EQUIP Associate Awards Communications Workshop

Effective communications is one of a project implementer’s most important practices. It encompasses the methods through which findings and innovations are disseminated and the instruments used to convey knowledge. By producing tools and publications, a project raises its profile among a selected audience, reaches out to engage new audiences, claims responsibility for important work, makes information available, influences change, and opens doors to new research and inquiry. Appropriate communications can increase a project’s impact and sustainability through knowledge management and development of networks.

In July 2006, the Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) hosted a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-supported international workshop on communications resources, practices, and strategy. Ten participants from eight countries met in Johannesburg, South Africa for three days to learn about USAID communications rules and requirements and develop new competencies for dissemination of lessons learned and key messages. The workshop was conducted by four members of the EQUIP Communications Working Group from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and included 26 participatory activities broken out over six thematic modules: Defining Communication, the EQUIP Information Communications Center (EICC), Developing a Communications Strategy, Developing Effective Communications Products, USAID Print and Electronic Materials Regulations, and Knowledge Sharing.

Prior to the workshop, 50 representatives from 45 EQUIP Associate Award country projects took part in a detailed survey to identify the project’s most pressing communications needs. Based on those responses, the workshop was developed to build technical expertise around USAID’s 2005 Marking Rules and develop the professional capacity of EQUIP’s communications specialists. Throughout the six modules, participants identified their strengths and weaknesses, successes and challenges, and the role communications has played in the development of their projects. They learned skills to develop integrated communications strategies, incorporate communications practices into overall programmatic objectives, build on success, capture knowledge, and share lessons learned. The resulting EQUIP Associate Award Communications Network will operate as a community of practice, utilizing online and material resources to collectively and innovatively share knowledge for increased impact on education policy and practice around the world.

According to one participant, “It was a great meeting. We met as different people and shared knowledge and skills. We also planned together and encouraged one another to work harder and produce better products. Honesty, integrity, and upholding USAID principles and objectives was generally accepted as part of our ethics.” Building on feedback from participants and working towards ever-expanding communications objectives, the EQUIP Communications Working Group is elaborating on the workshop to serve an even broader range of USAID audiences.

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