

Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Maturity Spectrum

USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) and its support mechanism, LEARN, have developed a [Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting \(CLA\) Framework](#) and [Maturity tool](#) to help USAID missions think more deliberately about how to plan for and implement CLA approaches that fit the mission's context and assist them in achieving their development objectives. While the tool is intended primarily for USAID audiences to be used in participatory self-assessment workshops, the CLA Framework and maturity spectrum are relevant to a wider audience.

USAID's CLA Framework identifies key components and subcomponents of daily work that may be opportunities for intentional, systematic, and resourced CLA. The framework recognizes the diversity of what CLA can look like in various organizations and programs while also giving CLA structure, clarity, and coherence across two key dimensions:

- **CLA in the Program Cycle:** how CLA is incorporated throughout Program Cycle processes, including strategy, project, and activity design and implementation; and
- **Enabling Conditions:** how an organization's culture, business processes, and resource allocation support CLA integration.

Recognizing that CLA is not binary—it's not an issue of “doing it or not doing it”—PPL and LEARN have developed a spectrum of practice for each of the 16 subcomponents in the framework. The spectrum offers examples of what integration might look like at different stages: Not Yet Present, Emergent, Expanding, Advanced and Institutionalized. The maturity stage descriptions are only illustrative and are intended to spark reflection on current practice and opportunities for improvements.

In this resource, each CLA subcomponent page describes the key concepts for that topic and includes a description of the maturity stages. Although the descriptions were originally developed for USAID, the majority of the concepts easily transfer or have equivalents in the partner community. For example, although organizations outside of USAID may not hold “Portfolio Reviews” (part of the Pause & Reflect subcomponent), the majority hold some type of meeting to review programmatic progress.

This is the seventh version of the CLA Framework and maturity spectrum. PPL and LEARN will continue reviewed and periodically update them based on user feedback, so if you have comments about the content, please email learning@usaid.gov. We would also love to hear how you've used this content with your team or organization.



This resource was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared by the LEARN mechanism out of the USAID Learning, Evaluation and Research (LER) Office in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL). LEARN is managed by Dexis Consulting Group.

CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE



COLLABORATING Internal Collaboration

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Identify and prioritize other teams/offices for strategic collaboration.
2. Decide how to engage those teams/offices.
3. Collaborate with those teams/offices based on decisions reached.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We are not yet collaborating with other teams/offices.

EMERGENT

- We collaborate with other teams/offices in an ad hoc fashion.
- Information silos are common.

EXPANDING

- We sometimes collaborate with other teams/offices.
- Inter-office collaboration is characterized by information exchange.

ADVANCED

- We usually:
- Identify other teams/offices and/or individuals who could have the greatest impact on planning and implementation.
 - Make decisions about what form collaboration takes to increase synergies.
 - Collaborate strategically with those teams/offices and/or individuals based on decisions reached.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We consistently and systematically:
- Identify other teams/offices and/or individuals who could have the greatest impact on planning and implementation.
 - Make decisions about what form collaboration takes to increase synergies.
 - Collaborate strategically with those teams/offices and/or individuals based on decisions reached.



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CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE



COLLABORATING External Collaboration

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Identify and prioritize key stakeholders for strategic collaboration.
2. Decide how to engage key stakeholders.
3. Collaborate with key stakeholders based on decisions reached.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We are not yet collaborating with stakeholders.

EMERGENT

- Analysis of stakeholders is informal and undocumented.
- We collaborate with stakeholders in an ad hoc fashion.
- Stakeholders are informed of USAID plans and/or interventions.

EXPANDING

- Planning processes sometimes include a stakeholder analysis.
- We collaborate with host government counterparts and/or implementing partners under specific agreements.
- Collaboration with additional stakeholders is limited to consultation/information gathering to inform USAID decisions.

ADVANCED

- We usually:
- Use stakeholder analysis to identify and prioritize stakeholders.
 - Make decisions about what form collaboration takes to increase synergies, which could include encouraging collaboration among partners when relevant.
 - Collaborate strategically with key stakeholders based on decisions reached.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We consistently and systematically:
- Use stakeholder analysis to identify and prioritize stakeholders.
 - Make decisions about what form collaboration takes to increase synergies, which includes requiring and resourcing collaboration among partners when relevant.
 - Collaborate strategically with key stakeholders based on decisions reached.



