CLA PLAYBOOK:

A PRACTICAL RESOURCE FOR PROJECTS AND PROGRAM DESIGNERS

TIPS | EXAMPLES | RESOURCES

Version 1.0 October 2017

ACDI VOCA
Expanding Opportunities Worldwide

Welcome!

This document provides **practical tips, examples, and resources** to help ACDI/VOCA project teams **C**ollaborate, **L**earn, and **A**dapt in more systematic, intentional, and effective ways.

It combines experiences and expertise of ACDI/VOCA global project staff with existing resources from USAID and others in our industry.

This is a "playbook;" it is not a blueprint or checklist. Use and adapt the tips and resources which make the most sense for your team, project, and local context.

Want help? Great! Email claplaybook@acdivoca.onmicrosoft.com or visit the CLA SharePoint site.

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Acknowledgements: We diligently sought to incorporate perspectives of a diverse cross section of individuals who represent ACDI/VOCA's best practice to date in CLA implementation. ACDI/VOCA program managers, COPs, field technical and M&E specialists, and operations staff provided valuable feedback during the initial review and vetting process. This included 12 staff (50/50 split across field and HQ-based) from five divisions and three countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Special appreciation to Cristobal Aguilar, Gevorg Adamyan, Carl Birkelo, Jim Flock, Tuba Khan, Beth Leonhardt, Bilash Mitra, Hamisi Mwango, and Chito Padilla. Also, thank you to Maria Fernanda Castro, Samiha Sobhan, and Jennifer Moffatt for design, formatting, and editing assistance.

Cover image: The CLA Framework graphic on the cover (repeated on page 1) is property of USAID, 2016.

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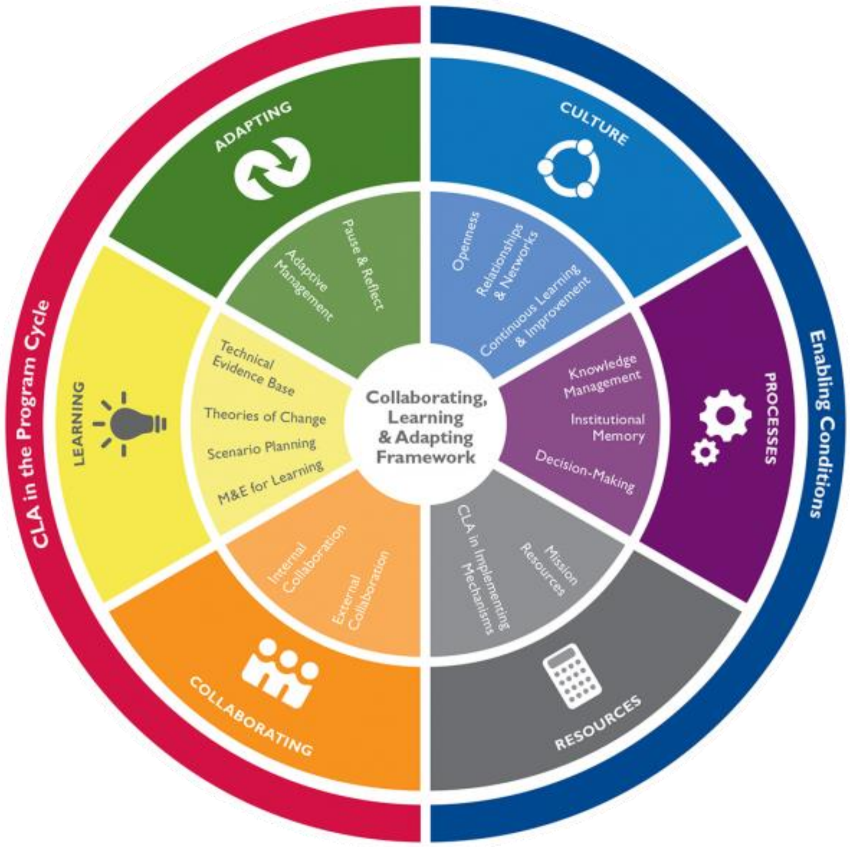
What is CLA? An Introduction

CLA is an approach to program design, management, and implementation that emphasizes *Collaborating*, *Learning*, and *Adapting*, all within a supportive enabling environment.

The truth is, most of us are already doing elements of collaboration, learning, and adaptation simply because it makes good sense. What distinguishes CLA as an approach is the way all these elements work together in a manner that is ***intentional***, ***systematic***, **and *well-resourced***.

USAID pioneered the CLA approach (and the term "CLA," others may simply call it adaptive management). USAID's initial focus was to improve the effectiveness of its own internal operations; it now encompasses implementing partners. USAID integrated CLA into its operational policy (ADS 201) in 2016. To crystallize key elements of the approach, USAID developed a **CLA Framework**, graphically represented by this "wheel" on the right. **The Framework has six components, organized into two categories:**



CLA in the Program Cycle*:*

1. **Collaborating** *intentionally* with stakeholders to share knowledge and reduce duplication of efforts
2. **Learning** *systematically* by drawing on evidence from a variety of sources and taking time to reflect on implementation
3. **Adapting** *strategically* based on applied learning

Enabling Conditions for CLA:

4. **Culture** that supports core behaviors such as curiosity, team work, and feedback
5. **Processes** to make CLA intentional and strategic
6. **Resources** to ensure CLA priorities are funded, staffed, and administered

Each component includes several subcomponents. For example, the Learning component has four subcomponents: *Technical Evidence Base, Theories of Change, Scenario Planning,* and *M&E for Learning*. The Adapting component has two: *Pause and Reflect* and *Adaptive Management*.

CLA at ACDI/VOCA

ACDI/VOCA knows that for sustainable, scalable impact to take place in our dynamic work environments, it is critical to analyze, learn, re-strategize, and improve throughout a project's life, and in a manner that is collaborative and driven by local institutions and change agents. Embracing CLA is consistent with our mission and increasingly demanded by our primary client, USAID.

ACDI/VOCA is already doing a lot in this area:

- In 2016, we launched an ***internal CLA Champions Network*** that meets regularly to build staff capacity and share insights/resources.
- We currently ***implement robust CLA components*** on several large-scale, USAID-funded market development programs *(the sections below include practical insights from these projects).*
- Our AflaSTOP project was a ***CLA Case Study Competition winner***, recognized by USAID for use of small-scale market research to routinely inform strategic technical and administrative adaptations on a post-harvest storage and drying project in Kenya.
- We actively engage with USAID/PPL's LEARN project, which supports USAID's CLA efforts. This engagement helps us stay abreast of evolving resources and best practices.
- ACDI/VOCA *has* ***trained CLA Self-Assessment Facilitators*** *(see pg. 3 for more).*
- ***USAID acknowledged our strengths in CLA***, remarking on our LEO project: "[ACDI/VOCA] exceeded the contract requirements for a cross-cutting objective on collaborating, learning, and adapting…through utilization of an adaptive workplan, the Contractor was able to seize strategic moments…they maintained high levels of coordination with other donors, implementing partners, Missions and various DC offices…these collaborations added significant value for USAID." (CPAR, 2015/6)

About the Playbook: How to Use It

This playbook is organized by each of the six components in USAID's CLA Framework. Each section includes a brief explanation of the topic and its subcomponents, practical tips, examples from practice where possible, and ample use of hyperlinks to tools, resources, templates, etc. This is version 1; we expect to create a "version 2" as our applied experience evolves. *This is part of a suite of signature ACDI/VOCA technical tools available* here.

> **"One size does not fit all.** CLA isn't about following a template but about really thinking about what works for your situation and context. **The solutions are as diverse as the needs—let's embrace that."** —USAID/LEARN

Color-coding and internal hyperlinks help you navigate quickly to the component you are trying to find. For example, the section on Adaptation (Component 3), has a dark green background, just like it does in the CLA Framework graphic. While we encourage you to jump to the section that most reflects your needs**, give the playbook a front to back read at least once,** as there are many synergies across components. For example, it is hard to *adapt* (Component 3) if you don't have the *processes* (Component 5) in place to *learn* (Component 2) and the *resources* (such as budget flexibility, discussed in Component 6) to support a change in intervention strategy.

For efficiencies' sake, we have chosen to hyperlink to resources instead of footnoting the full web address. If you have a "hard copy" print out of this Playbook, you can access the "soft copy" online by going to the ACDI/VOCA Global Intranet SharePoint Landing page (https://acdivoca.sharepoint.com), and clicking on CLA Resources in the Technical Resources section (lower right-hand side). Or, email claplaybook@acdivoca.onmicrosoft.com.

There are many existing resources on CLA and in developing this document we drew heavily on them. We are especially indebted to USAID's LEARN project and its Learning Lab website, to other organizations who contributed to the Market Facilitation Job Tools Portal created by ACDI/VOCA's LEO project, and to the BEAM Exchange.

