

DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL) STRATEGY

PURPOSE

This document outlines our approach to how we will assess and learn from the progress we are, or are not, making in achieving the objectives of DLP III. This is informed by DFAT's own Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Standards¹, OECD DAC evaluation criteria, as well as recognising that the MEL of research programs demands a specific approach. This document outlines a high level approach to MEL for DLP III including the top level evaluation questions we will use. A more specific framework covering both program and project level will be developed once the final portfolio of projects is agreed. The practical implementation of MEL, including roles and responsibilities, is explained in more detail in the DLP Standard Operating Procedures Manual.

DLP III OUTCOMES AND THEORY OF CHANGE

DLP III Outcomes (our emphasis) from the DLP III Design Document

They should be understood as intersecting and mutually reinforcing:

1. There is new and deeper knowledge and understanding about leadership in development and the implications for development actors (knowledge)
2. The policies and practices of DFAT and other development actors reflect DLP research into developmental leadership (uptake)
3. A diversity of researchers and practitioners are engaging in and with DLP and its research (outreach)

DLP's own research as well as other research on the interface between research and policy uptake notes the important relationship between the broader climate of ideas and how changes in policies and practices come about. As such DLP's outcomes and theory of change define and describe two broader and interlinked change pathways, notably:

- One which relates to changes in the broader ideas and narratives of the sector which in turn shape the policies and practices of organisations;
- And the second which is about more direct changes in the specific policies and practices of DFAT in particular, and other agencies.

Central to the achievement of these changes is the engagement of a diverse range of key audiences who can be grouped into the following categories: DFAT Governance Team; a broader range of policy makers and practitioners within DFAT; audiences in other development agencies, consulting companies, and NGOs; the wider research and development think-tank community working on similar issues (outcome 3). See the impact and engagement strategy for more detail on how we seek to engage these stakeholders. As such DLP's MEL approach has to allow us to assess progress on both

¹ In particular standards related to the MEL Plan - see <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/dfat-monitoring-and-evaluation-standards.aspx>.

of these pathways as well as the degree to which stakeholders are being effectively engaged. This is consistent with good practice in this field (see for example Pasanen and Shaxson, 2016²)

The MEL Framework is designed to align with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistant Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria in the following manner:

RELEVANCE

The focus of the routine monitoring of DLP III will be on the relevance and accessibility of DLP research. The continued relevance of 'leadership for development' will be tested during the independent evaluation.

EFFICIENCY

DLP's routine monitoring will collect cost data for all research and outreach activities allowing a comparison across different elements of the program. This may then allow for some comparison with other research programs in terms of not just efficiency but cost-effectiveness.

EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

The focus of the routine monitoring of DLP III will be on capturing from researchers' and relevant stakeholders' and audiences' evidence about progress towards outcomes based on both the effectiveness of the processes of stakeholder engagement, and the outcomes being achieved in terms changes in knowledge and ideas, as well as policies and practices.

The *independent evaluation* will a) verify the evidence collected, and b) seek further evidence from key informants on the effectiveness and impact of the program in particular the degree to which changes in DFAT have, or have not, occurred as a result of DLP's work and the partnership with DFAT.

SUSTAINABILITY

There are two different types of sustainability that will be tracked. The first relates to the sustainability of the changes generated by DLP in terms of ideas, and policy and practice. The emphasis here will be on verifying the degree to which DFAT staff are promoting DLP concepts or ideas, and the degree to which these changes have been adequately institutionalised i.e. the degree to which strategic policy or business practices, including training processes, or program designs or reviews have incorporated DLP findings (see effectiveness and impact).

The second level relates to the degree to which DLP is effectively working with and nurturing local researchers in the countries where it undertakes its research.

We do not see the institutional sustainability of DLP as a major focus of our MEL. Whilst we will track the degree to which DLP is able to leverage resources from sources other than DFAT, the continuation of DLP as a research program is not the primary sustainability question we will be asking.

² Pasanen and Shaxson, (2016) [How to design an MEL framework for a policy research project](#), ODI Methods Lab

THE KEY EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS WE NEED TO BE ASKING

Given the limited resources available for DLP III and the need to keep things as simple and clear as possible we seek to focus MEL efforts on those questions which are particularly important or strategic. The six MEL Questions for DLP III based on the design and on what a recent international synthesis review on research uptake suggests i.e. Oliver & Cairney (2019)³ are the following:

HIGH QUALITY ACCESSIBLE RESEARCH

1. Is DLP producing high quality research as planned?
2. Is DLP research relevant to, and accessible by, its key audiences?

ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

3. Has DLP built effective relationships with policymakers and other key stakeholders and audiences?

EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

4. Is DLP contributing to changes in donor policy and practice, and the broader ideas about leadership and development? Is it being effectively supported by DFAT to do so?

