



HELP! I'M HIRING NEW STAFF, AND I WANT THEM TO WORK ADAPTIVELY.

A tool to help you increase your chances of selecting staff skilled in adaptive management

WHAT CAN THIS TOOL HELP ME WITH?

If you are involved in hiring, this tool can help you increase your chances of selecting staff members skilled in adaptive management. It will help answer the questions:



Which **competencies** should I recruit for in order to hire more adaptive employees?



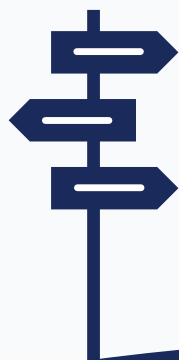
Which desired **qualifications** should I incorporate into position descriptions to attract adaptive employees?



Which **interview questions** should I ask to screen for adaptive employee competencies?

You should use this tool when you decide to hire a new individual - whether that be a direct hire, contractor, or consultant - or when you are changing an individual's current position description or scope of work. Specifically, this tool will help you determine which qualifications are most important for the position and offers interview questions you can use with candidates. USAID staff can also use this tool to consider what types of skills they want to see incorporated into solicitations for key personnel.

If you have any questions about or suggestions for this tool, please reach out to LabEIA@usaid.gov.



WHAT IS AN ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEE?

Individuals, **regardless of title**¹, who in **collaboration**² with relevant stakeholders, **systematically**³ **acquire and use knowledge** to make **decisions** and **adjustments**⁴ in their work in order to achieve greater **impact**⁵.



WHY DO ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEES MATTER?

With industries, technologies, and organizations in a near constant state of flux, leaders are recognizing the importance of adaptability. Along with the intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EI), the [adaptability quotient \(AQ\)](#) - defined as the “ability to adapt to and thrive in an environment of change” - is gaining recognition as a critical capacity. Because of this, it is not surprising that a recent [LinkedIn report](#) found that adaptability was the most important soft skill hiring managers were screening for.

Within the field of international development, there is a [growing recognition](#) that staff need adaptive management skills in addition to strong technical or sector-specific skills. USAID is in many ways leading the charge and has elevated the importance of adaptive management through a variety of high level policies and frameworks, including the integration of [collaborating, learning, and adapting \(CLA\)](#) throughout the Program Cycle ([ADS 201](#)), the Agency’s [Policy Framework](#), [Acquisitions and Assistance Strategy](#), [leadership philosophy](#), and [Risk-Appetite Statement](#).

