

Aid Transparency Index

US Brief

US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND TRANSPARENCY

The United States' commitment to transparency of its US foreign assistance programs, from a legal and policy perspective, has strengthened over the last decade. From joining the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) in 2011, to passage of the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) in 2016 and the BUILD Act in 2018, the publication of detailed, project level information is now required of all agencies involved in US foreign assistance.

The Aid Transparency Index has always included US agencies, which this year ranks 50 donors, using a robust methodology through a set of 35 indicators grouped into five components. This detailed analysis of the leading aid organizations allows us not only to assess progress but also to identify gaps in transparency. With the Index now in its tenth year, there have been notable improvements by several US agencies since measurement began. Progress, however, remains uneven.

The need for transparency has only grown with increased needs for assistance across the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic and its unequal impact on vulnerable populations, the growing food security crisis, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the increasing fragility of many states, and the effects of climate change are all putting serious strains on already tight resources. This only underscores the need for increased transparency to ensure effective use of resources, better coordination, and improved evaluation of all investments.

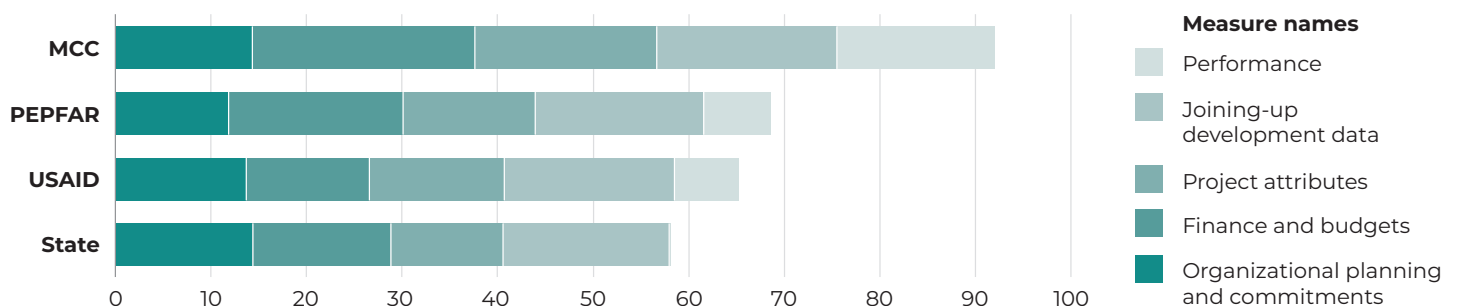
Given the strong policy commitments by the US, we expect these US agencies to be leaders in transparency, including improved monitoring and evaluations.

In our 2020 Aid Transparency Index, we called for more than just better-quality data, advocating for better engagement on the data with all stakeholders, especially local actors. That call is even more relevant today given the growing movement toward locally led development, with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) leading the charge. USAID Administrator Samantha Power has two specific targets: to have 25% of USAID's funding going to local partners within the next four years and building local voices into 50% of all programs over the next decade. Power has also called for more inclusive and responsive development. Monitoring that progress will be important to tracking the localization goal.

Dashboard consolidation

In a major accomplishment – [and one on which we spent considerable effort](#) – the two US official foreign assistance dashboards were finally consolidated into one. The single site, ForeignAssistance.gov, is run by a joint State-USAID team and housed within USAID. This was years in the making and represents a positive leap forward for data users and other stakeholders. We look forward to continued improvements to its useability, including complete and fully linked project level information, and more engagement with local stakeholders giving them the voice they deserve in their own development.

Performance of US Agencies in the 2022 Index



THE 2022 AID TRANSPARENCY INDEX

The 2022 Aid Transparency Index includes the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the Department of State (State), USAID, and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). MCC is the best performing US agency and the best performing bilateral in the 2022 Index, coming in the "very good" category with an overall score of 92.0. Showing significant progress is PEPFAR, which jumped nine points from the 2020 Index and moved up to the "good" category. USAID remained in the "good" category but dropped 12 points. State dropped into the "fair" category, with a score of 58.0.

