

Steps to Implement a RapidSMS-Based Information System

1. **A short-term software programmer** who is familiar with both the RapidSMS system and areas of project focus (nutrition, education, etc.) should conduct in-country preliminary project scoping and create a technical workflow for the proposed RapidSMS system. Tasks should include:
 - a. Analyzing stakeholder needs to ensure that RapidSMS specifically addresses challenges without imposing additional burdens.
 - b. Identifying an in-country lead to develop project upon conclusion of technical project manager's work. The in-country lead should work closely with the technical project manager throughout.
 - c. Undertaking a comprehensive analysis of existing systems (i.e., data collection, monitoring, health care provision, etc.). RapidSMS is most effective when it does not seek to replace or alter existing systems, but integrates as seamlessly as possible into existing systems by directly addressing key challenges and maintaining functioning systems.
 - d. Drafting project scope and technical workflow for customization by software programmers. The time frame necessary for customization is directly linked with the ability to adapt and integrate already coded applications.
 - e. Securing appropriate hardware and identifying location for server. This should be done in advance in countries where hardware is not available locally.
 - f. Consulting with key stakeholders on billing
 - g. Conducting negotiations with mobile phone providers to ensure appropriate billing structure and short codes
2. **RapidSMS implementer(s)** should work in-country with the software programmer. Some of these tasks can be implemented at the same time as those of the software programmer. In some situations, the RapidSMS programmer(s) can undertake the responsibilities of the technical project manager. Tasks should include:
 - a. Identifying local programmer support and building capacity
 - b. Setting up server
 - c. Writing project-specific code based on project scope and technical work flow
 - d. Testing for bugs and fixing them
3. Executing usability testing via small groups, with feedback to RapidSMS programmer(s)
4. Create training materials/curriculum and a basic toolkit to assist stakeholders in effectively managing the unique benefits of real-time data. Training should be comprehensive and, if possible, integrated into general training in order to reinforce the idea of RapidSMS as a tool within larger systems.
5. Phased rollout, with intensive monitoring in early stages
6. Initial field-based maintenance and support
7. Effectively managing systems which employ real-time data can sometimes be complex. Although it can drastically improve effectiveness and efficiency, new skill sets and targeted support are often necessary. Once specific-project needs are identified, an in-country representative should be responsible for management and support until all bugs are resolved and stakeholders are comfortable with the system.
8. As a project progresses, there may be a need to further customize code to better meet stakeholders' needs. Particularly with atypical implementations and large scale-ups, it is important to recognize this and build it into the overall budget. For this reason, we recommend building local capacity during the early stages of project design when possible.

