



**Global Acquisition and Assistance System**

Generating Value through the Program Management Office

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## **Executive Summary**

USAID's Global Acquisition and Assistance System (GLAAS) is an enterprise business system that will, for the first time, provide the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with the ability to process more than \$10 billion in yearly contract and grant transactions worldwide. USAID's investment in GLAAS is consistent with the Agency's business modernization initiatives and meets the objectives of the E-Government Act of 2002. GLAAS maximizes interoperability and minimizes redundancy through integration with multiple internal and external systems. The integration of GLAAS with USAID's enterprise financial management system provides real-time posting of commitments, obligations, and awards, as well as synchronization of vendor data. This system provides inclusive, timely, and accurate reporting for USAID management, and accommodates requirements and requests from external stakeholders, such as the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Congress. GLAAS is tightly integrated with public-facing government-wide systems including FPDS-NG, FedBizOpps, FAADS, and Grants.gov, to increase transparency and visibility by providing timely and accurate USAID data to the public.

USAID experienced some difficulties in its initial efforts to develop an automated solution that would modernize its acquisition and assistance business processes, including replacing the disparate paper-based processes used in 81 missions worldwide. The Agency's early efforts to provide an acquisition and assistance solution reflected two separate projects called the Procurement System Improvement Project (PSIP) and the Joint Assistance Management System (JAMS). For several reasons, including challenges associated with requirements definition, commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) software limitations, and other issues, the development and deployment of PSIP and JAMS experienced significant delays. The Agency terminated work on these two projects, deciding to develop a single system that included the required functionality for both acquisition and assistance. This single system, GLAAS, provides significant benefits to the Agency by streamlining and standardizing business processes, optimizing staff workload, reducing deployment costs, centralizing project management functions, and facilitating real-time reporting. In conjunction with the decision to develop GLAAS, USAID introduced more disciplined and robust project management processes.

An integrated, multi-disciplinary team of USAID staff and numerous contractors completed the major software development efforts, with global deployment and training activities well underway. More than 3,000 users at 23 offices at USAID Headquarters and 68 missions around the world use GLAAS to manage contracts and grants. Deployment to the remaining 13 missions is currently on schedule, with completion expected during 2011. USAID's success in the development and deployment of GLAAS reflects the disciplined use of best practices in information technology (IT) program/project management, earned value management, quality and organizational change management, and strategic communication.

## Challenges

USAID addressed a number of challenges during the GLAAS project to bring it to a successful conclusion. These challenges included:

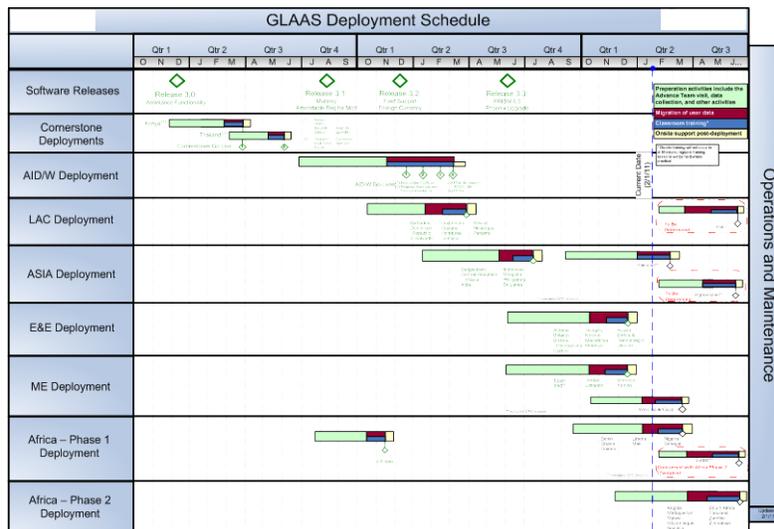
- Gaining support of stakeholders across the Agency due to the problems associated with the original PSIP and JAMS projects;
- Integration of multiple vendors with USAID staff to perform as a single team to provide the full range of required technical and logistical expertise;
- Synchronizing the phased development of major software components with deployment of GLAAS to USAID headquarters offices and overseas missions, and providing training to support that deployment;
- Deploying GLAAS to 81 worldwide missions that had varying political environments, organizational cultures, business processes, and IT infrastructure; and,
- Although the complexity and risks associated with GLAAS made the use of cost-type contracts appropriate, the Agency had to accomplish the project within a fixed budget.

