

PROGRAM CYCLE TECHNICAL NOTE

Using PADs to Develop RFPs

Planning Series

This Note describes how to map a Request for Proposal (RFP) from a Project Appraisal Document (PAD).

Program Cycle Technical Notes provide key concepts and approaches to USAID staff and partners related to the Program Cycle.

INTRODUCTION

As part of USAID's Program Cycle reforms, a "project" has been redefined to comprise a holistic set of interventions that together contribute to a high level result in the Mission's CDCS Results Framework. As such, a project now includes multiple implementing mechanisms, including contracts, cooperative agreements, partner country government agreements and others, all of which are authorized in a broader implementation framework known as a Project Appraisal Document (PAD). After the PAD is authorized, USAID should be able to move directly to procurement so that implementation can begin with little delay. This Technical Note provides guidance on translating five easy-to-adopt principles from the PAD into a Request for Proposal (RFP). These principles include:

1. Incorporate background text on the broader "project" context from the PAD into the RFP;
2. Develop the Statement of Work (SOW) to align with the project LogFrame and contribute to the project purpose;
3. Integrate recommendations from gender, sustainability, and other analyses into solicitation design and requirements;
4. Structure the Activity Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan (i.e. at the mechanism level) to feed into the Project M&E plan; and
5. Build Collaborating, Learning & Adapting (CLA) into mechanism design.

While this Note provides guidance for developing an RFP, these principles should be embedded within all project-based mechanisms. A subsequent note will provide complementary guidance for developing a Partner Country Government Agreement.

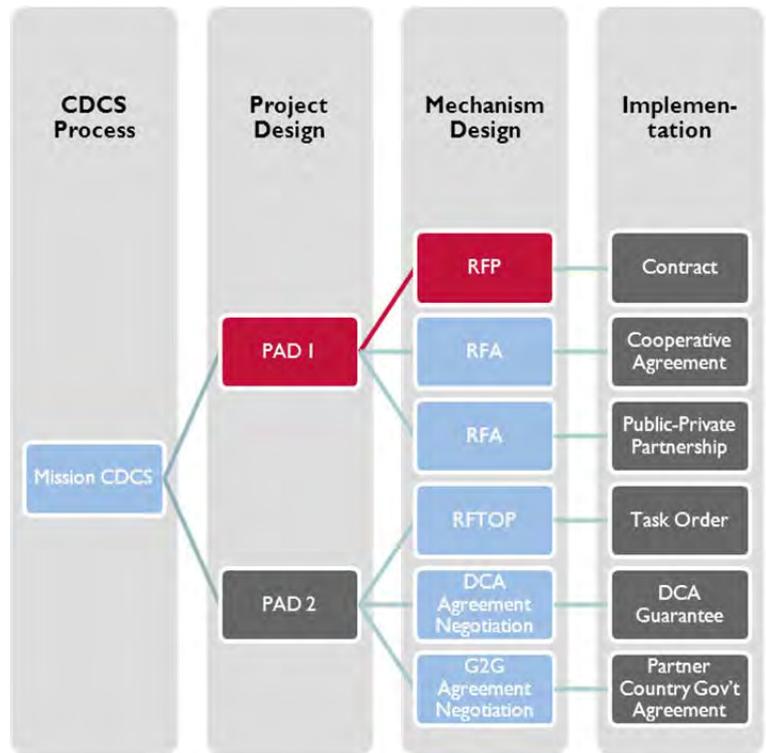
BACKGROUND

In 2010, USAID began developing a series of reforms to improve the effectiveness of the Agency's development programs. Organized around a framework known as the "Program Cycle," these reforms revitalize Mission strategic planning (known as the Country Development Cooperation Strategy or CDCS), ensure projects are designed to align with these strategies, and enable Missions to systematically monitor, evaluate, and learn from implementation and performance. This allows the Agency to continue to adapt

its designs and improve its strategies and policies, and ultimately advance development outcomes.

As part of these reforms, the term “project” has been redefined to signify a “set of executed interventions, over an established timeline and budget, intended to achieve a discrete development result through resolving an associated problem” that is “often linked to the CDCS Results Framework.”¹ The project design is to be based on analytical rigor, using the best available evidence, and reflect a theory of change that is depicted in the form of a Logical Framework (LogFrame) and authorized through a PAD.²

During the project design process, one of the most critical choices the design team makes in close collaboration with the Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer (CO/AO) and the Mission Regional Legal Advisor (RLA) (who should themselves be members of the team)³ is the selection of mechanisms to implement the design. Mechanism types range from contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements, to public-private partnerships, credit guarantees, and agreements with partner country governments and other donors. The choice of mechanism should be justified in the PAD’s Implementation Plan and be holistically planned to fully execute the LogFrame in a way that combined outputs are both necessary and sufficient to achieve the project purpose.



