



**GUIDANCE FOR USAID EDUCATION SECTOR
IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: MONITORING,
EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (MEL) DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**
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Guidance produced by USAID's Office of Education provides education-specific recommendations on how existing USAID Policy can be applied in education programming.

PREPARED BY

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I. SUMMARY

The following should guide monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) modifications, so that MEL activities are safe, feasible, and valuable during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Principles of MEL under COVID-19

1. Do no harm and be conflict-sensitive.
2. Maintain transparency around changes to the activity and MEL plans as a result of COVID-19.
3. Capture equity and inclusion.
4. Coordinate MEL activities across education sector partners, within and outside of the U.S. Government (USG).
5. Leverage MEL to manage uncertainty.
6. Provide relevant data for collaborating, learning, and adapting.

Two Key Questions to Guide MEL Modifications

1. How has the intervention changed?
2. Is the data safely accessible?

Reporting and Monitoring Recommendations

1. Revise or suspend targets if needed.
2. Incorporate applicable indicators from the *Guidance on Monitoring Indicators for USAID-COVID-19 Response: Pillar 4 Activities*¹.
3. Use Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators where applicable and possible.
4. Use context- and complexity-aware monitoring in addition to performance monitoring.
5. Modify cost reporting as needed to reflect changes in the intervention.

Evaluation and Learning Recommendations

1. Identify the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the original evaluation plan.
2. Engage in scenario planning with the evaluation partner.
3. Invest in critical learning opportunities elsewhere in the activity.

¹ Guidance available upon request from the award AOR/COR.

2. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have adverse impacts across multiple sectors over the next 12 to 18 months and may result in longer-term impacts beyond this timeframe.² To date, the education sector has experienced wide-spread closure of education facilities as an immediate response to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Activity-level monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plans may need to be adapted so that monitoring, evaluating, and learning is still safe, feasible, and valuable during and after the pandemic.

This guidance outlines six key principles that all USAID-funded efforts to monitor, evaluate, or learn in the education sector should follow during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as eight recommendations for altering or adapting specific components of activity MEL plans. Recommendations will need to be adapted to context and should complement the principles and guidance outlined in the USAID Education Policy. This guidance is limited to recommendations for activity-level MEL efforts and does not address implications of the pandemic for activity design and implementation.³ This guidance will be updated as needed. In the event any USAID implementing partner (whether under a contract, cooperative agreement, or grant) needs to modify or suspend a previously agreed-to MEL plan, it must first notify its Contracting Officer's Representative/Agreement Officer's Representative (COR/AOR). If formal award modification is needed, the Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer (CO/AO) must also approve.

² USG Action Plan to support the International Response to COVID-19: <https://www.state.gov/release-of-u-s-government-action-plan-to-support-the-international-response-to-covid-19/>

³ USAID has released COVID-19 guidance for implementing partners. There is an intranet page dedicated to COVID-19 guidance for USAID employees such as AOR/CORs.

3. PRINCIPLES FOR MEL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

PRINCIPLE 1: Do no harm and be conflict-sensitive⁴.

To protect the safety of USAID staff, partners, and beneficiaries, data collection plans and methods should be consistent with public health guidelines and be conflict-sensitive. Data collection partners should have adequate safety plans and infection prevention and control (IPC) measures in place. Data collection should not exacerbate the spread of COVID-19.

PRINCIPLE 2: Maintain transparency around changes to the activity and MEL plans.

Document key changes to theories of change and intervention design so evaluators can adjust their plans and others can understand changes after the fact. Sufficiently document circumstances around decisions made, who was consulted, equity and inclusion considerations, tradeoffs, and implications. Communicate changes with external stakeholders.

PRINCIPLE 3: Capture equity⁵ and inclusion.

The COVID-19 pandemic will erode gains to equitable access and learning across the education continuum. Data that help inform how activities can avoid exacerbating inequity are critical. Disadvantaged/marginalized individuals and communities will likely suffer the most disruption to the continuity of quality, accessible education services. Please refer to existing recommended disaggregates for education programming.

