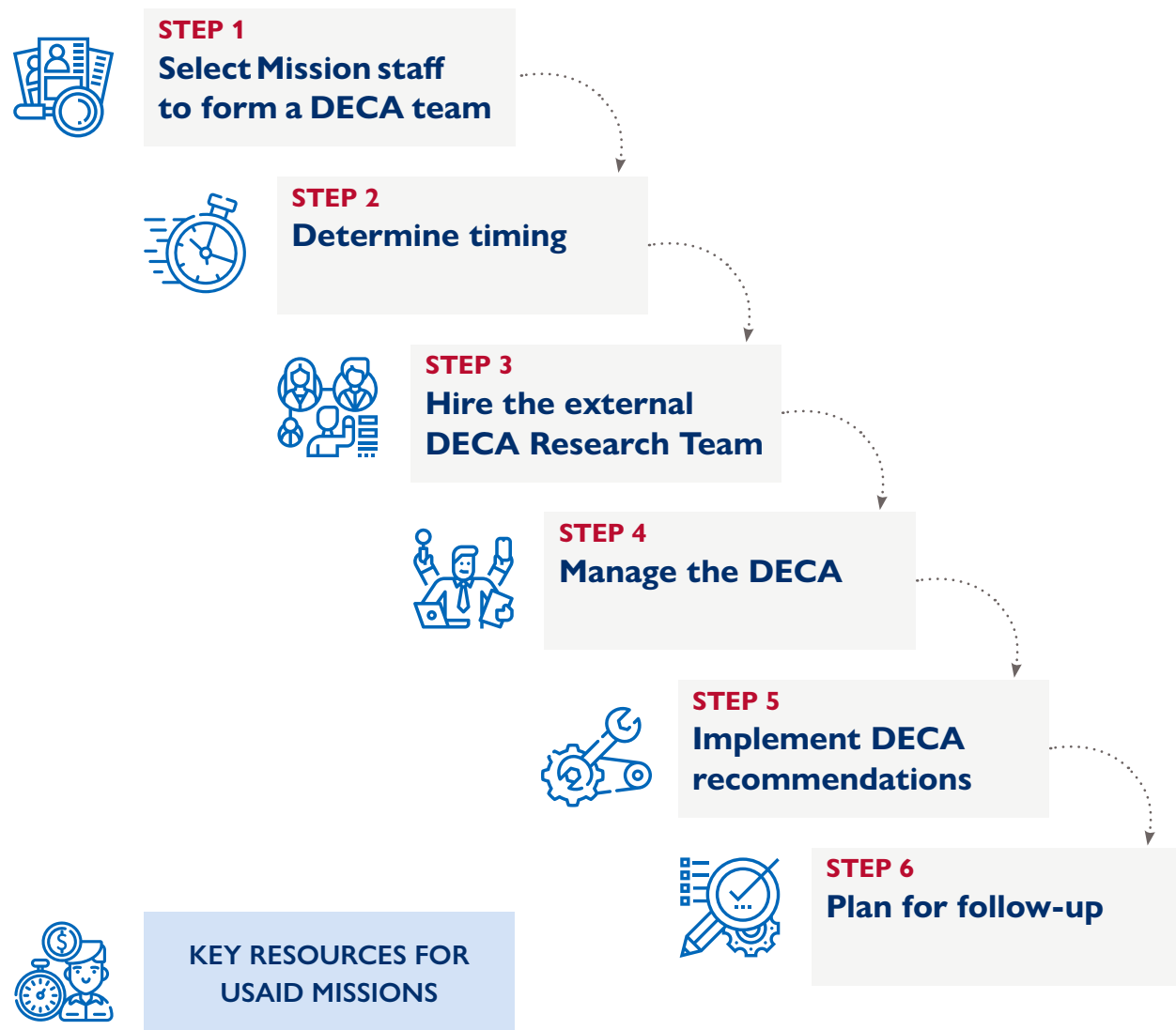
STEP 1

Select Mission staff to form a DECA team

A strong finding from the DECA pilot process is that consistent Mission engagement across technical sectors is key to a successful DECA. Mission leadership should clearly communicate the DECA's importance to the Mission and the expectation that all teams will participate, and select staff to participate on the Mission DECA Team (this will require between 10 and 17 working days over the span of five to six months for each team member).

The Mission DECA team will lead the assessment, determine (with help from the Mission's Contracting Officer) how to procure the external DECA Research Team, provide technical oversight and input, identify and liaise with key external stakeholders, solicit and collect feedback from Mission and Embassy stakeholders, participate in interviews and coordinate others' participation in interviews (when interested and available), provide regular updates to Mission, Embassy, and (if appropriate) external partners, and clear final products. The Mission DECA team will also ensure that all necessary host-country partners, especially interested government actors, are briefed and provide approvals before the start of the project.

Digital development is a relatively new discipline for many Missions; therefore, ensuring technical staff are involved with the DECA throughout the process will help the Mission understand and implement the assessment's recommendations. Participating in a DECA can be an excellent professional development opportunity.
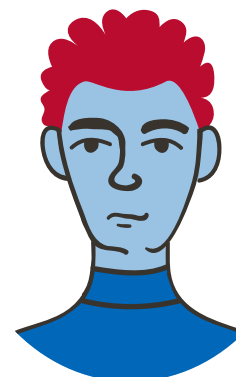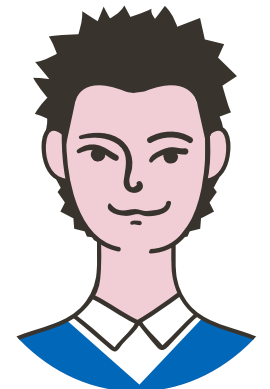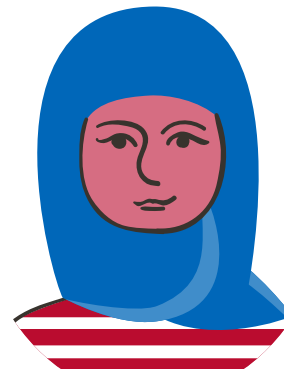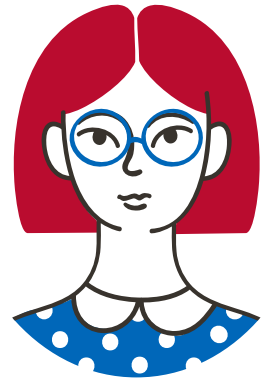
The Mission DECA Team should include the following roles:
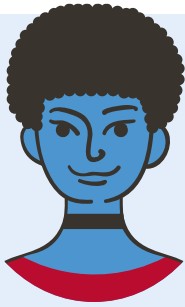
Mission DECA Team Lead

This individual leads the DECA process for the Mission and:

- Manages the Mission DECA team

- Provides direction to the external Research Team on how best to connect with Mission needs and priorities

- Ensures the Mission is fully engaged throughout the research process, for example, making sure that the Research Team has:

  ○ Insight on Mission priorities and programming (sharing documents, coordinating meetings).

  ○ Introductions to other key Mission staff, Embassy staff, and key stakeholders.

  ○ Security briefings and other protocol information for the country operating context (as appropriate).

  ○ Feedback on DECA products and processes from the Mission (along with Embassy and other stakeholders, if appropriate).

- Organizes all briefings for the Mission, and other stakeholders (e.g., Embassy, implementing partners, government, private sector, civil society).

The ideal Mission DECA Team Lead is someone who is familiar with the Mission's portfolio, has been empowered with convening authority across the Mission, and has some level of digital development expertise, or at least interest and involvement.

Estimated level of effort (LOE) The Mission DECA Team Lead should expect to spend 15–20 days over a five- to six-month period on the assessment.

If the Mission has a Digital Development Advisor (DDA), this person should be the Mission DECA Team Lead. If the Mission does not have that position, the ideal DECA Lead is a senior person in the Program Office who has a passion for and interest in digital technology, wants to deepen their knowledge about this growing area of development, has the ability to lead a team, and can manage a complex project. This was a key learning from the DECA pilots.
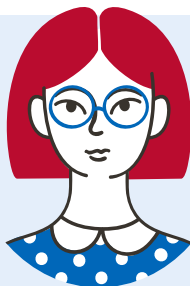
Mission DECA Team members
—one representative from each Technical Office

The DECA is grounded in the Mission's strategic priorities; it is critical that each Technical Office have one representative on the Mission DECA team to ensure the office's equities are included in the assessment. The Technical Office DECA members should have experience or interest in digital development from their sector, deep technical expertise in the office's programming areas, and familiarity with USAID.

Technical DECA team members' roles may include:

- Providing direct technical insight and feedback, sharing updates with their office, and ensuring all technical stakeholders have the opportunity to provide inputs at key decision points in the assessment.

- Sharing interview schedules with their teams and encouraging colleagues to participate in interviews that impact their portfolios. (NOTE: It can be especially valuable for Mission technical staff to participate in interviews, if available and interested. This is a good way for Mission staff to provide local context (especially Foreign Service Nationals), engage current partners, and build relationships with potential partners.
- Arranging Technical Office–specific briefings or feedback sessions for the DECA Research Team.
- Coordinating site visits or escorting the external Research Team for embassy-based meetings.
- Serving as the Mission DECA Team Lead if the current lead needs to step down.

Estimated LOE Mission DECA Team members can expect to spend 8–17 days over a five- to six-month period on the assessment.
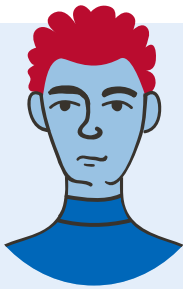
Office of Financial Management (OFM) and Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA) Points of Contact

The DECA research may need to draw upon existing procurement or financial information; the Mission DECA Team Lead should work with the Mission's OFM and OAA to identify a POC for the DECA Mission or Research Teams to engage. For example, questions related to implementing partners' obligation to use digital payments as appropriate, to collect data electronically,[1] and to comply with data guidance (ADS 579) will require input from OFM and OAA.

Estimated LOE These POCs are not required to attend Mission DECA meetings, but if interested, are encouraged to join. The POCs should expect to spend 4–8 hours over five to six months supporting the assessment.
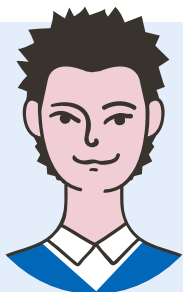
MEL Points of Contact

To plan for DECA follow-up from the outset and ensure knowledge capture and retention, it will be important to designate a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Specialist within the Mission to liaise with the Mission DECA Team throughout the assessment and during post-assessment follow-on activities and planning.

Estimated LOE The MEL POC is not required to attend Mission DECA meetings, but if interested, is encouraged to join. The POC should expect to spend 8–16 hours over five to six months supporting the assessment.

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1 Annex II of the Digital Strategy lays out a vision for "digital-by-default" data collection.

STEP 2
Determine timing

The Mission DECA Team should discuss the following questions to inform timing:

- What upcoming decision points could the DECA inform (e.g., CDCS drafting, CDCS midpoint stocktaking, project development documents (PDDs), project or activity design, key funding, or programming decisions)? When would findings and recommendations need to be available to meaningfully influence those decisions?

- When are Mission DECA Team members most likely to have the bandwidth to engage over the course of five to six months with the DECA, assuming the LOE listed in the table above?

- When will the Mission DECA Team Lead be available to lead the process?

- Will it be necessary to plan around any other major upcoming transitions, either at the Mission (e.g., leadership or staffing changes) or in the country (e.g., elections, holidays, etc.)?

- What procurement options are available to us, and what are their timelines?

STEP 3
Hire the external DECA Research Team

A   Select procurement option

Due to the amount of effort and technical expertise required for a DECA, we recommend that Missions work with external experts rather than relying on Mission staff. The Toolkit provides a draft Statement of Work (SOW) and Statement of Objectives (SOO), both of which provide stock language that can be tailored to meet the needs of the Mission. A SOW describes the requirement in detail, and the approach the contractor must take, including the methods, processes, and steps required to produce the final product or result. A SOW usually has a brief background, the objective, the scope of work, the task requirements, and the final product or result. A SOO, on the other hand, provides only the basic, top-level objectives for the acquisition. The government does not provide any required tasks the contractor must perform, but only the outcomes or results that the contractor must achieve. The government does not specify an approach that the contractor must take, or the methods, processes, and steps the contractor must use. The Offeror proposes a SOW to achieve the stated objectives.

INVOLVE YOUR CONTRACTING OFFICER

To help get the DECA off on the right foot, it is important to involve your CO early. An initial conversation could touch on:

- Choosing an appropriate procurement modality

- Identifying deliverables, reports, and milestones for inclusion in the contract

- Determining which of the guidelines in this Toolkit are suitable for inclusion in an SOW or SOO

Some options to consider are:

- Add the task into an existing Mission mechanism's work plan.

- Buy into an existing USAID/Washington mechanism, pending capacity and contract ceiling. Reach out to digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov for more information.

- Solicit a new Request for Proposals (RFP) on the local market, focusing on think tanks, academic institutions, or CSOs that work on digital issues.

- Issue a purchase order for short-term consultants (see below for suggestions on Research Team size and structure).

If Missions have a limited budget, consider reaching out to the Embassy country team and/or other donors to see if others have funding and would be interested in partnering on the assessment.

B   Determine DECA format

The Mission has some key decisions to make on the DECA format that will have implications for the procurement process and should be considered when evaluating potential implementers.

The DECA desk research is conducted virtually, so the location of the consultants for this phase is not critical to the Mission's procurement preference. However, if primary sources about the partner country are written in a language other than English, the DECA Research Team must include native speakers. That could limit the pool of talent available outside of the country to conduct the DECA.

Interviews can be conducted virtually or in-person, with either a local or foreign-based Research Team. During procurement, the Mission should discuss the preferred format for their DECA. If the Mission has a strong preference, the SOO or SOW can specify. Otherwise, the Mission can ask Offerors to propose and justify a format.

The Mission should select the format that aligns with their cost and timeline preferences as well as with the country context. The Mission can combine options to best meet their needs. For example, the DECA could use a hybrid model with both virtual and in-person interviews and hire a team including both local and foreign researchers.

Guidance for making key decisions on a variety of factors related to the format of your DECA is detailed below:

Caliber of local talent

Does the local market have high-caliber expertise available on topics such as connectivity, digital divides, internet freedom, digital finance, and e-commerce?

- If so, a local team may be the best way to go.

- If not, the Mission should consider implementers with foreign experts on their Research Team.

Language

Does the Research Team need to have fluency in the local language?

- If so, are interpreters available that have the knowledge to translate highly technical digital terminology? If interpreters are not available, it will be better for the Mission to consider implementers with local researchers on their Research Team. Regional or country expertise and language skills are always preferred.

- If not, this is not a factor.

Complexity of local context

Is it imperative to hire a team with country-specific expertise?

- If so, a Research Team with one or more local researchers is preferable.

- If not, a team fully staffed with foreign researchers can work, but local expertise is always preferred.

Connectivity

Do interviewees have reliable connectivity that enables them to participate in virtual interviews?

Security

What security and privacy concerns exist in the country for in-person meetings? For virtual? Which option better protects the interviewee and the content of their interview?

- For example, conflict and humanitarian assistance contexts may benefit from virtual interviews due to greater instability on the ground, but they may also face greater connectivity challenges.

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS REQUIRE ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

In-person interviews can offer a number of benefits over virtual. However, if the Mission selects a format that includes in-person interviews, the Mission DECA Teams may be required to provide additional administrative support, especially if the Research Team is foreign. The Mission DECA Team should work with the Research Team to support logistics preparation at least six weeks before the in-person interview phase. Support may include:

- Confirming Mission travel policies (e.g., visitors, clearances, security precautions, drivers)

- Coordinating with the Research Team to ensure all interested Mission staff can attend selected in-person interviews

Accessibility

Some interviewees may require accommodations or prefer virtual or in-person interviews based on their needs. For interviewees who travel frequently, virtual interviews may be easier and are preferred.
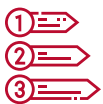
Mission timeline

In the DECA pilots, in-person interviews provided the shortest timeline, due to the tight schedule associated with a country visit. When the model moved to virtual interviews, the timeline expanded as did the number of interviews due to the lack of constraints around a short, in-country trip. Both approaches have pros and cons; the Mission must determine its timeline and understand the virtual interview model has the tendency to expand given its flexible nature.

- The timeline for DECAs done with virtual interviews will vary depending on the number of weeks needed to conduct up to 60 interviews. This depends heavily on Research Team time zones and could span two to seven weeks.

- The timeline for DECAs done with in-person interviews will also vary depending on the size of the Research Team and logistics for in-country travel. Typically, the Research Team should allot two weeks for in-country interviews.

Outreach and building support for next steps

Consider how the Mission will communicate its potential new digital approach to key stakeholders, such as implementing partners, government counterparts, key civil society groups.

- Should the contractors be asked to create one-page handouts specific to a key audience in addition to the public version of the report?

- Should the contractors be asked to do more than one final presentation to different stakeholder groups?

- Would the Mission require any workshops with stakeholders to help create recommendations or with staff to translate the recommendations into Action Plans?

- Will the Mission want products in local languages?

After a Mission determines the Research Team composition and interview approach, it should then determine budget limitations, type of support included in available mechanisms, and timeline.

C   Finalize Research Team composition

The size and composition of the Research Team may vary depending on the selected implementer. However, it is imperative that the proposed Research Team has technical expertise across the three DECA pillars. Regional or country expertise and language skills are always preferred. Under a Statement of Objectives, the government would not provide a specific team composition. If you are using a Statement of Work, a suggested team composition is outlined below, along with links to sample scopes of work that can be tailored and used to staff up the Research Team:

INVOLVE YOUR RESIDENT LEGAL OFFICER (RLO)

As you're deciding on a procurement option and format for the DECA, you should seek advice from your RLO on a couple of key topics:

- Section 3.7 contains some general pointers on privacy and informed consent that may need adaptation for your specific context. Ask your RLO what constraints will apply to the Mission and the Research Team. Additionally, ask the RLO to review the informed consent language in the Interview Guide Template to see whether it will require modifications.

- Some countries have political sensitivities or local laws related to research and data collection (especially foreign-sponsored research). You may need to get permission from local or national authorities before beginning the interview phase. Restrictions may apply to primary data collection through surveys and questionnaires and to interview-based research (e.g., licensing and data restrictions, restrictions on recording interviews). No matter the country, it is best practice to check with your RLO to be sure that any necessary permissions are obtained before the assessment begins.

Principal Investigator (full-time) [SOW]

Leads all aspects of the DECA and serves as the primary DECA interlocutor with the Mission. This individual should be experienced in project management and have extensive experience working or conducting research in digital development with expertise in one or more of the DECA pillars.

Research Analyst (full-time) [SOW]

Works with the Principal Investigator on all aspects of the DECA. This individual should have experience conducting qualitative research and some generalist experience in digital development.

Technical Researcher (half-time) [SOW]

Provides technical oversight throughout the DECA, contributing more heavily during interviews, analysis, and report writing. This individual's expertise should complement the Principal Investigator's knowledge gaps. For example, if the Principal Investigator has a background in digital infrastructure and experience in digital rights, an ideal Technical Researcher should have deeper expertise in digital finance, digital trade, and e-commerce.

Research Coordinator (quarter-time) [SOW]

Provides logistical and operational support throughout the DECA. For in-person DECAs, this individual serves as the primary contact to the Secondary Mission DECA Team related to all administrative and logistical protocols. *This role is not critical for DECAs done with virtual interviews.*

[optional] Interpreter (part-time)

Some DECAs may require an interpreter; the interpreter must have experience working on digital development projects or in a related sector to ensure technical terms are accurately conveyed to the Research Team.

STEP 4

Manage the DECA

In addition to the Mission DECA Team responsibilities outlined in Step 1: Select Mission Staff, this section details tips and tricks for managing each phase of the DECA.

The table below outlines expectations for the Mission DECA Team at each DECA phase. This level of engagement will ensure the DECA process is collaborative and the final product aligns with Mission priorities.

TABLE 1: Mission DECA Team responsibilities

DECA Phase Timing for Research Team	Mission Inputs including estimated LOE for each Mission DECA Team member
Mission DECA Team participates in biweekly meetings with the Research Team	
PREPARATION Timing dependent on Mission Program Cycle actions (ADS 201)	• Review Toolkit to understand project scope • Socialize the DECA within the Mission to garner interest and support, and determine potential areas for collaboration • Complete DECA design and acquisition plan • Select and contract the DECA external Research Team **Estimated LOE** 2–4 days per person (not including procurement)

DECA Phase Timing for Research Team	**Mission Inputs** including estimated LOE for each Mission DECA Team member
1 **DESK RESEARCH** **AND PLANNING** 5 weeks	**Before desk research:** • Share Mission priorities and expectations for what the DECA is intended to inform (e.g., new USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) or strategy midpoint stocktaking, new designs), and partnership outreach with the Research Team. If there are concerns about procurement-sensitive information, describe future projects in general terms, such as what is already available in public budget requests and the Business Forecast • Share details on Mission portfolio (current and possible future activities) that have a focus on digital programming with the Research Team • Share details, if relevant, of past digital-related programming or research (e.g., digital technology; cybersecurity; or Science, Technology, Innovation, and Partnerships (STIP) key issue narrative submissions), with the Research Team • Share OAA-issued Digital Payment waivers for the last three years (waivers for compliance with the Procurement Executive Bulletin (PEB) No. 2014-06 on E-Payments) with the Research Team • Set up meetings with Mission leadership/office directors, as needed • Set up security briefing as needed **When Desk Research is drafted:** • Review the four desk research briefs, providing feedback and direction for deeper investigation • Disseminate the desk research briefs across the Mission, Embassy, and other relevant stakeholders as appropriate • Identify and share contact information for potential interviewees, as possible • Coordinate DECA briefing for the Mission: Determine best-fit format for a broad Mission audience to be introduced to the DECA and desk research findings **Estimated LOE** 2–3 days per person
2 **INTERVIEWS** 2 - 7 weeks	• Arrange meetings with relevant people at U.S. Embassy, USAID, implementing partners, and other stakeholders • Participate in interviews, as interested and available • Share interview schedules with Technical Offices and encourage colleagues with relevant portfolios to participate. This is also a professional development opportunity for the Mission's staff to learn about digital development • Determine the appropriate format (Mission all-hands meeting, brown-bag presentation, workshop) and arrange read-outs of the early findings and preliminary recommendations to a broader audience within the Technical Offices **Estimated LOE** 1–5 days

DECA Phase Timing for Research Team	Mission Inputs including estimated LOE for each Mission DECA Team member
3 **ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING** 10-15 weeks	• Review the draft report and provide specific feedback on the recommendations. If other Mission, USAID, Embassy, or stakeholders would provide value at this step, the Mission DECA Team should engage those stakeholders to review the report. This ensures the DECA is collaborative and the final report aligns with Mission goals and priorities and local context • Advise on how the internal report will need to be adapted for an external audience, for example, by removing material that is procurement-sensitive • Coordinate Mission approvals and clearances of internal and external reports • Coordinate with a graphic designer to design internal and external reports • Review and provide feedback on the final presentation to the Mission to ensure alignment with expectations for length, content, and format • Arrange DECA Final Mission-wide presentation **Estimated LOE** 2–4 days
POST-DECA FOLLOW-ON Ongoing	• Participate in a post-DECA "exit interview" to share learnings and contribute to DECA adaptations • Participate in interviews and associated communications with USAID/Washington in support of the MEL agenda **Estimated LOE** 4–6 hours

DECA project management best practices

Mission DECA Team roles and responsibilities

• The Mission DECA Lead should be the primary point of contact with the Research Team, and is responsible for providing direction to the implementer throughout the assessment.

• Designate an alternative Mission DECA Lead from the Mission DECA Team to ensure robust collaboration with the Research Team and to smooth any potential staffing changes.

• If someone has to leave the Mission DECA Team during the assessment, ensure they have designated a replacement from the same team.

Recommendations for managing the DECA Research Team

• Hold a kickoff meeting (sample agenda) with the entire Research Team to set expectations early and build trust.

• The Research Team should set up biweekly meetings with the Mission DECA Team to encourage real-time problem solving, ensure regular feedback and open communication, and make sure the needs of the Mission's technical teams are being met.

- Facilitate Mission participation in the research process. This can include encouraging technical staff to participate in relevant interviews, review research findings, and provide technical feedback.

- Require the Research Team to use Google Docs so they can easily collect comments and suggestions from Mission staff. Dissemination within the Mission will be easiest if you share a copy that is owned by a *usaid.gov* email address (e.g., the Mission DECA Lead). The Mission DECA Team can create a shared folder where Mission staff and the Research Team can share and create relevant resources.

- Emphasize to the Research Team the importance of collaborating with the Mission in drafting DECA recommendations to ensure their relevance and practicality.

Recommendations for facilitating Mission broader engagement

- Discuss preferences for engagement with Mission leadership to determine the appropriate cadence, format, and level of progress updates, Mission briefings, and content feedback. For example:

  ○ Should the Mission DECA Team provide monthly progress updates to Senior Management? If yes, by email or briefing?

  ○ Does the Mission want briefings at the end of each DECA phase (desk research and planning, interviews, analysis and report writing)?

  ○ Does Mission management want to direct the Mission's engagement in review and feedback or delegate the responsibility to the Mission DECA Team?

