Measuring Performance Improvement in Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL)

A Guide to Planning for and Measuring Improved Performance Resulting from Capacity Strengthening Investments in MERL

September 2024

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What is the purpose of this guide?

Data for Impact (D4I) is a global monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) project working to support data generation and use for more effective, equitable, and sustainable health programming. Capacity strengthening is critical to this approach. This guide draws from the experience of D4I and predecessor MEASURE Evaluation, USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy, and other sources to help MERL actors apply the LCS principle "plan for and measure performance improvement in collaboration with local partners" to their work. The information and resources here can be used to design, implement, and learn from MERL capacity strengthening focused on improving performance according to locally identified priorities and metrics. Information on localization and partnership practices is also included to help readers understand how these concepts intersect with effective capacity strengthening.

Data for Impact

Data for Impact (D4I) is a six-year cooperative agreement funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with an objective of increasing capacity for rigorous evaluation. D4I works in partnership with local actors to generate evidence, ensure data quality, integrate gender, and promote data use. D4I's approach to capacity strengthening is aligned with USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, including a focus on local needs and priorities.

Who is this guide for?

USAID's Global Health Bureau LCS Policy implementation guidance puts forth different models for supporting LCS in USAID-funded health activities, involving USAID, local implementing partners and subrecipients, and their non-local collaborators. This guide is intended for all of these groups and more. It can help donor agencies plan for and invest in MERL capacity strengthening, and offers valuable information about LCS for MERL organizations and others who have not worked with USAID before and may be interested in doing so. USAID's LCS Policy addresses capacity strengthening for individuals, organizations, and networks and highlights mutuality. USAID's CBLD-9 Indicator measures improved performance specifically by supported local organizations. This guide includes tools and approaches for reporting on CBLD-9, which are likewise focused on capacity strengthening outcomes at the organization level.

Local actors, including local organizations (i.e., groups of people working together for a common purpose), originate from and are led by people within a given country or region, inclusive of government at national and sub-national levels.

Capacity encompasses the knowledge, skills, motivations, and relationships that enable an actor to design and implement solutions to local development challenges, and to learn, adapt, and innovate over time.

Local capacity strengthening (LCS) is an intentional and strategic investment into improving local actors' performance to produce jointly valued outcomes that align with local priorities.

How does local capacity strengthening (LCS) fit with localization?

USAID defines localization as a set of internal reforms and actions needed to ensure responsiveness to local communities. The Agency aims for local leadership in planning, designing, implementing, and/or evaluating at least 50% of USAID programming by 2030. Recognizing and investing in local capacity forms a major part of this shift, with "adapt[ing] policies and programs … through local systems practice and local capacity strengthening" as one of the agency's four lines of effort toward localization. Capacity strengthening investments may empower local actors in advocating for, managing, and leading programming—and helps to ensure that program

participants' needs and priorities come first. Although capacity strengthening has long played a role in USAID-supported programming, there is growing recognition of the need to decolonize these efforts and align them with local perspectives. This requires understanding and appreciating existing knowledge and skills in a given context and designing mutually beneficial activities for capacity strengthening and capacity sharing. For more ideas on leveraging MERL projects and partnerships to advance localization, see this guide from USAID.
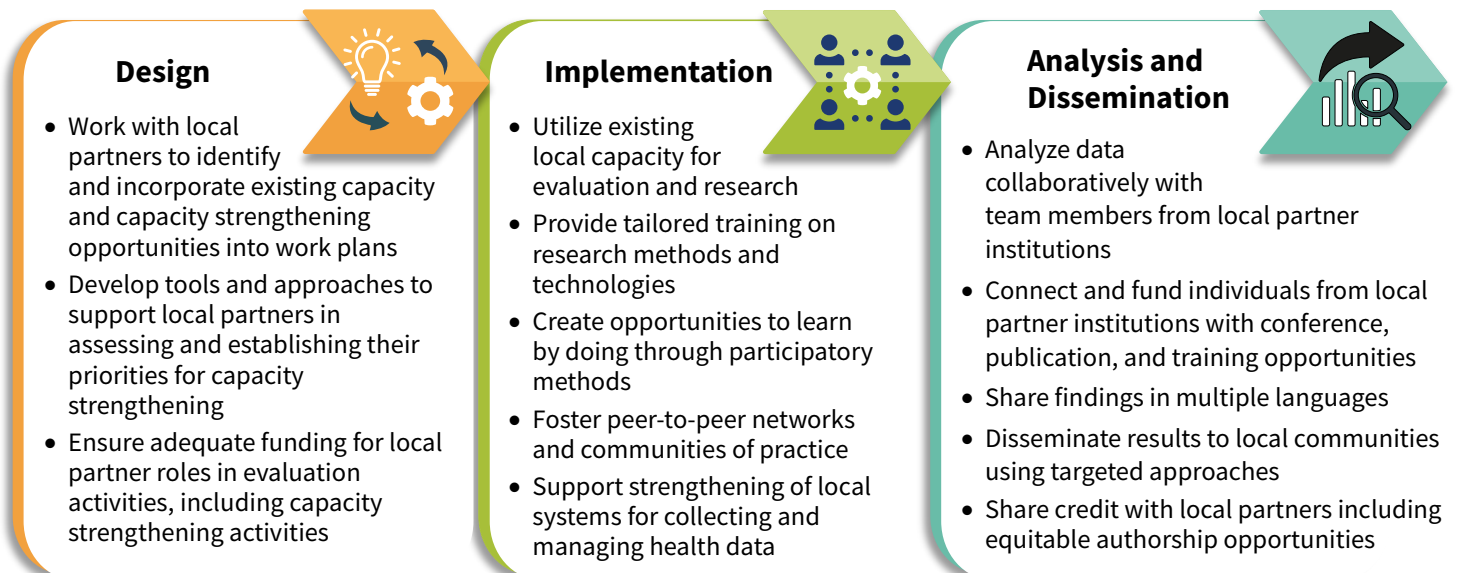
How does local capacity strengthening fit within MERL partnerships?

Local actors' knowledge and expertise have always been essential to planning, conducting, contextualizing, disseminating, and using the results of MERL activities. Capacity strengthening may be the focus of organizations' relationships, or capacity strengthening may be a component of jointly conducting research or an evaluation, with approaches such as peer-to-peer learning and relationship brokering benefiting both partners. Organizations may also support and engage in experiential learning, tailored training for developing specific MERL competencies, mentorship, and financial assistance to enable participation in professional conferences or other learning exchanges, writing about, and publishing MERL work. Transition awards offer one framework for integrating capacity strengthening into subawards to local entities, but organizations can and should look for diverse, creative ways to incorporate capacity strengthening into their collaborations. Approaches to capacity strengthening within MERL partnerships, like all capacity strengthening efforts, should consider the priorities of local partners and the local system first. For more information on advancing equity in partnerships, see this guide to subaward practices.