THE ANATOMY OF AN RFP

The Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) require that the format of RFPs be divided into 13 sections, labeled Sections A through M. While each section has a unique purpose and content, only a few sections are integral to the design of the mechanism or activity and serve as the basis for the offeror’s technical approach and the resultant contract (see Box I for the FAR Uniform Contract Format definitions of the relevant RFP sections).

RFP sections are typically drafted by different authors, and sometimes language is copied from one solicitation to another within a Mission without adequate review. However, all sections matter to the offeror, and the offeror will review all of these sections and their interplay with great care to ascertain where they should focus their proposal. Inconsistencies may generate questions and cause delays, result in protest, or limit the potential for innovative technical approaches. For this reason, it is critical that all of these sections be

¹ See ADS 201.3.11.

² See the Project Design Working Group at <https://programnet.usaid.gov> for examples of PADs. Note that only certain designated people in each Mission are authorized to access the Working Group.

³ Pursuant to the M/OAA Director’s memo to Contracting Officers/Agreement Officers (COs/AOs) on November 6, 2013, “Selection of the most appropriate instrument (contract, grant or cooperative agreement) should be the result of rigorous project design and [for this reason, COs/AOs] with specialized Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) knowledge, skills and experience must engage early in the project design [process].”

harmonized to maximize the procurement of goods and services from the offeror whose proposal represents the best value to USAID.

Key RFP sections for mechanism design include Sections B, C, F, L and M. In plain speak, these sections are:

Section B - Supplies or Services and Price/Costs. Specifies the purpose of the mechanism, the contract type, and any instructions on how to format pricing.

Section C - Description/Specifications/Statement of Work. Describes what the contract is about, including any relevant background, intended activities, outputs and outcomes, and any parameters around overall contract management.

Section F - Deliveries or Performance. Provides parameters governing reporting deliverables during implementation like the work plan, the quarterly report, and the annual report, as well as instructions on the Activity M&E Plan, Learning Plan, or any other documented deliverables or plans. It also includes a list of required positions, including those positions designated as “key personnel.”

Section J - List of Attachments. Provides any annexes to the solicitation, including additional background, analyses, or clarifying details.

Section L - Instructions, Conditions, and Notices to Offerors or Respondents. Describes how the offeror should prepare and submit their bid, and how the government wants the proposal organized. Typical categories include: Technical Approach; Staffing Plan, Key Personnel, and/or Management Plan; Institutional Capacity; Past Performance; and sometimes M&E Plan or Performance Management Approach, with many different permutations of these categories. This section also includes instructions on preparing the cost proposal.

Section M - Evaluation Factors for Award. Specifies the criteria by which the proposal will be scored and what the government thinks is most important. The criteria in Section M should mirror the organization outlined in Section L.

BOX I: UNIFORM CONTRACT FORMAT PER FAR 15.204

Federal government Contracting Officers are required to prepare solicitations and resulting contracts using the uniform contract format outlined in FAR 15.204-1. Please contact your Contracting Officer for further clarification of the content of these sections:

b) Section B – Supplies or Services and Price/Costs:

Include a brief description of the supplies or services; e.g., item number, national stock number/part number if applicable, nouns, nomenclature, and quantities. (This includes incidental deliverables such as manuals and reports.)

c) Section C – Description/Specifications/Statement of Work:

Include any description or specifications needed in addition to Section B.

f) Section F – Deliveries or Performance: *Specify the requirements for time, place, and method of delivery or performance.*

Section J – List of Attachments: *The contracting officer shall list the title, date, and number of pages for each attached document, exhibit, and other attachment. Cross-references to material in other sections may be inserted, as appropriate.*

l) Section L – Instructions, Conditions, and Notices to Offerors or Respondents:

Insert in this section solicitation provisions and other information and instructions not required elsewhere to guide offerors or respondents in preparing proposals or responses to requests for information. Prospective offerors or respondents may be instructed to submit proposals or information in a specific format or servable parts to facilitate evaluation. The instructions may specify further organization of proposal or response parts, such as - (1) Administrative; (2) Management; (3) Technical; (4) Past performance; and (5) Cost or pricing data or information other than cost or pricing data.