PRINCIPLE 4: Coordinate MEL activities across education partners, within and outside of the U.S. Government (USG).

Coordinate in order to maximize opportunities to safely collect needed information, find best practices, and/or leverage data from other sources. The COVID-19 pandemic affects all USAID investments in a location. USAID Missions and partners will be working to solve common MEL challenges: assuring safe access to data, using remote methods for data collection, and revising MEL systems to track revised programming.

PRINCIPLE 5: Leverage MEL to manage uncertainty.

Complexity-aware monitoring approaches are most useful when contextual factors are likely to influence programming; new opportunities or needs continue to arise; and the pace of change is unpredictable. Any of these circumstances may be true during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRINCIPLE 6: Provide relevant data for collaborating, learning, and adapting.

As technical activities pivot or pause in response to COVID-19, MEL activities should produce data that can inform continuous learning and adaptation. During disruption to the education system, new needs assessments may be required to inform intervention design or delivery. When education institutions reopen, learning assessments across population sub-groups will provide critical data for planning remediation activities.

⁴ Conflict-sensitive data collection approaches reflect an understanding of how methods/measures interact with the pandemic and conflict. Resources can be found [here](#) or pg. 21 of USAID's [conflict sensitive education checklist](#).

⁵ Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, disability, ethnic origin, or family background are not obstacles to accessing high-quality education services. The programmatic principle of equity refers to the idea that program resources must be used to compensate for existing barriers to education for marginalized groups.

4. HOW TO DECIDE IF YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR MEL PLAN

TWO KEY QUESTIONS GUIDE MEL MODIFICATIONS

How has the intervention changed?

In some cases, the intervention may need to be altered as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting emergency. For instance, in-person learning shifts to distance learning, teacher training is delayed, supervision or coaching of educators is less frequent, travel for scholarship recipients or research partnerships becomes impossible, or apprenticeships for youth workforce trainees disappear. If the length, intensity, timing, content, delivery mechanism, or target population of education activities change, the MEL plan will also need to adapt or modify indicators (and targets), update needs assessments, or change evaluation plans.

Note: In the event that any USAID implementing partner (whether under a contract, cooperative agreement, or grant) needs to modify or suspend the implementation of a previously agreed-to work plan, it must first notify its COR/AOR. If formal modification to the award is required, the CO/AO must provide approval.

Is the data safely accessible?

Depending on the timeline of data collection, data collected from learners, educators, or other sources (e.g. delivery of materials or inspection of facilities) may not be safely accessible. For example, with school closures and social distancing measures in place, in-person assessments such as Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) or soft skills assessments may not be feasible. If USAID supports the last mile delivery of reading or supplemental materials or the upgrading or furnishing of training facilities, in-person confirmation of completion to local standards may not be feasible. Plans to use remote data collection modalities such as phones or tablets may leave out key respondents who may not have access or ability to use these tools. In conflict-affected environments, respondents may not be willing to share information remotely.

Determine remote data collection methods by considering key parameters. Parameters to consider include technology penetration; accessibility of relevant stakeholder groups remotely; the safety, security, and privacy implications of remote technology; and how the change from in-person to remote data collection may affect the quality of the data. Various resources exist to guide decision-making with regard to remote data collection.⁶

If you need to make changes to your MEL plan because of changes to the intervention or the accessibility of respondents, the following sections review key guidance and considerations.

Note: Always consider award requirements when adapting or revising MEL plans.

⁶ See USAID's [Guide for Adopting Remote Monitoring Approaches](#), World Bank [blog](#), and this [webinar](#) on remote data collection, or the Center for Global Development [paper and blog](#) on assessing learning via mobile phone.

5. REPORTING⁷

REVISE OR SUSPEND TARGETS IF NEEDED

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, Missions and implementing partners may find it appropriate to revise targets for indicator reporting.

