Program Cycle

ADS 201 Additional Help
ACTIVITY MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING PLAN
TEMPLATE

Introduction

The template that follows this introductory page provides a suggested outline and basic guidance for the
development of an Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (Activity MEL Plan) by a USAID
implementing partner. As noted in USAID’s ADS 201.3.4.10:

Activities must have an approved Activity MEL Plan in place before major implementation actions
begin. USAID Project Managers should work with the USAID Contracting Officer’s Representative
(COR), Agreement Officer’s Representative (AOR), Government Agreement Technical Representative (GATR), or Activity Manager to ensure that the Activity MEL Plan is consistent with
and meets the data collection needs of the Project MEL Plan, the Mission’s Performance Management Plan (PMP), and the Mission’s annual Performance Plan and Report (PPR).

For Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) awards, implementing partners must submit a proposed
Activity MEL Plan to the COR/AOR in accordance with the guidelines in their award or agreement,
often within 90 days of an award. In cases of partner country government agreements, the
monitoring approach, including performance indicators, should be jointly agreed upon by the
Mission and the host-country government entity as part of the direct agreement with the
government.

How to Use This Template

While Activity MEL Plans are required, this template is not required. Nor is there any Agency-wide required
structure or format of Activity MEL Plans. This template is merely offered as a helpful tool for USAID staff and
implementing partners.

USAID Missions and other Operating Units that choose to provide a standard Activity MEL Plan template to their
implementing partners may adopt this template, adapt it, or devise a standard template of their own. USAID
Missions and other Operating Units may also leave the decision of how to structure and format the Activity MEL
Plan to their implementing partners.

USAID implementing partners should consult with their COR or AOR about specific requirements or
recommendations for their Activity MEL Plan.
The italicized guidance text in each template section provides recommendations for what to include in that section, including examples and sample text. For additional guidance on Activity MEL plans see the USAID How-To Note: Activity Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan.

Please note: This document uses terminology based on USAID ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Policy. Per ADS 201, this document refers to A&A awards (e.g., contracts, grants, cooperative agreements) as activities, not projects. Projects typically incorporate multiple activities planned to achieve a shared purpose.
[ACTIVITY TITLE]
Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning Plan

Approved Date: [e.g., January, 2019]

Version: [1]

Contract/Agreement Number: [Insert number]

Activity Start and End Dates: [e.g., January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2023]

AOR/COR/Activity Manager Name & Office: [Insert name, office]

Submitted by: [Insert name, position]
[Name of Prime Implementing Partner (IP)]

DISCLAIMER
The author’s views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.
List of Acronyms
[Insert acronyms here]
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1. Introduction

This section introduces the Activity MEL Plan and provides summary background information relevant to the MEL Plan.

Start with a brief introduction of the Activity MEL Plan, its purpose and intended use. Please note that this plan will be updated periodically in response to changes in the activity theory of change, implementation, or feedback received on MEL efforts. Sample text:

Updates to this plan will be provided to the [USAID COR/AOR] for review and approval on a [quarterly/semi-annual/annual basis] (per contract or agreement) or whenever revisions to the plan are proposed.

1.1 Project Theory of Change and Logic Model

If this activity is part of a USAID project and information about the USAID project has been provided by USAID, then:

- Provide a brief (no more than one page) summary description of the project’s theory of change;
- Include the project logic model; and
- Highlight where this activity fits in the project logic model.

1.2 Activity Theory of Change

Include a brief summary description of the activity theory of change based on activity planning documents or work plans. Typically, this will include the following information:

- The context in which the development problem is situated;
- If-then (causal) outcomes needed to achieve the desired change and evidence used to support those causal predictions;
- Major interventions that the activity will undertake to catalyze these outcomes; and
- Key assumptions that underlie the success of this theory.

A logic model that graphically depicts the activity theory of change is also recommended to be included in this section. If included, it is recommended that the logic model highlight the activity’s most important performance indicators, linking each performance indicator to the result in the logic model measured by that indicator, as shown in the example on the following page.
Example Logic Model with Attached Performance Indicators

Note: There is no standard format for logic models. Please see the Project Logic Model How-to Note for examples of different types of logic models.

2. Monitoring Plan

This section provides information on how the activity implementing partner will monitor the performance of the activity and contextual factors that may affect activity performance and inform learning and adaptation throughout implementation. For additional information on Monitoring at USAID, visit the USAID Monitoring Toolkit.