  ○ Are there any specific DECA topics of importance to the Mission Director that may require separate briefs?

- Encourage Mission staff outside the Mission DECA Team to participate in interviews whenever possible. Digital technology is a relatively new development area, and this assessment provides an excellent professional development opportunity for Mission staff to learn on the spot

- Consider adding additional presentations into the contract and have the external Research Team deliver public presentations to key stakeholders to build buy-in and ground truth approaches for the new path the Mission may be taking

REQUEST AGENCY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

At key points in the DECA process, Missions may want Agency technical experts to provide technical assistance. For example, Missions with limited digital expertise might request help reviewing the desk research briefs or final report. Missions can request technical support through the Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI) Bureau's field service request system linked to USAID's country support network[2] by submitting requests into the Unified Technical Request and Mission Support (UTRAMS), or emailing digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.

The following pages outline the Mission DECA Team's role during each phase of the DECA.

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2 See the USAID/DDI Client Services Playbook (USAID-internal)

PHASE 1:

DESK RESEARCH AND PLANNING

(5 WEEKS)

1 Set the research agenda

In the first week of the DECA, the Mission DECA Team and the Research Team should discuss the following questions and come to an agreement on general areas of focus. If the Mission doesn't know the answers to all of these questions, the questions can be revisited during the biweekly calls with the Research Team:

- What are the Mission's top programmatic priorities (e.g., Development Objectives from a recent or forthcoming CDCS, Agency-wide priorities with which the Mission is aiming to align)?

- Is the Mission concerned about particular communities or marginalized groups (e.g., women, youth, ethnic minorities, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ community)? What potential interviewees could speak to the needs of these marginalized or vulnerable groups and how they intersect with the digital ecosystem?

- What upcoming Mission decision points are you hoping the DECA will inform (e.g., CDCS drafting, PDDs, project design, mid-term evaluations, key funding decisions)?

- What are the digital challenges or opportunities facing the partner country (government, civil society, private sector) that the Mission has worked on or wants to work on?

- What are some examples of current (or planned) Mission programming that include a digital component? Don't worry if the "digital component" is a minor piece of a larger program; this is to help understand how the Mission currently sees technology being used in its portfolio.

- How aware are Mission staff of "digital-by-default" initiatives such as digital payments or digital data collection? Have there been challenges that might be indicative of broader ecosystem issues?

  ○ Over the last three years, how many and for which projects have waivers to the 2014 E-Payments Procurement Executive Bulletin (PEB) been issued by the Bureau for Management Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA)? *(The Research Team can use this information to help understand challenges in the digital payments enabling environment and to identify potential interviewees for the Digital Economy pillar.)*

2 Engage U.S. Government (USG) stakeholders

Depending on the size and expertise of the Embassy's country team, the Mission DECA Team can engage USG stakeholders. The Mission DECA Team should discuss who at the Embassy should be engaged in the DECA and in what capacity with Mission leadership. For example:

State Department: Political and Econ sections can be great resources for contacts and analysis. Some Embassies may have designated Cyber Officers (usually in the Econ section) or Regional Technology Officers that can provide added expertise on cybersecurity or digital issues. Staff in these sections may also be helpful interviewees for the Research Team.

Digital or Cybersecurity Working Groups: Some Embassies have interagency working groups focused on digital issues or cybersecurity that could provide contacts and review content.

Commerce Department: Some Embassies have Digital Attachés who specialize in Digital Trade and e-commerce. If your Embassy does not, and a lot of interesting work is taking place in the Digital Economy, Mission DECA Teams may want to reach out to the International Trade Administration's Office of Digital Services Industries Technologies. This office has staff who cover each region in the world and can discuss digital trade issues in the country.

As digital ecosystem interests grow within the U.S. government, Mission DECA Teams may want to contact digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov for additional recommendations for interagency engagement.

3 Provide relevant resources

- In the early stages of desk research, the Mission DECA Team should share relevant resources with the Research Team, including the finalized CDCS, recent assessments, and relevant activity reports.

- If it would be helpful to include maps in the final report, and the Research Team doesn't have the ability to generate them, consider making a technical assistance request to the GeoCenter in DDI/USAID Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub/Technology Division (ITR/T). It will be feasible for the GeoCenter to act on requests if the Research Team can help them identify and access relevant geospatial data resources.

4 Coordinate review of desk research

The Research Team will produce four desk research briefs—one for each DECA Pillar and one covering background and Mission priorities—to be shared with the Mission. The Mission DECA Team should follow up with the appropriate stakeholders in Mission Technical Offices to ensure these briefs receive a well-rounded review. Mission review should focus on highlighting findings that resonate with Mission priorities and areas that should be explored further during the interview phase.

5

Recommend interviewees

When possible, the Mission DECA Team should share names and contact information for potential interviewees. The Research Team will develop a list of interviewees, but the Mission is likely to have contacts that are important to include during the interview phase, especially within the government. The Mission DECA Team may want to request contact information of potential interviewees from the interagency as well. Types of stakeholders include:

Country or sector experts (both local and foreign)
- University professors (in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector)
- Think tanks

Host country government
- National government actors that manage the government's digital portfolio (Ministry of ICT, for example)
- National government actors that are included in the Mission's strategic portfolio (for example, if the Mission has a large Rule of Law program, interviewees could include the Ministry of Justice, Judiciary, Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender's Office, etc.)
- Sub-national government actors (for example, if the Mission has a large Health portfolio, interviewees could include government health clinic staff, provincial health directors, etc.)

Donors, international non-government organizations (iNGOs), multilaterals, regulatory bodies, and other international development organizations that work in digital development

Civil society organizations
- Organizations or advocates focused on digital and technology issues
- Human rights organizations
- Advocates for vulnerable or marginalized groups
- Religious organizations

Media outlets and influencers (independent and government)

Private sector
- Financial service providers (microfinance institutions, commercial banks, FinTechs, mobile money providers)
- Mobile network operators (MNOs) and internet service providers (ISPs)
- International technology companies (e.g., Microsoft, Google, Facebook)
- Local technology companies
- Local cybersecurity companies
- Tech startups
- Tech-oriented business accelerators and innovation hubs
- E-commerce platforms
- Local market research firms
- ICT workforce certification organizations

USAID implementing partners (projects with a technology component)

Other U.S. Government stakeholders

6 Arrange a DECA Introduction Presentation

Depending on the cadence of Mission briefing and communications agreed upon at the start of the assessment, this briefing can take place at any point. However, based on best practices learned through the DECA pilots, Missions should consider holding a briefing before the interview phase.

Timing: This presentation should occur shortly before the interview phase begins. For in-person interviews this can be an in-brief on the first day of field research.

Purpose: To introduce the DECA to a broad Mission audience, share and validate initial findings and gaps identified during desk research, solicit recommendations for additional interviewees, and invite any interested Mission staff to join interviews.

Length: 30 to 60 minutes (15- to 20-minute presentation and at least 15 minutes for questions and conversation).

Tone: It is a best practice to have the Mission Director or other senior figure provide a short welcome to the presentation (no need to stay for the entire hour). This underlines the importance of the DECA and helps support robust contributions and participation.

Audience: All Mission staff should be invited to attend the presentation. If relevant, the Mission DECA Team should also invite selected Embassy colleagues. The exact format of this is dependent on Mission size and staff availability. Instead of one Mission-wide meeting, it may be beneficial (especially in larger Missions) to break out separate meetings with Mission leadership, Technical Offices, and the Program Office, tailoring presentation content accordingly. The Mission DECA Team should advise the Research Team on which approach would maximize Mission-wide engagement. All versions of this presentation can be done in-person or virtually.

Presentation review: Mission DECA Team members should make sure the Research Team shares the slides before the presentation so that the Mission can provide feedback and ensure alignment with content, design, and length expectations.

PHASE 2:
INTERVIEWS
(2–7 WEEKS)

1 Attend regular debrief meetings

During the interview phase, the Research Team will have weekly debrief meetings (or more frequent if in-person) to discuss interviews, share key findings, identify gaps, and begin to highlight themes. Mission DECA Team members can attend the debriefs in a listening capacity if they are interested and available. This can help focus subsequent interviews and future recommendation writing.

2 Participate in interviews

Mission DECA Team members can participate in interviews when interested and available. This is a good way for the Research Team to leverage the Mission's local knowledge, meet current partners, and help the Mission initiate relationships with potential partners. Consider the pros and cons of attending more sensitive interviews, in case having Mission staff present would bias interviewee responses. A reasonable ratio of interviewers to interviewees should be maintained so as not to overwhelm the interviewee(s).

3 Arrange the DECA Post-Interview Presentation

Depending on the cadence of Mission briefing and communications agreed upon at the start of the assessment, this briefing may take various forms (e.g., Mission all-hands, informal brown-bag presentation, individual briefings with Technical Offices, interactive workshop) or may not be needed. For Missions that want regular updates, this is a good point for another discussion.

Timing: This presentation should occur at the end of the interview phase (e.g., on the last day of a temporary duty (TDY)). For virtual interviews, this presentation may not be needed.

Purpose: To stimulate Mission-wide interest in the final report, share initial findings from the interview phase, and gut-check preliminary recommendations and show how they align with Mission priorities.

Length: One hour with a 20- to 30-minute presentation and a minimum of 20 minutes for questions and conversation.

Audience: The same audience as the DECA Introduction Presentation. All Mission staff should be invited to attend. If relevant, the Mission DECA Team should also invite selected Embassy colleagues. Similar to the Introduction Presentation, it may be beneficial (especially in larger Missions) to break out separate meetings with Mission Technical Offices. However, if possible, a larger meeting for this presentation may surface more fruitful cross-sector feedback and ideas for DECA recommendations. All versions of this presentation can be done in-person or virtually.

Presentation review: Mission DECA Team members should make sure the Research Team shares the slides before the presentation so they can provide feedback and ensure alignment with content, design, and length expectations. They should direct the Research Team to emphasize topics that will resonate most.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE DECA POST-INTERVIEW PRESENTATION

A main objective of this presentation is to gather Mission feedback and test whether initial findings and recommendations resonate. Mission DECA Teams can work with the Research Team to consider alternative methods such as brown-bags, individual briefings with Technical Offices, or workshops that can make the sessions more interactive and engaging.

PHASE 3:

ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING

(10-15 WEEKS)

3

1 Help synthesize recommendations

Mission DECA Team members should coordinate with the Research Team to ensure recommendations align with Mission expectations for feasibility and content. Depending on Mission capacity and interest, this could be done in any of the following ways:

- The Research Team shares a draft outline of the recommendations, then discusses feedback and prioritization with the Mission DECA Team during a regular biweekly meeting.
- The Research Team works with the Mission DECA Team to arrange a workshop with selected Mission staff to brainstorm and refine recommendations based on key findings.

REPORT OPTIONS

Missions may choose to have up to three versions of the report produced:

1. **Internal USAID report:** All DECAs will produce this version; it is the primary report for the internal Mission audience, which includes nuanced findings from all interviews (including those that may be sensitive to external audiences) as well as recommendations detailing potentially procurement-sensitive activity designs and linkages to internal USAID resources and mechanisms.

2. **English external report:** This is the internal report with politically and procurement-sensitive information redacted. It will be posted on usaid.gov, and Missions will share this version with key stakeholders. If Missions prefer, the internal and external reports can be the same.

3. **Translated external report:** In some countries it may be valuable to have the external report translated into the dominant local language to be shared with stakeholders across the country. For example, the Colombia Mission opted to have all three: Internal report, English External report, and a Translated External report.

2

Review draft report

The Research Team will share a draft report with the Mission DECA Team for review. Mission review should focus on ground-truthing findings with existing country context knowledge and reviewing recommendations for feasibility, timeline, and prioritization. If the Mission wants additional technical support to review the findings and recommendations, the Mission DECA Team can request technical assistance from ITR/T through UTRAMS or digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov. To understand the types of DECA recommendations, the Mission DECA Team can review previous DECA reports (see key resources below). The DECA Toolkit (and Final Report Template) recommends including two elements that will be particularly relevant for the Mission's review:

- **CDCS mapping table:** This table maps the DECA findings and recommendations to relevant CDCS Intermediate Results (IRs). The purpose is to enable Mission staff to easily navigate the report to meet their specific needs and interests.
- **Recommendations table:** This table provides an easily digestible summary of the recommendations so Mission staff can quickly understand the scope of recommendations and identify which ones they want to know more about in order to implement.

3

Facilitate Mission report clearances

The Mission DECA Team will be responsible for ensuring the report goes through the appropriate Mission clearance process before design. The Mission should ensure the designed report/s follows the Digital Strategy Style Guide.

4

Review translated reports

If your Mission opts for a local-language version of the document, the Mission DECA Team should have native speakers review the translated report to ensure the content and translation are consistent with the original report.

5 Arrange the DECA Final Presentation

Timing: This presentation should occur when the internal report is designed and ready to be shared with the Mission. However, if clearances or design are slowing the process, ensure that it takes place no more than two months after the interview phase is complete.

Purpose: To share key findings and recommendations and outline near- and long-term action items for the Mission.

Length: 45 to 60 minutes, with a 20- to 25-minute presentation and 25 to 30 minutes for questions and conversation.

Audience: The entire Mission should be invited to attend. However, the exact format is dependent on Mission size and availability. The Mission DECA Team should ensure Mission leaders (ideally including the Mission Director) are in attendance. If appropriate, Embassy staff can also be invited, or the Mission DECA Team can set up a separate brief for the Embassy audience. (NOTE: In some pilots, the Missions wanted multiple presentations to include a general outbrief for the entire Mission, and another deep dive on the fifth-generation (5G) wireless technology for Mission leadership. The Research Team should ensure the Mission receives information in a format that is most useful to both the Mission and its leadership.)

Presentation Review: Before the presentation, the Research Team will share slides with the Mission DECA Team to receive feedback and ensure alignment with content, design, and length expectations.

6 Disseminate the final report

The Mission DECA Team should work with the Mission Development Outreach and Communications (DOC) officer, and if appropriate, the Embassy's Public Affairs Section (PAS) to develop and execute a dissemination plan. Dissemination should include sharing the external report with all interviewees. This is a good opportunity for the Mission to re-engage interviewees who may lead to future partnerships. If the contract included any additional presentations or communication materials, plan for their dissemination and pave the way for Step 5 below.

STEP 5
Implement DECA recommendations

No one wants to have a lengthy assessment report that sits on the shelf and doesn't lead to meaningful change. After the DECA research phase ends, you can take several concrete actions to keep the momentum going:

Source: Jack Gordon/USAID Peru

- **Start early:** Depending on what clearances are required, the report might be stuck in an "almost-done" state for a long time. Fortunately, the Research Team will share a draft version with preliminary findings and recommendations, and you can begin developing an action plan before the report is finalized.

- **Discuss widely:** The DECA Final Presentation is a good opportunity to broaden Mission involvement beyond the Mission DECA Team, engage senior leadership, and find out who might be interested in taking the lead on specific recommendations.

- **Write it down:** After consulting with others in the Mission, the Mission DECA Team could develop a written plan with concrete actions to take in the next one, three, six, and 12 months. This can be done through a Mission-wide workshop where the Mission DECA Team facilitates a discussion to prioritize the recommendations and develop a concrete plan for implementation.

- **Put someone in charge:** The Mission DECA Team could serve as the nucleus for a cross-team digital working group that takes the lead on implementing the DECA recommendations. If the team is led by a DDA, the DDA can take the lead in coordinating digital development across the Mission.

STEP 6
Plan for follow-up

As regular good practice, an after-action review (AAR) will provide accountability for the contractors and the resources invested. Also, feedback will add to the Agency's growing experience in digital development.

Through the Digital Strategy, USAID has established a *Digital Research and Learning Agenda* to ensure that the Agency is continually adapting to the digital domain. DECAs will help grow the evidence base for digital tools, systems, policy interventions, and platforms. Sharing information about your experience conducting a DECA and plans and progress on recommendation implementation will support the *Digital Research and Learning Agenda's* objective of assessing the impact of the Digital Strategy, and of digital technology writ large.[3] This in turn will assist other Missions and also create better tools for your Mission in the future.

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3   USAID Digital Strategy, Annex II, pg. 43

After-action review (process feedback)

The Digital Strategy DECA Team wants to ensure this toolkit is as useful as possible for Missions, and is seeking practical feedback that will be used to iterate and improve this product.

After the DECA Final Presentation, Mission DECA Teams should engage relevant and interested Mission staff to gather feedback on their experience being involved in a DECA, the performance of the Research Team,[4] and the usefulness of the process and product. The USAID Digital Strategy Team would greatly appreciate being involved to the extent that the Mission allows. The team would be happy to facilitate this AAR for the Mission through a virtual meeting or is also happy to receive just a copy of any feedback report or notes. The USAID Digital Strategy Team can be reached at digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.

Here are guiding questions for this learning-oriented discussion:

- What were your expectations for the DECA and were they met? Why or why not?
  (content, time commitment, output, etc.)
- What is your opinion on the concrete actions that were or will be generated from the DECA? Are they innovative, achievable, timely, relevant?
- What factors are supporting or constraining you from using the DECA?
- What was your experience using this Toolkit? What worked well, what didn't, what would you change?
- How was the contractor's performance? What suggestions do you have for other Mission assessments?
- If you requested technical assistance from digital specialists at USAID/Washington, what was your experience like? Did you get the help you needed?
- What suggestions do you have for future Mission DECA Teams?

Reviewing and reporting DECA implementation

As with all programmatic adjustments, action steps from the DECA should be captured in CDCS midpoint stocktaking updates, project/activity amendments, award modifications, or activity work plans as appropriate. Other aspects of the DECA may feed into new activity design documents. The first Mission Portfolio Review following the DECA should systematically review the DECA recommendations to gauge implementation and integration, similar to follow-up on evaluation report recommendations.

Ultimately, the Mission will have new results to share in the Performance Plan and Report key issues, including technology, cybersecurity, and/or gender. To the extent practical, the USAID Digital Strategy Team would appreciate Missions noting the DECA and any results that stem from it in these key issues. Also, ITR/T will occasionally send surveys on the DECA and the Digital Strategy (not to worry, this will be only once a year). Your feedback is important to ensure Washington resources effectively support Missions and create useful tools.

KEY RESOURCES FOR USAID MISSIONS

- Getting in the DECA mindset
- Example Serbia DECA desk research briefs

- Read the Colombia, Kenya, Nepal, and Serbia Internal DECA reports (available on MyUSAID)

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4   If through a contract, must be consistent with acquisition policy on Past Performance.

Research guide

Source: Paul Jeffrey

The DECA is a significant technical and project management undertaking. To ensure adequate preparation on both fronts, the Mission DECA Team Lead should read this entire section first, then ensure that the relevant information is communicated to the external Research Team. One possible resource for this is the Digital Ecosystem Framework, which is intended for USAID-external audiences and is very similar to the following section, "Getting in the DECA Mindset". Section 3 helps researchers "get in the DECA mindset" and then guides them through each step needed to conduct an organized and effective DECA as follows:

ORIENTATION
introduces technical concepts and key project management requirements.

PHASE 1
DESK RESEARCH AND PLANNING
details best practices and provides resources for project kickoff, logistics preparation, and desk research.

PHASE 2
INTERVIEWS
provide guidance on how to manage and conduct interviews.

PHASE 3
ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING
outlines best practices for analyzing research findings, writing a report that resonates with the Mission, and taking steps for finalizing and disseminating the report. This section also includes a request for providing feedback on the Toolkit.

Please note that this Toolkit is intended as best-practice guidance on how to implement a DECA and does not apply directly to contractors. Mission staff should work with OAA and as needed, the RLO, to determine the right contracting method to use to engage the external Research Team. The Research Team should refer to the activity's SOO or SOW for USAID's requirements and expectations. Nothing in this document should be understood as imposing additional requirements beyond what is included in the contract.

ORIENTATION

3.1 GETTING IN THE DECA MINDSET

Purpose   To get an overview of the range of topics explored, and what they mean for the DECA.

When   Refer to throughout the DECA process for guidance and understanding of the various topics

Implementation time   N/A

While this Toolkit explains how to execute a DECA from start to finish, the first step is to "get in the DECA mindset." The DECA covers a wide range of technical topics; you can start here by understanding the components of each DECA Pillar in more detail. While country context and USAID Mission priorities are key factors that shape a DECA, there are common topics that should be investigated in every DECA to ensure a robust assessment. The DECA is not structured around traditional development sectors, but USAID Mission priorities may direct the DECA to explore linkages between the broader digital ecosystem and specific sectors of interest.[5]
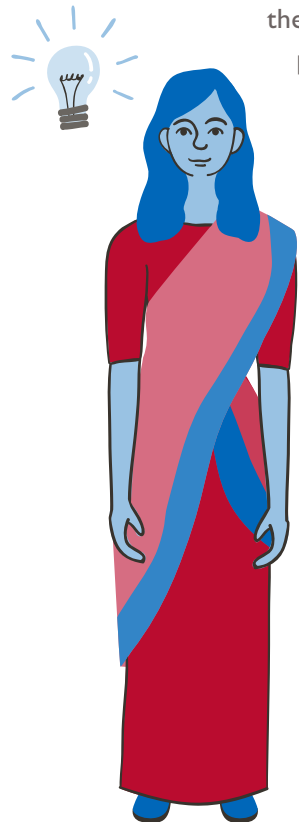
Before diving into the DECA, familiarize yourself with the topics in this section so you are ready to explore them throughout the assessment. Each topic definition is supported by brief examples, typically from the four DECA pilots (Colombia, Kenya, Nepal, and Serbia). This section can be used alongside the more technical Research Checklist, which provides a list of research questions and resources for each topic. See **APPENDIX C** for related universal definitions.

OVERLAP BETWEEN THE DECA PILLARS

You will find that topics under a specific pillar may not always fit neatly into that pillar and often impact discussions in other pillars. Use your best judgment on how each topic fits into the assessment and feel free to adjust this framework. The ultimate goal is to ensure your narrative provides the reader with a clear story.

5   See, for example, the Digital Health Maturity Model Navigator and Digital Agriculture Assessment Toolkit

PILLAR I
Digital Infrastructure and Adoption

Connectivity Infrastructure

Connectivity infrastructure refers to the foundational components that enable the use of data, devices (for example, mobile phones), and other internet services and systems. These include fiber-optic cables, cell towers, satellites, data centers, and fixed and mobile broadband. Choices made by the government and private sector about infrastructure directly affect who can provide digital services and where, how the internet is used, and who does and does not have access to digital tools and services. Connectivity infrastructure can also include innovative technologies and deployment models such as TV white space (TVWS), relay stations, wireless mesh networks, and community networks[6] that can help extend access to remote or underserved areas.

> **DECA pilot example** Internet connectivity is a major challenge in rural Colombia, with 2018 fixed internet penetration at 63 percent in urban areas compared to just 16 percent in rural areas. However, innovative technology and partnership solutions exist. For example, through its Airband Initiative, Microsoft is actively developing and helping ISPs to deploy fixed wireless solutions that include TVWS. Colnodo, an IT-focused NGO, is also carrying out an innovative pilot in partnership with the government that uses a licensed spectrum reserved for mobile communications to establish a community network.

Security, Interoperability, and Competitiveness

This topic addresses the basic features of a healthy telecommunications market. In a thriving market, government regulation is used to ensure secure, trustworthy networks, and to promote competition that drives innovation and lowers costs. Assessing the telecom market requires understanding the important policies, market players, the extent of government ownership, and the degree of interoperability.

> **DECA pilot example** In Kenya, several interviewees voiced concerns about the dominant role of Safaricom, which serves 65–70 percent of Kenya's mobile customers and nearly 99 percent of mobile money transactions. Safaricom's 2007 launch of M-Pesa allowed the company not only to be an early leader in digital finance innovation but also to grow into the largest mobile network in the region. However, many now feel that its outsized market power and cordial government relations enable it to squeeze out smaller firms, dampening the competitiveness and innovation of Kenya's digital ecosystem.

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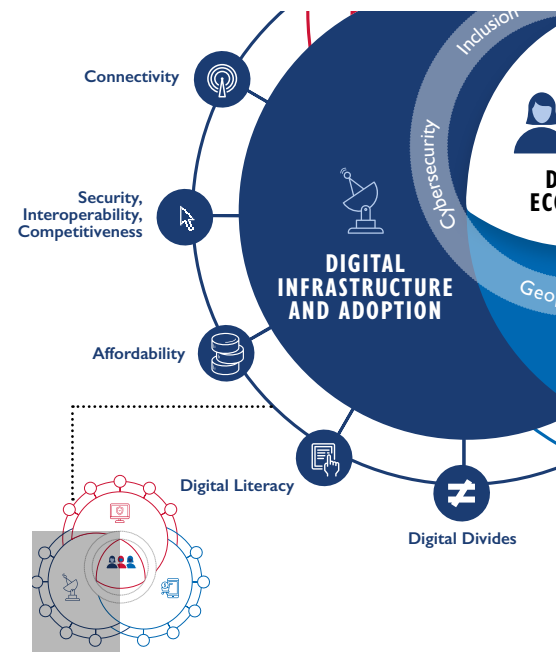
6   For more information on community networks, explore the Internet Society information page and this story from South Africa.

Affordability

Affordability measures the cost of connectivity relative to local income. Device, maintenance, and data costs can be deterrents to widespread mobile phone use. Effective regulation of the telecommunications market can improve affordability by promoting competition and innovation.

