



**Program Cycle Learning Guide—DRAFT for comment**

July 17, 2012

**PPL/LER**

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## Introduction

**Learning has always been a part of USAID’s work; it is clearly not new.** USAID staff and implementing partners (IPs) have always sought ways to better understand the development process and USAID’s contribution to it, to share the successes and lessons of USAID’s initiatives, and to institute improvements to our operating modes and mindsets. Learning is always taking place – but it is not generally systematically planned or adequately resourced, nor is it always facilitated or acted on in ways that are strategic and can maximize results.

This Learning Guide, and the Strategic Learning Plan<sup>1</sup> on which it is based, have been developed to build on and improve the ways that USAID learns, and to address a set of challenges and opportunities that confront most development organizations.

### *Why adopt a learning approach?*

There are many reasons. [Read about three of them here, along with some Strategic Principles](#) to guide you in this work.

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<sup>1</sup> In draft, the Strategic Learning Plan lays out a three-part strategy for making USAID a more effective learning organization that adapts and responds to new learning and changing circumstances. Phase 1 focuses on integrating collaborating, learning and adapting throughout mission programs. Phase 2 articulates the strategic role that Washington regional and pillar bureaus play on two levels: one, addressing mission knowledge needs; and two, contributing to USAID’s thought leadership in the broader international development field. Phase 3 addresses Agency-wide enabling conditions and the role that policy, technological infrastructure, human resources management and acquisitions & assistance can play in enhancing USAID’s ability to learn and to implement effective programs. The current draft is available here [\[hyperlink coming soon\]](#)

What to expect: what, who, when, where, how?

What's in a learning approach? There are countless things your Mission can do to improve internal and external coordination, collaborate and learn more effectively, and adapt when things change. This Guide attempts to equip you with a lot of what you need to develop a *comprehensive, integrated* approach to collaborating, learning and adapting in order to improve your Mission's program. That said, we recognize that many Missions will need to be selective in what they do, particularly at the beginning, and that's fine. What we'd like you to avoid is focusing on learning in one respect (for example, developing an agenda of technical questions to address through research) and neglecting it in another (e.g., failing to institute processes to analyze the implications of the research findings for the portfolio, and adapting the portfolio accordingly), such that the impact is lost. In other words, why set out to answer questions if you don't also adapt your program based on those answers?

So that's the "what." [Click here](#) for concise answers about who should be involved in the learning effort, when to begin and how long it will take, where in the Mission it should be housed, and how (beyond using this Guide) you can get help.

### **How to use this Guide:**

Developing a Mission-wide plan for collaborating, learning and adapting is **encouraged but not required** by ADS 201. Perusing this Learning Guide may be useful in determining whether your Mission will adopt this Mission-wide approach.

While this Guide is directed to Missions, it is also being shared with USAID's implementing partners (IPs) to facilitate collaboration among Missions and IPs in figuring out how to operationalize this approach. This is because, in order to be effective, the change process this entails needs to be defined and coordinated from both the Mission and the IP sides and to meet the needs of both.

This Guide introduces a lot of new information, so we've tried to structure it in a way that will help you get what you need without getting lost. Organized by Program Cycle component, the main body of the Guide – the first 14 pages -- contains a general description of how a learning and adapting approach could be integrated into each component. Hyperlinks in each section will take you to an expanded discussion, including examples. All of these expanded discussions and examples appear in [Annex 1](#). In both the main body and in [Annex 1](#), you'll also find

links to additional resources housed on the [Program Cycle Learning Lab website](#).<sup>2</sup> Resources that are not yet linked are still in progress, so be sure to check back later. If you have a resource to suggest, please follow the directions on the site.

The Learning Lab site is currently a repository of tools, models and other resources to help you operationalize the ideas and approaches described in this Guide. Although the options for interactivity on the site are currently limited to users being able to propose new content, the Learning Lab is being redesigned to support interactive knowledge sharing and collaborative learning among Mission staff, partners and other stakeholders. It will re-launch later this year as a dynamic site where you can also join or initiate discussions around any of the topics addressed in this Guide. There will also be a feedback feature for you to share your suggestions for improving the site.



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<sup>2</sup> Program Cycle Learning Lab website is USAID’s external website for exchanging lessons learned and examples among USAID, implementing partners and other stakeholders. Program Net is USAID’s intranet site for internal USAID discussions and exchange of information.

## 1. Glossary links

Here's a list of some of the terms used in this Guide. Clicking on any of these links will take you to definitions that appear in full in [Annex 6](#).

Activity  
Adaptive management  
AAR/After-Action Review  
ASR/Assessing, Surveillance and Response  
Big Picture Reflection  
CLA  
Collaboration, coordination  
Collaboration or influence mapping  
Contextual knowledge  
Emergent  
Evolutionary acquisition  
Experiential knowledge  
Game changers  
GIS mapping  
Knowledge Management  
Outcome mapping  
Partners' learning event  
Program  
Project  
System feedback loops  
Tacit knowledge  
Thought leadership  
Tripwires/trigger points

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## 2. Overview: Learning Throughout the Program Cycle

By now, you're probably familiar with the Program Cycle. If not, you can have a look at the [Program Cycle Core Course](#) and the case-study based [USAID/Dilbertia](#)



training, both on [ProgramNet](#). The goal of articulating an integrated Program Cycle is to produce more effective interventions and improved development outcomes. Program Cycle processes analyze what types of activities are appropriate for a given setting, determine priorities based on opportunities and tradeoffs, evaluate projects, and feed knowledge back into

planning, design, and future policy development, while identifying necessary course corrections to current implementation. These processes also serve as the basis for linking resource decisions with strategic plans and priorities, and performance and evaluation data. By integrating into the Program Cycle a strong emphasis on collaborating, learning and adapting, we can develop and implement programs that are even more effective – programs that are higher quality and achieve their objectives more quickly and more sustainably.

A few Missions have begun the work of integrating learning throughout their programs and when implementing the Program Cycle. These efforts generally aim to:

- **capture and share the learning** that USAID investments yield so that country-level innovations, sectoral research undertaken by technical units, and evaluation findings are shared among USAID Missions and with other development actors (governments, donors, foundations, and civil society and private sector actors), both to improve the quality of USAID programs and to extend USAID's influence among international development actors
- **coordinate efforts** so that project implementers are building on each other's efforts, and USAID is integrating its efforts with those of the government, other donors, etc.);
- **collaborate selectively** to build and strengthen partnerships that the Mission has identified as having the potential to make a significant difference in achieving results;
- **track-and in some cases, actively influence--the work of other development actors**, where their results are necessary for USAID to achieve our intended results;
- **strategically target research** to address key constraints that, if removed, can lead to needed innovation or significant advances in practice; and

- **facilitate candid exchange** of experiential knowledge in order to speed the transfer of wisdom that enables development actors to adapt and apply good practice to their specific contexts.

Several Missions have integrated **Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA)**<sup>3</sup> into their CDCSes, examples from which appear in this Guide. Although they have undertaken these planned learning efforts during CDCS development, this guide provides multiple opportunities to use learning for adaptive management.

ADS 2xx defines adaptive management thus:

Adaptive Management is an approach to implementing the Program Cycle that seeks to better achieve desired results and impacts through the systematic, iterative and planned use of emergent knowledge and learning throughout the implementation of strategies, programs, and projects. (This learning can take place through data, findings, conclusions, lessons, and analyses, as well as sharing experience and observations.)

Adaptive management can increase Missions' ability to respond quickly both to changing environments and in the event that the original framing proves inadequate, inaccurate, incomplete, or unrealistic.

Adaptation may include:

- redefining or otherwise modifying statements of anticipated results; and
- adapting or modifying modalities, mechanisms and approaches employed to achieve results.

Adaptive management is one aspect of implementing the learning and adapting component of the integrated Program Cycle. [ADS 2xx revision forthcoming]

Although there are no requirements for Learning Plans or CLA components of projects, this guide presents the opportunities, processes and tools to help Missions take this adaptive approach to management in order to maximize results.

Additional information about adaptive management can be found in Annex 3.

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## RESOURCES:

[Learning Throughout the Program Cycle](#)

[Operationalizing CLA: Illustrative Activities, version 1](#)

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<sup>3</sup> CLA was initially developed with USAID/Uganda as a component of its CDCS to ensure that the CDCS works as a "living strategy," providing guidance and reference points not only for implementation but also for learning and course correction as needed. USAID/Liberia has also incorporated CLA into its CDCS, USAID/Rwanda is in the process of doing so, and several other missions are also working to develop and implement variants of the CLA component. The CDCS guidance includes a section on learning and references the Uganda CLA specifically. This guide builds from these and other efforts within and beyond USAID.

### **3 Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS)**

Emphasizing learning can add value both to the process of developing the CDCS and to its implementation over the five-year period it covers. If your Mission is planning or developing a CDCS, read on. If you already have your CDCS approved, skip ahead to section 3.2.

#### **3.1 Developing the CDCS**

The robust analytical process of developing a CDCS is inherently learning intensive, and can generate knowledge that will be helpful later in implementing the CDCS. This analytical process can also help to build collaborative relationships with stakeholders who can contribute and are also important in the longer term to contributing to the results the CDCS seeks to achieve.

When developing a CDCS, there are certain activities and mechanisms the Mission can create and implement to ensure the Strategy and Missions' overall program are effective, evidenced-based, and have a high degree of local engagement and ownership

These activities and mechanisms include:

- continuous coordination of efforts (across Mission technical teams, and among IPs) and collaboration with other development actors in order to reduce duplication of efforts and working at cross-purposes, enhance synergies, and access a wide range of technical, contextual and experiential knowledge and expertise
- continuous expansion and improvement of the evidence base through research, capturing learning from implementation, and discussions that facilitate exchange of contextual and experiential knowledge
- periodic reflection on dynamics that affect USAID's efforts and effectiveness, such as: changes in the country and regional conditions, new evaluation findings and other subject matter learning, new developments in relationships with other development organizations, and other dynamics
- adaptation of strategic direction and program for maximum relevance, results and sustainability
- sharing of knowledge generated during the CDCS development (e.g., results from gender/environmental/sustainability analyses, etc.) and throughout its implementation (e.g., conclusions and decisions that come out of portfolio reviews, after-action reviews, mid-term evaluations, etc.) to enhance others' learning and contribute to USAID's thought leadership

You can [read more here](#) about some useful learning actions to take when developing a CDCS.

