



# INCORPORATING CLA IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

## Introduction

To help set an activity up for success, we need to design it in such a way that will enable USAID staff and future implementing partners (IPs) to share crucial knowledge, learn from their experience, and adapt their approaches as needed in order to achieve the outcomes sought. These practices lead to better development results, as a growing [evidence base](#) shows. Considering and planning for collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) is critical to ensuring that future IPs can better manage risk, shocks, and uncertainty; identify new opportunities; and deliver on the objectives of the activity.

Activity design teams that apply CLA practices and approaches throughout the design and procurement process can ensure that their efforts are bringing the CLA priorities that their Mission or Operating Unit (OU) has identified in its strategy and projects to the award. They can also assess the particular priorities, capacities, resources, and needs within the Mission; the nature of the portfolio; and the operational environment, in order to determine where, how, and to what degree CLA can best be incorporated into the activity design. An intentional design that includes and enables tailored CLA approaches will better support achieving the objectives of a particular activity.

This document provides resources and advice on using CLA to design a procurement process that will help to set an activity up for success, highlighting strategic collaboration internally within the Mission, especially with the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA), and with external stakeholders and partners prior to award, as applicable.

### Start By Asking

#### To inform activity design:

- What level of risk or uncertainty does the activity involve for USAID or the IP? What are the greatest or most impactful unknowns in the theory of change, implementation approach, and/or current context?
- How can we design collaboration between this activity and others in the project or portfolio?
- What learning questions or knowledge gaps, identified during the project design phase, will this activity explore?
- Who are some of the local actors with whom we most need to collaborate for shared learning and adapting? Are any of the local actors considered as implementing partners for the activity?
- What do we need to learn during implementation to make our program more effective?
- How can we use this mechanism's interventions to generate, capture, share, and support the application of learning?
- How could learning during implementation feed into adapting to ensure the success of this and other activities?
- Are there any known pitfalls or challenges, potentially identified through previous experiences that we need to address as we prepare for this procurement process?
- What degree of flexibility might the activity need? And within what, if any, predictable timeframes?
- How can we ensure this activity can adapt to unanticipated change?

### Start By Asking, continued

#### To identify capacity, resources, and methods for CLA integration:

- What resources and capacity will be available to help support CLA integration during activity design and implementation? For example, is there a learning advisor or CLA support mechanism in the Mission?
- How can USAID and IP staff best be supported in making use of existing materials (such as the CLA Toolkit) to integrate CLA in this activity?
- Does the Project Appraisal Document (PAD) prioritize this activity for a performance evaluation or an impact evaluation? How will this activity feed back to project-level learning?
- What incentives exist for USAID staff for integration of CLA at the activity level?
- What incentives would make sense to create for IPs to integrate CLA in this particular activity?

Your answers to these questions can help you in choosing your design and procurement approach. They can also suggest where and how you can infuse collaborating, learning, and adapting into the design itself.

## Internal Collaboration: Build the Activity Design Team

A successful activity begins with a strong activity design team to ensure that the design is aligned with the project's purpose and/or results and that its needs for flexibility are optimally incorporated.

- **Recruit the right people, and make sure roles and responsibilities are clear.** In designing an activity, there is substantial collaboration both within the Mission and potentially with Washington. The roles of key offices and officers involved are outlined in the [ADS 201.3.4.1. Strong inter-office collaboration](#) supports sound design, and by extension, management. Likewise, collaboration among different technical experts is especially important for interventions that aim at integrating evidence and contextual knowledge from multiple sectors. The activity design team should include the Project Manager whose role is to ensure synergies and coordination among activities identified as necessary to achieve the Project Purpose. It is also helpful at the start of the process to ensure that the activity design team is comprised of relevant technical experts from across the Mission and Washington, key OAA and Program Office staff, and others as appropriate, and that roles and the process of development and review are clearly delineated and understood.
- **Get OAA involved early and often.** Collaborating with OAA can also help you identify specific ways in which the procurement process itself can pave the way for more successfully incorporating adaptive management and CLA practices into the activity implementation. Working early and closely with your procurement officer is crucial to help them determine the instrument and inform the procurement process more broadly – and it is particularly important for a design which will require a strong CLA emphasis.

## Consider the Design and Procurement Approach

CLA practices can be integrated into any type of award, and resources exist on how to incorporate them into the [solicitation](#) and the subsequent [management](#) of implementation. OAA has been working closely with the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL) and other parts of USAID to advance the use of adaptable mechanisms. This work seeks to identify tools and strategies for designing activities so that they require fewer contracting actions when course corrections driven by programmatic learning and/or contextual shifts need to be made. This includes informing the procurement officer's instrument

## INCORPORATING CLA IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

determination, but also when and how to tailor the entire activity design and solicitation—from defining the results to establishing the solicitation evaluation criteria—to better support managing adaptively. In addition, it is worth considering the ways that different types of instruments might affect financial incentives or disincentives to adaptation for IPs: for example, in instruments where changes can affect the IP’s fee, they may be disincentivized to make the changes.

When considering the various opportunities for incorporating CLA into an activity design, it will be helpful to think through the considerations that might indicate the need for adaptability, such as the questions in the box above, to help ensure that the design and procurement approach meets the needs you have determined for flexibility and collaboration in the activity. In thinking this over, you might make use of the following resources:

| Resources on overall mechanism options   | Resources on adaptive mechanisms and solicitations   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 304</a> provides guidance on choice of acquisition and assistance instruments among other things.</li> <li>• <a href="#">USAID Implementing Mechanism Matrix</a> lays out the most common options.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Adaptive Approaches to Acquisition and Assistance</a> outlines some instruments and types of solicitations that are particularly conducive to flexibility.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Discussion Note from OAA on Shock-Responsive Programming and Adaptive Mechanisms</a> describes how to build more adaptability into existing mechanisms.</li> <li>• <a href="#">PEB 2014-01: Adaptable and Flexible Contracting Types</a> provides details on two flexible contract types: single-award IDIQ contracts and hybrid CPFF Completion-IDIQ contracts.</li> <li>• A <a href="#">webinar by Sunil Xavier</a> (OAA) summarizes adaptable mechanisms.</li> </ul> |

- **Focus on outcomes.** In any type of procurement, a key principle for building greater flexibility into your activity design is scoping the activity to be as outcome-focused as possible. This shifts away from prescribing approaches – at the component and/or intervention level, for example – so that implementers have more flexibility to propose and [adapt solutions or pathways that might best achieve the intended result](#) (see [Incorporating CLA into Solicitations](#) for more). But you can ensure that flexibility gets the results you intend by increasing your attention to how and when the partner is learning and adapting to experience throughout implementation – and how they are sharing the learning with others (and, as relevant, supporting others to apply it).

### External Collaboration: Engaging Partners and Other Stakeholders Pre-Award

In every procurement, you are encouraged to consult with external stakeholders and technical experts during design. You can use established tools such as Requests for Information, Industry Days, targeted consultations, or listening sessions to socialize your concepts, build or validate your context or problem analysis, or answer key outstanding design-related questions.