Partnerships for MERL activities may present unique opportunities for partners to grow specific monitoring, research, and evaluation skillsets that are useful and appropriate to local contexts. Historically, many MERL partnerships have focused on international partners contracting local partners for limited aspects of the research process, such as data collection. However, partnerships that practice mutuality throughout the research process, from design, to implementation, and then analysis and dissemination have much greater potential to yield results that are locally owned and locally relevant. Figure 1 shows examples of how D4I supports local capacity strengthening throughout the research and evaluation continuum.

Figure 1. How D4I supports local capacity strengthening throughout the evaluation and research process

Design

- Work with local partners to identify and incorporate existing capacity and capacity strengthening opportunities into work plans
- Develop tools and approaches to support local partners in assessing and establishing their priorities for capacity strengthening
- Ensure adequate funding for local partner roles in evaluation activities, including capacity strengthening activities

Implementation

- Utilize existing local capacity for evaluation and research
- Provide tailored training on research methods and technologies
- Create opportunities to learn by doing through participatory methods
- Foster peer-to-peer networks and communities of practice
- Support strengthening of local systems for collecting and managing health data

Analysis and Dissemination

- Analyze data collaboratively with team members from local partner institutions
- Connect and fund individuals from local partner institutions with conference, publication, and training opportunities
- Share findings in multiple languages
- Disseminate results to local communities using targeted approaches
- Share credit with local partners including equitable authorship opportunities

Source: Data for Impact's Approach to Individual and Institutional Capacity Strengthening

Steps in planning for capacity-strengthening investments

- Start with the local system
- Identify a performance goal
- Design a fit-for-purpose-approach

What is included in this guide?

The following sections provide a menu of options and tools for locally led capacity action planning and performance measurement. The strengths and limitations of different options will vary by context and approaches should be flexible.

Resources to support measuring improved performance

- Create a results model
- Facilitation guide for identifying performance goals, capacity-strengthening investments, and measures for improved performance
- Measurement approach examples

Additional resources

- Gender considerations
- Full list of tools to support capacity strengthening
- Sample CBLD-9 worksheet

Planning for Capacity Strengthening Investments

Start with the Local System

Principles 1 and 2 of USAID's LCS Policy[1] emphasize **starting with the local system** and **strengthening diverse capacities through diverse approaches.** These principles recognize that capacity strengthening will be most successful when investments are intentional in supporting key actors in their existing and unique roles and networks**.** Therefore, a key first step is to understand existing local capacities and clarify local priorities for MERL capacity strengthening, including how strengthening specific technical or managerial capacities will benefit the local system (which may be defined as the organization, the project, a multi-project program, a regional or national operation, or something else).

Partners will need to decide how to guide the process of identifying and clarifying priorities and related goals. This should be done early in the collaboration process, ideally when decisions for work planning and budget allocations are being made. Actors may enter a working relationship already knowing their priorities because they have previously invested in assessing their needs and interests. Some priorities may be outside the immediate scope of the partnership, and this information should also be factored into the approach.

Figure 2. Steps toward measuring improved performance
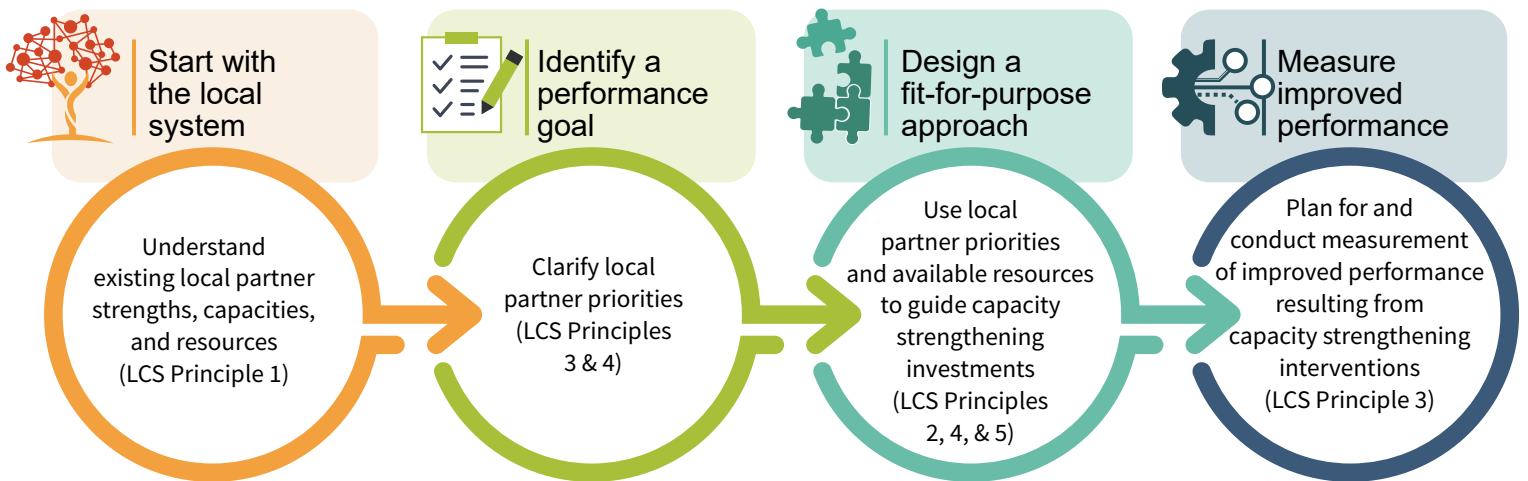

Identify a Performance Goal

Performance goals are the high-order change needed to achieve an organization's intended impact. The performance goals will be used to design capacity strengthening interventions as well as measurement approaches for understanding progress toward improved performance.

Capacity action planning tools can be used to identify an organization's own priorities for performance improvement. These tools can also help collaborating actors learn about existing strengths and the types of capacity strengthening support desired and needed. There are many options for identifying priorities and building consensus,

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[1] https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-capacity-strengthening
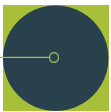
ranging from a simple strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis to more detailed and externally facilitated assessment tools. The approach will also be affected by partnership timelines and available resources. A guide to capacity action planning tools is included in Table 1.

From USAID's perspective, the use of an assessment tool for capacity action planning is optional, and there are other means of identifying capacity strengthening priorities. The approach should fit the scope and context and engage local actors as primary decision makers. If there is dedicated funding available for capacity strengthening investments, and participants have not previously engaged in a process to help clarify their priorities, then the tools listed in Table 1 or another more detailed assessment may be especially useful.