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**[GENERAL RESOURCES for this section](#)** (additional resources appear in the [hyperlinked section](#)):

*CLA components of CDCSes:*

[Uganda CDCS](#) (has references to CLA throughout)

[Uganda CLA Annex](#)

Liberia CLA (will be linked here once publicly available)

[Aid Effectiveness: Collaborating, Learning and Adapting in Uganda \(webinar\)](#)

*DHs and testing them:*

[USAID Uganda's 2011-2015 Key Development Hypotheses](#)

[Tips for Producing Promising Development Hypotheses](#)

[Uganda's DO 3/Health CLA plan](#)

### **3.2 Implementation at the Strategy/Program level**

Continuous learning and adapting works like a transmission belt, bringing the strategic direction articulated in the CDCS to bear on project design and implementation, and back to the strategic direction via adaptations the Mission makes to the program based on new learning that emerges (for example, based on an analysis of how the game changers or other contextual conditions may be driving the program in ways that were not anticipated at the time the CDCS was developed).

As Mission staff (and by extension IPs) are implementing a coherent strategy with a goal, development hypotheses and development objectives (DOs) (i.e. above the project/IR<sup>4</sup> level), there are opportunities to continuously learn, adapt, and collaborate to ensure the Strategy remains relevant and responsive to the changing conditions in the country.

At the DO and Goal levels, learning focuses on testing the development hypotheses and tracking game changers to better understand how the local context is evolving and affecting the Mission's program. Collaborating with other donors, government counterparts, and local thought leaders is an opportunity where USAID and other stakeholders' interests can align or collide. And adapting can mean changing strategic direction (as well as tactical implementation at the project level) if conditions call for doing so – which has implications for the work of those with whom we collaborate as well.

Thus, implementing the CDCS over five years involves collaborating, learning and adapting not only at the project level (which is discussed below), but at the program/strategy level as well. You can read more about specific approaches [here](#).

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<sup>4</sup> Typically, the scope of a project is at the IR level. The IR statement oftentimes becomes a project purpose.

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## **4. Project Design & Implementation**

### **4.1 Project Design**

As with developing the CDCS, project design entails building the evidence base. In part, this is done by conducting the required and necessary assessments. Beyond that, it may be useful to develop an agenda for generating new knowledge or synthesizing existing knowledge. Some of this will be done during project design in order to inform the project design itself; but some will be undertaken as part of project implementation, in order to contribute to testing development hypotheses and new approaches, to learn how to better implement and achieve results, and to ground implementation in experiential and contextual knowledge.

When designing a project, consider incorporating features into the project that will enable learning for maximum effectiveness:

- continuous expansion and improvement of the evidence base
- translation of the evidence base into projects that reflect the best available technical and experiential evidence and that are firmly grounded in local knowledge and responsive to local dynamics
- continuous coordination of efforts and collaboration among IPs to reduce duplication, friction and atomization of efforts and increase cross-fertilization and synergy
- periodic reflection on changes in the development context, subject matter learning and other dynamics that affect USAID's efforts and effectiveness, and facilitate adaptation of project implementation for maximum relevance, results and sustainability
- sharing knowledge generated during implementation to enhance learning among all of the implementers of a given project, as well as between and among projects that are related through a common DO or a cross-cutting concern
- sharing knowledge externally to create broader opportunities for USAID's investments to inform and be informed by -- and to influence -- other development work being conducted in the country and region
- facilitative approaches that catalyze learning among local development actors and aid them in taking control of their development agenda
- appropriate distribution of responsibility and resources to enable and facilitate these functions

For specifics on how to design projects that include these learning and adapting features, [read more here](#).

### **4.2 Project implementation**

A project's LogFrame(s), the causal theories they represent, and the implementation they drive need to be tested, refined and adapted based on new learning and changing contexts. Mission staff and partners' knowledge needs to be continually expanded; implementation needs to be monitored and performance managed; partners and others need to be engaged in collaborative knowledge generation, capture and sharing; and adaptive management processes need to be employed to support faster learning and iterative adaptation of implementation.

For specifics on project implementation, [read more here](#).

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## **5. Monitoring**

See above for specific mentions of monitoring for learning; and see ADS 203 on Monitoring & Evaluation.

Monitoring plans are needed at the project level to learn rapidly and support iterative course correction. PMPs incorporate Project M&E Plans as well as indicators at the higher CDCS level to monitor higher-level results and assess the validity of the results framework and development hypotheses underlying the Mission program. The aim of both the project M&E plan and the Mission-wide PMP is to learn and adapt iteratively to achieve maximum results, to learn over the longer term to increase our understanding of the dynamics of development, to generate lessons learned to apply to future project designs and the next CDCS, and to share with implementing partners and other stakeholders to inform their efforts.

When developing a project M&E plan, the Mission should consider the following:

- what approaches to monitoring can generate early warnings that implementation may not be going as planned, or that it is but it is not producing the results as expected; is outcome mapping helpful, to identify indicators that signal whether or not the LogFrame/anticipated causal path is driving implementation? are other methods useful? can we test a range of methods by having various IPs and other stakeholders use them and share knowledge about their experience with them?
- how monitoring data can be shared and analyzed for feeding back into adapting implementation
- how to monitor collaborating, learning and adapting
- anticipated results and useful indicators to monitor processes and effects of learning and adaptive management
- in employing facilitative methods, monitoring the system feedback loops for what they indicate in terms of course corrections to implementation as well as the information they yield about changes in the local context

- whether monitoring context indicators or another approach can pick up early signs of unanticipated effects
- tracking identified game-changing trends

For the latter -- tracking identified game-changing trends -- Missions could consider instituting an Assessing, Surveillance and Response plan that provides a grounding appraisal of the trend and some form of baseline, and draws widely on a range of information sources to monitor, analyze and report (to IPs and to other stakeholders as relevant) regularly on developments that do or may have an impact on USAID's strategy and program, or on other development efforts underway.

See sections on implementation above, and guidance on Portfolio Reviews in ADS 203, for discussion of how to apply monitoring data throughout implementation. Below are some examples:

Missions can use Collaboration Maps developed during CDCS development as baselines for key relationships, and, based on the goals established for those relationships during Project Design, determine what indicators and monitoring methods make sense to track the progress, effectiveness of and learning from Mission efforts to strengthen selected collaborations, influence or leverage specific actors' programs or resources, etc.

It may also be useful to consider using outcome mapping or another approach designed to track not only results but leading indicators that suggest the direction an intervention is taking before any results could be expected, in order to learn as much as possible and adapt as early as possible in the process.

Where the Mission has determined that influencing another development actor will yield key results, implementation should address questions with monitoring implications, such as: How do we plan to do the influencing and tracking? How will we know if it is working? What tripwires or trigger points should we establish to determine when influencing may not yield the results on which other results in our RF depend, and we therefore need to change course?

Both project and DO- or program-level learning will also depend in part on the approach taken to monitoring and the ways that monitoring data and analyses are used to understand broader development dynamics and change course accordingly – sometimes at the level of project implementation, and sometimes at the level of DO- or program-level strategy.

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## **6. Evaluation**

USAID's [Evaluation Policy](#) provides guidance for when and what kinds of evaluations should be conducted. Use of evaluation findings should be considered broadly.

- Evaluation findings should be mined for inputs into CDCS development and project design.
- Evaluation findings should be shared widely as part of USAID's contribution to thought leadership in international development.
- Evaluations can also play a role in building local capacity for country-led development: in planning evaluations and selecting evaluation type, the Mission should consider evaluation methods that engage stakeholders in ways that build their analytic capacity and contribute to learning that they can use in assessing development challenges and devising solutions.

Missions may choose to explore opportunities for evaluation above the DO level, above the level of the Mission, above the level of a single donor, by joining with other Missions and/or Washington technical bureaus, or external organizations, to jointly conduct evaluations of common interest – for example, of a methodology (such as value chain development) that multiple Missions have embraced and would benefit from learning more about.

Missions should also seek information about past or current evaluations undertaken by other organizations, and work to add value to rather than replicate those efforts, as well as take advantage of the learning they generate. This can include:

- analysis of similar evaluations conducted by USAID and other organizations to understand the status and evolution of efforts to address the development challenge at hand
- analyzing evaluations conducted by other organizations for what they can tell us about things we did not track in our evaluations, and questions we did not ask but that are important.

Finally, Missions may consider conducting interviews with staff from other organizations to learn how they have used evaluation findings to adapt their own approaches.

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#### RESOURCES:

[Jim Rugh, Promoting a RealWorld and Holistic Approach to Impact Evaluation](#)

[Michael Quinn Patton, The Niche and Implications of Complexity](#)

[John Gray, Evaluation for Learning](#)

## 7. Agency Policies & Strategies

Agency policies and strategies define and structure priorities from the QDDR, Congress and internally from USAID. These policies and strategies are then made operational through the Program Cycle. Policies and strategies provide focus and prioritization, and affect strategic choice, as well as operational approaches to follow.

Some of the more recent policies, such as the [Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy](#), have explicitly been designed both to guide programs and to be adapted as things change; these policies are ideally suited to the iterative, adaptive nature of Program Cycle learning. Their effectiveness in this approach will be carefully reviewed. The aim is that Agency policies and strategies can lead and guide, and not pose strategic and operational constraints.

The Agency policies and strategies themselves should also be seen as dynamic and should be revised by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning on the basis of experience with implementing, monitoring and evaluating our development programs. As with the overall learning approach of the Program Cycle, as programs are implemented what is learned can be fed back to the owners of the Agency policies and strategies, to allow validating and improving policies if necessary.

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Please see [Annex 1](#) for further discussion of many of the points raised above, and for links to additional resources on the [Program Cycle Learning Lab](#) and on [ProgramNet](#).

