

PROGRAMNET MONITORING FAQs – JANUARY 2015

1. How do we make sure that activity M&E plans are in line with the Project M&E plan?

Per ADS 203, at the activity/implementing mechanism level, implementers are expected to submit an activity M&E plan to USAID CORs/AORs within the first 90 days of an award and before major activity implementation actions begin. Consistent with revisions in ADS 300.3.4, all solicitations should include already-defined indicators that flow from a project's M&E Plan as outlined in the PAD. Project managers must work with CORs/AORs to ensure that all activity M&E plans include performance indicators that are consistent with and meet the data collection needs of the project M&E plan and the mission's Performance Management Plan (PMP) and Performance Plan and Report (PPR). This is best done during the project design stage. Activity M&E plans submitted to USAID should include only those indicators that the mission needs for project and activity management, rather than the entire set of all indicators an implementer uses for its internal management purposes.

For some missions that currently have projects and activities that do not fit directly within the CDCS, or have initiatives that fall outside of their project Log Frames, there may be a transition period until indicators fully align with mission strategy. During this transition period, missions should continue collecting data for the indicators needed to manage or report on these activities. During the annual work-planning process with implementers, missions should consider which indicators may no longer be needed to save resources and time and use the opportunity to trim unnecessary indicators from the implementer's collection and reporting burden.

2. Are PIRS required for all indicators? Can we share them with our partners?

PIRS are required for all PMP indicators including those project and activity-level indicators that contribute to the Mission-wide PMP. PIRS are also required for all indicators that require data to be sent to Washington. PIRS are a best practice to use for all indicators as they help all stakeholders understand--among other things--how an indicator is defined, how it is measured, how the data used to construct the indicator is collected, stored, and compiled, and how the data will be used. To the extent possible, PIRS should be shared with implementing partners, especially if various partners are supposed to be collecting data that will contribute to a common indicator(s) to help ensure data quality.

3. Why is it recommended that missions minimize the use of outside contractors to conduct Data Quality Assessments (DQAs) given that DQAs take so much time?

It is essential for USAID staff to understand the quality of performance data they are using for programmatic and management decisions and remaining involved in the DQA process is a key means to doing that. It is the responsibility for USAID staff to understand data

limitations, in particular for any data that are reported externally. Implementing partners have a role in DQAs: they may help to assist COR/AORs understand how the data is collected and stored when USAID conducts DQA monitoring visits. While there may be cases where specific outside technical expertise is needed for DQAs, USAID staff should still be involved in the DQA process. More information about preparing for and conducting DQAs is found in Part 2 Module 7 of the [PMP Toolkit](#).

4. What is the difference between a PMP and an M&E Plan? How are both utilized?

A Performance Management Plan (PMP) is a mission-wide document that serves as an internal management tool for USAID missions (see ADS 203.3.3). The PMP provides a systemized approach for tracking and reviewing progress made towards the achievement of the goals stated in the CDCS Results Framework while maintaining a standardized level of quality and verification controls. The creation and implementation of the PMP is managed out of the program office, but all technical units/Development Objective (DO) teams are both contributors and users of the PMP. While there is no standard format for PMPs, all PMPs should include the required components detailed in ADS 203.3.3. USAID missions should use a format that best fits their management and communication needs.

The PMP is a living document and it is expected that it will be regularly updated with relevant indicators and evaluation questions from project M&E plans. Project M&E plans are developed by mission staff on a rolling basis during project design and set out the plan for monitoring and evaluating progress toward results specified in a Project LogFrame. Project indicators (at the Purpose, Sub-Purpose, and Output levels from the LogFrame) and evaluation questions from the project's M&E plan must be included in the PMP. Project teams should work with the program office to ensure that the mission-wide PMP is regularly updated from new project M&E plans (see 203.3.3).

Activity M&E plans, in contrast, are developed by implementers post-award, before major activity implementation begins, and should align with the broader project M&E plan to which they contribute. Activity M&E plans contain the indicators that the implementer and COR/AOR need for activity management.

5. What is the difference between a Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS) and performance indicator tracking table? Are both considered part of the PMP?