REFLECTION, LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

5. Does DLP continuously reflect on its performance and engagement and adjust accordingly?

GENDER AND INCLUSION

6. Is DLP effectively incorporating gender and inclusion in its research and outreach, its assessment of effectiveness and in its learning?

DFAT is particularly concerned that its investments meet its gender and inclusion standards and policies. As such we have further detailed below the areas which will need to be monitored across the other domains. As the framework evolves – and the individual research projects are selected, more specific details under the previous questions will also be developed where appropriate.

Quality of Research: topic, researcher and partner selection⁴

- The selection of research topics, and overall balance of portfolio
- The selection of researchers, research partners and participants

Research and Outreach Processes

- The degree to which methods and approaches adopted are gender and inclusion sensitive

Effectiveness and Impact

- How changes in policies, practices and ideas promote gender equity and inclusion

³ Oliver & Cairney (2019) The dos and don'ts of influencing policy: a systematic review of advice to academics, *Palgrave Communications* 5, Article number: 21(2019)

⁴ See DLP III research selection criteria in annex A of <https://res.cloudinary.com/dlprog/image/upload/dlp-funding-opportunity-2019>

Reflection, Learning and Adaptation

- Using disaggregated data and the above domains to reflect on gender and inclusion concerns and adjust work as appropriate

It is our view that it is not appropriate to be fixing narrowly prescribed KPIs which define the magnitude of the change expected at a program level. This is for two main reasons a) pre-determining specific targets and magnitudes of change in a complex non-linear process in which shifts are often abrupt, unexpected, and difficult to predict, risks skewing MEL efforts and program activity towards relatively arbitrary targets, b) KPIs are useful as metrics when they can be counted and compared (to a baseline to similar processes or projects). We would argue that for a research program like DLP an overall approach which identifies proposed 'domains of change' maybe with associated rubrics (see for example annex 1) which are consistent with our Theory of Change and which then seeks evidence which can validate and exemplify change in those domains is more appropriate.

As DFAT's MEL standards require we therefore suggest that this is not 'due to poor analyses during the design phase', and there are clear plans outlined below for systematically gathering the required information, and a future date planned for further development of the outcome statements'.

This in turn does not mean that appropriate quantitative evidence will not be collected – see below.

HOW WE PLAN TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS – DLP III EVALUATION APPROACH, SOURCES OF DATA AND POSSIBLE METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

It is helpful to distinguish between the routine monitoring DLP will undertake, the data and analysis that the embedded research impact project and PhD student might produce as part of the process, and the role the independent evaluation will play. In the table below we look at each of these processes and suggest a long-list of the data sources and collection tools that might be used. These will be further refined and developed once the PhD student starts in late 2019 and presented to the Steering Committee in February 2020.

The table above illustrates that the **routine processes** will be undertaken by non-specialist MEL staff and researchers as part of their project and research management roles and provide DLP and DFAT with the basic activity and feedback data required for routine reporting and analysis⁵. As part of the routine processes the *partnership health check* which will be undertaken in mid-2020, will assist in assessing the 'health' of the relationship between DLP and DFAT, based on the partnership agreement developed during the inception phase. These process, will be managed and supervised by the Deputy Director (Operations) in close collaboration with the Deputy Director (Research).

In addition, DFAT is establishing an internal 'Advice Tracker' which will capture the use of DLP evidence by the Governance Team and the degree to which it influences policy and practice change in the agency. DLP influence in DFAT may include, for example, changes to design of investments and governance training/ implementation approaches. DLP and the doctoral student will be able to access some of this data as part of its MEL processes. There will be an opportunity to undertake a

⁵ Specific targets for outputs will be determined for each research project, as well as specific engagement and outreach processes. Currently we are assuming that on average small projects will produce 2 research papers, 2 more popular outputs such as blogs, practice notes and policy briefs, and will engage in at least 2 presentations to key stakeholders. Larger projects would produce on average 3 of each. Assuming we will undertake 5 or 6 large projects and 3 or 4 small projects over the life time of DLP, then we would be looking at approximately 25 research papers, 25 popular outputs and 25 presentations to stakeholders based on just the research projects being undertaken. More specific targets can be set once the agreed portfolio of research is finalised.

deeper analysis of more substantial instances of influence, in order to more fully understand how it came about.

The PhD student in the **embedded research impact project** will be involved in undertaking more sophisticated data collection and analysis. This is particularly suited to assessing changes in relationships (i.e. through Social Network mapping), tracking and communicating outcomes (such as Outcome Harvesting and forms of visualisation), as well as analysing why particular process have been more or less effective (i.e. through process-tracing, positive outlier studies or Qualitative Comparative Analysis -QCA). We will also explore how DLP III can garner support from research impact resources and skills within the University of Birmingham. These process will be managed and supervised by the Deputy Director (Impact) in close collaboration with the Deputy Directors (Research and Operations). The doctoral student will not be responsible for the routine monitoring processes, rather their work on cutting edge research engagement strategies will feed into developing the MEL approach of DLP and enhancing its impact strategy.