USAID's LCS Policy distinguishes tools for capacity strengthening by three main purposes:

Risk mitigation	Capacity action planning	Performance measurement
• Assess and plan for risk mitigation for USAID and other donors when partnering with an organization • Identify strengths of local partners • Mainly used to understand risks associated with making financial awards to an organization	• Provide a process for organizations to identify or clarify their priorities for capacity strengthening • Used to establish capacity strengthening goals	• Monitor and measure the extent to which capacity strengthening investments are contributing to improved performance

Alternately, the facilitation guide included in the helpful resources section can help structure a conversation to identify local partner priorities and capacity strengthening approaches without the use of a formal assessment.

Design a Fit-for-Purpose Approach to Capacity Strengthening

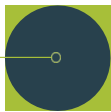A fit-for-purpose approach to capacity strengthening should be co-created with relevant actors. A co-creation process may involve brainstorming sessions, strategy development sessions, and/or other activities. Some options to help select capacity strengthening investments include:

➢ Using a tool to catalyze action planning for capacity strengthening such as D4I's RECAP, which is designed to describe and assess MERL capacities (see Table 1)

➢ Using a results framework to help identify desired inputs and outcomes to capacity strengthening interventions

➢ Using the facilitation guide for a consultative process (implemented during a co-creation event or other forum)
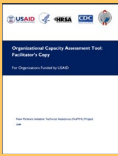
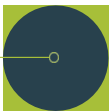Click to view a webinar on tools to catalyze capacity action planning

Table 1. Tools to catalyze capacity action planning (See Appendix A for additional tools for capacity strengthening)

Tool	Description	Considerations for use
Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Package (RECAP)	**Details:** Organizations assess critical elements across six domains of effective research and evaluation capacity. Numeric scores and qualitative notes are captured in an Excel workbook and used to inform action planning. **Time to implement:** 1–3-day workshop depending on number of domains assessed; 4–6 weeks to plan **Resources:** Neutral or external facilitator, space to convene **Output:** Organizations use assessment results to develop action planning for institutional strengthening	• Specific to research and evaluation capacity • Can be adapted to include only relevant domains • Institutional strengthening guide lists no- and low-cost resources by domain
Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA)	**Details:** Organizations assess critical elements of effective organizational management and identify priorities for strengthening. Similar to USAID's NUPAS but addresses a broader range of capacity designed to be used for the organization's benefit, ideally conducted shortly after receiving a direct or indirect award from USAID. **Time to implement:** 1–3-day workshop depending on the level of detail to be assessed and domains included; 6+ weeks to plan **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene **Output:** Numeric ratings are used to design an action plan	• Designed to assess organizational functions and processes for program and award management • Recommended for use following a direct or indirect award from USAID
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis	**Details:** A generic tool for assessing a team or organization's capacity using a simple matrix. A SWOT analysis is done using a simple matrix to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the goals of their organization. It can be self-applied or externally facilitated. **Time to implement:** 1–3-day workshop depending on the level of detail to be assessed and domains included **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene **Output:** A matrix that can be used to inform action planning	• Multiple guides to conducting SWOT analyses exist for different sectors • No predefined capacity statements to evaluate
PERFORM: the Performance Mapping and Improvement System	**Details:** This systems-oriented tool is based on MOMENTUM Knowledge Accelerator's Enhanced Organizational Capacity Framework and assists in identifying performance improvement needs and understanding the drivers of an organization's performance to create 100-day improvement plans. **Time to implement:** One full day or two half-days to conduct initial mapping; one half-day per 6 months to monitor. **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene, evidence validation panel **Output:** Data capture templates available in Word or Excel	• Urgency index helps determine priorities • Can be implemented independently or to complement other capacity or performance measurement tools. Including CBLD-9

| Organization Synthesis of Capacity Assessments for Award Readiness (OSCAR) (forthcoming) | **Details:** A facilitated self-assessment tool that synthesizes USAID's NUPAS and OCA tools while additionally evaluating critical sustainability factors. The OSCAR tool is a comprehensive instrument designed to provide a general overview of organizational capacity and a specific read of an organization's ability to receive and absorb direct donor funding.

Time to implement: Two days for the first self-assessment and action planning exercise; subsequent processes take 1–2 days

Resources: External facilitator for initial use

Output: Excel-based data capture tool | • Also designed for risk mitigation |

Measuring Improved Performance

Historically, efforts to measure capacity strengthening focused on improvements in participants' *latent* capacity, or the outputs of these investments, such as number of individuals trained. Focusing instead on improved performance supports learning from outcomes. USAID recommends using CBLD-9 for outcome monitoring when capacity strengthening is implemented with organizations and using other locally defined metrics when working with individuals or networks. Standard indicators may also be used to monitor the capacity strengthening outputs linked to performance improvements. These include CBLD-10 (the value of non-donor resources mobilized for local development priorities) and CBLD-11 (the number of organizations pursuing their own performance improvement priorities with capacity strengthening support from the United States Government).

Measuring improved performance from capacity strengthening poses several challenges:

➢ Limited opportunities to demonstrate improved performance

➢ Capacity strengthening investments that don't address all the skills needed to meet performance goals

➢ External influences that can be difficult to measure and account for in assessments

➢ Timeframes for capacity strengthening goals that extend beyond the life of the project or partnership

➢ Preponderance of existing tools and resources focused on latent capacity rather than performance

To measure improved performance, partners must first agree upon a goal for improved performance and then determine an appropriate measurement approach and metric(s). Within these parameters, there is substantial flexibility. Metrics may be quantitative or qualitative as long as they reflect the performance objective. Examples of possible measurement methods include observations, surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions. Methods that pose a substantial burden for the supported organization are discouraged, and existing data should be leveraged for performance assessment when possible.

Tips for Measuring Improved Performance (including CBLD-9):

➢ Select a measurement approach that captures performance, not latent capacity. Capacity is a form of potential; it is not visible until it is used. Therefore, performance is the key consideration in determining whether capacity has changed.

➢ Measure organizational performance results, not activity implementation. Performance improvement takes time, and simply implementing planned capacity development support does not imply improved performance.
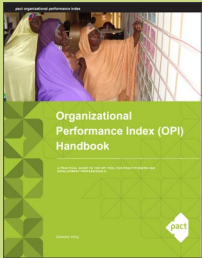
Refer to USAID's CBLD-9 Measurement Guide and the CBLD-9 Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS). This resource is not intended to replace these guidance documents, but to supplement them with focused information and examples for MERL capacity strengthening.

In the "Helpful Resources" section of this document, there is a facilitation guide to help guide this discussion between partners, as well as several examples of performance goals and real or possible approaches to measurement taken from D4I MERL partners' experiences.

A variety of tools exist to inform and guide LCS, including performance assessment. These tools can be used to identify and clarify roles, strengths, and priorities among partners, as well as to plan, measure, and learn from the effects of capacity strengthening investments. Table 2 describes tools and guidance for measuring improved performance from a variety of organizations.