This Guide is in draft; we welcome comments, questions and suggestions. Please contact:

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## Annex 1: Hyperlinked content

### Linked from: Introduction: Why adopt a learning approach?

While USAID can be proud of its many accomplishments over a half century of assistance to developing countries and their citizens, by integrating into its work a strong emphasis on collaborating, learning and adapting, it can develop and implement programs that are even more effective – programs that are higher quality and achieve their objectives more quickly and more sustainably:

- **We can align our programs continuously with the dynamic contexts in which we work** by making strategies, project designs and implementation plans – and the Agency processes we use to develop and manage them -- more flexible and adaptive.
- **We can expand our notions of accountability** to include helping ourselves and our partners be accountable for seeking and sharing knowledge, coordinating our efforts, using our influence strategically, analyzing new information and broad trends, adapting our programs accordingly to make them more effective, and catalyzing processes that help local organizations and individuals articulate and drive their own development agenda.
- **We can strengthen the technical knowledge base on which the Agency’s strategies and programs are developed** by conducting high quality evaluations of our programs; generating new knowledge that is directly relevant to country programs and/or helps USAID contribute to the discipline of development where we have specific comparative advantage; and systematically testing and refining our knowledge by rigorously combining research-based evidence with practice-based knowledge and local/context-based experience.
- **We can increase the relevance and sustainability of our programs** by employing participatory, facilitative approaches, which emphasize iterative development, testing and refinement of interventions in partnership with local communities and other development actors. This iterative approach is grounded in continuous learning: testing what works and what doesn’t, and aligning interventions with local priorities and conditions (even as they shift), requires tighter feedback and learning loops, and adaptation, that complement the longer-cycle learning that evaluation provides. This approach also helps to build local ownership of interventions and overall local capacity, in support of country-led, stakeholder-owned development agendas and processes.

There are many good reasons to do all of these things. Here are three.

1. Paris Declaration, Accra Agenda for Action and Busan Partnership Agreement<sup>5</sup>; QDDR<sup>6</sup>, USAID Forward<sup>7</sup>

Each of the outcomes from the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness – to which the United States is a signatory – either explicitly states or implies an emphasis on local ownership, collaborative, inclusive partnerships between aid agencies and implementers, continuous learning to improve our work, and development of local capacity.

The following text on the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda and the Busan Partnership Agreement is from [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org):

The *Paris Declaration* outlines the following five fundamental principles for making aid more effective:

**1. Ownership:** *Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.*

**2. Alignment:** *Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.*

**3. Harmonisation:** *Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.*

**4. Results:** *Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.*

**5. Mutual accountability:** *Donors and partners are accountable for development results.*

Accra Agenda for Action:

Designed to strengthen and deepen implementation of the Paris Declaration, the **Accra Agenda for Action** (AAA, 2008) takes stock of progress and sets the agenda for accelerated advancement towards the Paris targets. It proposes the following three main areas for improvement:

**Ownership:** *Countries have more say over their development processes through wider participation in development policy formulation, stronger leadership on aid co-ordination and more use of country systems for aid delivery.*

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_3236398\\_35401554\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,3746,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153109.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://forward.usaid.gov/>

**Inclusive partnerships:** *All partners - including donors in the OECD Development Assistance Committee and developing countries, as well as other donors, foundations and civil society - participate fully.*

**Delivering results:** *Aid is focused on real and measurable impact on development.*

[Capacity development](#) - to build the ability of countries to manage their own future - also lies at the heart of the AAA.

The QDDR – Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review – emphasizes an approach to development assistance that centers around collaborative partnerships, building our capacity to meet development challenges, grounding our planning and programs in evidence, investing in innovation and strengthening monitoring and evaluation.

USAID Forward takes these principles into the USAID context specifically and articulates a vision that includes changing the way the Agency does business through (among other things) an emphasis on new partnerships, innovation, research, knowledge-sharing and evaluation.

This Learning Guide offers some methods for grounding Mission programs and partner activities in these principles.

## 2. Findings from the Collaborative Learning Projects Listening Project

From 2005-2009, the CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (which grew out of work that Collaborative Development Action, Inc. conducted with UN funding) conducted 20 listening exercises throughout the developing world with people from all walks of life, about their experiences on the receiving end of development assistance. The aim of this “Listening Project” was to better understand one aspect of aid effectiveness by engaging a broad range of people in recipient communities in open-ended conversation about development assistance, and making the findings from this process available to those who deliver assistance.

The findings point to a mode of development assistance that places much greater emphasis on locally owned agendas and strategies, systemic approaches, greater trust between donors and recipient organizations, greater transparency and accountability to recipient communities, and longer-term investments. The methods discussed in this Learning Guide can help address some of these concerns.

You can read more about the CDA Collaborative Learning Project's Listening Project [here](#).

The Project's main findings are:

1. People want more ownership and to have a greater say in their own development. While progress has been made on increasing local participation, many people talked about the continued imbalance of power and control in setting development agendas and strategies. As a government official in Kenya said, "Projects just come because there is money and people may not need what donors bring. Policy-makers and donors sometimes push projects from the top-down through agreements made at the national level with no local input. Donors should fund a 'basket' [of options] and let them propose locally from their priorities so that communities can solve their problems on their own."
2. How assistance is provided is just as important as how much is given. People have suggested that donors work together more to address poverty and other systemic issues rather than fund individual projects or short-term interventions. They talked about the mismanagement of resources in the aid system and their governments, and asked donors to reduce the number of "intermediaries" and monitor them more frequently.
3. Donors should trust local people more, but should also monitor and verify what has been reported. As someone in Mali said, "Trust does not exclude control," and having rigorous monitoring systems in place does not have to reflect a lack of confidence or diminish the spirit of partnership. Regular visits and talking to people in and outside of the chain of delivery can help donors better understand the local circumstances and be more accountable for how their assistance is used.
4. Accountability is still weak. There continues to be more focus by governments and aid agencies on being accountable to donor countries than to aid recipients. Despite efforts at improving transparency, local people have said that they often lack access to the information needed to hold their government and aid agencies accountable.
5. A good process is intrinsic to good results. People suggested that donors and aid agencies need to slow down and invest the necessary time in order to listen and learn about the local context and capacities, to show respect for people's ideas and opinions, and "to help us solve our problems together." As a coordinator of a Lebanese NGO said, "We need strategic, long-term partnerships with donors. The impact doesn't come overnight. We need to know that we can rely on their support not only tomorrow. If they want to make a change that lasts, they need to start taking longer breaths."

### 3. Improving implementation

There are things we can gain by doing business differently, by making our processes more dynamic. Conversely, there are opportunities we lose and costs we incur when we initiate a promising approach but don't follow through in adapting our plan to what we are learning. This story from an implementing partner is just one example.

When the plan becomes the point: A story from an African country

A Mission in an African country planned an agriculture-led economic growth activity. The activity was designed and targets were set with the idea of increasing the numbers of farmers participating in an outgrower scheme, and increasing the amount of land each farmer had in production, as a way to achieve increased incomes among farm households. The planners designed the activity around a theory of change that assumed that extensification was the path to greater return, but they did not incorporate into the activity design an intent or method to test this theory.

The implementation team, though, employed a market facilitation approach, which entails engaging participants in analyzing challenges systemically, and seeking solutions sequentially that address weaknesses in the overall system. Through the kind of questioning, analysis and feedback that is the hallmark of facilitation, implementers discovered that farmers already had more land in production than they could manage well, and consequently were getting very low yields. Project staff tested a different approach with a subset of farmers to adapt implementation to this new knowledge. They replaced the extensification approach with an intensification approach that involved decreasing farm size to something much more manageable, and improving growing practices. As a result, farmers were better able to manage smaller plots, and their yields and profits grew.

The resulting higher yields and profits that were very good news for the farmers should have been good news for project management and for donors. They should also have prompted a reconsideration of the theory of change that led to the project being designed around targets of larger plot sizes. If farmers are increasing their profits by increasing the land they have under production, of course you would want more farmers and larger plots, and you would set your targets accordingly. However, if experience shows, as it did in this case, that farmers can't manage large plot sizes, a facilitation approach would lead to a different theory of change.

These results were not, however, well received by the Mission. What happened here, and what happens all too often, is that the targets came to stand in for results, and accountability was focused at the level of reaching targets rather than at the level of achieving results that actually improved the lives of the farmers. The targets, selected originally as a proxy for results, became the way the Mission defined results. Achieving better results for farmers, in all likelihood, was still

### Strategic principles

As you familiarize yourself with the approaches described in this Guide, it will be important to keep the following principles in mind:

- Development is the goal; knowledge management and learning can help us achieve the goal more effectively, but are not in and of themselves the purpose of our work.

- “Country-led development” has learning implications. We can help promote country ownership of development agendas and efforts by catalyzing learning among local development actors and building local capacity for analyzing development dynamics and devising solutions systemically.
- Tacit/experiential and local/contextual knowledge are critical complements to research/evidence-based knowledge. All three should inform the development of our strategies and programs, and the ways we manage them adaptively.
- Knowledge and learning solutions should be based on what’s needed to make a program stronger, more relevant to the context and more locally-driven, they can draw on general principles and established good practice, but they also need to be customized.
- USAID is an extended organization—our implementing partners are central to our effectiveness, and our partnerships with other local and regional actors are also key. All of these partners play a critical role in collaborating, learning and adapting for greater effectiveness.
- In establishing and building a learning-centric approach to development, Missions should consider building from things they already do in this regard, and leveraging existing processes as much as possible. Instituting this approach will take time and should be considered as evolving and phased.
- Management approaches need to value learning by committing resources, building trust, testing new methods, acting on new evidence, and adapting to change.

Integrating into Mission programs a range of activities to improve coordination and collaboration with others, and among implementing partners; to learn continuously and intentionally build our base of evidence, contextual and experiential knowledge; and to adapt our work iteratively as we learn more or as the context changes, entails achieving the objectives of the Strategic Learning Plan:

- Improve the quality and relevance of USAID’s programming by grounding it in evidence and making it quickly adaptive to new learning and changing contexts
- Extend USAID’s influence and ability to leverage other actors’ contributions
- Catalyze learning among country development actors to build capacity and facilitate country-led, sustainable development

A learning plan simply makes these processes more intentional and systematic, yet also more nimble, and brings to bear a range of tested approaches and tools that a Mission can integrate more effectively and efficiently to achieve higher quality results more quickly and sustainably.

A strong learning plan:

- Maximizes development results by helping the Mission and implementing partners learn more quickly and make iterative, timely course corrections.
- Reinforces the strategic direction of the Mission program by drawing it through all other parts of the Program Cycle, while also adapting it as evidence and context shifts indicate.
- Helps the Mission, implementing partners and others to identify and focus in on priorities in such a way as to maintain and strengthen the strategic direction and impact of the Mission's entire program.
- Helps build local capacity and facilitate country-led development, and operationalize Implementation and Procurement Reform.