Who is this Playbook for? Project leadership are key stewards of successful CLA approaches. This document is especially targeted at Chiefs of Party (COPs). Additional important users include HQ-based Program Managers, field-level M&E technical directors, plus program designers.

So Where do I Start? The CLA Self-Assessment!

USAID developed a group self-assessment exercise that is a great starting point. It is a simple, participatory, and inexpensive way to work as a team to think about CLA intentionally and strategically. It can take as little as two hours to complete. It involves the following:

- A preliminary selection of which subcomponents of the CLA Framework are most important for your team at the present point in time
- A self-assessment of how "mature" the team is now, and where the team wants to be six months from now
- An action planning process to prioritize manageable next steps for improvement

This playbook provides a rich set of ideas to inform the action planning phase of the exercise. For example, if you know what subcomponents you'll focus on during the Self-Assessment, read the relevant section of this playbook in advance, and use the tips there to jump-start ideas.

ACDI/VOCA has several trained CLA Assessment Facilitators. We also have tips and lessons learned from piloting the exercise with multiple ACDI/VOCA field projects so far.

To learn more about the Self-Assessment, or for support planning and implementing the exercise, email CLAPlaybook@acdivoca.onmicrosoft.com.

Summary of Practical Tips and Resources in this Playbook

COLLABORATING

Intentionally engage with strategic external and internal stakeholders to reduce duplication, enhance learning, and magnify influence

Key Tips:

- Professionalize & reward collaboration in staff SOWs, annual reviews
- Define stakeholder's "value proposition" (incentive) to collaborate
- Be efficient and strategic
- Capture impact of collaboration, use data to motivate internal collaboration, and share ME&L efforts externally

Select Resources:

- Collaboration Worksheet
- Stakeholder Analysis and Collaboration Mapping Tool
- 8 ways to build collab. teams
- Case studies on donor working groups, strategic planning

LEARNING

Learning with a purpose: tools, approaches, behaviors which enable strategic learning for better outcomes

Key Tips:

- Build shared understanding of the Theory of Change; regularly adapt based on learning
- Develop a concise, strategic learning agenda, using a mixture of traditional and action research methods
- Consider scenario planning exercises to challenge assumptions
- Formalize learning activities in annual workplan, budget

Select Resources:

- LEAP Tutorial
- Theory of Change MEL Guide
- Learning Agenda Template
- Case studies on project learning questions, mid-point TOC adaptations

ADAPTING

Take time to "pause and reflect" on learning that informs decisions about maintaining, adapting, or dropping an approach or tactic

Key Tips:

- Use after action reviews, scenario planning, adapt/drop/expand tools to guide pause and reflect sessions
- Ask the right, probing questions
- Pilot multiple possibilities and set concrete timelines for CLA research
- Reflect major adaptations in annual work plans but adjust iteratively throughout the year

Select Resources:

- Five Pause and Reflect Activities
- Key Adaptive Management resources
- Sample CLA Plan
- Examples of adaptive work plan strategies, project P&R tactics

CULTURE

How to cultivate a culture of openness, relationship building, and continuous learning that allows CLA to thrive

Key Tips:

- Provide positive feedback
- Create shared experiences
- Understand how intercultural and gender dynamics shape openness
- Design open office environment
- Promote, reward creative thinking
- Build time for learning into SOWs

Select Resources:

- 15 Team Building Activities
- 5 Ways to Build a Culture of Continuous Improvement
- Mapping Leadership (Inter)Cultures

PROCESSES

Defined processes for decision making, knowledge management, and institutional memory

Key Tips:

- "Pause and reflect" regularly
- Utilize ACDI/VOCA knowledge management platforms
- Integrate CLA into SOWs, staff review process, onboarding and exits
- Transparent decision-making processes, delegate authority

Select Resources:

- CLA Maturity Self-Assessment
- STAIRS Work Planning Handbook
- Facilitating Good Meetings
- SharePoint Tutorial
- Case study on quarterly program reviews

RESOURCES

Leveraging financial, human, and admin. (program award, pass-through funds) resources to enable CLA

Key Tips:

- Budget for collaboration, learning
- Create flexible pots of funding in annual budget requests to minimize mods due to mid-year adaptation
- ADS 201 is your friend
- Use specific recruitment techniques to identify CLA skills
- Wisely choose grant mechanisms

Select Resources:

- Staff Performance Appraisal Form with CLA behaviors
- CLA Director, CLA Committee SOWs
- Sample interview questions, examples of flexible grants

CLA IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE:

Collaborating (Section I), Learning (Section II), and Adapting (Section III)

I. COLLABORATING

The Collaboration component is about *strategically* choosing key stakeholders and working together with them to reduce duplication, share knowledge and learning, and facilitate coordinated, layered, sequenced, and collective actions. CLA works best when people are motivated to collaborate. There are two elements of this component—**internal** and **external**.

Internal Collaboration

We often assume internal collaboration is a given. Yet project teams can struggle with silos—especially with silos between technical and ME&L—both of which are critical to learning and adaptation. Every person, in every department, has a role to play in CLA.

TIPS

- **Professionalize internal collaboration** by promoting it in staff job descriptions, with clear expectations, work streams, and annual performance goals and metrics. See the Administration sub-component under **Resources** for graduated performance expectations in this area.
- **Make internal collaboration intentional** with organizational processes such as:
  - Joint/mixed team work planning and or matrixed implementation teams (market systems, nutrition, M&E, and finance all as one team)
  - For every activity in the workplan, ask "who do we need to collaborate with?" Identify opportunities and include collaboration activities in annual work plan
  - Team building activities
  - Collaboration as part of monthly project meetings—what is the team learning about collaborating, what are we good at, what could we improve, etc.
- **Promote a culture of collaboration** through:
  - Modeling collaborative behavior (especially senior management)
  - Encouraging open communication—sharing of information, experiences, observations or opinions
  - Scheduling and planning for regular/iterative collaborative events or activities
  - Rewarding cross-departmental initiatives to improve project management/ administration/implementation
- **Make collaboration effective**—pay attention to productive meetings. Use an engaged facilitator, have a clear agenda, and identify defined outputs.
- **Reflect on M&E data to motivate internal collaboration**: Utilize disaggregated M&E data and dashboards through Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Platform (LEAP) to inform a discussion on project results—and how better internal collaboration across teams (i.e., production team and marketing team, technical unit, and M&E or grants teams) can enhance future success.

Examples from Practice

- ACDI/VOCA's Crops and Dairy Market Systems project in Tanzania (known as NAFAKA II) has six offices spread out over a broad geographic area—this makes communication challenging. To overcome this, they set up team WhatsApp group chats to encourage easy and real-time discussion around learning questions and to share successes and challenges with technical and M&E teams.

Resources

- Eight Ways to Build Collaborative Teams
- An Epic List of Great Team Building Games (Team Building Without Time Wasting)
- Behaviors of Collaborative Leaders
- Facilitating Good Meetings / Discussions
- 15 Team Building Activities

External Collaboration

Every project has multiple stakeholders whose input and buy-in will influence, and in some cases, determine project outcomes. These could include government (national and local), private sector firms and groups, other donors and NGOs, CBOs, and our end beneficiaries. Seeking insight and feedback, incorporating priorities, opinions, and viewpoints, and engaging stakeholders as co-implementers will help build a "coalition of the willing" to achieve goals and magnify your project's scale and influence.

TIPS

- **Be strategic—work with the right stakeholders.** Are you collaborating with the right stakeholders? Use stakeholder analysis and collaboration mapping (see resource box below) to identify strategic stakeholders and develop a strategy for who, how, and when to engage**.** Consider nominating a point of contact with each partner to streamline communication.
- **Make external collaboration intentional**—include activities intended to help increase collaboration between external stakeholders within your annual workplan and budget. For example:
  - Multistakeholder, participatory work planning, pause and reflect, work plan reviews
  - Cross-donor working groups
  - Industry stakeholder forums
  - Technical advisory committees or strategic advisory groups
  - Joint-implementation of project activities
  - Joint-learning initiatives (data sharing, writing technical briefs)
  - Joint learning conferences
- **Define incentives/rewards of collaboration**—outline the "value proposition" of collaborative initiatives or relationships. Be specific and define this value from the perspective of the stakeholder, not the project.

- **Capture impact from collaboration—and collaborate on ME&L**: capture amplified outcomes and indirect impacts from stakeholder collaboration through annual indicators, qualitative studies, or other methodologies. Collaboration with other donors around performance monitoring, impact evaluations, and learning agendas is cost-effective and often highly valued by USAID.
- **When possible, use a facilitation approach**—take on the role of convener and relationship broker, creating incentives for other actors to come together (versus us doing the work directly)

Examples from Practice

- ACDI/VOCA's Feed the Future Resilience and Economic Growth in Arid Lands-Accelerated Growth (REGAL-AG) is an active and lead participant in the Partnership for Resilience and Economic Growth (PREG), a working group based on collective impact that brings USAID, its implementing partners across northern Kenya, the Kenya National Drought Management Authority, and local county officials together to coordinate activities. For example, PREG facilitated joint work planning and team building workshops in several counties over a period of four months. Each workshop produced joint work plans and outlined priorities to sequence, layer, and integrate activities by identifying two existing ward level sites where stakeholders could improve coordination. We have done joint technical trainings and shared key implementation learnings and models. Our willingness to meaningfully collaborate not only amplified our results but it is one key feature in USAID's satisfaction with the project.