Table 2. Tools and resources for measuring improved performance (See Appendix A for additional tools for capacity strengthening)

Name	Description	Considerations
CBLD-9 Indicator Guidance	**Details:** The CBLD-9 indicator measures whether USG-funded capacity development efforts have led to improved performance in organizations receiving capacity development support. Collaboratively identified metrics may be quantitative or qualitative but should reflect a clear objective for performance improvement. Measurement may occur through a variety of methods, including observation, surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions. **Time and resources:** Time to determine performance goals and complete worksheet. **Output:** CBLD-9 worksheet	CBLD-9 worksheets are uploaded to the "Documents" tab of the CBLD-9 indicator data entry screen in Development Information Solution (DIS).
Organizational Performance Index (OPI)	**Details:** A tool developed by Pact to support measurement of change in organizational performance, designed to clarify the link between capacity development inputs and community level impact. OPI focuses on capacity development outcomes, the change in organizational performance that results from improved internal capacity. OPI answers the questions "So what if this organization has an improved governance system?" and "So what if they are better at managing finances?" **Time to implement:** Up to four hours for partners to complete an initial self-assessment using the OPI. Reassessments and assessments tend to be much quicker—lasting less than one hour. **Resources:** Training and time for staff responsible for data collection. **Output:** Includes data collection tools used to record scores and list evidence. OPI data is then transferred into the Pact global online database called the Capacity Solutions Platform (CSP) via computer.	• OPI data can be collected over the course of the year, whenever it makes most sense for the organization to gather this information. • Annual data collection should be managed by two OPI-trained Capacity Development/Program staff members
PERFORM: the Performance Mapping and Improvement System	**Details:** This systems-oriented tool is based on MOMENTUM Knowledge Accelerator's Enhanced Organizational Capacity Framework and assists local partners and program implementers in identifying performance improvement needs and course corrections in a timely manner. The focus is to understand the drivers of an organization's performance and create 100-day improvement plans for course correction. **Time to implement:** One full day or two half-days to conduct initial mapping; one half-day per 6 months to monitor. **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene, evidence validation panel **Output:** Data capture templates available in Word or Excel	• Urgency index helps determine priorities • Can be implemented independently or to complement other capacity or performance measurement tools. Including CBLD-9

Additional Resources for Measuring Improved Performance

A formal tool or assessment, like those listed in Table 2, may not always be necessary or be the best fit for organizations engaged in LCS. The following resources offer alternatives to a more formal tool or may be used in combination with them. Organizations should consider which approach may best serve their project/partnership in identifying performance improvement priorities and measuring outcomes.

Who gets counted in CBLD-9?

CBLD-9 is used to monitor the results of demand-driven capacity strengthening support to organizations—groups of people working together for a common purpose. It is expressed as the percentage of supported organizations with improved performance on locally determined metrics.

Many factors influence progress toward improved performance, and CBLD-9 does not measure the effectiveness of the supporting partner as a capacity strengthening provider or other factors that may affect progress.

See Annex B for a sample completed CBLD-9 worksheet for MERL capacity strengthening support implemented in the context of local and non-local actors co-engaged in implementing a program.

Creating a Results Model to Guide Capacity Strengthening Efforts

A results model can help identify the logical progression of capacity strengthening priorities, associated inputs or investments, and intended performance outcomes. The examples provided here come from two D4I MERL partnerships with capacity strengthening components.

Example A: Strengthening qualitative analysis for research and evaluation in Nigeria
This case study highlights D4I's partnership with the Nigeria-based Data Research and Mapping Consult, Ltd. (DRMC) and how D4I strives to practice the LCS policy principles for effective programming and equitable partnerships through an intentional, demand-driven, partner-centered approach.

Figure 3. Local capacity strengthening framework, DRMC 2023
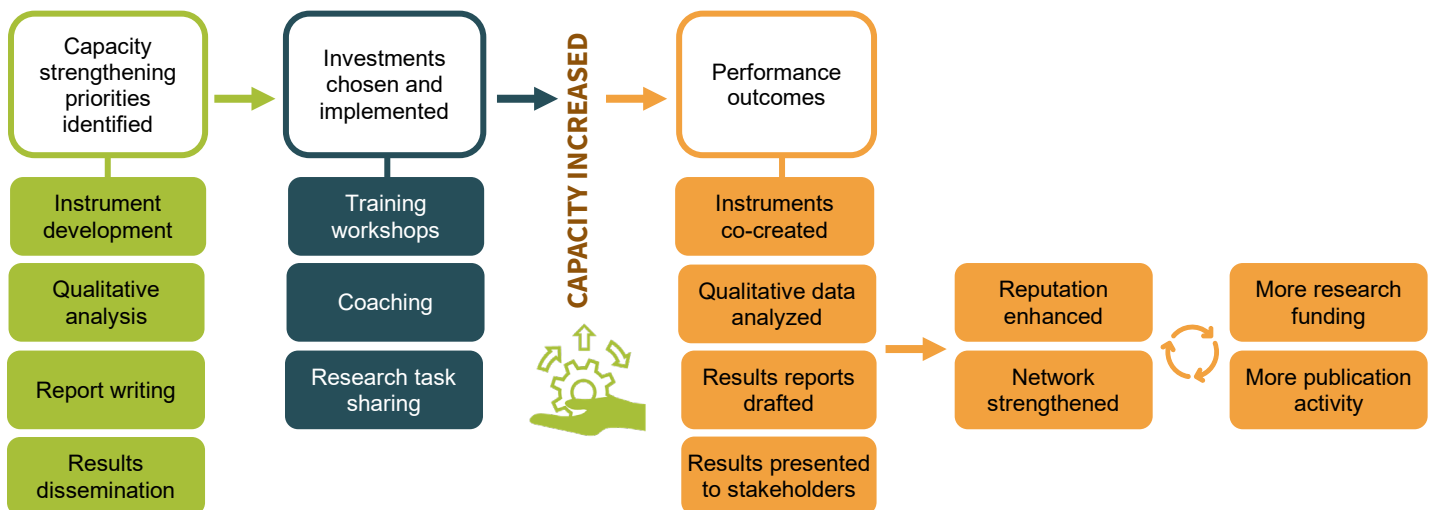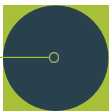
Example B: Strengthening capacity for evaluation at the Kinshasa School of Public Health

This case study of D4I's partnership with the DRC's Kinshasa School of Public Health (KSPH) from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) describes the use of a customized assessment approach that included surveys and interviews with students and faculty to help identify local priorities for strengthening research and valuation capacity at the school. Assessment results were used to identify the desired results of capacity strengthening efforts and to create a results model, mapping capacity strengthening inputs to their anticipated outcomes, shown in the figure below.