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### **Linked from: Introduction: What to expect: Who, when, where, how**

Who: Mission learning agendas will in many cases be housed in and managed by the program office, but technical teams must have strong roles in defining and implementing them, to ensure that development objectives remain paramount, and activities are prioritized to address critical issues associated with the effectiveness of the Mission's program. To be successful, they should also entail strong participation on the part of implementing partners and other stakeholders. And they should be supported from Washington with technical input and learning and other support from pillar and regional bureaus.

When: It takes time to become an effective learning organization, so don't feel daunted and don't expect to change everything at once. On the [Learning Lab](#), you'll find a number of knowledge management maturity models (here's [one](#)) which may be helpful in understanding the phases that your Mission might expect to go through on the way to becoming an effective learning organization. What's important is to prioritize and begin. You may find it most useful to look at the things your Mission is already doing – to collaborate internally, with IPs, with government counterparts and other stakeholders; to learn from new developments in the sectors in which you're working, and from regional bodies; and adapt your projects and program as you implement – and build on those activities that are working well, and also identify places where you could potentially see a lot of improvement in results by investing more, or more systematically, in the methods and approaches described in this Guide.

It's important to be realistic about phasing your shift toward a more learning-intensive and adaptive approach. It may be that in a year's time, your Mission has begun researching technical questions that arose during CDCS development and project planning, revised your approach to the portfolio review to emphasize high-level questions about the program's strategic direction, experimented with some knowledge-sharing activities among partners, and initiated a collaborative effort with your A&A office to come to agreement about funding mechanisms and scopes that facilitate rather than hinder continuous learning and adapting throughout implementation of projects and activities.

For another example, if you decide in year one that a three-year learning network among select IPs around particular technical or implementation questions makes sense, you might expect that at the end of year one you'll have a defined learning agenda, a rhythm and mode of interacting, a dedicated facilitator, and the beginnings of trusting relationships. At the end of year two, you could expect to be aggregating some initial learning and engaging people outside the learning network to offer feedback; and planning for capturing the network's learning in products (tools, reports) and processes (interactive discussions) and developing a dissemination and engagement strategy; and you could also be considering ways for network members to carry learning back into their own organizations. At the end of year three, you should have finished knowledge products, ongoing engagement processes, and if the network opts for it, a process for ongoing interaction among them and/or opening up the network to others as a thematic community of practice.

Where: While Missions should drive their own learning agendas, they can also seek technical assistance on subject matter questions from USAID/W pillar and regional bureaus, support for cross-Mission learning from regional bureaus, and support on strategies and methods for collaborating, learning and adapting from PPL/LER. With respect to new/emergent learning in sectors and themes relevant to Mission programs, it is of course helpful to look at what's coming out of development multilaterals such as the World Bank and the various UN organizations, think tanks such as the Center for Global Development, and other bilaterals such as DfID. Regional and national research centers are also excellent sources. It's important too not to overlook learning that is emerging from the NGO sector and from other field programs, where applied knowledge and innovations are often generated.

How: We expect that each Mission that elects to emphasize collaborating, learning and adapting will develop its own approach tailored to its own priorities, opportunities, funding and staffing realities, and so on. We will support you through [ProgramNet](#) and the [Learning Lab](#) as well as –where feasible – virtual and/or TDY

support. We envision a peer support community of practice among Missions operationalizing this general approach, such that you can seek assistance, models, coaching, and problem solving from each other. To that end, we also expect to support you in capturing your approaches and experience in operationalizing a collaborating, learning and adapting emphasis, so others can build on your accomplishments.

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### **Linked from: 3.1 Developing the CDCS:**

3.1.1 Articulate knowledge needs at the level of the whole program (testing development hypotheses, learning more about or getting baseline data on game-changing trends, etc.), and plan for addressing those needs.

- Identify the grounding hypotheses that underlie the whole program/the CDCS goal and DOs, and think through how to test them. This will be done through implementing project-level learning (through research, monitoring, knowledge sharing and collective analysis) and through aggregating results and lessons and analyzing them at the DO and goal levels. (An example: a program-level DH holds that, where work in all three DOs is implemented in the same target districts – geographic collocation – greater results will be achieved more effectively than in districts where only one DO is operating. Traditional project monitoring data, and a comparison of context data in collocated and non-collocated areas, will be useful in testing this, but also important will be open discussions about observations and perceptions that can help identify factors in change that may not have been included in the monitoring plan.)
- Identify key technical questions/knowledge gaps to explore through implementation of the knowledge generation agenda.
  - at the conclusion of the analytic processes that go into developing the CDCS, what key technical questions remain?
  - where are the uncertainties in the hypotheses reflected in the RF and what additional knowledge generation (research, evaluation) or knowledge synthesis activities should be conducted to address these questions?
- Identify gaps in the evidence base for the development hypotheses – these may be things the Mission needs to learn that have to do with subject matter

Identify game changers<sup>8</sup> to be tracked over the five year CDCS period, to enable the Mission to adapt programming to the evolving country and regional context

- Develop a research and evaluation plan to test key hypotheses
- Draw on, synthesize and apply research and evaluation findings and other learning generated beyond USAID, to implementation of current activities and to planning of future efforts
- Discuss plans for how the Mission will use existing (or create new) processes to ensure that members of different DO teams work together in managing projects that need to be informed by cross-sectoral knowledge and experience
- Ground the strategy in a firm basis of local/contextual knowledge: engage local thought leaders (directors of civil society organizations, university professors, think tank researchers, local history experts, et al.) in an advisory capacity and candid discussion about the Mission's plans for its CDCS in order to harness their expertise and local knowledge in identifying, fleshing out and ground-truthing strategic priorities for the CDCS

### 3.1.2 Locate USAID's strategy in the broader context of aid efforts in the country and region; identify needs and opportunities relating to coordination of efforts and collaboration for synergy

- Include in the CDCS attention to how the Mission and other USG agencies can use influence as a program resource and tool to achieve development results; show it in the RF where relevant
- Use GIS mapping and collaboration/influence mapping to understand the Mission's activities in the context of other actors' efforts, and to identify opportunities and needs for coordinating and collaborating with others, and/or influencing their actions as relevant within the overall Results Framework. Consider such questions as:
  - who else is working where we are, either geographically or sectorally?
  - what is the current nature of our partnership with them?
  - would a different type or degree of coordination or collaboration with them, or influence over their strategic direction or activities, help us achieve our DOs more effectively?
  - if so, how can we enhance those relationships? if we can't shift those relationships, does that imply that we should shift our activities or focus? are we working at cross purposes?
- Consider involving implementing partners and other stakeholders in ongoing effort to crowd-source GIS data, with activity maps and other information being shared widely so that all actors have up-to-date, relatively comprehensive information.

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<sup>8</sup> Emergent, broad trends that post significant risks to the entire portfolio.

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#### RESOURCES:

[USAID/Rwanda Collaboration Mapping technique](#)

[Eva Schiffer's NetMap tool](#)

[Utilizing Influence](#)

#### 3.1.3 Adapting

Indicate in the CDCS document the specific processes the Mission intends to employ over the five-year implementation period in order to:

- reflect on emergent learning, the evolution of the game changers, and other contextual dynamics, and
- translate their implications into adapting program interventions (and, where needed, program strategic direction).

These processes can include:

- “Big Picture Reflection” discussions that bring together a wide array of stakeholders in the Mission program to share learning and observations, and discuss implications for Mission strategy, implementation and any needed course correction (see Uganda CLA plan)
- Improved Portfolio Reviews that emphasize trends, ground-truthing the RF, and accountability for continuous learning and adapting (see Uganda Portfolio Review guidance)
- [After-Action Review](#) (AAR) methodology adapted for periodic reflection on the program or on specific DOs
- Assessing, Surveillance and Response (ASR) reports developed annually on each of the game changers. These reports would use a consistent method year to year to establish an initial state and subsequent evolution of these broad trends. The ASRs could then be used to inform discussions at the Big Picture Reflection and other exercises (internal and with partners and stakeholders) to understand the implications for the Mission program of shifts in such dynamics as population growth, climate change, environmental degradation and political and governance trends. (The ASRs would be one input into these discussion, to be complemented by participants’ nuanced and contextually specific observations.)

Obviously the processes specified in the CDCS document can be altered as the Mission sees fit; at this stage, it’s important only to identify some prospects, to illustrate the intent as a useful guidepost for the implementation period.

- 3.1.4 As appropriate, the Mission should consider sharing the assessments conducted in developing the CDCS, as well as other intellectual products of the CDCS process, with other USAID Missions and bureaus, and with IPs and other development actors as relevant to inform their work. In addition to the assessments, these intellectual products could include development hypotheses and results frameworks, GIS maps of development activity, the game changers and the Mission’s baseline analyses of them, etc. Sharing these could also be used as an opportunity to stimulate collaborative learning, for example through:
- stakeholders’ meeting to roll out the CDCS
  - roundtable discussions with local experts and thought leaders of game changers as a way to get input and help establish a baseline for tracking trends.

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#### RESOURCES:

[Uganda Portfolio Review guidance](#)

[USAID Uganda Partners’ Meeting After Action Review](#)

[Uganda CLA plan \[correct this link\]](#)

[After Action Review Technical Guidance](#)

**KDMD Guides (in development):**

- [AAR Utilization Guide](#)
- [Roundtable K&L Guidance](#)

3.1.5 Facilitating local capacity development to support IPR Government-to-government (G2G) programs are an important and expanding emphasis in USAID programming, and the Program Cycle is where these approaches will be integrated with the Mission’s project-based assistance. Given the relatively limited experience Missions have had in implementing G2G programs over the last decade or so, capturing and sharing what Missions learn about these programs throughout all parts of the Cycle will be essential to improving how the Agency implements them.

3.1.6 Initial planning on resourcing these activities and delineating roles and responsibilities

While not all specific roles and responsibilities will be sorted out at the CDCS development stage, some planning should take place at this initial phase in order to determine budgetary implications. Missions should consider whether they want to contract a learning activity that coordinates and facilitates collaborating, learning and adapting across the Mission program – possibly integrated with M&E functions and resources. (See a sample Statement of Objectives [here](#).) Also to be considered is

whether the Mission will hire a learning advisor, as both Uganda and Liberia have done. (See sample position description [here](#).)

In any case, the learning function should not be seen as being fully implemented by the program office, or by staff specifically dedicated to it, but rather should be understood as a function that will engage all Mission technical teams, all projects and implementing partners, select USAID/W technical KM & learning projects, and selected other development actors in varying capacities and to varying degrees. (See [“What to expect: Who, what, when, where, how” above](#).) Budgetary implications will therefore include Mission staff time and resources as well as implementing partner time and resources and therefore project and activity budgets.

