

PUTTING COLLABORATING, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING (CLA) INTO PRACTICE

USAID is increasingly using co-creation approaches to procurement. While this practice is helping to design more creative and responsive programs, significant shifts in context and priorities often take place after implementation begins. In many cases, findings from mid-term evaluations may come too late to inform effective and meaningful program adaptation. Can using a Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach to co-design earlier in the implementation phase create opportunities for more locally led and responsive development?

A new approach, piloted by USAID's Local, Faith and Transformative Partnerships Hub (LFT) through the [Cooperative Development Program \(CDP\)](#), is **collaborative redesign**: a process by which implementing partners and USAID come together to pause and reflect, revisit assumptions, and incorporate early learning into the program plan around 12-18 months into activity implementation (rather than after the midpoint). This process advances locally led development by integrating the knowledge and expertise shared by the local partners who lead activities in the field.

From February-September 2020, USAID's CDP completed a collaborative redesign process with nine activities. By timing the process just over a year into implementation, the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) ensured activities could be adapted based on early learning from baseline studies, gender assessments, stakeholder workshops, and memoranda of understanding with local partners.

The collaborative redesign built trust and transparency in the partnership, and fostered a culture open to adaptive management. Implementing partners were encouraged to revisit their original workplan to reflect on their program description, budget, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan. Partners appreciated the opportunity for reflection and meaningful course correction. The AOR found it valuable to discuss technical learning and an intentional shift for more effective programming. **This document shares key learning from the process and provides a framework for other AOR/CORs considering adopting this approach.**



USAID.GOV

EQUAL EXCHANGE

CDP implementing partner brainstorms with a local cacao cooperative in the Dominican Republic during a workshop on member equity.

CO-CREATION AT USAID

ADS 201 encourages the use of co-creation when the Agency needs to work alongside multiple actors to address complex problems. Co-creation can increase local ownership of USAID programming, and also improve/augment USAID's programmatic ability to achieve intended results by ensuring activity design and implementation is informed by meaningful engagement with a broad array of local stakeholders.

“

This process allowed us the opportunity to re-engage our partners, hear more on what they're learning and revisit and validate old assumptions.

”

- USAID AOR

“

It's a good exercise to ask ourselves how the activities are impacting our members and how they can be adapted as we gain a better understanding of topics like gender, member equity, and climate change that allows us to rethink activities and adjust them for the better.

”

- LOCAL COOPERATIVE IN MEXICO

ELEMENTS OF COLLABORATIVE REDESIGN

These recommendations are based on Agency [guidance on co-creation](#) and have been refined based on learning from the CDP's experience:

1. **Set objectives:** Clear objectives are crucial, not only to design a useful workshop, but also to generate partners' buy-in to the process. Objectives should reflect desired goals and outcomes of this collaborative approach.
2. **Consider timing:** Ensure the collaborative redesign is timed late enough into implementation that assessments and early learning have taken place, but significant time for strategic shifts remains (e.g., 18 months into a five-year program, or 12 months into a three-year program).
3. **Select and invite participants:** Consider who needs to be “in the room” to achieve stated objectives. If you have a sense of the type of participants you want (e.g. subject matter experts, interagency representatives, local partners) but do not know who to involve specifically, spend time to develop a list of interested actors, and reach out to partners for suggestions. Communicate the collaborative redesign objectives and process with participants clearly, openly, and early.
4. **Prepare for the session:** Review relevant background materials, recent reports, and assessments.
5. **Run the event(s):** Events can be in-person or virtual, using platforms such as Google Meet. Successful collaborative redesign events benefit from a clear introduction, a problem definition stage, a solution ideation stage, and a purposeful reflection on the process and outcomes. The event should have a designated facilitator, ideally the AOR who is most familiar with the partner and program.
6. **Follow up, finalize and enact the action plan:** In the weeks following an event, there is typically a need for follow-up communication to develop or refine an action plan. Where relevant, link partners to helpful Mission and Operating Unit technical contacts.
7. **Reflect:** Requesting partner feedback through a short survey at the end of the process helps to guide next steps in the collaborative redesign and build your knowledge about what works best (and what doesn't).