- REGAL-AG's follow-on project (Livestock Market Systems), awarded October 2017, will create shared learning agendas and coordinate collection of key performance and impact data with two other large, complex projects under USAID/Kenya's portfolio around the country. Stay tuned for insights from this experience in collaboration in Playbook Version 2!

- USAID/Bangladesh–CLA to Develop the Bangladesh Dairy Sector: This CLA Case Competition entry tells the story of how seven activities formed the Bangladesh Livestock Coordination Group to better leverage their collective work and increase impact on the sector.

- USAID/Malawi's Experiment in Integration to Foster Collaboration and Improve Programmatic Decision-Making: This CLA Case Competition entry presents USAID/Malawi's efforts to foster greater collaboration among partners by facilitating joint planning and leveraging resources.

Resources

- Project Collaboration Worksheet
- Collaboration Mapping Tool
- USAID Learning Lab Blog–How to Make Collaboration More Effective
- STAIRS Handbook for Collaborative, Multi-stakeholder Work Planning
- Open Space Technology
- The Facilitation Approach and CLA

II. LEARNING

The Learning component is about institutionalizing intentional, systematic processes to facilitate learning into project management and implementation. There are four primary elements to consider:

- Theories of Change (TOC)
- Technical evidence base
- Scenario planning
- M&E for learning

"There is often a mindset that M&E is about <u>showing</u> how what we are doing is working, but we need to change that—M&E has to be more about <u>asking if</u> what we are doing is working. We need more questioning and more analysis. Every project should articulate a theory of change that evolves and improves every year." *—Quote from ACDI/VOCA COP*

Theories of Change

A key starting point for learning is a project's Theory of Change (TOC) which points to specific areas for learning questions. A TOC is a type of causal model which shows: 1) hypothesized causal relationships between different outcomes a project will work towards (to achieve the desired project objectives or goals), and 2) any assumptions embedded within the hypothesized relationships between outcomes.

The hypothesis, assumptions, and risks surrounding these causal relationships become the focus of project learning.

For example, imagine a TOC with the causal relationship "Increased access to inputs results in increased agricultural yields."

Basic Elements of a TOC, adapted from TOPS Theory of Change Training Curriculum.

Example questions focused on this causal relationship might include:

- Is increased access to inputs alone sufficient to increase yield, or are there other variables (price, education, literacy, distance to markets, behavior, quality of inputs, control over income, etc.)?
- Is access the same for men? Women? Youth?
- What combination of activities are most significant to improving yields for target beneficiaries?

TIPS

1. **Ensure your project has articulated a TOC.** Many times, the donor/client provides a TOC or articulates one during the proposal process. Yet, the environment changes, and we learn new

things during implementation—even in start-up during staff hiring, partner engagement, etc. Thus, even if a TOC exists, take the time to review it as a team. If you don't have a TOC, work with your staff to articulate one (see the Resources section below for help). Visuals are very useful; people should also be able to give an "elevator speech" with the basic logic. Ensure staff continually reference the TOC and that the TOC is visible in common spaces such as conference rooms. This widespread knowledge of the project's TOC will achieve the following:

   - Help your team explore the different dimensions and variables influencing the changes your project hopes to affect, and how to achieve the results
   - Build shared understanding and expectations among your team
   - Provide a framework to link learning questions—ensures project learning is aligned with and informs project strategy and activity design

2. **Involve external stakeholders in design and review of your TOC.** Seek insight and feedback from external stakeholders (e.g., through feedback sessions or Advisory Panels). Incorporate their priorities, opinions, and viewpoints; it will help you minimize incorrect assumptions in your project design, maximize use of local knowledge, and build a "coalition of the willing." Identify collaboration, coordination, sequencing, and layering to help you achieve your goals and magnify the scale and degree of influence (and donors love this!)

3. **Leverage monitoring and evaluation data to observe progress in achieving expected project outcomes.** Regularly discuss what the data shows in terms of TOC achievements. Use the data to figure out what is and isn't working. Talk about why certain activities are or are not working in different areas, or with different beneficiary groups. Save your project TOC in your LEAP so teams can continually reference and review it.

4. **Regularly review your TOC.** Your TOC is your *best* understanding of how change happens. As you learn more, and your understanding changes, so should your TOC! Reviewing your TOC helps you ask questions which will help guide your team's learning. At a minimum, plan on a formal review of your TOC twice a year (mid-year and end of year), and revise as needed at the end of each year. Some people use "Pivot Logs" to document these changes for impact evaluators, which can be as simple as a Word Document to capture dates and reasons for a change. Go to the **Adapting** section for tips on taking time to reflect, review, and adapt.

Examples from Practice

- CLA in Action: A Revised TOC for Uganda's Agricultural Inputs Activity. How TetraTech revised their Theory of Change after a midpoint evaluation revealed flaws in the underlying logic, with outputs that were not leading to anticipated outcomes.

Resources

- Theories of Change in International Development *(a good overview paper)*
- TOC Facilitation Sourcebook *(a good overview of facilitating a TOC development)*
- TOPS Theory of Change Facilitator's Guide *(a very thorough guide and resources to developing a rigorous, evidence-based TOC)*
- Theory of Change Based Project Monitoring, Measurement, Learning and Adaptation *(a guide and resources for using a TOC in project implementation)*
- Theory of Change Building Template
- Value Chain Development Project Design Tool
- DCED Articulating Results Chains

Technical Evidence Base

A project's technical evidence base is the evidence which substantiates the project design. For a TOC-based project, this evidence supports the causal relationships between outcomes, objectives, and the project goal. Evidence from formative studies—value chain analysis, barrier analysis, systemic constraint analysis, political economy analysis—can help inform project and intervention design and targeting. Learning from regular monitoring and additional studies can also inform project adaptation.

TIPS

1. **Identify assumptions in your design.** Causal relationships in a TOC, or between an activity and an expected outcome—without evidence to back them up—are risky assumptions. These are areas you will want to prioritize for additional monitoring and learning activities.

2. **Collaborate with others** who may have evidence relevant to your design, or could be interested in jointly exploring an evidence gap through shared activities. Consider organizing a "Fail Fest," a safe space where others can discuss what is not working well and why.

3. **Don't forget the foundational design documents**—the background section of the original donor solicitation often cites evidence; ACDI/VOCA's proposal and the initial market analyses and sector strategies provide more. Evidence should also be the basis of the TOC.

4. **Develop a way to capture evidence** which supports or disputes your project design. Work with ACDI/VOCA's M&E team to develop custom LEAP Dashboards to capture and monitor evidence for your TOC.

5. **Ask "Why?" and "How?" as much as "What?"** We often look for evidence which explains "what" is happening—people are adopting technologies, mothers are breast feeding, yields are increasing, etc. The important learning which will help you figure out what to change and adapt will come from asking and finding the evidence for "why" and "how." Barrier analysis and social and behavior change studies are one method to tease out the "why," and ACDI/VOCA has institutional expertise on this (email ssahlaney@acdivcoa.org for more).

6. **Close the feedback loop—share it back.** Use learning products (papers, blogs, webinars) and events (in-person meetings, conferences, interactive feedback sessions) to share findings with

stakeholders—donors, implementing partners, private sector, public institutions, beneficiaries—to build the local, national, and global evidence base. Consider how you learned it, what it informed, and the contexts in which you can interpret or apply this learning.

Examples from Practice

- Through an impact evaluation, ACDI/VOCA's FTF Kenya Livestock Marketing Systems project will explore the link between people's capacity to maintain well-being during times of shock and stress (i.e., their resilience) and the program's diverse, integrated set of interventions in market development, livelihood support, nutrition, and employment. Results of this evaluation will contribute to the global evidence base around resilience, especially as people "step up" and "step out" of agriculture.
- Exploring the technical evidence base doesn't always have to be through complicated methods. Our AflaSTOP project conducted a range of market research and feedback sessions with stakeholders, key to commercializing a maize dryer—farmers (the end customers), shellers (the service provider), and manufacturers. These relatively inexpensive efforts provided critical evidence about what drives willingness to pay for a service by farmers, the process by which informal artisans manufacturer technologies, and profit margins for maize shellers. Learning shaped implementation.

Resources

- An Excel-based Tool for Capturing Evidence in a TOC
- Theory of Change-based Project Monitoring, Measurement, Learning, and Adaptation *(a resource for using a TOC in project implementation)*
- MarketFlow—ACDI/VOCA's Value Chain Analysis Toolkit

Learning Agenda and Plan

Make learning intentional through a "learning agenda"—a plan for learning that includes learning questions, learning activities, and knowledge exchange products and activities.