Following extensive consultations, the 2022 methodology was adjusted to reflect evolving priorities and several new indicators and weightings were added. This is part of our overall effort to continually push the ambition of the Index. [This resulted in a slight dip in the average scores.](#) Changes included tightening up the definitions of the conditions, results, and pre-project impact appraisal indicators, and some adjustments to the scoring structure based on accessibility. We also introduced a new networked data indicator to better identify the relationship between funders, implementers, and coordinators. PEPFAR, USAID, and State all performed well on this new test, coming in the top ten for this indicator (MCC was exempt from this test).

Along with this brief analysis of each US donor, more information and insights are available both in the main [Aid Transparency Index report](#) and on the Publish What You Fund [website](#), which contain the ranking chart and individual donor profiles.

MCC: Score – 92.0 Ranking – 5

MCC has once again been a consistently high performer, coming in as the top US agency, but also the top bilateral agency globally. It publishes 89% of its data in standardized format, and more than any other organization, makes extensive use of hierarchies for its country compacts, components, and subcomponents.¹

MCC scores well across all the components in the 2022 Index. Its organizational planning indicators are high quality and complete. It scored well on project attributes and where indicators were sampled, they were of high quality. MCC's finance and budget indicators were good, although it only publishes two-year forward-looking budgets, not three. It performed well on the joining-up development data indicators, such as flow, aid, and finance type, tied aid status, and the implementer indicator on networked data. The component on which MCC did least well was performance, while still above the average for others in the "very good" category, losing points for the lack of interim or final evaluations. Other sampled indicators for this component, such as results, objectives, and pre-project impact appraisals were of high quality.

Recommendations

Recommendations made in the 2020 Index remain. MCC, which became a stand-alone publisher in 2018, should consider becoming a monthly, rather than quarterly publisher. Additionally, it would be helpful for MCC to encourage the country Millennium Challenge Accounts, which implement the country compacts, to publish more of the MCA data. Now that there is an approach to referencing partner governments, MCC can start to publish to the networked data references test. Finally, it should work to publish more project level tenders in IATI.

¹ The IATI Standard allows publishers to reflect their business model by reporting their activities in a hierarchical structure. For example, a publisher can utilize hierarchical levels to distinguish between programs and underlying components and sub-components.

PEPFAR: Score – 68.6 Ranking – 20

PEPFAR increased its score by nearly 9 points and moved in to the “good” category from the 2020 Index. It increased the frequency of its publication to quarterly.

PEPFAR performed best on the joining-up development data component, increasing its score by almost five points from 2020. Although it published contracts and tenders in IATI for the first time, both failed quality checks as the documents were not project specific; the documents were, however, available in the manual checks. It did well on organizational planning in IATI, although the organizational strategy failed because it was only in draft form. Many project attributes were published in IATI, although no project specific conditions were published. It failed sampling on project titles, as many of them were not clear and used internal acronyms. PEPFAR improved on its finance and budget component from the 2020 Index, doing well on commitments, project budget documents, and disbursements and expenditures. Like other US entities, it only disclosed two-year budgets and the disaggregated budgets failed because they were not current. Finally, PEPFAR’s performance component was low. Although its project objectives have improved, reviews and evaluations failed quality checks as they were too generic, and no pre-project impact appraisals were published in any format.

Recommendations

PEPFAR has made considerable strides in its data publication and quality. It can continue this upward trajectory through publication of more project level information, including clearer titles (free of acronyms), tenders, conditions, and contracts. It should publish more project performance information, pre-project impact appraisals, and disaggregated financial information in IATI. It should continue to improve its networked data organization references. Finally, PEPFAR should consider whether it should be a stand-alone publisher to IATI, allowing it to update its own data and to publish on a monthly basis.

USAID: Score – 65.2 Ranking – 25

While USAID remained in the “good” category, it slipped 12 points from the 2020 Index, with the drop in performance occurring across all five components. However, USAID is the only US agency to maintain monthly publication of its IATI data.

