GLOSSARY OF COMMON EVALUATION QUESTION TERMS

Evaluation questions form the heart of every USAID performance evaluation. A set of clear, realistic questions clearly linked to the evaluation purpose can result in detailed findings and actionable recommendations that improve program outcomes. Inversely, questions that are unwieldy, unrealistic, or difficult to understand can make a mess of even the best methodology. One of the identified challenges is providing clear and specific definitions of terms within questions. To help evaluation commissioners write clearer questions with well-defined scopes, the following guidance provides definitions and examples for how to improve performance evaluation questions across some common evaluation question themes. For more information, see the full Addressing Learning and Evaluation Challenges – Performance Evaluations report, as well as guidance on improving question scope, clarity, and feasibility.

Effectiveness: Successful in producing a specific desired result. Results may include program intermediate results or outcomes, but the former is more feasible to determine. Consider using defined categories (very effective, effective, less effective, not effective) to help make the question clearer.

Sustainability: The ability to maintain a specific outcome beyond a defined period of time, such as the program period of performance. Specify the outcome of interest (partnerships, financing, systems or processes, knowledge management, etc), as well as the time period.

Inclusivity: Ensures all people can participate in and benefit from USAID's development efforts. Specify any groups of particular relevance of interest, potentially including women, youth, LGBTIA+, and religious or ethnic minorities. For example, specify "impacts on women" instead of "impacts on disadvantaged groups."

Capacity: The ability of people, organizations, or networks to take action to solve development challenges, learn and adapt, and innovate. Specify the type of capacity of interest— this may be related to knowledge, skills, motivations, and relationships.

Partnerships and stakeholders: Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that can positively or negatively impact the program outcomes. Be sure to specify the type of stakeholders or partnerships that are most relevant.

Resilience: The ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth. Be sure to specify who is expected to experience changes in resilience and what these changes are likely to be.

Adaptive management: 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. Be sure to specify both the adaptive management strategies and the results and impacts of interest.