CLA MATURITY TOOL

TOOL INSTRUCTIONS

VERSION 7

OBJECTIVE

To identify a few key specific ways that more intentional and systematic collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) could improve your effectiveness.

MATERIALS

Provided in the box:

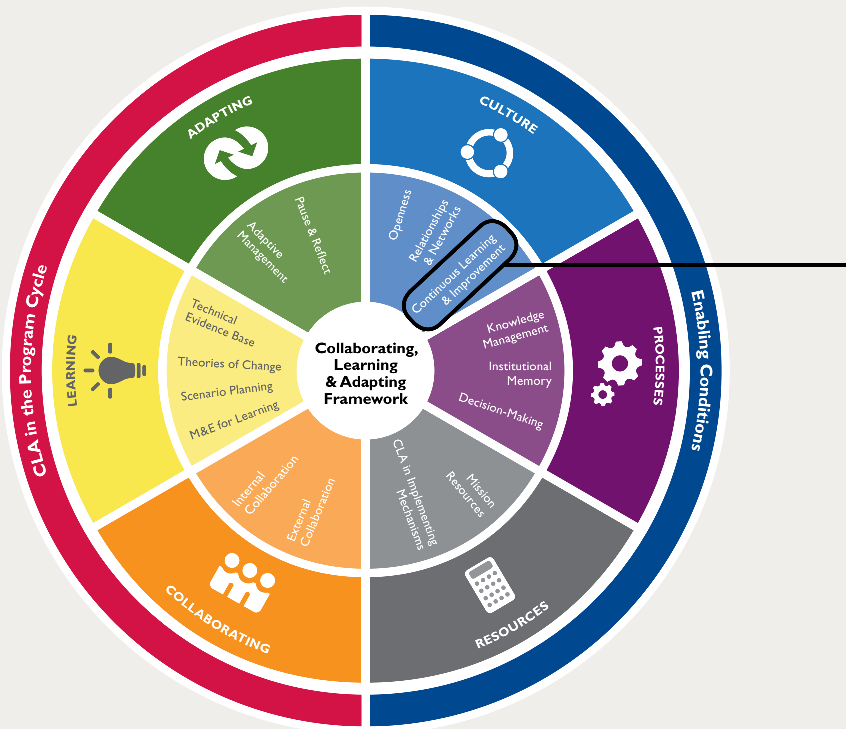
- 1 instructions booklet
- 1 deck of Maturity Tool cards with the following for each of the 16 subcomponents in the CLA Framework:
  – 1 key concepts and facilitation aid card
  – 5 spectrum cards—*Not Yet Present*, *Emergent*, *Expanding*, *Advanced*, and *Institutionalized*
- 1 CLA Framework handout (make a copy for each participant)
- 1 facilitator shorthand guide
- Individual stage card photocopy template (5 sheets—*Not Yet Present* to *Institutionalized*—4 cards per sheet)
  NOTE: *Each participant needs a way to indicate his or her perception of your current practice. Prior to the exercise, make copies of the stage card photocopy template, cut out the cards, and create one 5-card pack for each participant. Participants can also use tokens (e.g., coin, poker chip) as a marker instead of the stage cards.*
- 1 additional discussion questions booklet

Other recommended materials: Flip charts/other note-taking materials, sticky notes, markers, dot stickers.

CONNECTING THE CLA FRAMEWORK AND MATURITY TOOL

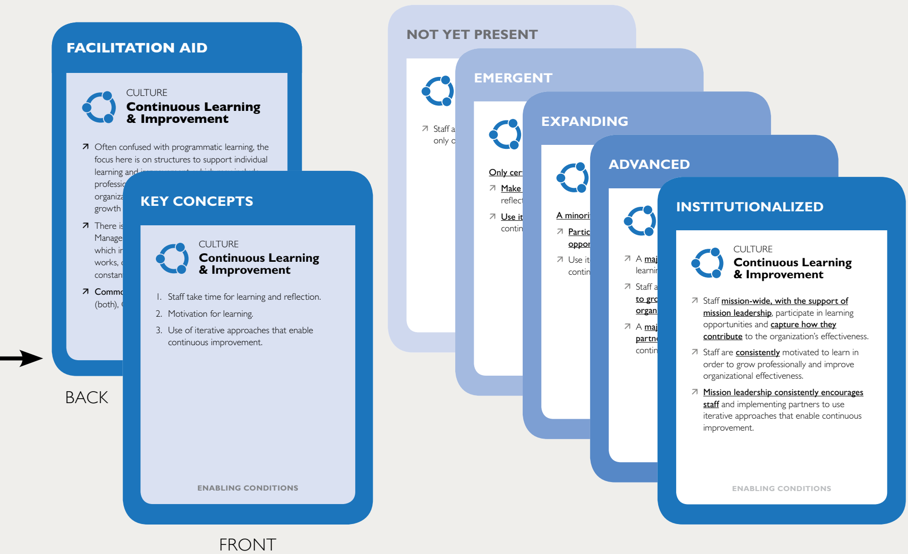
The CLA Maturity Tool can help you explore the CLA Framework (shown below) across a spectrum of practice for the following:

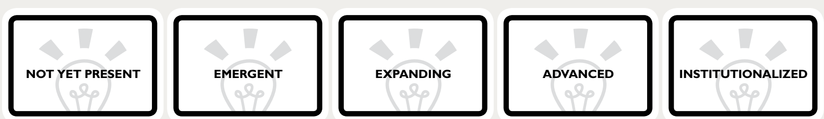
- **CLA in the Program Cycle** – the extent to which CLA is incorporated throughout Program Cycle processes, including strategy, project, and activity design and implementation.
- **Enabling Conditions** – the extent to which your organizational culture, processes, and resource allocation support CLA institutionalization.



The cards in the deck are color-coded by component (e.g., light blue cards will help you discuss Culture). Each of the 6 **components** has 2–4 **subcomponents**. The 16 subcomponents are shown in the inner ring of the framework (e.g., Continuous Learning & Improvement).

For each subcomponent, the Maturity Tool includes key concepts and facilitation aid and 5 spectrum cards. The **key concepts and facilitation aid** card broadly describes what the subcomponent covers (front) and offers clarifying explanations helpful in framing the subcomponent (back). The 5 **spectrum cards** describe how the subcomponent might show up in your work along a spectrum of practice, ranging from *Not Yet Present* to *Institutionalized*.





Individual **stage cards** should be organized into packs of 5, with a card for each stage, from *Not Yet Present* to *Institutionalized*. Make photocopies of the individual stage card photocopy templates, cut out the cards, and create a 5-card pack for each participant.

PLANNING

DECISIONS TO MAKE AHEAD OF TIME

- **When to use the tool?** You can use it at any time, but it may be particularly useful during team/mission retreats, work-planning, strategy development, stock-taking and pause & reflect activities, etc.
- **Who will facilitate and take notes?** It can be helpful to have people external to the participating team facilitate and take notes to allow team members to fully engage in the conversation.
- **Who will participate?** Identify the boundaries of the group/unit the self-assessment and action planning will focus on (e.g., DO team, office or office subunit, cross-functional team, the whole mission).
- **What will be the role of leadership?** Confirm what role leaders will play (e.g., full discussion participant, absent from or silent observer of the self-assessment, larger role in action planning to model commitment, etc.).
- **How much time will you have?** See page 8 on determining the number of rounds you will hold.
- **How many participants will you have?** For 6 participants or more, see Special Instructions on page 18.
- **How will you decide which subcomponents to self-assess?** See page 11 on choosing subcomponents.
- **How formal will your action planning be?** The full action planning process is found on pages 14–17. A simplified option is described on page 19.
- **What information will you capture and with whom will you share it?** Be transparent with participants about who will see what.

ROLES

FACILITATOR

This can either be someone on your own team or a trusted member of another team. The facilitator will:

- ensure common understanding of the CLA Framework,
- lead the process of choosing subcomponents (see page 11),
- ask prompting questions to help the conversation flow and encourage active engagement from all participants, and
- keep time and manage transition between rounds.

The facilitator should familiarize themselves in advance with these instructions, the key concepts and facilitation aid cards. Frequently Asked Questions are also addressed on USAID Learning Lab: usaidlearninglab.org/faqs-cla-self-assessment-and-action-planning.

NOTE: *If you have more than ~6 participants and plan to break up into smaller groups, you will likely need more than one facilitator. Plan to have a table facilitator for each small group and one main session facilitator (the main facilitator can also facilitate a small group discussion).*

NOTE-TAKER

It is very helpful to have note-takers who can capture highlights from the conversation. Preferably, this is someone other than the facilitator(s) or a participant. The note-taker will document the self-assessment conversation and action planning decisions, and distribute the notes after the exercise is complete. A note-taking/report template is available on USAID Learning Lab at usaidlearninglab.org/library/cla-maturity-tool-facilitator-resources.