## INCORPORATING CLA IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

In addition, you can choose design and procurement processes that facilitate collaborating, learning, and adapting at the activity level. Some options include:

### Resources on Collaborative Design and Co-Creation

- The [Co-Creation Discussion Note](#) developed jointly by OAA, PPL, and the Global Development Lab

Collaborative Solicitation Processes

- [Broad Agency Announcement](#)
- [Development Innovation Ventures](#)
- [Grand Challenges for Development](#)

- **Engage in collaborative design and co-creation:** The Program Cycle guidance emphasizes the importance of engaging stakeholders in various ways throughout the analysis and design process. While still maintaining practices that guard procurement-sensitive data, USAID staff are encouraged to engage a broad set of stakeholders in initial problem and context analysis, for example.

In addition, USAID's Global Development Lab has experimented with innovative solicitation processes that have a similar ethos, such as those listed below. Processes like these can help USAID source or co-create activity designs with external stakeholders in order to reframe development challenges, reach new audiences, and spur new ways of solving problems.

- **Conduct an iterative bid and review process:** Another technique that fosters collaboration, learning, and adaptive management is that of incorporating a multi-step process into proposal preparation and review. This allows USAID to request and review early (but less well-developed) ideas about its proposed theory of change and resulting activity design, provide feedback, and then ask bidders to iterate a fuller proposal. This iterative design approach presents USAID's problem analysis and initial thinking, without necessarily locking in a set of development interventions from the start. This provides a more flexible, collaborative design process.
- **Ask for in-person presentations:** Similarly, the procurement process can incorporate an additional step whereby bidders are asked to conduct an in-person presentation as part of their final proposal. This can be particularly helpful for activities that will require a high degree of adaptability in the leadership position(s) for the award, which is more challenging to assess on paper only. This is especially useful if the proposed Chief of Party (and/or other key personnel) can participate in the presentation.

With these considerations, you will be well on your way to designing an activity that incorporates collaborating, learning, and adapting. Check out these resources for help in [writing the solicitation](#) and [managing the activity](#) in ways that reinforce this approach to achieve better development results.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- › [CLA in Activity Design & Implementation](#)
- › [Incorporating CLA into Solicitations](#)
- › [Incorporating CLA in Activity Management](#)
- › For more information, please email us at [learning@usaid.gov](mailto:learning@usaid.gov)



# INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

## Introduction

After you have thought through how you want to incorporate collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA) into your procurement process, you have an opportunity to reinforce these approaches in the way you write the solicitation. One of the most important things we can do is infuse CLA consistently and coherently throughout the entire solicitation – in a way that is tailored to the objectives and particular theory of change for a given activity and builds upon the higher Project Purpose as outlined by a Project Design Team, or in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD). Doing this ensures that Missions and Operating Units (OUs) can learn from and manage activities in an adaptive way, and that implementing partners (IPs) are able to adopt and implement CLA practices and approaches in their work, in order to achieve better outcomes.

### Start By Asking

- How will this activity contribute to the Project Purpose? What kind of collaboration with other activities under the project is required, and what might that look like?
- With what other projects or other donor activities might it be important for this activity to coordinate and align?
- Are there cross-cutting objectives and elements from your Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) that individual activities need to support, beyond the project? For example, sectoral integration, geographic coordination, etc.?
- Which elements of the [CLA Framework](#) are most important to emphasize in this activity to ensure its success?
- What type and combination of skills, including technical and soft skills, are required from IP staff?
- How will the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) requirements support collaboration and [adaptive management](#)?

## Infusing CLA Throughout the Solicitation

In order to best leverage CLA approaches to support an activity's purpose, as well as set it up for successful adaptive management throughout implementation, it is critical to incorporate CLA approaches and practices throughout the various components of a solicitation. In short, CLA – by name and by practice – shouldn't appear only in one component of the technical approach, or in a paragraph of a cross-cutting section. Rather, CLA practices need to be present in the sections spanning technical approach, cross-cutting, monitoring, evaluation, learning, and reporting requirements, as well as management, personnel, and budget.

So what does this look like in practice? The following sections provide specific tips on what this CLA incorporation can include, whether in acquisition or assistance instruments, as well as excerpts adapted from

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

actual solicitations that serve as examples. They demonstrate how other Missions and OUs integrated CLA into each of the following sections. They are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to help you to think further about the design of the activity you want to create, and how you might tailor these concepts to your own solicitation.

### Content

1. [Background and Theory of Change](#)
2. [Guiding Principles](#)
3. [Performance Objectives/Expected Results](#)
4. [Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting](#)
5. [Work Planning](#)
6. [Reports and Other Deliverables](#)
7. [Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning \(MEL\)](#)
8. [Enhanced Performance Management through Advisory Groups](#)
9. [Personnel](#)
10. [Instructions for Proposal Preparation](#)
11. [Budget](#)
12. [Evaluation Factors/Application Review](#)

## I. Background and Theory of Change

In describing the background and theory of change of your activity, you can get stronger proposals by helping applicants or offerors understand how the activity is situated within larger contexts and relates to the project's theory of change, thereby laying the foundation for designing specific ways in which collaborating, learning, and adapting may be needed to respond to those contexts. For more on how to incorporate political economy considerations into your theory of change, see this resource from USAID's Center for Excellence in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center) in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance.

Technical evidence should play an important role in this section given that evidence-based approaches must underpin all USAID business processes. Evidence can and should be used to define and justify the activity's scope, the problem it is trying to solve, and the general approaches to be taken. Evidence gaps should be acknowledged and, if needed, filled over the course of activity implementation.

Use context analysis. Most activity descriptions include narratives that cover context, background, and problem analysis, as well as the proposed activity scope to catalyze change in a given system or sphere of development. In these narratives, and especially in the activity-level theory of change, it is important to recognize and explain:

- The role of that activity within the greater project, and its connection to other activities within that project designed to achieve a Project Purpose;
- The context or problem analysis from a local actor and/or systems perspective;
- Relevant analysis and evidence that grounds the theory of change, coupled with areas of uncertainty, knowledge gaps, potential learning/evaluation questions, risks, and assumptions that might significantly affect the activity's success; and
- If relevant, linkages to and impacts on/by other development sectors.

