LEARNING LAB

| Home | Community | Blog | "There's no money for that." Three Ways to Resou... |

Community Contribution ⑦

"There's no money for that." Three Ways to Resource Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

APR 25, 2016

Monalisa Salib

SHARE

This blog is the third in an ongoing series exploring the components of USAID's CLA Framework. Here is the first blog on organizational culture and the second on effective learning.

Collaborating, learning, and adapting happens all the time throughout all industries and organizations. We want to bring these approaches to scale at USAID and with implementing partners—making it more systematic and intentional—because we believe that how we manage programming is just as critical as what we program.

But as was pointed out to me via Twitter and in the comments on the last blog, this cannot be done without

the right resources. We couldn't agree more; this is why resources is one of the six core components in the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework (see the grey portion in the framework above).

How can you tell if you're not resourcing CLA adequately? You'll probably hear things like this (all of which I have unfortunately heard firsthand):

- "We have to get this proposal in under $15 million. Let's drop the learning specialist and assessment and evaluation work."
- "I've had this workshop synthesis report for a year and never got around to reading it."
- "It will take too long to modify the agreement; let's just continue as is or cut the activity altogether."

As I've mentioned before, CLA takes time and resources. But without a baseline assessment or team focused on supporting CLA throughout implementation, how do you really know if what you are doing is working? How much more expensive would it be to change course years later when a CLA approach could have set you on the right track from the beginning?

So how can we avoid this trap altogether and effectively resource CLA from the outset? When thinking about USAID mission and implementing partner resources in the framework, we focus on three main ways to resource CLA:

Mechanisms. The biggest obstacle to CLA that comes up time and time again is the lack of flexibility in funding mechanisms. That is why USAID needs to:

- Select **mechanism types** that enable adaptive management. One of the latest mechanism types is the Broad Agency Announcement, which enables a mission or bureau to co-create, co-design, co-invest, and collaborate with awardees in the development, testing, and scaling of practical and cost-effective innovations that can help USAID reach a development goal. For additional mechanism type options—including Single Award IDIQs and others—USAID staff can see the Procurement Executive Bulletin on ProgramNet.
- Write **mechanism scopes** in ways that enable adaptive management. One example of this is an agreement scope known as a 'statement of objectives' rather than a 'scope of work.' This allows USAID to determine the anticipated results while allowing for flexibility

in how those results are achieved. Another option is to design a solicitation and subsequent agreement in which learning itself is a phase/deliverable, based on which implementation decisions are made. The Community Connector mechanism created by USAID/Uganda is an example of this.

- Lastly, USAID staff can **manage mechanisms** in ways that enable greater CLA integration. USAID/Malawi's collaboration requirements, such as joint work planning for partners working in the same geographic target areas, is one such example.

Staffing. Our staff members are our greatest asset. We need to:

- **Hire staff with the skills necessary to incorporate CLA** into their work and support CLA integration within a USAID mission or implementing partner office. This may mean we go with someone with less technical experience but with solid soft skills and proven ability to manage adaptively. It's on USAID and other donors to request collaborative, learning-oriented, and highly adaptable staff as key personnel and on implementing partners to propose them in their proposals.

- **Assign clear roles and responsibilities for CLA.** Who will manage and facilitate partner meetings? Who on the leadership team will reinforce and model CLA? Who will write adaptable mechanism scopes and agreements? Who will onboard staff so they are familiar with theories of change and key strategic priorities? All of this takes time, and needs to be clearly assigned and built into position descriptions. We have also found it helpful to have a dedicated CLA team made up of learning advisors and champions to facilitate learning and adaptive management capacity throughout the organization. They are your cat herders and ensure you don't forget to apply what you've learned or connect with another team to share relevant knowledge.

- **Train current staff in CLA-related knowledge and skills.** Not all staff will come with the skills necessary to effectively collaborate, learn, and adapt. Provide leadership and organization development training to improve soft skills and facilitation, knowledge management, monitoring, evaluation, and learning training to improve hard skills.

- **Include CLA-related objectives in staff performance evaluations.** Collaborating, learning, and adapting is not one person or team's responsibility. It's on all of us. Incentivize staff to collaborate, learn, and adapt, not just to have high burn rates or achieve outputs; we need results.

- **Proactively make time for staff to pursue learning and reflection opportunities.** This goes back to culture—is leadership modeling how important CLA is and giving staff the resources and breathing space necessary to do it effectively?

Budgeting. In addition to our staff, we need to allocate funds for CLA-related activities or processes highlighted throughout the CLA framework, including:

- Facilitators, venues, and other costs associated with collaboration, learning, and pause-and-reflect events and activities with partners and stakeholders
- Institutional memory systems, such as filing systems and intranets
- Communications support to adequately document, distil, and disseminate key learning for decision-makers and other stakeholders
- Support for leadership development and team-building activities that can foster a learning culture, improve relationships among staff, and clarify decision-making processes.

USAID missions can build this work into implementing mechanisms and hire CLA support contracts to manage this work on their behalf. For implementing partners, once activities are awarded, it can sometimes be difficult to allocate the budget resources needed for effective CLA. That means incorporating sufficient and appropriate resources for CLA up front in proposals before it's too late.

Resourcing CLA is possible, but we have to make it a priority. And if it leads to having better information and making more informed decisions to improve people's lives, don't we have to?

TAGS

SHARE

Budget & Resources   Resourcing CLA

Related resources

BLOG

Exploring the CLA Framework

December 1, 2015

BLOG

Is My Organization's Culture Conducive to Collaborating,...

February 19, 2016

● ● ● ● ●

Back to top

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Explore USAID's LINKS sites for learning and knowledge sharing

AGRILINKS

Achieving agriculture-led food security

biodiversitylinks

Advancing biodiversity conservation

climatelinks

Improving climate change and development programming

DRGLINKS

Fostering resilient democratic societies

EDUCATIONLINKS

Creating successful and effective education programs

GenderLinks

Promoting gender equality and integration

GlobalWaters.org

Solving global water and sanitation challenges

HEALTHMARKETlinks

Sharing knowledge to advance health market development

LANDLINKS

Strengthening land tenure and property rights

LEARNING LAB

A collaborative learning community of development professionals

MARKETLINKS

Sharing market-based solutions for development

resiliencelinks

Helping communities withstand crisis and thrive

URBANLINKS

Supporting sustainable urban development

Learning at USAID
CLA
Monitoring
Evalution
Insights & Practice
Community

Follow Learning Lab