TIPS

1. **Use learning themes**—one way to design learning questions is to narrow the scope by identifying a few important themes (i.e., areas identified as high priority, weak, lack evidence, are particularly difficult to influence, or align with other partner/donor learning agendas).

2. **Keep it simple and utilization-focused**—a learning agenda with 50 learning questions is daunting, and could discourage staff. Start small. Begin with identifying 5–10 questions, and narrow it down to 2–5. In developing your learning questions, ask yourself:
    - Does it fill a gap in the evidence?
    - Is it feasible to answer? *(See M&E for Learning sub-section below)*
    - Will the learning it generates be useful?? Who will use it? How will they use it?

3. **Collaborate with others**—other projects have learning agendas. Look for opportunities to take advantage of work done by other projects to complement, expand, or deepen your own learning. In addition, explore opportunities to work with local universities and students to help carry out research, collect data, or help with analysis.
4. **Continually review and adapt your learning agenda** so that it keeps pace with and adjusts alongside the evolving project strategy.

Examples from Practice

- During ACDI/VOCA's NAFAKA II project in Tanzania, the chief of party convened a meeting towards the end of Year 2 of the project. It was **a joint technical and M&E "summit,"** introducing CLA concepts. Jim Flock shares: "The meeting was largely staff driven, telling success and failure stories. The failure stories came with a cultural caveat where no one was to blame." This fostered discussions on what staff would like to know, including:
    - How much can a project VBAA/lead farmer charge for extension services in the community where they received training on GAP practices by the project?
    - Do demo plots influence farmer purchases?
    - How do we measure the effectiveness of farmer associations?
    - Ideas on improving grant activities

  From this, "we…identified **three CLA-type questions** and included them into our work plan (one per component) and likely will have two CLA type research activities…tied into our grant program focusing on gender/youth mechanization grants (do no harm) and BCC strategy (maize fortification nutritional campaign). Two are actually low priority in regard to NAFAKA's overall goals, but are high-priority in the mission (and for A/V to build their institutional capacity on both topics). So, we've been creative with using Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers, regional [M&E] senior staff (Alex Rotich) and our partnership with Africa Rising to assist our technical staff that might know the questions to ask, but aren't quite sure the methodology/approach to answering it."
- How to Create a Learning Agenda…the Democracy, Human Rights and Governance way (USAID) and a sample DRG learning Agenda
- PSNP + Case Study and Learning Agenda and Plan

Resources

- What is a Learning Agenda–CLA Toolkit
- Learning Agenda Template and Example
- TOC-based Project Monitoring, Measurement, Learning, and Adaptation *(page 26)*
- USAID–Implementing a Learning Agenda Approach

Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is a process-focused exercise that brings groups together to envision alternative futures, and then reflect on takeaways for the current design. Have we properly factored in risks? Are we bold enough with our intervention designs? Where are the weak spots—or blind spots—in our assumptions and TOC that could undermine impact? The purpose of scenario planning is less the actual scenarios produced and more focused on what we can learn from the process of the exercise.

"Game changer" is a term meaning what would alter the future in scenarios, the most significant conditions—beyond our immediate control—that affect our ability to achieve intended results. There are several useful ways to view a game changer. A more traditional, risk-based approach is to look at negative events that create change—for example, disruptive elections or political shifts, natural disasters, global price falls, and conflicts. These events are often already reflected in the underlying assumptions of our TOCs. Another way to approach game changers in scenario planning is to use a more positive lens of possibility. What if a market innovation in processing or storage totally changed terms of trade for smallholders, or the investment equation for companies? What if mobile phone penetration, or access to the electric grid, or road access, shot up by 50 percent in our target areas? What if we used our grant fund in a totally different way—invested in different stakeholders with different mechanisms—what might the results be?

The key for effective scenario planning is to remain focused on the learning that arises from the *process.*

TIPS

1. **Look to the assumptions in your TOC to identify game changers.** During design or review of your TOC (see TOC section), explore all potential external assumptions—those things outside of our control, which could negatively or positively affect the outcomes of your project.
2. **Identify at least two different plausible scenarios for each trend.** Developing more than one scenario helps create a comparison—if we aren't seeing X, then are we seeing Y? If we aren't seeing Y, then are we seeing Z? Developing multiple scenarios will help your team think of ways to monitor trends in a more systemic way (looking at multiple dimensions of a system), than simply looking to validate a single assumption or scenario. A multi-dimensional approach can be helpful to identify new opportunities, threats, and assumptions.
3. **Get a little wild with possibilities.** Consider both positive and negative "game changers," and take some time to imagine some crazy ideas, such as those referenced in the introductory text to this section above.
4. **Revisit your strategy and TOC based on the outcomes of this exercise.**

Examples from Practice

- Scenario Planning for Assistance to Yemen: how USAID/Yemen used scenario planning
- How FEMA used the Zombie Apocalypse as scenario planning for disaster relief.

Resources

- USAID–What does Effective Learning Look Like (Game Changers and Scenario Planning)
- Strategy Development, Scenario Testing, and Visioning (ODI)

M&E for Learning

We often think M&E is what we do to measure what we are achieving. However, M&E can be an even more powerful tool for learning when tied to learning priorities. The purpose of M&E is to track project results and apply knowledge gained from evidence and analysis to improve development outcomes. The perception of learning should not be seen as separate from M&E or optional.

✔ TIPS

1. **Develop your M&E plan alongside the learning agenda** so that the project work plan and budget reflect both the PMP *and* learning priorities. Submit the learning plan with or as a part of your M&E plan, with clear milestones and deliverables.
2. **Identify existing M&E activities which you can adapt to increase learning.** Many standard M&E data collection activities are great opportunities to advance the learning agenda. Carrying out a couple additional focus groups, key informant interviews, and other quantitative and qualitative methods (during routine data collection activities) can expand project learning with limited resources. Engage technical staff alongside M&E staff in these processes.
3. **Consider developing a cross-departmental CLA team with a team charter**—there are often gaps between technical teams and M&E. Consider forming a CLA committee composed of technical team leads, M&E staff, and management to help bridge the gap between M&E, learning, technical design, and management. While a team charter might seem unnecessary, formalizing the team with a charter helps build team cohesion and trust, helps define activities, and keeps the team focused. Hold the CLA team accountable to their charter!
4. **Take advantage of ACDI/VOCA's LEAP System!** The Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Platform (LEAP) is ACDI/VOCA's streamlined, online M&E system that integrates data capture, management, and visualization technologies and allows for dynamic, live, online data that enables timely decisions on program adjustments. LEAP provides a suite of features such as dashboards that visualize project results, geographic mapping, storage of data in an accessible online relational database, centralized document libraries for knowledge sharing, and more. It could disaggregate and tab data in flexible ways.
5. **Disaggregated data: investigate the "why"** behind variances in results between women and men, young and old, different regions, microbusinesses versus SMEs, and more. Use these variances as a launch point for learning—start by asking field staff.
6. **Seek help to match "what" you want to learn with "how."** There are a variety of methodologies, simple and complex. Email claplaybook@acdivoca.onmicrosoft.com for help.
7. **Embrace action research and qualitative methods.** Complement regular MEL efforts (e.g., annual outcome surveys, etc.) with other action research and qualitative data collection methods to help explain the "why" and "how" of observed results. Some examples are below (contact M&E HQ or claplaybook@acdivoca.onmicrosoft.com for assistance):
    - Barrier analysis
    - Consumer market research
    - Feedback sessions and focus group discussions

- Small-scale user trials of a product or service
- Key informant interviews
- SMS surveys
- Simulations
- Minicompetitions
- Econometric analysis (regressions, t-tests)
- Willingness to pay studies
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Auction models

8. **Take the time to gather secondary evidence—**other organizations and government agencies are gathering information, just as we are, to inform their own activities. This data is often freely accessible via the internet, or is available upon request. This information can enrich project learning by providing comparison groups or factors that might be influencing project results. Secondary data is a cost-effective means to enhance project learning.

Examples from Practice

- **Acting on Insights from Data Analysis**: **How Simple Methods are Closing Gender Gaps Through Adaptive Management**: ACDI/VOCA's Feed the Future USAID/Ghana Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement II (ADVANCE II) Project collects gender-specific and sex-disaggregated data as part of standalone studies as well as integrated within other learning activities. They analyze their data for gender gaps, using our LEAP system, and then actively adapt programming to address those needs. For example, ADVANCE observed significant gender differences in a FY14 gross margin analysis. Acting on this information, the project designed activities to increase women's productivity. This included gender sensitization activities for agriculture extension agents and additional targets for increasing female participation in capacity building activities, as well as activities targeted to female farmers to increase their access to and comfort with agriculture technology, promote leadership, and increase their access and control over land. In 2013, the gender gap was between 7 and 32 percent depending on crop and region; due to these changes, in 2016, the gap reduced to between 1 and 7 percent.
- This AflaSTOP Case Study explains how this ACDI/VOCA project in Kenya used action research (including many of the methods bulleted out above) to inform an R&D to commercialization process and improve the product, business model, and route to market.