DETERMINE THE AGENDA

Each self-assessment round lasts approximately 20–25 minutes, during which you will discuss 1 subcomponent. The length of your action planning round will depend on how detailed you want to be. The number of rounds you hold may be determined by how much time you have for the exercise.

EXAMPLE AGENDAS DEPENDING ON TIME AVAILABLE:

GREAT: 3 HOURS*	
Introduction & Subcomponent Selection	(15 min.)
Self-assessment 1	(20 min.)
Self-assessment 2	(20 min.)
Self-assessment 3	(20 min.)
Self-assessment 4	(20 min.)
Break	(15 min.)
Action planning	(60 min.)
Next steps	(10 min.)
*Action planning can occur in a separate meeting	
GOOD: 2 HOURS	
Introduction & Subcomponent Selection	(15 min.)
Self-assessment 1	(20 min.)
Self-assessment 2	(20 min.)
Self-assessment 3	(20 min.)
Action planning	(40 min.)
Next steps	(5 min.)

TEASER: 1 HOUR OR LESS	
Introduction & Subcomponent Selection	(10 min.)
Self-assessment 1	(20 min.)
Self-assessment 2	(20 min.)
Action brainstorm*	(10 min.)
* This simplified option is described on page 19.	

Both in this table and on the following pages, approximate times are noted in parentheses next to each step in the process. These are intended only as a guide; the facilitator should be prepared to adjust as needed.

NOTE: *There are several variations of the action planning process. See* usaidlearninglab.org/faqs-cla-self-assessment-and-action-planning *for ideas and options.*

ROOM SET-UP

If you have options in terms of the venue or its arrangement, look for a room where the facilitator and all participants can gather around in order to see the cards during the self-assessment. If you have a large group and will need to divide into smaller groups, it may help to have smaller tables. Also ensure that there is space for action planning, either with whiteboards, clear wall space or flipchart stands.

INTRODUCTION & SUBCOMPONENT SELECTION

1. **Set the stage (5–10 minutes)**

   FACILITATOR: Establish the context for the activity, explaining what CLA is (if necessary) and why it is important for participants.

   Key talking points:
   - Collaborating, learning, and adapting aren't new for USAID. CLA is not a different work stream or done for its own sake. It's a different way of approaching our work; making our work as effective as possible; maximizing development impact.
   - This process sparks your creative thinking on the various elements in the CLA Framework, to begin to brainstorm the activities, behaviors and systems that are a priority for intentional, systematic, and adequately resourced CLA.

   Pass out copies of the CLA Framework to each participant and give an overview of the building blocks, components, and subcomponents of the Framework. The facilitator shorthand guide has helpful descriptions to get you started.

   FACILITATOR: Explain the self-assessment process you will use.

   Key talking points:
   - The Maturity Tool helps identify what we are doing well, where we want to improve, and out of that, what we want to prioritize. It's not meant to do everything at once, but really hone in on a few key tweaks that will be helpful for our work.
   - Maturity Tool stages help us articulate where we are now and where we may want to go with a specific topic. They range from *Not Yet Present* to *Institutionalized*.
   - [If you are using the individual stage cards] Everyone will get their own mini-deck and you'll have the opportunity to chose why you

feel our team is at a given stage and share your thoughts with the group. It's okay to feel where you are, but if you can provide an example that supports your selection, it can help everyone come to agreement.
- This is not a test or an evaluation, so please think critically and be open about what's working and what's not working.

Also explain how the information gathered will be shared and used.

2. Choose subcomponents to discuss (5–10 minutes)

FACILITATOR: Lead the group in choosing 1 subcomponent for each self-assessment round. It is important that the chosen subcomponents resonate with everyone. They should address topics immediately relevant to the team's current work.

Ideally, the participants should participate in the selection of the subcomponents at the beginning of the session, such as through a show of hands. They can vote on all of the subcomponents at the start (i.e., 3 self-assessment rounds = 3 votes each) or start with one and let it naturally lead to discussion of a related subcomponent, voting again on the next subcomponent at the beginning of each subsequent round. If necessary, the subcomponents may be determined in advance by the group's leader or the facilitator.

