LEARNING QUESTIONS
CHECKLIST

This checklist is intended for use by USAID and implementing partner staff when developing or reviewing learning questions during monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) planning processes (i.e., USAID Performance Monitoring Plan and Project MEL plan development or implementing partner Activity MEL plan development). You can use this checklist to assess the appropriateness of each learning question based on utility, focus, feasibility, and inclusivity. For more on learning questions and MEL, see also the USAID Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Toolkit section on Learning Agendas and M&E for Learning, the USAID Monitoring Toolkit, and the USAID Evaluation Toolkit.

USEFUL

☐ **Does the question have clear use/applicability in our work?**

Answers to the question directly inform programmatic decisions and help us identify specific actions that we should take or avoid. Avoid asking questions that do not have clear use. One way to help determine if a question has clear use would be to develop a use case.

☐ **Will the question be answered in a timely manner so that answers inform our decision-making and management processes?**

Questions that can only be answered after key decisions are made are not useful because they will lack clear use/applicability in our work.

FOCUSED

☐ **Is the question clear?**

Make sure the question is understood similarly by multiple people. Define key terms that could have multiple meanings or varied interpretations.

☐ **Will the question, when answered, help us be more effective?**

Consider the CLA Framework and Maturity Tool under the learning component for questions to focus on. For example, does this question test/explore our theory of change and/or help us understand the local context or critical operational decisions?

☐ **Is this question still unanswered?**

Always check first if your question has already been answered by someone else to avoid spending unnecessary time and money. Within your organization, check shared drives and intranets or ask colleagues. You can also search the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) for resources or check with your pillar or regional bureau (USAID) or headquarter technical or regional staff (implementing partners), Google Scholar (for academic articles and books), and general Google search for grey literature. USAID staff can also request assistance to identify relevant USAID documents from the Agency's Knowledge Service Center (ksc@usaid.gov).

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FEASIBLE

Note that for this criterion in particular, it may not be possible to determine whether the learning question can feasibly be answered until you determine the learning activities or methods to be used.

☐ **Is the question answerable?**

Given the scope of the question, consider whether there are appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods that can be used to answer the question and whether those methods will be considered valid and credible by the users of the learning.

☐ **Do we have the resources to answer this question?**

Consider whether sufficient financial and staffing resources are available to manage and carry out the learning activities and apply the learning that comes out of the effort. Consider what resources are actually needed to achieve minimum rigor and provide credible and valid learning for use by the intended audience.

☐ **Do the anticipated benefits of answering the question outweigh the effort required?**

If the level of effort (money, time, resources) required to answer the question outweighs the anticipated benefits of answering the questions (use, informing adaptations, contributions to the field, etc.), it is likely not worth including the learning question.

INCLUSIVE

For every question asked, there are individuals responsible for carrying out learning activities to answer the question and those who we hope use the answers to inform their work. Often we fail to collaborate with those stakeholder groups, reducing the likelihood that answers to learning questions will be used to adapt and improve programming.

☐ **Has the question been developed with and/or reviewed by those who will be answering it?**

☐ **Has the question been developed with and/or reviewed by those who we expect will use the answer in their work?**

Once all learning questions and learning activities have been identified, ask yourself whether the questions you've prioritized are likely to generate fresh and innovative thinking that improve programming. Also, remain flexible; remove questions with clearly documented answers and add questions should something come up that you did not think to ask.