# Emerging Guidance Quick Guide on Use of Data in Mid-course Stocktakings and Portfolio Reviews

Updated January 2023

**Note:** This quick guide is emergent thinking on the use of data in strategy-level portfolio reviews and Mid-course Stocktakings. Please send any feedback you have on the guide to learning@usaid.gov. We appreciate any recommendations for improvement.

**Overview**: The purpose of this document is to provide additional guidance, tools, and considerations for the use of data in R/CDCS Mid-course Stocktakings (MCSTs) and strategy-level portfolio reviews (referred to as strategy-level pause and reflect moments throughout this document). It is intended to complement the How-To-Note on Mid-course Stocktaking, How-To-Note on Strategy-level Portfolio Reviews, and resources provided in the Mid-course Stocktaking Module.

## Tip: Start with your Performance Management Plan (PMP)

Your Mission's PMP is often the best starting point to plan for your pause & reflect moment. The PMP describes Mission MEL expectations at the time of CDCS approval, and processes like strategy-level portfolio reviews and the MCST offer opportunities to make a holistic assessment of progress in implementing the strategy.

1. **Who to Include**: The structures identified in the Mission's PMP, such as DO teams, project teams, or MEL working groups are a solid starting point to analyze and discuss performance monitoring and contextual data. These groups can elevate key sources of evidence before engaging the Mission more broadly. It may be helpful to have smaller groups within these structures focus on particular issues or questions that have emerged during CDCS implementation.

2. **Where to Focus**: Start with your learning priorities[1] and questions[2] identified in the PMP. You may have tools identified in your PMP to track this learning, which can be revisited to inform planning for your pause & reflect moment. A potential tool for this is linked below. Questions to guide discussion include:
   a. What data has helped fill knowledge gaps through portfolio reviews and other learning events since R/CDCS implementation began?
   b. What information do you still need to quantify or collect related to these priorities and the Development Hypothesis underpinning the strategy?

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[1] Learning priorities are a short list of themes or topics critical to the Mission's strategic, programmatic, and operational decisions and implementation of its strategy. These may include validating its strategy's development hypotheses and results framework, filling in evidence and knowledge gaps, and considering implications for achieving and understanding progress toward results.

[2] Learning questions are specific, answerable, need-to-know questions that can be answered through monitoring, evaluation, research, or other analysis to address learning priorities incrementally. Several learning questions can cluster under a single learning priority and can contribute to a broader learning agenda or plan.

c. What large-scale surveys or assessments relating to USAID's portfolio, either within USAID or externally, conducted since CDCS development offer data that should inform strategy-level learning?
d. What data are needed to understand how country contextual factors, relating to the Mission's strategy and assumptions, have evolved since CDCS development?

It may be helpful to focus the strategy-level pause & reflect moments, and any pre-discussions, around those learning questions that remain unanswered from previous learning activities to help provide a frame for consolidating relevant PMP indicator data, and identifying where there may be gaps in information needed to address learning priorities in the PMP.

- For example, if a Mission seeks to understand how drivers of corruption influence particular sectors, the Mission may want to use the MCST to explore whether the PMP performance monitoring data or other data available to the Mission are suitable for illustrating variability in drivers across different sectors. Is systemic corruption continuing in spite of positive results in individual sectors? Why?
- To answer remaining questions, it may be necessary to pull in indicators for sub-IRs (if identified), or relevant activity-level or contextual data. Data placemats can be adapted around these questions with applicable data to probe on focused questions.

**Related tools**:
Learning Priorities Status
Information Gathering Worksheet
Information Gathering MCST Module

## Tip: Frame strategy-level learning around the Development Hypothesis and DO-level Theories of Change

During prior portfolio reviews, Missions may have focused primarily on activity-level indicators to assess progress toward activity-level results. A strategy-level moment (such as a portfolio review or MCST) is a great opportunity to lift the analysis from the activity-level to the strategic level. What do the Mission's PMP indicators at the IR-level say about the Development Hypothesis underpinning the results framework and the more detailed Theories of Change at the DO-level? Where and how might observed changes at the project and activity level be linked to desired strategic results? If things are not on track, what has been learned from performance evaluations or contextual data that may explain differences between anticipated results and actual results to date? Does the information in the Mission's PMP tell the Mission what it needs to know in order to track progress towards the DOs and IRs  or is information missing?  You may want to conduct external stakeholder consultations to re-validate underlying assumptions and logic/needs underpinning the development hypothesis, and use this information to inform the pause and reflect moment.