INCORPORATE APPLICABLE INDICATORS FROM THE *GUIDANCE ON MONITORING INDICATORS FOR USAID COVID-19 RESPONSE: PILLAR 4 ACTIVITIES*⁸

The *USAID and State Department Strategy for Supplemental Funding to Prevent, Prepare for, and Respond to Coronavirus Abroad* has *Guidance on Monitoring Indicators for USAID-COVID-19 Response: Pillar 4 Activities*. New and current USAID and State education activities that receive supplemental resources will need to develop or revise their Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan to reflect the results these activities expect to achieve with the supplemental funds. COR/AORs and implementing partners of such activities should select indicators that are relevant and applicable to their activity for inclusion in their Activity MEL plan.

USE STANDARD FOREIGN ASSISTANCE INDICATORS WHERE APPLICABLE AND POSSIBLE

Continue to use Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators, where applicable and possible, to meaningfully monitor and measure the status of inputs, outputs, or outcomes in the context of COVID-19 and interventions delivered at a distance.

For example:

- ES.1-3: Number of primary learners or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance - Can be used to measure reach for a distance learning program targeting primary learners.
- ES.2-52: Number of individuals affiliated with higher education institutions receiving capacity development support with USG assistance - Can be used to measure individual capacity development of faculty/instructors conducted through distance learning modalities.
- ES. 6-14: Percent of individuals who complete USG-assisted workforce development programs - Can be used to measure reach and completion for youth engaging in workforce development programming remotely.
- ES. 1-51: Number of learning environments supported by USG assistance that have improved safety, according to locally defined criteria - Can be used to capture the

⁷ USAID Office of Education's reporting guidance is summarized in [USAID 2019 Office of Education Reporting Guidance](#).

⁸ Guidance available upon request from the award AOR/COR.

contribution of activities that assure the safety of the learning environment (even at home or in the community) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please consult the Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator [Performance Indicator Reference Sheets](#) for more details.

The *Guidance on Monitoring Indicators for USAID-COVID-19 Response: Pillar 4 Activities*⁹ has several custom indicators that may be useful for education, which are not currently reflected in the ES.1, ES.2, or EG.6 Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator Framework. For example:

- Number of preparedness and response plans proposed, adopted, implemented, or institutionalized with USG assistance (at the school, community, institutional, district, state, or federal level)
- Percent of learning institutions/environments supported with preparedness, prevention, and/or response interventions with USG assistance
- Percentage of targeted individuals reporting an improvement in their sense of well-being at the close of USG-funded programming
- Number of USG-supported partnerships that address regional, national, and/or local development objectives through or with higher education institutions

If the Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator Framework or the custom indicators proposed under the *Guidance on Monitoring Indicators for USAID-COVID-19 Response: Pillar 4 Activities* do not adequately capture the progress of education programs, USAID Mission staff and implementing partners may also develop custom indicators to measure progress toward outputs and outcomes related to COVID-19 response or preparedness activities.

- As USAID Missions move from response to recovery and planning for resilience, formative assessments that capture learning and access, particularly across marginalized and vulnerable learners, will provide critical information to determine whether targets linked to literacy, numeracy, social and emotional or soft skills, school readiness, or professional/vocational/job-specific skills need revision.

⁹ Guidance available upon request from the award AOR/COR.