Both PIRSs and performance indicator tracking tables are considered part of a PMP. A PIRS stores reference information about a performance indicator, while the performance indicator tracking table stores indicator data, including baselines, targets, and actual values as well as justifications for individual targets. Note that neither needs to be part of a physical PMP document. Rather, both may be stored in an electronic database format (such as AIDtracker plus). Indicator data should be stored, at minimum, in an electronic spreadsheet,



but preferably in a database to facilitate data analysis and use. The PIRS should not be used as a substitute for an indicator tracking table.

6. How does the annual Performance Plan and Report (PPR) relate to the Mission Performance Management Plan (PMP)?

The PMP is an internal Mission management tool used to assess progress towards the "results" detailed in the CDCS Results Framework and Project LogFrames. In contrast, the PPR serves mainly as a reporting tool on USAID performance to stakeholders outside of the Mission, helping the Agency comply with legislative or other requirements (e.g. GPRAMA and initiative reporting). F leads the PPR process, issuing guidance annually.

Since the PMP is designed to help the mission monitor the performance of its portfolio, it generally has many more indicators than end up being reported in the PPR. The PMP will include both a set of F standard indicators that are applicable to the mission's portfolio as well as a larger number of custom indicators that provide more granularity on mission performance to facilitate decision-making and learning at the appropriate levels.

7. What is Complexity Aware Monitoring? How can my OU get involved? Can my OU use this approach?

Many monitoring approaches measure the predicted -desired results, planned implementation strategies and forecasted pathways of change -using indicators expected to provide useful information over the life of the project. Complexity-aware monitoring is intended to complement performance monitoring by tracking the unpredictable and is useful in a wide variety of programming contexts, not only in conflict or instability as most development contexts contain a mix of simple, complicated and complex aspects. Complexity-aware monitoring can help facilitate learning for adaptive management.

[USAID's Complexity-Aware Monitoring Discussion Note](#) is intended to raise questions, stimulate dialogue, and -- most of all -- inspire experimentation. PPL/LER is sponsoring trials to support those interested in meeting field-based monitoring challenges with these approaches. If you are interested in experimenting with complexity-aware monitoring, please contact Travis Mayo (tmayo@usaid.gov) . You can find more information on the [complexity aware M&E overview page on USAID Learning Lab](#).

8. Are missions required to submit their PMPs or project M&E plans to Washington for approval?

There is no formal Washington approval process for PMPs or project M&E plans. There are some indicators in a PMP that a mission reports to Washington in the annual Performance Plan and Report (PPR) or in initiative reporting; however, it is rare that a mission would

report all of the indicators in its PMP to Washington. The PMP is a management tool for missions.

Missions are encouraged to post PMPs (or portions thereof) on ProgramNet to share their experience with others, as well as to troubleshoot or garner ideas for new approaches. As missions design new projects, they are asked to post their Project Appraisal Documents (PADs), which include their project M&E plans, to ProgramNet, via the project design working group. However, this is not for PAD approval, but for better sharing to support mission staff as they become more adept at project design.

9. Are Washington Operating Units (OUs) required to do strategy-level Performance Management Plans, Project-level M&E plans, and portfolio reviews? In general, do Washington OUs have the same performance monitoring requirements as USAID Missions/Offices overseas?

The performance monitoring requirements in ADS 203.2 primarily apply to USAID Missions/Offices overseas. However, as stated in ADS 203.2, both Washington and field OUs are subject to requirements related to: (1) annual reporting on results (Performance Plans and Reports-PPRs); and (2) and data quality assessments (DQAs). Beyond PPRs and DQAs, Washington OUs may apply any aspects of ADS 203 that they find useful for their programs and priorities, also noted in ADS 203.2. In particular, it is highly recommend that Washington OUs develop and maintain a strategy-level PMP and conduct strategy-level portfolio reviews, as this ensures that OUs are implementing projects driven toward achieving results. Also, since most OUs have many different activities and projects, sometimes working in isolation, a PMP will help ensure that the OU is working toward the same end.

For Washington OUs that have a Country/Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (C/RDCS), the associated Results Framework will facilitate having a strategy-level PMP and strategy-level portfolio review. For Washington OUs that do not have a C/RDCS and associated Results Framework, they may find that using alternative strategy-level documents (e.g. strategic framework, Bureau/Office mission statement) may be useful in formulating a strategy-level PMP and the higher-level results therein, as well as structuring a corresponding strategy-level portfolio review.

