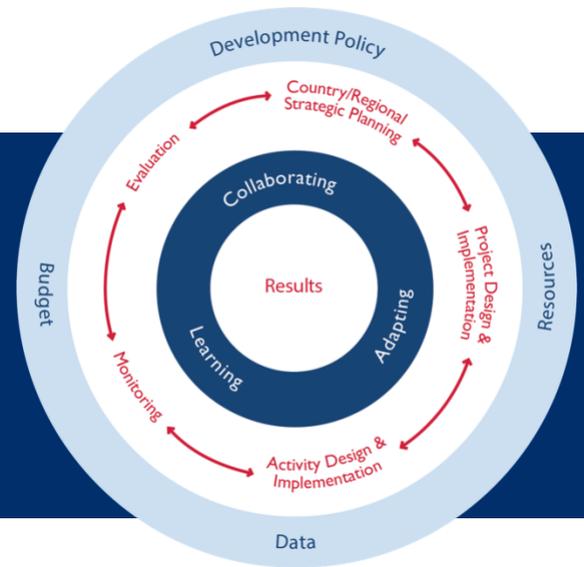# PROGRAM CYCLE

How-To Note:
Prepare & Maintain a Performance Management Plan

This resource provides tips for conducting a project design process that results in a Performance Management Plan.

How-To Notes provide guidelines and practical advice to USAID staff and partners related to the Program Cycle. This note was produced by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL).

Introduction

This How-To Note supplements ADS 201.3.2.15. It provides an overview of the Performance Management Plan (PMP) and outlines practical steps for developing and maintaining a PMP. The primary audience includes Program Officers, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Specialists, Learning Advisors, technical officers, and Project Managers.

Background

A PMP is a Mission-wide tool for planning and managing the process of (1) monitoring strategic progress, program performance, programmatic assumptions, and operational context; (2) evaluating performance and impact; and (3) learning and adapting from evidence. Missions use the PMP to inform the allocation of resources to support monitoring, evaluation, and Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) efforts, portfolio review processes, and Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) mid-course stocktaking.

Each Mission must prepare an initial Mission-wide PMP within three months of strategy approval. The Mission Director must approve the initial PMP, and then sections of it must be uploaded to ProgramNet, selecting "Performance Management Plan (PMP)" as the USAID Content Type, and selecting the Mission in the Regions & Countries box. Missions that do not have a CDCS, RDCS, or other strategic framework (henceforth strategy) are still required to have a PMP covering all projects or activities they fund.

It is not expected that the initial PMP will be comprehensive upon approval. A Mission should continually update the PMP components over the life of a strategy, including updating learning priorities or questions, adding newly planned evaluations, integrating new or adapted monitoring approaches and/or indicators, and any other new learning efforts.

While a Mission should update the PMP any time it is needed, it must be reviewed and updated at a minimum at least once each year following the annual strategic portfolio review.

Format and Content of the PMP

There is no standard format for a PMP. Missions should use a format that best fits their management and communication needs. A PMP is not required to be a single document, and its content may exist in different tracking systems or databases. There are, however, minimum content requirements for a PMP as described in ADS 201.3.2.15. Missions may include additional content in the PMP to suit their performance management needs.

Templates for required elements are available in the Monitoring Toolkit or are in development. PMPs should provide clear and concise information that can easily be reviewed and updated to reflect actual mission priorities and plans

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND MODIFICATION LOG

The Table of Contents and Modification Log describes each part of the PMP and links to any information in different files or systems. It also provides a log of modifications over time. This document connects all of the content together for ease of access. It helps a mission track the living nature of the PMP, with changes and updates logged in real time.

IDENTIFICATION OF LEARNING PRIORITIES AND PLAN TO ADDRESS THEM WITH MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND CLA

Section Overview

Missions must identify learning priorities and describe how they plan to address them, including through monitoring, evaluation, CLA efforts, and/or other studies, research, or analyses. Rather than planning these efforts in isolation, the Mission should consider how monitoring, evaluation, CLA, and other learning efforts reinforce each other and together contribute to addressing the learning priorities and help build an evidence base for decision-making. The Mission may also include information for how they intend to use monitoring, evaluation, and CLA activities and approaches to build the capacity and commitment of local partners. This section should be concise and easy to review and update and can be presented in a variety of ways (e.g., as a narrative, a presentation, or a chart or other type of visualization). It can be organized by learning priority, by development objective, by type of effort (e.g., monitoring, evaluation, and CLA), or any other way that is relevant and useful for the Mission.