USAID’s best performance was in the transparency of its organizational planning and commitments. Consistent with its 2020 Index score, it received full points for organizational strategy, annual reports, allocation policy, procurement policy, and audits. It dropped in country strategies as a number of regional strategies did not meet the assessment criteria. USAID did well on joining-up development data, although it did not always publish tenders and there were no contracts published to IATI. It was strong on project attributes but did not score for conditions and only published a small number of sub-national locations in IATI. Its finance and budgets data, when published (indicators for commitments, disaggregated budgets, disbursements and expenditures, and total organizational budget), was good, but it did not publish three of the seven indicators (budget alignment, project budget, and project budget documents). This information was not found in other formats. Performance related indicators were mixed at best, with only partial points awarded for objectives, pre-project impact appraisals, reviews and evaluations, and results.

Recommendations

USAID should prioritize the publication of its performance data, including objectives, pre-project impact appraisals, reviews and evaluations, and results, as this is valuable information. It should increase the coverage of its sub-national locations, which are likewise of high value to stakeholders. It should continue to improve its networked data organization references.

State: Score – 58.0 Ranking – 32

State dropped over five points from the 2020 Index, which was enough to fall into the “fair” category. This was due, in part, to moving from monthly IATI publication to quarterly.

As with previous assessments, State’s organizational planning and commitments information was very good. It did well in its joining-up development data, publishing aid type, flow type, finance type, tied aid status, and networked data implementers. For the first time, State published tenders and contracts in IATI, although the contracts indicator failed sampling (there were contracts in other formats). Most of the finance and budget indicators were published to IATI, but project budgets and project budget documents were not. Some indicators (commitments and budget alignment) were only sometimes found in IATI. Finally, State scored no points on the performance indicators. Where published in IATI, State’s data failed sampling; most activities contained no objectives, and the same document was used for evaluations. Although there was minimal information published for results, it failed sampling for the lack of actual results and State did not publish any pre-project impact appraisals.

Recommendations

As noted in previous recommendations, State should focus on basic project information, including titles and objectives, as well as project budgets, commitments, and sub-national locations. Without this project level information, it is very difficult for users to have a meaningful understanding of State’s investments. State should focus on performance indicators, including evaluations and results, especially considering the requirements of FATAA. It should continue to improve its networked data organization references. Finally, State should reconsider going back to monthly publication to provide stakeholders with more timely information.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

While some of our recommendations are agency specific, there are several overall recommendations that all US agencies should consider.

- Only USAID is publishing to IATI monthly, which is now the overwhelming global practice among publishers. Sixty percent of publishers included in the 2022 Aid Transparency Index are now publishing monthly. Given the importance of US foreign assistance, especially considering growing global needs, it is important that all US agencies provide timely data.
- Many of the recommendations included in this brief are issues that have been repeatedly raised in previous assessments. All agencies in this year’s Index have been included since the earliest full Aid Transparency Index in 2012. Despite that, many of the same issues prevail:
 - Despite the strong US policy on monitoring and evaluation, the absence of performance data was an issue across the board.
 - With the exception of MCC, publication of tenders and contracts, which are important for accountability, has been a perpetual problem.
 - Subnational locations have always been identified as a value-added field. Except for MCC, all other agencies have few if any subnational locations published.

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ABOUT PUBLISH WHAT YOU FUND

Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid and development transparency. Launched in 2008, we envisage a world where aid and development information is transparent, available, and used for effective decision making, public accountability, and lasting change for all citizens. Publish What You Fund independently researched and wrote the 2022 Aid Transparency Index and US Brief. It was produced with financial support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Publish What You Fund is grateful to the many people involved in producing this report. We would like to thank the following individuals who independently reviewed our initial assessments of the donor organizations covered by this brief: Sarah Rose, Annie Kilroy, and Adam Fivenson.

Special thanks also go to the board of Friends of Publish What You Fund: George Ingram, Matt Frazier, Ben Leo, Larry Nowels, Paul O'Brien, Nora O'Connell, Tessie San Martin, Kyle Matous, and Nancy Lee.

Find out more at www.friendsofpublishwhatyoufund.org.