m) Section M – Evaluation Factors for Award: *Identify all significant factors and any significant subfactors that will be considered in awarding the contract and their relative importance.*

A PRACTICAL APPROACH FOR UTILIZING PADs TO DEVELOP RFPs

PRINCIPLE I: INCORPORATE BACKGROUND ON THE BROADER “PROJECT” CONTEXT FROM THE PAD IN THE RFP

While the PAD provides USAID a common framework for project implementation, it is ultimately an internal Mission document (given that certain elements are procurement sensitive) that is not shared with the partner community. The solicitation and resultant contract therefore become the primary means to share information with prospective partners about the broader project context. Partners need this information so they understand how other activities will be complementing their work and can propose a technical, management, and budget strategy that facilitates their operating as a collaborative member of the project implementation team.

In addition, USAID conducts several analyses to develop the PAD. These analyses utilize significant resources and provide the foundation for the theory of change and development hypothesis. If this information is not contained in the solicitation, the prospective partner will either respond without the benefit of this investment or will use significant resources to recreate the analyses.

RFP SECTIONS. Below are some relatively easy steps for constructing an RFP by section.

Section C – Description/Specifications/Statement of Work. The Background section within Section C should provide contextual information from the PAD so that the offeror fully understands the project to which this mechanism will contribute. As part of the Background section, it is recommended that the following elements be included:

- **A description of ADS 201** (especially since there are significant, recent changes). Offerors should understand how the term “project” has been redefined: that it is linked to the CDCS strategy, based on rigorous problem analysis, represented by a LogFrame that clarifies the underlying project hypothesis, and usually includes multiple implementing mechanisms operating within a broader implementation framework. They should also understand that under this new project construct, mechanisms—now also called “activities”—are expected to intentionally and systematically collaborate with other mechanisms to realize the combined results necessary to achieve their shared project purpose. See Box 2 for sample language.

Narrative Summary	Indicators	Data Sources	Assumptions
Goal			
Purpose			
Sub-Purposes			
Outputs			
Inputs			

- **Background on the project, to be drawn from several sections from the PAD.** There are several required sections in the PAD (see ADS 201) that can be copied, either fully or in a sanitized or condensed form, into the solicitation.⁴ Once this Background section has been assembled for the first procurement under a PAD, it should be consistently recycled for subsequent procurements (with modifications for any updates to the LogFrame) so that all contractors have the same contextual information.

⁴ If any of these elements are particularly long, an executive summary may be provided in Section C with a longer explanation in Section J (List of Attachments).

- **Relationship to Mission CDCS and Other USG Programs.** This subsection should describe the relationship of the “project purpose” in the LogFrame to the Mission’s strategy. Typically, this linkage is at the Intermediate Result (IR) or Development Objective (DO) level in the CDCS Results Framework. If the CDCS is available to the public, a hyperlink should be provided.⁵

- **Relationship to Partner Country, Local Stakeholders, and Other Donor Programs.** This subsection should describe the relationship of the project to partner country and local stakeholder/citizens’ planning priorities. Other donor funding that will have a material effect on the success of the project should also be described, as well as any requirements to collaborate with or complement these activities.

- **Summary Project Description, including a copy of the Project LogFrame.**⁶ This subsection should provide a summary presentation of the project LogFrame, including the project development hypothesis, key assumptions, and brief descriptions of the sub-purposes and purpose of the project. It is highly recommended that the project LogFrame (in some cases a condensed version) also be included, either in Section C or as an attachment to the RFP in Section J.

Section J – Relevant Analyses in the List of Attachments. The project team should also include a summary or full copy of relevant analyses, likely in Section J as an attachment to the RFP, so that the offeror understands the analytical basis on which the project was designed.

BOX 2: SAMPLE LANGUAGE ON THE NEW PROJECT CONSTRUCT AT USAID

In 2010, USAID began developing a series of reforms to improve the effectiveness of the Agency’s development programs. Organized around a framework known as the “Program Cycle,” these reforms revitalize Mission strategic planning (known as the Country Development Cooperation Strategy or CDCS process), ensure projects are designed to align with these strategies, and enable Missions to systematically monitor implementation and performance. This allows USAID to continue to advance its policies and practices, and ultimately improve development outcomes.