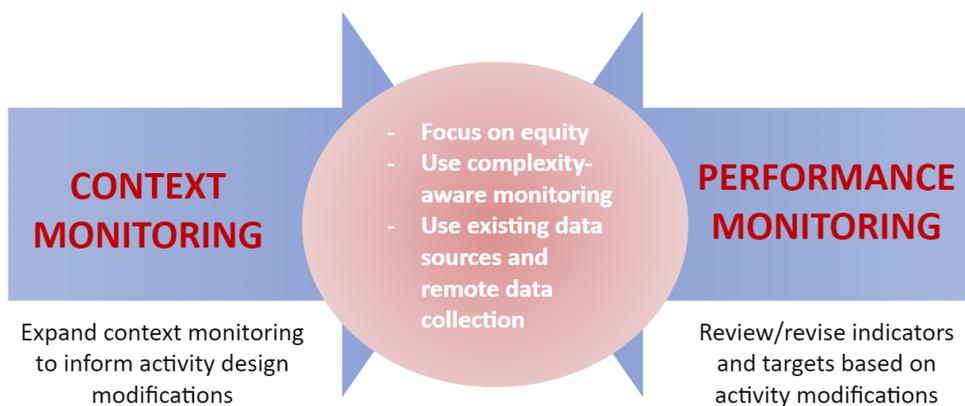
6. MONITORING¹⁰

USE CONTEXT- AND COMPLEXITY-AWARE MONITORING IN ADDITION TO PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, USAID should continue to monitor its programs. The ADS 201 requires performance monitoring and recommends context monitoring and complexity-aware monitoring in non-permissive and/or uncertain environments, such as the operational, programmatic, and policy environment created by the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1 summarizes the suggested COVID-19 response actions for context and performance monitoring, highlighting the cross-cutting elements in the middle. All modifications made to monitoring indicators, targets, or methods must be aligned with the strategy and objectives of the activity and clearly documented.

FIGURE 1. Expand Context Monitoring and Update Performance Monitoring



Performance monitoring is the systematic collection of information about implementation and deliverables; it helps reveal whether project and activity implementation is on track and whether expected results are being achieved. USAID provides guidance for establishing and collecting data on relevant performance indicators. The Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators, custom indicators, or indicators from the *Guidance on Monitoring Indicators for USAID-COVID-19 Response: Pillar 4 Activities*¹¹ can be used for performance monitoring.

Modifications may include:

- Create new or adapt existing performance monitoring indicators to capture equitable access to new intervention modalities, reflective of both reach and use.

¹⁰ See ADS 201 section 201.3.5 for more information on Agency guidance for planning and implementing monitoring activities, including data quality assessments (DQA).

¹¹ Guidance available upon request from the award AOR/COR.

- Revise targets as described in the reporting section.
- For activities that are paused, also pause performance monitoring.
- Consider replacing primary data collection with existing, secondary data sources or switch to remote data collection methods.

Context monitoring is the systematic collection of information about conditions and external factors relevant to the implementation and performance of an operating unit’s strategy, projects, and activities.¹² Context monitoring is critical during COVID-19 because of the extent to which the evolution of the pandemic and its second order impacts (like economic recession) will affect implementation and the interaction of the pandemic with existing conflicts, state fragility, and climate crises.

Recommended types of context indicators include:

- The opening/closure of educational facilities;
- Enrollment, retention, or attendance rates, particularly for marginalized populations;
- The use of education sector resources for the public health response (e.g. education personnel as contact tracers or educational facilities as quarantine or treatment facilities);
- Policy decisions that affect the education workforce (like discontinuation of payroll);
- New sectors that may employ youth;
- The opening or closure of critical sectors, like transport, manufacturing or processing, or agriculture;
- Factors that affect the safety and well-being of learners, educators, or personnel (like famine, locusts, or conflict);
- Factors that will affect education sector planning (like displacement);
- Waves of illness or related public health guidelines like physical distancing, quarantine, or isolation;
- Triggers for any scenarios identified by the implementer; or
- Public perception of, or satisfaction with, the education sector response.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, education services may be delivered in new ways or deliver new content. USAID will also be working in partnership with governments and other key stakeholders to inform judgments about how to safely reopen and what programming to offer

¹² USAID provides [guidance](#) for establishing and collecting data on relevant context indicators.

to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on learning and retention. One form of complexity-aware monitoring tool in particular that can help generate useful data are feedback loops. Learners, educators, and their families can provide input into the design or implementation of new services. They can also react to proposed plans for reopening or future closures.