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

**Identify the implications of your analysis for the aspects of the activity where CLA can help (and how).** The analyses produced can tell you a lot about the flexibility, capacity to adapt, and resulting CLA approaches needed within your activity. For example:

Concrete examples of how to highlight the need for collaborating, learning, and adapting to support the achievement of results – as well as the need to revisit the theory of change itself – appear below.

| Observing this in the activity context...  | ...may suggest a need for:   |
|--|--|
| Interdependence among/connection with other activities.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More attention to collaboration among partners throughout the activity scoping, implementation, and reporting.</li> </ul>   |
| A more complex system within which we envision stronger actor-led development                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in iterative analytics and collaborative context monitoring (with stakeholders, beneficiaries, et al.).</li> </ul>   |
| Key gaps in evidence and/or assumptions underlying the theory of change                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More proactive, frequent, or inclusive learning activities, such as studies, stakeholder-driven learning events, and/or pause and reflect and action-planning moments.</li> </ul> |
| The need for strategic opportunism inherent in activity design (e.g., in market systems development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility in selecting new strategic approaches, sub-awardees, or partners once the activity is underway.</li> </ul>  |

### Example Language for the Theory of Change Discussion

*In order to be transformative, this activity depends upon a multi-layered theory of change, which states that for its purpose and intended results to be best achieved, it is important that the award:*

- Identify and work with strong private sector and government partners, and facilitate a light touch to ensure local actors are leading their own development efforts;
- Maintain flexibility to adopt new and/or adapt existing interventions (over the course of the activity) to respond to emerging system dynamics, unexpected contextual shifts, and learning opportunities that emerge;
- Ensure a systemic view to recognize opportunities to employ and/or magnify the effect of interventions and leverage the mutually reinforcing impact of addressing enabling environment constraints simultaneously; and
- Prioritize intentional and collaborative learning to ensure rapid feedback loops and adaptation to achieve both short- and long-term change.

Ultimately, this activity will achieve [input purpose] through [input interventions/strategic approaches and intermediate outcomes]. However, USAID recognizes that given the complexity of the current development landscape, the theory of change will need to be periodically revisited through [applicant/offeree/USAID] concerted efforts, and potentially adjusted in accordance with an ongoing, iterative analytical approach. It will be essential for monitoring, evaluation, and learning actions, underpinned by staff skills and processes, to periodically examine ongoing progress with respect to the key drivers for transformative and sustainable development.

## 2. Guiding Principles

In setting out the guiding principles for your activity, the integration of strategic collaboration, continuous

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

learning, and adaptive management into the principles can help to orient the activity's design and implementation around these beneficial practices from the outset.

Include principles that promote alignment and adaptive management. Does your Mission or OU have a set of core operating principles for all implementing partners? You can promote alignment by drawing from the strategy or project-level language, or from lessons learned across other activity design and implementation experiences.

Incorporating collaborating, learning and adapting into the guiding principles can reinforce expectations and help frame and harmonize how activities operate. Principles focused on these kinds of practices, processes, and behaviors can help adaptive management concepts translate into implementation.

### Example Language Guiding Principles

- **Ability to learn and adapt approaches based on research and program experience:** The successful applicant/offeror must present a vision and strategy for management that intentionally plans for consideration and adaptation of approaches based on program learning, experience, and inputs from both internal and external researchers and evaluators.
- **Collaborative, capacity-building approach to partnership:** The applicant/offeror must ensure that all activities and support under [name of the activity] will be implemented with approaches that develop and/or build on (rather than duplicate) key [name of partner country] partners' capacity to plan, implement, manage, and monitor the activity.
- **Willingness to innovate in all aspects of [name of activity] implementation:** While the interventions that [name of the activity] partners anticipate employing may largely rely on well-documented interventions with proven impact, new and relatively untested approaches (or untested in this environment or in this sector) should be considered. Prudent risk-taking is important to ensure that [name of the activity] has impact in the [name of target region] and beyond.
- **Foster a culture of knowledge sharing, performance monitoring, and adaptation:** A key feature of [name of the activity] is a learning-by-doing approach. The applicant/offeror must introduce and utilize harmonized procedures and tools to regularly review and adapt to project progress and challenges.
- **Knowledge management and communications:** Experimentation is essential to innovation and effectiveness. [Name of the activity] must utilize a knowledge management methodology that facilitates continuous learning and adapting. Ongoing learning will allow [name of the activity] to obtain timely information on project successes and allow for adjustments in project design and management, as needed.
- **Active social inclusion:** The activity should actively work with local systems actors to reduce barriers for poor and vulnerable populations, including the stigma attached to these populations. In the face of increasing economic concentration and various forms of exclusion and discrimination, approaches and interventions will need to specifically engage and empower marginalized and vulnerable populations throughout all stages of activity design and implementation.

### 3. Performance Objectives/Expected Results

By taking an innovative approach to this section, you have a great opportunity to enable IPs to be creative, test their assumptions, and adapt based on what they learn.

**Emphasize outcomes rather than prescribing technical interventions.** Focus on “**what** we want to achieve,” not “**how** we expect to get there.” This can set your activity up for success by allowing applicants/offerors to propose and adapt their approaches as needed to reach your objectives. To make this possible, focus on the outcomes you want rather than committing the activity to a predefined set of technical interventions. With an outcome-oriented approach, USAID enables more flexibility. Consider using a



## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

Statement of Objectives (SOO), instead of a Statement of Work (SOW) or Performance Work Statement (PWS) in acquisition. With its focus on high-level objectives, an SOO can provide partners more space to propose creative, context-driven, and innovative approaches at the outset, as well as to learn and adapt as they go. An example of an SOO can be found [here](#). Similarly, the Program Descriptions in a Request for Application (RFA) should avoid prescribing specific technical approaches. [Fixed Amount Awards](#) (FAAs) can also be written to focus on outcomes rather than technical approaches when procuring assistance. The degree to which you apply this outcome-oriented approach may depend on how certain the theory of change and programmatic assumptions are, but most activities will benefit from being designed with adaptability in mind.

**Consider designing an inception phase.** An increasingly popular approach to ensuring the effectiveness of activities is the use of an inception phase, a six-to-twelve-month period at the outset of an activity that allows for more participatory, informed, and coordinated piloting and planning. An inception phase aims to ensure that the interventions used are based on the best possible understanding of the context and the best possible data on what works within it. It also models a learning-focused and adaptive approach to achieving the objectives of the activity. At the same time, it can require resetting expectations on the parts of all stakeholders in terms of the risks or delayed gratification that may come with the inception phase. Examples of where and how this option has been used can be found in the note developed by DCHA and the Office of Acquisition and Assistance in the Bureau for Management (M/OAA) on [Adaptive Approaches to Acquisition and Assistance](#). Some sample language appears below.

### Example Language Expected Results: Inception Phase

A critical initial phase of the award will be an inception phase to first analyze and understand system dynamics, the nature of the problem to be addressed, and where the activity might best intervene to achieve the activity purpose. Further interventions will be informed by the findings of the inception phase, including any studies, and pilots carried out. The applicant/offeror will utilize collaborative planning (with USAID and key stakeholders) in order to engage appropriate resources in the design, scale and sequence of this activity. This will allow the activity to create maximum impact, while employing an iterative and adaptive approach. In this sense, the illustrative actions listed below are only to be regarded as tentative illustrations as opposed to guidance from USAID for required elements of a proposal.