As part of these reforms, a “project” is defined as, “a set of executed interventions, over an established timeline and budget, intended to achieve a discrete development result through resolving an associated problem, often linked to the CDCS Results Framework.” As such, a “project” typically includes multiple mechanisms/ activities, including contracts, cooperative agreements, partner country government agreements, policy dialogue, and others. The project design is to be based on analytical rigor, using the best available evidence, and reflect a theory of change that is depicted in the form of a “Logical Framework.”

Under this new multi-mechanism project framework, USAID aims to take a more holistic approach to achieve the higher-level objectives in the Mission’s CDCS strategy. What this means is that “implementing mechanisms” are no longer synonymous with “projects”; they are now often referred to as “activities” that are constituent elements of a greater whole, and as such, they will be expected to intentionally and systematically collaborate with other project mechanisms to realize the combined results necessary to achieve their shared project purpose.

⁵ As the Program Cycle Guidance is rolled out, many Missions must release solicitations without a public version of the CDCS. Notwithstanding, as part of the PAD process, getting authorization to include at least the Results Framework is important.

⁶ In some cases, providing information on the overall project may run the risk of portending future procurements. However, as long as the solicitation is procured through a publically accessible source like www.fbo.gov, this information should not create any potential “unfair competitive advantage” (per the definition of Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCI) in FAR 2.101). If the solicitation is being procured other than through full-and-open competition (such as an RFTOP procured through limited competition) and is not publically available online, it is advisable that the team consult with the Mission Regional Legal Advisor (RLA) and Contracting Officer (CO) to discuss options for avoiding, neutralizing, or mitigating potential OCI concerns.

PRINCIPLE 2: DEVELOP THE STATEMENT OF WORK TO ALIGN WITH THE PROJECT LOGFRAME AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROJECT PURPOSE

After PAD approval, one of the key challenges is acquiring a set of mechanisms that executes the project LogFrame in a way that combined outputs are necessary and sufficient to achieve the project purpose. To this end, it may be useful to add an additional column to the LogFrame that cross references each result to a mechanism or set of mechanisms in the anticipated project portfolio. During each mechanism design process, alignment to the project LogFrame should be rigorously revalidated to ensure the LogFrame's full implementation.

RFP SECTIONS. Below are some relatively easy steps for constructing an RFP by section.

Section B –Services and Price/Costs: The mechanism purpose should be stated in very clear and concise terms in Section B. To ensure that the contractor is accountable and assumes responsibility for its own performance, each mechanism under a project should have its own purpose, but this purpose should clearly track with a result (or sometimes set of results) in the LogFrame, usually at the output or sub-purpose level, to which it contributes.

Section C – Description/Specifications/Statement of Work. The project team should use the relevant inputs and outputs in the project LogFrame, along with the sub-purpose(s) to which the mechanism contributes partially or fully, as the foundation for the work statement in Section C. In general, the level of design specificity required in the LogFrame (to be based on a rigorous analysis and review of the evidence) should lend itself to a more focused work statement for acquisition instruments than has been standard practice at USAID in the past. By bringing design leadership back in-house within USAID and designing scopes with more definition, the Agency hopes to be able to more effectively achieve the coordinated results it needs in support of the Mission's CDCS.

This being said, projects may include aspects with a higher degree of risk or tasks that cannot be predicted with an acceptable degree of certainty, which may require a different kind of work statement⁷ or a hybrid type of work statement to enable more adaptability during implementation.⁸ For example, there may be cases where evidence is weak or missing, or where circumstances are changing in complex and unpredictable ways, so that specific outputs or deliverables cannot be defined with a high level of confidence. Even in these cases, however, the solicitation should very clearly describe the highest level in the LogFrame to which the solicitation will contribute (this will generally be the mechanism/activity purpose included in Section B of the RFP); it should also describe the preliminary or illustrative causal pathway while acknowledging the dimensions of programmatic risk that may require additional evidence and/or adaptability.

In all cases, consult early with the CO since the level of detail, clarity, and expectations in the statement of work heavily influence the choice of contract type and are the primary driver of all other conditions of the contract. The project team, which is most familiar with the technical requirements and degree of uncertainty in the SOW, is in an important position to provide the CO with information critical to the contract type selection.

⁷ This will often be a Level-of-Effort SOW that requires the furnishing of technical effort in support of clearly defined results, as opposed to the development of clearly defined deliverables (e.g., under a completion contract) in support of those same results.