“

*This process of learning and adapting is continuing as we **revise our action plans** in light of the COVID-19 crisis. We believe this project can open a new window to support the development of entrepreneurs, and with the **opportunity to adapt** the action plan and understand the markets where they operate, we will have more ways to meet their development needs.*

”

- LOCAL COOPERATIVE IN GUATEMALA

“

*We felt a lot of **trust** in the USAID team so we were able to share very transparently. The **mutual respect** and sense of **shared goals** allowed for a genuine exchange.*

”

- IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

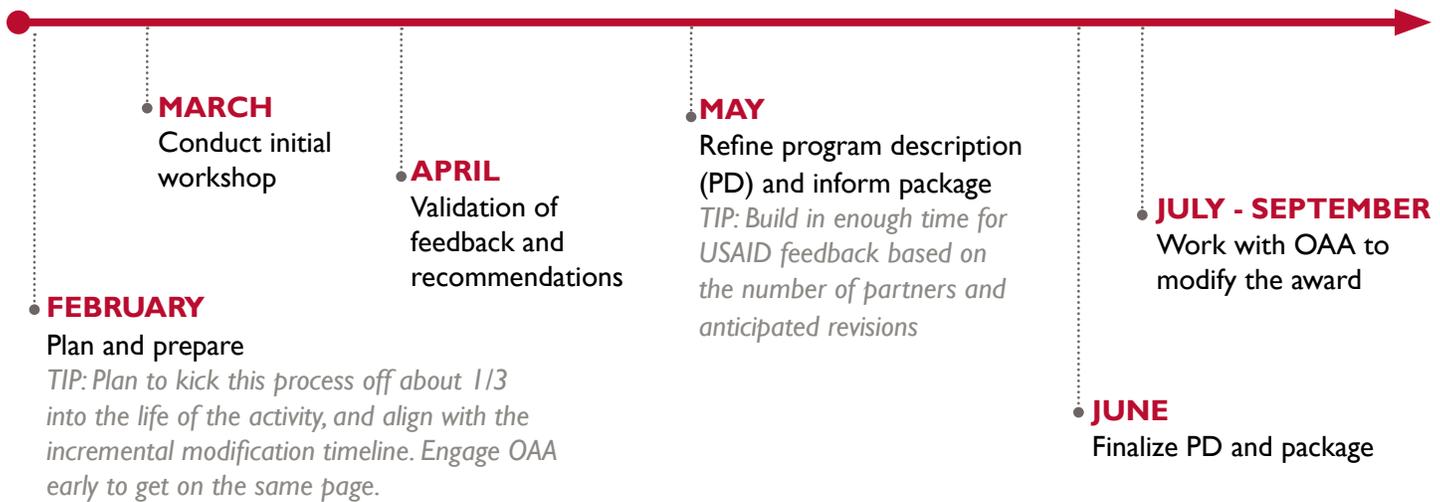
PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

“Our team highly valued the invitation to pause and reflect about our program description, work plans and objectives, resulting not so much in a pivot away from the original [plan] but rather a deepening of our commitment to restoring original elements that had gotten lost, and some new ideas about how to achieve the original goals. The timing also worked well—late enough in the project so we had good information about what was working and not working, but **early enough to be able to make some meaningful mid-course corrections**. The extended timeline also allowed us to **take time for reflection** without having to churn out a revised budget and program description at the same time. One key element of the process was that **we felt a lot of trust in the USAID team so we were able to share very transparently**. The mutual respect and sense of shared goals allowed for a genuine exchange.”

- CDP Implementing Partner Staff

SAMPLE TIMELINE

These months are illustrative based on the CDP experience, and should be customized depending on the activity timeline.



THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF COLLABORATIVE REDESIGN

A good practice is to request feedback from USAID staff and partners to understand how they perceived the redesign process. In this case, partners most appreciated the **opportunity for real-time feedback** and the dedicated space for **meaningful course correction**. They also shared how this process could be improved through clearer communication and expectations. Some of the Do's and Don'ts from this feedback are:



DO

- Clearly communicate the process and expectations to participants
- Anticipate and mitigate disruptions related to technology, physical space, and time
- Listen actively and ask clarifying questions. Provide honest feedback during the event
- Refamiliarize yourself with the partner's program description and budget
- Work together to determine next steps



DON'T

- Overcomplicate or overpopulate the agenda
- Forget to encourage partners to bring their sub-awardees or local partners into the preparation of the event
- Make assumptions on potential programmatic shifts
- Forget to bring your AO or CO in early and maintain consistent communication throughout
- Forget to have fun with the process; get creative!