> **PMPs and Activity MEL Plans**
>
> A **Performance Management Plan (PMP)** is developed by a Mission following CDCS approval to monitor, evaluate, and learn from the strategy.
>
> An **Activity MEL Plan** is typically developed by an implementing partner following an award. It is approved by the AOR/COR and describes plans to monitor, evaluate, and learn from a USAID activity.
>
> Each plan serves a distinct management purpose, but they are related and should be congruent, with some information appearing in more than one plan. For instance, a performance indicator may have relevance for, and appear in the PMP and one or more Activity MEL Plans.

Learning Priorities

The PMP should identify the Mission's initial set of learning priorities for CDCS implementation as of initial PMP approval and update learning priorities as needed as things change over time. Learning priorities are a short list of themes or topics critical to the Mission's strategic, programmatic, and operational decisions and implementation of its strategy. These may include validating its strategy's development hypotheses and

results framework, filling in evidence and knowledge gaps, and considering implications for achieving and understanding progress toward results. Learning priorities may be developed from scratch, drawn from CDCS learning questions, and/or consider questions (while not duplicating efforts) from relevant Agency-wide or Sector-based Learning Agendas.

While there is no one right way to approach developing learning priorities, the process of identifying learning priorities will generally follow four broad steps: (1) gathering and reviewing inputs such as CDCS learning questions, assessments, completed evaluations, and/or through facilitated participatory processes with staff and stakeholders; (2) identifying learning themes across inputs and persistent knowledge gaps; (3) narrowing to the most critical 3-4 learning priorities for a given time period and resource envelope; and (4) sharing learning priorities with staff and partners and integrating them into Mission Program Cycle processes. As with the rest of the PMP, the learning priorities should be updated and revised over the life of the CDCS. Missions should review the learning priorities and update them as needed following the annual strategic portfolio review or the mid-course stocktaking. Missions can also update the learning priorities at any time as new learning needs emerge or evidence gaps are identified.

Monitoring

Monitoring efforts should address learning priorities, support adaptive management, and help Missions understand progress toward achieving results. The monitoring approach should describe how Missions will use monitoring information to address learning priorities; support any relevant evaluations and other analyses; monitor strategic program performance at the Intermediate Result (IR) level; and monitor aspects of the operational context, including any key risks, that could affect the achievement of program results. While performance and context indicators may be listed in a separate database or file, this document should discuss how indicator data and other monitoring information will be analyzed and used. Where applicable, this section should also describe any plans to align with local monitoring priorities, use local systems or data, and/or strengthen local partners capacity to monitor. This section also may include descriptions of other efforts besides indicator data that will be useful for monitoring expected results or changes in context, such as periodic narrative reports, qualitative assessments, partner meetings, and expert panel reports.

Learning Agenda or Learning Plan

A systematic plan for identifying and addressing critical learning priorities and knowledge gaps through answering priority questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of an Agency or at the sub-agency level. Learning agendas should articulate critical questions, how to address them, and how to use the resulting evidence. More broadly, a learning agenda is a coordination tool for engaging stakeholders in evidence planning and building. In Missions, the learning priorities in the CDCS and PMP reflect learning agendas. USAID's Agency-wide Learning Agenda is equivalent to the Agency evidence-building plan required in Section JOI of the Evidence Act (Section 312(a) of Title 5 of the United States Code). (Chapter 201)

Learning Priorities
A list of key themes or topics critical to programmatic and operational decisions and implementation for the Agency; an Operating Unit; sector; strategy; project; activity; or a specific initiative. Learning priorities can include emerging patterns, cross-cutting themes, knowledge gaps in the existing evidence base, critical assumptions, identified (or emergent) risks, and points of connection with scenario planning or with context monitoring. Learning priorities come from various sources and inform learning agendas. (Chapter 201)

Learning Questions
Learning questions are specific, answerable, need-to-know questions that can be answered through monitoring, evaluation, research, or other analysis to address learning priorities incrementally. Several learning questions can cluster under a single learning priority and can contribute to a broader learning agenda or plan. (Chapter 201)

to address the PMP learning priorities. In addition, consider and document how monitoring, evaluation, and CLA activities will be mutually reinforcing and build on each other.