⁸ For U.S. government service contracts, the use of Statements of Work (SOWs) remains strong, although Statements of Objectives (SOOs) and Performance-Based Work Statements (PWSs) have become increasingly popular due to their emphasis on performance-based concepts. If a PWS or SOO is used, Sections L and M are prepared differently than recommended in several places in this document.

Section L & M – Instructions & Criteria. Instructions regarding what should be included in the offeror’s proposed Technical Approach are outlined in Section L. In addition to providing the Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) an understanding of how the offeror’s approach will meet all of the requirements in the solicitation, USAID may also consider requiring the offeror to provide additional tactical detail in order to fill gaps, define risks, and/or account for sequencing and complexity within its proposal. The offeror may also be invited or required within the Instructions to propose a framework or hierarchy of results to organize their work, as long as this framework directly aligns with and complements the project LogFrame.

BOX 3: SECTIONS L & M SHOULD MIRROR EACH OTHER

Inconsistent language between Section L (Instructions) and Section M (Evaluation Criteria) leads to ambiguity and confusion, which increases the risk of triggering a protest. Prior to releasing the solicitation, make sure to read Section L and M side by side to ensure quality and consistency.

To the extent that the project team seeks to invite innovation, Section L (along with the SOW in Section C) should be very clear regarding which aspects of the work are required and which may be refined or restructured based on the offeror’s evidence or interpretation of the evidence included as background documents in the solicitation. Likewise, offerors may also be encouraged to suggest adaptive approaches, meaning that they describe a methodology for identifying emergent outputs or outcomes that cannot be anticipated at the outset, and explain a process to adapt to that situation. Leaving bidders with some flexibility in their proposals to offer innovative strategies can also help ensure that they accept maximum responsibility and accountability for their work. In all cases, the Criteria in Section M should validate that the Technical Approach, including any alternative or adaptive approaches, is indeed based on evidence and aligned with the project LogFrame.

PRINCIPLE 3: INTEGRATE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GENDER, SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND OTHER ANALYSES INTO SOLICITATION DESIGN AND REQUIREMENTS

The team is required to conduct, at minimum, three analyses as part of the analytical phase of the project design process: (1) gender, (2) sustainability, and (3) environment. Other analyses like cost-benefit, socio-cultural, political economy, and others listed in ADS 201 are highly recommended and should be considered based on the scope, section, and relevance to the project. If done correctly, these analyses should describe how the project design will address these findings as reflected in the project LogFrame and M&E plan.⁹ Unfortunately, in too many cases, these analyses are divorced from the project design and remain as standalone annexes in the PAD. It is therefore incumbent on the drafter of the solicitation to read these annexes carefully and ensure that recommendations are incorporated into the activity design.

⁹ Note that because these considerations should be integrated into the overall project LogFrame, this task should not be devolved to the individual implementing mechanisms as may have been the practice in the past. However, further detailed analysis may still be required through the mechanism, in order to build on and deepen understanding of the findings and their application to specific activities, outputs, or outcomes to be addressed through the mechanism.

RFP SECTIONS. When integrating the findings from analysis into the solicitation, consider these questions:¹⁰

Section C	<p>Background: Does the solicitation spell out the specific issues impeding gender equality and women’s empowerment, sustainability, and other important cross-cutting analytical objectives with respect to the problem being addressed? Does the solicitation explain or indicate potential causes of the identified issues?</p>
Section C	<p>Statement of Work: Does the solicitation indicate what evidence gaps within the context of the overall project will be filled by this mechanism/activity? Is the contractor required to conduct a more detailed gender/sustainability/environmental analysis prior to or at an early stage of activity implementation? Does the SOW require the contractor to implement stand-alone or integrated interventions to ensure that the activity addresses the issues identified in the analyses?</p>
Section C	<p>Monitoring & Evaluation: Do the Project and Activity M&E Plans include specific gender-sensitive indicators that the contractor is expected to use? Are there strategies in place to monitor for unintended consequences (such as gender-based violence) or emergent (unforeseen) outcomes? Given the frequent trade-off between shorter-term outputs and longer-term sustainability objectives (such as capacity transfer), are there project and activity-level indicators to capture these important sustainability outcomes?</p>
Section C/F	<p>Contract Management/Staffing: Does the solicitation request a technical expert who has experience with gender integration, capacity building/facilitation, or environment, if such an expert is important for ensuring optimal project/activity results?</p>
Section F	<p>Deliverables: If capacity development of local partners is a major objective, does the solicitation require a sustainability plan within a specified number of days after award?</p>
Section L	<p>Instructions: Does the solicitation stipulate that offerors highlight their “Past Performance” in addressing gender gaps, building sustainability, etc.? Does the solicitation request that offerors illustrate how their “Management Plan” will ensure that gender disparities/capacity gaps are deliberately and adequately addressed? Do the Criteria in Section M mirror the requirements in Section L?</p>
Section M	<p>Evaluation Criteria: Does the solicitation state that offerors will be evaluated on how well the proposal addresses relevant issues as described in the SOW and other sections of the solicitation, as appropriate?</p>