Resources

- M&E for Learning—USAID's CLA ToolKit
- M&E Plan Learning Component—USAID's Guidance for Program Cycle Learning
- How to develop M&E Processes that Foster Learning—LenCD
- 7 Components of an Actionable Team Charter
- Theory of Change-based Project Monitoring, Measurement, Learning, and Adaptation

III. ADAPTING

Learning has little value without action. The Adaptation component is about intentionally planning activities at regular and strategic moments in a project's life cycle which help us to stop; think about what we are learning and observing; and then adjust program approaches, tactics, and interventions accordingly. Smart adaptation leads to more effective programs and efficient use of resources. There are two subcomponents under Adaptation:

- **Pause and Reflect (P&R)**
- **Adaptive management**

Pause and Reflect

Sometimes, we fail to ask the most basic questions—is this working? Or, we ask the same questions in the same way, every time, and are surprised when we get the same, stale answers. Pause and Reflect activities are all about planning and carrying out specific and regular times for reflection—as a team AND on your own. Such moments are critically important to reaping the benefits of collaboration and learning.

Pause and reflect activities can be a mix of stand-alone and embedded initiatives, such as:

- **After Action Review (AAR)**—an assessment conducted after a project or major activity, which allows team members and leaders to uncover what happened and why, reassess direction, and review both successes and challenges. An example from a market development project in Uganda is here. A more general, comprehensive version is here. One ACDI/VOCA COP suggests allocating one to two hours at a quarterly senior staff meeting to do AARs. No PowerPoint—just open discussion with engaged staff.
- **Adapt, Drop, Expand**—"One of the most important actions during the Quarterly Portfolio Review is *'**Adapt, Drop, Expand**,'* an idea illustrated in this case study of the FTF AVC project in Bangladesh. This useful idea means that a requirement for every team should be to identify one intervention that needs to be shifted, one that is not working and needs to be dropped, and one that should be expanded. It messages that the team should always be adapting and shifting technical focus towards interventions with the most momentum." Several ACDI/VOCA projects, including FTF Bangladesh RDC and Tanzania CDMS regularly do this activity.
- **Data Examinations**—invite the M&E Team to present disaggregated activity results, using LEAP dashboard visuals for ease of discussion—and then engage in open discussions with technical teams on the links between outputs, outcomes, and the causal model.
- **Appreciative Inquiry**—a change management approach that focuses on identifying what is working well, analyzing why it is working well, and then doing more of it. To learn more, watch this video interview with Kipp Sutton, USAID/RDMA.

TIPS

1. **Adaptation is not an annual event. Build in regular "pause and reflect" activities**. Many projects build in time for reflection at the start of their annual work planning. ACDI/VOCA's STAIRS tool, for example, has a module to facilitate such a "Fix, Add, Drop" session. However, once a year is not enough to pause and reflect. Build time into the regular senior management meetings to step back and reflect on key activities or the implications of ongoing learning for project strategy, design, and activities. Project leaders may want to build in a 30-minute personal reflection time monthly and do a more substantive group meeting quarterly with senior leadership using one of the activities described above, such as AAR.
2. **Timing matters**. Schedule reflections while ideas are fresh and the output is still applicable.
3. **Use participatory methods to encourage candid conversations**. Some sample participatory methods are illustrated in the text box above. You may also consider bringing in an outside facilitator for critical P&R moments. See the **Culture Section** for additional reflection on how to encourage an environment that supports transparent feedback from staff.
4. **Ask the right questions.** Instead of asking questions that others can answer in a "Yes" or "No" format, prioritize open-ended, probing questions such as "What is working? Why?" (e.g., *"What information do we need to assess whether the benefits will last?" or "How do participants feel about the activities?")*

   Bilash Mitra, the ME&L team leader from ACDI/VOCA's Feed the Future Bangladesh Rice and Diversified Crops (RDC) project had these additional suggestions:

   - *"Are there any new market actors emerging or existing actors who are leaving? Why?"*
   - *"Have any new constraints risen? What innovative solutions are emerging autonomously?"*
   - *"Are there any new opportunities for interventions? What synergy potential do we have?"*
   - *"Are there any signs of systemic change? If not, why not?"*

   You may need to balance these probing questions—best explored in-person—with written "trigger questions" (such as the operational and strategic assessment questions in this quarterly report template used by field managers on the DFID-funded SAMARTH project).
5. **Link, pause, and reflect activities to a TOC review.** As outlined in the **Learning Section**, include a review of the major causal linkages in your TOC during quarterly meetings with a focus on the link between outputs, outcomes, and impact. For example, if you assume improved knowledge of good agricultural practices leads to increased adoption of technologies, instead of asking, "How are our farmer field schools doing?" or "Are we on target to complete FFS on time?" (two output related questions), ask "Are we seeing any increase in adoption of technologies with FFS participants? What differences are we seeing between men and women?" Include a full review and revision of your TOC and learning activities during annual work planning. ACDI/VOCA's STAIRS work planning module includes facilitator guides for this kind of reflection.

   - One ACDI/VOCA project has this learning question: "*Are demonstration plots influencing farmers to purchase improve seed varieties*?" They use a propensity score matrix, a test method to show what trainings are working. The project focuses on assessing the effectiveness of demo plots, because they are part of one of the highest program activity costs in the budget. They analyze the results of this ongoing research, combined with observations from staff, at quarterly meetings through open discussion and use of AAR.

6. **Come together as a group**. Independent reflection is a foundational building block to a useful pause and reflect moment, but "What can be achieved from 90 minutes of conversation is not achieved by compiling independent insights from team members gathered in one-on-one interviews" (see Goddard example below for more).

Examples from Practice

- ACDI/VOCA's CDMS COP recommends **storytelling** as one way to tease out the "Why?" and "How?" behind what's happening, as part of pausing and reflecting. He invites staff to share a story of success, while focusing on the elements that led to that success, especially with regards to collaborations, insights they learned along the way, and any adaptations in that activity or future ones.
- Read more about how NASA's Goddard Space Center uses "**Pause and Learn"** (PAL) activities, and lessons learned from their doing nearly 100 to date. *"On the surface, a PAL is deceptively simple, just a conversation among members of a team, typically conducted after a significant event or project milestone. But it is different in many ways from other conversations—from a staff meeting, for example."* To learn more, click on this link.

Resources

- 5 Pause and Reflect Activities from USAID/LEARN
- ORID Reflection Model and Questions
- Short Guide to Good Facilitation

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management focuses on how managers use the learning and insights from pause and reflect activities to inform decisions about maintaining, adapting, or discontinuing current approaches, partnerships, tactics, and more.

TIPS

1. **Adapt major strategy pieces through work plans**—annual work planning is a natural time to make formal adaptations to your project. The STAIRS work planning process includes a step where a team looks at their activities, and decides 1) what to add, 2) what to drop, and 3) what to change. This is one way to review project components or project activities and is like the AAR activity described under the pause and reflect section above.

…but don't be limited by annual timelines. Good adaptive management happens regularly and iteratively *throughout* the year, on a natural timeline with implementation. Many changes can happen without affecting the core of your annual work plan—and the more you reflect a CLA approach in your annual work plan, the more your donor will expect shifts in approach or implementation. See “Examples from Practice” below for how one ACDI/VOCA project integrated multiple scenarios into annual work plans. Consult your agreement and your HQ award administrator, and of course “know” your AOR/COR, to identify what adaptations require approvals and what don’t. (More under **Administrative subsection in Resources**).

2. **Set concrete timelines for CLA-related research,** separate from the annual work plan timeline, and identify a champion per question to ensure this research stays on track and that you know what you need when you need it.
3. **Co-creation design and implementation**—consider structuring flexible design and implementation mechanisms such as adaptive grant programs that allow for co-creation. See the **Resources** section for specific tips and examples from practice.
4. **Pilot Quickly**—design quick, small pilots to test prior to roll out on a larger scale.
5. **Pilot an intervention with multiple partners in multiple communities**—we often pilot an activity one time in one geographic area with one partner. Yet, what works with one partner in one community could be very different in another context. Consider getting a larger sample group to compare results and adapt accordingly.
6. **Compare different activity designs**—consider designing similar pilots with slightly different iterations such as different packages of agronomic extensions or different methods of receiving market information and compare results.
7. **Scenario planning**—during work planning, develop different activities for different scenarios to allow for quick adaptation upon learning assessment. See AflaSTOP example below.