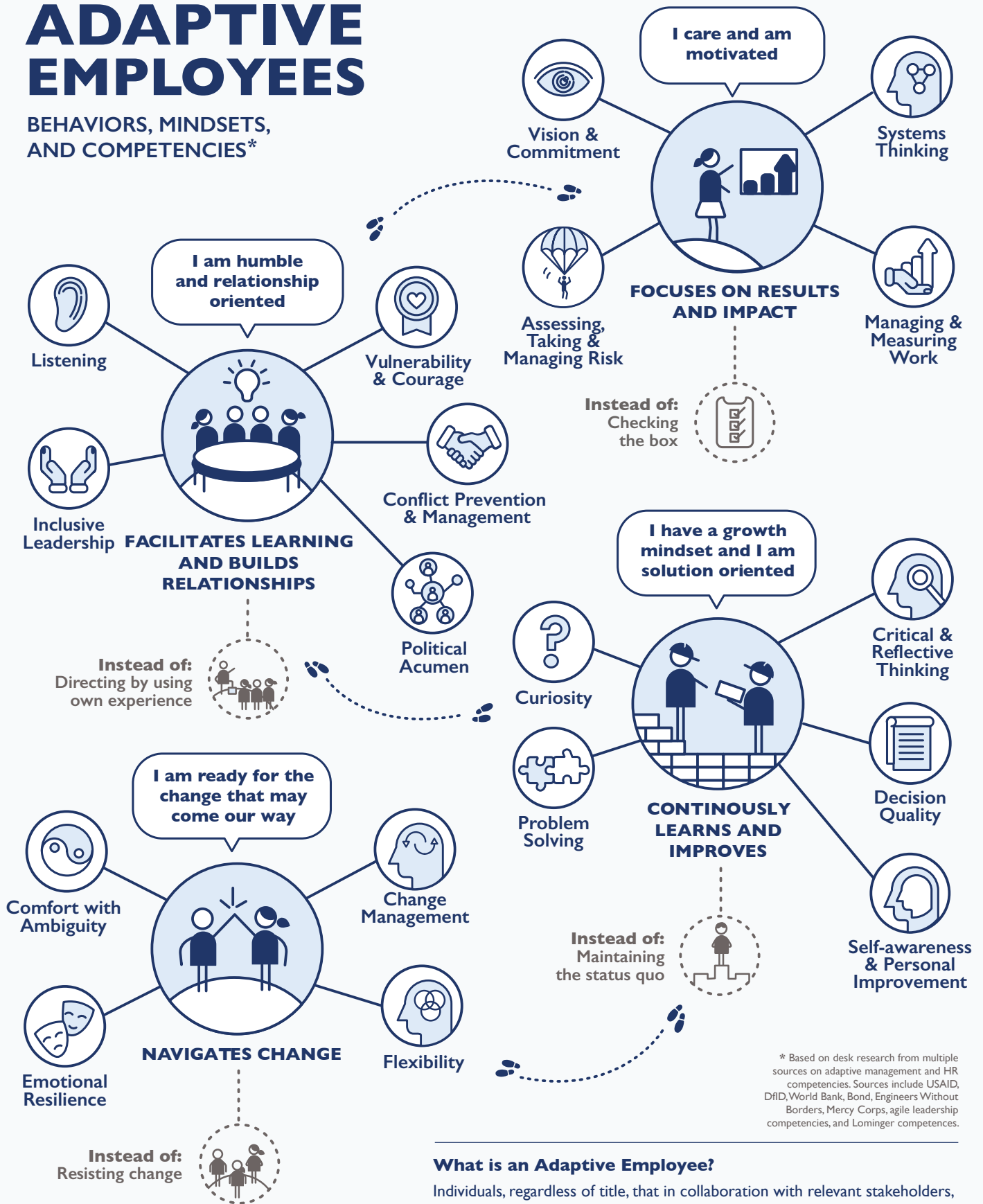
[Evidence](#) also shows that teams that apply more data-driven and adaptive leadership practices perform better compared to those that focus less on those practices. It’s no surprise then that managers want to recruit more team members who are skilled in adaptive management—it helps achieve results.

The following page provides a synthesis of the key adaptive employee behaviors, mindsets, and competencies. It is based on research from multiple sources on adaptive management and HR competencies, including USAID, DfID, World Bank, Bond, Engineers without Borders, Mercy Corps, agile leadership competencies, and Lominger competencies.



ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEES

BEHAVIORS, MINDSETS, AND COMPETENCIES*



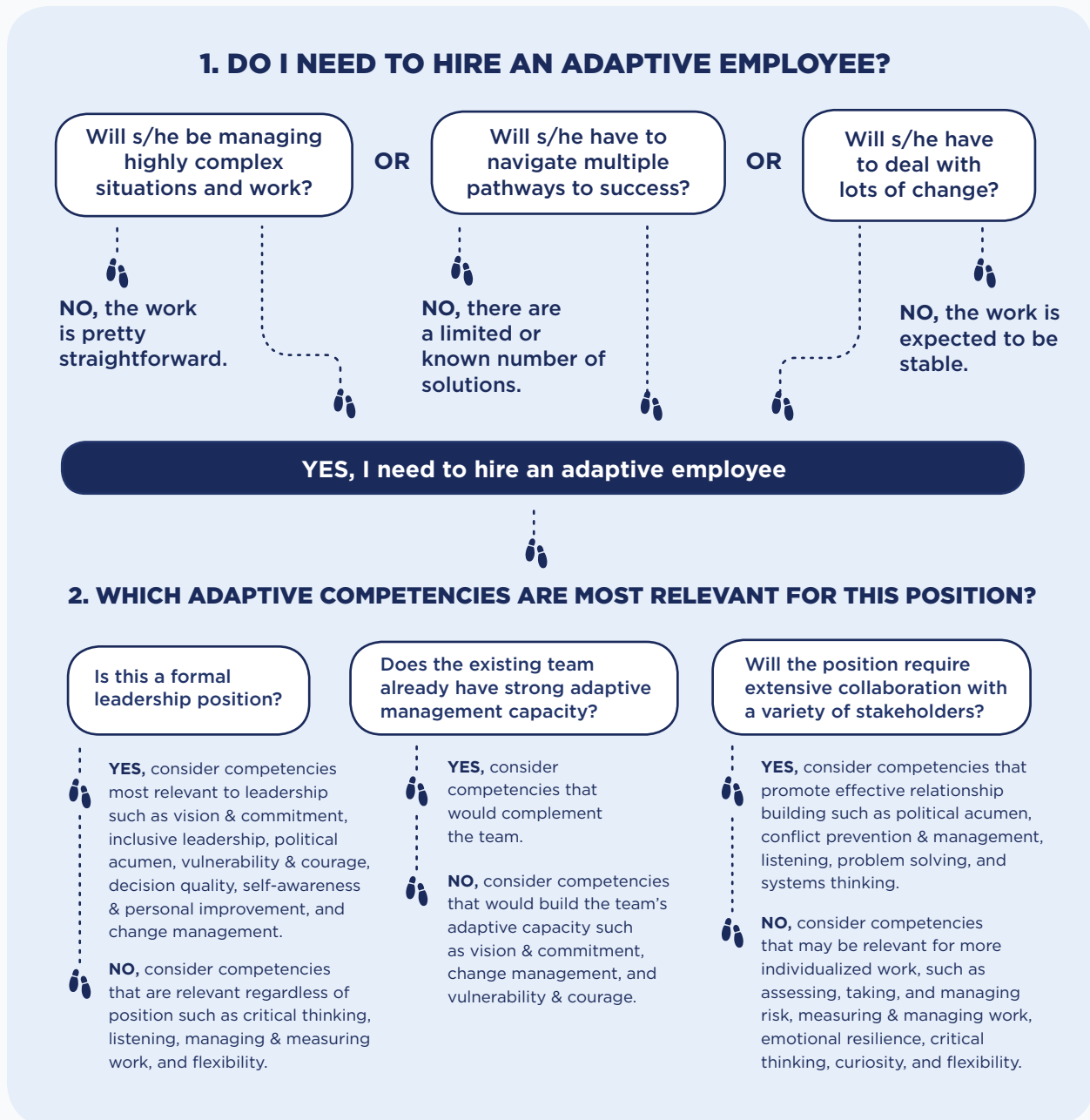
* Based on desk research from multiple sources on adaptive management and HR competencies. Sources include USAID, DFID, World Bank, Bond, Engineers Without Borders, Mercy Corps, agile leadership competencies, and Lominger competencies.

What is an Adaptive Employee?

Individuals, regardless of title, that in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, systematically acquire and use knowledge to make decisions and adjustments in their work in order to achieve greater impact.

WHICH COMPETENCIES SHOULD I RECRUIT FOR IN ORDER TO HIRE MORE ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEES?

Not all positions will require highly skilled adaptive employees. Likewise, not all positions that need adaptive employees require the same competencies. The decision tree below will help you determine which adaptive employee competencies (found on the previous page) would be most relevant to the position. If you're not sure how to answer the questions in the decision tree, speak with your colleagues, especially those who have been in similar positions.



There are a variety of considerations that could affect which competencies you select, and the above considerations don't provide an exhaustive list of relevant competencies. Use your knowledge of your particular situation to select the competencies that are most relevant to the position and the needs of your team.

WHICH DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD I INCORPORATE INTO POSITION DESCRIPTIONS TO ATTRACT ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEES?



FOCUSES ON RESULTS AND IMPACT



Vision & Commitment: Ability to articulate a clear vision of what should be accomplished and how and to persevere to achieve results



Systems Thinking: Ability to understand, affect, connect, and leverage various parts of a system while maintaining sight of the whole system



Taking & Managing Risk: Ability to determine whether new ideas are worth pursuing and develop processes to assess whether they are bearing results



Assessing, Managing & Measuring Work: Ability to set clear objectives, coordinate resources, people, and processes, and manage feedback loops to adjust approaches as necessary



FACILITATES LEARNING & BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS



Listening: Ability to actively listen (i.e., seeks to understand, asks good questions, paraphrases, and is in tune with speaker's emotional state)



