



DRG Mission Use of Evidence (MUSE)

Findings and Guidance for DRG Activity Planners

There are different kinds of evidence and we use evidence at different points in the design process. The different types include:



Research evidence, or systematic research that tests hypotheses, includes impact evaluations, systematic reviews, and many academic studies.








Contextual evidence, or research centered on a particular time and place, includes most USAID assessments, political economy analysis, and local data sources.



Experiential evidence, including past and personal experience, may entail input from technical experts, lessons learned exercises, and some performance evaluations.

The design process has five major decision points that can be informed by the various types of evidence. By completing a template like the one below, planners can plan strategically to find and apply appropriate evidence throughout the process.

Decision point	Type of Evidence (research, contextual, experiential)	How will evidence be collected, and by whom?	When and how will findings be incorporated?
 Strategize the problem to address			
 Diagnose the problem and its causes			
 Prescribe the best programmatic approach			
 Inform refinement of the approach			
 Target who should receive the approach			

Activity planners tend to do a good job of incorporating contextual and experiential evidence but could do more to incorporate research evidence.

A survey of

88

USAID DRG activity design planners found that

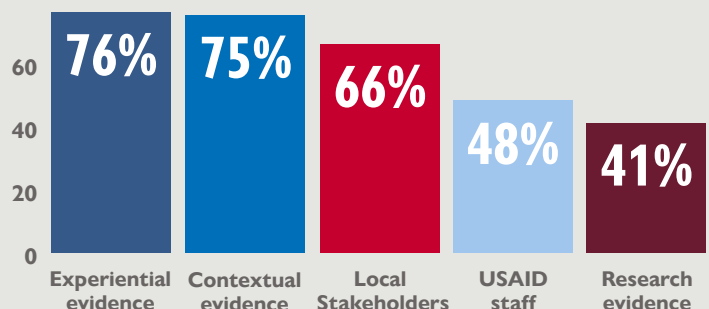
76% & 75%

Reported using experiential evidence

Reported using contextual evidence

41% But a smaller reported using research evidence

Percentage of Respondents Listing Each Source as a Significant Influence on the Activity Design (n=88)



There are a number of measures activity design planners can take to increase the use of research evidence in the design process.



1. Have confidence in your own searching! The DRG Center’s partner 3ie compiled [six evidence maps](#). Use these to search through 1,625 impact evaluations, 63 qualitative studies, and 181 systematic reviews. Supplement your search with [Google Scholar](#) and [OneSearch on USAID’s Library](#). DRG country level [Data Portraits](#) offer a valuable tool for strategic decision making.



2. Commission an evidence review: Often activity planners don’t have time to do a deep dive into the research evidence, but the DRG Center’s E&L Team commissions evidence reviews on behalf of design teams. See evidence review template and guidance [here](#).



3. Learn from the experts: Scholars are often thrilled to discover that practitioners are interested in learning from their work. A simple email to a knowledgeable source about the research evidence can lead to helpful conversations. For more formal academic-practitioner peer learning, the E&L team can work with partners at the [Evidence in Governance and Policy](#) network and [research4impact](#) to identify potential academic peers.



4. Require the use of evidence in implementing partner proposals: Often it is USAID implementing partners that are best suited to bring research evidence to bear on design decision-making. Solicitations can expressly require research evidence to support a proposed approach as an evaluation criterion. An RFI can also be used to gather evidence from implementing partners.



5. Generate new evidence going forward: In addition to using existing evidence today, we also want to be building the evidence base for the future. Rigorous evaluations require planning at the activity design stage. The DRG Center offers technical support, occasional co-funding, and an evaluation mechanism to support such planning. You can find out more about the DRG initiative Fostering Rigorous Evaluations in DRG (FRED) [here](#).



6. Tap into conversations on the use of evidence: The DRG Center has a variety of initiatives to encourage a culture of evidence and learning. Check out the monthly [Learning Digest](#), the [E&L Talk Series](#), and [Facty Friday archive](#); join the DRG Learning Community of Practice; or attend the [Using Research Evidence training](#).



7. When in doubt “Reach out”!: The DRG Center’s Evidence and Learning Team is available to help you address your evidence needs and support in evaluation planning. Reach out to ddi.drg.elmaillist@usaid.gov.

The MUSE study: The findings and guidance in this document are derived from the [DRG Mission Use of Evidence \(MUSE\): Lessons from Evidence Utilization in USAID DRG Activity Design study](#). This study included a survey of DRG activity designers, follow-up with select respondents, key informant interviews, a document review, and coding and analysis of recent requests for proposals.