Examples from Practice

- ACDI/VOCA’s AflaSTOP project in Kenya presented multiple intervention scenarios in our annual work plan, described the rationale behind why there were multiple scenarios, and the specific action-based learning (field pilots, feedback sessions, trials, user surveys) we would do to inform our choices of which activities for implementation or scaling. We also articulated clear decision points in time when choices about adaptation must take place (based, for example, on the agriculture season, or a business process cycle). Better articulation of this in work plans built donor buy-in and shared expectations. It limited the need for frequent work plan approvals because they mapped out multiple scenarios to achieve a stated goal, which were pre-approved. Upon reaching decision points, we updated our donor through a formal communication channel (a presentation, an email, or a phone call).
- Managing Complexity: Adaptive Management at Mercy Corps
- Adaptive Management in Practice: A Market Systems Application in Bangladesh

Resources

- Sample CLA Plan from ACDI/VOCA’s Bangladesh RDC project
- BEAM Adaptive Management resources
- ACDI/VOCA’s STAIRS Work Planning Module

CLA'S ENABLING ENVIRONMENT:

Culture (Section IV), Processes (Section V), and Resources (Section VI)

IV. CULTURE

Without an organizational culture which supports CLA, all the other components of CLA are less likely to fall into place. It is important for COP and senior management to establish a CLA culture from day one, to model CLA behavior, and encourage behaviors and actions in other staff that contribute to effective CLA. At the same time, projects must also weigh the culture of the client. Not all donors or missions will embrace or understand CLA the same. Understanding the donor's external culture is one—though not the only—critical input into your own. The culture component has three primary areas:

- **Openness**
- **Relationship building**
- **Continuous learning and improvement**

"The dynamics between team members were as important as the specific technical skills held by individual team members." *—Insights on the importance of the internal team culture to successful adaptive management, from a* *USAID-funded case study* *in Bangladesh.*

Openness

People are better able to collaborate and learn if they feel open to speak their minds, share their opinions, experiences, perspectives, and recommendations. This openness requires a conscious effort—helping your colleagues, partners, and project participants to feel comfortable and safe to be open and honest with one another to incentivize continual reflection and analysis.

TIPS

1. **Create opportunities for people to relate to one another as informally as people, not just as colleagues**—generally, the more familiar you are with other people, the more comfortable and open you will be. Plan out-of-the-office events such as dinners, trips to the beach or to some other destination. In the office—allow some informality—allow staff to dress casually once a week, have monthly potlucks, or other informal gatherings.
2. **Budget and plan for team building events**—investing in team building will go a long way to creating stronger, more effective teams that share learning and collaborate. This can include office celebrations for birthdays, weddings, or national holidays to off-site retreats with deliberate team building activities built into the agenda. This is especially important in the beginning of a project where staff need to quickly become more familiar and comfortable with one another to build trusting and productive relationships.
3. **Consider intercultural and gender dynamics**—some core CLA values such as openness can be different from many traditional values such as deference to those in authority, age, or gender. Expatriate staff will need take a multifaceted approach to leadership that is sensitive to local cultural norms while still promoting core CLA behaviors of openness (see tip seven

below). Leaders must be informed, flexible, and good listeners while choosing which leadership style will work best in which cultural context.

4. **Design an office environment that reinforces an open culture,** where teams sit close together to easily facilitate communication. To the extent possible, create comfortable and fun spaces for people to meet and work together—couches, a Ping-Pong table, an in-house café. This needs to be balanced with sufficient quiet space and meeting rooms or learning libraries. Managers should have open door policies and sit on the same floor as program staff when possible. Invest in the interior office design, and include posters/other materials that reinforce key project frameworks (CLA Framework or TOC) as well as inspirational messages.
5. **Conduct regular all staff meetings and program team meetings** where formal communications about information and decisions can take place and where staff voice opinions or concerns openly. Regular program team meetings that are inclusive of all team members and regularly include other cross-cutting or administrative staff will create trust and openness within the project. Staff that chair meetings should get coaching on how to effectively run a meeting so that they include at a minimum: i) an agenda, ii) notes and action items captured, and iii) encourage participation from all. Invest in simple technologies such as Polycom or Adobe Connect to allow field offices to participate remotely.
6. **Provide positive feedback and reinforcement**—managers can continually praise and call out publicly staff that support an open culture. Providing positive feedback ("I liked what you said when you said….") will go a long way to building skills and behaviors required in a successful CLA organization. For more on this, see the **Human Resources subsection.**
7. **Promote these core behaviors:**
    a. Sense of comfort and confidence to share opinions and ideas
    b. Openness to hearing alternative perspectives
    c. Willingness to take action on new ideas

Examples from Practice

- Openness in Uganda–Mercy Corps
- Market Systems in Practice Field Notes from Bangladesh AVC—describes how the AVC project in Bangladesh designed their office to facilitate a culture of learning
- Openness in Namibia—Pact
- Spotify's Culture: And how it sounds like CLA—Two videos
- Intentionally Creating and Maintaining the LEARN Culture: "Walking the CLA Talk"—blog on culture of the USAID LEARN project

Resources

- Facilitating Good Meetings/Discussions, Managing Group Discussions
- 15 Team Building Activities
- Is My Organization's Culture Conducive to Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting?
- Mapping Leadership Cultures Across Authority (Hierarchical vs. Egalitarian) and Decision-Making (Top-down vs. Consensual)—discusses intercultural management

Relationships and Networks

Building relationships among staff, partners, participants, and other stakeholders is a crucial step to creating openness, honesty, and collaboration. Building relationships is natural for some, but for others may require more intentional actions. See the **Collaboration Section** for more tips.

TIPS

1. **Create shared experiences**—to build relationships among staff, partners, and project participants, go out of your way to create shared experiences. Do team building exercises. Invite a colleague or collaborate you don't often work with to join a meeting. Invite community stakeholders to travel along on a field visit. As a project leader, encourage your teams to reach out to other stakeholders to co-participate in activities.
2. **Predictable, repeated, and reliable engagement**—strong relationships require repetition to develop. One activity, or one connection, is rarely enough. For key relationships, design repeated engagement. Schedule weekly lunch dates. Schedule and keep stakeholder meetings, even if only one or two people show up. Develop a schedule for meetings with communities, project groups, or other stakeholders and stick to the calendar.
3. **Consistent communication**—once established, maintain strategic relationships through consistent, regular communication, either in-person or via other forms of communication. When was the last time you spoke to your counterpart in the ministry? Send an email just to check in. When was the last time you spoke to that community leader? Send a text message letting them know what is happening with your project, and when you think you will visit them again. Keep a list of your key relationships, and contact/communicate with them regularly. The key to good relationship maintenance is regular, consistent communication.

Examples from Practice

- Relationships and Networks in Bangladesh—how proper communication and relationship building within communities led to overcoming societal barriers to women's entrepreneurship.

Resources

- Building and Sustaining Relationships—Community Tool Box
- 8 tips for Developing Positive Relationships

Continuous Learning and Improvement

Our staff culture must value, promote, and reward continuous learning and improvement.

TIPS

1. **Recruit for intellectual curiosity and proactive thinking**—you can encourage curiosity through hiring curious people—using innovative interview techniques to get an idea of a

person's intellectual curiosity and analytical thinking skills. Traditional interview questions are often not appropriate to test for this attribute, so consider developing relevant skills tests, such as reacting to a case study or researching a particular problem in a targeted value chain. See interview guidelines in the resource box below.

2. **Promote and reward out-of-the-box thinking, independent, and collective actions**—reward staff, stakeholders, or project participants when they take CLA-enhancing actions and raise their visibility. For staff, ongoing learning can be explicit in everyone's job description. Mercy Corps Ethiopia, for example, makes it mandatory that everyone dedicate five percent of their time to learning. Management should give staff the time to learn and hold them accountable during performance reviews for such learning and sharing.

3. **Provide learning and staff capacity-building opportunities**. The HR director can encourage staff learning and development opportunities along with other senior staff members. Encourage staff to utilize free online training and learning resources through Aspire Global, such as the eCornell courses (contact StaffLearningandDevelopment@acdivoca.org for help) as well as participate in industry webinars and read relevant technical documents. Provide feedback to others after engaging in a learning opportunity, such as through brown bag presentations or more formal Training-of-Trainers.

4. **Build time for learning—in job descriptions**—staff cannot pause and reflect without time to do so. Mercy Corps adopted this commitment to organizational learning by placing a disclaimer in their job advertisements that staff must commit 5 percent of their time to learning activities that benefit Mercy Corps as well as themselves.

5. **Promote these core behaviors:** take time for learning and reflection, have the motivation to learn, and iterate to enable continuous improvement.

Examples from Practice

- Continuous Learning and Improvement in Bangladesh
- Mercy Corps Concept Note System—to encourage critical thinking to percolate up from field staff across remote locations, Mercy Corps' PRIME managers initiated open "calls" for concept notes, whereby staff could regularly propose concepts to senior leadership as part of a competitive process. Allocated funding in the budget supported these ideas financially.
- Uganda Mission of USAID Leaders—short video describing USAID/Uganda's Mission of Leaders Initiative which was an initiative to empower all mission staff to engage in continual learning.