SAMPLE AGENDA: COLLABORATIVE REDESIGN WORKSHOP

The CDP AOR scheduled collaborative redesign workshops for 1.5 hours with each partner, which included:

1. Overview of Activity
2. Current Activity Description
 - Problem statement
 - Objectives and results
 - Activities by region
 - Partners - local and international
3. Revisiting Assumptions
 - What partner anticipated
 - What happened in practice
4. Learning from initial start up/implementation
 - Baseline and gender assessments
 - Work planning and activity development
5. Process for informing collaborative redesign
 - Field and headquarters staff reflection
 - Engagement with local partners
 - Mission engagement
6. Proposed revised Program Description
 - Problem statement
 - Objectives and results
 - Activities by region
 - Partners - local and international
7. Questions and discussion from the group
8. Next steps in collaborative redesign



NCBA CLUSA

In Madagascar, a CDP implementing partner meets with a local dairy cooperative to discuss project priorities.

“

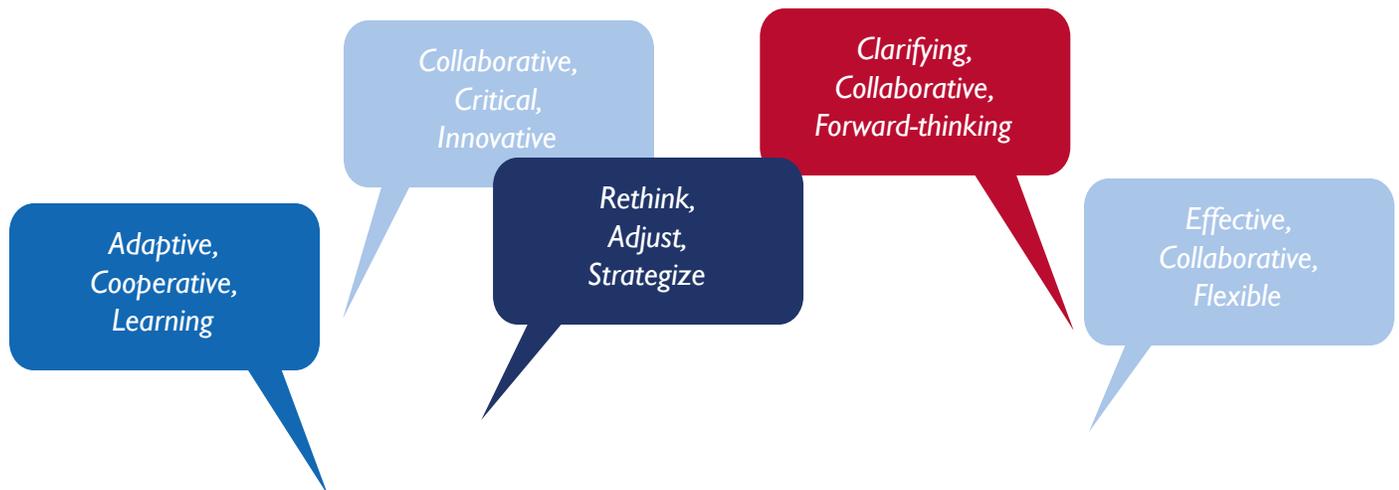
*Since cooperatives bring together families from different contexts and changing realities, and in doing so, have to respond to issues and needs on a daily basis, we often experiment with new technologies and new training methods. **You never stop learning and redesigning helps to continue that learning.***

”

- LOCAL COOPERATIVE IN MEXICO

PARTNER FEEDBACK: COLLABORATIVE REDESIGN IS...

The AOR asked partners to describe the collaborative redesign process in three words. They shared:



Questions about collaborative redesign?

For more information, please contact the LFT Hub at localsustainability@usaid.gov.