

PROGRAM CYCLE

ADS 201 Additional Help

Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Maturity Tool

What is it?

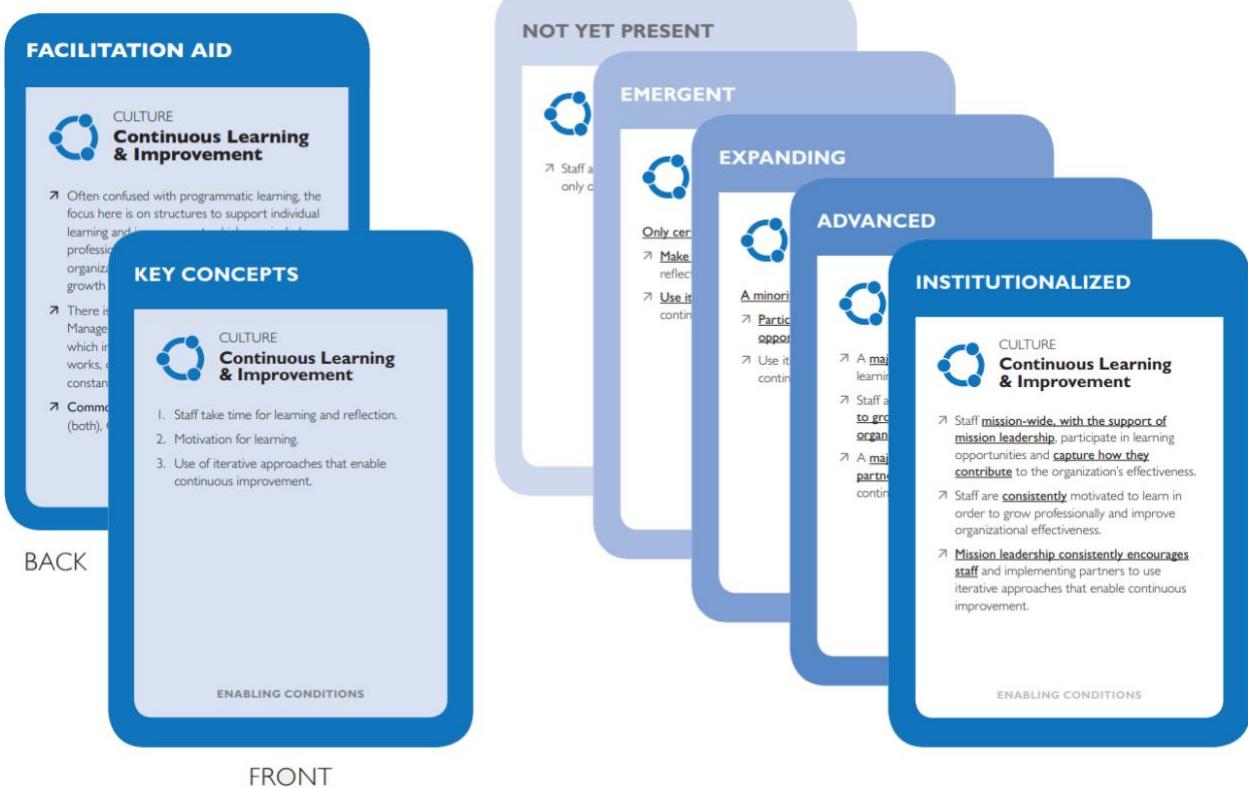
Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) involves strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management. CLA approaches to development include collaborating intentionally with stakeholders to share knowledge and reduce duplication of effort, learning systematically by drawing on evidence from a variety of sources and taking time to reflect on implementation, and applying learning by adapting intentionally.

The purpose of the maturity tool is to help USAID Missions think more deliberately about how to plan for and implement CLA approaches that fit the Mission's context and needs. Through a set of easy-to-use cards, the CLA maturity tool offers examples of what CLA looks like at different stages of maturity. USAID staff can use the deck of cards to both assess current practice and plan for the future.

The maturity tool cards correspond to the two dimensions of CLA:

- **CLA in the Program Cycle:** By using the cards to guide a conversation, teams can explore how well CLA is incorporated into the planning and implementation processes of the Program Cycle.
- **Enabling Conditions:** The cards encourage discussion of the conditions that can significantly influence how CLA and the Program Cycle are implemented at a Mission, including operating processes, organizational culture, and resourcing.