Resources

- 5 Ways to Build a Workplace Culture of Continuous Improvement
- Interview Guidelines for CLA Manager and Market Systems Analysts

V. PROCESSES

The Processes dimension focuses on three main categories:

- **Knowledge management**
- **Institutional memory**
- **Decision making**

The focus here is not just on general knowledge management or institutional memory processes, but specifically, *how these processes advance and support Collaboration, Learning, and Adaptation in a strategic and significant way*.

"Holding quarterly learning agenda meetings with staff and partners is critical. This provides a forum to utilize data to adjust project implementation. One idea to promote ownership of learning is to have field staff ask and answer a learning question and present the results at each monthly meeting."
—Quote from ACDI/VOCA COP

Knowledge Management

TIPS

1. **Build in regular "pause and reflect" meetings**. For more on this, including a variety of ways such a meeting can take place, and tips on facilitating them for maximum value, see the **Pause and Reflect subsection in Adapting**.

2. **Utilize ACDI/VOCA's knowledge management platforms.** ACDI/VOCA has many top-notch knowledge management platforms including SharePoint, LEAP, and Aspire Global. Staff should use these platforms. ACDI/VOCA HQ staff can help your team learn how to get the most out of these platforms.

    - **SharePoint**—love it or not, ACDI/VOCA's organizational wide document management and storage platform is Microsoft SharePoint. Ensure that all staff receive training on how to access and use SharePoint and that final versions of all project documents are easily searchable and accessible. Find out more here.
    - **LEAP**—housed on SharePoint is ACDI/VOCA's Learning, Analysis, and Evaluation Platform. LEAP houses all project-related M&E data and can analyze data queries and provide customizable dashboards to indicate performance target process. Access ACDI/VOCA's LEAP home page here, or ask your M&E Manager for more information. A first version of the LEAP Level One video tutorial can be found here. This tutorial describes what LEAP is, walks through the process of navigating to a project's LEAP page and explains the various components of LEAP.
    - **Aspire Global** is ACDI/VOCA's internal knowledge sharing and learning hub—a place to find technical information, how to complete administrative processes, share experiences, and make connections with other A/V staff around the globe. Access Aspire Global from the resources column on the A/V SharePoint site here.

If internet connectivity makes such web-based platforms challenging, the project should have a well-organized shared drive with common file structures that is regularly backed-up.

3. **Designate a staff member to ensure maintenance, consistency, and widespread use of knowledge management platforms.** This person could be the CLA manager, communication manager, or IT Manager.
4. **Share knowledge in user-friendly formats via appropriate communication channels and knowledge management platforms.** Consider how the packaging of information and sharing with our donor and stakeholders can get more mileage from our technical work and gain us recognition as thought leaders. Value chain reports could be turned into PowerPoint presentations or infographics, traditional success stories into engaging videos, and long quarterly and annual reports into shorter, easier to read documents.

Examples from Practice

- **Sharing knowledge aimed at adaptation through a Quarterly Program Review**—the management on ACDI/VOCA's FTF Bangladesh Rice and Diversified Crops project introduced regular, structured team sharing, and brainstorming workshops for monthly intervention reviews, semi-annual value chain sector reviews, and annual strategic portfolio reviews. These meetings provide opportunities to compare notes, aggregate and prioritize challenges, consolidate learning, and facilitate application of meaningful findings directly back to intervention design.

Institutional Memory

One constant in our complex project lives is that staff are constantly coming and going. We need formal processes and resources to ensure we capture and share the knowledge staff bring and acquire while on a project. In addition to processes that capture and share knowledge, it is also vital to understand the local context and key relationships for personnel onboarding and transitions.

TIPS

- **Exiting Staff**—ensuring that the knowledge of departing staff doesn't leave with them is critical to preserving a project's institutional memory. Some tips: 1) require all staff to produce handover notes, tips, and suggestions for their successor—also consider developing a standardized template and 2) Do exit interviews!
- **Onboarding**—consider developing a thorough onboarding process for all incoming staff. This process should include meetings with all key departmental staff, key background project documents, and possibly establishing an ambassador program to mentor new staff.
- **Meeting Notes**—designate note takers at staff meetings to ensure the recording of key decisions and action items. This will not only keep everybody accountable but will also record the history of decisions to allow everybody to see how the project changed over time.
- **Brown Bags**—informal brown bag presentations during staff lunch times are a great way to encourage staff to share information within an organization. A short presentation on the

learning from project activity, or information gathered from a training or external presentation, will help build institutional memory as well as build team relationships. You can record and share the presentations more broadly via Aspire Global.

- **Competitions** can help staff share knowledge and build institutional memory. Lessons learned competitions (i.e., "What was the most impactful lesson you learned in the last quarter?"), or "fail fest" competitions (i.e., "What was one of the most important failures you had last quarter, and how has it helped you do better work?"). You can also have program adaptation competitions (i.e., "What is one major adaptation you think the program should do which will have the most impact on improving the project?").
- **Build Knowledge Sharing into Job Descriptions and Performance Evaluations**— "*It would be nice if you could*" is not as effective as "*It is in your job description, so I expect you will*." If we are serious about building institutional memory and knowledge sharing, then it should be everybody's responsibility to contribute to our organization's intellectual capital. Staff performance evaluations should also include this requirement.

Decision Making

TIPS

1. **Implement transparent decision-making processes**

    - **Inclusive decision-making processes**—consult staff on key decisions. This can be as simple as letting them know that a change/decision is going to take place, conducting interviews with key staff to get their insight, or holding "town hall" style meetings where leadership can share their thinking and get input from staff.
    - **Communication**—communicate decision-making processes to staff, partners, and external stakeholders. This could range from staff promotions to grant approvals. Clear and transparent communication immediately after decisions take place will avoid unnecessary conflicts and rumors that can have a serious impact on staff morale.

- **Ensure decisions reflect core values**—ensure big decisions reflect the core values that reflect the project culture and ACDI/VOCA's own organizational brand.

2. **Assign authority at the appropriate levels to enable greater adaptability**

3. **Empower agile and autonomous teams** to develop solutions to problems on their own. This may also generate more innovation and creative thinking. Look at ways to have informal competitions between teams to further motivate and energize staff.

Resources

- Handover Notes Template—a template for capturing insights, in-process tasks, and other key information during staff transitions
- Exit Interview Template—a SharePoint link to suggested exit questions from AV's HR team

VI. RESOURCES

Resources may be the most critical "enabling environment" condition. The Resources component focuses on three main categories:

- **Financial** (i.e., budgets)
- **Human** (i.e., people)
- **Administrative** (we chose to focus on grant and contracting mechanisms in the CLA Playbook)

Financial Resources: Budget

You may have heard the phrase "put your money where your mouth is." The tips below cover some practical recommendations for budgeting to support CLA.

TIPS

1. **Create a budget for your CLA Plan, and consider these four often overlooked areas:**
   - ***Learning products***—e.g., special surveys, writing up findings, designing infographics and presentations, hosting learning forums, and travelling to share findings
   - ***Collaboration***—e.g., logistical costs of hosting meetings and stakeholder forums, time for key staff to participate in meetings, fees for a trained facilitator, shared costs for jointly-funded activities, and costs for printing materials
   - ***Pilots linked to testing the Theory of Change*** may mean your initial procurement costs increase. For example, to learn what activity is most likely to increase rural access to better inputs, you may first set up three pilots in different areas, each with unique costs: a grant to input providers to fund discount coupons, seed procurements for demo sites, and a consultant and software to train input companies how to improve client retention
   - ***Capacity building****:* as explored elsewhere in this Playbook, trainings, experiences, and processes that build capacity and community are worthwhile investments
2. **Budgeting for adaptation.** It can be challenging to forecast resource needs years into the future, as we are often asked to do, because you expect your needs to change as a result of learning and adaptation. Budgeting is a delicate dance between knowing enough to forecast best-guess figures, but not getting so lost in the details that you limit flexibility in the future.
   - ***Submit an updated budget with each annual work plan***—predictions 12 months out are easier to do[1] and you can more directly link costs to the technical plan.
   - ***Create "buckets" of funds that transcend multiple scenarios***. Where possible, especially in early years when piloting and scenario planning is most intense, don't budget more detail than necessary in your official award budget. For example, you may have a line with a large lump sum that says "training" or "investment fund" in the Excel sheet, and in the narrative, explain the multiple scenarios for the use of these funds based on the outcome of activities

[1]For more tips on an Annual Work Plan that supports Adaptation with minimized administrative burdens, see the [Adaptation section](#).

detailed in the work plan. To ensure the usage of the funds for the right thing and that you estimated enough, you'll still want to cost out the various scenarios.

  - ***In any modifications, make a clear link to CLA and the technical work plan.*** The more CLA is integral to your technical approach instead of a separate, stand-alone endeavor, the easier it is to present a strong rationale for why these costs directly relate to achieving the technical outputs and outcomes planned for that year. For example, if you are planning demo sites, include a learning activity in the design of that work plan and budget and include that cost as part of that budget line for that activity, not a separate "learning" budget line.
  - ***Know your award***. Cooperative agreements will always have more significant flexibility than contracts. Increasingly, USAID is also using alternative mechanisms like IDIQs and Statements of Objectives where they want to encourage flexible management. The perspective and relationship you have with your COR is also critical and work to establish shared expectations for learning and adaptation as reflected in your budget. Work closely with your award administrator.