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#### **RESOURCES:**

[CLA Advisor position description from Uganda](#)

[CLA Advisor position description from Liberia](#)

[KDMD SOO Section C](#)

### **Linked from: Implementation at the Strategy/Program Level**

#### 3.2.1 learning agenda

The Results Framework depicts our best understanding of the causal logic by which a Mission’s activities cohere as projects and achieve intermediate results, and how those intermediate results combine to achieve the objectives, and how the objectives combine to achieve the goal. The CDCS document’s discussion of the development hypotheses is where a Mission articulates the lines between the boxes, and the conditions that might shift or impede this anticipated progression over the five years of CDCS implementation.

Project management can support learning at the project/IR level (see below). But learning also should take place above the project level, as there will be things to learn from how projects/IRs do or don’t reinforce each other, whether the causal logic at the higher levels of the RF is borne out in implementation, and so on.

Supported by monitoring and evaluation, CDCS/program-level learning entails:

- aggregating learning across projects in order to understand what’s happening at the DO level; and across DOs, to better understand whether and in what aspects our higher-level development hypotheses and RFs are correct, and to help the Mission figure out whether and how to adapt programs and projects in real time during implementation
- testing development hypotheses through implementation; this will require analysis above the DO level about what indicators and other sources of information will yield useful and valid conclusions, and development of a robust plan for monitoring and for synthesizing knowledge
- informing the evaluation agenda, the next generation of project designs and the next CDCS
- sharing lessons learned with other Missions, and as appropriate with IPs, and other stakeholders in country; where the program has yielded innovations, or surprising and useful new learning, sharing lessons in broader international development fora (as a USAID contribution to thought leadership in the field) can help other development organizations and extend the influence and impact of USAID investments
- facilitating Mission technical teams and implementing partners to continuously update and expand their knowledge about technical issues and advances, and about the evolving local and regional context for development
- bringing tacit/experiential knowledge to bear on the Mission’s strategic direction
- tracking game changers over the course of the CDCS period: what information sources and analytic processes will be used? who will participate, and in what formats? how will the conclusions be fed into course correction in implementation, into future project design, into the next CDCS, and outward to partners and others in the development community to inform their work? what

*Why project indicators are not enough: testing development hypotheses*

A mission technical team managing a health portfolio that accounts for 90% of the country’s health budget had monitoring data that indicated that targets were being met and project performance was very good. However, national health statistics were not improving. The disconnect between project results and health outcomes indicated a problem with the theory of change underlying the portfolio – and also illustrated the need to analyze performance monitoring data within a broader context and alongside other information; and to adapt the theory of change, its implementation, and target results in order to achieve the broader development objective of improved health outcomes. And it indicated a place where a program evaluation could potentially add enormous value to the team’s understanding of where its theory of change was flawed, and how to adapt the theory and translate it into more effective strategies and project designs in the future.

Without a process to reflect on a range of information and analyze it – that is, to learn – and then to adapt implementation (in the near term) and strategy and design (in the longer term) accordingly, the mission might have focused primarily on monitoring data, concluded that all was well, and continued to allocate resources in ways that were likely to have very limited impact on health outcomes.

provisions need to be made in Mission resources and management structures to enable these processes?

- facilitating knowledge sharing and learning within the Missions, across projects and across DOs; and continuously bringing technical expertise from across various sectors to bear on project and program implementation
- using information to continuously inform reflection on and adaptation of DO-level strategic direction

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#### RESOURCES:

[Uganda docs on DHs](#)

[Uganda DO3 CLA Plan](#)

#### 3.2.2 Collaborating

- Collaboration within the Mission, across DO teams/technical areas, can help to ensure that technical stovepiping, and the unintended consequences it can cause, are avoided. Methods can include:
  - in Portfolio Reviews, emphasizing cross-sectoral/cross-DO participation, and being sure to discuss the technical issues that might seem sector-specific with technical experts from other DOs
  - peer-assist discussions for technical team leaders to present unanticipated developments to technical experts from the other DOs and solicit their insight, feedback and guidance
- Collaboration externally with other development actors identified through the collaboration mapping can be done as part of CDCS development and is one way to expand your pool of knowledge.
  - The first step can be to establish goals for the collaboration – is it simply more information sharing? Or joining efforts? Is the aim to influence the organization to alter a priority or activity, or allocate resources to a new initiative?
  - Identifying indicators of progress toward the goals may be useful, but engagement will likely be fluid and should be allowed to be highly adaptive
  - Consideration should be given to formal methods and fora such as donor coordination groups and also to invitations to share knowledge via participating in Big Picture Reflections, in topical round table discussions and on advisory bodies, e.g., for project
  - Where the Mission expects to work closely with local government officials, it could be helpful to consider adapting USAID/Uganda's District Operational Plan approach – both the plans and their implementation – to your context as a way of facilitating coordination and synergy between local government efforts and Mission investments

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#### RESOURCES:

Uganda materials on District Operational Plans (MOUs, powerpoint, plans, DOP 101)

KDMD guide: Conducting Effective Peer Assists

#### 3.2.3 Adapting

The central element of implementation is adaptive management, which can significantly improve results by enabling Mission staff and partners continuously to learn and adapt to remain relevant in a shifting development context. Adaptive management is what keeps tools such as strategies, results frameworks and LogFrames aligned with overall goals within an evolving local context, and prevents them from devolving into static prescriptions that can become less relevant over time.

There are a number of things you can do periodically during implementation to maintain and refine the program's strategic direction. These can include Big Picture Reflections conducted as part of a Portfolio Review, as well as other opportunities for reflection and adaptation at and above the project level.

For reflecting and adapting, the CDCS is the reference point. You can use it to:

- translate the RF into project-level interventions and LogFrames
- develop collaboration/influence plans (based on the collaboration maps done for CDCS development) for those actors whose achievements show up in the Mission's RF as IRs or as necessary contributions
- use the CDCS as a statement of intent and expectation, and thereby as a guide to what the Mission, partners and other stakeholders reflect on iteratively in Big Picture Reflections, in more frequent smaller settings, in Portfolio Reviews, etc.

At these moments, participants should ask tough questions about strategic direction and the broader context: Are the DOs still the right ones? What's happening with the game changers? What trends are we observing in the country/region? Do our strategy and hypotheses still hold? What are we learning? Any new opportunities for collaboration? Any need for course correction?

- engage external stakeholders as well as Mission staff and IPs in discussing these questions
- bring in the learning gleaned from implementation and gathered from looking at what learning is being generated beyond USAID
- share what comes out, unless it's sensitive, to help other actors in the country take advantage of what USAID has learned and understand the decisions USAID has made

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**RESOURCES:**

Materials from USAID/Uganda Partners' Meeting on Local Governance: agenda, facilitator guidance, Big Picture Reflection summary, discussion questions, meeting notes, survey, survey results

KDMD guide: Conducting Effective Peer Assists

3.2.4 Sharing

Findings can also be captured (in useful formats – including informal ones, such as notes, blog posts, interviews, etc.) and shared with those directly involved in the program as well as other stakeholders who can learn from and apply the lessons from the findings. This can also be done to, capture, share and apply lessons at the project level.

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**RESOURCES:**

KDMD guide: Knowledge Capture & Sharing

3.2.5 Facilitating local capacity development

Implement Government to Government (G2G) programs

Learning should be captured and shared about all aspects of G2G programs – how they're designed, the nature of USAID-government relationships, how they're implemented over the five years of the CDCS, and how they adapt to changing circumstances.

Implementing G2G efforts will require being innovative about allocating staff time and building staff skills necessary to manage the relationships that are key to G2G support. There aren't a lot of models available, so sharing your Mission's experience with other Missions can be a real service.

Building support among counterparts for emphasizing learning and adaptive management may lead them to adopt similar approaches, which can help improve the sustainability of these programs.

Liberia has worked to build Ministry of Finance capacity, and is now doing the same with the Ministry of Health, in order to channel support through local systems.

And the Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Local Governance Infrastructure and Livelihoods (NUDEIL) activity is a partnership with the GOU to build capacity in District Governments to plan, implement, and manage infrastructure programs.

### 3.2.6 Resources

How will all of the above will be resourced and managed? Which parts fall to the projects and project/activity budgets? Which parts does the program office implement, vs. simply guide? Which are the responsibility of the technical teams? Will any of these efforts be supported through a broad learning mechanism, and if so, will that mechanism encompass M&E, or will it simply intersect and coordinate with an M&E mechanism the Mission puts in place?

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## **Linked from: 4.1 Project Design**

### 4.1.1 Defining a knowledge generation agenda

You can start by comparing the results framework with the LogFrame in order to articulate the development hypotheses in greater detail, and to determine which parts need further research and validation. Based on this, you can develop a plan for monitoring and evaluation, as well as research, and knowledge gap filling through interviews and other methods.

As at the program level, some of the gap filling will address technical questions that can be answered through synthesizing existing knowledge. For example, the question of how climate change may affect the viability of the crop value chains that a Mission has selected in its agriculture-led economic growth program can be addressed by analyzing existing climate projections. Other questions may relate to customizing an intervention to the local context, and a different method, such as interviews with key stakeholders or a roundtable with local experts might be more suitable.

As indicated in the Project Design guidance, this process should include a systematic search and use of knowledge generated by USAID Missions and USAID technical/functional bureaus and by other development organizations. This knowledge can include:

- practices recognized as “good” and foundational to their sectors by acknowledged technical experts
- findings and conclusions from evaluations
- findings from assessments and other research/analytical products
- local/contextual knowledge
- tacit knowledge and accumulated wisdom
- technical questions and topics to explore through a structured learning agenda
- contextual “game changing” trends being tracked for their implications for the Mission’s strategic direction and implementation

Also key will be the plan for monitoring the implementation and results of the coordination and collaboration efforts in order to shift course as needed, as well as to identify information about other actors' efforts that should be shared with other projects. Processes to ensure that this monitoring and sharing takes place and is effective can be incorporated into project design and project budgets as well as Mission staffing and management plans.

Project design and the associated learning plan can also include ways to bring in outside perspectives, in the form of technical learning developed elsewhere, as well as contextual and experiential learning held by local thought leaders.