NOTE: *If possible, try to pick a mix of subcomponents from both sides of the CLA Framework—CLA in the Program Cycle and Enabling Conditions.*

Once the subcomponents are chosen, pull the relevant subcomponent card set(s) from the deck and review the facilitation aid card for the subcomponent, which has clarifying explanations that facilitators have found helpful in framing the subcomponent self-assessment.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ROUNDS

1. **Describe the subcomponent and its stages (2–3 minutes)**

   FACILITATOR: Read the key concepts to the group. Next, describe each stage, reading the spectrum cards aloud (or having the participants do so), and lay the cards down for participants to see. Remind everyone that the descriptions on the spectrum cards are illustrative.

2. **Individual reflection (2–3 minutes)**

   EVERYONE: Take a few minutes to read the cards and silently reflect on how this subcomponent of CLA shows up in your and your team's work.

   FACILITATOR: Ask everyone to place the appropriate stage card (or token) on the description that best matches your group's current practice at the same time. Count to three for the "reveal".

   EVERYONE: Indicate the stage by laying your stage card (or token) on the spectrum. In-between stages may be appropriate if you can explain why.

3. **Discuss the current stage (10 minutes)**

   FACILITATOR: Prompt discussion by asking participants to explain why they chose the stage they did.

   Example prompting questions:
   - Which stage resonates with you? Why?
   - Can you think of an example from our current work that relates to this subcomponent?
   - How do we typically behave?

Don't let the group make final determinations about the current stage without discussion—the conversation about your current practices is more important than the stage you choose. If everyone comes to agreement quickly, discuss their examples.

If the group struggles to agree on a stage, suggest one to get a reaction from participants and move the conversation forward, see if an in-between stage (e.g., Expanding+) is an acceptable compromise, or agree that the group is not able to reach consensus on a stage. Make sure to note why.

NOTE-TAKER: During each round, document the initial votes on the current stage and the group's reflections about their practice related to the subcomponent. Also note for future reference any components or subcomponents that the group identified as relevant but did not have time to fully discuss.

4. Discuss aspirational stage (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR: Ask the group what stage they aspire to and encourage them to identify a stretch goal.

EVERYONE: Identify an aspirational stage for the short term (e.g., next 6 months) and/or longer term (e.g., over the course of a CDCS, PMP, project, or activity). You can use the stage cards again or simply discuss what is reasonable.

NOTE: *Not everything can be a priority. While it is important to set stretch goals, in some cases you may already be at the most appropriate stage for your context (e.g., if you don't have enough leverage or resources to change things, or if the country context is particularly difficult).*

NOTE-TAKER: Document the group's reflections and the agreed-upon aspirational stage.

ACTION PLANNING ROUND

There are many ways to conduct action planning—this is just one suggested process. It may directly follow the self-assessment rounds or happen in a different session. If it happens later, it is critical to review self-assessment results (i.e., where you are and where you want to be). See page 19 for simplified action planning instructions.

1. **Brainstorming (5 minutes)**

   EVERYONE: Once you have completed all self-assessment rounds, spend 5 minutes brainstorming ways to improve CLA practice consistent with the aspirational stage(s) you identified during the previous rounds. These might build on ideas that were generated during the self-assessment rounds, or they can be entirely new. Ideas should be:
   - tied to achieving programmatic objectives,
   - as specific as possible,
   - within your control/manageable interest, and
   - within a particular timeframe (1 year or less).

   Write each idea on a separate sticky note.

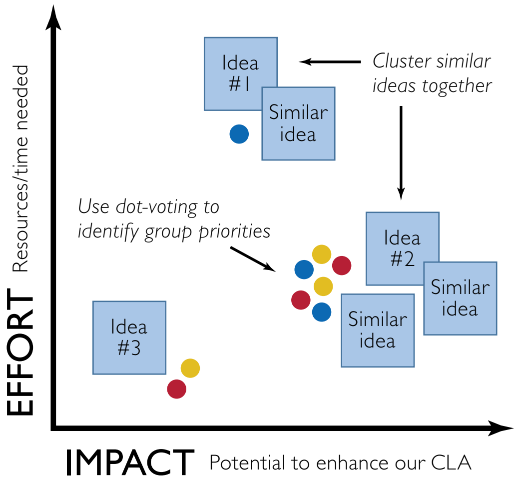
   FACILITATOR: Encourage the group to set realistic expectations and reassure participants that not everything can be a priority.

   Example prompting questions:
   - Which specific CLA practices and approaches identified within the subcomponents could support more effective implementation of the Program Cycle?
   - Which CLA practices and approaches could lead to greater efficiency and/or a shorter path to achieving our objectives?