DFAT will commission a 'modest' **independent evaluation** as described in the design document early in the third year of DLP III. As such the evaluation is likely to heavily rely on the data collected and analysis undertaken as part of ongoing monitoring and through the embedded research impact project, as well as key informant reviews to inform the findings. This evaluation will be managed by the governance team in DFAT and supported by the Deputy Director (Impact) and the Deputy Director (Operations).

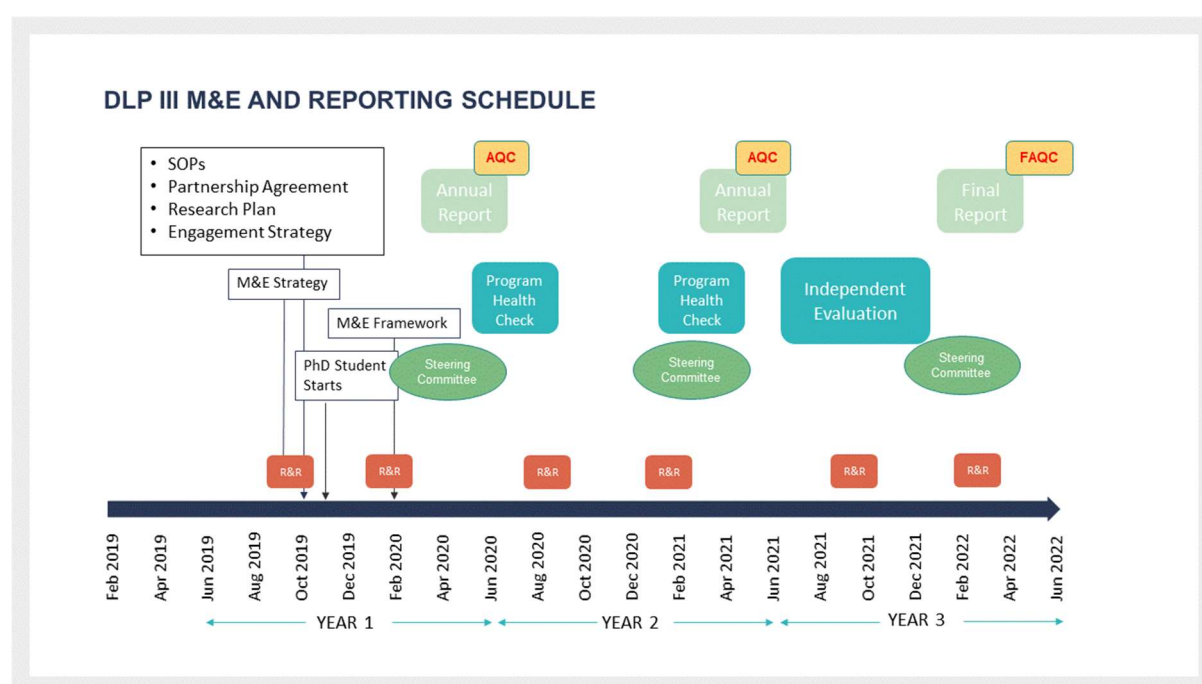
INDICATIVE LONG LIST OF METHODS AND SOURCES OF DATA TO BE REFINED BY FEBRUARY 2020

| Evaluative Questions | Routine monitoring | Embedded Research Impact Project (PhD Student) | Evaluation (using routine monitoring and PhD research data) |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1. Research Quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Review processes Research Progress Journal Publications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bibliometric & citation analysis | Data + Key Informant Feedback |
| 2. Relevance and Accessibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from key audiences Survey questions in DFAT peer review template Reach and readership, web-data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience surveys Document tracking analysis | Data + Key Informant Feedback |
| 3. Effective Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher logs Research partner feedback Audience data and feedback Partnership Health check | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Network Analysis Relational analytics | Data + Key Informant Feedback |
| 4. Changing Policy, Practice & Ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher logs DFAT and donor feedback and references in policy, strategy, and design documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public document analysis Social media scraping Outcome harvesting | Data + Key Informant Feedback |
| 5. Learning and Adaptation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 monthly R&R exercises – drawing from robust monitoring and PhD data Data to be presented via an accessible dashboard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive Outlier studies QCA Comparison with other research programs Visualisation tools | Data + Key Informant Feedback |
| 6. Gender and Inclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disaggregated data on researchers and audiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion analysis of all of the above | Data + Key Informant Feedback |

WHEN AND WHO WILL DO WHAT? A ROLLING CALENDAR FOR THE THREE YEARS

Below is a time line indicating how the major elements of the MEL approach and reporting requirements as defined in the grant order relate. This includes the timing of the proposed program health check after year one of the program, the independent evaluation at the beginning of year 3, as well as regular Reflection and Refocus exercises (R&R). The calendar is designed to ensure that MEL and reporting fits with DFAT internal reporting requirements (i.e. Aid Quality Checks) and how DLP reporting can contribute to the Governance Team reporting on higher level outcomes. In particular the R&R process will be the key moment at which the DLP team will analyse the MEL data generated, adjust its activities in the light of that data as appropriate, and further refine the MEL process itself.