Also, Washington OUs should note that the term Performance Management Plan (PMP), is now reserved for the strategy-level PMP (ADS 203.3.3) and should not be used at the project or activity/implementing mechanism level. Instead, the terms "project M&E plans" (ADS 203.3.4) and "activity-level M&E plans" (ADS 202.3.5) should be used. This will ensure that both field and Washington OUs are using consistent terminology and be helpful to implementing partners who work with both missions and Washington.



10. Is there any guidance on how the 5-10% of total program resources allocated for M&E should be calculated? Should 3% of program funds be allocated to evaluation?

ADS 203 recommends that missions dedicate 5-10% of total program resources (across the entire Operating Unit) for monitoring and evaluation, of which 3%, on average, should be devoted to evaluation. The actual costs of monitoring and evaluation may vary depending on operating environment and the specific types of evaluations the mission plans to undertake. Operating units should use available data, reasonable estimates, and defensible decisions in their M&E resource allocation keeping in mind that M&E may be provided through a number of different mechanisms, through individual awards or mission-wide monitoring and/or evaluation support mechanisms. Missions should document their approach to allocating funds for evaluations as well as monitoring in their PMP.

11. What is an evaluation plan?

Program Offices must create a mission-wide evaluation plan, included in their mission Performance Management Plan (PMP), to identify and track evaluations across the mission and over the entire CDCS timeframe as described in ADS 203.3.3.1. Evaluation plans should include, at minimum, the DO/project/activity to be evaluated, evaluation type, possible evaluation questions, estimated budget, planned start date and estimated completion date. A recommended multi-year evaluation plan template is available on ProgramNet.

Project M&E plans should also include planning for evaluations at the project level, as described in ADS 203.3.4.4.

12. Are missions supposed to include all M&E costs (including data collection, analysis and reporting) for a project under one line item? What about within implementing mechanisms?

The project budget should include a line item for M&E. This helps ensure that adequate resources are allocated for M&E within eventual implementing mechanisms, or for project level evaluations and monitoring that are not part of individual mechanisms (for example, surveys or other primary data collection needed for the project purpose level indicators). At the mechanism or activity level, missions should draft RFPs, RFAs and G2G or other mechanisms to include necessary M&E costs (as well as roles and responsibilities). This will ensure that Monitoring is an explicitly-funded part of every award and that both Monitoring and Evaluation (if an internal evaluation is expected from the implementing mechanism) are budgeted separately from other tasks. It is better if those costs can be captured under an M&E line item rather than allocated across individual staff salaries, though individual implementing mechanisms will vary in their ability to do this.

13. What role can an M, E, & L contract play in supporting CLA?

The specific types of activities included in a CLA scope of work will depend on the Mission's priorities, capacities, resources and needs. In general, contracts are called upon to support or manage the following types of tasks:

- Providing **analytic support** by conducting research, assessments or analyses to help fill the Mission's knowledge gaps
- Supporting **adaptive management**, by for example, facilitating and/or supporting learning and reflection events and opportunities (such as after-action reviews, strategic portfolio reviews, partner meetings)
- Facilitating **knowledge capture and exchange**
- Supporting **stakeholder engagement** efforts
- Encouraging **peer-to-peer learning** with implementing partners, donors and/or government counterparts to foster collaboration and share lessons

Scopes of work for learning support contracts are available [here](#) and [here](#).

14. What is Washington's role in the peer review of evaluation SOWs and reports?

USAID/W regional and technical bureaus play a key role in providing evaluation guidance and assistance to field OUs. Therefore, Regional and Technical Bureau M&E POCs are required to, upon request of the Mission, participate in and/or organize reviews of evaluation scopes of work and draft reports. The Mission and Bureau M&E POCs should collaborate to determine the most appropriate format for the participation. For example, it may be most appropriate for the Washington M&E POC (and any other Washington reviewers) to simply participate as an extended team member of the regular Mission peer review process.