## 4. Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

In order to ensure that the activity benefits from a robust approach to strategic collaboration, learning and adapting to achieve its objectives, it is recommended that you dedicate a section to this, in addition to weaving it throughout the solicitation.

**Describe your expectations for CLA.** Here you have an opportunity to further define what CLA means in your context and what your expectations are for its use, as well as to elicit specific approaches from bidders. This section may appear after the Expected Results, for example, or alongside Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning.

Solicitations can direct bidders to describe how their CLA approaches will:

- Facilitate [collaborative learning and problem solving](#) internally and with external stakeholders and other implementing partners (especially those within the same project);
- Advance local learning to support local ownership of development processes for increased self-reliance;
- Generate and share knowledge and evidence about what works, what doesn't, and why;

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

- Identify and monitor learning questions or evidence gaps, especially as they relate to key programmatic assumptions and/or the influence of external contextual conditions on activity impact; and
- Apply learning and evidence to make adjustments and adaptations, as necessary, during implementation.

### Example Language for Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

- **Introduction:** The applicant/offeror is expected to contribute to [the Mission's] commitment to a multi-faceted collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA) approach to development. The CLA approach is based on the understanding that development efforts yield more effective results if they are coordinated and collaborative; test promising, new approaches in a continuous yet also rapid, targeted search for generating improvements and efficiencies; and build on what works and eliminate what doesn't. It is also understood that CLA takes into account programmatic learning and shifts generated by the activity (outward-generating) as well as those adopted by the activity from external learning sources. USAID also anticipates that a strong focus on adaptive management techniques as expressed through staffing skills, structure and culture, business processes, and stakeholder engagement will be particularly important in the implementation of this activity, in order to track and adjust to the opportunities to operationally integrate with other activities working in related efforts. Thus, USAID anticipates a CLA approach that tailors CLA to the needs and opportunities of this activity, while leaving open options for future evolution in its interpretation and application.
- **Collaborating:** Engage in active collaboration with other key in-country partners to share knowledge around assessments, emerging research, lessons learned, and evaluations, and jointly develop action plans for integrating learning resulting from these activities into improved program implementation.
- **Learning:** Hold annual learning summits to identify promising practices, work collaboratively to overcome implementation obstacles, and address changing conditions. Results should be used to inform upcoming year work plans and activity design across multiple stakeholders, and captured and shared broadly. Specifically define how innovative and dynamic learning agendas will be developed and implemented with the teams and the Mission as a whole.
  - Identify learning questions to guide the gathering of information to better understand or challenge key programmatic assumptions.
- **Adapting:** Engage in periodic reflection activities using approaches such as after action reviews to identify, capture, and act upon lessons learned in technical, cross-cutting, and management activities.

The applicant/offeror will demonstrate adaptability that is informed by knowledge gained through learning, and recognize behaviors and incentives necessary to create change. Knowledge gained through learning will influence decision making, resource allocation, and adaptation to contextual shifts. Application of new knowledge to implementation decisions will be reflected in the Semi-annual work plan, and the Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (Activity MEL Plan).

Decisions to adapt may be based on, but not limited to the following:

- Extraneous changes in the operating environment (i.e. emergency or natural disaster, policy changes);
- Financial and human resource constraints; and
- Emerging evidence that interventions are not working or could work better if adapted.

## 5. Work Planning

The way in which the IP and USAID plan for the work under the activity can, itself, benefit from collaborative and adaptable approaches.

**Build collaboration, learning, and adaptation into the work-planning process.** Consider options such as the following:

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

- Require joint work planning among several partners working in a geographic area or under the same project, to promote coordination, complementarity, and alignment.
- Require six-month work plans instead of annual work plans, paired with a six-month cycle of implementing, pausing to reflect, and then planning. This would enable adaptive management and greater responsiveness to new learning and/or changing conditions.
- Require applications/proposals to provide specifics on how they will carry out adaptive management, including:
  - How, when, and from whom they will gather data and input;
  - How and by whom decisions regarding adjustments will be made; and
  - How decisions, and the learning that led into them, will be documented and shared.
- Often USAID requires the first workplan to be due within 60 days of award; however, you may consider requesting a provisional work plan (or separating requirements for administrative work plan and a technical work plan) in order to give the implementing partner time to get established and confirm their context analysis and strategic design. When paired with an analytics- and learning-focused inception phase (as discussed [in Section 3](#) above), this can be particularly helpful in establishing a pattern of evidence-based, continuous learning throughout implementation.

### Example Language for Work Planning

- The successful applicant/offeror shall consult the Mission, implementing partners and other relevant stakeholders in preparing the semi-annual work plan to ensure broader ownership of implementation.
- The successful applicant/offeror will prepare and submit a semi-annual work plan to guide implementation under the contract. The work plans will be based on the activity theory of change and will reflect a results-based orientation. The work plans will be structured for continual learning, adaptive management, and flexibility, such that well-constructed feedback loops are in place and mid-course corrections in response to shifting circumstances can be identified and made quickly. The work plans will take into account lessons learned in implementing the contract and draw from best practices from experiences elsewhere; and indicate where adjustments are being proposed as a result of lessons learned. Finally, as appropriate, work plans will reflect input from and collaboration with other implementing partners. USAID's intention is to harmonize the due dates for when Mission support contractors submit semi-annual plans in order to facilitate collaboration. Work plans will be finalized with input from USAID and approved by USAID.
- The applicant/offeror must ensure that all activities and support under [name of the activity] will be implemented with approaches that develop key [name of partner country] partners' capacity to plan, implement, manage, and monitor the program. For example, work plans will be developed using a participative, capacity building process before local governing bodies roll out implementation of specific interventions/activities. This inclusive analysis and planning approach ensures local ownership of selected activities that effectively respond to identified needs and priorities at local government and community levels. Additionally, the collaborative process will sensitize local governments to the needs of the most vulnerable community members and directly inform the development of their broader annual work plans, indicators, and targets.

## 6. Reports and Other Deliverables

The reporting requirements and other deliverables present another opportunity to enhance learning and adaptation. It is recommended that you consider how to:

**Design your reporting requirements with broader use, coordination, and learning in mind.** This can help you determine what types of reports and deliverables you want to require, in what format, and with what frequency. For example, you might consider the following:

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

- Request an activity theory of change and logic model as a deliverable for activity start-up and describe how this deliverable will be used to inform the first and subsequent work plans and iterations to the MEL Plan throughout implementation.
- Specify that partners will participate in an activity start-up process that includes a workshop to refine the activity's theory of change and logic model.
- Ask partners to limit report lengths and include executive summaries, data visualization (e.g., a one-page infographic or 10-minute video), and substantive lessons learned sections, in order to synthesize dense information to increase its usability.
- Opt for 'light' document versions of quarterly reports, coupled with in-person learning sessions that include both partner and Mission staff, and potentially other partners as well.
- Try to align data reporting so that it easily feeds into the Mission's reporting processes, both in terms of indicators/PIRS and reporting deadlines. When possible, timing reporting cycles across activities within a given project can significantly help multiple activities share learning as it emerges, and set up coordinated work planning for the next implementation cycle.
- Specify that the reporting process can promote reflection and learning, and be strategically planned, budgeted, and sequenced in such a way as to feed into the next work planning process.
- Specify deliverables that directly support collaborating, learning, and adapting. These could include: having the partner convene USAID staff to discuss the implications of new learning and plan for adapting programs on the basis of the learning; convening other development actors (particularly local actors) to exchange data and learning, and share experiences and observations to increase all participants' awareness of new learning and context changes, and to support locally led efforts; contribute knowledge to training, capacity building, communications and other efforts being undertaken by USAID or its IPs or other development actors as relevant; participate in round tables or other knowledge management and peer learning opportunities organized by a knowledge management/learning support contract; etc.
- Ask partners to describe what information management and knowledge management systems will be used in support of CLA objectives.
- Detail the requirements of an end of activity summary report that focuses on describing overall progress through the activity's theory of change, highlighting successes and lessons learned, and documenting expected sustainability and local ownership post-activity.

### **Example Language on Reports and Other Deliverables**

In line with and critically informing the semi-annual work planning cycle, the successful applicant/offeror will prepare and submit semi-annual performance reports to the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). The reports will describe progress in the context of the MEL Plan and the previous semi-annual work plan milestones. Within the reports, the successful applicant/offeror will provide: 1) quantitative and qualitative analysis of progress against objectives and results; 2) discussion of lessons learned, good practices, and success stories; 3) challenges which impact implementation; 4) updates on any steps being taken with regard to past success or shortfalls; 5) cooperation with other implementing partners; and 6) a summary table of performance indicators and results to date. The report structure and narrative should focus on communicating implementation results, advances, and learning along the activity's theory of change.

Following receipt of each report, a review meeting with the COR and other relevant Mission staff will be held to discuss results, challenges, and the way forward.

## **7. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)**

Setting up monitoring, evaluation, and learning to be well aligned and to feed into adaptation is one of the

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

most impactful ways of supporting the success of your activity. More information on what M&E for learning means, and what it looks like, can be found [here](#).

**Design MEL requirements for alignment, learning, and adaptive management.** The MEL section of a solicitation should clearly align with the activity theory of change in its entirety, while also linking to the [Project Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan](#) set out in the project design. The MEL section is an opportunity to promote the integration of accountability and performance management, learning, testing of the theory of change, and informing adaptive management and decision-making. The MEL requirements laid out in the solicitation can specifically help set expectations for how learning will feed into program implementation. For example, consider asking bidders to:

- Outline appropriate periodicity, mechanisms, and key stakeholders in pause and reflect and learning activities that best suit activity objectives.
- Provide illustrative, rather than final, performance indicators (in addition to any indicators – such as [standard foreign assistance indicators](#) – which the Mission may require). This will allow the final choice of indicators to be tailored to the activity theory of change finalized during activity start-up.
- Outline approaches for development of MEL practices (e.g., linking listed indicators to a more detailed theory of change diagram or logic model) and maintenance (e.g., annual pause and reflect exercises).
- Articulate how they will address ongoing analytic needs, knowledge gaps, [context monitoring](#) and change management throughout the course of implementation.
- Explain how they may identify triggers to prompt review and/or a pivot during implementation.
- Articulate how evaluations will serve to understand performance and improve learning, by linking to the learning section of the MEL Plan and seeking to answer learning questions.
- Articulate how MEL approaches and CLA activities will seek to test programmatic and context assumptions.
- Address mechanisms and methods for developing a strong learning organization at the partner level, through organizational strengthening, links to management structures and data systems, etc. These should clearly link to the key personnel, management capacities/structures, and other proposal requirements as outlined.

### **Example Language for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)**

The successful applicant/offeror must have an approved Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan in place before major implementation actions begin. Key components of an Activity MEL Plan include:

- The activity's monitoring approach, including relevant performance indicators of activity outputs and outcomes;
- Any proposed internal and external evaluations; including any relevant preliminary evaluation questions;
- The activity's learning approach that will include processes and actions designed to: (1) identify and fill knowledge gaps through research, knowledge sharing, and outside technical assistance and training; (2) facilitate application of learning from assessments, evaluations and periodic monitoring and reflection processes; and (3) build sustained knowledge capture and sharing, across activities, partners, and sectors, and with key stakeholders from the USAID Mission, partner country government, and other donor funded activities through networking and collaboration;
- Learning actions, including pause and reflect exercises, exchanges with other project activities, field visits, and knowledge capture at activity closeout and life of activity summary report. Learning actions are expected to engage and be useful not only to USAID, but to involve and inform activity beneficiaries;
- Estimated resources for these monitoring, evaluation, and learning actions that are a part of the implementing partner's budget; and

### Example Language for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), continued

- Roles and responsibilities for all proposed monitoring, evaluation, and learning actions.

The MEL Plan should be revised as needed over the life of the activity in response to changes in context, learning, updates to the theory of change, and so forth.

## 8. Enhanced Performance Management through Advisory Groups

Seeking input from, and promoting accountability to, different external stakeholders can be an important factor in ensuring that the activity is responsive to the context. Language requiring these may appear in sections of solicitations that concern management, alongside other elements such as MEL and personnel. For more details, see the DRG Center's [Tips for Better Use of Advisory Councils](#), from which the text below was adapted.

**Consider asking for an advisory group.** In order to promote the type of strategic external collaboration that can provide the types of feedback loops your activity needs to ensure its success, consider asking IPs to set up an advisory group of local stakeholders. Alternatively, you might ask them to specify other ways they plan to seek input, oversight, and validation from diverse stakeholders, and ensure that programming is responsive to them as well as to USAID.

### Example Language on Advisory Groups

In order to encourage local ownership and high-level strategic direction of the program, the successful applicant/offeror shall support the formation and proper functioning of an Advisory Group (AG) made up of local stakeholders. Local members will serve in their individual capacities except for those representing USAID or another donor. Initial members of the AG will be selected by USAID. Subsequent nominations, where vacancies arise, will be made by the existing members of the AG. The membership will elect a Chair with one-year tenure. The Chief of Party, and grant partners as appropriate, will brief the AG on issues and progress, and solicit input. Final decision-making will remain with USAID. In conjunction with the Advisory Group and USAID, the applicant/offeror will hold regular strategic review sessions each year, preceding the submission of progress reports and work plans. The purpose of these sessions is to provide a collective platform for updating the context/problem analysis and determining how best to adapt to evolving local dynamics and new knowledge gained from real-time monitoring and evaluation.

## 9. Personnel

The people who lead your activity are central to shaping the way in which it will be implemented. Here you want to emphasize the skills and traits, as well as the types of positions, that will support their capacity to collaborate, learn, and adapt.

