



USAID

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

“How to Work with USAID” Training Series



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Review how your MEL system informs your work and supports USAID.
- Understand what should be included in your MEL plan.
- Develop best practices for a strong tracking process.
- Discover how MEL relates to effective activity management.



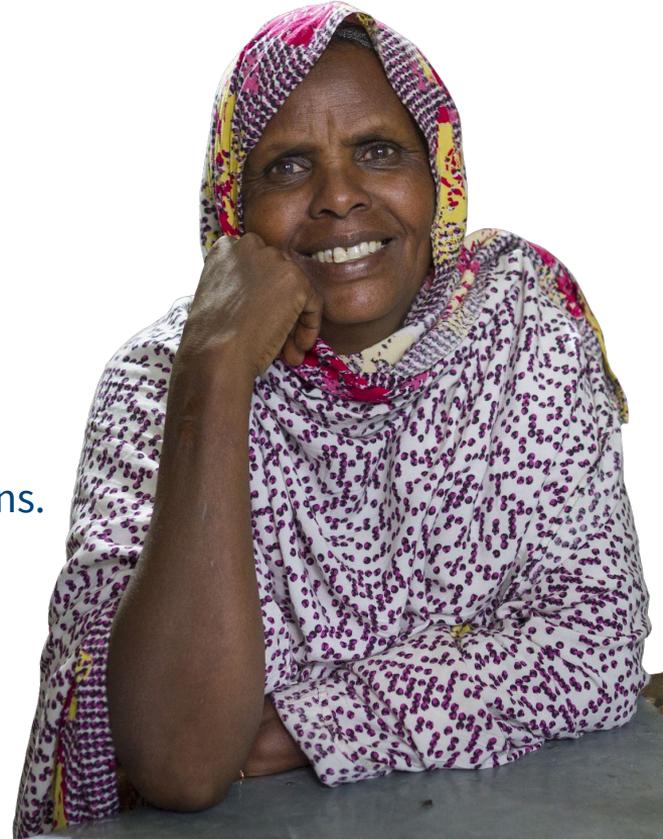
WHY MEL IS IMPORTANT

MEL facilitates learning by:

- Supporting USAID's Program Cycle.
- Supporting effective decision-making.
- Helping you adapt and improve your activity.

It also helps you maintain accountability by:

- Ensuring compliance with USAID policies and federal regulations.
- Promoting transparency in programming.
- Providing a basis for sound documentation and reporting.



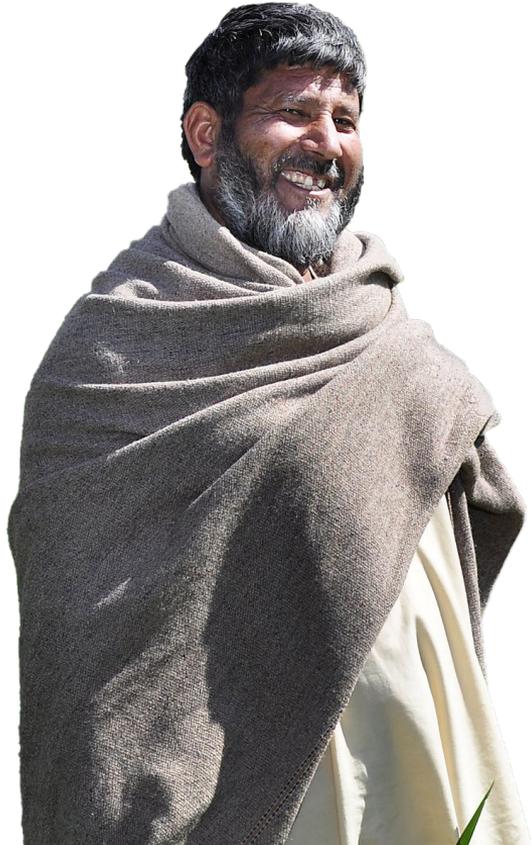
SUPPORTS USAID'S PROGRAM CYCLE

USAID follows these steps in its programming:

1. **Country and regional strategic planning:** The Agency develops overall goals.
2. **Project design and implementation:** Missions create overall MEL plans to monitor progress in their regions or countries.
3. **Activity design and implementation:** AORs/CORs help partners develop the MEL plans they will use to track progress.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Partners' MEL systems provide USAID with feedback on implementation challenges and successes.