## Solution

The GLAAS Project Team successfully implemented disciplined and robust project management processes that reflected Agency best practices. The need for effective monitoring and control of GLAAS activities proved essential to meeting the project's overall objectives, ensuring resolution of issues in a timely and effective manner, and completing all phases within the fixed amount of available funding. Some of the best practices used on GLAAS are described below.

### Project Management

The GLAAS Project Team utilized an Integrated Master Schedule (IMS) as a critical tool for monitoring and controlling the status of work. The resource-loaded IMS included GLAAS activities and activities related to operation and maintenance of the Agency's infrastructure and other systems that interfaced with GLAAS. The software



development effort - and especially the global deployment of GLAAS to 81 worldwide missions - presented significant risks that required management and oversight at the enterprise and project levels. The GLAAS Team followed a disciplined risk management process that included a weekly review of high- and medium-priority risks, and development and updates of mitigation strategies and contingency plans. To further enhance the impact of these project management efforts, the GLAAS Team also conducted weekly discussions of project status, issues, and risks with key managers from USAID and the contractors involved.

As part of the project management strategy, USAID implemented a phased development approach for GLAAS releases over an 18-month period. This approach provided earlier access to important new functionality in advance of the final system's availability. After releasing the version with assistance functionality in December 2008, the agency implemented three major releases in August and December 2009, and June 2010. In addition to accelerating access, this strategy validated progress in developing the system. The Agency coordinated training updates for offices and missions using the system prior to each new release to minimize the amount of supplemental training required.

#### Earned Value Management

The GLAAS Project Team implemented an effective Earned Value Management process that provided the schedule and cost metrics necessary to understand the overall project status and identify the specific areas that required corrective action. On a monthly basis, the team analyzed schedule and cost performance metrics down to the 5<sup>th</sup> level of the Work Breakdown Structure. The team used techniques such as the "Rolling Wave Approach" and formal Integrated Baseline Reviews to establish an accurate and comprehensive Performance Measurement Baseline (PMB). This approach allowed the team to effectively plan for activities necessary to complete the project over a 2 ½ year period within a fixed budget. For purposes of ensuring effective performance metrics, the team used weighted milestones for reporting progress against the PMB. USAID expects to complete the deployment of GLAAS within the current funding allocated.

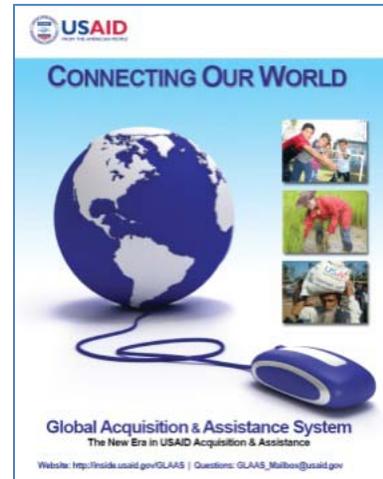
#### Quality Management

As part of the systems development life cycle processes, the team implemented quality management activities for all deliverables, including software. The team established a formal deliverable review process to ensure their quality and completeness prior to their use for subsequent work. Upon completion of each phase of software development, the team conducted a phase-gate review to determine the readiness for starting the next phase of software development. In addition to conducting an independent validation and acceptance

process for software testing, USAID performed user acceptance testing for each new software release to ensure that the software met the specified requirements.

### Organizational Change Management

The implementation of GLAAS reflected a major change for staff across the agency. For USAID Headquarters staff, GLAAS replaced a legacy procurement system and provided users with greater functionality and reliability. For the 81 overseas missions, GLAAS introduced automation to replace disparate paper-based processes. Ensuring adoption of GLAAS by staff across the Agency required a multifaceted organizational change management (OCM) program. The OCM program used multiple media to ensure effective dissemination of information and engagement by users. In addition to promotional posters, the GLAAS Team launched a website that provides USAID users around the world with access to project information, including project news, training links, frequently asked questions, help desk information and contacts, etc. The OCM team established and monitored on a real-time basis, the GLAAS Mailbox, through which users could make requests for information or obtain answers to their specific questions. To further inform the user community, the OCM team issued announcements about plans for software releases, maintenance downtimes, and training opportunities using standard “color-coded” heading banners to quickly inform users of the content/type of message being communicated. The OCM program played a critical role in the support of deployment operations by providing users with information throughout the process. A professional association recognized the OCM strategy used for GLAAS with its 2009 MarCom Gold Award.