**Related tools**:
Summary of Portfolio Review Findings and Next Steps Tool
Summary of Evaluation Findings for MCSTs

**Tip: Think in advance about how you want to present or visualize the data to prompt meaningful discussion on what it means for the Mission**

Identifying and gathering the relevant data is the first step- next, Missions need to ensure that the right stakeholders within the Mission internalize that data and reflect on what it means for the Mission. For example, say DO teams have gathered and analyzed performance monitoring and contextual data, and identified key themes that the Mission should discuss more broadly at a capstone event. How will they share their analysis and bring evidence into the room so their colleagues can process it in the moment to have thoughtful, data-driven discussions during the capstone? This is frequently done through plenary presentations - but there are other ways to help staff process data more interactively (and often in less time). Missions may want to consider using data placemats, gallery walks, "world cafe" discussions, or other facilitated approaches to reviewing the results of the data collection and begin reflecting on what it means for the Mission.

**Related tools**:
Using Data Placemats to Pause and Reflect on Strategy-level Results
Designing and facilitating Learning-focused meetings
PPL Analytics Team support to Missions

**Tip: Document learning and actions related to strategy, project, and activity design and implementation**

Documenting how the Mission arrived at lessons around R/CDCS implementation, as well as what needs to happen going forward and who will be responsible, helps organize the Mission to take action on lessons learned and adaptively manage the strategy going forward. This action plan tool is one template (which can be adapted) to plan strategic adaptations and fill any needed gaps in learning for the remainder of R/CDCS implementation. *Revisit and update the PMP following a strategy-level pause and reflect moment, noting updates in the PMP change log and placing appropriate links to MCST outputs and resources. This may include adding the MCST action plan as an appendix.*

**Related tools**:
Stocktaking Action Planning Template

**Tip: Consider whether and how to bring in additional support**

The scope and parameters of a strategy-level pause and reflect moment vary from Mission to Mission. As Missions plan their scope, they should consider what data they want to bring in, who will gather it, analyze it, and present or visualize it to inform discussion. Missions may want to bring in additional support for this
- The Mission's MEL platform, if it has one, can help coordinate and facilitate strategy-level pause & reflect moments, including tools and discussion ahead of the main event. These platforms can

be particularly helpful at consolidating and visualizing data in advance, to help participants quickly view and reflect on key findings (for example, through tools like [Data Placemats](...)). It may be worth asking the MEL platform what data visualization resources/expertise they have if this isn't a service the Mission has utilized previously.

- PPL and Regional Bureaus can:
    - Support the design of the pause and reflect moment, and provide facilitation support.
    - Share best practice, tools/templates, and examples.
    - Help Missions think through what their PMP indicator data is telling them and what is missing.
    - Advise Missions on third-party contextual data relevant to planning and provide customized contextual analytical support to the exercise.
    - Coordinate with MEL experts and PPL's Analytics Team in Washington to identify data sources to answer learning questions.
    - If indicators aren't quite providing the right information about results, help design more useful indicators.

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## CLEARANCE: Clearance Process - *Drafter, Team Leads*

### Responsible Person (Drafter or Other):
Primary Drafter: *Name, Title*  Stephanie Dorman, Program Officer
Secondary Drafter (if applicable):  Roberto Martin, Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist

### Persons Accountable (Approvals):

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| Travis Mayo, Monitoring Team Lead | Clear with edits | 04/19/2022 |
| Reena Nadler, CLA Team Lead | Clear with edits | 03/31/2022 |
| Allison Haselkorn, Evaluation Team Lead | Clear | 03/30/2022 |
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