Partners' MEL data will guide more effective decisions when the Agency begins its next Program Cycle.

ENABLES DECISION-MAKING



Data gathered by your MEL system informs decisions throughout your activity life cycle. It helps you to:

- **Monitor** activity progress.
- **Evaluate** how well your activity has met its objectives.
- **Learn** what is necessary to make ongoing adjustments to programming.

HELPS YOU IMPROVE YOUR ACTIVITY

Apply lessons learned to:

- Identify ways to streamline the planning and implementation processes.
- Revise your MEL approaches so you can more efficiently collect, analyze, and use information.
- Adjust reporting processes to gather and use more relevant information.
- Adapt your programming to enhance its effectiveness.



ENSURES COMPLIANCE



With a strong MEL system, you can deliver evidence that you are:

- Fulfilling key management requirements.
- Meeting activity goals.
- Upholding USAID policies and standard practices, and ensuring program quality.

PROMOTES ACCOUNTABILITY

A robust MEL system confirms that:

- Information is accurate and transparent.
- Good activity management practices are followed.
- Resources are used as intended.
- The activity is accountable to participants and stakeholders.





USAID INDONESIA URBAN WATER SANITATION AND HYGIENE

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 5
OCTOBER 2014 – SEPTEMBER 2015

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT 18
JULY – SEPTEMBER 2015



NOVEMBER 2015

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SUPPORTS PROGRESS REPORTING

Focus on:

- What data should be collected.
- How to use that information to manage your activity.

For details on the reporting process, go to USAID's
[“Preparing Progress Reports”](#) module.



MEL REQUIREMENTS

REVIEW EXPECTATIONS

- You must develop your MEL plan within 90 days of receiving a USAID award.
- Your MEL plan should be updated as your activity evolves.



Your AOR/COR will help you implement and manage your plan.

ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT CYCLE



PLAN TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Start design of your proposed activity by developing a theory of change that outlines the difference you anticipate making.

The following questions will help you design your MEL system:

- What type of change do you want to achieve?
- What kinds of data will help you determine whether your activity is effective?
- How will you document your results?
- How will your team use what it learns to improve?

BASELINES AND ASSESSMENTS

To ensure program quality, you should follow standard MEL practices to:

- Develop indicator baselines about the current situation you are hoping to address with your activity.
- Use a performance indicator reference sheet (PIRS) for each indicator to explain why it is important and when and how you will collect information on it.
- Conduct regular data quality assessments as you implement your activity.



YOUR MEL PLAN: WHAT TO INCLUDE

- 1 Explain your activity and goals in a summary.
- 2 Outline how you will collect, monitor, and maintain data.
- 3 Detail how you will measure the success of your activity.
- 4 Describe how you will use what you learn to adjust your actions.

Find a guide to content in USAID's [How-To Note: Activity MEL Plan](#).



KEY ELEMENTS: MONITORING

Two types of indicators help you assess progress:

- **Output indicators** measure the short-term and direct results of your work.
- **Outcome indicators** track longer-term, more gradual changes.

Include a tracking table that outlines each indicator and its method of data collection.

“SMART” INDICATORS

To better understand your activity’s progress, use indicators that are:

Specific: Identify the concrete change that will take place.

Measurable: Quantify the change that you are working to achieve.

Appropriate: Measure something that your activity can affect.

Realistic: Provide change that can be achieved with available resources.

Time-bound: Specify a timeline for achieving change.

Establish indicators for your plan with this [Indicator Criteria Checklist](#).

TYPES OF DATA

Your activity's MEL system should generate two types of data:

- **Quantitative** data is represented in the form of numbers, such as workshop participation rates or number of households reached.
- **Qualitative** data includes insights on activity challenges and successes, such as stakeholder interviews and staff feedback about activities.