7. COST REPORTING

MODIFY COST REPORTING AS NEEDED TO REFLECT CHANGES IN THE INTERVENTION

Where awards include cost reporting, partners should continue to collect and report on cost data. If interventions change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, include documentation of these changes in the appropriate cost reporting template (Annex C: details of the intervention). USAID's cost measurement initiative builds on the existing USAID systems and best practices with collection and analysis of cost data. Cost reporting includes three components: financial reports disaggregated by agreed-upon cost categories, annexes with data on contributions of third parties to USAID-funded activities, and annexes with information on details of intervention.

New sub-categories may be added to capture expenditures associated with new activities. For example, an activity may have systems set up to report all expenditures under the In-Service Teacher Training cost category in two sub-categories: cascade teacher training and teacher coaching. Under the COVID-19 response, all teacher training intervention transitioned to distance learning using an online platform. An activity then may want to introduce the third cost sub-category, distance teacher training, and capture the expenditure associated with setting up and implementing distance teacher training in this third cost sub-category.

8. EVALUATION

IDENTIFY THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE ORIGINAL EVALUATION PLAN

The COVID-19 pandemic may affect timing of evaluation, evaluation design or implementation, the evaluation sample, key evaluation outcomes of interest, and the interventions being evaluated.

Evaluation Timing: Planned evaluations may be postponed. Ongoing evaluations may require extensions to their timelines.

Evaluation Design and Implementation: If an evaluation has commenced but field work has not yet occurred, the Evaluation COR/AOR and implementer may need to change the design to focus on document review, collect data remotely, and conduct interviews via phone or other methods. If the field work is complete, the evaluation may need to be finalized remotely and dissemination plans may also change.

Key outcomes of interest. Even if interventions have been completed or undergo minimal changes, the COVID-19 pandemic may affect key outcomes of interest. For example, the

widespread closure of informal and formal economies will likely negatively influence earnings and employment in the short-term. Stress, isolation, grief, and trauma may stunt the growth of social and emotional or soft skills.

Evaluation sample. It is very likely that some people or institutions in the evaluation sample will be lost to follow up with or be completely inaccessible. Sample attrition is very unlikely to be random.

Intervention under evaluation. Many USAID-supported programs in the education sector, from pre-primary to higher education, may need to be reprogrammed, redirected, paused, or converted to be viable at a distance. If the intervention is significantly interrupted or modified, the original evaluation plan will require changes.

ENGAGE IN SCENARIO PLANNING WITH THE EVALUATION PARTNER

The COVID-19 pandemic has different implications for the two main types of evaluation used at USAID.

Impact evaluations. Significant changes to the intervention modality/models due to public health guidelines may result in a lack of comparability between data collected pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 because the intervention for which baseline data were collected is not the same intervention at endline. An impact evaluation may no longer be meaningful. An intervention delivered along a delayed schedule or with reduced dose due to the COVID-19 pandemic may be able to modify the sample or timing of data collection.

Performance evaluations. These evaluations may be able to continue with adaptations, even if the intervention has significantly changed, as long as respondents are safely accessible and/or secondary data can be used to answer key evaluation questions. Document the ways in which the evaluation was adapted in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consider adding questions that help explain or describe the ways in which the pandemic or its second order impacts are visible in the findings or conclusions.

If the original evaluation plan cannot meaningfully continue, consider repurposing those funds for critical learning elsewhere in the activity.