3. **Remember: the updated ADS 201 is your friend.** ADS 201—operational guidance for all of USAID updated in Sept 2016—requires USAID missions to establish CLA plans and emphasizes the importance of CLA in achieving development goals. Be sure to reference ADS 201 in any budget modification request that is based on CLA. The CLA Champions Network is available to support crafting the CLA elements of that request.
4. **Don't forget LOE! People cost money too**. CLA takes time, and time equals money. So, make sure LOE—for full time and short-term staff—is in the budgeting exercise.
5. **CLA is an investment—know what you'll get for it.** The point of adaptation is to be more efficient and effective. Don't waste money on activities that aren't working. If you must spend a few dollars to know how to spend $5 million dollars right—that's a good return on investment.

Examples from Practice

- ACDI/VOCA's RDC Project in Bangladesh budgeted a number of pilots in the first 18 months. They also had a rolling work plan, not an annual work plan. A rolling work plan "looks" a lot like a traditional work plan on paper—but with an agreement with the mission that we could submit adjustments to the work plan at any time based on strategic adaptations.
- For an alternative approach—see the example of ACDI/VOCA's AflaSTOP project (a cooperative agreement) under the **Adaptive Management section** above.

Human Resources: People

People are a project's most valuable resource.

TIPS

1. **It starts with recruitment**. During the interview process, try to assess someone's analytical capacity, interest in learning, curiosity, and collaborative nature. These capabilities don't

usually come through on a CV and you can sometimes find these skills through nontraditional candidates (i.e., recent business school grads). A few **sample questions** to consider:

- Tell me about a time you had an assumption that was wrong. How did you discover this? What did you change as a result?
- This project would work with a lot of stakeholders. Who do you think is most important to achieving our goal? What are some specific ways you collaborated with stakeholders in the past; would those methods would work here?
- What are sources of professional inspiration for you? How do you learn about new ideas, techniques, models, and more?
- Send someone out to a nearby market place and ask them to simply report back with what they observed and learned. This activity is a great, hands-on way used by some market facilitation projects to assess a person's ability to analyze market signals and interpret them in a useful, insightful way.

2. **Reward CLA-enabling behaviors**. People—just like market actors—respond to incentives. There are many ways to reward and recognize staff that embody CLA behaviors, and encourage people to think about their jobs in new ways, along the lines of learning, innovation, team work, etc. Two particularly helpful resources from field projects are below:
    - Kenya Markets Trust project's Performance Appraisal Form—see Section C, which articulates specific behaviors around learning, knowledge sharing, team work.
    - The Uganda's Ag-Inputs project Competency Framework Appraisal—especially relevant to CLA are the competencies under Communications, Teamwork, and Innovation and Learning.
3. **Invest in your leadership**. Incorporate CLA Awareness into onboarding for senior staff, their annual performance reviews, and capacity building opportunities.
4. **CLA in the org chart: to centralize or not?** Some projects (like ACDI/VOCA's CMSD project in Tanzania) have a CLA director, who reports to the DCOP, manages the M&E and communications team, and works closely with the technical leads. Some (like ACDI/VOCA's RDC project in Bangladesh) choose to not centralize CLA management within one person and instead spread responsibilities across team members. There are pros and cons to each.
5. **Consider bringing in short term expertise in specialized fields**—such as meeting facilitators for key collaboration events, graphic designers and storytellers to illustrate learnings in more user-friendly and persuasive ways, etc. Use local experts, or connect with HQ's communications and/or training teams for expat suggestions.
6. **Consider using USAID's CLA Maturity Self-Assessment exercise** to get a pulse on how your staff perceive resources are being leveraged to drive CLA.
7. **There's more!** See the tips, examples, and resources in the **Culture** and **Processes** sections for more on cultivating an environment that maximizes human resources.

Examples from Practice

- The NAFAKA II COP recognizes staff for posing CLA questions presented in meetings or in group chats and emails. At the annual review, staff receive a certificate of recognition for questions they posed that led to adaptations on the project.

Additional Resources

- SOWs for a [CLA Director (AV–TZ)] and [CLA Coordination Committee] (AV–Bangladesh)
- CLA Maturity Matrix: [Self-Assessment exercise]
- In the **Tips section** (previous), see Tip 1 for sample interview questions! And see Tip 2 for sample Performance Appraisal Forms that highlight learning, collaboration, and innovation.

Administrative Resources: Grant and Subcontracting Mechanisms

CLA demands creative management of administrative mechanisms that govern the degree of flexibility a project has *upwards* with USAID and *downwards* to its subs and vendors. There are many types of administrative resources—M&E systems are a key one—but we chose to focus primarily on grant and subcontracting mechanisms because they are central to CLA and often overlooked. There is ample discussion of how to leverage M&E-related resources more effectively elsewhere in this toolkit.

TIPS

1. **Choose your mechanism wisely, to maximize flexibility in alignment with CLA**. For subgrant and subcontracting funds, build flexibility to adapt from the start. Make sure the mechanisms you choose are the best fit for the technical goal you want to achieve. Be creative and consider a range of options:
    - SOWs that include a pilot phase and associated budget
    - Co-creation workshops with partners
    - Blanket Activity Announcement (see **Examples and Case Studies section** below)
    - Challenge funds and other competitions that build collaborative networks amongst multiple partners and create space for partners to achieve the same goal using different methods they adapt themselves
2. **Bring the technical and operations teams together**—the more each team understands each other, the more effectively and efficiently they can come together to achieve a shared goal. Let the technical goal drive the selection of a mechanism. Don't ignore one team over another in building awareness about CLA and capacity building.
3. **ADS 201 is your friend**, as noted above. Reference it in requests to USAID for grant approvals, budget and work plan modifications, and more.
4. **Prepare yourself to modify**—and be upfront about this reality with all parties—your subawardee, grants/contracts team, and USAID. Shared, upfront expectations can transform the surprise and burden of a mod.
5. **Include a CLA lens in your evaluation criteria for partners**. Are they skilled collaborators? Do they have proven track records of adjusting midcourse based on learning? Are there systems and people going to support adaptation and engender a culture of CLA in their team?

Examples and Case Studies

- ACDI/VOCA's AflaSTOP project approach to "changing early—not late" required a willingness and a shared expectation between donors and implementers to adapt. This expectation of flexibility related to our work planning and budgeting as much as the microdetails of managing subcontracts and scopes of work. For example, we modified our contract seven times with the dryer design and manufacturer training organization. Both parties must understand from the get-go the iterative and dynamic nature of the scope, and factor a subcontractor's comfort level and ability to adapt into the evaluation process (and the contracting mechanism). Adaptation becomes a part of the "best value" determination; it is not all about cost, because cost may change.

- Similarly, DAI's large Feed the Future agricultural value chain project in Bangladesh had a $7 million grant fund, and was looking for ways to maximize programmatic flexibility. A full brief from the AVC Grant Fund Manager is available here.

> "AVC modified and adapted the U.S. government's Broad Agency Announcement to help facilitate grant competition compliance requirements within AVC's market system strategy. AVC's ***Blanket Activity Announcement*** is issued on an annual basis and calls for concept notes for proposed innovations, technologies, or other interventions to strengthen the agricultural market system in their target area. ***The concept notes submitted do not become binding scopes of work but instead launch a series of co-design meetings which gives AVC tremendous flexibility in crafting the final relationship with the partner***. This process also tightly integrates the technical and operations/compliance teams to create a higher level of efficiency: grants are issued and adapted quickly to move towards interventions that are generating the most change, and shift away from activities that are less effective. ***AMAA activities can lead to several different funding mechanisms*** including purchase orders, small subcontracts, fixed amount award grants, and in-kind grants.
>
> Under a typical grants mechanism, modifications to the scope of work as defined in the solicitation would require AVC to re-solicit that scope, starting the process over from scratch. With the AMAA system, the grant activities and budget operate in six month increments. This makes the ***entire grant award adaptable***, with activities designed and adjusted, as long as the overall objectives of the AMAA strategy with the grantee do not change, in which case a new grant needs to be issued. The adaptive process has defined time periods for reflection and modification/adaptation of strategy and tactics. This initial scope also allows AVC to gauge the seriousness of the market actor and gain vital information for future adaptations.
>
> ***AVC includes adaptive language within our grant requests to USAID***, and luckily AVC has a great working relationship with our USAID contracting office representative and communicates what could be adapted and modified throughout the period of performance when the grant requests initially are approved." *(Gwendolyn Oliver Armstrong Tweed, DAI, 2017).*

Additional Resources

- Tips for Building Flexibility in Value Chain Development Programs, ACDI/VOCA
- Adaptive Mechanisms from USAID's OAA office