



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Agency for International Development

January 11, 2024

The Honorable Joni Ernst
United States Senate
208 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Ernst,

This letter responds to your August 28, 2023, letter requesting that the USAID Office of Inspector General (OIG) conduct an agency-wide review of USAID's remote work and telework policies and processes, as well as its utilization of office space. In your letter, you highlight concerns with remote work practices across the federal government including timecard abuses, underutilization of office space, and locality pay for remote work. Given the OIG's independent oversight mandate to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer funds, we take these issues and related issues very seriously.

Given USAID's evolving posture toward remote work, telework, and hybrid work over the past three years, as well as the OIG's limited resources and focus on other high-visibility oversight issues, we have not initiated a singular comprehensive review of USAID's remote work, telework, and space utilization policies. However, we have incorporated elements of USAID's workforce posture into many of our ongoing and planned oversight products.

For example, our oversight work going back to 2020 has identified actions taken and challenges faced by the Agency related to domestic operations in the wake of the pandemic, as well as the effect of monitoring USAID programs overseas. In response to a June 2020 letter from Congressman Gerald E. Connolly, asking about USAID's reopening plans in the wake of the pandemic, we reviewed USAID's "Roadmap to Return," which outlines its plan to return to more in-office, routine operations. Related to domestic operations, we noted that USAID designed the plan to emphasize the need for decision-making regarding reentry back to the office based on local conditions, continuous communication with employees, and ensuring protective health measures remained in place.¹

In our June 2021 COVID-Information Brief, covering December 2020-March 2021, we noted that USAID updated its "Roadmap to Return" with criteria for the reopening of domestic facilities and tracking a deterioration in COVID conditions that may warrant a subsequent change in office posture.²

¹ USAID OIG Correspondence, "[OIG Letter to Chairman Connolly on USAID Reopening Plans](#)," August 6, 2020.

² USAID OIG Information Brief, "[USAID COVID-19 Activity Update](#)", June 2021.

In our October 2021 COVID-Information Brief, covering April 2021-July 2021, we noted that USAID reported submitting its reentry plan to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in July 2021.³ Additionally, our May 2021 audit titled, “USAID Adapted To Continue Program Monitoring During COVID-19, But the Effectiveness of These Efforts Is Still To Be Determined,” concluded that:

USAID has taken steps, both at the headquarters and mission level, to respond to the challenges the pandemic poses to program monitoring—a key element of effective stewardship of taxpayer resources. Agency offices and staff have shown flexibility and adapted to the constraints on movement and IT. However, as noted by officials interviewed, remote engagement cannot fully replace direct, in-person interaction with implementers and beneficiaries and direct observation of program activities.⁴

While our May 2022 audit, “Strategic Workforce Planning: Challenges Impair USAID’s Ability to Establish a Comprehensive Human Capital Approach,” did not specifically examine agency telework and remote work policies, we reported on related strategic human capital issues and found that:

Without current strategic workforce planning guidance—to include plans, policies, and procedures—USAID lacked a comprehensive approach to human capital management. This is important to address the Agency’s unique mix of hiring mechanisms, the role of its operating units in identifying needs across USAID’s global footprint, subsequent Agency progress toward staffing targets, and current goals and objectives to ensure that its human capital practices are aligned with its mission.”⁵

Finally, the OIG is aware of USAID’s 2023 revision of its workforce posture as a result of the April 2023 OMB memorandum that directed federal agencies to “substantially increase meaningful in-person work” for headquarters staff in Washington, D.C.” For information collected by the Agency on its 2023 revision of its return-to-work posture and its associated impacts, we suggest reaching out to USAID’s Bureau for Management.

We will continue to monitor these important issues and examine any developments or allegations of waste, fraud, and abuse as it relates to the Agency’s workforce posture. Please reach out to us if you have additional questions on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,



Paul K. Martin
Inspector General

³ USAID OIG Information Brief, “[USAID COVID-19 Activity Update](#)”, October 2021.

⁴ USAID OIG Audit, “[USAID Adapted To Continue Program Monitoring During COVID-19, But the Effectiveness of These Efforts Is Still To Be Determined](#),” May 21, 2021.

⁵ USAID OIG Audit, “[Strategic Workforce Planning: Challenges Impair USAID’s Ability to Establish a Comprehensive Human Capital Approach](#),” May 25, 2022.