**Include collaboration, learning, and adaptive management skills in qualifications.** Having a leadership team with an adaptive mindset, facilitation skills, collaboration skills, etc. is key to the activity's success. In addition to traditional technical skills, consider selecting language from the box below to add to the desired qualifications for key personnel, and underscore the importance of these skills being held across the team as a whole. As you think about the balance of skills across the team, you might consider what skills might be most important for the Chief of Party to have and what the Deputy Chief of Party would need – regarding factors such as adaptive management skills, strong collaboration and people skills, and USAID experience. See the [Evaluation Factors/Application Review](#) section for information on the use of oral presentations to help you in discerning these skills.

**Describe the roles you need for the outcomes you want.** To ensure that your IP is equipped with the

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

right personnel to manage your activity adaptively, consider integrating and elevating the following roles as part of their senior leadership team:

- Director (or Manager) of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning; and
- Organizational Learning Advisor, or a similar staff position, in complement to the MEL Manager, who can serve as a focal point for CLA (see sample language below).

**Anticipate adaptation.** To integrate adaptive management in staffing plans, consider if and how:

- Staffing and staffing structure needs may evolve over time;
- The particular roles, skills, and time allocations of staff members may shift; and
- The most effective management structure may change - perhaps multiple times - over the course of an activity.

Anticipating this potential in the design (including proposal requirements, budget allocations, etc.) may assist in enabling more nimble adjustments later.

### Example Language for Personnel

- **Example qualifications to add for any key personnel:**
  - Demonstrated ability to be collaborative, flexible, and creative;
  - Excellent communications and interpersonal skills with evidence of ability to establish strong working relationships with diverse stakeholders;
  - Evidence of open and learning-oriented management style;
  - Proven success in leading highly collaborative, dynamic teams and managing change; and
  - Proven experience in iterative, flexible, adaptive management of teams and projects.
- **Language describing the role of an Organizational Learning Advisor:** Separate from the role of a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, this individual will ensure that the activity functions as a true learning organization – one that captures, disseminates, and effectively utilizes knowledge gained from experience; generates data through research and evaluations to determine what does and does not work in development assistance; and uses evidence-based program management decision-making.
- **Example qualifications for an Organizational Learning Advisor:**
  - Education: A degree in the field of organizational learning or development assistance.
  - Work Experience: Progressively responsible, professional-level experience in organizational or action learning, development, consulting, and/or knowledge management is expected.
  - Knowledge: Understanding of the economic, ecological, social, cultural, and political characteristics of development dynamics required. Ability to quickly acquire a thorough understanding of USAID/[Name of Mission]'s current CDCS Development Objectives and programming.
  - Skills and abilities: Demonstrated passion for facilitating and creating organizational learning, change, and advancing foreign aid effectiveness opportunities. Demonstrated conversation and presentation skills that can influence decision makers, foster organizational change strategies, and implementing them within a complex organizational setting. Demonstrated abilities and track record in strategic, systems and holistic thinking, managing resistance to change and understanding of organizational culture, learning and change management. Ability to serve as an effective USAID representative with a wide array of individuals and institutions essential. Strong writing skills and ability to prepare clear, substantive reports and briefing papers in English, in a timely manner. Familiarity with a wide range of development issues, including but not limited to [input development sectors directly and indirectly related to the activity].

## 10. Instructions for Proposal Preparation

By asking that collaborating, learning and adapting be represented in the technical approach and management approach of proposals, you help applicants or offerors to think in more specific terms about how these

## INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

practices will translate. Be sure that these instructions align with your evaluation criteria (discussed below).

**Ask for specifics on adaptive management capacity.** To reinforce all of the messages above and ensure they translate into action, you should also require bidders to include specifics on their approach to collaboration, learning, and adaptive management in their proposals as part of the technical quotation instructions. For example:

- Reiterate the interpersonal, leadership, and adaptive management skill requirements for key personnel;
- Refer to collaboration, learning, and adaptive management when describing management capacity;
- Ask for descriptions of past experience related to collaborative, learning-focused, and adaptive management of activities; and
- Request evidence of ways the applicant/offeror values and cultivates learning, such as through training, incentives, etc.

### Example Language for Instructions for Proposal Preparation

- **Technical Approach:**
  - Ensure that the guiding principles indicated in the solicitation are reflected throughout the technical approach.
  - Provide a description of the applicant/offeror's MEL Plan and specifically its CLA approach. This must clearly demonstrate an understanding and deployment of [complexity-aware monitoring](#) approaches, CLA principles, and appropriate indicators.
  - Provide a detailed work plan for the carrying out of the inception phase at the beginning of the activity and the regular studies, feedback points, and pilot activities beginning after the inception phase and continuing throughout the life of the activity. Part of the necessary actions must be the establishment of the core team needed to carry out these studies and pilot activities. As long as it is centered around the activity's theory of change, this work plan can take any format the applicant/offeror deems most appropriate, but must convey clearly the actions proposed, the outcomes to which those actions are contributing to, the resources necessary for those actions (equipment, staff LOE, etc.), time for each action, and the deliverables in different moments. The final indicators and their corresponding targets will be set during the inception phase once priority value chains and leverage points have been proposed by the applicant/offeror and approved by USAID. The applicant/offeror is not expected to propose targets for these indicators or any additional indicators they propose to adequately measure systemic change as a result of the activity's interventions.
- **Management Approach and Institutional Capacity:** The applicant/offeror shall provide a narrative section that describes its approach to the overall management of [name of the activity]. Applicants/offerors must describe:
  - The management approach for the overall execution of the activity. This includes an overview of the management component and the applicant/offeror's proposed role for the management component during activity implementation;
  - A vision for activity management that allows adaptation of approaches based on learning, experience, and inputs from both internal and external researchers and evaluators as well as a discussion of how the applicant/offeror would adapt and change according to the findings of learning efforts;
  - A process for selecting partners that will assist in implementing a variety of CLA efforts; and
  - A plan to transfer knowledge to and build capacity of local partners and partner country counterparts as a strategy for sustainability. The applicant/offeror shall describe its proposed in-country financial and procurement management systems.
  - A process for selecting partners that will assist in implementing a variety of CLA efforts; and
  - A plan to transfer knowledge to and build capacity of local partners and partner country counterparts as a strategy for sustainability. The applicant/offeror shall describe its proposed in-country financial and procurement management systems.



### 11. Budget

In providing budgeting instructions, you have an opportunity to help implementing partners to set themselves up for success by prompting them to allocate resources for the CLA practices that will help them to adapt, and by allowing some flexibility for adaptation.

**Ask applicants/offerors to budget for collaboration, learning, and adaptive management.** In addition to considering staffing needs through key personnel, mechanisms should allocate funds for CLA-related activities or processes, such as convening partners, facilitating knowledge capture and sharing, or investment in organizational development and adaptive management skills.

**Simpler budgets are more flexible budgets.** In order to facilitate adaptive management, consider including fewer line items in the budget incorporated into the contract so that frequent budget realignments are not necessary.