Figure 4. Results model for the KSPH capacity-strengthening plan
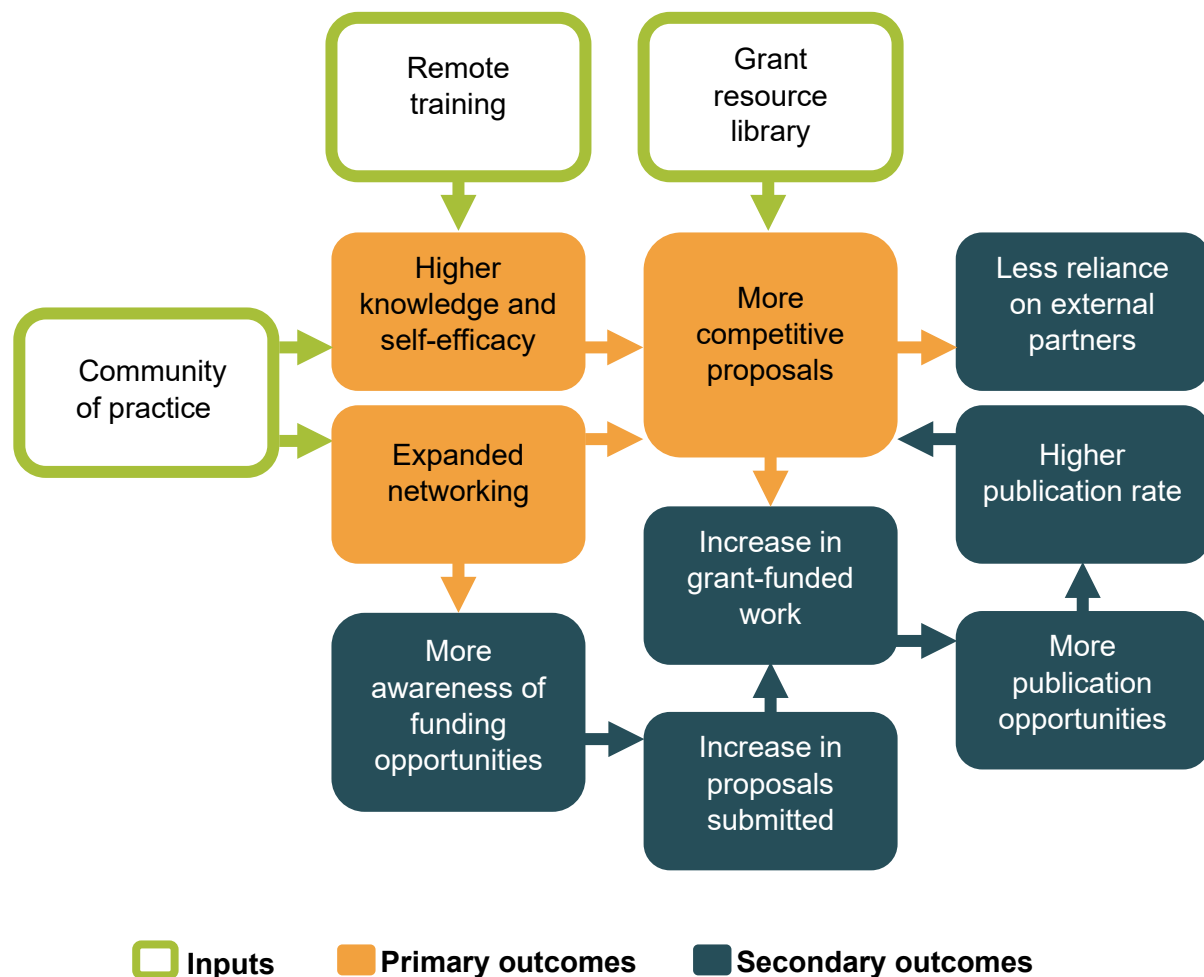
Facilitation Guide for Identifying Performance Goals, Potential Capacity Strengthening Investments, and Measures of Improved Performance

As an assessment tool, this facilitation guide may be useful for identifying performance goals, capacity strengthening interventions, and measurement approaches.

A note on mutuality: These questions are intended to help clarify priorities for each entity engaged in capacity strengthening (including LCS providers) in the short and longer term. This can help highlight existing strengths and guide a collaborative process for identifying approaches that will be mutually beneficial, even if resources are mostly directed to one actor in the process (hereafter "the supported organization").

Performance goals are the high-order changes needed to achieve impact. Performance goals will in turn be used to design capacity strengthening interventions and approaches to measuring progress toward results.

Pre-facilitation considerations:

- Before identifying a performance goal and measurement approach, participants should review the facilitation guide questions.

- The supported organization may want to first convene a representative and diverse core team to discuss their organizational goals and priorities. The convened group should include representatives from across the organization who fill different roles and span various levels of seniority (e.g., not only those in technical roles, but those who manage the organization's finances, human resources, logistics, etc., and both junior and more senior staff).

- Be mindful of power dynamics within the conversation, particularly when collaborators have contractual relationships. Both partners should be given opportunities to speak and provide input.

When planning your measurement approach for this indicator, it is critical to:

- Select a measurement approach that captures performance, not latent capacity. Capacity is a form of potential; it is not visible until it is used. Performance is the key consideration in determining whether capacity has changed.

- Measure organizational performance results, not (or not only) activity implementation. Performance improvement takes time, and simply implementing planned capacity development support does not indicate improved performance.

Facilitation Guide: Discussion Questions

1. What is the organization's mission or vision?
2. What are the organizational interests or priorities for the organization toward meeting its mission or vision?
3. What are the organization's performance goals for the next 3–5 years?
4. How will we know when those goals have been achieved? What will we see?

5. Which skills or practices would the organization want to strengthen to achieve these goals? This can include areas the organization already feels strong in but wants to continue to grow. Be as specific as possible.

    a. What other resources may be needed to achieve this goal (e.g., material resources, additional human resources, or financial resources)?

6. What would strengthened capacity in the areas mentioned in Q3 lead to in the short term? This may be on a path to achieving longer term performance goals, or secondary goals. For example, a performance goal might be increased capacity to implement evaluations and strengthened qualitative analysis skills may be needed to achieve this. This may lead to the ability to take on more direct funding for evaluation work, including qualitative and mixed methods work.

    How could support best contribute to strengthening capacity and reaching performance goals?
    Be as specific as possible.

Skills needed to achieve performance goal (Q3):	Performance goal (Q1):	Secondary or long-term goals (Q4):
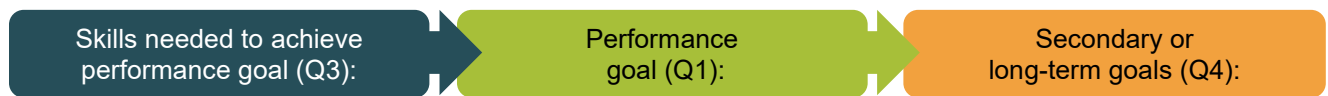
7. What specifically would you like to be able to do better?

    a. How would you like to provide ongoing feedback about the effectiveness and quality of the capacity strengthening interventions to ensure they are meeting your performance objectives?

    b. Are there other resources or relationships you plan to use to strengthen these skills or capacities?

    c. How do you anticipate using [skills learned/strengthened] in your work in the future so that they support your organization's vision and mission?