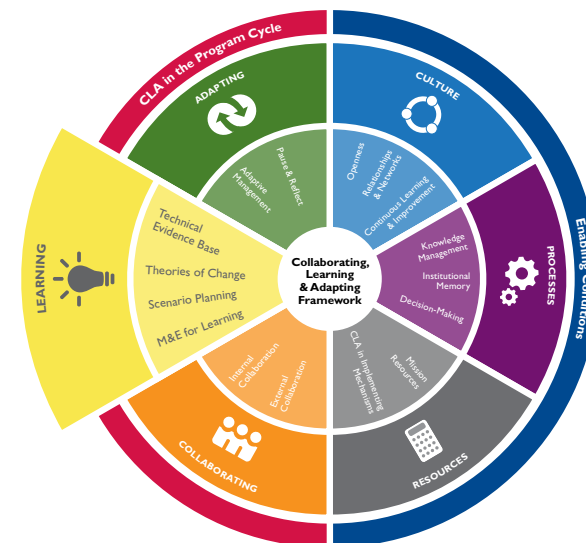
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LEARNING Technical Evidence Base

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Track the technical evidence base.
2. Apply the technical evidence base in planning and implementation.
3. Contribute to/expand the technical evidence base.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We are not familiar with the technical evidence base.

EMERGENT

- We informally track the existing technical evidence base.
- We have identified some knowledge gaps.

EXPANDING

- We primarily track and use previous evaluation reports to identify implications for programming.
- We fill knowledge gaps using informal or ad hoc approaches.

ADVANCED

- We usually:
- Track the existing technical evidence base, including up-to-date research and subject matter expertise generated by USAID and others.
 - Use a mix of relevant knowledge types and sources to identify implications and inform strategy, projects, and/or activities.
 - Fill gaps and contribute new knowledge to the evidence base through a mix of knowledge synthesis, research, piloting/experimentation, and evaluation.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

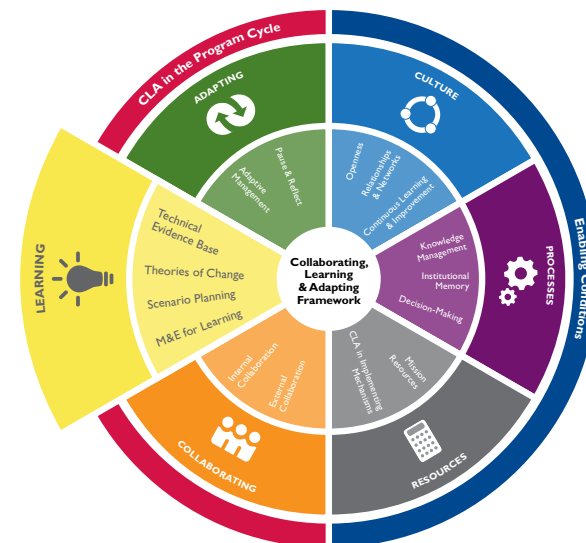
- We consistently and systematically:
- Track the existing technical base, including up-to-date research and subject matter expertise generated by USAID and others.
 - Use a mix of relevant knowledge types and sources to identify implications and inform strategy, projects, and/or activities.
 - Fill gaps and contribute new knowledge to the evidence base through a mix of knowledge synthesis, research, piloting/experimentation, and evaluation.



LEARNING Theories of Change

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Quality of theories of change.
2. Testing and exploration of theories of change.
3. Awareness among stakeholders about theories of change and the learning that results from testing them.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We have not yet developed a theory of change.

EMERGENT

- Theories of change typically describe activities already in place.

EXPANDING

- Logical theories of change are developed based on an understanding of existing technical evidence, and assumptions are identified.
- Some aspects of theories of change are tested through evaluations.
- Theories of change are shared and understood among a limited number of staff and key stakeholders.

ADVANCED

- Logical theories of change are developed based on an understanding of the context and relevant analyses, as well as existing technical evidence.
- We regularly test and explore prioritized theories and their assumptions using a variety of learning approaches beyond evaluations.
- Theories of change are widely shared and understood by the majority of staff and key stakeholders.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We systematically:
- Develop logical theories of change with sufficient stakeholder input and based on an understanding of the context, relevant analyses, and existing technical evidence.
 - Test and explore theories of change and their assumptions and modify theories (as needed) based on results.
 - Use and share learning from testing theories of change to inform USAID's and other stakeholders' planning and implementation.



CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE



LEARNING Scenario Planning

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Identify risks and opportunities through scenario planning.
2. Monitor trends related to scenarios.
3. Respond to and apply learning from monitoring.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We have not yet participated in scenario planning.

EMERGENT

- We informally ask big picture 'What if?' questions.

EXPANDING

- We ask and document big picture 'What if?' questions.
- We informally monitor trends related to those questions.

ADVANCED

- We usually develop scenario narratives to reflect on potential risks and opportunities.
- We regularly monitor trends related to those scenarios.
- Monitoring of scenarios often informs planning and implementation.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We consistently develop scenario narratives, identifying early warning signals for anticipated risks or opportunities.
- We systematically monitor trends related to scenarios.
- We use early warning signals to respond to context changes in real-time.



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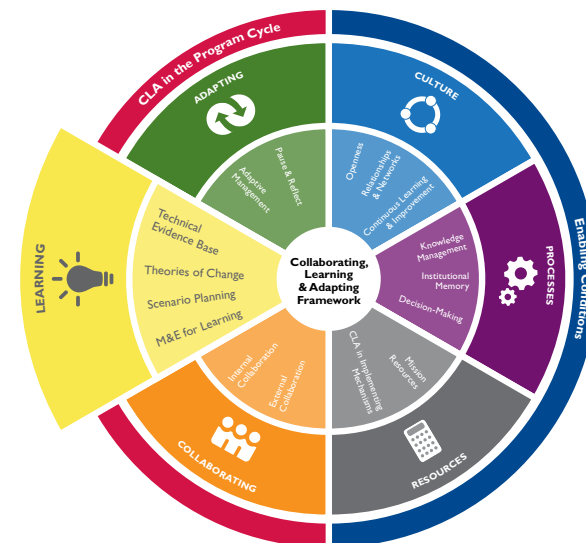
CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE



LEARNING M&E for Learning

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Relevance of monitoring data to decisionmaking.
2. Design and conduct evaluations to inform ongoing and future programming.
3. Align monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts across the strategy, project, and activity levels.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- M&E efforts are implemented primarily for meeting reporting requirements.

EMERGENT

- Monitoring data is **generally disconnected** from decision-making.
- **Required evaluations** identify new and relevant information.

EXPANDING

- Monitoring data is **some-times** relevant and of **sufficient rigor** to inform decision-making.
- We use evaluation findings to **inform future** activities or projects.
- We align learning across **multiple activities** to **inform future activity or project design**.

ADVANCED

- We **usually** identify and collect **good-quality**, credible monitoring data that informs decision-making.
- We **regularly** design and conduct evaluations to inform **ongoing and future** programming.
- We intentionally design M&E efforts so resulting learning can be aggregated **across projects and/or activities** to inform **design and implementation decisions**.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We **consistently prioritize** and collect **high-quality**, credible monitoring data that informs decision-making.
- We design and conduct **timely evaluations** that inform ongoing and future programming.
- We intentionally design M&E efforts so resulting learning can be aggregated across projects and/or activities, and feeds up to **inform achievement of mission-level results**.



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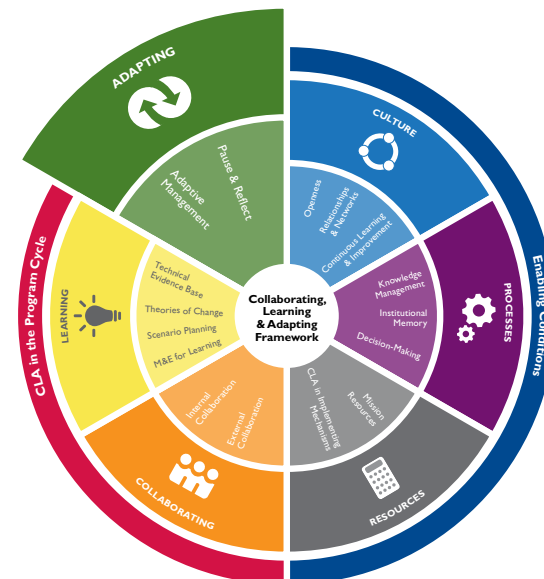
CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE



ADAPTING Pause & Reflect

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Variety and purpose of pause & reflect (P&R) opportunities.
2. Timeliness of P&R opportunities to inform decision-making.
3. Quality of P&R opportunities.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We have not yet participated in P&R opportunities.

