| Resource type | Tool | Date created | 2020 | Last reviewed | 2022 |

Resource series   Emphasizing evaluative thinking for complex systems change

Project   Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Toolkit for Grantmakers and Grantees

▌ MANAGE an evaluation or evaluation system

Template for developing a portfolio learning strategy

This template is for use by each portfolio team to assist with the organization of its own learning agenda, and to serve as the basis for a research plan they will execute over the next 2–4 years. It surfaces inputs for the development of a work plan for portfolio learning agendas.

Portfolio learning agendas will be a crucial part of our **Reflect, Revise, Adapt, and Plan** (RRAP) process. The annual review process for grant and investment portfolios aims to iterate strategies in a quest to improve design and practice. The heart of that process will involve taking stalk of what has been learned to date from what we have done and from our engagement with the issue. These agendas will also form a part of our **portfolio review** with Senior Management and the Strategy Unit. This process is designed to make that learning process more intentional and better thought out.

The process

- From <date>, **identify inputs for portfolio learning plans**

  - Identify and select primary learning question(s) and break them down into sub-questions
  - Specify rationale for questions; clarify what difference answers make
  - Map timelines, i.e., when you will expect inputs for answers and the answers themselves
  - Work with MERL team to develop a learning work plan for <year> (how you will answer questions)

- The MEL team will work with you (as needed) to **develop a research plan** for the questions that are most salient for you/your portfolio

  - Map data collection/information gathering approach for question and sub-questions
  - Specify when and how data will be analyzed
  - List portfolio expectations for the RRAP session based on the question

- From the development of the research plans <date>, **Execute the research plan**

  - Work with MERL team to collect and analyze information
  - Develop practice-oriented answers to questions

- From <date>, hold Review, Revise, Adapt and Plan sessions, in which we will go over what we've learned from our research and from our grantmaking, investment and advocacy work in order to **iterate and improve our learning strategies**.

Learning questions

Answers to each primary learning question as well as to its sub-questions will be developed through a combination of desk research, grant results, and/or consultancies. For each learning question, you are asked to note:

- the expected consequences of the answers on our practice, to your portfolio;
- the operating assumptions behind each question with an associated level of confidence and an associated "weight" (how important the truth of the assumption is to your plans);
- a breakdown of the question into sub-questions that will feed into answering the former; and
- fields for timelines for answers.

The purpose of this exercise is threefold.

1. It will help prioritize learning questions by enabling you to identify the expected consequences of the answer.
2. It facilitates the management of inquiries by identifying the confidence level of assumptions and attaching timelines for acquiring information.
3. It connects grant management to learning by linking questions to indicators, where possible.
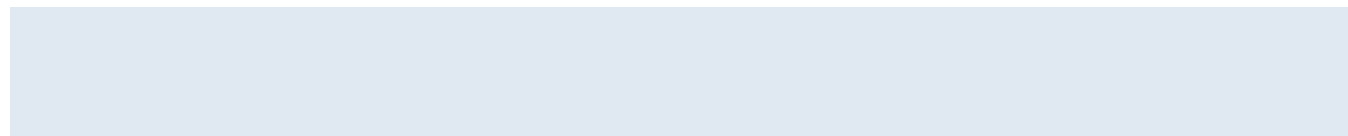
It will also assist the MERL team in helping you fill knowledge gaps and develop learning strategies that are integrated with M&E plans. We are here to help you make the connection between the sub-questions and indicators where possible.

Portfolio review preferences

Established portfolios are required to hold two portfolio reviews during our strategy period, <date>. Emerging portfolios are required to hold one portfolio review during this period.
For planning purposes, please indicate the quarter(s) and year(s) that you would ideally hold your review(s):

Review 1: _____   Review 2: _____

Primary Learning Question 1

Expected uses of knowledge

How will the answers to this question inform portfolio practice? Check all that apply.

☐   Change assumptions and theory of change

☐   Change outcome expectations (including timeline)

☐   Alter/adapt funding strategy (e.g., reprioritize outcomes, change sequence)

☐   Alter/adapt advocacy strategy

☐   Identify funding partners

☐   Refine understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) priorities

☐   Help strengthen organizations and field actors

☐   Modify portfolio goals and objectives

☐   Other_____

Assumptions implicit in the question

For each, indicate confidence level and weight* — High, Medium, Low

* Weight answers: were the assumption false, how much would your theory of change alter?

	Confidence	Weight
Assumption 1:		
Assumption 2:		
Assumption 3:		
Assumption 4:		

Research timeline

What is the timeline for developing and for implementing these answers?

Goal

What do you hope to achieve at the end?

Sub-questions

Break down the question into smaller ones if warranted.

	Connection to practice
Sub-question 1:	*The answer to this question will…* *The timeline for answering this question is…* How will you answer this question? (e.g., expert interviews, convene experts and practitioners, commission research, track indicators, grant-making to test hypothesis)
Sub-question 2:	*The answer to this question will…* *The timeline for answering this question is…* How will you answer this question?

Primary Learning Question 2 (if relevant)

Expected uses of knowledge

How will the answers to this question inform portfolio practice? Check all that apply.

☐　Change assumptions and theory of change

☐　Change outcome expectations (including timeline)

☐　Alter/adapt funding strategy (e.g., reprioritize outcomes, change sequence)

☐　Alter/adapt advocacy strategy

☐　Identify funding partners

☐　Refine understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) priorities

☐　Help strengthen organizations and field actors

☐　Modify portfolio goals and objectives

☐　Other_____

Assumptions implicit in the question

For each, indicate confidence level and weight* — High, Medium, Low

* Weight answers: were the assumption false, how much would your theory of change alter?

	Confidence	Weight
Assumption 1:		
Assumption 2:		
Assumption 3:		
Assumption 4:		

Research timeline

What is the timeline for developing and for implementing these answers?

Goal

What do you hope to achieve at the end?

Sub-questions

Break down the question into smaller ones if warranted

	Connection to practice
Sub-question 1:	*The answer to this question will…* *The timeline for answering this question is…* How will you answer this question? (e.g., expert interviews, convene experts and practitioners, commission research, track indicators, grant-making to test hypothesis)
Sub-question 2:	*The answer to this question will…* *The timeline for answering this question is…* How will you answer this question?