Construction of rural SEED community day secondary school.

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Measuring Improved Performance: Measurement Approach Examples

USAID's CBLD-9 measurement guide provides sector-specific examples of capacity strengthening activity performance goals and measurement approaches. This resource provides additional examples which are specific to **capacity strengthening for MERL organizations and partnerships.**

The following are examples of D4I partnerships that have included investments in capacity strengthening. In partnerships with capacity strengthening processes that may not yet meet CBLD-9 reporting criteria, potential performance goals and measurement approaches are provided as illustrative.

Jimma University Meeting of the Mind.
© Fikadu Mitiku/JU

Read a more about this partnership

Activity overview: Jimma University (JU), based in Ethiopia, partnered with D4I to support monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) for a Packard Foundation-funded, multisectoral program in the Oromia region of Ethiopia.

Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Priorities were identified on an emerging basis in discussions between D4I and JU and during planning for evaluation activities.

Capacity-strengthening investments: Collaborative design and implementation of a MEL plan for a multisectoral project; tailored training on tablet-based data collection using ODK, mentoring two MSc students for thesis work using the baseline data they helped to collect, co-publishing articles, tailored training on qualitative data collection, analysis using Dedoose software, and learning-by-doing qualitative coding and summarizing.

Performance goal: JU aims to increase local use of data and to serve as a national resource carrying out MEL of integrated, multisectoral programming.

Possible measurement approach: This could be measured in number of local workshops and meetings in which Jimma was asked to participate and provide presentations and feedback.

Activity overview: D4I has partnered with the Government of Armenia (GOAM) to strengthen Armenia's monitoring systems for counter-trafficking in persons (C-TIP).

Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Assessment to identify opportunities for capacity strengthening with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA)'s Division of Counter Trafficking and Women's Issues.

Capacity-strengthening investments: Tailored trainings, mentorship, and coaching for monitoring and evaluation processes and increased data use for counter trafficking response and interventions within MOLSA's Division of Counter-Trafficking and Women's Issues.

Performance goal: MOLSA aims to improved data quality and use of C-TIP data; compliance with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) minimum standards; independent monitoring of the National Action Plan progress.
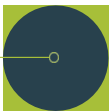
Possible measurement approach: May include interviews, rapid self-assessments, and task-based benchmarks.

Armenia CTIP event. © D4I

Read a more about this partnership

Activity overview: The Kinshasa School of Public Health (KSPH), based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, partnered with D4I to conduct an evaluation of the Integrated Health Program.

Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Faculty and student surveys and interviews were used to identify priorities for research capacity strengthening and investments were guided with the support of a committee led by KSPH faculty.

Capacity-strengthening investments: Capacity-strengthening lead (personnel), resources, and a new server for the e-learning platform.

Performance goal: KSPH aims to provide quality evaluation skills to the next generation of program and research practitioners, reduce institutional reliance on external experts, and increase the quality and competitiveness of evaluation-related proposals.

Measurement approach: Pre- and post-capacity-strengthening investment survey and interviews with faculty and students to understand outcomes including manuscript publication and grants or contracts awarded to KSPH.

The Dean of KSPH.
© Tory Taylor/D4I

Read a case study about this partnership

Qualitative training session
© Milissa Markiewicz/D4I

Read a case study about this partnership

Activity overview: Data Research and Mapping Consult, Ltd. (DRMC) is a Nigerian research organization that partnered with D4I on a multi-year, mixed-methods evaluation of USAID's health portfolio.

Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Determined through use of the RECAP tool.

Capacity-strengthening investments: Support for qualitative training, learning-by-doing in collaborative coding, and analysis.

Performance goal: DRMC aims to implement qualitative analysis demonstrating relevant skills as part of the services it can offer.

Measurement approach: Approved codebook creation, coded transcripts, and results memos as part of the qualitative analysis process. Possible longer-term measurement could include independently secured qualitative research grant awards.

Activity overview: D4I partnered with the Centre for Social Research in Malawi to conduct an impact evaluation of the Malawi Secondary Education Expansion for Development (SEED) Project.

Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Participatory workshop using RECAP to identify priorities for capacity strengthening.

Capacity-strengthening investments: Learning by doing and tailored training for the use of qualitative data analysis software and research dissemination product creation.

**Performance goal:** To increase institutional capacity for independent qualitative analysis (coding and summarizing) and increased leadership in research products dissemination.

Possible measurement approach: Improved performance could be measured in CSR-led creation and presentation of research dissemination products.

Malawi SEED project © Tetra Tech

Read more about this partnership
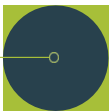
Activity overview: D4I partnered with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MOLSP) of the Republic of Moldova to strengthen data collection systems and information use for decision making.

Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Participatory M&E capacity assessments and plans for strengthening capacities were co-created with the MOLSP and other local actors. Reviews of university/college curricula and focus groups with social assistance staff were used to identify needs in teaching and training programs.

Capacity-strengthening investments: M&E capacity-strengthening plans were developed; data review rooms were set up to facilitate and mentor decision making related to the refugee crisis. Grants were given to universities and colleges to strengthen teaching material.

Performance goal: Improved data quality related to children in adversity; improved data use to support children in adversity, persons with disability and Ukrainian refugees; MOLSP able to independently develop M&E frameworks for policy documents; new M&E/Data use disciplines embedded in the regular curriculum of universities and colleges; social assistance policy makers and social services providers; improved social services provision based on data analysis and decisions taken at local level; improved child outcomes.

Measurement approach(es): Post-training survey six months after the end of trainings; student feedback post- graduation; review of social statistics for child outcomes; quality check of M&E frameworks for policy documents; decisions of university senate and college boards on the institutionalization of the new curriculum; instances when the MOLSP and partners used data and evidence for changes in policies and legislation.

Data review room. © Stefan Voda/D4I

Read more about this partnership

Data review room meeting . © D4I

Read more about this partnership

Activity overview: D4I supports the Stefan Voda Rayon and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MOLSP) in Moldova to improve effective data use to positively impact vulnerable children and respond to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.
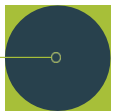
Identification of capacity-strengthening priorities: Support for the review and use of data to inform government decisions, with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of Ukrainian refugees currently in Moldova.

Capacity-strengthening investments: Support and mentorship for the creation, promotion, and use of two "data review rooms" to strengthen effective use of high-quality data.

Performance goal: Improved data quality and use of data related to Ukrainian refugees.

Possible measurement approach: Interviews to understand how data are being used; data quality reviews before and after establishing data use rooms.

Gender Considerations

Gender is an integral and cross-cutting aspect of MERL processes, including capacity strengthening. Planning for gender integration in LCS requires an approach that is planned collaboratively with local actors. Supporting actors must be mindful to mitigate unintended consequences of capacity strengthening activities in providing opportunities for some individuals or groups over others. Approaches to capacity strengthening should apply good practices for locally led development.