When handling any data tied to personal identifiable information, take special care to ensure confidentiality through data and access controls.

ENSURE DATA QUALITY

Use the following criteria when developing your data quality plan:

- **Validity:** Data should clearly represent intended results.
- **Integrity:** Safeguards should be in place to minimize data errors.
- **Precision:** Data should have enough detail to inform sound decision-making.
- **Reliability:** Data collection and analysis should be consistent over time.
- **Timeliness:** Data should be current and ready for use when needed.

Guidance from your AOR/COR will determine how you meet USAID's requirement for a data quality assessment.

Use USAID's guide to [Conduct a Data Quality Assessment](#).



KEY ELEMENTS: EVALUATION

Evaluations are used to determine the overall contributions of an activity. They:

- Facilitate accountability.
- Document ways to strengthen approaches.
- Include the perspectives of those served by your activity.

Learn more about evaluations with USAID's [Evaluation Toolkit](#).

KEY ELEMENTS: LEARNING

USAID partners use the collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) process to ensure that their staff members:

- Seek feedback.
- Assess data.
- Review adjustments.



COLLABORATE, LEARN, AND ADAPT

CLA helps you improve performance by incorporating ways to:

- **Collaborate:** Which partnerships are essential to implementation?
- **Learn:** What drives success or causes failure?
- **Adapt:** Where can you adjust to amplify activity results?

Learn more at the USAID [Learning Lab](#).



INCORPORATE CLA



Collaborate with the right partners for an informed and integrated approach.



Learn by asking the right questions to support decision-making.



Adapt your plans to improve effectiveness.



Enable success by creating a culture that encourages CLA efforts.

Work with your AOR/COR to integrate CLA into your activity.



MEL PROCESS

PERSONNEL



You will need technical staff with the skills to:

- **Manage** the overall MEL approach for your USAID award.
- **Coordinate** the actions that make up your MEL system, from design to evaluation.
- **Ensure** the accuracy and security of data entered into your system.
- **Incorporate** CLA practices across the full activity management cycle.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Plan for success by scheduling enough time to:

- Conduct a complete analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Review conclusions and lessons learned to date.
- Involve the communications team in drafting, editing, and formatting a progress report.
- Allow senior management to review the report before you submit it to USAID.



TELL YOUR ACTIVITY'S STORY

Activity stories are important communication tools to share your work with donors, stakeholders, and the public.

- A strong MEL system provides evidence and examples of your activity's achievements.
- Regular communication with your AOR/COR will help identify opportunities to share stories.



KEY POINTS

- **Develop** “smart” MEL indicators that measure the direct results of your work.
- **Confirm** the quality of your data so that decisions and progress reports are based on accurate information.
- **Conduct** strategically timed evaluations to ensure accountability and promote learning.
- When preparing reports, give your team time to **collect and analyze data** and **consider lessons learned**.
- **Use the CLA approach** to continue to adapt your activity so it remains relevant and effective.

RESOURCES

- [USAID Evaluation and Monitoring Terms \(PDF\)](#)
- [“Preparing Progress Reports” module](#)
- [Learning Lab: Monitoring Toolkit](#)
- [USAID Compliance Division](#)
- [ADS 201: Monitoring \(201.3.5\), Learning \(201.3.6\), and CLA \(201-3.7\)](#)
- [How-To Note: Activity Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning \(MEL\) Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [Program Cycle: Indicator Resources \(PDF\)](#)
- [How-To Note: Developing a Project Logic Model \(PDF\)](#)
- [How-To Note: Conduct a Data Quality Assessment \(PDF\)](#)
- [Learning Lab: USAID’s Evaluation Toolkit](#)
- [Learning Lab: Understanding CLA](#)

Questions? Ask your AOR/COR.

Thank You



This module was produced by the United States Agency for International Development. The presentation team comprises staff from USAID and the Partnerships Incubator. USAID is grateful to all the individuals who contributed their time and ideas toward the development of this series.

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