15. What is the link between performance monitoring and evaluation?

Performance monitoring and evaluation are mutually reinforcing, but distinct, practices (see ADS 203.1). Together, monitoring and evaluation contribute to good performance management - the systematic process of collecting and analyzing performance information to track progress toward planned results; and using performance information and evaluations to influence decision-making and resource allocation. In many cases, good performance monitoring can allow for richer evaluations. From establishing baselines to systematically collecting and analyzing indicator data, solid performance monitoring can save resources for more in-depth data collection and analysis during evaluation. Performance monitoring may trigger evaluations by pointing to the need to probe further to understand project performance during implementation.

16. What is the function and timing of the Performance Indicator Reference Sheets (PIRS)?

A PIRS includes all the relevant reference information about a performance indicator. It helps ensure that USAID staff and implementing partners are on the same page regarding what an indicator means, how it is collected, and who is responsible for it. It also helps ensure consistent indicator data collection and use, and documents decisions about the indicator by current staff for future staff.

The mission-wide Performance Management Plan (PMP) should contain Performance Indicator Reference Sheets for all performance indicators. A PIRS should be completed as soon as an indicator is identified (i.e. definition, data source, etc.). During PMP development, some PIRS will be completed right after CDCS approval as Goal and DO level indicators are determined; others will be completed as projects are designed and indicators are further identified and refined. Consequently, PIRSs should be completed on a rolling basis as indicators become finalized. PIRS are required for all F standards indicators and all indicators included in the PMP. PIRS are a 'best practice' as such should be used for all indicators. While all F standard indicators have PIRS that can be found on the State/F website, the USAID version of the PIRS has a few additional fields. Thus, if USAID is using an F indicator, the information from the F version should be transferred to the USAID PIRS form and the additional fields completed.

The PIRS serve as an authoritative reference for each indicator, and it is important for Missions to share PIRS with implementing partners so that there is a common understanding of the indicator (how it is collected, compiled, stored, etc.). Missions should ensure that there is a way to update the PIRS and a place online where stakeholders can access them.

PIRS can also be used as a starting point when conducting DQAs, which are required for any indicators being reported to Washington. Once the DQA is conducted, the PIRS should be updated with the necessary information from the DQA checklist. More about PIRS can be found in Part 2 Module 6 of the [PMP Toolkit](#). The PMP Toolkit also has the recommended PIRS template.

17. Some implementing partners have their own rules and indicators for activity monitoring. How do we work with these indicators? What control do we have over implementers using funds for collecting indicators that we don't need?

Implementing partners have the primary responsibility for activity-level monitoring. In some cases, implementing partners may collect monitoring data for their own internal activity management and implementation purposes beyond that which is needed or required by USAID. That said, due to the time and cost of data collection, it is important that indicators be selected strategically. Per ADS 203, at the activity/implementing mechanism level implementers are expected to submit an activity M&E plan to USAID CORs/AORs within the

first 90 days of an award and before major activity implementation actions begin. Project managers must work with CORs/AORs to ensure that all activity M&E plans include performance indicators that are consistent with and meet the data collection needs of the project M&E plan, the mission's Performance Management Plan (PMP), and the mission's Performance Plan and Report (PPR). A litmus test for which indicators implementing partners should report to USAID is those which are relevant for management or mission reporting and decisions.

In the past, implementers have expressed concern that they are engaged in extraneous data collection. It is important for the USAID mission to be able to identify and communicate data expectations and needs early in a project or activity. To the extent that implementing partners have a clearer understanding of USAID's data needs, they are more likely to focus their monitoring efforts on what is most important for the mission.

18. What is the status of data warehousing? What is required to be submitted and by whom?

USAID policy requires that all quantitative data collected by USAID or one of the Agency's contractors or grantees for the purposes of an evaluation must be uploaded and stored in a central database. The data should be organized and fully documented for use by those not fully familiar with the project or the evaluation.

While evaluation reports are to be submitted to the DEC, quantitative datasets should not be submitted to the DEC, but should be collected by the mission for the "Development Data Library". There will soon be a new ADS 579 on the Development Data Library that will provide further details. Until this database is established, data can be submitted by contacting opendata@usaid.gov for further instructions. Supporting documentation for quantitative data should include code books, data dictionaries, as well as relevant information about the scope and methodology used to collect and analyze the data.