Vulnerability & Courage: Ability to share lack of knowledge, mistakes, or failures; give and receive feedback; and raise difficult questions or concerns



Inclusive Leadership: Ability to work collaboratively with all kinds of people and make those you work with feel valued and part of the team regardless of background or role



Political Acumen: Ability to maneuver through complex political situations, demonstrating an understanding of power relations and sensitivity to how people and organizations function



Conflict Prevention & Management: Ability to proactively identify potential disagreements, notice existing disagreements, tactfully bring them into the open, and support others in expanding areas of agreement

WHICH DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD I INCORPORATE INTO POSITION DESCRIPTIONS TO ATTRACT ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEES?



CONTINUOUSLY LEARNS AND IMPROVES



Curiosity: Ability to articulate and explore novel areas of learning that would contribute to greater effectiveness



Critical & Reflective Thinking: Ability to analyze and understand situations from a variety of perspectives



Decision Quality: Ability to make quality decisions based on a mixture of analysis, evidence, and experience.



Problem Solving: Ability to weigh information and options and determine the most appropriate and high impact solutions to complex challenges



Self-awareness & Personal Improvement: Ability to recognize and develop personal strengths and areas in need of improvement and adjust style and approach depending on what the situation requires



NAVIGATES CHANGE



Comfort with Ambiguity: Ability to deal with a lack of clarity in role definition, work processes, and decision-making and to create clarity for others when little exists



Flexibility: Ability to accept the unexpected and adjust to what the situation now requires rather than what was planned



Emotional Resilience: Ability to stay composed and act as a calming influence through difficult situations, crises, or periods of change



Change Management: Ability to identify, manage, initiate, and influence change and manage and support others through change. That change may be brought about by external factors beyond their control or because they recognize a need to change to achieve greater and more sustained results.

WHAT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK TO SCREEN FOR ADAPTIVE EMPLOYEE COMPETENCIES?

Interviewing candidates is an opportunity to assess the extent to which they could manage adaptively if you hire them. This section provides sample interview questions you can use. As with the qualifications earlier, select interview questions based on the most relevant adaptive employee competencies given the nature of the position and composition of the existing team.

Some interview questions below include “green” and “red” flags; green refers to what you would want to hear from the candidate and red the opposite.

Many of these questions are considered behavioral interview questions, requiring candidates to provide specific examples where they exhibited certain behaviors. Do not be surprised if candidates need a few moments to come up with examples. Remain comfortable in the silence while they consider the question. Feel free to ask follow-up questions to gain greater clarity about the situation and the candidate’s response to it.

General

Note that the interview is an opportunity to check for the listening and curiosity competencies.

Listening: Are interviewees listening to your questions and responding with relevant information? If you are providing information to the interviewee, are they incorporating what is important to you into their responses?

Curiosity: Does the interviewee have relevant questions for you, indicating their curiosity about the position and organization?

① Tell me about a time you demonstrated _____ (insert adaptive employee competency you are interested in hearing more about).

② Give me an example of a time when you felt you led by example. What did you do and how did others react?¹

GREEN FLAG

Interviewee provides an example that demonstrates one of the adaptive manager competencies.

RED FLAG

Interviewee provides an example that is not aligned with the team or organization’s values.

¹ LinkedIn, 2017. [30 Behavioral Interview Questions to Identify High Potential Candidates.](#)



Facilitates learning and builds relationships

- 1 Tell me about one of your favorite experiences collaborating within a team, with another team, or with another organization. What was your contribution to making that an effective collaboration?

Competencies: potentially listening, vulnerability & courage, inclusive leadership, and political acumen

- 2 Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a challenging relationship and/or situation but did not have formal authority.

Competencies: political acumen, inclusive leadership, flexibility, comfort with ambiguity, conflict prevention & management

- 3 Ask the candidate to explain something complex in a simple way; the candidate selects the topic and must also engage you in the explanation in some way. Provide the candidate with five minutes to prepare (and a flip chart, markers, post-its, etc.) and 3-5 minutes to explain. You can leave the room as they prepare. After the discussion, ask the candidate to reflect on what went well and what could have gone better.