EMERGENT

- We participate in required annual portfolio reviews and CDCS mid-course stocktaking for accountability and reporting purposes.
- Partner meetings are rare and are used to provide information to implementing partners.
- Additional P&R opportunities might be identified, but are not acted upon.

EXPANDING

- We participate in portfolio reviews and ad hoc partner meetings focused primarily on activity-level learning, as well as CDCS mid-course stocktaking.
- P&R activities are not aligned to design and implementation schedules.
- P&R activities are characterized by information dissemination and basic knowledge exchange.

ADVANCED

- We usually:
- Host and attend a variety of relevant P&R activities to reflect on progress and learning to date.
 - Hold P&R activities to feed into design and implementation schedules so learning is generated when most usable.
 - Facilitate P&R activities for staff and relevant stakeholders, using a variety of participatory approaches to encourage candid conversation.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We consistently and systematically:
- Host and attend a variety of relevant P&R activities to reflect on progress and learning to date.
 - Hold P&R activities to feed into design and implementation schedules so learning is generated when most usable.
 - Facilitate P&R activities for staff and relevant stakeholders, using a variety of participatory approaches to encourage candid conversation.

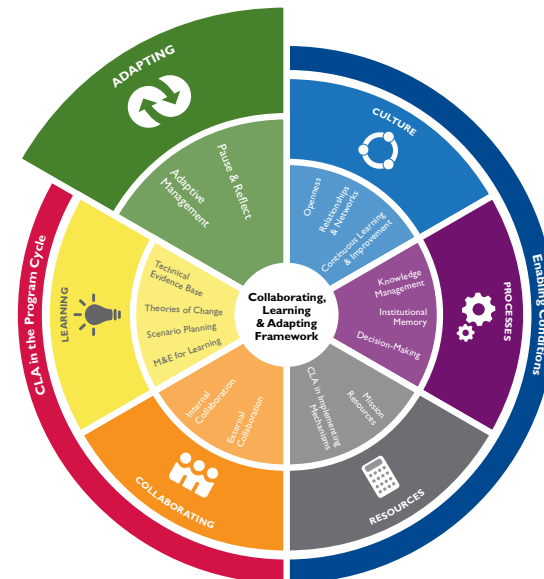
CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE



ADAPTING Adaptive Management

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Analyze learning from implementation and/or P&R opportunities.
2. Inform decision-making.
3. Follow through on decisions reached to manage adaptively.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We have not yet identified opportunities to apply learning or course correction.

EMERGENT

- We work with partners to identify successes, challenges, and subjects that warrant further exploration at the activity level.

EXPANDING

- We work with partners to:
- Identify successes, challenges, and subjects that warrant further exploration at the activity level.
 - Use learning to inform activity-level decisions on maintaining or adapting current approaches.
 - Sometimes take action based on decisions reached, consulting with key colleagues in the mission as needed.

ADVANCED

- We usually:
- Work with key internal and external stakeholders to analyze successes, challenges, and failures to identify lessons and subjects that warrant further exploration.
 - Use learning to inform decisions on maintaining, adapting, or discontinuing current approaches.
 - Work with key colleagues in the mission and Washington bureaus (as appropriate) to take action to adapt strategy, projects, and/or activities accordingly.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We consistently and systematically:
- Work with key internal and external stakeholders to analyze successes, challenges, and failures to identify lessons and subjects that warrant further exploration.
 - Use learning to inform decisions on maintaining, adapting, or discontinuing current approaches.
 - Work with key colleagues in the mission and Washington bureaus (as appropriate) to take action to adapt strategy, projects, and/or activities accordingly.