> **DECA pilot example**   In Kenya, the high cost of data is a barrier to increased use of digital tools and services. As of 2019, 1 GB of mobile broadband cost Kenyans 4 percent of the per-capita Gross National Income, or GNI; a broadly accepted target is 2 percent or less. Young people often try to stretch their mobile data bundles by checking WhatsApp or other social media at fixed times rather than running the apps continuously. These affordability-driven use patterns have implications for USAID projects that use digital communications to reach Kenyan youth.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and networked technologies for participation in economic, social, and political life. This topic includes competencies such as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy, and media literacy. A person with basic digital skills can usually make calls and access social media on a mobile phone. A more advanced and digitally competent user can easily navigate several types of digital platforms, protect their information online, and evaluate the validity of information available to them.

Source: USAID Serbia

Digital literacy influences adoption of digital tools and services, but should also be kept in mind for other DECA pillars. Pillar 2: Digital Society, Rights, and Governance covers government capacity to develop digital policies and programs that account for citizens with varying digital (and media) literacy levels. Media (or information) literacy is an individual's ability to search for and critically evaluate available information (data, news articles, reports, etc). Pillar 3: Digital Economy highlights the importance of digital literacy in building the digital talent pool. Digital literacy is also connected to cybersecurity, one of the cross-cutting DECA areas. Cyber hygiene is the ability of an individual to stay safe and secure online through routine practices. Cyber hygiene as well as media and information literacy are important components of digital literacy.

> **DECA pilot example**   Early during the COVID-19 crisis, the Serbian government took measures to promote access to distance learning for school-aged children through TV and online platforms, resulting in 98 percent of school children using distance learning. Part of ensuring that children stay safe online includes cyber hygiene—how to protect yourself and your data online—which is not currently built into the standard ICT curricula at schools. However, a multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2019 created curricula[7] called the *Children and the Internet – Smart from the Beginning* digital guide that are intended for use in schools and preschools. This resource highlights key themes that parents and teachers may need to understand, such as digital device settings for safe internet use, or how internet predators may work. For children, the guide includes cartoons and leaflets explaining good cyber practices and what it means to protect one's data on the internet.

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7   The Children and the Internet – Smart from the Beginning digital guide was produced within the Family Safety Net project, launched by UNICEF and Telenor Company, and implemented by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, and the Užice Child Rights Centre NGO.
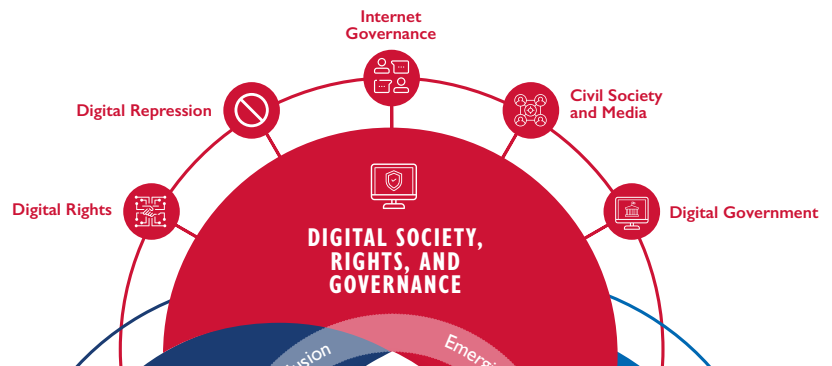
Digital Divides

The digital divide is the distinction between those who have internet and/or mobile phone access and can make use of digital communications services and those who are excluded from these services. Digital divides can stem from social norms or from inequities in access, literacy, income, or availability of relevant content. Digital divides may be associated with gender, race, ethnicity, disability, economic status, geography, sexual orientation, language, refugee status, and age, among other factors. Digital divides overlap and will often have specific intersectional barriers (e.g., for women with disabilities).

> **DECA pilot example**   In general, digital inclusion (and exclusion) in Nepal are around four dimensions: income, geography, gender, and marginalization. This includes barriers to accessing smartphones and the internet, digital and financial literacy, access to the internet, as well as cultural norms inhibiting women from entering and advancing in ICT sector. These digital divides inhibit the adoption of digital finance and other tools in rural Nepal, where most farmers are women, female illiteracy among marginalized groups is high, incomes are lower than in cities, and infrastructure expansion is challenging. USAID created a program to mitigate these gaps, Mahila Udhyami, an online platform designed to promote buying from women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses to minimize COVID-19 pandemic impacts on women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). MA-Udhayami Campaign is now looking to expand through Thulo.com's e-commerce platform.

PILLAR II
Digital Society, Rights, and Governance

This pillar is divided into three sub-pillars:

A   **Internet Freedom** explores elements of the digital ecosystem that enable and impede individuals and institutions in exercising human rights and fundamental freedoms online.

B   **Civil Society and Media** identifies key institutions and how they report on, advocate for, and influence freedoms online.

C   **Digital Government** looks at the government's efforts to *manage* its internal IT processes and systems, *deliver* citizen- and business-facing e-services, and *engage* with the public through digital channels.

A   Internet Freedom

Internet freedom refers to the ability of individuals to access the internet without obstacles, produce and consume content without censorship, and have their fundamental human rights respected online. Assessing internet freedom requires understanding which online rights are recognized, how those rights might be violated, and what institutions and processes exist to govern the online space.

Digital Rights

Digital rights refers to the rights and freedoms that individuals can exercise online,[8] including rights related to privacy and data ownership.[9] It includes topics such as freedom of expression online, access to online media, data privacy and protection, and other human rights issues such as journalists and bloggers having the freedom to post information online without the fear of arrest or attack, protecting children from digital harms, and protecting women and girls from online gender-based violence. The digital rights topic also considers the extent to which private sector companies use human rights impact assessments (HRIAs) to identify and prioritize human rights impacts. For example, Facebook's HRIA in Myanmar shaped their stance and implementation plan to address human rights in the country.

> **DECA pilot example**   Colombia has robust data protection and privacy laws that provide legal safeguards for citizens operating online and using digital tools. The constitution includes an explicit protection of the right to privacy, and two data protection laws are in place, as well as a data protection authority.

Digital Repression

Digital repression refers to the use of digital tools and technology to violate human rights and includes five techniques—surveillance, censorship, social manipulation and disinformation, internet shutdowns, and targeted persecution of online users. While digital repression is common under authoritarian regimes, democracies have also used these techniques. Digital repression is not limited to government actors; non-state and foreign actors (including private sector and religious groups) can also deploy these techniques for political, social, and economic reasons. Digital repression can be deployed using various technological tools including surveillance cameras, commercial malware, social media "botnets," and access-blocking firewalls. Censorship and surveillance circumvention technologies (e.g., VPN, encrypted messaging applications) are used by people in many countries to mitigate some elements of digital repression.

> **DECA pilot example**   Since 2018, Nepal's government has increasingly restricted free expression online. Freedom Forum, a Nepali NGO, reported that between May 2018 and May 2020, more than 350 people were arrested for something they said online. Outdated policies and statutes are used to regulate and prosecute online speech. During COVID-19, government critics and journalists were detained and numerous news websites were shut down amid criminalization of online "misinformation." Investigating these digital rights dynamics between citizens and policymakers provided a nuanced perspective to the Nepal DECA and can help identify opportunities for USAID activities.

NOTE: RESEARCH IN CLOSING CIVIC SPACES

Governance research in repressive environments can inadvertently put interviewees and others at risk, particularly for foreign researchers who may be less aware of local history and context. Consult with the Mission's RLO and democracy and governance experts to find out how best to manage communication, what to expect, and how to protect some potentially sensitive interviewees. Make sure the Mission DECA Team is notified before any interviews with government officials, and try to have someone from the Mission join interviews. Be open and honest about your work, and respect the confidentiality of informants. The American Anthropological Association's Statement on Ethics can provide more guidance on responsible interview-based research.

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8   See Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

9   See ICCPR Article 17

Internet Governance

Internet governance is defined as the development and application of principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the internet. Internet governance includes two primary models:

- Multi-stakeholder, **the model USAID supports**, is a collaborative effort involving governments, the private sector, and civil society.

- State-based, in which processes, decisions, and actions are dominated by the government, includes little to no stakeholder input.

Internet governance touches on a range of public policy issues, including trade, civil liberties, cybersecurity, and sovereignty. Internet standards affect how people can access online resources, how businesses expand on a global scale, and how governments use the internet to manage their internal processes and deliver citizen services. Internet governance ideally includes multi-stakeholder responses to illicit activity such as data breaches, scams, child exploitation, or extremist recruiting on the internet.

A multi-stakeholder approach to internet governance ensures that processes are driven by mutual consensus, and that a single stakeholder group does not monopolize control. Two notable internet governance institutions are the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). The IGF operates at a global, regional, and national level to create an open and inclusive dialogue on internet governance issues. ICANN coordinates internet protocol addresses and domain names that people and devices use to connect to the internet. This topic also looks at a country's participation in and compliance with international agreements (e.g., Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, regional trade agreement requirements).

> **DECA pilot example**   The Serbian National Internet Domain Registry Foundation (RNIDS) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) and a multistakeholder consortium that manages the ".rs" national internet domain. RNIDS makes decisions about which organizations can register domain names and adjudicates disputes over domain name ownership. It has representation from diverse stakeholders, including telecommunications companies, university faculty, and government entities. DECA interviews revealed the multi-stakeholder approach to be a key success factor for Serbia's domain name registry. At the same time, Serbia lacks a national IGF initiative, and appears to be taking a state-based approach to other aspects of internet governance. This could be a programming opportunity for the Mission to help the Serbian government develop a multistakeholder Internet Governance Forum.

B   Civil Society and Media

Civil society organizations (CSOs) include formal NGOs as well as formal and informal membership associations (e.g., labor unions, business and professional associations, farmers' organizations and cooperatives, and women's groups) that articulate and represent the interests of their members, engage in analysis and advocacy, and conduct oversight of government actions and policies.

CSOs and the media play an important role in a digital ecosystem by promoting the inclusion of diverse perspectives and calling attention to abuses. This topic emphasizes how CSOs and the media report on, advocate for, and influence online freedom. It explores how these institutions serve a watchdog role in the face of declining online freedoms, strategies they use to uphold online freedom and inclusion, how digital media is used and accessed, how social media is used for activism (both online and offline), and how the internet is used for political organizing. Media includes both state and independent media, as well as informal media influencers who publish and/or share content that triggers and shapes broader conversations.

> **DECA pilot example** In Kenya, an active and diverse civil society advocates for equitable policies, citizen protections, government transparency, data privacy regulation, online freedoms, and fair business practices. CSOs like Mzalendo Trust, a Parliamentary watchdog, have made digital technology a core part of their work, posting annual scorecards about parliamentarians and using social media and SMS to engage with the public. The DECA highlights the work of media and CSOs in upholding digital rights and freedoms and recommends ways for Missions to further engage with and support such organizations.

C Digital Government

Digital government refers to the use of digital technologies as an integrated part of government modernization strategies to create public value.[10] It relies on a digital government ecosystem comprised of government actors, non-governmental organizations, businesses, citizens' associations and individuals, which supports the production of and access to data, services, and content through interactions with the government. Digital government can be divided into three broad categories of systems used by governments to *deliver*, *manage*, and *engage*.

- **Deliver Government Services:** Government services refer to the use of technology such as online government service portals and digital ID to enable and improve how public bodies provide services to people (government to person, or G2P) and to businesses (government to business, or G2B). Online government portals bring together government information and services for individuals and businesses to access information and carry out administrative procedures. This topic also includes the availability and usability of open government data and, when applicable, Open Government Partnership commitments.

> **DECA pilot example** In Serbia, most digital government services are accessible through the Office for IT and eGovernment website, which provides a one-stop landing page called the eUprava portal (uprava translates to "administration"). The portal offers about 800 electronic services connected to various ministries and levels of government. Services include business registration, building permits, vehicle registration, school registration (eKindergarten), birth registration (eBaby), a health information system (ePrescription), and a system for electronic payment and filing of personal and business taxes. The eUprava portal is becoming increasingly integrated with Serbia's national ID system.

- **Manage Government Systems:** Digital government systems include back-end IT systems, management information systems, financial management information systems, and data storage solutions (e.g., cloud storage and government data centers). Strong digital government systems are interoperable, well managed and maintained, widely used, and well-protected. When high-quality solutions are available and suitable, governments can promote security and interoperability by embracing open-source software solutions.

> **DECA pilot example** The Serbian National Interoperability Framework, adopted in January 2014, aims to modernize public administration. It considers interoperability to be key to developing an information society. A key piece of Serbia's interoperability approach is the Government Services Bus (GSB), a shared communication channel that connects 23 government databases and allows secure information exchange.[11] The GSB was established in late 2019 with support from the World Bank's Enabling Digital Governance project.

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10 Digital government is often used interchangeably with terms like "e-governance" and "e-government". See Appendix C for a more detailed definition.

11 The term "bus" (short for "omnibus") comes from the computer hardware field and originally referred to a bundle of parallel wires that connect key components including the central processing unit, memory, and peripherals. Today, any shared communication channel that allows different components to share information might be referred to as a "bus."

- **Engage Citizens and Organizations:** Digital technology can provide a powerful way for governments to collect feedback and input from the public. This can include reports of service outages; online polls, surveys, and petitions; and potentially even online elections. These feedback mechanisms are an essential piece of participatory governance in a digital world, but require careful attention to inclusion, privacy, and transparency. Government innovation hubs provide platforms for the government to work directly with innovators to solve particular challenges and foster connections with the private sector (e.g., 18F in the U.S.).

  > **DECA pilot example** In 2015, Colombia launched the *Urna de Cristal* (crystal urn) platform for citizen participation. *Urna de Cristal*'s name is a metaphor for transparency, and it was intended to offer consultation services, participation exercises, and public education on civic issues. While the system has faced its share of criticism, it is recognized as a step toward building a culture of public participation in Colombia.

- **Guardrails for Technology:** Effective digital government systems build public trust by respecting individual rights. This often means being explicit about what will *not* be done with citizen data—limiting the use of technology by government and other actors for malign purposes. Governments can visibly constrain misuse by adopting and enforcing data governance policies and ethical guidelines (e.g., with AI and similar emerging technologies). Governments can choose to use transparent procurement and to consult impacted communities when deploying new technologies (e.g., for digital IDs, Smart Cities, and e-citizen portals).

  > **DECA pilot example** In Kenya, the *Huduma Namba* national identity system was initially set up to collect identity information including DNA samples and GPS coordinates of individual houses. In 2020, these details were prohibited by a Supreme Court decision, and the roll-out of the program was halted until a data protection framework could be put in place.

PILLAR III
Digital Economy

Digital Financial Services (DFS)

DFS are financial services enabled by or delivered through digital technology (e.g., mobile phones, cards, the internet). These services (e.g., payments, credit, insurance, savings, advisory) can be offered by a range of providers, from banks to a host of non-bank financial institutions, such as microfinance institutions, digital credit providers, payment providers, technology vendors, and electronic money issuers. Well-developed national payments systems are likely to include infrastructure such as a national switch[12]

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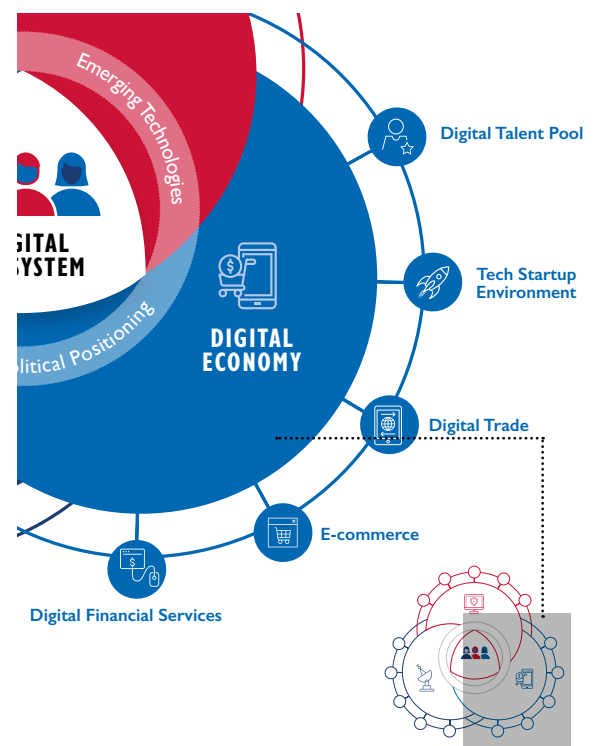
12 A national switch is a shared platform that connects all commercial banks and MNOs, and also facilitates clearing of retail payment transactions.

and automated clearinghouses.[13] Well-designed DFS products are created and piloted with the target users to operate in an environment that prioritizes consumer protection.

Given that many USAID programs serve low-income, marginalized groups, understanding the concept of "digital financial inclusion" is key. It is defined as digital access to and use of formal financial services by excluded and underserved populations. Inclusive DFS are suited to the customers' needs and delivered responsibly, at a cost that is affordable to customers and sustainable for providers.

> **DECA pilot example** In Colombia, the goal of increasing financial inclusion through applying DFS faces several barriers. These include weak rural connectivity, gaps in the physical bank infrastructure, high real and perceived risks on behalf of financial service providers, and serious trust issues among customers in rural post-conflict areas. However, the financial regulator favors innovation across the financial system and in 2018 launched a regulatory sandbox (a framework designed to enable financial entities to experiment with innovative products, services, and business models). The first innovation approved through the sandbox was TPaga, a mobile wallet for the unbanked.

E-commerce

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines e-commerce as "the sale or purchase of goods or services, conducted over computer networks by methods specifically designed for the purpose of receiving or placing of orders." E-commerce may be conducted through formal (e.g., Amazon, Etsy) and informal (e.g., Facebook, Whatsapp) digital platforms. Physical goods may need to be shipped domestically or overseas; virtual goods and services (such as streaming video or a telehealth consultation) can be delivered digitally. In addition to digital tools (such as payment platforms), e-commerce depends on physical infrastructure for the warehousing and delivery of goods. E-commerce growth has implications for traditional methods of cross-border trade and domestic transport infrastructure, postal, and logistics systems. This topic also considers the degree to which businesses, particularly SMEs, use digital platforms (such as e-commerce platforms) to interact with customers and streamline and protect internal processes.

> **DECA pilot example** Sastodeal, one of the leading e-commerce platforms in Nepal, partnered with Women for Human Rights (WHR) Nepal to connect rural women entrepreneurs to new markets. Women in rural Nepal are often involved in small-scale production but struggle to sell their goods beyond their localities. Through their partnership with Sastodeal, WHR Nepal leverages e-commerce to remove middlemen. This DECA anecdote illustrates how e-commerce can expand market opportunities for MSMEs in harder-to-reach locations.

Digital Trade

The U.S. International Trade Commission defines digital trade as "The delivery of products and services over the internet by firms in any industry sector, and of associated products such as smartphones and internet-connected sensors." This includes services such as cloud storage, software-as-a-service, banking and e-commerce platforms, and digital media content, as well as ICT hardware. Whereas e-commerce focuses on the purchase and delivery of physical goods, digital trade takes a broader view, including trade in digital services and media

Source: Des Syafrizal for USAID

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13 The Automated Clearing House (ACH) is the primary system that agencies use for electronic funds transfer (EFT). With ACH, funds are electronically deposited in financial institutions, and payments are made online.

and emphasizing cross-border transactions. Digital trade facilitation refers to a range of topics from international payment services to e-signatures and digitized customs processes. Exploring this topic involves understanding how enterprises buy and sell goods and services across borders and what regulations and agreements shape their work.

> **DECA pilot example** Cross-border trade in Nepal is slow and costly, with notable weaknesses in digital trade. For exports and imports, burdensome documentation requirements slow processes and add costs. Understanding the nuances of digital trade through a DECA can illuminate critical gaps USAID is well positioned to address, and that can help expedite the country's growth trajectory. For example, Nepal has only implemented 2 percent of its World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) commitments,[14] and has requested implementation assistance for all of the WTO TFA obligations that touch on the application of digital technologies to trade procedures (e.g., information on procedures and requirements made available through the internet; electronic payments enabled for duties, taxes, fees, and customs charges).

Tech Startup Environment

The tech startup environment is an indicator of technological advancement in a country. Tech startups include both social enterprises[15] and profit-oriented businesses focused on business services, transportation, or even gaming. In many developing countries, digital startups cater to an international market rather than aiming for local adoption. A promising startup environment can attract foreign investment, incentivize skilled IT professionals to remain in-country, and encourage innovation.

> **DECA pilot example** Kenya has a thriving startup ecosystem where the tech industry is often referred to as the 'Silicon Savannah.' These startups have attracted investors from around the world. Many startups use technology to address development issues in Kenya. For example, companies such as Andela and Lynk are utilizing digital platforms to connect the local workforce with contract or "gig" opportunities. Against this background, the Kenya DECA highlighted the importance of further strengthening of the sector through support such as patient capital and building business acumen among entrepreneurs. Such measures can help cultivate an enabling environment for Kenya's ICT sector, and advance the government's goals of digital transformation.

Digital Talent Pool

The digital talent pool describes the availability of skilled workers who can support the growth of the digital ecosystem in a country. This can range from IT technicians and specialists, to entrepreneurs, and from young Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) graduates to academics and policymakers. A digital talent pool can also include digital media professionals such as marketers, social media influencers, and journalists. A skilled digital talent pool can help build a strong, globally competitive digital economy and pave the way for a country's digital transformation.

> **DECA pilot example** Serbia has a strong digital talent pool and there are several ways to be involved in the country's ICT talent pool, including as full-time employees, contractors, or freelancers. Many ICT professionals in Serbia work in the latter two categories. Despite the average salary of ICT professionals being higher than the median salary in Serbia, the DECA found that many Serbian ICT professionals seek opportunities abroad.

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14 As of March 2021

15 These startups are created with the objective to support social and development issues.

Cross-Cutting Topics

Inclusion

Marginalized and vulnerable populations are often unable to fully participate in the digital ecosystem. Exclusion can stem from social norms or from inequities in access, literacy, income, or the availability of relevant content. Depending on the local context, people may be excluded based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, economic status, geography, sexual orientation, language, and refugee status. Discussions around inclusion overlap and will often intersect (e.g., for women with disabilities). The term "digital divide" is commonly used to describe disparities in access (see Pillar 1), but other aspects of inclusion (e.g., gender equity in the digital talent pool) should be considered.

The examples below use gender and disability to illustrate the role of inclusion in digital ecosystems. Other marginalized and vulnerable populations may experience similar challenges.

PILLAR 1 Digital Infrastructure and Adoption

- **Gender:** Girls and women not only face unique barriers in accessing and using digital tools and services, but also often lag behind boys and men in digital literacy. According to data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), this digital literacy gap is present in almost every country in the world, regardless of geography or income (Figure below). Digital tools, services, and skills education often do not consider the needs or preferences of women and girls.

COMPOSITE DIGITAL LITERACY SCORES
Average over nine digital competencies

Source: UNESCO

These composite scores are averages of the nine digital competencies included as indicators for SDG 4.4.1. The solid gray line indicates parity; countries farther below the line have a larger gap between male and female digital literacy.
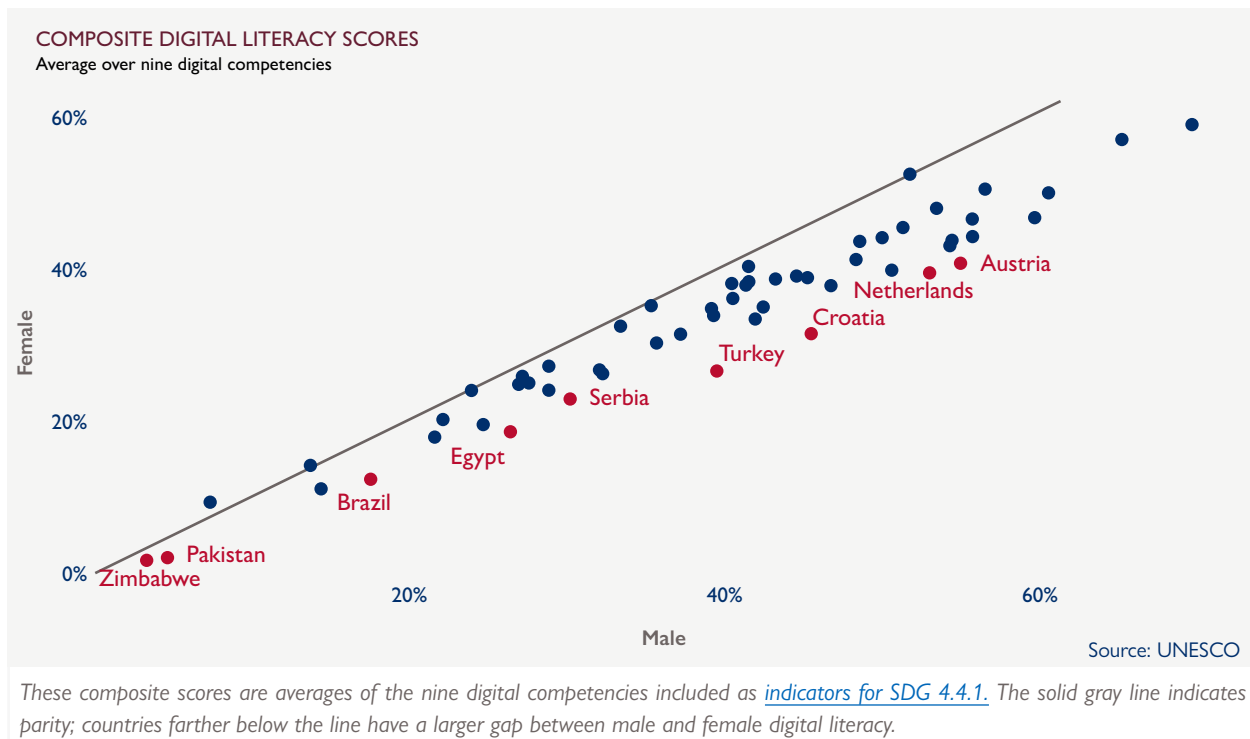
- **Disability:** Equitable access to digital tools and services must account for persons with a broad array of abilities, including those who are hard of hearing, blind, have speech impediments, or other learning, developmental, and psychosocial disabilities. Persons with disabilities must have access to digital tools and services that will work for them.