9. LEARNING

INVEST IN CRITICAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ELSEWHERE IN THE ACTIVITY

MEL resources could be used to collect and analyze information critical for response and preparedness planning as well as future program design. The Office of Education has existing [learning agendas](#) that can be used to inspire learning questions. Potential COVID-19 specific learning questions that align to USAID Education Policy Priorities:

<p>CHILDREN AND YOUTH, PARTICULARLY THE MOST MARGINALIZED AND VULNERABLE,¹³ HAVE INCREASED ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION THAT IS SAFE, RELEVANT, AND PROMOTES SOCIAL WELL-BEING.</p>	<p>CHILDREN AND YOUTH GAIN LITERACY, NUMERACY, AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS THAT ARE FOUNDATIONAL TO FUTURE LEARNING AND SUCCESS.</p>
<p>What inequities has COVID-19 exacerbated with regards to access to safe, relevant education (pre-primary through higher education)?</p> <p>What types of learners and educators do not return to their education after the crisis? What do they do instead? What would an education system have to do in order to re-recruit these learners or educators?</p> <p>How can parents/communities be best supported for continuity of learning and education in the context of COVID-19?</p>	<p>What interventions effectively and cost-effectively improve learners' skills, particularly at a distance? How can effective interventions be brought to scale in different education systems?</p> <p>How can existing education systems/structures best support continuity of education and learning in the context of COVID-19? What factors enabled certain education systems or institutions to adapt?</p> <p>What factors and interventions are effective in mitigating learning loss/backsliding?</p>
<p>YOUTH GAIN THE SKILLS THEY NEED TO LEAD PRODUCTIVE LIVES, GAIN EMPLOYMENT, AND POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY.</p>	<p>HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) HAVE THE CAPACITY TO BE CENTRAL ACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT BY CONDUCTING AND APPLYING RESEARCH, DELIVERING QUALITY EDUCATION, AND ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES.</p>
<p>What are the economic impacts of COVID-19 on youth's employment situations, prospects, and plans?</p> <p>How did COVID-19 affect youth's decisions to obtain further education or leave education in favor of economic activities?</p>	<p>How can HEIs be best supported (through partnerships, capacity development, etc.) to mitigate and respond to COVID-19?</p> <p>How did HEIs provide community-relevant responses to COVID-19 (i.e. through research and innovation, facility use, etc.)</p>

¹³ These populations vary by context, and frequently include girls, rural populations, individuals marginalized because of their sexual orientation, individuals with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children and youth from poor households (USAID 2018 Education Policy).

10. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These frequently asked questions will continue to be updated, based on feedback or queries from partners and USAID staff.

Q1: How do I revise my Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data collection plan in light of COVID-19?

A1: If EGRA is planned to support an evaluation of a USAID-funded activity, it may be affected by two considerations: a) changes in the intervention design/delivery, and b) safe accessibility of respondents for data collection. School closures will have an impact on the dosage of USAID-funded intervention and on an ability of evaluators to assess learning. Assessments for evaluation purposes may need to be postponed until the school is in session for a full year to generate comparable learning data. For example, if a baseline was conducted in May 2019 and midline was anticipated in May 2020, given the school closure the midline will not take place. However, it will be important to plan assessment activities for when schools reopen for learning purposes, to assess learning loss across population sub-groups, and provide data for planning remediation activities. Assessments for learning purposes can be designed to provide estimates for learning outcomes/learning loss for specific sub-populations. When delivering assessments during or after the COVID-19 pandemic, weigh the burden on staff and learners against the benefit/use of additional data. If extra assessments are needed to adequately design educational supports or inform policy and planning, consider adapting the length, administration approach, and assessment environment in order to reduce the burden on learners and transparently communicate findings with communities.

Q2: How do I revise my youth workforce data collection plan in light of COVID-19?

A2: If a data collection is planned to support an evaluation of a USAID-funded youth workforce development (YWFD) activity, it may be affected by two considerations: a) changes in the intervention design/delivery, and b) safe access to respondents. A variety of consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic –including training center and school closures, psycho-social needs participants, and learning loss or income loss -- will have an impact on how a USAID-funded intervention is delivered and on the ability of evaluators to assess learning. Interventions that are paused due to closures will need to also pause evaluations. Interventions that continue through different modalities and possibly with different interventions may revise their evaluations accordingly. Interventions that restart with revised aims based on participants' needs will need to revise their evaluations as well.

