



# Digital Square Partner Meeting

November 7, 2018

## Presentation Notes

This call is focused primarily on how the Digital Square mechanism can support country-level work by connecting ministries of health, partners, and USAID Missions. A short presentation included background on the Digital Square mechanism and how it supports in-country work. This was followed by an opportunity for Digital Square partners to ask questions and seek clarification about Digital Square and how to get involved. We also requested for feedback about how to communicate and engage with our partners.

### Overview of Digital Square

Digital Square is a partnership of the world's leading digital health experts from 40+ organizations working together with countries to strengthen digital health systems.

Digital Square offers a new way to invest in digital health—providing a space where countries and members of the global community can gather to think big and do good, together. By convening government officials, technological innovators, donor and implementation partners, and others across borders and boundaries in the Digital Square, we can grow possibility into reality by focusing on our common goal: **connecting the world for better health**.

Digital Square works in three key ways:

- **Co-investment:** We coordinate investments in digital health to maximize the impact of every dollar spent.
- **Global goods:** We scale tools and technologies that can be adapted to different countries and contexts.
- **Digital market readiness:** We create digital market readiness by building capacity with governments, local technology developers, and health workers.

### Digital Investment Principles

Officially announced at the World Health Summit in Berlin, the [Principles of Donor Alignment for Digital Health](#) provide guidance to donors and investors on how to invest in digital health, including the use of global goods, investments in digital health strategies, capacity building—all components that aligning with Digital Square's mission and work. USAID, CDC, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, among others, have endorsed these principles. USAID specifically named Digital Square as a mechanism that can be used to operationalization these principles in their [October Newsletter](#).

This is a good frame to discussion with partners about how can we use global goods and how we advance digital health in countries around the world.



### **Details on the Digital Square/USAID Mechanism**

Digital Square's current agreement with USAID runs through 2021. A key piece of this work is to support governments through USAID Missions, utilizing the 40+ implementing partners under the Digital Square umbrella. Through a mechanism called a "country buy-in," Digital Square can serve as a funding source for country-level digital health work.

There are some categories of work Digital Square supports in-country:

- Landscape analysis of country digital health programs.
- Design and implementation of digital health programs.
- Harmonization of multiple in-country digital health investments (including cross-donor investments).
- Digital health support across program areas (including HIV/TB, Malaria, Maternal & Child Health, etc.).
- Rapid access to and information on possible partners. Including an ability to add new partners to address specific country requirements or requests from government.

We have a strong and growing set of partners, including a range of local partners. We can help bring coalitions together to support country-level work.

Outside of USAID, Digital Square works with a range of donors (9 donors, leveraging a total of \$30m to date). Digital Square also supports co-investment. For co-investments, money does not pass through Digital Square, but we help align these investments to build and deploy digital health implementations in alignment with the Principles of Donor Investment and the work of our partners.

### **Example of country-level work: South Africa**

In South Africa, Digital Square is supporting the National Department of Health bring a provincial-level digital health system to national scale. The work is primarily carried out by partners on the ground.

We want to emphasize the capabilities the Digital Square partners bring to countries. We have a broad mix of partners that can support different types of country-level needs and different digital health tools. Digital Square can provide a funding mechanism to support work as our partners identify opportunities.

### **Other Digital Square work**

- Digital Square is the secretariat of HDC's Digital Health and Interoperability Working Group.
- Support regional networks such as the African Alliance of Digital Health Networks.
- Member of the Digital REACH Steering Committee – coordinating and implementing digital health investments for the regional East African Community.
- Support to global goods.
- Advocacy and development of global standards (OpenHIE, HL7 FHIR).
- Resource mobilization for digital health activities such as the WHO AFRO/ITU Digital Health Leadership Workshops. The first of these workshops is happening later in November 2018 in Lesotho.



## Q&A

### **How does Digital Square engage with partners and/or USAID?**

Digital Square is not trying to control the process—recognizing conversations happen in-country and where there are preexisting relationships. Instead, Digital Square is available as a potential mechanism for funding around the implementation of global goods, adoption of digital health standards, and/or alignment with the digital investment principles. We don't necessarily want to formalize the process, but as you have conversations with ministries, we can work with you to identify potential partners (globally and locally) and reach out to USAID Missions together.

### **How can partners share their capabilities with others?**

One potential solution is for organizations to provide capability statements that can be shared with Digital Square's audiences: other partners as well as USAID Missions. We don't currently have capability statements from all of our partner organizations, so we will begin collecting them. Digital Square will make these available (exact location TBD) so all partners have a better sense of the breadth of experience, skillsets, and interest.

### **Is this a continuous, rolling co-creation exercise that is country driven and owned?**

Yes, country and regional. We can reach out to regional USAID offices as appropriate, or other stakeholders such as Digital REACH. We are looking for ways to address countries' specific needs and connect them with the right resources and partners.

Beyond serving as a financial mechanism, Digital Square can also provide other types of support services, particularly for communication and coordination with USAID. As you engage with the USAID Missions, we can communicate back to USAID headquarters in order to advocate for the needs of governments.

### **What are the types of things Digital Square would be interested in funding? Does this go beyond implementation to projects like impact evaluations?**

The most important factor is that the work is country-driven. As long as the country is interested, things like evaluating tools, implementing systems, developing a roadmap, and creating a digital health strategy would all be considered.

If we look at the Digital Investment Principles, the first step is assessing whether there is a digital health strategy or framework in the country. If not, that should be the starting place for investment. This is not necessarily reflected in country priorities, but this is becoming a more globally accepted view of digital investment.

### **Practically, how do we get countries to consider the Digital Square mechanism? Many countries will think about Global Fund as a mechanism first, not Digital Square.**

This is going to depend on each country. Each USAID Mission has its own set of priorities, and based on this, pursuing Digital Square might not be appropriate in a particular country. Yes, there are multiple funders in Digital Health (USAID, Gates Foundation, Global Fund) – these can be found on the Digital Investment Principles website. Digital Square can be introduced as another potential option for resourcing and encouraging countries to think more broadly. We are still working on how to communicate to investors, country stakeholders, and implementing partners to understand how we can all work together.



Digital Square is developing a new set of materials that can assist in conversations with different stakeholders. The WHO AFRO/ITU Workshops are aimed at ministries of health and ICT leadership, but much of this content will be helpful for country offices of donors. We will make this available online. The Global Good Guidebook is being published soon that highlights global goods being supported by Digital Square. This can be shared with stakeholders to help explain how these tools can be used across health areas and what coordinated investment could look like.

**If partners have conversations with USAID missions, how should they keep Digital Square updated? Are there focal people for certain countries?**

There are no focal people based on geography. We have posted an open position for a [Digital Square Deputy Director of Programs](#) that will oversee all country and regional buy-ins, in particular those implemented in conjunction with USAID. The Deputy Director will be handling intake once they are in place. For now, you can reach out to Carl Leitner or another member of the Digital Square leadership team (based on existing relationships). If you have conversations with a USAID Mission about the Digital Square mechanism, please let us know so we can help connect the dots within the Digital Square team and with USAID headquarters.

**Are there suggestions for how Digital Square can improve its messaging or provide further guidance to make it easier to engage?**

Please let us know if you would like to have more specific conversations about engaging with country stakeholders around Digital Square. It is helpful to have a letter from the Ministry of Health when engaging with USAID missions. We have examples that can be shared when making a request.