> **Example**   Since 2011, the USAID-funded "All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development" has aimed to improve the literacy skills of early-grade learners through open competitions to create and scale technological solutions. In 2019, eKitabu, the Kenya-based prize finalist of the "Sign on for Literacy Prize", launched Studio KSL (Kenyan Sign Language) to support deaf communities. The project translated KSL into a visual glossary, produced KSL videos for integration into accessible books, and created visual storybooks to introduce KSL to early-grade readers. The project made notable impact, including developing 60 digital local sign language materials and engaging with over 150 parents and local deaf communities across three schools.

PILLAR II Digital Society, Rights, and Governance

- **Gender:** Online violence targeting women and sexual minorities can take many forms, such as cyber stalking, defamation, identity theft and hacking, or exploitative threats and shaming, all of which are violations of their digital rights.

- **Disability:** Digital government services can consider inclusive design elements to ensure they are accessible for everyone. This can include providing services through websites or portals for those who can't travel, voice-based interfaces, alternative text for images, and chat support. Digital ID systems (particularly those incorporating biometrics) can provide alternatives to retina scans or fingerprints. Persons with disabilities may also be uniquely vulnerable to online harassment, personal data breaches, and mis- and disinformation.

> **DECA pilot example**   In Colombia, misogyny and violence against women online is prevalent and leads some women to self-censor or reduce their activities online. In 2015, Fundación Karisma—a civil society organization dedicated to supporting the protection and promotion of human rights online—launched the Alerta Machitroll website to raise awareness and enable easy reporting of online violence against vulnerable groups including women and the LGBTQI+ community. The website allows users to upload screenshots of abuse. It provides an alternative course of action for women facing online harassment and highlights the amount of online abuse and its serious impact on women's digital inclusion.

ACCOUNTING FOR INTERSECTIONALITY IN YOUR RESEARCH

Intersectionality recognizes that cross-cutting identities (e.g., overlap between gender, age, socio-economic status, race, sexual orientation, or disabilities) further complicate efforts in digital inclusion. Digital divides may be larger when people experience intersecting forms of exclusion. For example, women face unique challenges accessing and using digital tools and services, and these challenges may be magnified for women with disabilities or for women in minority groups. Ultimately, none of these groups of people should be treated as monoliths; problems faced by one specific population cannot be generalized to others.

PILLAR III Digital Economy

- **Gender:** STEM is frequently seen as a "male" field, and men often participate in higher numbers in both higher education and the ICT workforce. From a young age, girls may be discouraged from entering STEM fields; the absence of women in visible roles may further discourage

them. When women do enter ICT fields, they often face barriers to career advancement. Other barriers for women in the digital economy may include financial exclusion due to safety and social issues surrounding interactions with male agents, or due to a lack of products or services tailored to their needs.

- **Disability:** DFS and e-commerce platforms need to be accessible for persons with disabilities. ICT education programs and curricula can be developed in a way that enables and encourages inclusion of students with disabilities.

> **DECA pilot example** Nepal has a large male population living and working abroad, which leaves many women at home to act as head of household. Although women can open bank accounts in their own names, they often turn to less-secure, informal financial channels due to low financial literacy, distrust, lack of mobility, lack of citizenship certificate, and physical security. Chhimek Laghubitta Bikas Bank, in partnership with the FCDO Sakchyam project, launched Nepal's first women-led microfinance technology campaign called Digital Mahila. The bank trains female staff to electronically record payments, disburse loans, and offer financial literacy training to rural female clients.

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is the protection of information and communications systems and information against damage, unauthorized use or modification, or exploitation. Cybersecurity goes beyond the physical and digital protection of computer and communication systems. It includes individual, institutional, and national considerations. Effective cybersecurity requires adequate policies and strategies along with institutions that can implement those strategies. It also requires that institutions have the human and material resources to mitigate, detect, and prevent cyber attacks. Actors across governments, civil society, media outlets, and the private sector can include cybersecurity considerations in all aspects of operations, such as enterprise systems, procurement, supply chains, and contracting agreements.

Cybersecurity is needed to mitigate or respond to cyber harms. For the DECA, we assess not only the security measures in place, but also high level-trends on cyber harms impacting the country. In addition to "outside" attackers, some of the most common cyber threats come from authorized users pursuing unauthorized goals, such as embezzling funds from a company account.

Cybersecurity impacts every digital element across the DECA pillars; however, the assessment will focus on the most pressing issues for the country:

PILLAR I Digital Infrastructure and Adoption

- National-level cybersecurity includes the protection of critical internet infrastructure[16] such as fiber optic cables and cloud storage systems, and the supply chain for digital infrastructure (e.g., switches, routers, base stations). Individual-level cybersecurity focuses on the cyber hygiene aspects of digital literacy, such as understanding cyber threats and taking action to protect personal data.

> **Example** In October 2016, a massive Distributed Denial Of Service (DDOS) attack caused half of Liberia to go offline. The perpetrator was contracted by a local Liberian telecommunications company to gain a competitive edge over Liberia's only other telecommunications company. The hacker modified

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16 Critical internet infrastructure (CII) includes essential hardware and software components that Internet services rely upon. Hardware CII include fiber optic cables, wires, or routing equipment; software CII may include Domain Name System, storage systems, or authentication and authorization services.

a virus freely available on the dark web and unintentionally disrupted the country's connectivity for almost a week. This affected banking transactions, internet access, and even communications between international agencies and health workers responding to the Ebola crisis.

PILLAR II Digital Society, Rights, and Governance

- National-level cybersecurity requires the protection of government data and IT systems, cross-border data flow agreements, and continued adaptation to new threats. Cyber attacks on government systems can decrease public trust in government processes and services. Government cybersecurity institutions such as Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) are critical, but require adequate staff and resources. Government, civil society, and digital media outlets can make choices to ensure data protection and privacy as well as individual and institutional protection against cyber harms that violate digital rights. These harms may be caused by actors (state and non-state) employing digital repression tactics such as mis- or disinformation, censorship, and surveillance.

  Example   In 2019, at least 1,400 WhatsApp users in Togo were victims of a cyber attack that injected NSO spyware onto phones as part of a targeted attack on civil society. The attack coincided with nationwide protests during which many journalists, opposition leaders, and human rights activists were detained.

PILLAR III Digital Economy

- Cybersecurity in the digital economy involves measures that protect consumers and systems against cyber threats to the financial system and to e-commerce platforms. Ministries of Finance, central banks, commercial and microfinance banks, and FinTechs alike can ensure a cyber-secure financial sector. Threats include ransomware attacks and large-scale consumer data breaches.

  DECA pilot example   In September 2019, Nepali banks experienced the financial sector's biggest cyber attack and lost over Rs 35 million (USD 297,300) in an ATM heist carried out by Chinese hackers. The hackers injected malware into the Nepal Electronic Payment System to drain cash from ATMs.

Emerging Technologies

The term "emerging technology" encompasses AI, IoT, blockchain, 5G, and other new technologies. These technologies can bring a range of benefits, including digital experiences that are faster, more user-friendly, and more inclusive across disability or language barriers. Applying emerging technologies also brings inherent risks. For example, if not designed carefully, some AI technologies may encode bias that can harm marginalized or vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities.

PILLAR I Digital Infrastructure and Adoption

- Cloud computing and AI can help governments, companies, and institutions handle large data volumes. With more developing nations moving towards 5G networks, the amount of data will continue to increase. Internet service providers can also explore the application of emerging technologies to strengthen their competitive advantage and provide better service to last-mile customers. Emerging technologies can also help bridge digital divides, for example, through speech-recognition interfaces for some persons with disabilities and those with lower literacy.

> **Example**   Accenture's Responsible AI, in partnership with the National Association for the Blind in India, developed mobile software, Drishti, that reads texts, identifies objects, and narrates them to the user.

PILLAR II Digital Society, Rights, and Governance

- Government services can be enhanced by emerging technologies such as through blockchain-backed data registries and AI-powered citizen e-service delivery. Emerging technologies also pose potential risks including "deepfakes" (which can spread disinformation through falsified images, audio, and video) and advanced surveillance systems that employ facial recognition.

> **Example**   In late 2018, Gabonese president Ali Bongo delivered a traditional New Years' address by video, amid intense speculation about his health. Bongo's unusual appearance in the video led many social media users, including some opposition politicians, to accuse the government of releasing a deepfake to cover up the president's illness or death. A week later, Gabon's military launched an unsuccessful coup, citing the "fake" video as part of its rationale for seizing power. Forensic analysis later showed that the video was authentic, but merely the *threat* of manipulated video is enough to erode public trust in dangerous ways.

PILLAR III Digital Economy

- In the digital economy, AI and machine learning can be used to improve back-end business processes or customer-service chat bots. FinTechs also use AI, blockchain, and machine learning across a range of services such as digital banking, credit scoring, and predictive analytics. Cryptocurrencies and other digital assets are challenging regulators and central banks around the world by enabling the creation of currencies that are outside the control of any state institutions.

> **DECA pilot example**   In Nepal, AgriClear, a challenge-finalist of the 2020 UNCDF AgriTECH challenge, uses blockchain technology to improve traceability in agricultural products.

Geopolitical Positioning

Although each DECA focuses on the country-level digital ecosystem, countries exist in a global context and are impacted by the actions of others. One specific area of concern is the influence of authoritarian states, including but not limited to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation, which are actively working to shape the global digital space. USAID Missions must understand how these global dynamics play out in the countries where they work and how global technology rivalries can affect development. While an in-depth geopolitical analysis is beyond the scope of the DECA, assessments should aim to give Missions a high-level overview of what's happening and help them decide whether more detailed research is needed.

PILLAR I Digital Infrastructure and Adoption

- Investments in digital infrastructure (e.g., being a part of the PRC's Digital Silk Road Initiative), and partnerships with foreign telecommunications companies and equipment manufacturers may have serious implications for security, interoperability, and financial sustainability.

> **DECA pilot example**   The Chinese technology firms Huawei and ZTE are the main contractors for much of Kenya's fiber optic network, active partners in advancing 5G networks, have a significant share of the mobile device market, and have invested in local workforce skills training. The U.S. and other countries have expressed concerns about the long-term security of Huawei and ZTE equipment, prompting the Kenyan government to put its 5G rollout with Huawei on hold, only to move ahead again less than three months later. Realistically assessing and mitigating the security risks of network equipment from PRC-linked companies will require careful coordination with a broad range of allies and partners.

PILLAR II Digital Society, Rights, and Governance

- Foreign powers can use digital technologies in several ways to exert and broaden their global influence. In some cases, such as the export of surveillance technologies or commercial spyware, foreign companies can enable the illiberal instincts of local actors. In more extreme cases, foreign actors can attempt to undermine the legitimacy or stability of a government through disinformation or cyber attacks.

> **DECA pilot example**   The government of Serbia is partnering with Huawei on "Safe City" initiatives that involve surveillance cameras with facial recognition capabilities. The project grew out of an increasingly close relationship between the Ministry of the Interior and Huawei. In 2019, the Interior Minister announced plans to install up to 1,000 cameras throughout Belgrade, allowing police to identify criminal suspects and potential witnesses. The procurement, administration, placement, monitoring, and purpose of the cameras lacked transparency. As an indicator of the secrecy around this project, a Huawei website listing the Belgrade pilot as a case study was subsequently deleted (but was archived by Wayback Machine).

PILLAR III Digital Economy

- Geopolitics may affect a country's digital trade policies, such as their accession to the World Trade Organization.

> **DECA Example**   The topic of trade facilitation in Serbia is complicated by the fact that Serbia is not yet a member of the World Trade Organization. The problem dates back to the aftermath of the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s—Western powers indicated that they would block Serbia's accession until Kosovo could also join the WTO as an independent country, while Russia indicated that Serbia could join the WTO only after Kosovar independence was off the table. Serbia's trade policy continues to be shaped by the strategic priorities of the Serbian government and the geopolitical dynamics in the region.

3.2 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

Purpose	To provide an overview of the requirements, skills, and responsibilities needed to conduct a successful DECA
When	Throughout the DECA
Implementation time	1 to 2 weeks to finalize the work plan and define team roles

This section is a reference to use when an external Research Team is needed to conduct the DECA. This section provides examples of language, requirements, criteria, and deliverables for the Mission's OAA to consider as it develops the requirements, scope of work, and deliverables.

Mission Engagement

Consistent Mission engagement is key to a successful DECA, and the Research Team needs to collaborate and garner feedback from the Mission throughout the assessment. The Mission will designate a Mission DECA Team that includes one leader (ideally a DDA or Program Officer) and a representative from each Technical Office. Throughout the assessment, the Mission DECA Team will provide technical direction and insight on Mission priorities and programming. The Research Team should schedule meetings with the Mission DECA Team every two weeks. **TABLE 2** below summarizes the kinds of support the Mission can consider providing to the Research Team at each DECA phase.[17]

TABLE 2: Key Mission points of engagement with the DECA

DECA Phase	Mission Contributions
1 **DESK RESEARCH AND PLANNING**	• Share Mission priorities and expectations for what the DECA is intended to inform (e.g., CDCS, activity design) • Share details on Mission portfolio (current and future projects) that have a focus on digital programming • Review and disseminate (within the Mission and other relevant USG stakeholders) the four desk research briefs • Identify and share contact information for potential interviewees • Arrange the DECA Introduction Presentation
2 **INTERVIEWS**	• Arrange meetings with relevant people at USAID, U.S. Embassy, and implementing partners • Participate in interviews, as interested and available • Arrange dissemination (read-out) of early findings to broad Mission audience
3 **ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING**	• Review draft report, providing specific feedback on framing of recommendations and priority areas for intervention • Advise on how to adapt the internal report for an external audience • Arrange the DECA Final Presentation

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17 For a more detailed description of Mission responsibilities, see **TABLE 1** in Section 2

DECA Format: virtual versus in-person interviews

Interviews can be conducted virtually, in-person, or some combination of the two. When choosing a format, take into account the following variables:

- **Connectivity:** Do interviewees have reliable connectivity that enables them to participate in virtual interviews?

- **Security:** What security and privacy concerns exist in the country for in-person interviews? For virtual? Which option better protects the interviewee and the content of their interview?

- **Accessibility:** What accommodations may some interviewees require, including a preference for in-person or virtual interviews?

Once the interview format is determined with the Mission, the Research Team should staff and plan accordingly. The remainder of the Toolkit contains guidance and templates that, when appropriate, note considerations specific to in-person or virtual interviews.

Team composition

Staffing a DECA with individuals that have the appropriate skills and availability is critical to ensuring a quality DECA. The size and composition of the Research Team will depend on Mission needs, and the team can be either local- or foreign-based (or a combination of the two). When considering team composition (local versus foreign staff), consider local language skills, technical background, proficiency in written English, and awareness of local context.

The team will need technical expertise across the three DECA pillars. Regional or country expertise and language skills are preferred. When possible, the team should have experience writing assessment-type documents and targeted recommendations for a non-technical donor audience. All Research Team members should be involved from start to finish, and responsibilities should be delegated to match each team member's skills.

A four-person Research Team model is outlined below, with links to sample Scopes of Work. These should be tailored to the team's specific needs. When the Mission plans to acquire services to form the external Research Team, the models below can be used as a recommended team, as a guide to develop key personnel and minimum qualifications for a team, or as a tool to understand the functions and necessary components of the Research Team (see **TABLE 3** below for detailed roles and responsibilities).
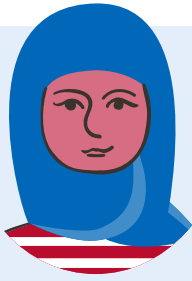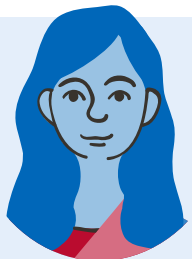
Principal Investigator

(full-time) [SOW]

Leads all aspects of the DECA, serves as the primary contact with the Mission, and provides final sign-off on all DECA products. This individual should be experienced in project management and have extensive experience working or conducting research in digital development with expertise in one or more of the DECA pillars.

Research Analyst

(full-time) [SOW]

Works with the Principal Investigator on all aspects of the DECA. Conducts the bulk of the desk research, oversees planning, interviewee identification and outreach, participates in interviews, and contributes to report writing. This individual should have experience conducting qualitative research and some experience in digital development.

Technical Researcher

(half-time) [SOW]

Provides technical oversight throughout the DECA, contributing more heavily during interviews, analysis, and report writing. This individual's expertise should complement the Principal Investigator's knowledge gaps. For example, if the Principal Investigator has a background in digital infrastructure and experience in digital rights, the Technical Researcher might have expertise in digital finance and digital trade.

Research Coordinator

(quarter-time) [SOW]

Provides logistical and operational support throughout the DECA process, provides research and note-taking support, manages logistics of interviewee outreach, and supports the DECA Research Team in finalizing all DECA products. More level of effort may be required for in-person DECAs, as the Research Coordinator serves as primary POC with the Mission (under guidance of the Principal Investigator) related to all administrative and logistical protocols. This role is not critical for DECAs with virtual interviews.
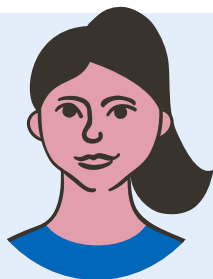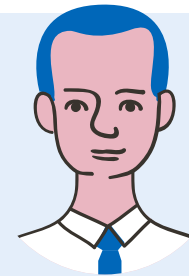
[optional] Interpreter

(part-time)

Some DECAs may require an interpreter; it is important for the interpreter to be experienced with development projects or in a related sector, to ensure technical terms are accurately conveyed to the Research Team. Finding a technical interpreter can be challenging and requires leveraging all available networks.

TABLE 3: Research Team roles and responsibilities

Principal Investigator (full-time)

Responsibilities

Throughout
- Lead and manage internal DECA Team check-ins
- Lead meetings with Mission DECA Team
- Facilitate internal monthly learning meetings and adapt as needed

Desk research and planning phase
- Guide desk research, work with team to conduct desk research, lead identification of key themes and knowledge gaps
- Serve as lead author for one desk research brief
- Provide technical review and final sign-off of desk research briefs

Interview phase
- Develop and review content for DECA presentations
- Lead DECA presentations
- Provide guidance and input on interview guides
- Lead interviews

Analysis and report writing phase
- Lead post-interview synthesis session to identify trends
- Delegate report writing responsibilities
- Serve as lead author for one findings and recommendations sections
- Provide final technical review and sign-off of report

Minimum Qualifications

- Strong knowledge of digital development technical areas, deep expertise in at least one DECA Pillar
- Experience conducting qualitative research and analysis, including leading interviews
- Experience overseeing cross-sectoral research
- Project management skills
- Leadership experience
- Personable, curious, and flexible
- Excellent synthesis and writing skills

Research Analyst (full-time)

Responsibilities

Desk research and planning phase
- Conduct desk research, serve as lead author for one desk research brief
- Identify interviewees
- Oversee interview scheduling

Interview Phase
- Draft interview guides
- Develop content for DECA presentations
- Participate in DECA presentations
- Lead interviews and take notes

Analysis and report writing phase
- Support the team lead with analysis of debrief and synthesis processes
- Serve as lead author for one findings and recommendation sections
- Work with Research Coordinator to finalize report design

Minimum Qualifications

- Knowledge of digital development technical areas, expertise in at least one DECA pillar
- Ability to be flexible across technical areas
- Experience conducting in-depth desk research
- Experience conducting qualitative research and analysis, including leading individual interviews
- Project management skills
- Strong synthesis and writing skills
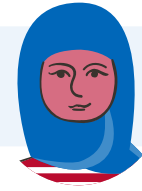
Technical Researcher (half-time)
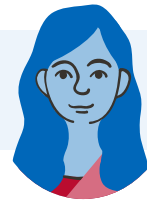
Responsibilities

Desk research and planning phase
- Serve as lead author for one desk research brief
- Provide technical review of four desk research briefs

Interview Phase
- Provide guidance and input on interview guides
- Lead interviews

Analysis and report writing phase
- Provide technical and analytical input during the debrief and synthesis processes
- Serve as lead author for one findings and recommendations sections

Minimum Qualifications
- Strong knowledge of digital development technical areas; ideally, the Technical Researcher should be able to fill any gaps in the Principal Investigator's technical background.
- Experience conducting qualitative research and analysis, including individual interviews
- Excellent writing skills

Research Coordinator (quarter-time)

Responsibilities

Desk research and planning phase
- Support Research Analyst to complete desk research briefs, gathering and organizing resources
- Help the Research Analyst identify interviewees and lead interview outreach and scheduling
- For in-person DECAs, serve as primary logistics point of contact with the mission and coordinate all in-country logistics

Interview phase
- Take notes during interviews
- Draft interview guides with Research Analyst

Analysis and report writing phase
- Support report finalization
- Coordinate report design

Note: This role is not critical for virtual DECAs; for in-person DECAs, level of effort would vary throughout, with greater LOE required during the interview phase.

Minimum Qualifications
- Experience conducting desk research
- Familiarity with USAID policies
- Highly organized with operations experience
- Strong writing skills

The DECA Work Plan

The DECA Work Plan Template outlines all suggested activities for in-person and virtual DECAs and can be helpful to keep the DECA process organized. Until the Work Plan is incorporated into the contract, it is not a requirement for the contractor. USAID and the contractor must agree to the Work Plan. Once agreed upon by both parties, the external Research Team is responsible for the Work Plan. USAID

can use the DECA Work Plan Template to guide those discussions, to help streamline the drafting of the Work Plan. The work plan identifies team member responsibilities, tracks task status, and monitors the timeline. One team member should be responsible for revisiting and monitoring the work plan throughout the DECA. Depending on team dynamics, this could be the Principal Investigator or the Research Coordinator. Either way, make sure this individual is designated early in the project; clear role definition is key to ensuring an on-task team and an on-time DECA. Please note that these timelines are estimates and could vary depending on the size of the Research Team, available level of effort, time zone accommodations for virtual DECAs, local and U.S. holidays, clearance processes, and other factors.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Work Plan | This is a detailed Excel spreadsheet with a work plan and timeline. Options for: In-person DECA; Virtual DECA

Project management best practices

The DECA involves many stakeholders and a lot of information gathering. A collaborative and communicative team is essential. Below is a list of project management best practices to ensure you cultivate a flexible, learning-oriented, and collaborative team culture. For external Research Teams, you can provide guidance to convert these best practices into requirements, or deliverables:

- Set up meetings with the Research Team and the Mission DECA Team every two weeks for the complete duration of the DECA to encourage real-time problem solving and ensure regular feedback and open communication.

- Designate note takers for each meeting. Detailed documentation of decisions made during meetings is a useful way to keep track of the several moving pieces in a DECA.

- During the interview phase, ensure that the Research Team sends regular email updates to the Mission detailing upcoming interviews so interested Mission staff can participate.

- Conduct monthly learning discussions to enable reflection, documentation, and adaptation. Consider reviewing USAID's Collaborating, Learning, Adapting (CLA) Toolkit for additional guidance on promoting a learning culture.

- DECAs have a long project timeline, and life happens. Make sure you have thought through transition plans in case anyone (including the Mission DECA Team Lead) leaves and needs to be replaced by someone new.

- Pay attention to external forces that could affect scheduling, such as national and religious holidays and political cycles, when planning and selecting a time frame for the assessment,

PHASE 1:
DESK RESEARCH AND PLANNING

1

3.3 PROJECT KICKOFF/POST-AWARD CONFERENCE

Purpose	To set expectations and build trust between the Research Team and Mission DECA Team.
When	Early in the desk research and planning phase
Implementation time	5 to 6 weeks

Once fully staffed, the Research Team should begin Step 1 of the desk research: Mission Context Review. Starting this part of the desk research early will equip team members with important information about the Mission's portfolio and country context so they are prepared to ask clarifying questions about Mission priorities, current and future programming, and country context during the kickoff call with the Mission DECA Team. The Mission DECA Team can set up a kickoff call using the Sample Kickoff Meeting Agenda; the Research Team should come prepared with clarifying questions. The Mission DECA Team should work with the cognizant Contracting Officer to hold a post-award conference with the external Research Teams, following the procedures found in the Federal Acquisition Regulation, Part 45.503-2 and using the material in this toolkit as a guide:

- What are the Mission's top programmatic priorities (e.g., Development Objectives from a recent or forthcoming CDCS, Agency-wide priorities with which the Mission is aiming to align)?