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#### 4.1.2 Facilitating coordination and collaboration

For obvious reasons, it's a good idea to make sure that the Mission's projects (and specific activities within them) build on, rather than work at cross purposes to, other projects and activities. It may therefore be helpful to develop a plan for how the Mission and its partners will coordinate and collaborate with, and influence, other development actors as priorities dictate.

Also important is taking advantage of what experienced people have learned over time that can help improve project design, make it more likely to result in interventions that are country-led, effective and sustainable. Additionally, knowledge about the contexts in which interventions are implemented is critical to tailoring them correctly and engaging the right stakeholders.

Priority opportunities for coordinating efforts and collaborating will have been identified in the collaboration/influence mapping and GIS mapping and analysis described above, if the Mission has chosen to do those things. That program-level assessment and planning can now be taken down to the project level to get a clear sense of the landscape in a given sector, geographic location, etc., and how the Mission's work can contribute. If it's useful to do so, this collaboration mapping can be expanded through social network analysis methodologies to identify individuals and organizations who may be particularly important to the Mission's work, and to identify and locate any instances of innovation and positive deviance that the Mission may want to facilitate and extend through project activities.

As with CDCS development, the project design process itself can benefit from collaborating with experts from local institutions, other donors and USAID/W to offer insight on technical knowledge/good practice, and with local external advisors on adapting good technical practice to the local context, and on what other development organizations and activities are taking place with which USAID should coordinate, collaborate and/or influence.

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#### 4.1.3 Determining the reflecting and adapting processes to be used at various points throughout implementation

These processes can be useful for:

- reflecting on what implementation is revealing about the causal logic/LogFrame, and on emergent technical learning as well as shifts in the evolving local and regional contexts and their implications
- adapting work accordingly to ensure relevance and results
- establishing a timeframe and processes for when and how to reflect on new learning and shifts in the local context
- instituting methods to ensure sufficient flexibility in implementing mechanisms so that emergent opportunities to collaborate strategically can be seized, additional or different learning topics can be pursued, and adaptation to shifts in game-changing trends can take place without the need for formal modification of funding mechanisms.

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#### 4.1.4 Capturing what is learned and share it strategically to assist, inform and influence

The project design process is learning intensive, yielding useful knowledge to share with IPs and other stakeholders, thereby creating opportunities to build collaborative relationships. Assessments, syntheses of technical knowledge, or of contextual or experiential/tacit knowledge, can be captured in useful formats and shared with stakeholders as appropriate, to inform their work and strengthen relationships.

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#### 4.1.5 Developing capacity for country-led development and IPR

In designing projects, Mission staff can consider how to select among and combine several modes, including traditional project assistance, government-to-government (G2G) programs, and facilitation/participatory methods. G2G and facilitation have the advantage of building local capacity for country-led development. Facilitation is a learning-centered, adaptive approach to working intensively with local stakeholders/"beneficiaries," engaging with them in iterative processes to analyze

the development challenges they face from a systemic perspective, and then to facilitate strengthening of those systems at various points within them by helping country actors align their interests and cooperate for mutual benefit and systemic shift. This is a highly adaptive approach that inculcates in all parties the skills and habits of iterative reflection and adaptation and enables participants to take control of their development agendas, enhancing sustainability.

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#### RESOURCES:

PROFIT project example:

PROFIT Zambia Impact Assessment [\[check link\]](#)

EWB/Canada examples

Outcome mapping methodology resources

#### 4.1.6 Defining resources, roles and responsibilities, including:

- budgetary implications for implementing partners' collaborating and learning
- Mission staffing and staff skillset implications for collaborating with key stakeholders, and for managing IPs to ensure optimum collaboration, progress against a learning agenda, knowledge sharing, and analysis of implications and consequent adaptation of project activities.

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### **Linked from: 4.2 Project Implementation**

#### 4.2.1 Project learning can address the following:

- Identifying what works and what doesn't in implementation of specific projects so that we can adapt implementation early and often, to improve project performance
- Learning whether our interventions actually yield the results we expected them to when we developed our Results Frameworks and project LogFrames – i.e., whether our theories of change/hypotheses were valid, and
  - if not, how implementation of specific projects can be adapted to increase our chances of achieving project purpose
  - whether or not the theories of change/hypotheses prove valid, what Mission staff and partners can learn about higher-level/generalizable lessons about how to create development results
  - how to know -- What indicators and monitoring will help Mission staff determine whether the chosen project purposes and LogFrames are

necessary and sufficient to achieving IRs? Beyond monitoring data, what other kinds of information and analysis do we need in order to answer these questions?

- Updating and expanding technical knowledge among Mission staff, IPs and country development actors.  
Research and evaluation (from USAID and from other development organizations) can be synthesized and shared with USAID technical teams, implementing partners and others with whom the Mission collaborates, through formal roundtables and seminars and informal discussion groups convened to discuss:
  - findings and implications for project implementation
  - analyzing the nature of a given set of problems
  - what is known about more and less successful approaches to similar problems and sets of problems (e.g. through evaluation findings, case studies, peer assists, etc.)
  - what innovations are available or plausible
  - how to adapt what works in other contexts to the one at hand

These discussions can yield a knowledge generation plan that aligns with the knowledge gap-filling discussed above, and identifies priority technical areas/questions by sector but also leaves room to stay current on emergent learning. Experiential and contextual learning should also be central.

Methods and resources can include:

- knowledge exchange (explicit and tacit) through sector councils and other knowledge networks, and through learning programs either driven by the Mission or implemented through other parts of USAID or other development organizations
- Assessing, Surveillance and Response (ASR) reports developed annually on each of the game changers and discussed in Big Picture Reflections
- donor coordination groups and other country knowledge networks
- access to technical experts for consultation; access to peers for peer assist
- knowledge exchange opportunities among local development actors
- topical evidence summits
- technical or skills-based training courses
- engagement with existing Agency technical resources (e.g., food security seminar series, microenterprise discussion forums, health training modules, natural resource management communities of practice; repositories of case studies, good practice, theory, etc.); training curricula; sector strategies; evaluation findings; expertise locators; evidence summit outputs; etc.
- tacit knowledge sharing opportunities among project staff, and across projects, can aid knowledge transfer and can also be a forum for aggregating field-level observations that can act as early indicators of shifting or emergent dynamics

Knowledge sharing among partners should be funded through projects; if there is a learning mechanism or learning advisor, it can be supported with some logistical coordination, and some skilled facilitation to help participants identify topics, formats and rules for engagement; performance management can ensure that it takes place. Beyond that, the Mission may want to employ a light touch in this area, allowing implementers to build collaborative relationships in settings in which they can share candid observations and sometimes sensitive information without a donor presence or agenda. This can increase cohesion among implementers which can in turn speed learning across the consortium.

Learning activities around updating and expanding contextual knowledge can help Mission staff, IPs and other stakeholders to better understand the country/local context, and to track and understand its dynamic effects on the USAID program and vice versa. IPs and other local development actors need to be engaged as knowledge peers and advisors in productive relationships that can include:

- participation in working groups that include government counterparts and other donors
- inclusion in Advisory Committees that aid the Mission in CDCS development and project design
- proactive engagement with local thought leaders, academic and research institutions in interactive knowledge sharing opportunities such as Big Picture Reflections, discussion forums to assess implementation and its implications for strategy and adaptation; etc.
- sharing and collaborative analysis of findings from country assessments, evaluations and monitoring

Uganda's DRG DO team is considering using advisory committees composed of local experts to act as a sounding board for specific project designs, and to fulfill a longer-term advisory function in periodically refining the DRG program.

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#### 4.2.2 Collaborating

Partners who are implementing project activities will in some cases be more effective if they are engaged in collaborative partnerships with each other – for instance, if their activity-level outputs are closely interdependent in the project LogFrame, or if they are working with the same participants. Project budgets and workplans, and performance management, need to support this collaboration. Support may also take the form of using a dedicated facilitator to assist partners in delineating common ground and the terms of a useful partnership that will be mutually beneficial, and that will support achievement of the Mission's objectives.

and helping them to put in place the processes that will make that partnership as fruitful as possible.

Using a Learning Network model<sup>9</sup> with selected implementers can leverage collaboration to generate knowledge and innovation that targets particularly difficult technical problems, and to capture and share that innovation broadly, for scaled impact on a sector/industry level. This is an intensive collaboration model spanning an entire grant period and requires dedicated facilitation and other inputs, including budget for ongoing partner collaboration.

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#### RESOURCES:

[Audio powerpoint on learning networks](#)

[Powerpoint from learning network launch meetings:](#)

[Learning Networks: Increasing Program Reach through Facilitated Learning and Sharing](#)

[GROOVE learning network product on the model illustrated with cases](#)

Collaboration between Mission staff managing projects and project IPs is also critical. Depending on how it's done, project performance management can help to build a collaborative relationship with IPs as knowledge peers, working jointly with Mission staff to harness resources, analysis and action in the direction of achieving project purpose and higher-level development objectives.

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#### RESOURCES:

[Interview with Uganda staff person on NUDEIL](#)

[Sean's report on GEMAP—Liberia capacity building with Ministry of Finance](#)

### 4.2.3 Adapting

Learning and collaborating form a feedback loop that, under the right circumstances, enable the Mission and its partners to identify problems in projects – either in their causal theories/LogFrames, in implementation, or in shifting circumstances beyond their control – and correct course as soon as possible to maximize results. This feedback loop requires

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<sup>9</sup> In which selected partners are strategically grouped and funded to implement promising activities likely to lead to breakthroughs, and also to work together in a facilitated network to develop and implement a knowledge generation agenda specifically designed to draw from the activities they are implementing and analyze learning at the group level to address key technical challenges and knowledge gaps that hinder progress broadly, not just narrowly for specific initiatives.

- A schedule and processes for Mission staff and project implementers (and perhaps others) to reflect on monitoring data and other information about emergent results, as well as new technical learning and information about game changers and other contextual shifts, and to analyze the implications for implementation and adapt implementation accordingly
  - it will be important to establish a method for spotting early signs that implementation is diverging from the LogFrame, so that course correction is possible when there's still time to make a difference in project results
- Sufficiently adaptable implementing mechanisms (see [Annex 2](#) on project design)
- Big Picture Reflections and other smaller/informal fora for eliciting and analyzing contextual information from implementers' observations, from tracking game changers and from other sources

At various times during implementation, it may be prudent to

- alter activity and project implementation
- coordinate with new actors, or with those who are changing course in their programs with implications for dependencies in the Mission RF
- add activities to the program; or in some other way implement a course correction to increase the effectiveness of the program.