2.1 Performance Monitoring

Describe the efforts that the activity implementing partner will undertake to monitor performance. This should include monitoring the quantity, quality, and timeliness of outputs and relevant outcomes to which the activity is expected to contribute. Efforts to monitor performance may include a range of quantitative and qualitative methods such as surveys, direct observation, qualitative interviews, focus groups, expert panels, the recording of administrative actions, etc.

The Activity MEL Plan must include relevant performance indicators of activity outputs and outcomes. For more information about performance indicators, see the Selecting Performance Indicators guidance document.

A summary of all performance indicators that the activity implementing partner will report to USAID should be listed in a summary table in Annex I. Include all performance indicators required or requested by USAID, including required foreign assistance standard indicators, and all additional performance indicators deemed necessary by the activity implementing partner for monitoring and reporting on progress.
Each performance indicator must:

- Be linked to an intended result (output or outcome) that it measures.
- Have a corresponding Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS) that is complete and sufficient, and included in Annex II. The PIRS should be completed in coordination with USAID, or even provided by USAID, when multiple partners are collecting data on the same performance indicator. If the PIRS is not complete at the time the plan is submitted to USAID, it must be completed within three months of the start of indicator data collection.
- Have a baseline. If baseline data have not been collected at the time this plan is submitted to USAID, the plan should note when baselines will be collected. Baseline data collection should be completed before the start of implementation actions related to that performance indicator.
- Have targets. If targets have not been set at the time this plan is submitted to USAID, the plan should note when targets will be set. Targets should be set prior to collecting and reporting data (other than baseline data) on an indicator.
- Be disaggregated by sex when measuring person-level data.

2.2 Context Monitoring

The Activity MEL Plan should include, if relevant, a description of any efforts that the activity implementing partner may undertake to monitor the conditions and external factors relevant to activity implementation. These may include: environmental, economic, social, or political factors, programmatic assumptions, and operational context. Efforts to monitor context may include a range of quantitative and qualitative methods such as surveys, direct observation, qualitative interviews, focus groups, expert panels, tracking of independent third-party indicators, etc.

If the activity implementing partner is planning to track context indicators, these should be reported in the summary list of indicators in Annex I. The Context Indicator Reference Sheets (CIRSS) should be included in Annex II, if any context indicators are planned.

3. Evaluation Plan

3.1 Internal Evaluations

Internal evaluations are evaluations that are conducted by the activity implementing partner or its sub-contractor(s), often with the intent to learn and adapt during implementation. Implementing partners are not required to conduct an internal evaluation unless it is stipulated in their contract or agreement. Implementing partners may propose to conduct an internal evaluation in their Activity MEL Plan.

This section of the Activity MEL Plan identifies any internal evaluations that the activity implementing partner plans to manage over the life of the activity. For each internal evaluation, the plan should include (at minimum):

- the type of evaluation (performance or impact);
- purpose and expected use;
- proposed evaluation questions;
- estimated budget;
- planned start date; and
- the estimated completion date.
The evaluation plan should also clarify the expected level of USAID involvement, if any, such as reviewing an evaluation Statement of Work (SOW) or draft report.

The USAID Evaluation Toolkit includes an evaluation plan template that may be adapted for use in this section.

3.2 Plans for Collaborating with External Evaluators

It is USAID’s responsibility to inform the activity implementing partner if an external evaluation of the activity is planned. An external evaluation is an evaluation that is contracted directly by USAID. If such an evaluation is planned, this section may explain how the implementing partner will interact with the evaluation team to support the external evaluation. Even if one is not planned, this section could outline expectations for collaboration in the event that an external evaluation is later determined to be necessary.

Sample text:
[The implementing partner] will assist external evaluators commissioned by USAID by:

- Reviewing and providing feedback on draft evaluation designs, draft evaluation data collection instruments, and the draft evaluation report.
- Sharing data used for performance monitoring. If this includes person-level data, [the implementing partner] will anonymize the data prior to providing it to the evaluation team.
- Providing written responses to an evaluation self-assessment questionnaire.
- Making staff available to answer questions related to the activity.
- Supporting the evaluation team in identifying and obtaining access to activity stakeholders, beneficiaries, and sites of operation.
- Supporting the evaluation team in holding stakeholder meetings to discuss and develop recommendations based on evaluation findings.