¹⁰ ADS 205 provides additional guidance related to gender.

PRINCIPLE 4: STRUCTURE THE MECHANISM OR ACTIVITY-LEVEL M&E PLAN TO FEED INTO THE PROJECT M&E PLAN

Per ADS 203, M&E plans are required at three levels: (1) the “Activity M&E Plan”¹¹ at the mechanism/activity level; (2) the “Project M&E Plan” at the project level; and (3) the Mission-wide “Performance Management Plan (PMP),” which reflects all indicators needed to measure progress toward results in the CDCS Results Framework. By design, the Project M&E Plan serves as the overarching M&E framework for all mechanisms contributing to a project. The Project M&E Plan is included as an annex to the PAD and details how the project will be monitored and evaluated, as well as how M&E data will be used for learning.

	Mission PMP	Project M&E Plan	Activity M&E Plan
What is it?	Mission-wide tool to plan and manage the process of monitoring, evaluating, and analyzing progress toward achieving results in the CDCS and Project LogFrame	Tool to measure progress toward planned results in the Project LogFrame; serves as M&E framework for all activities contributing to a project	Tool for planning monitoring and evaluation at the activity/ implementing mechanism level
When?	4-6 months following CDCS approval, and updated when PADs are approved	During project design as an Annex to the PAD, and updated after awards are made	Within 90 days post-award, before activity implementation
Who Develops?	Mission Staff	Project Team	Implementers

PERFORMANCE MONITORING. Project-level performance indicators should be mapped to the results in the project’s LogFrame, in addition to being described in the Project M&E Plan. Prior to solicitation, and during Project M&E Plan development, the project team should clearly identify which actors will be responsible for collecting and reporting on which project-level indicators. Some project-level indicators may be tracked by a third party M&E contract, some may be tracked by multiple project implementing partners, and some may be tracked by a single mechanism; others may be collected by the Mission through secondary data sources, the host government, or other donors.

Offerors should be advised upfront about which indicators they will be required to collect data against as part of their Activity M&E Plan, as this may have budget implications. Required indicators may include not just designated project-level indicators, but also any context indicators¹² or standardized indicators for the Presidential Initiatives and/or the Mission’s Performance Plan and Report (PPR). Offerors should also be advised whether any of the designated project-level indicators are notional or illustrative and may be modified based on the specific approach proposed by the offeror.

In addition to these higher-level indicators that flow from the Project M&E Plan, the Activity M&E Plan may also include some additional indicators for activity management that are not part of the Project M&E Plan and that the offeror would propose either before or after award. These may include, for instance, process indicators or benchmarks that are useful to manage implementation.

EVALUATION. Within the RFP, offerors should be advised if a project-level evaluation is planned for the activity, as detailed in the Project M&E Plan. Per ADS 203.3.1.3, an external evaluation must be conducted of

¹¹ Note that the Activity M&E Plan was previously called a PMP (Performance Management Plan). Now the acronym PMP is used only for the Mission-wide Performance Management Plan.

¹² The Project M&E Plan should identify any context indicators beyond the offeror’s management control that are relevant to activity performance. Context indicators may be used to monitor critical assumptions in the project LogFrame or other economic, social, or political conditions critical to activity performance and sustainability.

all “large or pilot projects.” In the case of a pilot project, the evaluation should be (unless otherwise justified) an impact evaluation.¹³ Missions may also conduct evaluations that are not required by policy.

In addition, the RFP should advise the offeror of responsibility for cooperating with the third-party evaluator during any evaluations. This is particularly important if an impact evaluation is planned since it requires that the activity be designed and implemented in a specific manner to allow for treatment and control groups.

In some cases, the Mission may want to conduct a non-required, internal evaluation of an activity. In this case, the RFP should still specify the offeror’s expected role in this evaluation and any available information on evaluation questions, purpose, and methods.