The Mission may want to think carefully about the following:

- How can project managers and others get more robust and accurate information more quickly, analyze it, and use what is learned to adapt interventions?
- What plans can be made and resources employed for consultations with experts on subject matter and the local context? for monitoring and analyzing game changing trends? for learning from other organizations?

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#### RESOURCES:

See above—all materials from Uganda partners meeting

[Interview with Bruce McFarland on agile acquisition \(on ProgramNet\)](#)

4.2.4 Sharing knowledge across Mission DO teams, among partners, with other donors and stakeholders, with other USAID Missions and bureaus can help:

- smooth coordination
- inform implementation
- extend USAID's influence through thought leadership

It will also be useful to consider:

- how learning will be captured and shared across all of the activities within a project, as well as between projects
- how project deliverables will be structured to include effective knowledge capture and sharing
- ensuring that knowledge is shared widely by incorporating into project design a plan for knowledge capture and sharing among the various implementers; and analysis of emergent learning and implications at both the activity and the project level, including bringing in learning emerging from G2G and influencing efforts (not just funded and implemented interventions)

If the Mission plans a learning mechanism, it can support seminar series, an electronic newsletter, interactive partners meetings, blogs and other electronic discussion fora (with hosting and content generation included in partner agreements) to create regular, branded opportunities for partners to share their work.

Products of implementation and of the knowledge generation and synthesis activities the Mission undertakes should be shared widely (as appropriate), including:

- Audio and video capture of events described above
- Knowledge syntheses
- ASRs on game changers

Reports and interviews on innovations emerging from implementation can be captured and shared within USAID and externally, including with government counterparts, other donors, civil society and private sector entities who are working in the same space, etc.

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#### RESOURCES:

[KDMD guides \(in progress\) on knowledge capture, seminars, webinars, blogs, etc.](#)

#### 4.2.5 Facilitation, G2G and local capacity development

What role does G2G assistance play in our RF/LogFrame? How will we capture what we're learning about how to do G2G, and share it with the rest of USAID? Do we need to facilitate any capacity development to make G2G possible/more effective?

Facilitative approaches that focus on catalyzing learning as a development method have their roots in earlier participatory methods (participatory rural appraisal, for example). Facilitation extends those methods by prioritizing engaging local communities in systemic analysis of their development challenges, and in

identifying solutions that involve mobilizing existing resources and forging win-win relationships within the system so that it functions better for everyone. Some characteristics of facilitation include:

- Goals are set – action is not aimless – but specific interventions are iterative and evolutionary, and are the product of community engagement
- Interventions are tested and adapted iteratively
- Investments are made in feedback loops -- observe and analyze, feed results back into next test – and in maintaining the conditions needed for feedback loops to work:
  - Strong internal culture of encouraging feedback and making it count in terms of iterative course correction
  - Empowerment of staff
  - Incentives for analyzing and sharing observations and learning, etc.

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#### RESOURCES:

[Uganda LEAD Project workplan](#)

[Interview with Eric Derks—on ProgramNet \(check\)](#)

[Meeting the Challenges of Value Chain Development](#)

[PROFIT M&E Plan](#)

[PROFIT Work Plan](#)

[PROFIT Project Management Document](#)

[ODI Outcome Mapping for M&E](#)

[Outcome Mapping Facilitation Manual](#)

[Being a Market Facilitator Guide](#)

[Market Facilitation Practice Case Studies](#)

[Facilitation Staff Capacity Role Cards](#)

[Organizational Capacity for Facilitation Screencast](#)

[EWB/Canada -- Ghana project rolling workplan?](#)

Annex 2: Project Concept Paper, PAD, and Mechanisms

Annex 3: Adaptive Management

Annex 4: Mission Transformation for Learning

Annex 5: Staffing and Budget Scenarios (to be developed)

Annex 6: Glossary (full) (in progress)

## **Annex 2. Project Concept Paper, PAD, and Mechanisms**

### *Project concept paper*

The Project Design guidance stipulates the following:

“Identify 1-2 central questions to be evaluated over the course of project execution.”

“For Missions that have a Mission-wide learning and adapting plan, indicate the part each project plays in the larger plan.”

In developing the concept paper, the PD team can collect available knowledge and review lessons learned relating to anticipated project purposes and activities. Sources can include evaluation findings, reports from precursor projects, sectoral learning and good practice, as well as contextual knowledge (about the district/country/region as relevant), and experiential knowledge held by Mission staff, IPs, project beneficiaries and other stakeholders. This process this will identify some of the critical questions around which the project learning agenda should be developed. Because it will likely entail broad consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, it should also help to identify opportunities for greater strategic collaboration with key actors. And because this is a learning process in itself, it will also yield analyses that can be shared widely to contribute to stakeholder learning, as appropriate.

### *PAD synthesis*

The PAD synthesis would include discussion of the project learning plan in terms of both content and process. What are the key questions and topic areas to be addressed? How will they be addressed through project activities? (e.g., through research, implementing and comparing distinct approaches, employing a facilitation approach with a rolling work plan and tight, iterative feedback loops, etc.) What roles will USAID staff, implementing partners, other stakeholders play? How will learning be captured? How will it be shared and how will the project engage key actors who can add to and benefit from the learning and exchange of related knowledge (for example through partner meetings)? How will Mission staff and partners analyze the learning and apply it through adaptive management to expand, alter or shift course during implementation for maximum impact?

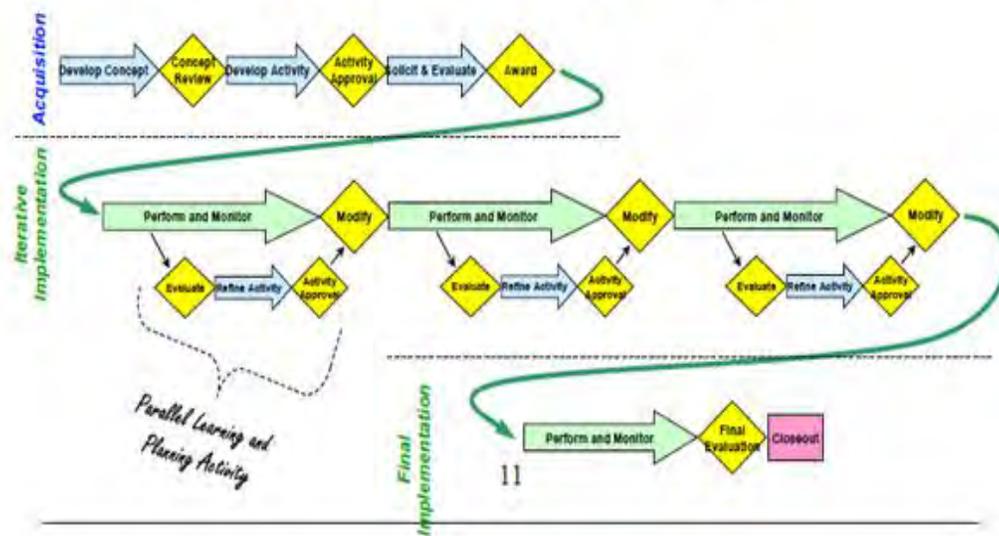
### *Mechanism types*

Planning for more strategic and systematic collaborating and learning won't be all that useful unless project direction and activities can be adapted accordingly. The PD team should take into account, and discuss in early meetings with CO the types of mechanisms and the structure and content that will afford sufficient flexibility and adaptability. In cases in which several methods or approaches will be tested and

compared, or in which practice is emergent and evolving quickly, they may also consider employing Statements of Objectives (vs. Statements of Work) and make clear how learning gleaned through implementation will be captured and analyzed for what it suggests regarding ways to adapt iteratively throughout implementation to ensure that evidence and experience quickly feed into improving prospects for achieving development objectives within the CDCS and project time frame.

One mechanism type to consider is “agile/evolutionary acquisition,” in which implementation takes place in phases, with a structured and strategic learning agenda implemented in parallel during each phase to inform each subsequent implementation phase. Mechanisms structured in this way can modify activities and adapt to emergent learning without formal contract modifications as long as they adhere to the original purpose.

## Evolutionary Acquisition



### *RFPs/RFAs, SOWs for activities*

RFAs and RFPs should identify learning agenda/questions and invite bidders to propose ways to fulfill those agendas. Examples include technical questions that need to be answered to ensure project effectiveness; game changing trends that need to be tracked and analyzed for implications for project and portfolio effectiveness; comparison of different implementation approaches to achieving project purpose; sector-specific learning that can contribute to testing portfolio-wide development hypotheses; etc. Language can be included that either describes or invites bidders to propose processes and time frames to ensure iterative

reflection on new learning and emergent contextual shifts, and adaptation of project activities accordingly.

If the Mission anticipates or has put in place a standalone learning activity, RFPs/RFAs should describe that activity, articulate the principles by which the technical project under design will interact with, be supported by and contribute to that activity, and invite bidders to suggest plans for interaction with that activity.

Selection criteria can include:

- quality of plan for pursuing learning agenda
- collaborating with other project implementers and other stakeholders
- plan for knowledge sharing/influencing

### *Deliverables*

Deliverables should meet two purposes, the lesser of which is accountability as it has traditionally been defined. The greater purpose is to capture knowledge in useable form, share it effectively and engage others in ways that extend USAID's impact. In other words, deliverables should be designed for maximum results and (where relevant) scale.

Deliverables can ensure accountability:

- by ensuring clarity and transparency about what activities have been undertaken according to what time frame, at what expense and with what results.