- Is the Mission particularly concerned about specific communities or marginalized groups (e.g., women, youth, ethnic minorities, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ community)? What potential members of these communities or other interviewees could speak to the needs of these vulnerable groups and how they intersect with the digital ecosystem?

- What upcoming Mission decision points are you hoping the DECA will inform (e.g., CDCS drafting, activity or project design, mid-term evaluations, key funding decisions)?

- What are some examples of current (or planned) Mission programming that include a digital component? Don't worry if the "digital component" is a minor piece of a larger program; this is to help understand how the Mission currently sees technology being used in its portfolio.

- How aware are Mission staff of "digital-by-default" initiatives, such as digital payments or digital data collection? Have there been challenges that might be indicative of broader ecosystem issues?

  - Over the last three years, which projects requested OAA waivers to the 2014 E-Payments Procurement Executive Bulletin, and what were the justifications provided? *(The Research Team can use this information to help understand challenges in the digital payments enabling environment and to identify potential interviewees.)*

- How available are Mission staff to participate in DECA interviews? Should Embassy staff also be involved?

- Who at the Embassy should be engaged in the DECA, and how frequent and detailed should updates be?

- Will anyone in the host-country government need to be briefed on the DECA or provide approval for interviews? Mission staff should provide the Research Team with guidance on how to navigate conversations like this.

INDIVIDUALS TO ENGAGE EARLY

The Research Team and Mission DECA Team should work to appropriately engage the following key individuals early in the DECA, as they have useful country experience and knowledge and an important stake in USAID's activities:

- USAID Country Desk Officer based in Washington, DC

- Mission Technical Office leads *(Education, Health, Economic Growth, etc.)*

- Embassy contacts *(be sure to work through the Mission DECA Team)*

- USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) *(as relevant)*

Meetings with these individuals can be set up during Step 1 Mission Context Review of the desk research with the goal of getting a more nuanced understanding of the existing programming, general Development Objectives, and country context.

The USAID Mission DECA Team can refer the Research Team to these individuals and identify who should be included in these conversations

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MANAGING GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS

In some countries, there are political sensitivities around research and data collection (especially foreign-sponsored research), and law enforcement authorities may prefer or even require that you seek official permission before beginning interviews. During the kickoff meeting between the Research Team and the Mission DECA Team, be sure to discuss any necessary approvals or briefings that need to happen in order to ensure an uninterrupted, above-board interview phase. In addition to coordinating with USAID, Research Teams should follow any procedures required by their company or university. For OAA staff, this should be included as a post-award conference requirement.

3.4 LOGISTICS PREPARATION FOR IN-PERSON DECA

Purpose	To adequately prepare logistics, primarily for in-person DECAs
When	Desk research planning phase
Implementation time	5 to 6 weeks

If the DECA includes in-person interviews, there are additional logistical considerations, especially if the Research Team is not based locally. Logistics planning should begin at least six weeks before the in-person interview phase (concurrently with desk research). For external Research Teams, logistics planning should be a requirement incorporated into the Statement of Work or the deliverables. Here are some illustrative examples for logistics preparation:

- Securing visas, flights, hotels, and transportation to and from the airport.

- Hiring a local consultant to support the team on the ground with any logistical needs.

- Confirming Mission travel policies (e.g., visitors, clearances, security precautions, drivers).

- Scheduling interviews in coordination with the Mission. Aim to have the interview schedule at least partially filled two weeks before arrival, leaving space for new contacts that will be referred by initial interviewees.

Relevant DECA Templates

Travel Schedules, Equipment Roster Template	Collects travel information and details about any equipment that will be brought into USAID facilities. Missions should be sure to ask for any information required by their security protocols.

Source: USAID Indonesia

3.5 DESK RESEARCH

Purpose	To collect information on country context, themes, and emerging trends relevant to the digital ecosystem.
When	Desk research and planning phase, post DECA-Mission kickoff call
Implementation time	5 to 6 weeks
This is a good time to revisit	Getting in the DECA mindset, Research Checklist

Desk research is a foundational part of the DECA. The goal is to equip DECA Team members with information on country context, themes, and emerging trends as they prepare for the interview phase. The desk research provides Research Team members with the knowledge they need to enter the interview phase well-informed and having identified what gaps need to be filled. At this stage, the research is not intended to be exhaustive. For external Research Teams, the Mission DECA Team should work with the Contracting Officer to determine what information USAID must provide the contractor, and what desk research should be included in the Statement of Work, using the material in this toolkit as a guide.

The desk research includes three components:

1   Review of the Mission's CDCS, funding allocations, and digitally relevant programming.

2   Quantitative analysis and visualization of public data and indices for regional comparisons (e.g., GSMA, The World Bank, World Economic Forum, International Telecommunication Union).

3   Qualitative literature review guided by key topics and questions under each DECA Pillar about the state of the country's digital ecosystem (as outlined in the Desk Research Template and Research Checklist).

The Mission DECA Team and the Research Team can discuss how to best disseminate findings to a broad Mission audience. This may include sharing completed desk research briefs (described below), a Mission all-hands meeting, or individual briefings with each Technical Office to discuss how the findings can add value to current and future programming.

INTERVIEWEE IDENTIFICATION

Throughout the desk research, make note of potential interviewees to be included in the interview phase. The desk research template and the research briefs contain space to note relevant stakeholders from the government, private sector, academia, and civil society, among other groups.

STAY INFORMED

An easy way for foreign researchers to stay up to date with the country's local and international news is to sign up with Google Alerts for country specific updates.

Desk research instructions

The steps below outline instructions for conducting DECA desk research. The instructions reference the DECA Desk Research Template, a resource that details the desk research process, key topics, and relevant resources. The desk research should also be guided by the Research Checklist. Refer back to the checklist while you conduct the desk research to help identify what questions you want to answer, which questions you have answered, and what gaps exist that you want to answer with further research or during the interview phase.

STEP 1 Mission context review

Mission context review should begin as soon as the Research Team is staffed. This step includes gathering general background and Mission priorities, including reviewing the CDCS and USAID country factsheets. This should occur before the kickoff call between the Research Team and the Mission DECA Team.

STEP 2 Key facts, data, and statistics

Using the "Key Statistics" section of the DECA Desk Research Template, document country-specific key facts and statistics for each of the three DECA pillars. In addition to providing context, this step helps identify gaps that need to be further explored through qualitative research or data visualizations (e.g., a low mobile penetration rate may require further probing through network coverage maps and relevant reports from organizations such as GSMA and International Telecommunication Union (ITU)).

STEP 3 Resource round-up

At this early stage, the resource round-up does not need to be exhaustive, but it is helpful to identify key resources. Start with web searches for reports, articles, and blogs, using suggested search terms and sources found in the "Key Topics" section of the DECA Desk Research Template. Some reports and resources may be easier to find on Google Scholar. Always link and reference sources. Consider saving the resources in the Relevant Resources spreadsheet. This serves as a library of all resources, to be used for quick reference throughout the DECA and will be shared with the Mission at the end of the desk research phase.

STEP 4 First-pass content review

Now that you have collected key data points and reviewed a range of resources, you can begin identifying emergent topics and key issues within each of the three DECA pillars. The DECA Desk Research Template provides a list of standard DECA topics that are described in the Getting in the DECA mindset section of this Toolkit. Keep in mind that new or different topics or subtopics may arise or require greater emphasis depending on the country context.

> **NOTE: INFORMATION OVERLOAD**
>
> This stage of the desk research may be messy and include many sources. The goal is to note findings, begin to organize them around key topics, and keep track of key sources.

STEP 5 Analysis and desk research briefs

The objective of this step is to synthesize your findings into desk research briefs and group topics into the most relevant themes for your DECA. At this stage, create four desk research briefs one covering Mission portfolio, priorities, and country context and one for each of the three DECA pillars; use the templates in the Desk Research Briefs Folder. Describe your findings in short paragraphs to help streamline and highlight findings from the different sources. This makes the desk research digestible and actionable.

USING MAPS IN THE DECA

Maps can be a good way to make the final report more interesting and compelling. Some countries may have usable, detailed maps and publicly available data files (e.g., GSMA network coverage maps, and ITU interactive fiber backbone maps). Interesting data might include connectivity infrastructure, population density, banking infrastructure.

STEP 6   "What does this mean for the DECA?"

In this step, consider "What does this mean for the DECA?" by first outlining potential connections between the Mission's priorities and elements of the digital ecosystem and then identifying gaps in the research that the team intends to fill during the interview phase. To help draft this content, ask yourselves, "How might the Mission's priorities intersect with opportunities or risks in the digital ecosystem? What do we not yet know? What details or nuances are missing in the desk research? What questions do we need to ask to fill these gaps?" These could include potential areas for USAID programming or topics with apparent information gaps. Revisit Mission priorities (and any guidance the Mission has provided to this point) and frame this section in a way that will be most helpful for the Mission. **FIGURE 3** below shows sample format and content for the summary analysis.

FIGURE 3: Sample "What does this mean for the DECA?" box from the research briefs

PILLAR 1: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE DECA?

Connections to Mission priorities:

- **Enhancing the capacity of key institutions:** As institutions increasingly rely on digital channels for service delivery, they will require stronger infrastructure. This means rebuilding, restoring, and expanding connectivity infrastructure and securing critical internet infrastructure against cyber attacks.
- **Empowering citizens in conflict mitigation:** While non-government stakeholders are increasingly using digital technology in their work, exploring these avenues in more detail will be necessary to identify clear digital opportunities and risks for the Mission's plans to empower citizens in conflict mitigation. This can be through exploring alternative connectivity solutions (e.g., TV white space), ensuring affordable and stable access to the internet, and using alternative/offline solutions for e-learning.

Gaps to fill in interviews:

Online searches in English revealed several plans for connectivity and e-learning initiatives, with no follow-up on their current status. How many plans have survived is unclear. We will need to identify the status of plans, along with new opportunities and avenues for the Mission.

Understand what actions the Mission can take now and after the upcoming elections to promote "digital champions" in the government, define what expertise is most needed, and set them up for success.

There is little clarity on how the internet is used by members of marginalized and vulnerable populations, particularly rural populations, and internally displaced persons.

INITIAL REVIEWS

Once the desk research briefs are prepared, the Research Team can send them to the Mission DECA Team to review, disseminate at the Mission, and gather feedback to ensure that research is moving in the right direction. If additional support is needed, the Mission DECA Team Lead can make a service request to USAID/Washington for further review and comment. The briefs, combined with expert guidance, will help frame robust interview questions during the interview stage.

The email should provide links to all the desk research briefs. Point technical experts to the specific sections that they need to review; this will likely result in quicker feedback. You can use the Reviewing Desk Research Email Template for this purpose.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Desk Research Template	This template helps you stay organized and on track throughout the desk research while large amounts of information are being collected and analyzed. It includes guidelines and suggested resources to help make the desk research process as efficient as possible.
DECA Research Checklist	The Research Checklist is your technical "North Star" to be used throughout the DECA. During the desk research, refer to this document to understand key research questions and identify information gaps to be filled during the interview phase.
Relevant [Country] Resources Library	Use this spreadsheet to document all the resources used in the desk research, their dates, and relevance to the DECA. This will be shared with the Mission along with the four research briefs.
Desk Research Briefs Templates (sub-folder)	This folder contains templates and examples of four desk research briefs: 1. Background and Mission Priorities 2. Pillar 1: Digital Infrastructure and Adoption 3. Pillar 2: Digital Society, Rights, and Governance 4. Pillar 3: Digital Economy Toward the end of your desk research, begin populating these briefs to share with the Mission before you begin either virtual or in-person interviews.
Reviewing Desk Research Email Template (Phase 1)	Use this email template to request feedback and fill information gaps in desk research from Mission DECA Team, Mission technical staff, and other technical experts.

DECA Introduction Presentation

Whether or not the DECA Research Team is in-country to conduct interviews, it is beneficial to have an introductory presentation for all Mission staff. The Research Team should work with the Mission DECA Team to determine the most appropriate format. For external Research Teams, the Mission DECA Team should work with the cognizant Contracting Officer to develop an appropriate task and deliverable for the contractor, using the material in this toolkit as a guide. Some Missions may prefer a formal Mission-wide presentation while others may advise smaller group presentations for each

Technical Office. The purpose of this engagement is to introduce the DECA process and value to a larger Mission audience. This helps the Mission DECA Team gain buy-in across the Mission, which is critical for implementing its recommendations moving forward.

DECA Introduction Presentation objectives:

1   Explain why the Mission has commissioned a DECA and explain the value it can provide to the Mission

2   Show how the DECA aligns with USAID's Digital Strategy

3   Share and validate initial findings and gaps from the desk research phase

4   Demonstrate how DECA recommendations may align with current or future Mission programming and priorities

5   Identify stakeholders and gaps that the Research Team aims to fill during interviews

6   Invite Mission staff to join interviews

7   Begin a discussion about what will happen after the DECA is completed. This is a good way to learn who in the Mission will be interested in using the DECA and exactly what they will need

> **SETTING UP VIRTUAL DECA INTRODUCTION PRESENTATIONS**
>
> For a virtual DECA, aim to set the DECA Introduction Presentation well in advance; timelines tend to slip when they aren't anchored to travel dates, and you don't want your introduction to the DECA to happen halfway through the interview phase.

DECA Introduction Presentation format suggestions:

Length: 30 to 60 minutes (15- to 20-minute presentation and at least 15 minutes for questions and conversation).

Audience: All Mission staff can be invited to attend the DECA Introduction Presentation, along with relevant Embassy colleagues. The exact format of this is dependent on Mission preference, size, and staff availability. Instead of one Mission-wide meeting, it may be beneficial (especially in large Missions) to break out separate meetings with Mission leadership, Technical Offices, and the Program Office, tailoring presentation content accordingly. The Research Team should coordinate with the Mission DECA Team to decide which approach will maximize Mission engagement. All versions of this presentation can be done in-person or virtually.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Introduction Presentation Template

This PowerPoint template provides a starting point and guidance for developing the DECA Introduction Presentation. The presentation will look similar regardless of whether the interviews are conducted in-person or virtually. The Research Team should work with the Mission DECA Team to ensure the presentation is tailored to meet the country context and Mission priorities.

PHASE 2:
INTERVIEWS

2

3.6 INTERVIEWEE IDENTIFICATION AND OUTREACH

Purpose	To manage identification and scheduling of interviews; strategize outreach.
When	Desk Research Planning phase; Interview phase
Implementation time	Approximately 5 weeks

Guidelines for finding and selecting interviewees

It is important to reach out to your RLO as you begin to plan the interview stage. RLO help is needed due to the presence of several significant legal issues such as privacy, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), data collection, and local law restrictions on collecting information. The RLO's legal advice will inform the entire interview process.

The Research Team should start identifying interviewees by thinking through whether any individuals in their network could provide relevant insights for the DECA. The team should also ask the Mission for any relevant local contacts (e.g., expert consultants, implementing partners). The types of stakeholders that you should be interviewing (either virtually or in-person) include:

Country or sector experts (both local and foreign)

- University professors (in the ICT sector)

- Think tanks

Host-country government

- National government actors that manage the government's digital portfolio (Ministry of ICT, for example)

- National government actors that are included in the Mission's strategic portfolio (for example, if the Mission has a large Rule of Law program, interviewees could include the Ministry of Justice, Judiciary, Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender's Office)

- Sub-national government actors (for example, if the Mission has a large Health portfolio, interviewees could include government health clinic staff, provincial health directors)

Donors, iNGOs, multilaterals, regulatory bodies, and other international development organizations that work in digital development

Civil society organizations

- Organizations or advocates focused on digital and technology issues

- Human rights organizations

- Advocates for marginalized groups

- Religious organizations

Media outlets and influencers (independent and government)

Private sector

- Financial service providers (microfinance institutions, commercial banks, FinTechs, mobile money)

- MNOs and ISPs

- International technology companies (e.g., Microsoft, Google, Facebook)

- Local technology companies

- Local cybersecurity companies

- Tech startups

- Tech-oriented business accelerators and innovation hubs

- E-commerce platforms

- Local market research firms

- ICT workforce certification organizations

USAID implementing partners (projects with a technology component)

Other U.S. Government stakeholders

Some stakeholders may not fit easily into these categories, but these stakeholder types should provide a starting point for thinking through whom you need to interview. For additional examples of institutions that fit into these groups, see columns J and K in the "Stakeholder Mapping" tab of the Interview Tracker.

Best practices for interview scheduling and outreach

Whether reaching out to schedule an interview in-person or virtually, follow these best practices to ensure smooth scheduling:

- Designate one team member to manage all outreach and interview scheduling to prevent miscommunication.

- Ask the Mission DECA Team Lead if they wish to see your interviewee list before you reach out with interview requests. In a country with high political interest, ask if the Department of State or other USG agencies should be consulted or informed. Be mindful if this country has U.S. Office

of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) restrictions (if in doubt, just ask the Mission DECA Team Lead). If the country does have OFAC restrictions, ask the Mission DECA Team Lead about the extent of the restrictions. You may need to check your interviewee list against the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list.

- Seek Mission guidance on the best people to approach and how, when reaching out to partner government organizations. It is often culturally and politically important to start at the top, contacting higher-level officials first. Reaching out to government officials using a *usaid.gov* email (preferably someone within the Mission DECA Team) may increase the odds of a timely response.

- If priority interviewees don't respond within 10 days of initial outreach, follow up with a reminder.

- Ensure you are aware of, and can provide, reasonable accommodations for interviewees with disabilities. For example, hearing-impaired interviewees might prefer to answer questions through a text-based platform like Slack or Rocket.chat.

- Confirm the availability of interested USAID/USG stakeholders before scheduling with the interviewee, when relevant.

- Provide the potential interviewee with a limited set of time options to choose from based on your availability and timeline, rather than sharing the entire time window during which you're planning interviews; this can be too ambiguous and open-ended.

- As meetings are scheduled, update the Interview Tracker (column J, interview status) and the interview schedule to ensure all DECA Team members are aware of upcoming interviews.

- If interview times are scheduled far in advance, follow up two days before confirming the appointment.

- Ask for the interviewee's phone (or WhatsApp) numbers when confirming the time in case there are any last-minute changes or, for virtual interviews, connection issues. For in-person interviews, ask for the interviewee's preferred meeting location.

- Be aware of any cultural considerations for interviews (especially in-person), such as expectations that visitors will bring a small gift, always accept a cup of tea, or remove shoes.

- If you will be interviewing children and youth, additional precautions will be necessary. Similar considerations may be needed when interviewing members of other vulnerable groups—when in doubt, talk to someone with direct in-country experience with the population in question.

CONFIRMING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AND PLATFORMS

For both in-person and virtual interviews, confirm whether the interviewee has any requests for reasonable accommodations, such as a sign language interpreter, captioning, or alternate formats.

For virtual interviews, ensure that the platform for interviewing (e.g., WhatsApp, Google Hangouts, WebEx) works well for the interviewee

Be strategic during interviewee identification and outreach:

- **During the desk research and planning phase:** Identify sector-agnostic interviewees such as digital experts at donor institutions and iNGOs and flag their interviews to be early on in the interview phase. They can provide a high-level overview of the digital ecosystem and referrals to additional interviewees through their (typically large) in-country networks.

- **Early in the interview phase:** Schedule high-stakes government interviews for later during the interview period once the Research Team has had time to identify gaps and develop a nuanced understanding of the country's digital ecosystem. Don't procrastinate too long, though; these meetings can take time to set up, and it may be most efficient to work through existing relationships with the Mission.

Source: USAID Serbia

- **Toward the middle/end of the interview phase:** Evaluate the value-add of including additional interviews and strategically target those additional interviews to fill information gaps. Do not feel obligated to add interviews simply because the referral was provided; pursue additional interviews only if the Research Team determines information saturation has not yet been reached. Consider using a midway gap identification exercise to prioritize late-stage interviews.

Relevant DECA Templates

Interview Tracker, Schedule, and Stakeholder Mapping	This tracker is used from key-informant identification, through interview scheduling, during the interview phase, and for a midway/continuous stakeholder mapping exercise. Each of these uses for the tracker is described later in the Toolkit. Also, a "Purpose" row at the top of each tab helps you understand and navigate this tracker.
	Options for: In-person DECA; Virtual DECA
Interview Outreach Email Template (Phase 1 and 2)	Use this template for reaching out to interviewees. This can be modified if you have familiarity with the interviewee and would like to be less formal. This sample email includes language relevant for either an in-person or virtual DECA.
	Options for: In-person DECA; Virtual DECA

3.7 INTERVIEWS

Purpose	Filling gaps and collecting relevant information through interviews, DECA Team protocol, and best practices on knowledge management
When	Interview phase
Implementation time	2 weeks (in-person); 2 to 7 weeks (virtual)
This is a good time to revisit	Research Checklist

This section includes guidance and templates related to conducting interviews, engaging with the Mission through briefings and communications, and best practices for working as a DECA Team throughout the interview phase. The Interview Tracker, described above, is a resource for organizing and tracking your progress during the interview phase, whether in-person or virtual.

At this point, the Research Team should be in regular communication with the Mission DECA Team. For external Research Teams, regular meetings between the contractor and the COR will need to be a requirement to facilitate this communication. If you are conducting in-person interviews, Research Team members may find it beneficial to have informal meetings with Mission Technical Offices before the interview phase. This will help increase their awareness that the DECA is happening and show how they can be involved, provide additional information, and make use of the results.

Conducting Interviews

Interviews are intended to fill gaps in the desk research, develop and confirm key themes, and identify areas for further inquiry. While asking similar questions establishes basic comparability across interviews, you should adapt your interview questions to fill gaps, test emergent themes, and capture new information. This approach may entail asking follow-up questions, challenging responses, and generally adopting a dynamic and flexible approach to interviewing. Before each interview, populate the Interview Guide Template using relevant questions from the Research Checklist and plan for ample preparation and coordination among team members.

REGULAR COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE MISSION

At the start of each week (especially in the case of virtual interviews), the Research Team should send the Mission and other relevant colleagues an email listing upcoming interviews for the week and invite them to join. This would have to be a contractor requirement if it is needed when using an external Research Team. Ask the Mission DECA Team Lead about the best approach for coordinating interview participation, especially when dealing with government officials or other potentially sensitive stakeholders.

You can use the Mission Communication Email Template for this purpose.

DATA COLLECTION CAN BE CULTURALLY SENSITIVE

Some cultures discuss conflicts quite openly, for example, while others are relatively closed. The form and process adopted for interviews needs to respect those preferences. It is best practice to discuss these potential sensitivities with the Mission DECA Team and/or local consultants before beginning the interview process.

During an interview:

- **Provide introductions:** Introduce the team and the DECA (guidance provided in the template)

- **Confirm informed consent:** Before turning to questions, ensure that all interviewees know that information will be shared, that they do not need to answer all questions, and that they have the right to confidentiality if they choose. Read the consent form (provided in the Interview Guide Template) to the interviewee(s) and document their responses in the form.

- **Be prepared to ask follow-up questions:** While the questions prepared in the interview guide are helpful, remember to listen carefully and ask follow-on questions as necessary to help reveal nuances relevant to the DECA. Beware of cases where exciting topics may lead you to lengthy conversations that are outside the scope of or too technical for the DECA.

CONSENT AND PRIVACY IN VIRTUAL DECAS

Virtual interviews conducted by video conferencing platforms can be far more convenient than a voice-only telephone call, and make it easier to take detailed notes during an interview. Even when platforms allow recording of interviews, however, current USAID policy strongly advises against and sometimes prohibits the recording of online meetings. If you have any questions about the applicability of USAID policies to the Research Team, consult the Mission's Resident Legal Officer. In addition to USAID guidance, an external Research Team must follow the terms and conditions of the award on informed consent, data storage, privacy, and data protection when collecting, documenting, and storing interview notes.

- **Ask for consent during the interview.** Quotes should be included in the final report and attributed only if the interviewee agrees. See the interview guide template for language and options.
- **Access to notes and interviewee lists should be restricted** as provided in the informed consent to ensure protection of privacy.
- **Don't record interviews** without legal advice that confirms it is allowable.

After an interview:

- Immediately after an interview, it is beneficial for the team to fill out Section 2: Interview Content Debrief (in the Interview Guide Template) to ensure all key points are noted while memories of the interview are still fresh.

- Try to "give back" to interviewees by sharing resources they might find interesting. Once the DECA report has been published, follow up with interviewees to share the report. (Or better yet, ask your Mission DECA Team to reach out to them and share the report.)

- Follow good data management practices. Be sure that interview guides and notes are stored in a secure location, and limit access to those who need this information.

THANK YOU EMAILS

Within a week of conducting interviews, send a thank you email to your interviewees. In this email, you can also follow up with requests for additional documentation or contacts.

