ADS 201 Additional Help

DRAFTING A COLLABORATING, LEARNING AND ADAPTING PLAN

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. Strategic collaboration, continuous learning and adaptive management connect all components of the program cycle. CLA can help USAID program in a way that is coordinated, grounded in evidence and adjusted as necessary.

Developing a CLA plan helps ensure that learning is planned, resourced, integrated into ongoing tasks and acted on in ways that can maximize results.

The CLA plan in the Performance Management Plan (PMP) focuses on collaborating, learning and adapting at the strategy level. Project and activity Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plans address these issues for project and activity implementation. The CLA plan in the PMP should inform project and activity MEL plans. As projects and activities are designed, the PMP and CLA plan should be updated as necessary, so that activity MEL plans, project MEL plans and the PMP complement each other. (See the Project MEL plan and Activity MEL plan guidance for more information.)

The Mission's Program Office is responsible for drafting the CLA plan, managing its implementation and updating it as necessary. However, support and technical offices should be involved in developing and implementing the plan as appropriate.

Contents of a CLA plan

The CLA plan should include information on how CLA activities will support the Mission's CDCS and describe mission-level activities and processes to address:

- strategic collaboration;
- learning at the strategy level;
- opportunities for reflecting on progress to inform adaptation; and
- resourcing these activities.

It may also address the enabling conditions--organizational culture and processes--that affect learning.

The text box below describes some of the activities and processes that might be included in a CLA plan.

CLA Activities and Processes

These are some of the types of activities and processes that Missions may consider including in their CLA plans, as appropriate:

Strategic Collaboration
- Coordinating site visits among technical teams to encourage collaboration
- Facilitating implementing partners' efforts to collaborate and share information with each other through joint work planning sessions or other means

Learning
- Developing learning agendas or questions around critical knowledge gaps at the Development Objective, project or activity level
- Identifying trends or changes in the context that could impact the portfolio and processes for tracking and responding to them
- Participate in knowledge sharing forums, such as communities of practice and learning networks

Reflection to Inform Adaptation
- Planning for facilitated reflection sessions with local stakeholders to regularly gather information on context changes
- Instituting stocktaking and other reflection opportunities to consider new learning, shifting priorities, and necessary adaptations


Each activity or process listed in the plan should include information on:

- ● *Roles and Responsibilities* - Which office or staff member will be responsible for leading the activity or process?
- ● *Expected Outcomes* - What is the intended outcome for each action item? What will change as a result of implementing the identified process or activity?
- ● *Timeline* - What are the key milestones and/or deadlines for the action items?
- ● *Resources* - What resources (including staff time, mechanisms, implementing partners, funding, etc.) will be used to implement the action item?
- ● *Next steps* - What is the first step to be taken in implementing this action?

Developing the CLA Plan

An effective CLA plan is based on first understanding the organization's current practices that support strategic collaboration, continuous learning and adaptive management -- both the successes and challenges -- and then defining aspirations for these practices and the practical steps to achieve them. Missions can opt to use the CLA maturity matrix tool to facilitate the self-assessment and action planning process. The CLA maturity matrix is a set of cards that offer illustrative examples of what CLA looks like at different stages of maturity; when missions use the tool, staff are engaged in conversations that help define priorities and next steps to strengthen learning processes. (See the maturity matrix overview for more information).

CLA maturity matrix cards
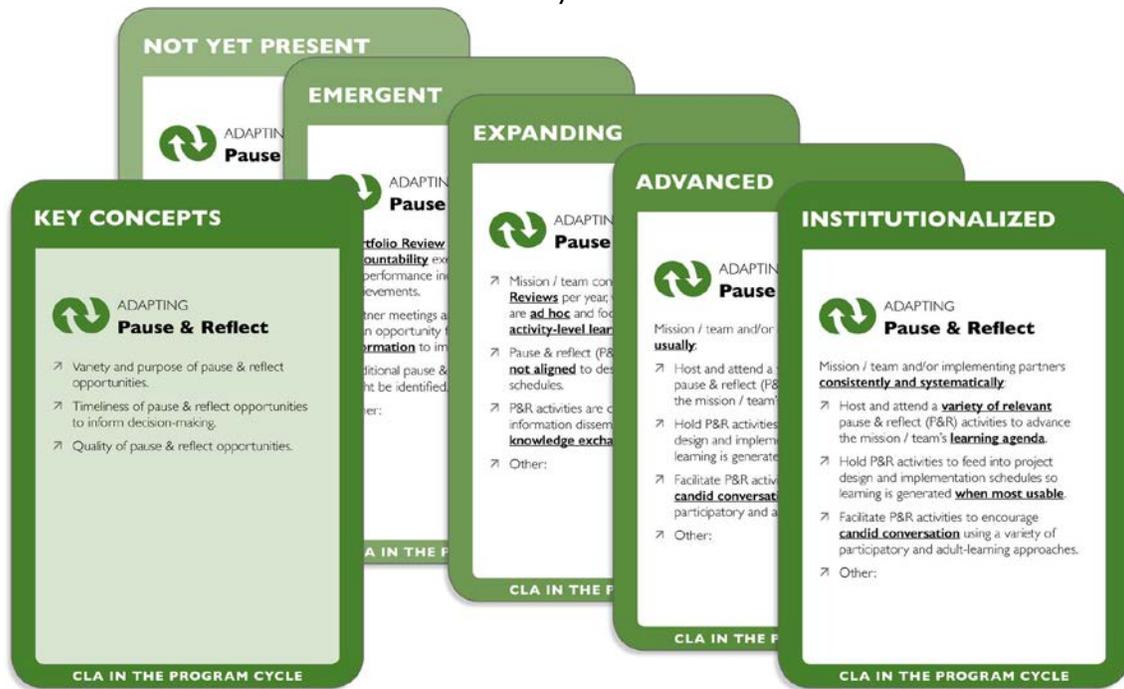
Alternatively, the Mission may use another organizational learning, knowledge management or organizational development assessment tool, or convene staff from a variety of offices in a meeting or series of meetings around CLA.

