COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

CASE COMPETITION

Case Title * (10 word limit)

Continuous Evaluation with Real-Time Feedback Fosters Adaptive Program Management

What is the general context in which the story takes place? * (250 word limit)
Set the scene by providing some background details about the country and/or activity context. Was the CLA activity part of a larger project, mechanism or initiative? Who were some of the key stakeholders involved?

To tackle unacceptably low literacy and rising HIV infections, the Government of Uganda (GoU) embraced an innovative strategy that integrates mother tongue reading instruction through the third grade with health and HIV/AIDS education in primary and secondary schools. This is part of Uganda's effort to combat HIV/AIDS multi-sectorally, in this case marrying the fight against HIV/AIDS with its goal of dramatically improving literacy.

USAID/Uganda is supporting Uganda's integrated approach to early grade reading and health education within a health Development Objective, using education and PEPFAR funds. USAID designed the School Health and Reading Program (SHRP) to increase both literacy and health-seeking behaviors. RTI is implementing SHRP under a five-year Cooperative Agreement begun in May 2012.

Reflecting USAID/Uganda's strong commitment to CLA, the mission enhanced SHRP's potential by creating a parallel contract – Performance & Impact Evaluation (P&IE) – to provide annual impact evaluations, mid-term and final performance evaluations, and CLA support. Begun in October 2012, P&IE is a five-year contract implemented by NORC at the University of Chicago with woman-owned small business partner, Panagora Group. NORC lead annual impact evaluations and Panagora leads performance evaluations and CLA support.

The case we present in this competition is the novel

CLA process Panagora designed and oversees for SHRP under P&IE, with support from NORC. In this CLA process, the implementing partner's activities on SHRP are continuously evaluated and real-time performance feedback – both appreciative and constructive – is provided to RTI on a monthly basis so that its activities can be constantly adjusted to optimize impact.

What was the main challenge/opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity? * (500 word limit)
What prompted your team/organization to undertake this activity or implement this approach? Was there a particular opportunity for new or improved collaboration, learning, and/or adapting? Or was there a problem or pain point you were trying to solve?

The *main challenge* was that, given the relatively recent advent of CLA, Panagora needed to interpret how CLA could be most useful and then collaboratively design a process to be used that would have the necessary buy-in among stakeholders. This was a delicate process, given the novelty of the opportunity among all stakeholders as well as the understandable concern among the implementing partner about ongoing evaluation by an external third party.

The main *opportunity* was to break new ground for USAID in the CLA area, and provide a pragmatic pathway for **continuous evaluation to foster adaptive management and improved development outcomes**, with clear systems, processes, and tools that could be used by others in the future. Panagora took a CLA approach to this opportunity, with iterative adjustments to the systems, processes, and tools for continuous evaluation as we gained hands-on experience and feedback in using them. We embrace the case competition as a way to share our CLA experience.

Describe the CLA approach or activity employed * (600 word limit)
What were the objectives or anticipated outcomes of the CLA initiative? What were the main strategies, tools, or methodologies used to carry out this approach or activity? Was it something new, or did you amend/improve an existing process or activity to promote stronger collaborating, learning, and/or adapting? Was it a one-off action, ongoing, or recurring over time? Who was involved?

Summary. To implement the CLA component, Panagora, in collaboration with NORC, developed a variety of systems, processes, and tools used by resident staff in Uganda to observe SHRP activities. The data from these observations is rolled up into a monthly performance feedback memo with clearly articulated appreciative and constructive feedback. Initially on a monthly basis and less frequently as SHRP implementation has progressed, Panagora leads a Skype meeting in which the memo is discussed with the SHRP country management team, allowing each item to be clarified. Using appreciative as well as constructive feedback improves the context for understanding and develops trust. The monthly interface via email and Skype dialogue gives RTI the opportunity to provide its comments and for additional information and understanding to make program adjustments that improve its efficacy and outcomes.

Step-by-step description. The CLA approach pioneered by Panagora features a multi-stage approach to continuous evaluation aimed at maximizing collaborative reflection and learning, and, importantly, providing the implementing partner with the real-time performance information needed to underpin adaptive management decisions and actions that can in turn lead to improved program results. We

integrate concepts from appreciative inquiry, recognizing that appreciation is important in learning what actions and practices to continue as well as in creating trust and greater receptivity to constructive feedback regarding what actions and practices to modify.

Specifically, we use the following sequence of activities:

- We track work plan rollout by having the local Uganda P&IE CLA Team (Resident Evaluation Manager and HIV/AIDS Evaluation Specialist) meet monthly with the SHRP result managers to understand planned activities against the work plan, including any modifications and the associated rationale.
- Panagora's home office P&IE CLA Lead reviews planned SHRP monthly activities with Uganda staff and agree on what to observe and which of our observation tools to use.
- All observation and data collection tools include sections to record overarching comments, appreciative feedback (what went well), and constructive feedback (areas needing attention and/or improvement).
- The local CLA team provides a report immediately following each observed event or activity, which might be a training, consultation, workshop, data collection, and so on.
- At the end of each month, the CLA team uses a template to provide (1) a report detailing what was observed in a given month and (2) a draft performance feedback memo for the IP in which the appreciative and constructive feedback from each observation is rolled up, by event.
- Panagora's home office CLA Lead reviews the performance feedback memo for content, clarity, and tone, and then shares it among the entire P&IE team for review and input prior to finalizing the memo and sharing it with SHRP leadership.
- SHRP leadership shares the performance feedback memo internally, collects comments from the leads of the various activities observed, collates the comments, and sends the memo back to the P&IE team.
- The P&IE team and SHRP leadership discuss the contents of the performance feedback memos, initially on a monthly basis and later every 2-3 months.
- SHRP leadership outlines in its comments responding to the performance feedback memo and in the subsequent conversation what actions will be undertaken, if any, to address the feedback, which represents the adaptive management (continuous improvement) based on real-time performance feedback.
- The data from the observation reports and the monthly feedback memo provide an important record charting program progress and are used as part of the performance evaluations.

Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources or enabling factors)? * (500 word limit)
Describe the critical success factors or particular implementation challenges. Did you need any special tools or skills? What type of resources (e.g., financial and/or non-financial) were required? Were there any conditions or factors (e.g., leadership buy-in) that contributed to or inhibited implementation?

There were many enabling factors. The most important enabling factor by far was that USAID created a P&IE contract with the mandate, resources, and ingenuity to develop a pragmatic and productive CLA

system for SHRP. Setting up a pragmatic and productive CLA system required a strong understanding of USAID CLA objectives, knowledge of development evaluation methodologies beyond traditional performance and impact evaluation, and deep experience with program implementation under USAID-funded mechanisms. Panagora, in collaboration with NORC, brought this range of expertise to the challenge.

Having the necessary resources through the P&IE contract was essential to the success of the CLA process. This includes the time to devote to collecting and analyzing monthly performance data, developing a well-conceived and sensitively presented monthly performance feedback memo, and then collaboratively exchanging views and perspectives with the implementer partner aimed at real-time programmatic adjustment. Had we not effectively planned and budgeted time for these activities, including involving leadership from both the P&IE and SHRP teams, this CLA activity would not have occurred.

The resources required are in reality modest, with a full-time resident Evaluation Team Manager and a very part-time HIV/AIDS Evaluation Specialist organizing observation schedules, carrying out observations, and reporting; a couple of days of effort per month after the system was established for the Panagora CLA Team Lead to provide ongoing oversight, guidance, and input; and a few hours per month for the collaborative performance feedback sharing and learning among the whole P&IE team and SHRP leadership team.

Creating comfort, receptivity, and buy-in with the concept and routines of continuous evaluation is a process unto itself. Unfortunately, project implementers too often regard evaluation with a certain degree of suspicion. There is an underlying concern that evaluation might be more of a fault-finding exercise than a constructive exercise aimed at identifying both what is working as well as what needs attention, along with constructive suggestions for adaptive management and improved outcomes. We needed to build confidence that our goal ultimately was to help the implementing partner better succeed at a very challenging task. Providing appreciative feedback along with constructive feedback was pivotal to developing this confidence and trust. Persistence, uniformity, and a constructive tone to our written and verbal exchanges were also paramount in developing receptivity and buy-in.

What have been the outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date? * (300 word limit)
Have you been able to qualitatively track or measure any outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach thus far? What have you seen? Did you use any particular M&E methodology? If you do not yet have any noticeable outcomes or results, what are you doing to monitor the value provided by the approach or activity?

We have tracked all feedback provided and actions taken by SHRP as a result. There are both significant and small adaptations by SHRP following the monthly feedback. Because the feedback and adaptations in implementation and management are quite numerous and often very detailed, they cannot be listed comprehensively here. However, we provide the following illustrative example:

Example of P&IE Feedback	Example of SHRP Resulting Action
It was not clear whether trainers had presentations they followed during the sessions. Some sessions were not systematically delivered, and many seemed to lack logical order or content. For example, at one station, the session on learner continuous assessment lasted for less than 30 minutes and was taught together with support supervision; however the agenda showed these topics as two separate presentations. At another station, support supervision was held separately but for only 8-10 minutes. Trainers did not appear to be clear on what to present on these two topics.	Program has noted this and recognizes the need to do more in the packaging of materials and improve on the sequencing in a systematic way. This has sparked a lot of discussion around the realities of having 5 hours of training, rather than 8. More detailed training materials (facilitator's guides) have been developed which include objectives and timing for each session. We have made sure that we have more hours to train by limiting logistics and other non-training activities (such as registration). Also, now the teacher guides and learner primers are available in adequate amounts at the training venues. This was not the case in September. This tremendously facilitates training efforts.

This feedback is generally only possible through continuous evaluation, and unlikely to be captured in either a performance or impact evaluation. Yet it is critical for improved performance and outcomes.

What were the most important lessons learned? * (300 word limit)
How will your organization use this experience moving forward? If others wanted to implement a similar approach or activity, is there anything they should consider? What worked or did not work?

Among the many lessons learned about using a CLA approach to improve real-time performance, we highlight the following two lessons as most important:

1. **Clear feedback loops must be established and continually reinforced.** It is insufficient to "go through the motions" – participating in a single event, workshop, or learning activity. In order for CLA to be successfully incorporated as a standard way of doing business, continuous attention must be paid to real-time feedback, and that feedback must lead to real-time adaptation. The monthly performance review process was successful in part because it was *ongoing*; implementers knew that part of their job was to respond to that feedback and improve the project's operations as a result. The cycle of learning and adapting must be intentionally established, nurtured, and promoted. Real feedback loops do not happen by accident.

2. **Adequate time and staff resources must be allocated to learning.** In the real world, learning and adaptation do not happen unless project implementers, USAID staff, and stakeholders collaborate to prioritize them. The monthly performance review process had to be planned, managed, and facilitated. In a resource-constrained environment, it can be difficult to carve out the staff time necessary to implement CLA activities. And yet this is exactly what must be done. There is simply no substitute for specifically designating project staff and evaluation team members responsible for implementing CLA activities.

Any other critical information you'd like to share? (250 word limit)

In collaboration with NORC, Panagora thanks USAID for the opportunity to share this important case.