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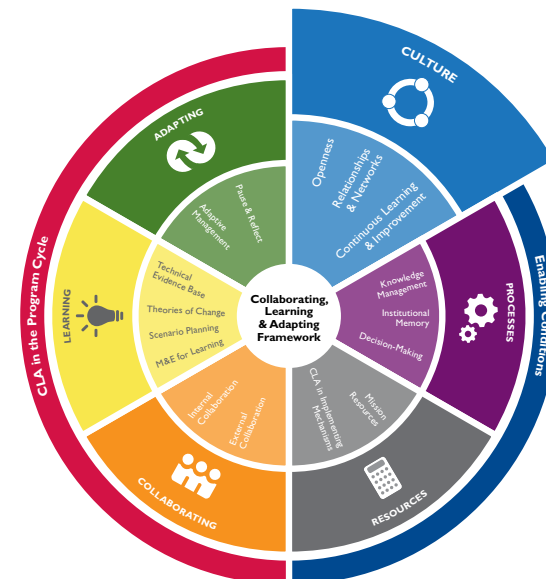
ENABLING CONDITIONS



CULTURE Openness

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Sense of comfort in sharing opinions and ideas.
2. Openness to hearing alternative perspectives.
3. Willingness to take action on new ideas.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- Openness to sharing and hearing alternative perspectives or trying novel approaches is not yet part of mission culture.

EMERGENT

Only certain individuals:

- Ask difficult questions or feel able to express unpopular viewpoints.
- Invite alternative perspectives.
- Are willing to explore untested or novel ideas.

EXPANDING

The minority of mission staff:

- Ask difficult questions or feel able to express unpopular viewpoints.
- Invite alternative perspectives.
- Are willing to explore untested or novel ideas.

ADVANCED

The majority of mission staff:

- Ask difficult questions or feel able to express unpopular viewpoints.
- Invite alternative perspectives.
- Are willing to explore untested or novel ideas.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

Staff mission-wide, with the support of mission leadership, consistently:

- Ask difficult questions or feel able to express unpopular viewpoints.
- Invite alternative perspectives.
- Are willing to explore untested or novel ideas.



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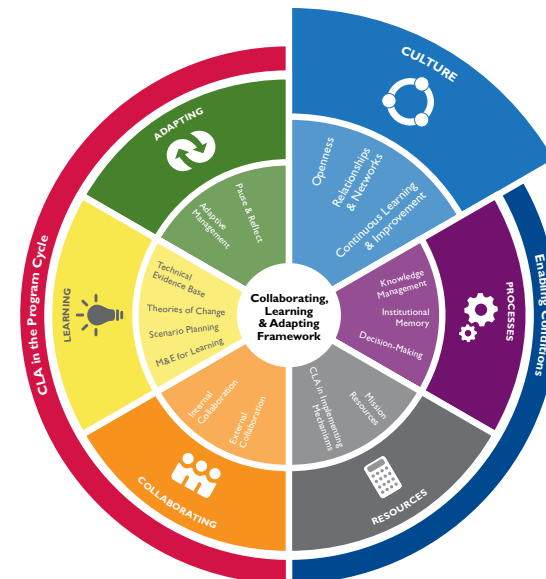


CULTURE

Relationships & Networks

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Development of trusting relationships.
2. Exchange of up-to-date information.
3. Use of networks across the system to expand situational awareness.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

Staff are not yet leveraging relationships and networks.

EMERGENT

Only certain individuals:

- Have strong internal and external relationships and networks based on mutual trust.
- Consistently and transparently communicate with a wide range of stakeholders (as appropriate) to exchange up-to-date information and tacit knowledge.
- Use relationships and networks to remain aware of developments across the system that could impact, leverage, or streamline ongoing or future efforts.

EXPANDING

The minority of mission staff:

- Have strong internal and external relationships and networks based on mutual trust.
- Consistently and transparently communicate with a wide range of stakeholders (as appropriate) to exchange up-to-date information and tacit knowledge.
- Use relationships and networks to remain aware of developments across the system that could impact, leverage, or streamline ongoing or future efforts.

ADVANCED

The majority of mission staff:

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- Consistently and transparently communicate with a wide range of stakeholders (as appropriate) to exchange up-to-date information and tacit knowledge.
- Use relationships and networks to remain aware of developments across the system that could impact, leverage, or streamline ongoing or future efforts.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

Staff mission-wide:

- Have strong internal and external relationships and networks based on mutual trust.
- Consistently and transparently communicate with a wide range of stakeholders (as appropriate) to exchange up-to-date information and tacit knowledge.
- Use relationships and networks to remain aware of developments across the system that could impact, leverage, or streamline ongoing or future efforts.