2d. Review and Select Performance Indicators

At the time of initial PMP approval, ensure each IR defined in the CDCS has one performance indicator and that baseline data or a plan for collecting baseline data is included. Performance Indicator Reference information does not have to be complete until within three months of collecting indicator data (and preferably before data are collected).

2e. Evaluation Plan – Identify Proposed Evaluations

Identify the evaluations for inclusion in the Evaluation Plan. At the time of initial PMP approval, these should include, at a minimum, evaluations planned to meet the one evaluation per IR requirement. Revisit the list of performance indicators in case any will be relevant for planned evaluation questions or evaluation planning reveals new monitoring data needs.

2f. Schedule of Performance Management Tasks and Associated Resources

Review updated sections of the PMP for tasks that should be scheduled, assign a POC, estimate needed resources to complete the task, and identify the timeline for task completion. This section can be created specifically for the PMP, or the Mission can update other project management schedules or calendars with this information and provide a link to that in the Table of Contents and Modification Log.

3.   MISSION DIRECTOR APPROVAL

The Mission Director reviews, comments on, and ultimately approves the initial Mission-wide PMP within three months of CDCS approval. The initial PMP should have the following minimum information:

- The Table of Contents and Modification Log with links to other sections of the PMP or description of where the information is located;

- The Learning Priorities and Plan to Address Them through Monitoring, Evaluation, and CLA (this can be a narrative, a chart or spreadsheet, a graphic, or other format);

- Confirmation that each IR has a performance indicator and a link in the Table of Contents to the location of indicator information;

- Confirmation that the Evaluation Registry has been updated with initial plans for any known evaluations (or a link to the location of this information if it is not in the Evaluation Registry); and

- The Schedule of Performance Management Tasks and Associated Resources (or a link to the location of this information if it is stored within an existing Mission management plan).

Updating, Sharing, and Using the PMP

Initial approval of the PMP is just the beginning. A PMP is only valuable for informing Mission decision-making if it is updated, shared, and actively used.

UPDATE

Although the initial PMP is approved three months after the CDCS, it is not expected that the PMP will be comprehensive upon approval. The PMP is updated and changed over the life of a CDCS as new

projects and activities are designed; strategies, projects, and activities are modified during implementation; or performance management efforts require adaptation to better serve Mission needs.

Missions must keep the PMP up to date to reflect:

- Changes in the CDCS;

- Identification of new learning priorities and needs and efforts to address those needs;

- Updates following each annual strategic portfolio review;

- Project purpose performance indicator upon the approval of any new projects or modifications to existing projects when those result in changes to the project purpose;

- Other project related changes such as new evaluations or CLA activities;

- Addition of new monitoring indicators or revision of existing indicators; or

- Identification of new evaluations to be conducted.

At a minimum, the Mission should review and update the PMP at least once per year as part of the Mission's portfolio review process as described in the PMP Schedule of Tasks and Responsibilities. Mission Director approval is not required on the iterative updates made to the PMP following initial approval.

SHARE

It is critical for Missions to share relevant parts of the PMP and associated information with external entities contributing to USAID's performance management processes. For instance, PIRSs should be shared with implementing partners reporting on indicators in the PMP. Other stakeholders, such as joint funders or country partners, may also value understanding USAID performance management efforts as described in the PMP. Prior to sharing the PMP, procurement sensitive information should be removed, such as plans for evaluations that will be contracted.

Upon initial PMP approval, Missions must upload the Table of Contents and Modification Log and the Learning Priorities and Plan to Address Them with Monitoring, Evaluation, and CLA to ProgramNet, selecting "Performance Management Plan (PMP)" as the USAID Content Type, and selecting the Mission in the Regions & Countries box. Once the PMP is uploaded, Missions should inform their Regional M&E POCs and the PPL Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research by sending an email to MandE@usaid.gov.

USE

As *a plan*, the PMP should document a Mission's expected efforts to monitor, evaluate, and learn from the implementation of the CDCS. In particular, the PMP should be used to:

- Set expectations about monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts over the life of the CDCS;

- Ensure that monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts are adequate to facilitate strategic learning, adaptively manage risks or seize opportunities, and implement the strategy; and

- Highlight monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts that require coordination across teams so that these efforts are efficient and mutually reinforcing.

Ultimately, Missions should use the monitoring data, evaluation reports, and learning that result from the planned efforts described in the PMP. See the [Monitoring Toolkit](#), [Evaluation Toolkit,](#) and [CLA Toolkit](#) for further information on using monitoring data, evaluations, and learning activities.