Each year the Governance Team will prepare an Aid Quality Check (AQC) report in February/March. The purpose of the AQC is to enable DFAT to review how well the partnership performed over the previous 12 months against standard quality criteria, record practical actions to improve performance, and provide information about the achievements of DLP. The performance review centres on three aid quality criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, and gender equality) and DFAT makes an assessment using a six-point scale (4-6 satisfactory, 1- are unsatisfactory). DFAT and DLP will jointly decide each year whether an independent moderation would be useful. Evidence (such as DLP's annual plans, reports, budgets, and evaluations) will be used to write-up the AQC. In the final year of DLP a Final Aid Quality Check (FAQC) is conducted), and an independent moderation is required.



FURTHER NOTES ON DLP III MEL SCHEDULE:

- It should be highlighted that the MEL framework and methods to collect data will be reviewed and confirmed after 4 months of the doctoral student being in post (February 2020). The rationale for this allows both time for the research portfolio to be underway, with the nature of projects influencing our MEL activities, as well as for the PhD student to develop their topic and work plan. This date will be confirmed once the doctoral student's visa has been processed and will be communicated to the DFAT Governance Team.

- MEL methods will be developed throughout the lifetime of DLP III to reflect the evolving nature of research. In the first two years of DLP III the focus of MEL efforts will be on the degree to which the pre-requisites for achieving – and measuring progress towards – outcomes are in place i.e. are research projects being set up to produce quality and relevant outcomes (Q1&2), are effective relationships and engagement with key stakeholders being built (Q3), are process in pace to track changes in policy and practice (Q4), is DLP learning from and adjusting its work as appropriate (Q.5), and have gender and inclusion been addressed in all of the above (Q.6).

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

DLP III has limited resources available for specialised MEL work. The majority of MEL work will be carried out by DLP staff and commissioned researchers as an integral part of their role in managing and conducting DLP research and outreach, as well as by the embedded PhD student. This will require a clear focus on key questions, effective overall project management and the establishment of basic data collection systems on both the research and outreach areas, as well as realistic expectations about what a resource constrained process can produce given the complex nature of the relationship between research and uptake. As DFAT's MEL standards note 'the degree of rigour should be proportionate to the importance of the decisions being made', and we would argue the resources available (DFAT MEL Standards p.3)

Secondly as noted above setting neat indicators about the magnitude of expected change that DLP might contribute to is not straightforward for a program of this type. This is compounded by the fact that a) these expectations may shift over time as circumstances change and as DLP and DFAT's learning evolves and b) the outcomes of the program are a function of the combined efforts of the DLP and DFAT governance teams. It will therefore be really important that the necessarily evolving expectations of both parties is regularly discussed and agreed

MEL RUBRIC FOR DLP III

| Engagement & Impact | Unaware | Ear Level | Eye Level | Practice Level | Leadership Level | Institutional Level |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|--|
| <i>Is there evidence of the engagement with ideas and concepts of DLP?</i> | Individual or team ⁶ is unaware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, but has not seen them used in practice. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, and has some experience of them being used in practice. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, and has attempted to put them into practice in their domain of work. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, has attempted to put them into practice in their domain of work, and are seeking to promote that pro-actively with others outside of their immediate team. | The ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research have been widely diffused in the organisation and there are attempts at further diffusion and institutionalisation. |
| <i>Is there evidence of an impact from the ideas and concepts of DLP?</i> | | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, but has not seen them used in practice, but feels that the ideas might be useful and relevant to them. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, and has some experience of them being successfully used in practice. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, and has successfully put them into practice in their domain of work i.e. in their area of immediate responsibility. | Individual or team is aware of the ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research, has attempted to put them into practice in their domain of work, and have successfully promoted them with others outside of their immediate team i.e. outside their area of immediate responsibility. | The ideas and concepts promoted by DLP research have are becoming institutionalised in DFAT through changes in policy (organisational policies, sector policies, program management policies or practice (selection of consultants, sharing of experiences, design and content of training etc) in ways which are supported by the formal and informal rules which means this process reproduces itself. |

⁶ In line with DLP thinking leadership needs to be demonstrated at both individual and collective levels, in using this rubric we will need to distinguish between the two.