19. Which indicators from project M&E plans feed into the PMP and which ones do not?

Results Framework and key LogFrame indicators should be included in the PMP. Measures of project inputs and indicators included in Activity M&E plans that are not also included in Project M&E plans do not need to be included in the PMP. For more information about indicator and how project M&E plans feed into the PMP see the [PMP Toolkit](#).

20. Are there any tips for indicator selection so as to make sure indicators reflect the right level (e.g. input, output, outcome, etc.)?

USAID staff should consult ADS 203.3.6 through 203.3.8, and ADS 203.3.11.1 for guidance regarding indicators. [The PMP Toolkit](#) (Module 2.2) is an excellent resource for learning more about indicators. Regional bureaus and offices as well as pillar bureaus and technical offices have M&E experts and POCs who can provide guidance on appropriate indicators for

particular sectors. All of the Standard State/F indicators have Performance Indicator Reference Sheets (PIRS) that provide information about what is measured, how it is measured, how the data are collected, etc. Determining the 'right' indicator for a particular level of a strategy, project, or activity is dependent upon the results expected to be achieved at that level.

21. How should we manage the findings and recommendations coming out of evaluation reports to inform learning and decision-making?

High-quality evaluation findings should inform USAID decisions. The Program Office should ensure that evaluations are timed so that evaluation findings are available when decisions need to be made, and that findings are integrated into decision-making and learning about priorities, resource allocations and project design. The standardized mission order on Evaluation calls for the Program Office to lead relevant mission staff through the process of responding to evaluation findings, as described in ADS 203.3.1.9. This process will lead to the development of an action plan for addressing the evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations the mission has accepted or any other actions it deems necessary as a result of evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations. During Portfolio Reviews, the status of action plans for evaluation findings and their use in respective decisions will be discussed and documented. When planning for an evaluation, we should already be thinking about intended users and involve them as early as necessary. Evaluations findings, conclusions, and recommendations should be shared widely in appropriate ways. Beyond submitting final evaluations to the DEC, other methods of sharing this knowledge that bring it to a wider audience should be developed. These can include short summaries, seminars/webinars, and utilizing USAID sector specific websites where appropriate.

22. Is it required that all evaluation reports be submitted to the DEC? Are there are any exceptions to this requirements?

The Evaluation Policy/ADS 203 requires that all evaluation reports be submitted publicly to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) (dec.usaid.gov) within three months of their completion (see ADS 203.3.1.10). If the evaluation was not "finalized," the USAID Mission/Office should submit the last draft it received. There are very rare exceptions to this publicly-available requirement which are granted after a formal request is submitted to and approved by the Director of PPL's Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (PPL/LER). Without this approval, all evaluation reports must be submitted to the DEC and available for the public to view. If there are sensitive issues, Operating Units should have both a public version of the report and an SBU version of the report. In some situations, PPL/LER recommends that approval be sought for an SBU version only for a specific, limited time frame to allow time for sensitivities to decrease.

Exceptions to the public disclosure requirement are expected to be rare, must be requested and justified in writing, and should be based on one or more of the following criteria:



1. Disclosure would impair foreign assistance objectives.
2. Disclosure would involve releasing otherwise proprietary information owned by third parties.

Information disclosed could put individual safety at risk or release private personal information.

The few exceptions to public disclosure approved thus far have been on the basis of the safety and security of our partners. Even if an exception is granted by PPL/LER, the evaluation should be posted on the DEC as SBU so that it is at least available to USAID staff. Any mission seeking an exception should submit an action memo to PPL/LER from the mission director requesting the exception.

23. What is AIDtracker? What are its features?

AIDtracker Plus (AT+) is an easy-to-use web application that helps Missions manage data related to projects and implementing mechanisms, including a robust indicator management module.

Mechanisms are linked to their contract and financial information obtained directly from GLAAS and Phoenix. The indicator management module tracks indicators at all levels of the results framework, from Mission Performance Management Plan (PMP) (tracking Country Development Cooperation Strategy results), to Project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan (tracking logframe indicators) to Activity M&E Plans at the implementing mechanism level.

WCIO and PPL partnered to enhance the system and make it fully compliant with the new ADS 203 and standardized Mission Orders. AT+ is also fully compliant with the Agency's information security requirements and the Federal Information Security and Management Act (FISMA).