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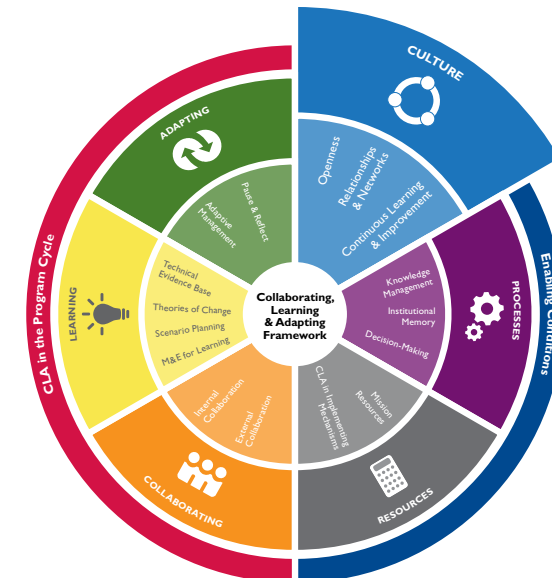


CULTURE

Continuous Learning & Improvement

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Staff take time for learning and reflection.
2. Motivation for learning.
3. Use of iterative approaches that enable continuous improvement.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

Staff are able to focus on learning and reflecting only outside of regular working hours.

EMERGENT

Only certain individuals:

- Make time for their own learning and reflection.
- Use iterative approaches that enable continuous improvement.

EXPANDING

The minority of mission staff:

- Participate in learning and reflection opportunities.
- Use iterative approaches that enable continuous improvement.

ADVANCED

- A majority of mission staff participate in learning and reflection opportunities.
- Staff are usually motivated to learn in order to grow professionally and improve organizational effectiveness.
- A majority of staff and implementing partners use iterative approaches that enable continuous improvement.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- Staff mission-wide, with the support of mission leadership, participate in learning opportunities and capture how they contribute to the organization's effectiveness.
- Staff are consistently motivated to learn in order to grow professionally and improve organizational effectiveness.
- Mission leadership consistently encourages staff and implementing partners to use iterative approaches that enable continuous improvement.



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PROCESSES

Knowledge Management

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Source various types of knowledge from stakeholders.
2. Distill knowledge.
3. Share knowledge with stakeholders.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We are not yet sourcing, distilling, and/or sharing knowledge.

EMERGENT

- In planning and implementation, we **rarely**:
- Source relevant technical, contextual, and experiential knowledge from key stakeholders.
 - Distill knowledge to inform decisions.
 - Share knowledge strategically and in user-friendly formats to influence decisions within and outside USAID.

EXPANDING

- In planning and implementation, we **sometimes**:
- Source relevant technical, contextual, and experiential knowledge from key stakeholders.
 - Distill knowledge to inform decisions.
 - Share knowledge strategically and in user-friendly formats to influence decisions within and outside USAID.

ADVANCED

- In planning and implementation, we **usually**:
- Source relevant technical, contextual, and experiential knowledge from key stakeholders.
 - Distill knowledge to inform decisions.
 - Share knowledge strategically and in user-friendly formats to influence decisions within and outside USAID.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- In planning and implementation, we **consistently and systematically**:
- Source relevant technical, contextual, and experiential knowledge from key stakeholders.
 - Distill knowledge to inform decisions.
 - Share knowledge strategically and in user-friendly formats to influence decisions within and outside USAID.

ENABLING CONDITIONS



PROCESSES

Institutional Memory

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Access to institutional knowledge.
2. Staff transitions.
3. Contributions of Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) to institutional memory.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We do not yet have systems or processes in place to maintain institutional memory.

EMERGENT

- We have knowledge management system(s) that are not in use.
- Transition and onboarding processes are articulated, but not implemented.

EXPANDING

- Mission staff use a knowledge management system for daily operational needs and basic access to institutional knowledge.
- Ad hoc knowledge transfer between incoming and outgoing staff depends largely on individual initiative.
- FSNs sometimes play a role in maintaining knowledge continuity.