4. Learning Plan

This section explains the activity’s approach to learning from monitoring data, evaluation findings (if applicable) and other learning efforts, and how the activity implementing partner – in collaboration with USAID and other key stakeholders – will seek to pause, reflect, learn, and adapt throughout implementation. Activity implementing partners may broaden the scope of this section to function as a Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) plan for the activity. The plan may include:

- Learning questions based on the activity or project’s logic model or potential gaps in the technical knowledge base, and efforts to explore those questions.
- Knowledge generation, capture, and sharing efforts, including at activity close-out.
- Reflection opportunities (e.g., during work planning or quarterly reporting, after-action reviews, or other learning events). Information on potential participants, frequency, and utilization should be included.
- Plans for adaptive management, based on learning and knowledge gained during implementation, including from identified learning questions that will enable the implementing partner and its key stakeholders to prompt course corrections as needed.
- Strategic collaboration activities designed to support learning and adapting with and for key stakeholders (including USAID) relating to specific questions identified in the learning plan.

For more information on CLA and learning plans, visit the USAID CLA Toolkit.

5. Roles, Responsibilities, and Schedule

This section provides a schedule of individual and recurring MEL tasks during the life of the activity. This may be a simple matrix outlining tasks, responsible parties, and dates for initiation and completion. A calendar (including a link to a shared calendar) or Gantt chart may be included to illustrate the schedule. A more detailed narrative may also be included to address roles and responsibilities among multiple partners (such as sub-awardees) and involvement from USAID or other stakeholders. MEL tasks to include in this schedule may include data collection efforts, data quality assurance activities, data analysis and visualization, special studies, assessments, learning processes and events, quarterly report preparation, etc.

This section may also describe the various monitoring, evaluation, and learning reports and other information (including ad hoc and recurring reports) that will be provided to USAID during the life of the project. This may include, for example, quarterly reports, performance indicator data, activity location data, research documents, TrainNET data, learning products (i.e., syntheses, event readouts, learning and adaptation summaries), etc.

Include a summary of the content and how information will be transmitted to USAID and in what format (for instance through a partner portal of a management information system, in-person check-ins, as part of a quarterly report submission, or in an Excel file). A table may be a useful way to summarize anticipated reports and related information.

Example Table: Schedule of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Reports to USAID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Transmission to USAID</th>
<th>Description of Content/ Expected Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Resources

Specify the budget allocated to monitoring, evaluation, and learning by listing the tasks, estimated costs, and proportion of the budget. Please use a table to present the information.

7. Change Log

The Activity MEL Plan should be adjusted in response to changes in activity (or relevant project) implementation, feedback received on MEL efforts, changes in the operational context, and other new information. This section includes a table to describe the changes that are made to the Activity MEL Plan.
Plan over time. For more information about making changes to an Activity MEL Plan, please see USAID’s How-to Note: Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan.

### Example Change Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Change by:</th>
<th>Change to:</th>
<th>Description of Change:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>Person who made the change</td>
<td>Section of the Activity MEL Plan changed. If an indicator has been changed, include the indicator number.</td>
<td>Summarize the change that was made to the Activity MEL Plan and the reason the change was made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>date of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>date of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Insert Short Activity Name] Activity MEL Plan [Date]
8. Annex I: Indicator Summary Table

An example Indicator Summary Table is provided below and a template is available in the USAID Monitoring Toolkit. This plan may be adapted to include other information based on what is most relevant to the needs of the activity implementing partner or the USAID Operating Unit.

Please note that an Indicator Summary Table is not the same as an Indicator Tracking Table or monitoring information system. The Indicator Summary Table is a text table found in a PMP, Project MEL Plan, or Activity MEL Plan. It contains information about the indicators for which USAID plans to collect data. The Performance Indicator Tracking Table is a spreadsheet or database form where indicator data is recorded. Per ADS 201.3.5.7, performance indicator data must be stored in an Indicator Tracking Table or monitoring information system. Also, including information from an indicator’s PIRS in the Indicator Summary Table does not replace the need for a PIRS for each performance indicator. A template and guidance for developing a PIRS is available in the USAID Monitoring Toolkit.