Refer to the Thank you Email Template for Interviewees for additional guidance

USING MAPS IN THE DECA

During your desk research, you may have found that usable geospatial data were unavailable or difficult to find. During interviews with stakeholders such as the telecom regulator, internet service providers, mobile network operators, and the financial regulator, take the opportunity to ask them if they can share maps or geospatial data. Interesting data may include connectivity infrastructure, population density, banking infrastructure, etc.
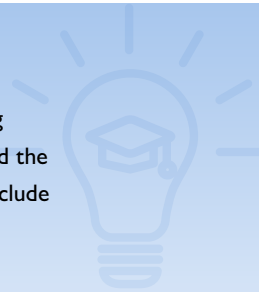
Relevant DECA Templates

|	
Interview Guide Template	This template is used for all interviews. It provides a space to enter interviewee information before the interview. It also includes sections on introductory talking points, interviewee consent, interview questions, and post-interview debrief.
DECA Research Checklist	The Research Checklist is your technical "North Star" throughout the DECA. During the interview phase, use this document to identify interviewees, populate interview guides, and identify and strategize how to fill information gaps.
Mission Communication Email Template (Phase 2)	This email template can be used to keep the Mission informed of upcoming interviews (either in-person or virtual) to garner the Mission's interest in joining. It can be sent weekly, or as needed. Sending out meeting invites to all attendees lets them know of any last- minute changes.
Thank you Email Template for Interviewees (Phase 2)	Use this email template to thank your interviewees for taking the time to speak with the Research Team within a few days of the interviews. Use this as an opportunity to ask for follow-up resources and additional interviewee names.

DECA Research Team interview insight management

A lot of information will be gathered during the interview phase. To avoid being overwhelmed with information, it is important that you are organized and strategic in your information gathering and preliminary synthesis. See the approaches, resources, and templates below to help you intentionally collect, organize, and analyze the data during the interview portion of the DECA. For external Research Teams, best practices such as interview debriefs, midway stakeholder mapping exercises, and midway synthesis and gap identification exercises can be used as milestones in the contract to assess the contractor's progress and performance.

Interview debriefs

At the end of each day during the in-person interviews, and twice a week for virtual interviews, the Research Team should have a debrief meeting to discuss interviews and compare notes. Discussing highlights and preliminary insights from each interview with the entire Research Team using the Interview Debrief Template ensures all team members are briefed on each interview and facilitates the triangulation of emerging themes that can be tested in subsequent interviews.

INCREASE MISSION ENGAGEMENT

The Research Team can invite Mission DECA Team members to attend the debriefs in a listening capacity if they are interested and available. This will help focus subsequent interviews and future recommendation formulation.
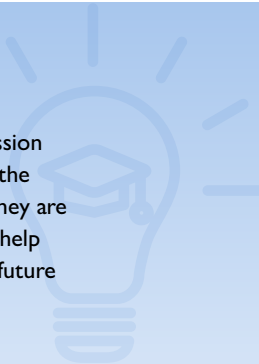
Midway stakeholder mapping exercise

Halfway through the interview phase, the Research Team should collectively pause and reflect on the interviews thus far, to ensure you are reaching the necessary stakeholders (see the Guidelines for Finding and Selecting Interviewees). Use the "stakeholder mapping" tab within the Interview Tracker Template to identify where there may be gaps in stakeholder groups or information collection, and help align findings across the three DECA pillars and Mission priorities. Ideally, stakeholder mapping should be a continuous process to ensure interviews are scheduled strategically. During this activity, refer to the Research Checklist to help with gap identification.

Midway synthesis and gap identification exercise

For both in-person and virtual DECAs, the full Research Team should conduct a midway synthesis and gap identification session.

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to create a foundation of preliminary findings to build upon during a final synthesis exercise, which will lead to concrete recommendations for the final report.

During the gap identification exercise, the Research Team will:

Source: USAID/Michael Gebremedhin

- Identify emerging themes from the first-half of interviews

- Identify information gaps

- Target interviewee selection (complementary to the stakeholder mapping)

- Consider interview content for remaining interviews

If the Research Team has confirmed that the Mission expects a post-interview briefing, in particular for in-person DECAs, begin developing content to share preliminary findings and recommendations with the Mission.

The process outlined below is one approach you can take to help organize the team's thoughts on initial findings. However, if you prefer, you may use another synthesis approach that meets the same purpose and objective.

You can use either sticky notes or a digital collaboration application like Google Jamboard. Once you have decided on the synthesis mode as a team, the process will look fairly similar whether you are doing it in-person with sticky notes or virtually. This way, much of the data can be seen at once, which helps you and your team uncover patterns and trends. Here are step-by-step instructions for conducting synthesis and gap identification sessions and an example of what it might look like (see **FIGURE 4** for an example board):

1 **Set up:** Create a table with a column for "Key Findings" listing each of the three DECA pillars (digital infrastructure and adoption; digital society, rights, and governance; and digital economy).

2 **Brainstorm:** Spend about 10 minutes per DECA Pillar having all participants write key findings; one key finding per note, with no limit on how many notes each individual writes.

   ○ After writing all the notes individually, ask participants to place their sticky notes in the corresponding DECA Pillar (if this is being done on a digital collaboration application, it may be easier to place the virtual sticky notes in the corresponding pillar while they are being written).

3 **Synthesize:** Once all notes for all DECA pillars are posted, begin to group similar notes together (this can be done by the Principal Investigator, another selected participant, or collaboratively by all participants). This step is about organizing all the data to find patterns and themes.

4 **Validate:** Validate the groupings as a team and begin to condense, describe, and label them. For the new groupings, it is helpful to choose one color of sticky note, say red, as seen in **FIGURE 4**. The team may add additional findings that emerge during discussion. It may help to label each group as presenting an "opportunity" or a "risk." This can clarify the transition to drafting recommendations at the end of the interview phase.

5 **Identify gaps:** Once the groupings are validated, pause to brainstorm information gaps for each pillar. These should be documented using another color of sticky note (dark blue in the image below). This will help you proceed strategically with future research. Subsequent interview selection and targeted interview questions should be selected to fill these gaps. During the final post-interview synthesis session, the team can ensure all gaps were filled. During this gap identification process, be sure to refer back to the Research Checklist and identify which points under each topic need further exploration.

POTENTIAL SYNTHESIS PITFALLS

Throughout the interview phase and, in particular, during the midway synthesis and gap identification exercise, Research Team members must be aware of and do their best to avoid the following potential pitfalls:

• **Star of the show:** Interviewees often have unique perspectives and it can be tempting to over-emphasize a memorable quote or standout moment from a particular interview. Remember not to give undue weight to a single interviewee's comment. Always make sure to validate interesting "n of 1" stories with takeaways from other interviews; qualitative research best practice is that you reach information saturation at about six to seven interviews per topic.

• **Rabbit hole topics:** The DECA is broad and covers many highly technical topics; as a result, it is not uncommon for interviewees to provide great detail on a topic that is not directly relevant to the DECA or the Mission's priorities or that gets too technical. While it may be interesting to explore new topics in greater detail, always be sure to ask yourselves "How does this align with the Mission's priorities? Will Mission colleagues find this information useful? Is this a core topic for the DECA?"

• **Expert biases:** While it is impossible to empty your mind of prior knowledge and experience, especially for the more experienced technical experts on the team, staying grounded in the context of your DECA is essential. Inevitably, information gathered during interviews will spark connections or comparisons to previous work. However, always remember that no two countries are exactly the same and a solution or trend in one context may not be immediately appropriate in another.

These potential pitfalls should be kept in mind not only at this stage, but also during the Post-interview synthesis and throughout report writing.

If you conduct this step virtually (in MURAL, Miro, or Google Jamboard, for example), make sure to save your work to continue using for the post-interview synthesis exercise. For in-person sessions, you can document your results by photographing your sticky note collection.

FIGURE 4: Sample format for midway synthesis and gap identification exercise

[COUNTRY]: KEY FINDINGS

Relevant DECA Templates

Interview Debrief Template	The aim of the document is to compile learnings and key takeaways from each day's interviews (twice a week for virtual DECAs). Notes from all days should be compiled in this document.
Interview Tracker, Schedule, and Stakeholder Mapping	Use this spreadsheet during the midway stakeholder mapping exercise to ensure you interview the necessary stakeholders, with a focus on the three DECA pillars and Mission priorities.
DECA Research Checklist	The Research Checklist is the technical "North Star" to be used throughout the DECA. During the midway stakeholder mapping and gap identification exercises, refer to this document to identify questions that remain unanswered, refine interview questions to uncover additional nuance, and strategically target additional stakeholders.

Post-Interview Mission Presentation

For DECAs that involve visiting researchers conducting in-person interviews, the Mission DECA Team and the Research Team should work together to determine how to share initial findings and preliminary recommendations at the end of the Research Team's visit. For external Research Teams, initial findings and preliminary recommendations may be included in the contract as deliverables. Potential formats include a read-out during a Mission all-hands meeting, an informal brown-bag presentation, an interactive workshop, or individual presentations for each Technical Office. For virtual DECAs, this will likely be unnecessary for two reasons. First, virtual engagements have timelines that are typically more fluid, and don't have a "hard stop" to their interview phase. Second, a longer interview phase means that you will have had several biweekly check-ins with Mission DECA Team members, which means they will already have had ample opportunity to react to your preliminary findings and share reactions and ideas. However, for virtual DECAs it may be useful to arrange a workshop after the interview phase to brainstorm and refine recommendations (see recommendations drafting guidelines below).

Post-Interview Presentation objectives:

1   Reinforce why the Mission has commissioned a DECA and demonstrate the value it can provide to the Mission

2   Stimulate interest in the final products by sharing initial findings and recommendations

3   Show sensitivity to Mission inputs by demonstrating how preliminary DECA recommendations align with current Mission programming

4   Gut-check initial findings and preliminary recommendations with Mission staff

5   Collaborate and gather feedback on potential recommendations

6   Outline timeline for final report

Post-Interview Presentation format suggestions:

Length: One hour with 20- to 30-minute presentation and a minimum of 20 minutes for questions and conversation.

Audience: The same audience as the DECA Introduction Presentation - all Mission staff should be invited to attend. If relevant, the Research Team should coordinate with the Mission DECA Team to invite selected Embassy colleagues. Similar to the Introduction Presentation, it may be beneficial (especially in larger Missions) to break out separate meetings with Mission Technical Offices. However, if possible, a larger meeting for this presentation may surface more fruitful cross-sector feedback and ideation for DECA recommendations. All versions of this presentation can be done in-person or virtually.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Post-Interview Presentation Template

This PowerPoint template provides a starting point for creating the Post-Interview Presentation. The Research Team should coordinate with the Mission DECA Team to ensure the presentation is tailored to meet Mission priorities.

PHASE 3:

ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING

3

3.8 ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

Purpose	To prepare for report writing; synthesize findings
When	Analysis and report writing phase
Implementation time	2-3 weeks
This is a good time to revisit	Getting in the DECA mindset, Research Checklist

At this point, the Research Team will have already started analysis while conducting interviews to help identify emerging themes, make strategic decisions about interviews, and plan for report writing. You should be in great shape to dive deeper into analysis and synthesis of the information collected. For external Research Teams, the DECA should work with the cognizant Contracting Officer to identify deliverables, reports, and milestones for inclusion in the contract.

Post-interview synthesis

Post-interview synthesis exercise

Within a week of completing the interview phase, the Research Team should convene to revisit the themes across key findings that arose during the midway synthesis and gap identification exercise and to start brainstorming recommendations.

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to organize findings and begin to develop recommendations as you start to outline the report. During the synthesis exercise, the Research Team first confirms the validity of the midway synthesis findings by referring back to interview notes, debrief notes, and desk research sources, and then brainstorms preliminary recommendations.

You are welcome to use any preferred method of analysis and synthesis. However, if you want to pick

up where you left off with the midway synthesis and gap identification exercise outlined above, see the instructions below. They are similar to those of the previous exercise, but include a "Recommendations" column to build off of the validated "Key Findings."

Here are step-by-step instructions for conducting a post-interview synthesis (see **FIGURE 5** for an example board):

1 **Set up:** Create a table, with one column for "Key Findings" and another for "Recommendations," with rows for each of the three DECA pillars (digital infrastructure and adoption; digital society, rights, and governance; and digital economy). It is helpful to use the same board and/or sticky notes from the previous synthesis session, or the saved Google Jamboard (or similar platform), from the midway synthesis and gap identification exercise. (If you are doing that, simply add a "Recommendations" column to the existing table.)

2 **Review and validate findings:** Spend five to seven minutes per DECA Pillar reviewing and validating the key findings discussed previously during the midway synthesis and adding any additional findings under the relevant DECA pillars.

3 **Synthesize findings:** Discuss any new findings and try to hone in on the key findings for each DECA pillar. This synthesis will lay the groundwork for outlining the "findings" section of the report. If not done during the midway synthesis, it will be helpful to label findings (in a different-color sticky note) as presenting an opportunity or risk in the digital ecosystem. This sets you up for the next step: brainstorming recommendations.

4 **Brainstorm recommendations:** Spend 10 to 15 minutes writing recommendation ideas to correlate with each finding. As you brainstorm recommendations, it is helpful to frame each recommendation as mitigating a risk or seizing an opportunity. Think about what challenge the recommendation aims to solve. As the team brainstorms, place ideas in the relevant DECA Pillar under "Recommendations"; some recommendations may cut across more than one pillar. The goal is to generate a handful of preliminary recommendations that will be built out later. See the recommendation drafting section for detailed guidance.

5 **Synthesize preliminary recommendations:** Once time is up, group the recommendations into themes to identify topics and patterns (this can be done by the Principal Investigator, a team lead or another selected participant, or collaboratively by all participants). This can also include adding additional or adjusting existing recommendation ideas based on the group discussion.

CONTEXT AND TIPS FOR BRAINSTORMING PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

For USAID Missions, the recommendations are the most important part of the DECA. Therefore, it is key to identify potential recommendations early and refine them carefully. This will ensure that the recommendations are well-developed and aligned with DECA key findings and Mission priorities. The post-interview synthesis exercise is a good time to start brainstorming recommendations. Those initial draft recommendations can help the Research Team determine what is most important when writing the "findings" section of the report. Once that is complete, Research Team members can return to their brainstorm results as they draft detailed recommendations.

6   **Agree on preliminary recommendations:** As a team, consider whether this set of recommendations is sufficiently complete, relevant, and actionable. Once you've reached a rough consensus, condense recommendations to remove repetition and begin to describe and label them.

7   **Identify gaps:** Once you've agreed on recommendation groupings, pause to brainstorm information gaps for each pillar. These should be documented using another color of sticky note (dark blue below in **FIGURE 5**). These gaps can be used to plan follow-up interviews or search for additional written sources. Be sure to revisit the Research Checklist to help with gap identification.

FIGURE 5: Sample format for post-interview synthesis exercise
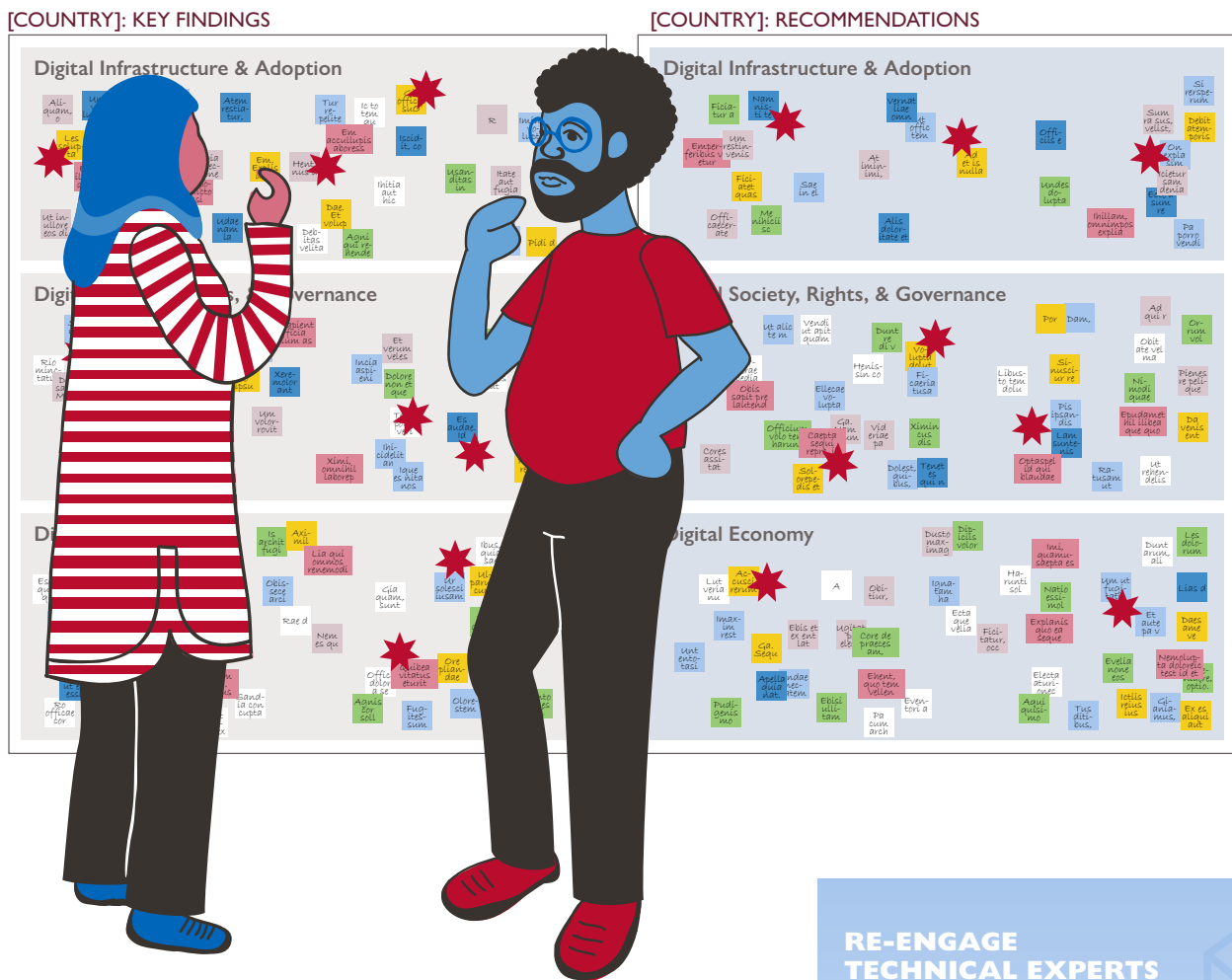
Optional: Additional Interview Analysis and Synthesis

In-depth qualitative analysis includes many approaches. If you are interested in taking a more rigorous approach and have the training and resources, **consi**der using a qualitative analysis software, such as Dedoose, Nvivo, or ATLAS.ti. These tools allow you to better organize, clean, code, and analyze qualitative data. This extra layer of rigor can help avoid biases and assumptions in findings.

RE-ENGAGE TECHNICAL EXPERTS AS NEEDED

After your initial synthesis and before drafting the final report, your Mission DECA Team may want to re-engage USAID technical experts by requesting support from USAID/Washington. These experts can be the same people who provided input early on. The purpose of this engagement is to fill any large technical or knowledge gaps before writing (or during the writing phase).

3.9 REPORT WRITING

Purpose	Create the final DECA products
When	Analysis and report writing phase
Implementation time	8-12 weeks (2 weeks of overlap with other tasks)
This is a good time to revisit	Getting in the DECA mindset

Final report project management

After the Research Team brainstorms and validates key findings and preliminary recommendations, report writing can begin. To make this process easier, refer to the suggested work plan and associated templates in the DECA Final Report Tracker to assist with report project management. **The Research Team is responsible for completing two versions of the report: one for internal USAID audiences and one for external audiences.** Some Missions may request a third version: a report translated in the dominant local language.

First, review the "Report work plan" tab to understand the step-by-step process, including report drafting, technical review, clearance, and design—both for the internal and external reports. Update the "Responsible Individual(s)" column with the name(s) of the Research Team member who will be responsible for completing each task.
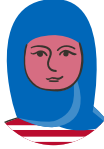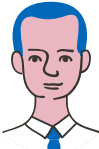
After the draft report is complete, the DECA Final Report Tracker has additional tabs to help manage the review and finalization processes. Each tab has a purpose listed at the top to help you understand how to best use it. These tabs include:

- Peer Review Tracker

- Peer Review Comments Matrix

- Copy Editing Standard Checklist

- Report Design Checklist

- Comment Tracker for Designer

Report writing role definition

Report writing responsibilities should be designated based on the Research Team's composition (skills, expertise, size, availability). The report must be technically rigorous and accurate yet concise and digestible and written in a consistent, high-quality writing style. **TABLE 4** below outlines one possible way to divide the writing responsibilities.

TABLE 4: Report writing roles and responsibilities

Research Team role	Report writing responsibilities
Principal Investigator	• Serve as lead author for one findings and one recommendations section (by DECA pillar), based on technical expertise • Review all sections for cohesion and flow • Coordinate the peer review process: reach out to Mission and other selected peer reviewers, sign off on comments being accurately and sufficiently addressed • Provide final technical review and sign-off • Coordinate the report clearance process (with Mission DECA Team)
Research Analyst	• Serve as lead author for one findings and one recommendations section (by DECA pillar) • Integrate peer review feedback for relevant sections • Draft executive summary, introduction, CDCS mapping, and recommendations tables • Work with the research coordinator to finalize report design
Technical Researcher	• Serve as lead author for one findings and one recommendations section (by DECA pillar), based on technical expertise • Integrate peer review feedback for relevant sections • Provide high-level review of the entire report
Research Coordinator	• Draft any necessary appendices • Coordinate with the copy editor and designer to finalize the report • Support the Research Team with any outstanding research and writing as needed

Final report drafting

To make the report writing process as smooth as possible, start with the DECA Final Report Template. This document includes a detailed outline, standard language, and instructions for how to populate each section. Use the output from the synthesis sessions to guide how you distill and frame the findings. It may be helpful to review previous DECA reports linked in Appendix B. You can refer to the USAID Style Guide for guidance on writing style.

Final report structure

In addition to the Executive Summary, How-To Guide for Missions (CDCS mapping), and Introduction, the report has two major sections:

1 **Findings:** details key themes from the desk research and interview phases organized by the three DECA pillars. This will likely be the longest section of the report.

2 **Recommendations:** includes eight to twelve recommendations (three to four per pillar) for how the USAID Mission can learn from the DECA findings to better understand, work with, and support the country's digital ecosystem. Detailed guidance for drafting this section is included below.

INCORPORATING MAPS IN THE DECA REPORT

As you write the report, think about places where geospatial data could enhance the story. For example, in Pillar 1 when discussing connectivity, it is useful to include a map showing the digital infrastructure and to highlight gaps in last-mile connectivity. However, make sure when you choose to use maps you are not doing so for the sake of adding a map. You want the maps to add to the story. You can do this, for example, by overlaying interesting data such as agent banking network reach with population density and connectivity infrastructure for Pillar 3.

To create useful maps, you need useful data. There are three points during the DECA to think about creating maps:

- During the desk research phase, you may come across maps that provide sufficiently detailed information (e.g., GSMA network coverage maps)

- Not all countries have publicly available accurate or up-to-date data. During the interview phase you can ask relevant interviewees (e.g., internet service providers, telecom regulators, implementers) about the availability of data.

- If you gain access to usable data files and the Research Team or the USAID Mission does not have the technical capability to create maps, the Mission DECA Team can request support from USAID/Washington's GeoCenter.

The technically dense and topically broad DECA must be digestible and usable by the Mission. Two elements of the report have proven to be particularly helpful for Mission colleagues:

- **CDCS mapping table:** This table maps the DECA findings and recommendations to relevant CDCS Intermediate Results (IRs). The purpose is to enable Mission staff to easily navigate the report to meet their specific needs and interests.

- **Recommendations table:** This table summarizes the recommendations, breaking them down by "what, why, how." The "what" links to recommendation details; the "why" provides the intended impact and is framed to be outcome oriented; and the "how" summarizes possible partnerships, programming opportunities, available resources, and important considerations for implementing the recommendation. The purpose is to provide an easily digestible summary of the recommendations so Mission staff can quickly understand the scope of recommendations and identify which ones they want to know more about in order to implement.

Recommendation drafting

Recommendations are the most important and useful part of the DECA report for Missions. It is essential to develop actionable recommendations that resonate with Mission interests and goals.

1   Before drafting final recommendations, the Research Team should dedicate a regular weekly team meeting in this phase to discuss recommendation drafting (this should be at least an hour-long meeting).

2   Before the meeting, all Research Team members should review the types of DECA recommendations section below to familiarize themselves with the kind of recommendations that are included in a DECA (see **TABLE 5**).

3   During this meeting, the team should revisit the post-interview synthesis documents and the Mission's priorities (refer to the CDCS and any other prior engagement or documentation provided by the Mission).

4   Now that the "findings" section of the report is near-final, the Research Team is better equipped to refine and expand on the previously brainstormed preliminary recommendations.

5   Spend the hour-long meeting discussing recommendations in detail. The Principal Investigator should facilitate the session using the **best practices outlined below**. (It may be helpful to do this using a new Google Jamboard; otherwise collaborate in person or by using Google docs.)

The Research Team should agree on the recommendations and how to frame them (as opportunities to solve challenges or mitigate risks).

Best practices for developing effective recommendations

As you start to write recommendations, consider:

- With the USAID Mission as the primary audience, how can you align the recommendations with the Mission priorities and CDCS?

- What challenges in the country's digital ecosystem is USAID well-positioned to help stakeholders address? It is useful to connect the recommendation to specific key findings.

- How can USAID support or leverage what is currently working in the country's digital ecosystem to improve development outcomes?