Within these dimensions, the tool covers 16 subcomponents of CLA. For each subcomponent, the maturity tool includes one key concepts and facilitation aid card and five spectrum cards. The key concepts and facilitation aid card broadly describes what the subcomponent covers (front) and offers clarifying explanations helpful in framing the subcomponent (back). The five spectrum cards describe how the subcomponent might show up in your work along a spectrum of practice, ranging from *Not Yet Present* to *Institutionalized*.



How do I get started?

There are several ways to use the CLA maturity tool, and the option you choose will depend on what you are trying to achieve as well as the amount of time you can dedicate to the exercise. The points below are intended to help you start thinking about what question(s) you are trying to answer (i.e., your purpose) and how the maturity tool might be able to help. Links to additional information and resources can be found at the end of this document.

Determine your purpose. This tool is designed to be flexible, allowing you to adapt it to meet different needs at different times. Potential purposes include: assessing the opportunities and challenges of managing adaptively; considering how to use evidence and data in programming; identifying and prioritizing opportunities as input for the Mission CLA Plan or Activity MEL Plan; engaging implementing partners (IP) in a dialogue about how you work together; and catalyzing a conversation about mission culture and processes. Determine what you are trying to achieve at the outset in order to pick the facilitation approach best suited to your purpose.

Think about who should be involved. The purpose will help determine who should be included in the self-assessment and action planning exercise. For instance, if you want to build CLA capacity within your team, consider using the tool during a regular staff meeting. If your purpose is to build capacity for collaborating and learning with IPs, you could use it at a partner meeting. As a general rule, the tool works best with groups of 5-6 people. Larger teams can be divided into small groups that complete the exercise simultaneously.

Develop the format. The purpose for using the tool, as well as who is engaged, will help determine the format and timeframe of your CLA self-assessment and action planning exercise (see the [Tool Instructions](#) for suggested formats and other helpful information). In choosing the format, consider the following:

- How much time do you have for this exercise?
- How many people will participate?
- Can you find an appropriate space to facilitate the exercise? An ordinary conference room works well for a small group of people, but you will want to be able to seat people in ‘pods’ if you have a larger group of participants.
- Do you feel comfortable facilitating the exercise or will you need to find a facilitator to assist?

Important Tips

- **Choose your facilitator carefully.** You will want to identify a facilitator who can create a safe space for all participants to speak openly. Whom you choose will depend in part on your purpose. If you intend to have a relatively short and informal conversation about your existing CLA practices (e.g., during an existing team meeting), the facilitator can be someone from your own team or a trusted member of another team. If you are conducting a longer, more-formal stocktaking (e.g., in a half-day or full-day offsite), hiring an external facilitator will ensure optimal participation from the whole team.
- **Document the process and key decisions.** The maturity tool comes with a self-assessment and action planning worksheet that you can use to document your conversation and key decisions. Consider identifying a dedicated note-taker who can complete the worksheet during your exercise and circulate it afterwards. You may also want to think about how you will socialize decisions made during your exercise with other colleagues at the mission, new staff, and/or key stakeholders.
- **Keep it simple.** All of us work within constraints. The CLA self-assessment and action planning exercise can be ‘right sized’ to help you think more deliberately about your CLA approaches in the amount of time you have available - there is no expectation that you will go through the entire deck of cards in a single session. Similarly, rather than focusing on big changes, start small and set realistic expectations for how you will improve your CLA practice. For example, you might decide to incorporate moments for reflection or analysis into meetings you already hold.
- **Think holistically.** Even when starting small, it is important to keep the bigger picture in mind. The CLA framework brings structure and intentionality to a wide variety of tasks and approaches by helping you prioritize targeted areas for improvement. The framework can also help you identify existing strengths that can be built upon to improve your practice in another area. For instance, a team with strong “pause and reflect” practices but a weak understanding of the technical evidence base might decide to use existing reflection opportunities to review and/or incorporate new evidence into programming discussions.

- **CLA is not a separate workstream.** Practices and principles of collaborating, learning, and adapting should be integrated into existing processes to strengthen our development work and improve aid effectiveness.

How can I learn more?

See the [CLA Framework & Key Concepts handout](#) to learn more. To obtain a deck of cards and to learn more about the process, please contact learning@usaid.gov.