   NOTE: *This step may also be done immediately following each subcomponent self-assessment round.*

2. **Prioritization (25 minutes)**

FACILITATOR: Draw a large grid on a whiteboard or flipchart. Label the vertical axis as 'Effort,' referring to the resource intensity needed, and the horizontal axis as 'Impact,' referring to the potential impact on improving CLA and the team's work.



EVERYONE: One at a time, share your ideas with the group, placing each sticky note in the appropriate place on the Effort/Impact grid. As a group, discuss the required level of effort and possible impact each idea would have. As ideas are placed on the grid, participants with similar ideas can group their sticky notes, creating clusters.

FACILITATOR: After all of the ideas have been shared and clustered, use dot-voting to identify which ideas to include in the action plan. Let participants know how many votes they will each have (usually 3–5).

- If using dot stickers, distribute them now.
- If no stickers are available, have participants vote by making hash marks on the sticky notes.

NOTE: *The voting process should only take a couple of minutes.*

EVERYONE: Once voting has finished, identify which ideas received the most votes and discuss which of these to adopt. It is up to you to determine how many action items you can adopt. This will depend in part on the feasibility of the ideas and the level of effort you can commit to implementing your plan.

3. Action Planning (25 minutes)

FACILITATOR: Once the group identifies 1–3 action items, guide participants through the creation of a rough plan. For each action item, discuss the following topics and capture them on a flipchart (the note-taker may help with this):

- Expected Outcomes: Articulate the expected outcomes of each action item and what success looks like.
- Next Steps: Identify basic implementation steps/activities. *These next steps do not need to be fully fleshed-out; the person responsible will likely need to consult with others and determine resource needs/availability to make a detailed implementation plan for the adopted action item.*
- Timeline: Propose milestones and/or deadlines for the chosen action items, keeping in mind the broader context of and timing for your efforts and activities.
- Person Responsible: Ask for volunteers to lead each action item adopted. *The person assigned to the action item is not solely responsible for every step of implementation, only for ensuring that the action is implemented within the time proposed, the right people are part of the process, and the necessary resources are mobilized.*
- Resources: Briefly discuss existing resources (e.g., staff time, mechanisms, implementing partners) that will be used to implement each action item. If new resources are required, determine if this is feasible before committing to the action item.

- **Connections to Existing Activities/Processes:** Discuss how this effort builds upon and supports what the team is already doing. *This helps ensure that it isn't seen as a new or separate workstream.*

NOTE-TAKER: Document the discussion, making sure to capture the commitments made on the points above, for example in a table such as the one included in the note-taking/report template available on usaidlearninglab.org/library/cla-maturity-tool-facilitator-resources.

4. Accountability/Follow-Through (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR: Ask the group how they will check in on and hold themselves accountable for their agreed action plan. For example, they can review their action plan and discuss progress at a monthly or quarterly team meeting.

NOTE-TAKER: Add this commitment to the Action Plan and share the decisions made after the exercise.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

FOR LARGE GROUPS (MORE THAN 6 PEOPLE)

It becomes difficult to see and engage with the cards if more than 6 people try to self-assess a chosen subcomponent at the same time.

For Self-Assessment Rounds: Split into groups of approximately 4–6 people for self-assessment discussions (15 minutes). When dividing up, if there are natural subunits among the participants (e.g., like technical teams or staff who work together on shared activities or processes), have them form small groups. If not, encourage participants to form diverse groups with a mix of different perspectives and experiences. Each small group should have a designated facilitator who is familiar with these instructions.

At the end of each self-assessment round, reconvene the larger group so that each small group can report orally in 3–4 sentences what stage they chose and why (5 minutes each).

It is up to you whether small groups will discuss the same subcomponents, or if they will discuss different subcomponents. The former is useful for gathering insights and perceptions from the whole group on a particular topic, and the latter is useful for covering more topics in a limited amount of time. The facilitator or group's leader should make this decision in advance.

For the Action Planning Round: Proceed as the full group according to the instructions on page 14.

FOR SIMPLIFIED ACTION PLANNING

If you do not have time or buy-in for full action planning, use an abbreviated process by spending 5–10 minutes brainstorming as a group and coming to consensus on "light lift" ways to improve CLA practice consistent with the aspirational stage(s) identified during the previous rounds. Once the team has identified 1–3 action item ideas, discuss and document the following for each: Next Steps, Timeline, and Person(s) Responsible.