



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 Development Document (PDD). 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 or if a standalone activity, to advancing CDCS development objectives? 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.

Contents	
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

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 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.

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](#).

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.

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:

Observing this in the activity context...	... may suggest a need for:
Interdependence among/connection with other activities.	More attention to collaboration among partners throughout the activity scoping, implementation, and reporting.
A more complex system within which we envision stronger actor-led development	Investment in iterative analytics and collaborative context monitoring (with stakeholders, beneficiaries, et al.).
Key gaps in evidence and/or assumptions underlying the theory of change	More proactive, frequent, or inclusive learning activities, such as studies, stakeholder-driven learning events, and/or pause and reflect and action-planning moments.
The need for strategic opportunism inherent in activity design (e.g., in market systems development)	Flexibility in selecting new strategic approaches, sub-awardees, or partners once the activity is underway.

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](#) – appear below.

Example Language for the Theory of Change Discussion
<p><i>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:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>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;</i> • <i>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;</i> • <i>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</i> • <i>Prioritize intentional and collaborative learning to ensure rapid feedback loops and adaptation to achieve both short- and long-term change.</i> <p><i>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 or offeror/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.</i></p>

2. Guiding Principles

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

Example Language for Guiding Principles

- **Ability to learn and adapt approaches based on research and program experience:** The successful applicant or 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 or 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 or 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.

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.

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 or 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 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, a 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

INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

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. The [PEB 20-02: Advisory Phased Acquisition Process](#) Bulletin discusses two forms of advisory phased processes: a pre-solicitation process, and a post-solicitation process. Other examples of where and how an inception phase has been used can be found in the following note, [Adaptive Approaches to Acquisition and Assistance](#). Some sample language appears below.

Example Language for 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 or 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 sustainable development outcomes;
- Generate and share knowledge and evidence about what works, what doesn't, and why;
- Use pause and reflect opportunities to analyze new learning and adjust accordingly;
- Identify and monitor Mission and Agency 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 or 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 or 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:

- 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.

INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

- 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 or 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 or 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 or 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:

- 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

INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

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 or 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 or 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 most impactful ways of supporting the success of your activity. More information on what monitoring and evaluation 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 aligning to the requirements of the Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan specified in [ADS 201.3.4.10 a](#). Activity MEL Plans must include:

- The activity's monitoring approach, including monitoring processes, systems and relevant performance indicators; and

INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

- As appropriate, the activity’s approach for collecting and responding to feedback from beneficiaries.

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 or 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;*
- *As appropriate, the activity’s approach for establishing effective procedures for collecting and responding to feedback from beneficiaries.*
- *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*
- *Roles and responsibilities for all proposed monitoring, evaluation, and learning actions.*

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

- *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 this compilation of good practices in setting up and using these bodies, [Tips for Better Use of Advisory Councils](#), from which the text below was adapted.

Example Language on Advisory Groups

In order to encourage local ownership and high-level strategic direction of the program, the successful applicant or 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 or 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.

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.

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

INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

- 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.

Example Language for Personnel
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Example qualifications to add for any key personnel:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Demonstrated ability to be collaborative, flexible, and creative;</i>• <i>Excellent communications and interpersonal skills with evidence of ability to establish strong working relationships with diverse stakeholders;</i>• <i>Evidence of open and learning-oriented management style;</i>• <i>Proven success in leading highly collaborative, dynamic teams and managing change; and</i>• <i>Proven experience in iterative, flexible, adaptive management of teams and projects.</i>• Language describing the role of an Organizational Learning Advisor: <i>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.</i>• Example qualifications for an Organizational Learning Advisor:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Education: A degree in the field of organizational learning or development assistance.</i>• <i>Work Experience: Progressively responsible, professional-level experience in organizational or action learning, development, consulting, and/or knowledge management is expected.</i>• <i>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.</i>• <i>Skills and abilities: Demonstrated passion for facilitating and creating organizational learning and 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 is 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].</i>

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

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

INCORPORATING CLA IN SOLICITATIONS

about how these 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 or 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 or 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 or 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 or offeror and approved by USAID. The applicant or 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 or offeror shall provide a narrative section that describes its approach to the overall management of [name of the activity]. Applicants or offerors must describe:*
 - *The management approach for the overall execution of the activity. This includes an overview of the management component and the applicant or 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 or 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 the capacity of local partners and partner country counterparts as a strategy for sustainability. The applicant or offeror shall describe its proposed in-country financial and procurement management systems.*

11. Budget

Example Language for Instructions for Budgets
<p><i>In budgeting for labor, travel, equipment and supplies, and other direct and indirect costs, the applicant or 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:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Facilitators, venues, and other costs associated with collaboration, learning, and pause & reflect events and activities with partners and stakeholders;</i> • <i>Knowledge management, evidence building, information synthesis, and institutional memory systems, such as evidence and evaluation support services, performance management systems, filing systems, and intranets;</i> • <i>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</i> • <i>Support for leadership development and team-building activities that can foster a learning culture, improve relationships among staff, and clarify decision-making processes.</i>

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 or 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.

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 and encouraging experience in collaboration, learning, adaptive management, and engagement of local stakeholders in the evaluation criteria, 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 or 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 or 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 or 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 or 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 other key personnel is encouraged. Oral presentations are expected to occur approximately two weeks after the selected applicants or 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](#) 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