

## Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations Program (MERLIN)

### Rapid Feedback Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (Rapid Feedback MERL) FACT SHEET



Rapid Feedback MERL is a collaborative approach to learning and adapting. Improved data capture and compressed feedback loops provide decision-makers with timely, actionable evidence. Design and implementation decisions can be optimized to maximize chances of impact and improve prospects for long-term success.

#### THE CHALLENGE

Few programs build systematic feedback loops into early stages of project implementation. Even projects with a strong evidence-based design include assumptions that need to be pressure-tested in reality. M&E systems are often considered tools for accountability and therefore, learning often occurs too late in the project cycle to influence change. Many M&E activities rely on a limited, inappropriate, and inadequate set of methods.

#### THE INNOVATION

Rapid Feedback MERL brings learning to the early stages of project implementation in a rigorous, empowering, and flexible way. It applies proven monitoring, evaluation, and analytic techniques to increase effectiveness systematically. Rapid Feedback guides programs in testing key program adaptations to inform how best to achieve desired results – potentially at lower cost. This includes focusing feedback loops on specific aspects of the project, and may also include using advanced statistical methods to reduce required sample sizes and the use of tools that can support rapid data collection – cell phones and tablets for survey implementation, SMS and IVR technology for remote data collection, and geospatial imagery from satellites.

#### THE APPROACH

Rapid Feedback MERL is tailored to program managers' learning needs, the local context, and the realistic trade-offs between rigor, time, and budget. Experimental designs such as randomized controlled trial and quasi- and non-experimental designs may be integrated with advanced qualitative methods such as most significant change and learning collaboratives, with an emphasis on engaging beneficiaries. This mechanism is particularly useful at the early stages of a project when there is uncertainty about the specific intervention modalities to follow or outcomes they may yield. It is appropriate when a project is being tailored or adapted to a new setting, moving from a pilot to scale-up phase, or considering alternative strategies to promote greater engagement or participation. Rapid Feedback can also be used when there is interest in "unpacking" programs to identify the most effective elements.

#### QUICK FACTS

**Tools (illustrative):** Tools will match the design questions to support timely decision making, but may include focus groups, RCTs, quasi-experimental designs, and in some cases factorial orthogonal design

**Funding mechanism:** Cooperative Agreement (buy-in option for USAID operating units)

**Partners:** Results for Development Institute (prime), Abt Associates Inc., Mathematica Policy Research, Notre Dame Initiative for Global Development

**Period of Performance:** 10/01/2015 – 9/30/2018

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