Deliverables can support learning and extend scale and impact of investments through:

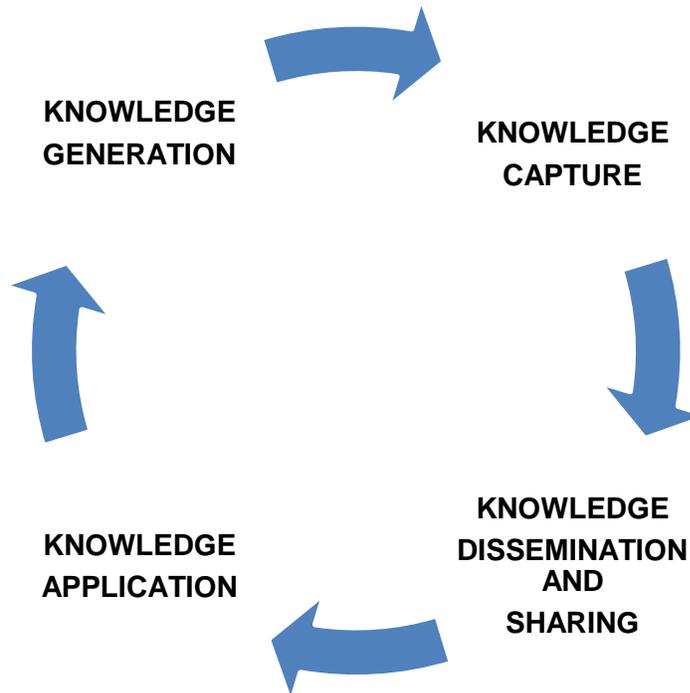
- strategic knowledge capture and sharing to expand influence—technical briefs, analytic documents for decision makers, other useable formats
- collaborative learning to increase effectiveness of project consortium—deliverables defined as leading discussion forum/community of practice, peer assists, etc.

### *Budgets*

If learning is an emphasis, project budgets should include funding for:

- knowledge generation, including collaborative efforts such as learning networks
- knowledge capture and sharing, and strategic engagement of key actors with knowledge to maximize learning and influence
- reflection leading to adaptation of project activities and application to future strategy and project design

Think of it in terms of the knowledge cycle:



K generation – generate new knowledge by building into project design:

- evaluation questions/hypothesis testing
- knowledge gap filling
- tacit/experiential knowledge exchange
- contextual knowledge seeking including tracking game changers

K capture also needs to be built into project design:

- partners should capture K in useable form – shape deliverables accordingly
- think in terms of scale and impact – deliverables designed for influence and results, not just for accountability narrowly defined.
  - YouTube videos
  - Local language briefs
  - Case stories that illustrate and analyze participant response to interventions

–Case studies of system strengthening

K dissemination and sharing:

Build interactive learning that engages partners and other stakeholders by building into project design:

- continuous learning and knowledge sharing opportunities for IPs throughout implementation, including by shaping deliverables to include hosting discussions/seminars/webinars, participating in peer assists, etc.
- strategic coordination and collaboration among partners and with country development actors—built into project design, PMP, budgets and deliverables, to ensure that IPs are engaging in topical working groups across the project consortium and with other smart people
- coordination meetings among project partners to share information about their respective interventions)
- annual meeting/Big Picture Reflection of stakeholders in USAID portfolio to review processes and results, game changing trends, and emergent learning or good practice, and discuss implications for adapting activities

K application:

Build in:

- adaptability in mechanisms
- accountability among partners for undertaking evidence-based course correction
- Mission processes for iterative reflection and adaptive course correction vis-à-vis strategy, project direction, monitoring and performance management

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### **Annex 3. Adaptive Management**

In working with partners, Missions can work to ensure that management processes involve incentivizing, facilitating and rewarding continuous adaptation of projects/activities to align with and build on new technical/sectoral learning (including evaluation findings), emergent local conditions, and evolving understanding of development hypotheses and causal logic.

Adaptive management is central to implementation. As a foundation for the Mission-implementing partner relationship, performance management has a key role to play in establishing and maintaining a learning culture in which learning is generated, captured, shared and applied in ways that make interventions more effective.

Some relevant questions include:

- what are we making our partners accountable for? how can we help them achieve the standards we set?
- how can we use the portfolio review as a learning tool?
- how can we increase incentives and lower barriers to candid knowledge sharing by treating partners as knowledge peers and bringing them into planning and decisions?
- how can we make it easier for IPs to tell us what they think? how can we engage with them as knowledge peers for mutual learning and analysis?
- what conditions do USAID staff need to put in place to enable implementers to adapt quickly when evidence suggests a course correction is needed?
- how can both Mission staff and IP staff build analytic skills so both are better at understanding and synthesizing monitoring data, other information about implementation, new research and learning coming from other development efforts, etc., and assessing the implications for the program and implementation modes?
- performance should be defined to include knowledge generation, capture, dissemination/sharing, and applying; as well as to track what other are doing, and to collaborate effectively where relevant

A critical aspect of collaborating, learning and adapting is the explicit, formal and informal processes and the spoken and unspoken values and behaviors that combine to form the culture surrounding knowledge and its application. These should be shaped in ways that encourage staff and implementing partners, advisors and other stakeholders to raise difficult questions, gather information widely, think across sectoral and other boundaries, seek understanding rather than blame, and look continuously for ways to improve prospects for positive outcomes rather than

restricting implementation to pre-formed plans. This last point is key to adaptive management, which itself is a fundamental requisite for maintaining the relevance and maximizing the effectiveness of the Mission’s assistance program. (see ADS xxx and glossary entry on adaptive management)

Translating these principles into practice will be a work in progress and will require champions, resources, sustained commitment and phased implementation.

One example of how Mission processes can be used to deepen the learning culture concerns the Portfolio Review and its treatment of monitoring data and other findings that are unexpected. Missions should devise a format for Portfolio Reviews that facilitate learning and adapting by:

- beginning from the assumption that strategies, project designs and implementation plans may need to be altered as new learning emerges or the development context shifts will be important
- ensuring that some analysis of monitoring data has been completed and shared with Portfolio Review participants in advance of the meeting(s), and that this analysis asks what can be learned (not who is at fault)—from instances both when things went as planned as well as when they did not
- using Portfolio Reviews as collaborative opportunities to build analytic capacity among participants and to engage all participants in thinking through what aspects of implementation need to be adapted, and what the implications are for other parts of the program

Additional guidance on Portfolio Reviews can be found in ADS 203.

Adaptive management entails, among other things:

- Translating new learning and shifts in context into iterative course correction in strategy and implementation (through, e.g., improved portfolio review process and Big Picture Reflections, and other ways to solicit and use input from stakeholders beyond USAID and IPs)
- Managing performance to reward candid knowledge sharing, leadership of/participation in collaborative learning efforts
- Remembering the difference between targets and results
- Putting in place incentives for collaborating, learning and adapting
- Planning for generating, capturing, sharing and applying knowledge
- Making sure that Portfolio Reviews are used to ask strategic as well as tactical questions, and assess the need for course correction

- Making sure that evaluations ask the important questions, and that findings are shared widely, and processes emphasize analyzing and applying them for more effective programs.

Performance management helps ensure that collaborating, learning and adapting are supported by Mission processes and relationships with implementing partners; monitoring ensures that necessary information is collected and analyzed in a timely fashion to feed into iterative adaptation during implementation for maximum results; and evaluation enables learning at a higher strategic and program level, informing future project design and next-generation CDCS, and forming a basis for USAID's thought leadership in the field of international development.

Collaborating is important, among many different actors: within the Mission across DOs, projects and technical areas; among IPs; with government counterparts, donors and other stakeholders; and across Missions and with USAID/W units. Collaboration internally among Mission staff, or by Mission staff with other donors, government counterparts, representatives from the private sector and civil society, can likewise be supported through coaching from a skilled facilitator, and building collaboration competencies among staff.

- How can the Mission ensure coordination – and, where it will improve results, collaboration – among the activities that constitute a project, among the projects that constitute a DO, across, DOs, and with other development actors?
- What kind of Mission management structure will aid coordinating efforts at the DO level and across the DO?

For coordination and collaboration to work, the Mission needs to:

- figure out how to constitute teams and define collaboration processes to get knowledge and learning moving across sectoral areas of specialization among Mission project design and management teams, so that insights from one sector are brought to bear on projects that focus on other sectors; and so that projects that are inherently cross-sectoral end up integrating rather than atomizing their sector-specific components
- figure out how to manage collaboration and knowledge flows within and between/among projects (keeping in mind that the definition of project = combination of activities aimed at the IR level, with “activity” consisting of grant, contract or cooperative agreement, but also non-project assistance, and formal and informal collaboration and influence employed to help achieve development objectives and the overall CDCS goal). This includes

understanding where collaboration among partners within a project, and in some cases across projects, can achieve greater results by coordinating their efforts, collaborating around their interventions or in sharing knowledge and experience.

Useful methods:

- Partner meetings
- Peer assists
- Learning networks
- Learning mechanisms that facilitate topical communities of practice

Training/coaching/support on collaboration and on facilitating collaborative relationships among partners may also be a useful input.

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## **Annex 4: Mission transformation for learning**

### **Portfolio Transformation**

As Missions adopt the Program Cycle, in most instances they'll be preparing their strategic plans while still implementing a series of contracts and grants. These will have to be reviewed and assessed to determine which will contribute to achieving results that are relevant to the new CDCS and useful for the projects to be designed. Some may need to be amended while still others may need to be terminated, possibly prior to their proposed end date. The process of doing this analysis, outlined in a new note from PPL, is innovative but untried. Learning will be involved in three ways:

- Part of the objective of portfolio transformation is to enhance the adaptability of the new CDCS's portfolio, as well to improve the learning inherent in the mechanisms. For instance, as the CDCS is operationalized through the design of projects at the IR level, many Missions may find themselves with a series of grants and contracts which are relevant to the DO but without any way to promote learning and sharing between mechanisms. Project design may in fact offer opportunities to substantially accelerate learning within and between these mechanisms, through careful amendment, or the provision of a new learning mechanism designed to leverage these existing mechanisms.
- For the activities that are continued, the Mission will need to take care that continuing them actually addresses a relevant purpose. Biannual portfolio reviews will need to pay close attention to the actual relevance of these continued "legacy" efforts, to ensure that program funds, and management time, are not wasted.
- Transformation essentially is an ongoing process, as programs react and adapt to new information and changing circumstances. In effect, learning is the fuel that drives adaptive management, while transformation is the process by which programs are reviewed, triaged, revised and improved in terms of adaptability – not just in the design of the CDCS but through the five years of the CDCS.

(include section on continuity: staff knowledge transfer, FSN-led orientation, etc.)

In some respects, what your Mission is undertaking is similar to develop a learning strategy at an organizational level; therefore, you may find useful some resources on the [Learning Lab](#), including those relating to change management at the

organizational level for learning; knowledge management and learning strategies developed by other international development institutions; knowledge management maturity models; etc.

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**RESOURCES:**

**KM maturity models**

**Excerpts from KM strategies**

**Steve Trautman webinar on knowledge transfer**

Annex 5: Staffing and Budget Scenarios (to be developed)  
Annex 6: Glossary (full) (in progress)