RFP SECTIONS. M&E should be represented in several places in the solicitation and should be cross-referenced through all of the potential sections that may have M&E language, as follows:

Section B – Price/Costs. There are different means to assure that funds are allocated to M&E. One option, given the level of effort required to carry out both M&E as well as CLA activities (described in the following section), is to identify a lump-sum or offeror-proposed set-aside over the life of the activity through a separate Contract Line Item Number (CLIN) in Section B to ensure that these two related work streams receive the focus they deserve. A second option is to require details in the Instructions for the Cost Proposal (see Section L). Per ADS 203.3.2, Missions should budget approximately 5 to 10 percent of total program funds to M&E,¹⁴ including approximately 3 percent of program funds for external evaluations.

Section C – Description/Specifications/Statement of Work. The work statement in Section C should provide the most detailed description of USAID’s requirements for M&E. Because the language in this section often forms the basis for the resultant contract, it may be prudent to list specific indicators required of the implementer, preferably in the format of the project LogFrame, in Section J (List of Attachments). This approach enables the offeror to prepare a monitoring plan based on these indicators without codifying it in the underlying contract. If a SOW for an external evaluation has already been drafted, this may also be attached to Section J.¹⁵

Section C – Contract Management/Staffing. Depending on the size of the mechanism and volume of anticipated M&E work, it may be useful to specify that the staffing plan include an M&E specialist. Required or desired background and skills typically include a master’s degree in international development, the social sciences, public health, or another relevant field; demonstrated experience with quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques; past work experience applying M&E methodologies and/or operations research, and knowledge of state-of-the art methodologies; and proven experience leading M&E teams/systems and promoting organizational learning through collaborating, learning, and adapting principles.

Section F – Deliveries or Performance. The deliverables in Section F should include the requirements for the Activity M&E Plan to be submitted within 90 days of an award and before major activity implementation actions begin (see ADS 203.3.5). The M&E language in Sections C and F should be harmonized to ensure consistency.

¹³ Per ADS 203.3.1.1, impact evaluations measure the change in a development outcome that is attributable to a defined intervention. Impact evaluations are based on models of cause and effect and require a credible and rigorously defined counterfactual to control for factors other than the intervention that might account for the observed change.

¹⁴ Greater than five percent would be for particularly complex projects or the extra costs in high threat environments.

¹⁵ If this mechanism is being procured other than through full-and-open competition, consult the Mission RLA and CO to ensure that releasing the evaluation scope does not raise potential OCI issues.

Sections L & M – Instructions and Evaluation Factors. The Instructions in Section L often request that the offeror submit a Draft M&E Plan. If a Draft M&E Plan is required, Section L must include specific instructions of what elements should be included in the proposal. (Not all sections included in the description of the M&E Plan in Section F should be included as a requirement for offerors to submit at the proposal stage.) Section L also includes any instructions regarding the Staffing Plan or Management Plan, which may include specifications for M&E expertise and/or functions.

Section L should specify details regarding M&E costs in the cost proposal instructions. Some of the M&E-related costs for which the offeror should potentially budget include salaries of M&E staff, data collection, data analysis, data quality assurance measures, data cleaning, technical assistance, and dissemination and learning events. Section M, the evaluation criteria, should closely mirror Section L, evaluating the offeror on M&E within the Technical Approach, Staffing Plan, or Management Plan as appropriate.

PRINCIPLE 5: BUILD COLLABORATING, LEARNING & ADAPTING INTO MECHANISM DESIGN

Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) is an operational model used to facilitate the necessary feedback loops for learning and course correction as needed. The M&E Annex in the PAD typically includes a Learning Approach, which provides the overall CLA framework for the project. Integrating CLA approaches and processes directly into solicitations helps to: (1) facilitate collaborative learning and problem solving internally and with external stakeholders; (2) generate and share knowledge and evidence about what works, what doesn't and why; and most importantly, (3) apply this knowledge and evidence to make important course corrections, as necessary, during implementation. The intent is to continuously assess the causal pathway of the LogFrame and theory of change with attention to unintended effects and/or factors that emerge to influence that pathway, and then adjust activities to yield the most effective course of action.



RFP SECTIONS. Below are some relatively easy steps for constructing an RFP by section.