Example Indicator Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Result Measured by Indicator</th>
<th>Type of Indicator</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Unit of Measure</th>
<th>PPR (Y/N)</th>
<th>Baseline Date</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Endline Date</th>
<th>Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator DR.1.5-1 Number of USG-assisted courts with improved case management systems</td>
<td>Improved operations of East Tambou civil courts.</td>
<td>Performance / Standard</td>
<td>Implementing Partner count of courts assisted.</td>
<td>Reported annually.</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>09/2017</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>09/2022</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3.4.1(a) Neonatal mortality rate (number of deaths of infants during the first 28 days of life per 1,000 live births) in childbirth facilities in the southern region of East Tambou.</td>
<td>Improved child birth outcomes in the southern region of East Tambou.</td>
<td>Performance / Custom</td>
<td>Survey of child birth facility vital registration data.</td>
<td>Reported quarterly.</td>
<td>Number per 1,000</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>01/2016</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>09/2021</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Result Measured by Indicator</td>
<td>Type of Indicator</td>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Unit of Measure</td>
<td>PPR (Y/N)</td>
<td>Baseline Date</td>
<td>Baseline Value</td>
<td>Endline Date</td>
<td>Endline Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3.4.1(b) FEMALE - Neonatal mortality rate (number of deaths of infants during the first 28 days of life per 1,000 live births) in childbirth facilities in the southern region of East Tambou.</td>
<td>Improved child birth outcomes in the southern region of East Tambou.</td>
<td>Performance / Custom</td>
<td>Survey of child birth facility vital registration data.</td>
<td>Reported quarterly.</td>
<td>Number per 1,000</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>01/2016</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>09/2021</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3.4.1(c) MALE - Neonatal mortality rate (number of deaths of infants during the first 28 days of life per 1,000 live births) in childbirth facilities in the southern region of East Tambou.</td>
<td>Improved child birth outcomes in the southern region of East Tambou.</td>
<td>Performance / Custom</td>
<td>Survey of child birth facility vital registration data.</td>
<td>Reported quarterly.</td>
<td>Number per 1,000</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>01/2016</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>09/2021</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructions:**

1. **Indicator:** State the name and unique identifier for the indicator that will measure the expected result listed in the next column. Disaggregates of an indicator may be listed on a separate row below the parent indicator.
2. **Result Measured by Indicator:** State the result statement and the unique identifier for the expected result in the theory of change that the indicator intends to measure.
3. **Type of Indicator:** State whether the indicator is a (1) a “Performance” indicator or a “Context” indicator, and (2) a “Standard” indicator or a “Custom” indicator.
4. **Data Source:** State the source of the data
5. **Frequency:** State how often the data are reported to USAID.
6. **Unit of Measure:** State the unit of measure (e.g., number of hours, percent of households).
7. **PPR:** State “Y” if this indicator is included in the PPR or “N” if this indicator is not included in the PPR. (Note: standard indicators are required to be reported in the PPR.)

8. **Baseline Date:** State the month and year (mm/yyyy) when the baseline data were collected.

9. **Baseline Value:** State the value of the indicator at “baseline,” i.e., before major implementation actions of the planned USAID-supported activity.

10. **Endline Date:** State the month and year (mm/yyyy) when the endline data will be collected.

11. **Endline Value:** State the specific value of the indicator expected at “endline,” i.e., when major implementation actions of the planned USAID-supported activity have been completed.
9. Annex II: Indicator Reference Sheets

All performance indicators require a PIRS. Completed Performance Indicator Reference Sheets (PIRS) for all indicators in the Activity MEL Plan may be included in this annex.

For Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators, see the Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator Reference sheets and Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators and USAID PIRS Cross Walk.

While not required, it is recommended that context indicators have completed indicator reference information, stored in a Context Indicator Reference Sheet (CIRS). They may also be included in this annex.
10. Annex III: Data Management

A section or annex on managing data is an opportunity to explain how data will be managed at all stages, from collection to reporting. If several organizations are jointly managing the activity, this section should touch on how data will be consistently handled across the partners to ensure a high quality of aggregated data. Potential topics to cover in this section include the following:

- **Data Collection** summarizes the data collection methods included in the PIRS or evaluation plans and explains the methods and frequency with which data will be gathered, including potential limitations or challenges.

- **Data Quality** for indicators should reasonably meet USAID’s five data quality standards of validity, integrity, precision, reliability, and timeliness. This section may address findings from Data Quality Assessments and note whether any mitigating actions are being taken to improve data quality.

- **Data Storage** sections detail the formats in which data will be held and shared. This includes file types (for example, Microsoft Word, Excel, paper copies), larger storage units (for example, a private server, a cloud-based system, file cabinets), and processes for sharing knowledge internally and externally. For more information, see ADS 579.

- **Data Security** protocols for every activity should meet a basic threshold of restricting access to key offices and workspaces, preventing unauthorized computer access, and safeguarding data during both storage and transfer. This section should detail data security protocols. In particular, personally identifiable information (PII) must be protected. For more information, see the USAID Monitoring Toolkit Data Security Guidance.

- **Data Analysis and Use** details how USAID or the implementing partner will analyze and use data. If specific software will be employed for this purpose, it may be useful to identify it by name or function.