#### Example Language for Instructions for Budgets

In budgeting for labor, travel, equipment and supplies, and other direct and indirect costs, the applicant/offeror should incorporate the costs of venues, software, communications and publishing, and other support associated with fostering collaborating, learning, and adapting. Illustrative costs may include:

- Facilitators, venues, and other costs associated with collaboration, learning, and pause & reflect events and activities with partners and stakeholders;
- Knowledge management, evidence building, information synthesis, and institutional memory systems, such as evidence and evaluation support services, performance management systems, filing systems, and intranets;
- Strategic communications support (including writing, editing, graphic design, video, and print production) to develop an activity communication plan, and adequately document, distill, and disseminate key learning for decision-makers and other stakeholders; and
- Support for leadership development and team-building activities that can foster a learning culture, improve relationships among staff, and clarify decision-making processes.

### 12. Evaluation Factors / Application Review

The more CLA practices are built into the evaluation criteria and considered during the review process, the more fully they may translate into the proposals and staffing for your activity.

**Reinforce the value of collaborating, learning, and adapting throughout the evaluation criteria.** By including expectations around collaboration, learning, and adaptive management, as well as engagement of local stakeholders, in the evaluation criteria, and encouraging experience in these, you ensure that bidders will recognize these as critical elements of the activity. This improves the outlook for your activity to be implemented by a partner equipped with the capacity needed to achieve the best possible results.

**Consider including non-traditional evaluation methods as part of the review process.** One non-traditional method, as discussed in Incorporating CLA in the Procurement Process, is to require oral presentations by proposed Chiefs of Party during the evaluation process. Oral presentations can offer a better sense of a Chief of Party's style, technical background, and perspective on collaboration, learning, and adaptive management. Additional methods to reinforce CLA may include, for example, requesting a stakeholder analysis and engagement plan, evaluating the applicant/offeror's ability to use a logic model to design a MEL framework, or requesting a description of illustrative CLA activities.

### Example Language for Evaluation Factors/Application Review Criteria

- **Technical Understanding and Approaches:** Applicants/offerors will be evaluated on the basis of the extent to which the proposal reflects a thorough understanding of the overall activity Statement of Work and its purpose. [Name of the Mission] is looking for approaches that focus on bringing evidence of effective interventions to scale, values innovation and creativity, and also supports adaptation based upon continuous learning about successes and failures in implementation.
- **Management Approach and Institutional Capacity:** Extent to which the proposal presents a vision and strategy for program management that allows adaptation of program approaches based on program learning, experience, and inputs from both internal and external researchers and evaluators.
- **Adaptive Experience:** Extent to which the proposal describes past experience generating theory of change-based MEL Plans, adapting approaches based upon MEL findings and course correcting in order to improve outcomes.
- **Staffing capacity:** Extent to which the proposal reflects that skills related to strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management will be prioritized in the recruitment of staff, across the team, and that the staffing plan will itself be designed for adaptation and adjustment as needed over the course of implementation.

### Example Language for Application Review Information

Merit Review Phase 2: Selected applicants/offerors, up to five, will be invited to participate in the oral presentations approximately two weeks after the submission of the concept notes or proposals. The oral presentations will occur in [name of the country capital]. The format and technical requirements will be made available to those applicants/offerors invited to participate in the oral presentations. The proposed Chief of Party would ideally be present for the oral presentations and lead the presentation, and the presence of any the other key personnel is encouraged. Oral presentations are expected to occur approximately two weeks after the selected applicants/offerors have been notified and invited to participate in the oral presentations. The apparent winner will be notified within approximately two weeks of the oral presentations. Costs incurred will not be reimbursed.

These tips, taken together, can help you to write a strong solicitation that guides your applicants or offerors toward the specific forms of systematic, intentional, and resourced integration of CLA [that can best promote the success of your activity](#). For help in supporting collaborating, learning and adapting during implementation, have a look at [this resource](#).

### Additional Resources on Incorporating CLA into Solicitations

[Tips on Making Your Solicitations Invite Context-Driven Adaptive Programming](#) from the DRG Center, which emphasizes the Thinking and Working Politically approach. This approach has many areas of overlap with CLA, and can likewise be helpful in crafting a robust solicitation.

#### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- › [CLA in Activity Design & Implementation](#)
- › [Incorporating CLA into the Procurement Process](#)
- › [Incorporating CLA in Activity Management](#)
- › For more information, please email us at [learning@usaid.gov](mailto:learning@usaid.gov)



# INCORPORATING CLA IN ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT

## Introduction

The degree to which strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management characterize the implementation and management of an activity [can have a significant impact on its effectiveness](#). As you manage your activity, you have a chance to model these practices, and to encourage and incentivize them in your implementing partner (IP). By laying the foundation for an open, trusting, and learning-oriented relationship with your IP, and facilitating collaboration, learning, and adapting throughout the life of the activity, you can help to ensure the best possible development outcomes.

Many of the tips and resources below can also be helpful for incorporating more Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) midstream into an activity or project that is already underway.

### Start By Asking

- What key messages need to be emphasized with the IP to set the right tone? How can interactions with the IP establish and reinforce expectations for a collaborative relationship?
- How can the Mission, the Contracting Officer's Representative or Agreement Officer's Representative (COR/AOR), and the Project Manager model – and explicitly recognize and encourage – the behaviors and CLA approaches expected from the IP?
- What does adaptive management look like in this case? Given the type of contract or agreement in place, what scope is available for adaptive management? What incentives or disincentives exist that would affect the IP's ability to respond to certain requests?
- How does this particular experience of managing adaptively need to sync up with the rest of the portfolio, Mission, and other stakeholders to be most effective? How will you work to ensure that this flows up into the project's theory of change or Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS)'s development hypotheses?
- What additional stakeholders will need to be brought into adaptive management decisions?
- What expectations have been set on the part of the beneficiaries, external collaborators, or host government counterparts?

Your answers to these questions will help you to plan your interactions with your implementing partner, and your management of the activity, to be optimally effective.

## Four Strategies for Successful Activity Management

### I. SET THE TONE FOR A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

Once an award has been made, the IP's first encounter with the Mission typically happens at the post-award briefing. This is an excellent opportunity for the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA), technical

## INCORPORATING CLA IN ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT

offices, and others involved to set the tone for the relationship, clarify expectations and reiterate the importance of utilizing a CLA approach, as defined in the award. Here are some potential topics to cover at the onset of the activity:

- Explain the activity's connection with and contribution to higher-level project purpose, Mission CDCS, and any learning agendas.
- Articulate expectations for collaboration with relevant stakeholders (e.g., other activities within the same project or with similar geographic scope, local development organizations, beneficiaries, other key local actors, and the partner country government).
- Outline engagement and communication modalities between the USAID COR/AOR and other Activity Managers and the IP leadership and staff (e.g., weekly check-in calls, monthly meetings).
- Discuss collaborative work-planning between the IP and the COR/AOR and among activities within the project.
- Make a mutual commitment to openness regarding timely, transparent feedback about what's working, what's not, and possible solutions to resolve challenges.
- Clarify decision-making processes for adaptive management and the type of evidence and information needed to inform adaptation.
- Make sure the IP knows of and has access to available resources (including the CLA Toolkit) that will help them infuse CLA through the activity implementation and in accordance with USAID Program Cycle protocols.