Section B – Price/Costs. There are different means to assure that funds are allocated to CLA. One option, given the level of effort required to carry out both CLA as well as M&E activities (described in the previous section), is to identify a lump-sum or offeror-proposed set-aside over the life of the activity (through a separate CLIN in Section B) to ensure that these two related work streams receive the focus they deserve. A second option is to require details in the Instructions for the Cost Proposal (see Section L).

Section C – Description/Specifications/Statement of Work. Whether or not the Mission opts to procure an external CLA mechanism, it is recommended that each implementing mechanism within a project portfolio have a set of CLA interventions in Section C (required, expected, or notional), either woven throughout the Statement of Work or explicitly listed as a separate work stream, to provide the basis for an intentional and coordinated focus throughout activity and project implementation. The potential or proposed interventions should utilize the analyses, LogFrame, and other tools to include actions that:

- **Provide for Dynamic Stakeholder Engagement Processes.** The contractor should be encouraged to identify key stakeholders among developing country citizens and/or institutions for consultations, collaborative learning, and joint planning and problem solving to foster more effective country-led partnerships.

- **Fill Knowledge and Evidence Gaps.** The contractor should be encouraged to generate new knowledge and evidence around identified learning questions, as well as unplanned questions that may emerge during the course of implementation.
- **Share Knowledge.** The contractor should be encouraged to strengthen knowledge sharing with stakeholders, including project implementing partners, national government counterparts, sectoral experts, and others to encourage more widespread learning across teams, mechanisms, sectors, etc.
- **Incorporate Agile and Adaptive Processes.** The contractor should be encouraged to develop adaptive management and implementation processes to allow course correction and response to unintended effects, changing/emerging realities and priorities.

BOX 4: PROCURING A THIRD PARTY CLA MECHANISM

One model being piloted in several Missions is to procure a separate, third party CLA mechanism, either at the project level or at the CDCS level, which facilitates CLA activities across the relevant portfolio. Such a mechanism can be valuable for a variety of roles, including conducting assessments and research, facilitating collaborative learning, encouraging open dialogue around interventions that are or are not working, and assisting with creative problem solving. In this case, it is important that all implementing mechanisms within the CLA mechanism's scope be advised upfront (at the time of the solicitation) that they will be expected to closely collaborate with the CLA partner as well as implementers of other complementary project Implementing Mechanisms.

Section C – Contract Management/Staffing. Depending on the size of the mechanism, it may be useful to require that the overall Staffing Plan include a CLA specialist. Oftentimes, this role is described as learning advisor, CLA advisor, or Knowledge Management (KM) advisor. This individual would facilitate, convene, and serve as overall coordinator for CLA efforts. In other cases, roles can be designated among other staff, including the M&E advisor, the Chief of Party or Deputy Chief of Party. Required or desired skills typically include experience with organizational or action learning, facilitating group processes and dialogue, data analysis and use, operations research and delivery science, knowledge management, leading communities of practice, and partner engagement.

Section F – Deliveries or Performance. To ensure that CLA efforts are adequately planned for and systematized in activity management and implementation processes, it is suggested to include a requirement for offerors to develop a CLA Plan that is finalized after award. Depending on the size of the mechanism and the priority given to CLA efforts, such a plan may be requested as a free-standing deliverable or as part of the annual work plan.

The design of a standardized quarterly report template in Section F is another opportunity to incorporate defined contributions to CLA into the regular reporting process. The added benefit, particularly when required across mechanisms, is that it makes it easier to share information and assist in external evaluations.

Sections L & M – Instructions & Evaluation Criteria. It is recommended that the Instructions require that the offeror include a description of their Technical Approach to systematizing CLA. They may also request that the proposed Staffing Plan ensure that staff members with appropriate skill are performing CLA functions or that the Management Plan incorporate joint planning and other coordination, collaboration, and learning processes. Section L may also specify details regarding CLA in the cost proposal instructions. The Evaluation Criteria should mirror the requirements in Section L to ensure that the offeror is evaluated accordingly.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ADS Chapter 201 – Planning: www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/201

ADS Chapter 203 – Assessing & Learning: www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/203

Logical Framework Technical Note: <https://programnet.usaid.gov/library/logical-framework-technical-note>

Developing Results Framework Technical Note: <https://programnet.usaid.gov/technical-note-rf>

Program Cycle Learning Guide:
www.usaidlearninglab.org/e-consultations/e-consultations-resource/program-cycle-learning-guide

ProgramNet: <https://programnet.usaid.gov>

Other resources on Learning Lab: <http://usaidlearninglab.org>