Gender integration approaches may include: encouraging gender balance among participants in capacity strengthening activities including training or mentoring opportunities; implementing activities designed to strengthen local capacity for mainstreaming gender in MERL work; and raising awareness of local gender dynamics and local context through inclusion of gender experts and individuals representing a variety of backgrounds and perspectives in planning for MERL activities and LCS.

Additional resources on gender competencies in MERL

➢ M&E of Gender and Health Programs Basic concepts in gender and its impact on health, M&E; designed to build individual and organizational capacity for MERL.

➢ Addressing Gender in Impact Evaluation: What Should Be Considered? A Methods guide that helps to clarify the meaning of gender as socially constructed norms and explains the implications for MERL work.

Gender representation in MERL teams

- Inclusion of local researchers with relevant gender and cultural expertise in study design and planning
- Inclusion of members of diverse sexes and gender identities in MERL teams and partnerships
- Considerations for varying levels of support that may be needed for people of different genders to participate in capacity strengthening (e.g., for primary caregivers to participate in trainings)
- Capacity strengthening for non-local actors through consultation and collaborative planning processes with local gender experts

Strengthening capacity for gender integration in MERL

- When planning training or mentoring sessions, include examples that are gender-sensitive or highlight gender differences
- Include gender-specific training, mentoring, or collaboration as appropriate
- Include gender competencies in capacity strengthening activities as relevant

Measuring improved performance for gender integration in MERL

- Consider whether gaps in performance related to gender integration in MERL were assessed and addressed
- Assess improved performance for gender competencies in MERL*

*For more on this topic, see D4I's SOP for Integrating Gender in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research.

Adolescent panel at the Bangladesh Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Survey 2019-2020 dissemination event. © 2021 Data for Impact
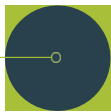
Appendix A. Full List of Tools

Adapted from USAID's [Guide to Distinguishing Tools Used for Local Capacity Strengthening](#)

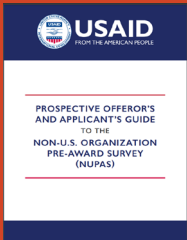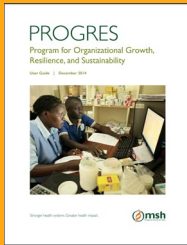|	Tool	Description	Considerations for use
Tools for risk mitigation	**Non-US Organization Pre-award Survey (NUPAS)** USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE PROSPECTIVE OFFEROR'S AND APPLICANT'S GUIDE TO THE NON-U.S. ORGANIZATION PRE-AWARD SURVEY (NUPAS)	**Details:** A USAID tool used to determine if an organization has sufficient systems in place to manage assistance awards according to U.S. Government and Agency requirements. Completed by an external audit team, used to determine if an organization has sufficient financial and managerial capacity to manage USAID funds. **Time to implement:** A multi-step process usually conducted over days to weeks **Resources:** Time to gather documentation and participate in interviews **Output:** NUPAS report with recommendations	• Specific to USAID risk assessment requirements • Requires the presence of an external facilitator • The NUPAS is not meant to be "pass/fail" conclusion, but rather a tool to identify areas of risk and corresponding mitigation measures
Tools for risk mitigation and capacity action planning	[**Organization Synthesis of Capacity Assessments for Award Readiness**](#) **(OSCAR)**	**Details**: A [Management Sciences for Health (MSH)](#) tool, OSCAR is a facilitated self-assessment tool that synthesizes the NUPAS and OCA tools while additionally evaluating sustainability factors. The OSCAR tool is a comprehensive instrument designed to provide a general overview of organizational capacity and a specific read of an organization's ability to receive and absorb direct donor funding. **Time to implement:** Varies by organization size, but typically 2 days for self-assessment and action planning exercise. **Resources:** External facilitator for initial use **Output:** Excel-based data capture tool	• Initial application requires the presence of an external facilitator

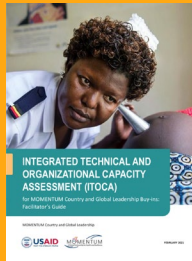| Tools to catalyze capacity action planning			
The Program for Organizational Growth, Resilience, and Sustainability (PROGRES)	**Details**: A Management Sciences for Health (MSH) tool, PROGRES is a participatory organizational assessment process that helps civil society organizations and government institutions identify areas requiring support to foster sustainability and resilience. **Time to implement:** May vary by organization size, but typically 2 days **Resources:** Three facilitators are recommended, one from the organization being assessed and two from outside the organization. **Output:** Excel-based data capture tool to be used to inform institutional strengthening plan	• PROGRES can also be adapted for use by organizations working in areas outside of health	
Integrated Technical Organizational Capacity Assessment (ITOCA)	**Details**: Designed to support MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership teams through a participatory, facilitated self-assessment that results in a change action plan. Scores are calculated according to two dimensions: capacity (strengths and weaknesses) and consensus (high and low agreement among scorers). Scores are used to identify "quick fixes" and longer-term capacity investments. ITOCA aligns with USAID's NUPAS to take regular measurements to support organizational capacity. **Time to implement:** Typically a 3-day workshop **Resources:** Space to convene **Output:** Excel-based worksheets are used for self-scoring by participants following	• Designed for MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership - USAID MOMENTUM • The facilitator guide includes an annex for virtual facilitation	
Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Package (RECAP)	**Details:** Organizations assess critical elements across six domains of effective research and evaluation capacity. Numeric scores and qualitative notes are captured in an Excel workbook and used to inform action planning. **Time to implement:** 1–3-day workshop depending on number of domains assessed; 4–6 weeks to plan **Resources:** Neutral or external facilitator, space to convene **Output:** Organizations use assessment results to develop action planning for institutional strengthening	• Specific to research and evaluation capacity • Can be adapted to include only relevant domains • Institutional strengthening guide lists no- and low-cost resources by domain	