ADVANCED

- Mission staff and relevant stakeholders are able to access needed information and knowledge.
- Departing and/or current staff usually transfer mission knowledge, understanding of the local context, and key relationships to incoming staff.
- FSNs are usually valued as a source of institutional knowledge and encouraged to contribute to staff onboarding and transition processes.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- Mission staff and relevant stakeholders are able to easily access up-to-date information and knowledge in a timely manner.
- Departing and/or current staff systematically transfer mission knowledge, understanding of the local context, and key relationships to incoming staff.
- FSNs are consistently valued as a source of institutional knowledge and are encouraged to contribute to staff onboarding and transition processes.



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PROCESSES

Decision-Making

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Awareness of decision-making processes.
2. Autonomy to make decisions.
3. Appropriate stakeholder involvement in decision-making.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We do not yet have clarity around decisionmaking processes or authority.

EMERGENT

- Only certain mission staff and implementing partners understand programmatic decisionmaking processes or the scope of their own autonomy.
- Rationale for decisions taken is rarely documented and only shared with stakeholders after the fact.

EXPANDING

- A minority of mission staff and implementing partners understand decision-making processes at the mission.
- The level of autonomy staff have to make decisions about their work differs according to the teams and individuals involved.
- Decisions are sometimes made after soliciting input from stakeholders, and the rationale is documented and shared with them.

ADVANCED

- The majority of mission staff and implementing partners understand decision-making processes.
- Staff are usually granted an appropriate level of autonomy to make decisions about their work.
- Decisions are usually made after soliciting input from appropriate internal and external stakeholders, and the rationale is documented and shared with them.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- The process for making decisions is fully transparent.
- Staff are consistently granted an appropriate level of autonomy to make decisions about their work.
- Decisions are consistently made after soliciting input from appropriate internal and external stakeholders, and the rationale is documented and shared with them.



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RESOURCES

Mission Resources

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Roles and responsibilities vis-a-vis CLA.
2. Professional development in CLA.
3. Procurement of CLA support.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- We are not yet leveraging financial and human resources to support CLA integration throughout the Program Cycle.

EMERGENT

- The mission's **M&E specialist(s)** are responsible for CLA.
- **Only a few individuals** are trained in and recognized for CLA-related knowledge and skills.

EXPANDING

- The mission's **M&E specialist(s) and points of contact from technical offices** are responsible for CLA.
- A **minority** of staff are trained in and recognized for CLA-related knowledge and skills.
- The mission has **support mechanism(s) with some elements relating to CLA**.

ADVANCED

- The mission has **CLA points of contact** in the Program Office and across the technical offices.
- A **majority** of staff are trained in and recognized for CLA-related knowledge and skills.
- The mission **procures mechanisms** to support CLA.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- Staff **mission-wide** incorporate CLA into their **scope and workload**, and there are identified CLA champions throughout the mission who coordinate efforts with the Program Office.
- Staff **mission-wide** are trained in and recognized for CLA-related knowledge and skills.
- The mission procures and **uses tailored support** to promote effective CLA.



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RESOURCES

CLA in Implementing Mechanisms

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Mechanism type and scope enables CLA.
2. Budgeting.
3. Staff composition and skills.



MATURITY STAGES

NOT YET PRESENT

- Implementing mechanisms are not yet supporting CLA integration.

EMERGENT

- We rarely:
- Use mechanism types and scopes that enable CLA integration during implementation.
 - Allocate and/or approve mechanism resources to support CLA integration.
 - Request and/or approve key personnel with capacity in adaptive management and other CLA-related skills.

EXPANDING

- We sometimes:
- Use mechanism types and scopes that enable CLA integration during implementation.
 - Allocate and/or approve mechanism resources to support CLA integration.
 - Request and/or approve key personnel with capacity in adaptive management and other CLA-related skills.

ADVANCED

- We usually:
- Use mechanism types and scopes that enable CLA integration during implementation.
 - Allocate and/or approve mechanism resources to support CLA integration.
 - Request and/or approve key personnel with capacity in adaptive management and other CLA-related skills.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

- We consistently and systematically:
- Use mechanism types and scopes that enable CLA integration during implementation.
 - Allocate and/or approve mechanism resources to support CLA integration.
 - Request and/or approve key personnel with capacity in adaptive management and other CLA-related skills.