Competencies: inclusive leadership, vulnerability & courage, comfort with ambiguity, decision quality, emotional resilience, critical & reflective thinking

GREEN FLAG Candidate communicates clearly and makes the interviewer(s) feel included in the discussion. Candidate is able to identify strengths and areas of growth that align with the interviewers' assessment.

RED FLAG Candidate does not present confidently, is unclear, etc., and doesn't engage the interviewers. Candidates' assessment of performance misaligned to that of interviewers'.

- 4 When was the last time you asked for direct feedback from a peer or superior? What prompted you to ask for feedback?²

Competencies: vulnerability & courage, listening

GREEN FLAG Candidate requested feedback to improve themselves, their working relationships, and/or overall results without it being required.

RED FLAG Candidate was forced to request feedback as part of a standard performance review process.

2 LinkedIn, 2017. [30 Behavioral Interview Questions to Identify High Potential Candidates.](#)



Continuously learns and improves

- 1 Can you tell me about your most recent failure or mistake? What did you learn from the experience? How have you applied what you learned since then?

Competencies: self-awareness & personal improvement, critical & reflective thinking, vulnerability & courage

- 2 Describe how you expand your knowledge and skill base at work. When was the last time you intentionally did this? What prompted you to do this? How did you use your new knowledge or skill?³

Competency: curiosity, self-awareness & personal improvement

GREEN FLAG

Candidate describes ongoing learning approaches and learning from peers.

RED FLAG

Candidate describes one-off instances of learning (i.e., a training) rather than an intentional and systematic approach to continuous learning and improvement.

- 3 Present the candidate with a real, current challenge being faced by the team/office - it could be strategic or operational. Ask them to generate as many alternatives as possible (provide 2-5 minutes of prep time) and make it clear they are being assessed on the breadth/range of options. After the discussion, select an idea and ask the candidate to talk through the possible downstream consequences of implementing it, both positive (intended) and negative (unintended).⁴

Competencies: critical & reflective thinking, problem solving, systems thinking, decision quality

³ LinkedIn, 2017. [30 Behavioral Interview Questions to Identify High Potential Candidates.](#)

⁴ Beam Exchange. Accessed 2018. [Traditional Interview Questions.](#)



Navigates change

- 1 When you suffer a setback or series of setbacks, what are some strategies you use to cope with the stress?¹

Competency: emotional resilience

GREEN FLAG

Candidate intentionally integrates strategies that promote long-term, personal well-being indicating capacity to deal with challenging circumstances.

RED FLAG

Candidate fails to articulate clear strategies for dealing with setbacks.

- 2 Tell me about a time when you were required to change an approach or plan on-the-fly (i.e., in the moment with very little warning). What happened and what did you do?

Competencies: flexibility, comfort with ambiguity, decision quality

- 3 Tell me about a time when you initiated substantive change in your team or organization. What was the change, how did you manage it, and what were the outcomes?

Competencies: change management

¹ Adapted from University of Southern Maine. Accessed 2018. [Competencies Listing with Sample Behavior-Based Questions.](#)



Don't forget about reference checks!

Reference checks are another opportunity to learn more about potential candidates and help validate what you hear directly from candidates. You can use variations of the interview questions above when checking references.

WHAT ABOUT EXISTING STAFF?

This tool is focused on bringing on new team members, but what about existing staff? What resources can help them gain greater skills in adaptive management?

FOR USAID STAFF:

- Take the online *Introduction to Collaborating, Learning & Adapting in the Program Cycle*; register in USAID University.
- Take the 5-day, in-person *Better Development through Collaborating, Learning & Adapting* training; register in USAID University.
- Join the Collaborating, Learning & Adapting Community of Practice to share with and gain adaptive management resources from colleagues; to join, email learning@usaid.gov.
- Update your individual learning and training plan in USAID University to include a focus on adaptive employee competencies.

FOR EVERYONE:

- Take the online *Introduction to Collaborating, Learning & Adapting in the Program Cycle*; find it on usaidlearninglab.org.
- Check out the Collaborating, Learning & Adapting toolkit (usaidlearninglab.org/cla-toolkit), specifically the section on Adaptive Management.



We would love to hear from you!

We are considering investing additional resources in tools like this one. Your feedback will help inform that decision. Did this tool help you? How? What can be improved? What else do you need help with?

Please send your comments and suggestions to LabEIA@usaid.gov.



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