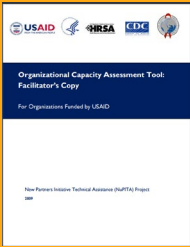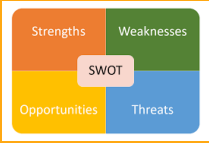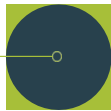|			
Tools to catalyze capacity action planning (continued)	**Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA)**	**Details:** Organizations assess critical elements of effective organizational management and identify priorities for strengthening. Similar to USAID's NUPAS but addresses a broader range of capacity designed to be used for the organization's benefit, ideally conducted shortly after receiving a direct or indirect award from USAID. **Time to implement:** 1–3-day workshop depending on the level of detail to be assessed and domains included; 6+ weeks to plan **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene **Output:** Numeric ratings are used to design an action plan	• Designed to assess organizational functions and processes for program and award management • Recommended for use following a direct or indirect award from USAID
	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis	**Details:** A generic tool for assessing a team or organization's capacity using a simple matrix. A SWOT analysis is done using a simple matrix to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the goals of their organization. It can be self-applied or externally facilitated. **Time to implement:** 1–3-day workshop depending on the level of detail to be assessed and domains included **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene **Output:** A matrix that can be used to inform action planning	• Multiple guides to conducting SWOT analyses exist for different sectors • No predefined capacity statements to evaluate
Tools to catalyze action planning and measure improved performance	**PERFORM: the Performance Mapping and Improvement System**	**Details:** This systems-oriented tool is based on MOMENTUM Knowledge Accelerator's Enhanced Organizational Capacity Framework and assists local partners and program implementers in identifying performance improvement needs and course corrections in a timely manner. The focus is to understand the drivers of an organization's performance and create 100-day improvement plans for course correction. **Time to implement:** One full day or two half-days to conduct initial mapping; one half-day per 6 months to monitor. **Resources:** External facilitator, space to convene, evidence validation panel **Output:** Data capture templates available in Word or Excel	• Urgency index helps determine priorities • Can be implemented independently or to complement other capacity or performance measurement tools. Including CBLD-9

Tools to measure improved performance			
	CBLD-9 Indicator Guidance	**Details:** The CBLD-9 indicator measures whether USG-funded capacity development efforts have led to improved performance in organizations receiving capacity development support. Collaboratively identified metrics may be quantitative or qualitative but should reflect a clear objective for performance improvement. Measurement may occur through a variety of methods, including observation, surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions. **Time and resources required:** Time to determine performance goals and complete worksheet. **Output:** CBLD-9 worksheet	• CBLD-9 worksheets are uploaded to the 'Documents' tab of the CBLD-9 indicator data entry screen in Development Information Solution (DIS).
	Organizational Performance Index (OPI)	**Details:** A tool developed by Pact to support measurement of change in organizational performance, designed to clarify the link between capacity development inputs and community level impact. OPI focuses on capacity development outcomes, the change in organizational performance that results from improved internal capacity. OPI answers the questions "So what if this organization has an improved governance system?" and "So what if they are better at managing finances?" **Time to implement:** Up to four hours for partners to complete an initial self-assessment using the OPI. Reassessments and assessments tend to be much quicker, lasting less than one hour. **Resources:** Training and time for staff responsible for data collection. **Output:** Includes data collection tools used to record scores and list evidence. OPI data is then transferred into the Pact global online database called the Capacity Solutions Platform (CSP) via computer.	• OPI data can be collected over the course of the year, whenever it makes most sense for the organization to gather this information. • Annual data collection should be managed by two OPI-trained Capacity Development/Program staff members

Appendix B. Sample CBLD-9 Reporting Worksheet

Below is an example of a completed CBLD-9 reporting worksheet for implementing partners (worksheet use is optional for most partners at the time of this writing). The template is available here: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/CBLD-9-Workbook-For-IPsFY21.xlsx
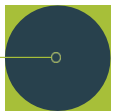
WORKSHEET FOR CBLD-9: Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance, Part I						
About the Organizations			Were resources allocated for organizational capacity development?		Does the organization demonstrate that it has undergone and documented a process of performance improvement, including the following steps:	
Activity and Implementing Partner, if applicable	**Organization Name** *(Name of organization receiving organizational capacity development support.)*	**Organization Type** *(Type of organization receiving organizational capacity development support.)*	Were resources (human, financial, and/or other) allocated for organizational capacity development as reflected in the activity theory of change, award documents, work plan, or other relevant documentation?	*Briefly describe how organizational capacity development is reflected in activity documentation, and what types of resources were allocated toward this objective.*	(1) Was input obtained from the supported organization and/or any other relevant stakeholders to define desired performance improvement priorities?	*Briefly describe how stakeholder input was obtained, and from whom.*
Data for Impact	Ex. Local research firm <name>	Research institutions (non-degree granting)	Yes	The activity evaluation included a theory of change and relevant D4I activity work plan designed to address capacity strengthening investments, processes, and results. Resources allocated include D4I staff time plus funds for a scope of work covered by the subcontract with the organization, including participation in trainings and co-development of research products and other learning-by-doing efforts in the context of the evaluation.	Yes	The Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Resource (RECAP) package developed by D4I was implemented at the start of the partnership. Results from this participatory capacity action planning tool have been used to inform capacity strengthening prioritization and investments, including the structure and content for qualitative analysis trainings.
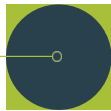
WORSHEET FOR CBLD-9: Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance, Part II							
Does the organization demonstrate that it has undergone and documented a process of performance improvement, including the following steps:							
(1) Was input obtained from the supported organization and/or any other relevant stakeholders to define desired performance improvement priorities?	(2) Were performance gaps analyzed and assessed?	*Briefly describe how performance gaps were analyzed and assessed.*	(3) Were performance improvement solutions selected and implemented?	*Briefly describe the area for performance improvement that solutions aimed to address.*	(4) Was the performance area monitored and measured using a performance metric or tool?	*Briefly describe how performance was measured, including any metrics or tools used.*
Yes	Yes	A series of internal workshops focused on CBLD-9 planning, including capacity strengthening results modeling and identifying possible approaches to measuring improved performance in the local context. The organization's engagement in qualitative research activities (e.g., data coding) and development of related products (e.g., qualitative codebooks, analytic memos) were identified as key performance metrics, and baseline performance status on these metrics was assessed through discussions with the organization's leadership and staff. The development of results presentations for diverse audiences (including sharing qualitative research findings) were also identified as a priority for performance improvement.	Yes	Solutions have aimed to address the local partner's capacity to conduct qualitative research not limited to data collection, with a focus on analysis and dissemination. During FY 2023, relevant efforts included: in-person qualitative analysis training, collaborative codebook development and co-coding of qualitative data, virtual training sessions on thematic analysis and memo writing, individualized coaching for memo/report writing, jointly development of findings presentations for stakeholders.	Yes	Improved performance was expected to primarily manifest in qualitative research work and products created by the partner or with the partner's significant involvement. Performance measurement was conducted through direct engagement with the partner (co-work, focused discussions, review of deliverables).

WORSHEET FOR CBLD-9: Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance, Part III		
Measured Performance Improvement	**Calculating the Indicator**	
Has the organization's performance improved, as measured by the chosen performance metric or tool?	**Denominator** *Does support to this organization meet the criteria of the CBLD-9 process?*	**Numerator** *Was there a measurable improvement in organizational performance?*
Yes	1	1

For more information

D4I supports countries to realize the power of data as actionable evidence that can improve programs, policies, and—ultimately—health outcomes. We help strengthen technical and organizational capacity to collect, analyze, and use data to support sustainable development. For more information, visit https://www.data4impactproject.org/