- What is the motivation and purpose of each recommendation? This can be framed in terms of the cost of inaction.

- What tools or mechanisms do the Agency and the Mission have at their disposal to implement recommendations?

- What new partnerships would support the open, secure, and inclusive growth of the country's digital ecosystem? And the responsible use of digital technology?

- What is the first thing that someone at the Mission would have to do to implement this recommendation? (Be clear about next steps.)

MISSION INVOLVEMENT IN DRAFTING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Research Team should coordinate with the Mission DECA Team to determine the Mission's preferred level of involvement in the recommendation drafting process. Depending on Mission capacity and interest, the Research Team can consider doing one of the following before fully drafting recommendations:

- Share a draft outline of the recommendations with the Mission DECA Team; then discuss feedback and prioritization during a regular biweekly meeting.

- Arrange and facilitate a workshop with selected Mission staff to brainstorm and refine recommendations based on key findings. This option is especially appropriate for virtual DECAs, as it may help increase interest in the DECA recommendations and may take the place of the DECA Post-Interview Presentation that will more commonly happen during in-person DECAs

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Eight months after receiving a draft version of the report, USAID/Colombia had started to apply eight of the 12 DECA recommendations. The Mission has included digital as a cross-cutting theme in USAID/Colombia's CDCS, and is focusing on digital as an integrated approach. Sample activities include:

- **Digital Infrastructure and Adoption:** Partnering with Microsoft on projects including digital literacy training and women's entrepreneurship.
- **Digital Society, Rights, and Governance:** Working to provide digital security training for CSOs and coordinating a Digital Security Community of Practice.
- **Digital Economy:** StartPath Empodera program to support women entrepreneurs in early-stage ventures to advance women's economic opportunities, foster a more inclusive digital economy, and create a new generation of female entrepreneurs.

Types of DECA recommendations

DECA recommendations can be roughly grouped into three categories: partnerships, programs, and processes.

Partnerships enable USAID to maximize its resources by working with others to fill gaps in the digital ecosystem.

Programs outline plans for building on current activities or conducting future programming that maximizes USAID's support for growing an inclusive digital ecosystem.

Processes focus on how to make digital development an integral part of the USAID Mission's programming.

Not all recommendations will fit perfectly in this paradigm; for example, you may find that some recommendations are a blend of partnerships and programs. Don't let this framework stall your synthesizing of recommendations. Rather, use it to help identify gaps and generate ideas for USAID to address them. TABLE 5 below describes each type of recommendation in more detail and offers examples from the four DECA pilots. The table outlines each of these examples by first presenting a challenge that was identified during the DECA and then summarizing the associated recommendation. When crafting your recommendations, it can be helpful to think about them as solving specific challenges and what the cost of inaction might be.

Source: USAID Serbia

TABLE 5: Breakdown of types of DECA recommendations

Partnerships

Recognizing that no one organization or sector can solve the world's most intractable development challenges, USAID proactively seeks to build partnerships that leverage the combined skills, assets, technologies, and resources of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to deliver sustainable development impact. Such partnerships enable us to achieve more working together than we ever could working alone.

USAID is passionate about working in partnership with a variety of partners—large multinational corporations, local businesses, universities, foundations, NGOs, diaspora groups, in-country partners, government agencies, and other donors— to make a real difference in the lives of people across the world. The DECA provides an opportunity for USAID to build new partnerships focused on supporting the development of a partner country's digital ecosystem.

DECA pilot examples   The following examples illustrate the range of partnerships recommended during the four pilots:

Challenge	Recommendation
• Various actors including the government, internet service providers, and civil society experiment with alternative last-mile connectivity solutions. There are also many technologies available to deploy rural networks. However, coordination is needed to align efforts in target geographies, select the right technology, and coordinate learning and planning for sustainability.	• Convene stakeholders from the public and private sectors for a co-creation event on digital connectivity to help shape smart investments in last-mile connectivity and to showcase and align partners' respective resources.
• Access to the internet is prohibitively expensive, especially for the Mission's target program participant populations. A multi-stakeholder alliance focused on cross-sector digitalization exists and has a strong reputation. However, members are not yet focused on improving affordability.	• Create an internet affordability working group including policymakers, regulators, internet service providers, civil society, and private sector actors to promote fair rules for a competitive and diverse broadband market. Provide TA if needed.
• Private sector financial service providers (FSPs) would like to offer DFS to rural customers, but face a number of barriers. These include supply-side issues of high perceived and real risk, as well as demand-side issues like mistrust and unawareness of digital tools.	• A partnership with local and international FSPs could help them to expand digital finance offerings to last-mile customers. To help them improve their product offerings, USAID could offer robust market research, along with innovative financial instruments that de-risk market entry.
• The move to online schooling due to COVID-19 has negatively impacted marginalized and vulnerable students' access to a quality education.	• Collaborate with other donors and NGOs to identify and address digital infrastructure and digital literacy gaps that hinder inclusive online education, particularly during and after the COVID-19 response.
• The host government displays a strong push toward digitalization; however, a lack of capacity among government personnel is slowing the process.	• Work with the government and other relevant donors to conduct a gap assessment of government staff to identify pain points, gaps, and strategies to address these capacity issues.

Programs

Programs outline specific ways to (1) integrate digital technologies into current and future programming, (2) support inclusive growth of or mediate risks in the country's digital ecosystem, and (3) work with existing digital programming to enhance scale and sustainability. Programs can take many forms, including innovative uses of emerging technologies, supporting data management systems, digital skill-building projects, de-risking market entry, and follow-on assessment activities.

DECA pilot examples Across the four pilots, we recommended a range of new programs, and adjustments to existing programs based on gaps or needs in the DECA findings.

Challenge	Recommendation
• As new networks are built and internet usage increases, the risk of a widening digital divide becomes even more serious. Gender inclusion is critical to ensuring the economic benefits of an expanding digital ecosystem are fully realized.	• Building on the results of the WomenConnect Challenge, and the Mission's existing work in women's empowerment, design a new activity to target the gender digital divide. This could include identifying communities with the largest divides, conducting field research to uncover common attitudes and ideas about gender and technology, and developing targeted communications products (for men and women) that build on shared values and introduce new perspectives.
• Civil society organizations (CSOs) are at high risk of cyber harms (e.g., DDOS attacks, data breaches, surveillance, ransomware) and have minimal capabilities to mitigate or prevent them. They want to protect themselves and the people they serve, but often don't know where to start.	• As part of the Mission's existing civil society portfolio, develop a digital security training initiative for CSOs. Evaluation of this activity will help develop a cybersecurity evidence base that could encourage broader uptake of digital security measures among civil society. The Mission can buy into DC-based mechanisms or expand existing work plans.
• Consumers are not aware of the risks that come with online transactions and increasingly fall victim to extortion, scams, and misuse of personal information.	• Develop a digital literacy/cyber hygiene activity in an existing program that will create and disseminate awareness campaigns on how to protect personal information and avoid misinformation, scams, and predatory online lending.
• Mission project participant populations, particularly people in rural areas, older people, and women, do not use the internet because little digital content is available that they perceive to be relevant to their daily lives. This impedes traction and sustainability of digital development solutions.	• Use an existing health program as an opportunity to develop localized digital content that is specifically geared to these target audiences, and carefully monitor its consumption and impact. Based on the results of this initial trial, it may make sense to apply lessons learned in the Mission's media-strengthening activities, to stimulate creation of more content for these target audiences.
• Disaster risk management (DRM) systems are not optimized to allow for information sharing (within the government and among external stakeholders). The lack of effective sharing means that data from different sources cannot be analyzed together, which impedes data-driven decision-making.	• Provide technical assistance to local and national government agencies to forge consensus on DRM data standards and definitions and support the development of an interoperable DRM data system. Train local officials to manage and maintain the data system and to analyze shared data for better risk mitigation.

• There is a mismatch between the supply and demand of digital skills, which undermines the country's competitiveness and economic growth.	• Fund a program that supports higher-education institutions to grow the digital talent pool through mentorship and internship opportunities with the private sector. This type of program could emphasize the importance of building skills in emerging technologies and an awareness of technology ethics.
• Media literacy is relatively low for some populations, particularly older people. At the same time, disinformation is a growing problem. Independent media outlets and CSOs also lack capacity to mitigate digital repression.	• Expand funding for programs that focus on countering disinformation and increasing media literacy. Specific areas not addressed in current programming include supporting CSOs to counter disinformation by mapping its sources, providing resources to help independent media increase their reach and generate new revenue, and building digital security capacity for CSOs.

⚙ Processes

Processes focus on changing the way USAID Missions work across their portfolios to elevate digital development, and in procurement to ensure partners are using the "digital by default" approach outlined in the Digital Strategy. This may include issuing requirements and guidance around the use of digital payments or digital data collection methods.

DECA pilot examples   The following challenges and recommendations exemplify some of the recommendations we made to elevate USAID Missions' digitally aligned processes.

Challenge	Recommendation
• Offerors sometimes add digital elements to their activities as an afterthought, resulting in a lack of cohesiveness and ineffective use of digital in their activity.	• Include standard language encouraging Offerors to submit a "digital plan" for their activity and to connect their digital plans with both the USAID Digital Strategy and the DECA report.
• A key risk to digital development programming is that it is not context-driven. The lack of contextual awareness can result in low uptake or even encourage risky online behavior if the target population's digital literacy levels are not accounted for at the outset.	• Include standard language encouraging offers to include digital literacy, focused specifically on cyber hygiene, requirements into all mechanisms and sub-grants, or contracts that include digital programming.
• Digital development impacts all sectors; therefore, communication channels on digital elements of projects were irregular and often lacked clarity.	• Require projects with a significant digital component to designate a "digital point of contact" on the implementer side who would liaise directly with the Mission's DDA.
• Mission was not coordinating digital across the portfolio. Roles, requirements, and responsibilities were unclear.	• Create a Digital Development Mission Order that establishes a digital development working group with representatives from all offices. This working group would prioritize recommendations from the DECA, determine which ones the Mission will enact, and coordinate implementation across the Mission. It would also outline the responsibilities of each office regarding digital development programming and operations. (See this Digital Development Mission Order Template for additional details and sample language.)
• Donors in the country are working on digital development, but there is no structured collaboration in place.	• USAID should work with government and like-minded donors to develop a donor coordination body focused on digital development.

Standard DECA recommendations

Although DECAs focus on country-specific recommendations, standard DECA recommendations in the table below are detailed with suggested descriptions ready for use in the report. These should be tailored to the country and Mission context, but can be recommended as general approaches to digital development programming.

TABLE 6. Standard DECA recommendations

Recommendation	Suggested description	
Hire a Digital Development Advisor	• **Challenge:** USAID's staff regularly face unfamiliar challenges as they work to carry out development and humanitarian-assistance programming in a rapidly changing digital world. The opportunities and challenges of doing development in a digital age necessitate creating new support roles upon which Mission staff can draw for technical expertise and strategic guidance.	• **Recommendation:** USAID Missions should create a full-time Digital Development Advisor (DDA) position. This person would take responsibility for implementing the Digital Strategy initiatives as well as provide technical expertise on the digital aspects of projects across the USAID Mission's portfolio, similar to the roles typically filled by Communications, MEL, Gender, or Private Sector Advisors. USAID's Office of Human Capital and Talent Management has made DDA PDs at the FSN 12, 11, and 10 levels available for Mission use.
	This recommendation may need to be made context-specific for Missions with a smaller personnel footprint who may not have specific Gender or Private Sector Advisors. For example, one option may be to recommend the creation of a Digital Development Counselor (Foreign Service Officer) or Senior DDA (Foreign Service National/U.S. Personal Services Contractor) positions at larger Missions in the region to support digital programming in smaller Missions. This would help reduce the resource burden on individual Missions and promote region-wide sharing of insights and ideas.	
Best practices in program design for digital development	• **Challenge:** The Principles for Digital Development are foundational to all digital development programming; however, development practitioners who are newer to the space (at USAID Missions and their implementing partners) may not be fully aware of them.	• **Recommendation:** To ensure digital programming achieves intended outcomes and impact, integrate the Principles for Digital Development into all program design and implementation. The Digital Principles are nine guidelines that provide best practices for every phase of the project life cycle. They were created in consultation with various international development institutions including USAID. The Digital Principles are: Design With the User; Understand the Existing Ecosystem; Design for Scale; Build for Sustainability; Be Data Driven; Use Open Standards, Open Data, Open Source, and Open Innovation; Reuse and Improve; Address Privacy and Security; and Be Collaborative.
	USAID Missions can use the USAID Digital Investment Tool to learn how to integrate the Principles for Digital Development into programming. The step-by-step tool can be used throughout the Program Cycle; however, it is designed for use during activity design and implementation. It is flexible in that it can support planning for either a stand-alone activity or a component of a larger activity. The Digital Investment Tool is designed to enable a participatory process between USAID, its implementing partners, and other stakeholders involved in digital programming decision-making.

USAID staff can take the Digital Principles training available by DIAL, and a USAID-specific e-module training will be available in USAID University in 2022 that will teach staff how to use the principles in project design and management. | |

Recommendation	Suggested description	
Standard procurement language	• **Challenge:** Not all Mission staff have the technical vocabulary or knowledge to ensure each procurement includes the appropriate request for digital mainstreaming in Offerors' activities.	• **Recommendation:** The Digital Strategy calls for implementing partners to change their operations to a "digital by default" approach, including using digital payments, collecting program participant data digitally (e.g., using tablets instead of paper), and adopting cybersecurity and data-privacy protections for their internal operations and implemented activities. Some Missions have explored using standard procurement language to encourage informed use of digital technologies across their portfolios.
Integrate the DECA into Mission MEL processes	• **Challenge:** Digital development is a relatively new area for USAID; therefore, Missions should maintain an intentional focus on investing in this area, learning, and creating processes to iterate.	• **Recommendation 1:** Missions should systematically review the DECA recommendations in each Portfolio Review to gauge implementation and integration, similar to follow-up on evaluation report recommendations. • **Recommendation 2:** Missions will have new results to share in the Performance Plan and Report. To the extent practical, the USAID Digital Strategy Team would appreciate Missions noting the DECA and any results that stem from it in the relevant key issues (e.g., technology, cybersecurity, gender). • **Recommendation 3:** Missions should conduct a DECA after-action review to gather Mission feedback on the DECA process, contractor performance, programmatic recommendations, and suggestions for future Mission DECA Teams. (The Digital Strategy Team at USAID/Washington may be able to provide support; contact them at

Recommended follow-on activities

Research

Although DECAs examine a broad range of digital topics, the DECA may reveal the need for additional research based on the country's digital ecosystem and the USAID Mission's priorities. The DECA can be used to identify information gaps and justify the need for a specific follow-on study. Deep-dive topics may be sector or stakeholder specific. In particular, USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance has a variety of relevant assessment tools, including Applied Political Economy Analysis, Civil Society Assessment, Media Assessment, and Human Rights Landscape Analysis. Another suggestion is a Digital Agriculture Assessment (through USAID's Bureau for Resilience and Food Security), one of the digital health assessment tools available through USAID's Bureau for Global Health, or more focused primary research on specific topics of interest.

Nationally representative survey

The first two DECA pilots (Colombia and Kenya) contracted a data polling firm to conduct a nationally representative telephone survey. The intention was to fill information gaps by adding a third layer of data to complement the desk research and interviews. Data polling can be a valuable tool for gathering information about perceptions and use of digital tools and services across the country. However, the utility of integrating the data polling results into the DECA was dependent on timing and Research Team technical capacity. It was challenging to align the time needed to contract a firm, design the questionnaire, administer the survey, and analyze the results with the anticipated timeline for the report. Therefore, a better use of data polling may be as a follow-on activity to the DECA, collecting population-level data to complement the expert views gathered through the DECA research process.

When recommending data polling, it is important to advise the USAID Mission to:

- Pinpoint information gaps the data polling will be intended to fill

- Ensure the sampling frame can account for the desired geographic granularity

- Secure the technical skills needed for data analysis (e.g., statistics, econometrics, data science)

Provide the sample Data Polling SOW as a resource for Missions that may be interested and well-suited to carry out this follow-on activity. Also see the Kenya DECA Report in Appendix B for how to integrate data polling into the report narrative.

DIGITAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

While the DECA is sector-agnostic and doesn't focus specifically on health systems, it can provide a solid foundation for follow-up work in digital health. USAID's Bureau for Global Health and other actors, including GIZ, have recently produced two key resources to advance health sector–specific digital transformation assessments:

- The Navigator for Digital Health Capability Models incorporates six assessment tools in an interactive framework that selects indicators based on user needs.

- The Digital Pandemic Preparedness Assessment tool looks at digital systems readiness specifically in the context of pandemic response needs.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Final Report Tracker	This template is the project management tool to use while writing and finalizing the DECA Final Report. The "Step-by-step Report Work Plan" tab is most relevant to this section.
DECA Final Report Template	Use this template to begin your DECA final report. It includes a detailed outline for the report and standard language where appropriate.
USAID Style Guide	Includes guidance on formatting, style, grammar, and punctuation, mostly based on the Chicago Manual of Style.
Data Polling Scope of Work	This sample scope of work can be used to procure a firm to conduct a DECA follow-on data polling activity.

3.10 FINALIZATION OF THE DECA REPORT

Purpose	Management and finalization of the DECA reports (*internal and external*)
When	Analysis and report writing phase
Implementation time	About 5 weeks from draft to design

The final stages of the DECA report include peer review, clearances, and design. One or more team members will be involved at varying levels of effort throughout these steps. Note that two versions of the DECA report may be published: an *internal* report and an *external* report. For external Research Teams, the contract should include final reporting requirements, the purpose and implications of inspection and acceptance, presentations, including format, and the details of the final report, such as number of copies, distribution, format, and full and summary versions.

Peer review

Peer review helps close any technical or contextual gaps in the final DECA report. Peer reviewers can include technical experts requested from USAID/Washington, the Mission DECA Team, and other relevant Mission staff. The team should allot about two weeks for peer review.

As feedback is provided, the Research Team should track high-level comments in the "Peer Review Tracker" and "Peer Review Comments Matrix" tabs of the DECA Final Report Tracker, incorporating feedback as relevant. Once all comments are reviewed and integrated, consider hiring a copy editor to ensure editorial consistency and alignment with the USAID Style Guide. The "Copy Editing Standard Checklist" tab in the DECA Final Report Tracker can be used to highlight common issues copy editors should look out for during their review.

PEER REVIEW REQUESTS

The complete draft should be sent to the **Mission DECA Team** for peer review. It may be beneficial to schedule calls with experts to get added context. Use the Report Peer Review Request Email Template.

At this stage, you should also re-engage relevant interviewees to fill gaps and get their consent if you're quoting them or using potentially sensitive information from their interviews.

Clearances

The Research Team should coordinate with the Mission DECA Team to understand the Mission's communications protocol. The Mission DECA Team should be responsible for coordinating all clearances.

Guidelines for creating external reports

Although the main audience for the DECA is the USAID Mission, DECA learnings can often benefit the development community more broadly. The findings can be useful to the government stakeholders, other donors, implementing partners, civil society organizations, and private sector actors. The external version of the report is simply the internal report with selected redactions such as:

- Pre-publication CDCS content or other strategic planning materials

- Interviewee names and contact information, and other personally identifiable information

- Sensitive Agency information and references

- Language that may be considered controversial or critical to an external audience, especially of the host-country government

- Specific recommendations that might not be implemented by the Mission

- Recommendations referencing specific USAID mechanisms, or anything else potentially procurement-sensitive

Source: Melinda Donnelly for USAID/Oceans

Guidelines for report translation

If the Mission prefers having the external report in another language, consider hiring a translator. If hiring a translator, follow these steps:

- Designate one team member to facilitate communication between the translator, DECA Team, and Mission DECA Team.

- Send the translator all documents, including separate attachments (such as graphics, maps, and tables) with labels and text.

- Make sure someone on the team speaks the language and can support the translator with technical terms. If that is not possible, ask a native speaker at the Mission to review the translated document in full before it goes through clearance.

- Once the translated document is cleared by the Mission, send it to the designer.

Note: Citations do not need to be translated and should remain in the language the source is written in.

Design

The final stages of wrapping up the DECA report involve working with a graphic designer. One person on the DECA implementation team should be assigned to liaise directly with the graphic designer. You can share the "Report Design Checklist" from the DECA Final Report Tracker with the designer to minimize initial back-and-forth and ensure general design preferences are addressed.

You should always double and triple check the designed report. Use the "Copy Editing Standard Checklist" tab in the DECA Final Report Tracker to ensure you are reviewing thoroughly. Multiple DECA Team members may be simultaneously reviewing the designed report; it is therefore most effective to note feedback for the designer using the "Comment Tracker for Designer" tab in the DECA Final Report Tracker to ensure that all comments are compiled in the same place.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Final Report Tracker	This template is the project management tool to use while writing and finalizing the DECA Final Report. It includes: • Step-by-step Report Work Plan • Peer Review Tracker • Peer Review Comments Matrix • Copy Editing Standard Checklist • Report Design Checklist • Comment Tracker for Designer
Report Peer Review Request Email Template (Phase 3)	Once the report is drafted, send this email to peer reviewers for comments. You can draft more targeted emails for reviewers, for example, identifying key DECA pillars and recommendations for a technical expert.
Digital Strategy Style Guide	This style guide applies to any Digital Strategy–related knowledge product, detailing standards for language and design.
USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide	Includes guidance on USAID colors, logos, typefaces, and other graphical standards
Final Report Standard Graphics	This folder contains standard DECA graphics as well as design elements for presentations and the final report.

3.11 DECA DISSEMINATION

Purpose	To communicate clear guidelines on sharing *internal* and *external* DECA reports
When	Analysis and report writing phase; post DECA
Implementation time	1 week for final presentation

Internal report dissemination and final presentation to Mission

The primary audience of the DECA is the Mission. Once the report has been cleared, it should be disseminated within the Mission and relevant Bureaus.

After finalizing the report and getting clearance from the Mission DECA Team, the Research Team should deliver a Mission-wide final presentation. Ideally, this presentation would occur when the internal report is ready to be shared. However, **if approvals or design are slowing the process, ensure that it takes place no more than two months after the in-person or virtual interview phase is complete.** It is crucial for the Research Team to engage with the Mission DECA Team on

this presentation to ensure the right USAID stakeholders attend and the content is presented in a way that aligns with Mission priorities.

DECA Final Presentation objectives:

1   Reinforce why the Mission commissioned a DECA and demonstrate the value it can provide to the Mission.

2   Share key findings and recommendations, spending more time on recommendations.

3   Demonstrate how DECA recommendations align with current Mission programming, emphasizing what can be done in the near- and long-term.

4   Outline next steps for the Mission, specifically highlighting recommendations that align with Mission priorities.

DECA Final Presentation format suggestions:

•   **Length:** 45–60 minutes, with a 20- to 25- minute presentation and 25–30 minutes for questions and conversation.

•   **Audience:** The entire Mission should be invited to attend. However, the exact format is dependent on Mission size and availability. The Mission DECA Team should work to ensure Mission leadership (ideally including the Mission Director) are in attendance. If appropriate, Embassy staff may also be invited, or the Mission DECA Team can set up a separate brief for the Embassy audience. (NOTE: In some pilots, the Missions wanted multiple presentations to include a general outbrief for the entire Mission, and a deep dive on more specific topics for Mission leadership. The DECA Team should ensure the Mission receives information in a format that is useful to both the Mission and its leadership.)

External report dissemination

Dissemination of the external DECA report largely falls on the Mission DECA Team, and should follow Mission communication guidelines.

Relevant DECA Templates

DECA Final Presentation Template   This PowerPoint template provides a starting point for creating the DECA Final Presentation to share key findings and recommendations with the Mission.

3.12 FOLLOW-UP

Purpose   Monitoring learnings from the DECA; building a use case for the DECA

When   Post DECA

Digital Strategy learning and engagement

Through the Digital Strategy, USAID has established a *Digital Research and Learning Agenda* to ensure that the Agency is continually adapting to the digital domain. DECAs will help grow the evidence base for digital tools, systems, policy interventions, and platforms. Sharing information about your experience in conducting a DECA will support the *Digital Research and Learning Agenda's* objective of assessing the impact of the Digital Strategy, and of digital technology writ large.[18]

After the DECA is completed, the Digital Strategy Team would like to hear from members of the Mission DECA Team and (if possible) the Research Team. They are interested in refining the DECA tool by learning about your experience conducting the assessment and about its application in the countries where USAID works.

Depending on your preference, please either fill out the DECA Toolkit Feedback Form, or reach out to digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov to schedule a conversation. Before the conversation, you should reflect on the DECA you just completed and be prepared to discuss some of the following questions:

- Overall, what were your expectations for the DECA, and were they met? Why or why not? *(content, time commitment, output, etc.)*

- What was your experience using this Toolkit?

  ○ Which parts worked well?

  ○ Which did not work for you?

  ○ What would you like to see changed in future versions of this Toolkit?

  ○ What suggestions do you have for future Mission DECA Teams and Research Teams?

- Do you feel like the Mission will be able to act on some of the DECA recommendations?

- Do you know whether the Mission has started work on any of the recommendations?

Please direct any questions about the DECA Toolkit to digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.