Discussions or participatory activities during these meetings should address questions such as:
1. **Collaborating**: Are we collaborating with the right partners? In the right way? How are we collaborating internally? Which relationships or networks need attention?
2. **Learning:** What processes and activities are in place to encourage learning? What sort of questions are we asking to fill knowledge gaps and make informed decisions? How are we using and learning from our monitoring data and evaluations? How are we learning from program implementation? How are we sharing what we've learned internally and with stakeholders?
3. **Adapting**: What are we doing to regularly reflect on our programs and the context in which we work? How are we using what we've learned from collaboration and learning activities to make decisions and adjustments? What processes and activities are in place to encourage adaptation?
4. **Enabling Conditions**: How does our organizational environment support our collaborating, learning and adapting efforts? What changes in the organizational culture or processes would make the biggest difference?

Based on these discussions, the Mission should decide on a few priority areas of focus during the strategy period. There are several principles to keep in mind during this process:
● CLA should build upon and reinforce existing processes and practices as much as possible, rather than creating new ones. CLA should not be viewed as a separate workstream.

- Not everything can be a priority. While it is important to set stretch goals, in certain areas the mission may already be practicing collaborating, learning or adapting at an appropriate level for their context. In those cases, planning to maintain the status quo or make incremental changes may be the best course of action.
- The focus areas and level of attention paid to certain activities and processes will vary depending on the context, budget, staff and other factors, so CLA will look different in every Mission.
- CLA approaches should be based on the mission's context and programs, with an emphasis on practices that will be the most effective in intensifying development results.

Using the information gained during the self-assessment, the Mission drafts a CLA plan, using one of the templates provided or another format.

Follow-up/Review

Like the rest of the PMP, the CLA plan should be used as a management tool and revisited periodically. As the context changes, priorities evolve, and the strategy is implemented, learning activities should be adjusted accordingly. Regularly updating the plan helps ensure that learning continues to be addressed systematically, resourced adequately and integrated with ongoing work. Missions should consider updating the CLA plan in conjunction with any PMP updates, portfolio reviews, stocktaking exercises or other major learning events. Missions may also find it useful to revisit the maturity matrix or other assessment exercise to check on progress and re-validate priorities.

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COLLABORATING, LEARNING AND ADAPTING PLAN TEMPLATE

This plan describes the mission's approach to Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA)--a set of processes and activities that help ensure programming is coordinated, grounded in evidence, and adjusted as necessary to remain effective throughout implementation.

Introduction

This section may include a description of:
- The Mission's CLA priorities
- How these priorities support the Mission's development goals
- The process or approach used by the Mission to identify CLA priorities

Missions may describe their plan in narrative form, as a table (both options below), a combination of both, or another format.

CLA Summary

This section should include a description of the Mission's plans to address:
- Strategic collaboration
- Learning at the strategy level
- Reflection opportunities to inform adaptation
- Organizational culture issues (optional)
- Mission processes (optional)
- How the Mission plans to resource CLA activities described above.

Key activities may be included in the PMP task schedule. If not, include information in this section on timing and next steps.

Roles and Responsibilities

This section includes a brief narrative on the Mission's approach to implementing this plan and who will be responsible for which activities.

Expected Outcomes

Include narrative that describes what the Mission hopes to achieve with the CLA activities described above. {What is the desired end state? What will be different about the mission's CLA or development practices in five years? How will the Mission know if efforts have been successful?} If used earlier, the Mission may revisit the CLA maturity matrix tool to gauge progress and reassess as needed.

CLA Summary

Activity or Process	Responsible Office or Person	Expected Outcomes	Timing	Resources	Next Steps
Strategic Collaboration					
Learning					
Opportunities for Reflection					
Organizational Culture (optional)					
Mission Processes (optional)					