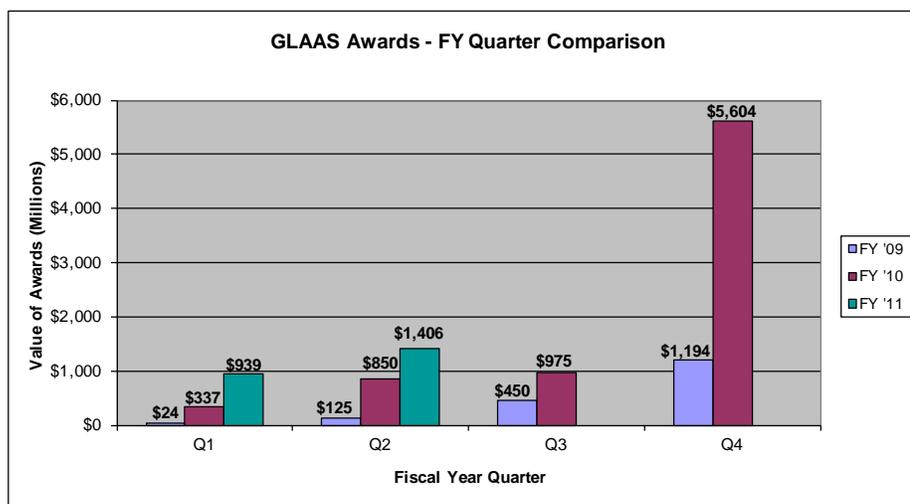


### Strategic Communication

With more than 100 contractor and USAID staff at multiple locations supporting the GLAAS project, effective communication proved critical to ensuring that the project staff worked together as a coherent team. The communication plan brought key government and contractor managers together on a weekly basis to review and discuss status, issues, and upcoming activities. The project had a central repository database for storage of and access to all documentation across the team. The GLAAS Team engaged USAID executives to obtain high-level support and guidance related to critical issues and activities. As part of the worldwide deployment effort, the team communicated with the managers and key points of contacts for USAID offices and missions almost 9 months in advance to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the required activities and unique issues that required resolution.

## Results

USAID has responsibility for managing billions of dollars and acquisitions and grants, and the successful development and deployment of GLAAS represents a major accomplishment. GLAAS has improved the acquisition and assistance business operations for more than 3,000 USAID staff throughout the world – modernizing the process by reducing cycle times and error rates, providing better information, and strengthening acquisition and assistance tools through business process improvement. These improvements support USAID’s mission by increasing efficiency, improving data quality, and



delivering more consistent, accurate, and complete reporting. GLAAS provides transparency and accountability for Agency management and for reporting to key external stakeholders. These improved business processes have provided the additional benefit of facilitating staff’s ability to quickly transition to different offices and missions across the world. Since the release of the GLAAS 3.0 in December 2009, utilization of GLAAS for processing acquisition and assistance actions continues to grow rapidly on a quarterly basis. To date, USAID staff have used GLAAS to process more than 17,000 awards of acquisitions and grants valued at more than \$12 billion. GLAAS has replaced the legacy New Management System, which was only available to USAID headquarters. Prior to the deployment of GLAAS, missions worldwide relied on their respective paper-based business processes. With the deployment of GLAAS to 68 of 81 missions, USAID has standardized and streamlined acquisition and assistance processes for more than 80% of its missions, with the remainder scheduled for completion in 2011.

## Lessons Learned

USAID’s experience on GLAAS identified some critical lessons learned that the Agency plans to apply to future projects. These include:

- Defining the project's objectives and specific success criteria provides information critical to making even day-to-day decisions about the project.
- Senior-level management engagement with a project's team is critical to ensuring that the final product meets the Agency's needs.
- Effective project management by the Government requires establishment of a dedicated staff with the appropriate diversity in skills and experience.
- Applying project management best practices at the start of the project can minimize cost and schedule issues.
- Implementing disciplined quality management processes, such as formal review and sign-off of deliverables and phase gate reviews for software development activities can identify issues earlier in the process, providing the opportunity to resolve them more quickly and at a lower cost.

#### **Disclaimer**

- References to the product and/or service names of the hardware and/or software products used in this case study do not constitute an endorsement of such hardware and/or software products.