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18 USAID Digital Strategy, Annex II

Appendices
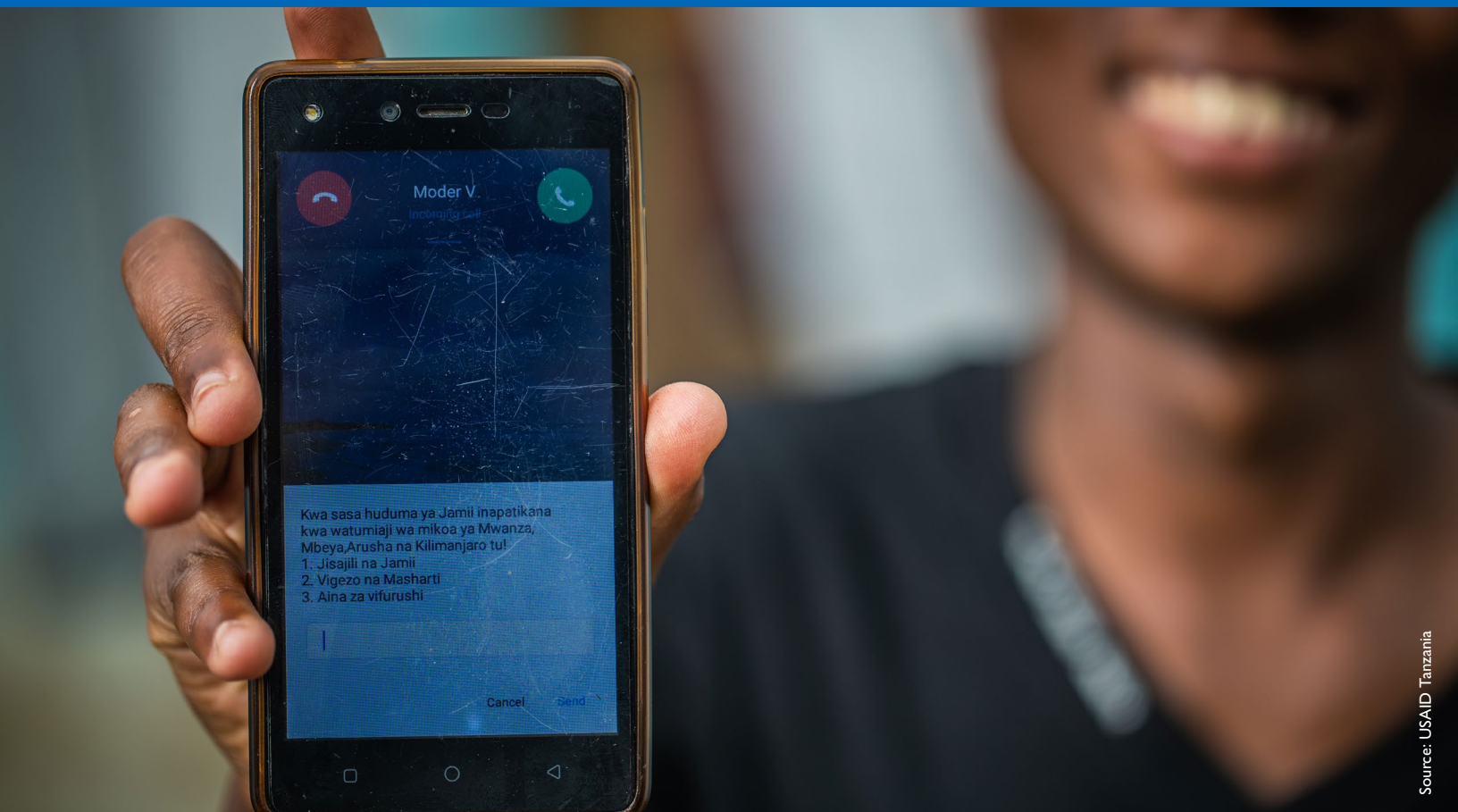
A. Digital Ecosystem Framework

[USAID's Digital Ecosystem Framework](#) offers a practical structure that defines the core and cross-cutting elements of a country's digital ecosystem. This Framework provides a way to understand a country's digital operating environment and inform the design of effective, sustainable projects and activities.

The Framework can help you consider how each component of the ecosystem may impact development and humanitarian assistance programming and help identify risks or opportunities beyond a specific technical area. For example, an agricultural intervention that uses digital technology for agricultural extension services will certainly consider digital literacy, but may not account for potential online harms, cybersecurity risks, data privacy and protection legislation, or the existence of national data systems.

The Framework also provides insight into how USAID is prioritizing its digital development work moving forward and offers a common understanding of digital development. Donors, multilaterals, partners, the private sector, think tanks, and government agencies can adopt and incorporate the Framework to facilitate coordination, program alignment, and identify potential areas of collaboration with USAID.
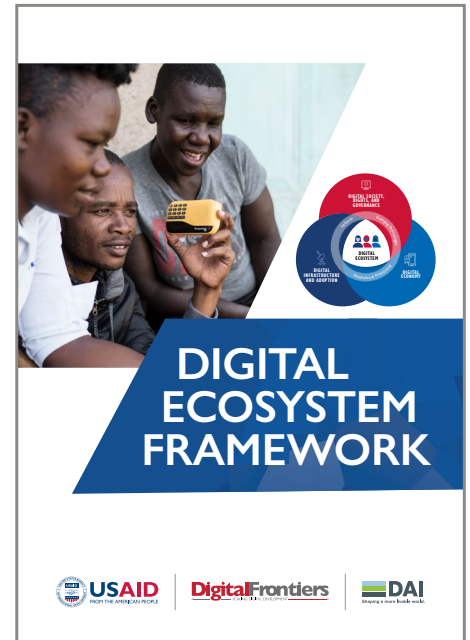
B. Final DECA report examples

USAID-internal reports are available on [MyUSAID](#).

External reports:

- [Colombia](#)
- [Kenya](#)
- [Serbia](#)

C. Digital ecosystem glossary

Term	Definition
Affordability	Whether a person can afford the cost of data relative to their income, measured as gigabytes (GBs) of data per percentage of monthly income. The Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) uses a "1 for 2" measure for affordable internet—affordable internet is where 1GB of mobile broadband data is priced at 2 percent or less of average monthly income.
Agent/Branchless banking	The delivery of banking services outside conventional bank branches, usually through a network of agents equipped with point of sale devices or mobile phones. Agents can take many forms including individuals at small shops, petrol stations, and supermarkets. Financial services provided by agents can include cash-in and cash-out points, credit, loans, insurance, bill payment, and person-to-person transfers.
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	The science and technology of machines that perform activities normally thought to require human intelligence. One subset of AI is Machine Learning (ML), a technique in which computers "learn" to recognize patterns in existing data, creating systems that can be more flexible, responsive, and adaptable than previously possible. Some AI systems use computers to automatically make decisions, while others create recommendations for human decision-makers.
Blockchain	An example of a distributed ledger technology (DLT), which is a type of shared, peer-to-peer computer database that enables all network participants to agree on a set of facts or events without needing to rely on a single, centralized, or fully trusted intermediary party. Blockchains are the most common form of DLT, and require data on the "chain" to be structured in linked, sequential "blocks."
Censorship	The suppression of free speech by governments or private institutions based on the assumption that said speech is objectionable or offensive. In addition to hard forms of censorship (handed down officially through laws and regulations), soft forms of censorship exist (applied through financial and/or reputational pressure).
Civil Society Organization (CSO)	Organizations including formal non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as formal and informal membership associations (labor unions, business and professional associations, farmers' organizations and cooperatives, and women's groups). CSOs articulate and represent the interests of their members, engage in analysis and advocacy, and conduct oversight of government actions and policies.
Cyber Hygiene	The practices and steps that users of computers and other devices take to maintain system health and improve online security. These practices are often part of a routine to ensure the safety of identity and other sensitive details that could be stolen or corrupted.
Cybersecurity	The activity or process, ability or capability, or state whereby information and communications systems that support or affect development outcomes, and the information contained therein, are protected from and/or defended against damage, unauthorized use or modification, or exploitation.
Data Governance	Policies, strategies, frameworks, and practices that governments implement to regulate data collection, management, use, and sharing in the public and private sectors. This broad topic can include data privacy practices, data sovereignty, data stewardship roles and authorities, cross-border data flows, regulations on AI, and data infrastructure (e.g., open data portals and interoperability layers).

Term	Definition
Data Privacy	The right of an individual or group to maintain control over and confidentiality of information about themselves. Data privacy can be at risk both from unintentional sharing and from undue or illegal gathering and use of data about that individual or group.
Data Protection	The practice of ensuring the protection of data from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, disruption, modification, or destruction, to provide confidentiality, integrity, and availability.
Digital Divide	The distinction between those who have access to the internet and can make use of digital communications services, and those who find themselves excluded from these services. Often, one can point to multiple and overlapping digital divides, which stem from inequities in access, literacy, cost, or the relevance of services. Factors such as high cost and limited infrastructure often exacerbate digital divides.
Digital Economy	The use of digital and internet infrastructure by individuals, businesses, and government to interact with each other, engage in economic activity, and access both digital and non-digital goods and services. As the ecosystem supporting it matures, the digital economy might grow to encompass all sectors of the economy—a transformation driven by the rise of new services and entrants, as well as backward linkages with the traditional, pre-digital economy. A diverse array of technologies and platforms facilitate activity in the digital economy; however, much activity relies in some measure on the internet, mobile phones, digital data, and digital payments.
Digital Ecosystem	The stakeholders, systems, and enabling environment that together empower people and communities to use digital technology in order to gain access to services, engage with each other, or pursue economic opportunities. Although certain aspects of the digital ecosystem have country-wide reach, other features differ across geographies or communities. USAID's framework for understanding the digital ecosystem is structured around three pillars
Digital Financial Inclusion	The use of digital technology to reach financially excluded and underserved populations with a range of formal financial services that are suited to their needs and are responsibly delivered to customers and sustainable for providers.
Digital Financial Services (DFS)/FinTech	Financial services enabled by or delivered through digital technology (e.g., mobile phones, cards, the internet). DFS (e.g., payments, credit, insurance, savings, advisory) can be offered by a range of providers, from banks to a host of non-bank financial institutions, such as microfinance institutions, digital credit providers, payment providers, technology vendors, and electronic money issuers.
Digital Government	The use of digital technologies, as an integrated part of government modernization strategies, to create public value. This includes how the government manages internal information technology (IT) processes and systems, delivers citizen- and business-facing e-services, and engages with the public through digital channels. Digital government is often used interchangeably with terms like "e-governance" and "e-government."
Digital Identity	A set of attributes that uniquely describes an individual or entity. Digital identification (ID) systems often require registering individuals into a computerized database and providing certain credentials associated with each individual (e.g., birth certificates, identifying numbers, cards, digital certificates) as proof of identity. Digital ID systems sometimes use biometrics (fingerprints, iris scans, etc.) to identify individuals, but many advanced systems do not. Government actors can set up these systems to create foundational, national ID programs, or donors or NGOs for functional purposes to identify beneficiaries, e.g., for humanitarian assistance and service-delivery.

Term	Definition
Digital Literacy	The ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and networked technologies for participation in economic, social, and political life. This may include competencies that are variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy, and media literacy.
Digital Payments	Payments initiated or received by electronic means. For an end-user, these payments might be made through a text message, mobile application, website, or merchant-level point-of-sale device, such as a dongle or QR code. A financial institution—e.g., bank, switch, MFI, or payment service provider—might facilitate these payments to or from a range of instruments. Instruments might include
Digital Repression	The use of digital tools and technology to suppress internet freedoms and includes five techniques—surveillance, censorship, social manipulation and harassment, internet shutdowns, and targeted persecution of online users. This term can include offline actions taken to penalize online speech (e.g., arrests, physical violence), as well as online actions that seek to suppress freedoms in online and offline spaces.
Digital Rights	The fundamental rights and freedoms that individuals can exercise online,[19] as well as a respect for privacy and ownership of data.[20]
Digital Trade	The delivery of products and services over the internet by firms in any industry sector, and of associated products such as smartphones and Internet-connected sensors.
Disinformation	False information that is knowingly shared to cause harm. Disinformation is often confused with misinformation, which is false or misleading information shared by error or mistake.
E-commerce	The sale or purchase of goods or services, conducted over computer networks by methods specifically designed for the purpose of receiving or placing orders.
Emerging Technologies	Technologies for which ethical, policy, and regulatory frameworks are struggling to keep pace with the rate of technological progress. They often lack rigorous testing in the real world, so their implications on people and societies remain less well-understood. These include artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things (IoT), blockchain, drones, and 3D printing, among others. As these technologies become more affordable and widespread, they may have a significant impact on digital ecosystems and on development more broadly.
Information and Communications Technology (ICT)	Diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, video-conferencing, etc.).
Internet Freedom	The online exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms regardless of frontiers or medium. Where internet freedom is respected, the same rights that people have offline are also protected online.

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19 ICCPR Article 19, ICCPR
20 ICCPR Article 17, ICCPR

Term	Definition
Internet Service Provider (ISP)	An organization that delivers access to end-users using both fixed-line and wireless technologies. Wireless ISPs (especially those in rural areas) often seek to take advantage of low licensing and equipment costs by delivering service using unlicensed spectrum. ISPs range in size and scope from small, local providers to providers with international and even global reach.
Interoperability	The ability of computer systems or software to exchange and make use of information from other systems. For example, interoperable data systems allow for data sharing and reuse with common formats and definitions, and interoperable payment systems allow digital transfers of money between different financial service providers.
Internet Governance	The development and application by governments, the private sector, and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the internet.
Last-Mile Connectivity	Where the end-users access the internet using devices (mobile phones, laptops, tablets, computers) through local access networks.
Malinformation	Information that is based in reality (unlike misinformation and disinformation), but used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country. An example is a report that reveals a person's sexual orientation without public interest justification.
Media Literacy	The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression needed for citizens of a democracy.
Misinformation	False information that is shared, but no harm is meant. Social media platforms are regularly used to spread misinformation. Note that disinformation is a type of misinformation— disinformation refers to misinformation that is spread with malicious intent.
Mobile Money	A technology that enables people to receive, store, and spend money using a mobile phone. Can also be referred to as a mobile wallet or e-money.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	An entity that provides voice and data services primarily via wireless terrestrial networks. MNOs typically use licensed spectrum bands, which, due to the fact that they are not shared, tend to deliver a higher quality, more reliable (and more cost-intensive) service.
National Payment Gateway	An electronic payment transaction system that allows customers to make secure non-cash payments from any associated financial institutions. A well-functioning national payment gateway allows for the online purchase of international goods and services and enables merchants to affordably adopt digital payment options that are attractive to all customers, no matter their preferred financial institution.
Open Government Data	A philosophy—and increasingly a set of policies—that promotes transparency, accountability and value creation by making government data available to all.

Term	Definition
QR Code	Technically, an abbreviation for Quick Response code, a trademark name of the most popular type of 2D barcode readable by smartphones. In comparison to linear barcodes, QR codes store a large volume of data, can be scanned from a screen (not just paper), can be read even if part of the code is damaged, and can be encrypted. QR codes offer a hassle-free, contactless, low-cost digital payment option for merchants. To complete a transaction, a QR code is scanned using a mobile phone that associates the QR code with an account or digital wallet. QR payments can occur with customers scanning business' QR codes, businesses scanning customer's phone screen, or through app-to-app payments.
Radio Spectrum	Refers to the range of frequencies of electromagnetic radiation that are used to deliver radio transmissions. A critical function of telecommunications sector regulatory authorities is to designate specific frequency ranges (or bands) for different purposes, including telecommunications (but also for applications such as radio astronomy or other industrial uses). Some bands (e.g., WiFi) are *unlicensed*, meaning that anyone can use them without seeking explicit prior permission.[21] *Licensed spectrum* requires users (e.g., commercial cellular networks or FM radio broadcasters) to secure a regulator's approval prior to use. Licenses are typically assigned through spectrum auctions, which seek to establish the economic value of spectrum - which is a finite natural resource.
Transparency	An environment where governments and public officials engage in the clear disclosure of rules, plans, processes and actions in a form that is readily accessible to all. Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the government is doing.
TV White Space	The unused spectrum between TV stations that can be capitalized upon for increased connectivity. This block of spectrum is considered ripe for innovation and experimental use, holding rich potential for expanding broadband capacity and improving access for many users, and for developing technologies that can expand this type of spectrum access to other frequencies and services to greatly increase our ability to use spectrum.
Universal Service Funds (USF)	A mechanism designed to promote network infrastructure development in areas that commercial access providers deem uneconomical. Essentially established as subsidy programs, USFs are resourced through contributions drawn from the revenues of telecommunications operators. USF funds are often applied to help de-risk otherwise complement network investments in underserved (or unserved) areas. In many cases, USFs target projects that serve schools, hospitals, and other anchor institutions where demand for services can be aggregated.
Virtual Currency	No globally accepted definition exists, but a virtual currency can be considered a digital representation of value intended to be used as a medium of exchange, unit of account, or store of value. It is not issued by a government and not treated as legal tender. As an umbrella term, virtual currency can include fully decentralized cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin as well as alternatives that are issued, stored, transacted, or redeemed in a centralized fashion. Virtual currencies are distinguished from proposed government-issued digital forms of cash, typically referred to as central bank-issued digital currencies, or CBDCs.

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21 While permissions are not required for unlicensed spectrum use, users are typically limited to technical parameters (such as transmission power or antenna specifications).

D. DECA templates

Please note that all templates should be downloaded before use.

Phase 1: Planning Templates

Sample Statement of Objectives (SOO)

Sample Statement of Work (SOW)

DECA Sample Kickoff Meeting Agenda

DECA Work Plan

Travel Schedule, Equipment Roster Template

Sample DECA Research Team Scopes of Work:

- DECA Principal Investigator SOW
- DECA Research Analyst SOW
- DECA Research Coordinator SOW
- DECA Technical Researcher SOW

Phase 1: Desk Research Templates

DECA Research Checklist

DECA Desk Research Template

Relevant [Country] Resources Library

DECA Introduction Presentation Template

Desk Research Briefs Templates (sub-folder)

Phase 2: Interview Templates

Interview Tracker, Scheduling, and Stakeholder Mapping

Interview Guide Template

Interview Debrief Template

DECA Post-Interview Presentation Template

Phase 3: Analysis and Report Writing Templates

DECA Final Report Tracker

DECA Final Report Template

DECA Final Presentation Template

Digital Strategy Style Guide

USAID Style Guide

USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide

Final Report Standard Graphics (sub-folder)

Email Templates

Reviewing Desk Research Email Template (Phase 1)

Interview Outreach Email Template (Phase 1 and 2)

Mission Communication Email Template (Phase 2)

Thank You Email Template for Interviewees (Phase 2)

Report Peer Review Request Email Template (Phase 3)

Post-DECA Templates
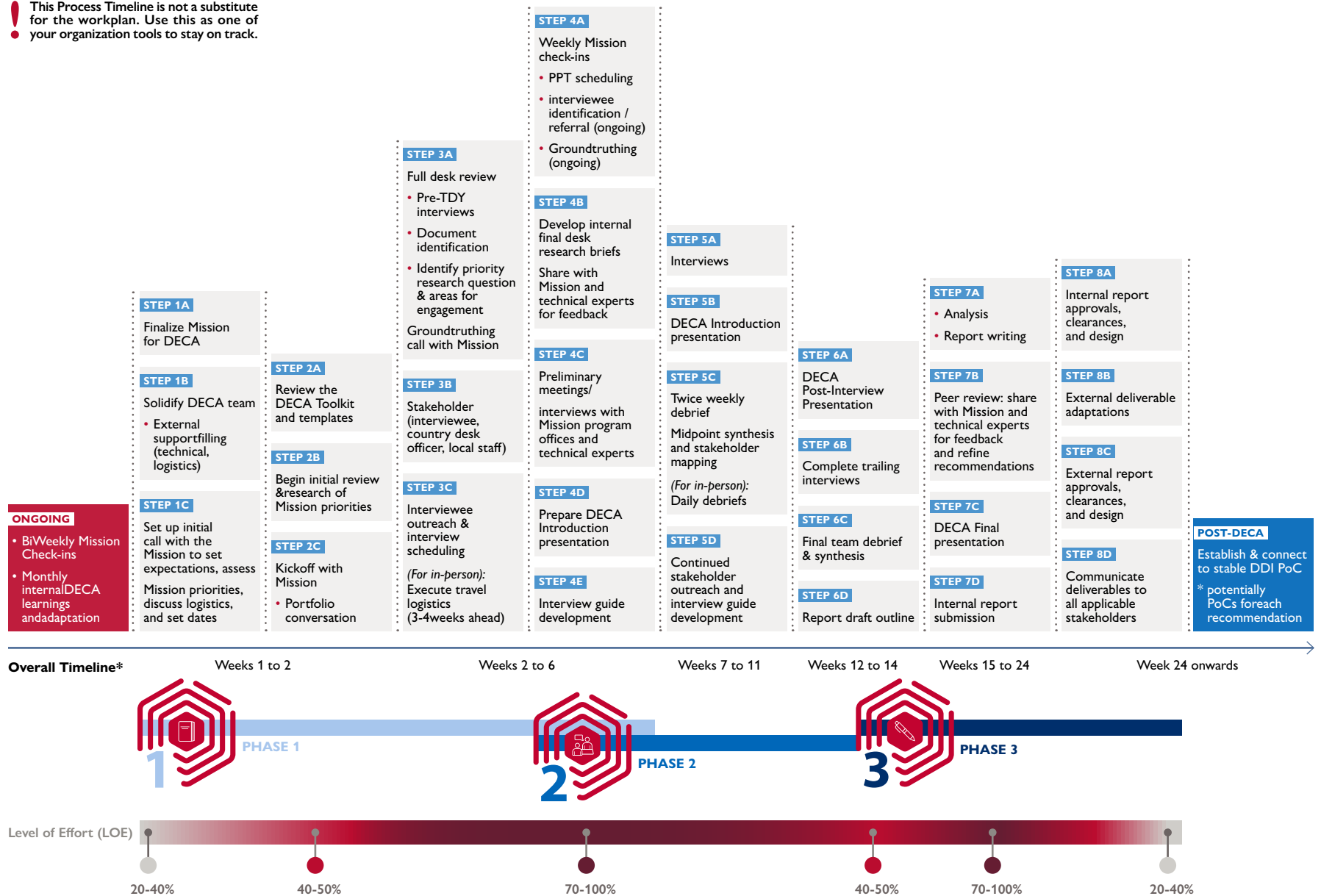
Data Polling SOW

DECA Toolkit: Feedback Form for Implementers

This Process Timeline is not a substitute for the workplan. Use this as one of your organization tools to stay on track.

ONGOING
- BiWeekly Mission Check-ins
- Monthly internalDECA learnings andadaptation

STEP 1A
Finalize Mission for DECA

STEP 1B
Solidify DECA team
- External supportfilling (technical, logistics)

STEP 1C
Set up initial call with the Mission to set expectations, assess Mission priorities, discuss logistics, and set dates

STEP 2A
Review the DECA Toolkit and templates

STEP 2B
Begin initial review &research of Mission priorities

STEP 2C
Kickoff with Mission
- Portfolio conversation

STEP 3A
Full desk review
- Pre-TDY interviews
- Document identification
- Identify priority research question & areas for engagement

Groundtruthing call with Mission

STEP 3B
Stakeholder (interviewee, country desk officer, local staff)

STEP 3C
Interviewee outreach & interview scheduling

(For in-person): Execute travel logistics (3-4weeks ahead)

STEP 4A
Weekly Mission check-ins
- PPT scheduling
- interviewee identification / referral (ongoing)
- Groundtruthing (ongoing)

STEP 4B
Develop internal final desk research briefs

Share with Mission and technical experts for feedback

STEP 4C
Preliminary meetings/ interviews with Mission program offices and technical experts

STEP 4D
Prepare DECA Introduction presentation

STEP 4E
Interview guide development

STEP 5A
Interviews

STEP 5B
DECA Introduction presentation

STEP 5C
Twice weekly debrief

Midpoint synthesis and stakeholder mapping

(For in-person): Daily debriefs

STEP 5D
Continued stakeholder outreach and interview guide development

STEP 6A
DECA Post-Interview Presentation

STEP 6B
Complete trailing interviews

STEP 6C
Final team debrief & synthesis

STEP 6D
Report draft outline

STEP 7A
- Analysis
- Report writing

STEP 7B
Peer review: share with Mission and technical experts for feedback and refine recommendations

STEP 7C
DECA Final presentation

STEP 7D
Internal report submission

STEP 8A
Internal report approvals, clearances, and design

STEP 8B
External deliverable adaptations

STEP 8C
External report approvals, clearances, and design

STEP 8D
Communicate deliverables to all applicable stakeholders

POST-DECA
Establish & connect to stable DDI PoC
* potentially PoCs foreach recommendation

Overall Timeline*

| Weeks 1 to 2 | Weeks 2 to 6 | Weeks 7 to 11 | Weeks 12 to 14 | Weeks 15 to 24 | Week 24 onwards |

1 PHASE 1
2 PHASE 2
3 PHASE 3

Level of Effort (LOE)

| 20-40% | 40-50% | 70-100% | 40-50% | 70-100% | 20-40% |

*Note that the timeline may be shorter for in-person DECAs due to a shorter interview phase (closer to 2-3 weeks).

Source: Oscar Leiva Marinero/Silverlight Photo & Video