

AET Institutional Transformation: A Design Review Workshop

USAID and other donors have been making investments to strengthen AET institutions and investigating alternative strategies to improve programming. In support of this endeavor, the Innovation for Agricultural Training and Education (InnovATE) project will host a design review workshop uniting project implementers involved in current or recently completed AET institution building projects to compare experiences and examine the challenges faced, success stories and lessons learned. This workshop will promote interaction among these AET project implementers, and document the tacit knowledge and lessons learned to inform system policies and institutional transformation recommendations for future investments in this area.

Within the framework of design thinking (Brown and Martin 2015), project design involves two components. The first component is the design of the product itself (i.e., transformed AET institutions); the second is the design of the process by which that product is achieved. Most project design review focuses on the end-product. In this exercise, the design review will focus on the processes through which that product emerges and transformation occurs.

Specifically, workshop activities will elicit critical insights on processes for project-driven transformation in AET institutions. Activities will be organized in two phases. A pre-workshop dialog will involve key individuals (project implementers and host institution representatives) selected from among those with considerable hands-on experience. Initially, in twos and threes, these informal discussions will be held via Skype or teleconference. These conversations will begin with these two questions:

- What are the critical challenges you have faced in the process of implementing AET institutional transformation projects?
- What was done (successfully and unsuccessfully) to address them?
- What can be done to enhance AET institutional transformation projects in the future?

During the course of these conversations, key themes of institutional transformation will be explored and classified for discussion during the in-situ workshop. Based on the experiences of project implementers, themes to be covered during these early conversations will include (but not limited to):

- project context, organization, and delivery approaches;
- change leaders and institutional transformation triggers;
- securing buy-in and partner ownership of the process;
- building trust and activating stakeholder networks;
- targeted behavioral changes and institutional performance;
- methods for communication, negotiation and governance;
- critical issues confronted, overcome or sidestepped;
- sequencing and depth of project implementation processes;
- measures of success and/or failure; and
- opportunities for institutional transformation.

To facilitate comparisons and shared learning, information on institutional context, mission, key stakeholders, scale, duration, impact, and other pertinent facts for each institution building project will be compiled in a standardized format to help clarify the context surrounding the issues discussed at the workshop.

After the pre-workshop discussions, selected individuals will be invited to prepare 500-1000 word blogs describing a critical process of institutional transformation to be posted on the InnovATE website in the weeks running up to the workshop. These blogs will be introduced during panel sessions whose focus is to stimulate interactive discussions among workshop attendees. The organization of panel sessions will be negotiated during the initial dialogs.

The Design Review Workshop itself will be held over two days in May or June 2016 in Blacksburg, Virginia. The first day will consist of panel sessions structured according to the critical themes identified during the preliminary discussions. The morning of the second day will involve world café or round table discussions of emergent lessons. Based on these discussions, the final plenary session will outline and decide upon a format for a synthesis document (tentatively entitled: Lessons for Local Solutions: Common Ground Experiences from Institutional Transformation) to be prepared as a result of the workshop.