Q3: How do I monitor and evaluate my COVID-19 distance learning program?

A3: Designing the M&E plan for a distance learning program will be guided by the intervention design, safe accessibility of respondents, and the level of learners. It is important to include measurement of access disaggregated by population sub-groups with particular focus on equity and inclusion. The monitoring system for distance learning education should first and foremost focus on questions of equity, inclusion, and access: is the target audience accessing distance learning offering, and if not, why not? The process evaluation should focus on the dosage and adherence: is the target audience using distance learning offerings consistently over time? And

finally, outcome evaluation should focus on measurement of learning outcomes in cases where this is safely possible (e.g. user analytic data for online courses).

Q4: How should implementing partners go about making changes to indicators and/or targets for existing activities?

A4: CORs/AORs should work with implementing partners to document updated approaches in each agreement's plans for MEL, and should upload these amended MEL plans into the Agency Secure Image and Storage Tracking System (ASIST) immediately. USAID encourages activities to continue to use Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators, where applicable and possible, to monitor and measure progress in the context of COVID-19 and interventions delivered at a distance. Context monitoring may need to be expanded, to provide relevant and timely data to inform program adaptations. Additional guidance on reporting indicators and targets from PPL and E3/ED will be released prior to the start of the FY20 PPR cycle in September 2020.

Q5: Do implementing partners need to revise the Activity MEL Plan? What if the project is in the start-up phase?

A5: All activities affected by COVID-19 will need to review their Activity MEL Plan to assess what changes may be needed. Likely changes include revisions of the indicators, revisions of targets, changes to data collection modalities, an expansion of context monitoring, updated evaluation plans, and revision of learning activities to support ongoing and planned changes in the activity implementation. USAID encourages activities to discuss proposed changes with their CORs/AORs. Any changes in the Activity MEL Plan should follow agreed-upon modifications of intervention activities. The same guidance applies to activities in the start-up phase.

Q6: How can we capture learning loss/backsliding?

A6: Having reliable historical data on learning outcomes is a necessary precondition for capturing learning loss. For example, if an EGRA was implemented with grade 2 at the end of the school year in 2018 or 2019, those data can provide a baseline for measuring the learning loss in the school year affected by the school closures under COVID-19. Research plans developed to measure learning loss should include comparisons across population sub-groups, since they may be affected differently and require targeted interventions to address learning loss.

Q7: With school closures and delay in evaluation, will my midline/endline be able to inform findings on the impact of my reading program?

A7: If the intervention will not be delivered as originally planned, the impact evaluation design will no longer be valid. While the results from the midline/endline implemented after the schools reopen are not going to be able to establish the impact of the intervention, they might be very useful in measuring learning loss due to school closures. An appropriate disaggregation by sub-populations will provide useful information for designing targeted interventions.

Q8: Our baseline EGRA was being planned for the end of this school year. Should we conduct it as soon as schools reopen?

A8: EGRA is designed to measure the results of the full year of schooling. Following the traditional cross-sectional design, the baseline EGRA should be implemented at the end of the

next year when schools are in session. If schools are anticipated to close and reopen multiple times, alternative evaluation designs might be employed. For example, a longitudinal (panel) study measures learning outcomes of the same sample of learners during two or more points in time, to estimate natural learning growth over a time period. This design can be effectively used to measure effects of intervention programs, as well, if a sample of learners receiving intervention is compared with a sample of learners from a control group.

Q9: What are recommended remote data collection methods and techniques?

A9: When in-person data collection is not possible, using remote data collection methods may be the right solution, particularly if the intervention is being delivered remotely. In determining which remote data collection methods to use, it is essential to consider a number of parameters, such as technology penetration, remote accessibility of relevant stakeholder groups, and how the change from in-person to remote data collection may affect the quality of the data. The USAID Learning Lab has also created a [webpage](#) for [MEL during COVID-19](#) for all USAID sectors that have remote data collection resources, which includes the [USAID guidance on adopting remote monitoring approaches](#). External resources also exist to guide decision-making with regard to remote data collection, such as a [World Bank blog](#) and [webinar](#) on remote data collection or a Center for Global Development [paper and blog](#) on assessing learning via mobile phone. Using remote monitoring technologies, however, represents real risks to the safety and security of people in fragile states or conflict and crisis-affected environments. [A research report](#) on remote monitoring in fragile states also provides helpful recommendations for how to safely use remote monitoring technologies in these contexts.