It is important at the onset of a new activity for CORs/AORs, and the Mission in general, to begin to build trust with the IP, in addition to oversight. While CORs/AORs have an important compliance role to play in managing awards, a CLA approach also calls for us to move from being solely compliance officers to being partners with our IPs. This means acknowledging explicitly with our partners that implementation may bring surprises, which are expected. The aim is to work together with IPs to understand what's happening, analyze options together, and conduct joint problem-solving and course corrections, working as knowledge peers who are, on both sides, committed to making the activity as successful as possible. Our chance of success in realizing development outcomes and impact is higher when working collaboratively, as the [evidence base](#) shows.

In the case that the award was not designed with CLA in mind, you may need to take more time to carefully review the agreement, decide the existing scope for adaptive management, and make a plan to either revise the award or work around its constraints.

## 2. COLLECTIVELY VALIDATE AND REVISE THE THEORY OF CHANGE AT START-UP

Once the key personnel are in place, hold a start-up workshop with the IP(s) to discuss, validate, and revise, if necessary, the activity's problem analysis, purpose, and theory of change. If relevant, you might also include personnel from other activities that are most closely aligned with this one – that have a shared project purpose or otherwise inter-related theories of change, for example. At this workshop, you can:

- Review the situation that the activity is designed to address, including the scope, focal interests, threats, and drivers. Identify any changes in context or priorities that need to be addressed in activity work planning.
- Make any necessary modifications to strategic interventions and their accompanying indicators.
- Revise your logic model to make sure it coherently communicates the activity theory of change in a manner that all stakeholders can understand and support.
- Assisted by the logic model, identify and prioritize (or validate) learning questions that can be

## INCORPORATING CLA IN ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT

included in the Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan and articulated in a learning agenda as applicable.

- Align the formats of the work plan and MEL Plan with the structure of the theory of change.
- Use a stakeholder identification and collaboration planning tool to identify key stakeholders and plan how to engage them to maximize locally-led development whenever and however appropriate.
- Set the expectation that revisions to the theory of change will be a recurring activity that precedes work planning.
- Identify what changes in the activity's theory of change might affect the project's theory of change.

### 3. FACILITATE CLA IN IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout the implementation of the activity, you have many opportunities to cultivate collaborating, learning, and adapting with your implementing partners. Not only can you use your convening power, create communication channels, and support capacity building among your IPs, you can also model openness and a learning focus in the way you conduct site visits and other interactions with your IPs. Some concrete examples include:

- Create channels for IPs to share what they learn from implementation and ideas they have for adaptation.
- Provide IP staff with capacity building in theory-of-change-based programming in the context of the USAID Program Cycle, strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management, as well as the enabling conditions that support these practices.
- Support IPs in collaborating with local development actors, other donor activities, and community members for consultation, joint learning, problem-solving, and adaptation.
- Conduct joint site visits with other CORs/AORs under the project to help ensure that work towards the project purpose is moving as planned and build a common understanding of how different activities contribute to that purpose.
- Participate in site visits with an eye for both accountability and learning, to help build a culture supportive of sharing what is working and what is not. Reward honest dialogue about implementation challenges with a listening ear and demonstrated responsiveness.
- Hold partner meetings and key learning events to provide important reflection moments throughout the life of an activity and project, and aid in understanding an activity's role within a broader context and possibly changing environment.

These practices can also be helpful in promoting CLA in existing activities that do not have CLA written into their award. In these situations, you can use techniques like the above to model, encourage, and reward collaborating, learning, and adapting. Even absent formal incentive structures in the award for engaging in CLA, you can motivate IPs to do so by highlighting their contributions in your reports, for example, and amplifying their success stories through your channels.

#### Resources in Facilitating CLA in Implementation

- CLA Case Competition Entry on [improving feedback loops from the Mission to implementing partners](#) outlines the content and utility of a "State of the Mission Address" to provide feedback on partners' reports.
- [How-to Guide on Field-Based Portfolio Reviews](#) presents this approach, drawing from USAID/Uganda's experience.

### 4. ENABLE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

With respect to adaptive management in particular, you can help to lay the groundwork for thoughtful,

## INCORPORATING CLA IN ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT

well-informed, and agile adaptation throughout the activity. From the outset, you can set the expectation that things will change and that responding appropriately is encouraged. In addition, you can:

- Scope out your options for adaptation. Ideally, you have [written your solicitation to ensure that there is workplan flexibility](#). This can translate into a more seamless way to manage adaptively: it allows for fewer contract modifications, and allows for changes to be made at the workplan level. If not, there are some tips in this [Discussion Note from OAA on Shock-Responsive Programming and Adaptive Mechanisms](#) on how to build more adaptability into existing mechanisms.
- Use the theory of change and related logic model to guide the identification of adaptive management needs and to prioritize actions to be taken.
- Encourage and, where possible, incentivize your IP to proactively seek out and communicate learning from implementation and monitoring data, as well as from new technical evidence, and to commit to review this learning before strategic adaptation points, such as before the creation of the next workplan.
- Consider the planning and reporting cycle that other awards are on, and what benefits may be gained by putting activities that will achieve more through collaboration on the same quarterly or semi-annual cycle.
- Ensure that [context monitoring](#) is in place, that there is a clear two-way line of communication between the IP and the Mission related to any contextual changes that may affect the activity, and that that information is provided in real time. This can help ensure more nimble responses.
- Build strategic [pause and reflect](#) moments into the work plan to assess whether particular interventions are moving in the right direction, and whether new learning or contextual changes necessitate some course correction.
- Document what adaptations are happening along the way. Capturing knowledge for successors will help them understand how and why certain directions and decisions were made – key for knowledge transfer, and ultimately for learning. Some organizations use pivot logs to do this; a basic template is available [here](#).
- Celebrate and communicate successful adaptations and track their impact in improving outcomes.

**Reflect:** What other steps can you take to enable adaptive management in your activity?

### Resources on Enabling Adaptive Management

- The [Adaptive Management Discussion Note](#) discusses adaptive management at all levels of the Program Cycle, and the enabling conditions for it, as well as the traits of an adaptive manager.
- [ProgramNet Blog](#) on improving adaptive management in missions, with a link to a “gut check” tracker tool.
- [CLA Case Competition Entry](#) from an IP on adaptive management during implementation.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- › [CLA in Activity Design & Implementation](#)
- › [Incorporating CLA into the Procurement Process](#)
- › [Incorporating CLA into Solicitations](#)
- › For more information, please email us at [learning@usaid.gov](mailto:learning@usaid.gov)