Q10: Does the COVID-19 pandemic represent an opportunity to do a natural experiment?

A10: A natural experiment is a type of observational research design in which exposure to the treatment and control conditions are determined by factors that cannot be influenced by the researcher or other actors. Because a natural experiment does not rely on randomization to construct treatment and control groups, it can be a helpful research design in scenarios where randomization is unethical or not feasible. In the case of COVID-19, particularly during the return to learning and potential subsequent school closures, natural experiments may be useful in two ways: 1) understanding the extent to which education decisions influence the pandemic at the local level, and 2) understanding the extent to which other policies and choices influence education outcomes. For example, in a very isolated location, if there is a robust surveillance system in place, tracking the incidence of COVID-19 as learners and educators return to learning could provide helpful information about the risk of returning to learning.

Q11: How should an activity balance responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the evaluation of results?

A11: The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have adverse impacts across multiple sectors over the next 12 to 18 months, or longer, and may result in longer-term impacts beyond this timeframe.¹⁴ The evaluation of results of USAID-supported response programming in the

¹⁴ USG Action Plan to support the International Response to COVID-19: <https://www.state.gov/release-of-u-s-government-action-plan-to-support-the-international-response-to-covid-19/>

education sector is critical to informing longer-term policies and plans and can help assure that USAID-supported activities do no harm. At the same time, learning from feedback loops, process evaluations or real-time evaluations, may provide more timely and relevant ways to understand the consequences of education or training services and adapt accordingly. Thus, USAID encourages activities to conceptualize changes to programming and evaluation as enduring for the short term (for example, while schools/training centers are physically closed or while individuals are requested to stay at home) or enduring for the long term (for example, while schools/training centers are open but on modified schedules or for as long as individuals must social distance). The balance of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and evaluating results may shift between the short and long term. In the short term, activities will likely focus on responding to the pandemic and data collection efforts such as needs assessments, context monitoring, monitoring access, and responding to feedback loops. In the longer term, activities may focus on supporting schools/training centers and individuals to transition back to education/training or restarting programming; appropriate data collection efforts might include assessing learning loss, performance monitoring, and evaluations that are feasible, relevant to programming, and which keep learners and data collectors safe.

Specific resources for the evaluation of education services delivered in conflict and crisis can be found at the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies, which includes the [Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit for Accelerated Learning](#) and the [Foundational Standards for Education in Emergencies](#) (standard 4 is evaluation). [The ALNAP Guide to Evaluation of Humanitarian Action](#) (2016) has useful principles for deciding when and what to evaluate in humanitarian emergencies.

Q12: How should an activity measure changes in access to education when educational or training facilities reopen?

A12: Closures of educational or training facilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to have variable impacts on different sub-populations of learners. Marginalized and vulnerable learners, such as those living in extreme poverty, language and religious minorities, orphans, and learners with disabilities, will likely be more negatively affected. After facilities reopen, it is important to assess attendance among different sub-populations of learners across geographic and administrative areas in the country. Such data can be collected remotely through educator or administrator surveys, or by examining administrative records, if they are considered to be reliable. Data on absenteeism or drop-out rates following the pandemic can be then compared with data from before the pandemic to quantify absenteeism/drop out rates among different population sub-groups and establish patterns. These data would be very useful for designing targeted interventions to improve access to education for those more adversely affected by the pandemic.

For questions or feedback related to this document, please email the E3/ED Indicator Helpdesk at edindicators@usaid.gov