

So you want to propose a learning agenda question?

A good DRG Learning Agenda question is narrower than a general question (“what works in anti-corruption programming?”) and broader than an evaluation question (“what were the effects of USAID’s anticorruption programs in Southern Africa?”) Clear? No? Read on.

A good place to start thinking about what would make for a good Learning Agenda question is to think about the **causal assumptions and theories of change** that you see over and over in USAID programs. For example, USAID supports civil service reform in hopes that it will reduce corruption by increasing professionalism. But is there evidence that a) civil service reform increases professionalism and b) that a more professional civil service is less likely to be corrupt? If you are interested in the answer to the question from the DRG Center’s 2016 Learning Agenda, “*what kinds of interventions are most effective at reducing the propensity of civil servants to engage in corruption?*” you can see the infographic [here](#).

Another approach to a good learning agenda question is to think about **where results routinely fall short of expectations**. “*What are the most effective civic engagement strategies for maintaining and creating civic space in restrictive environments?*” turned out to be a very relevant question for many USAID Missions in 2016-17. [A comparative-historical case study analysis](#) of civic activities in restrictive countries provided some suggestions for creative interventions that USAID could pursue, but showed that there is no proven strategy for keeping civic space open when governments want it closed.

A third approach is to think in terms of **advocacy**: is there an issue or intervention that you are pretty sure is important, but you need evidence to make the case to others? An example of this is the 2016 DRG Learning Agenda question asking what the evidence is that incorporating DRG principles into sectoral programs improves sectoral outcomes. This question resulted in a [systematic review](#) of rigorous research on sectoral outcomes that will help us make the case to other USAID Bureaus why it is important to integrate good governance principles of accountability and inclusion into their programs.

Finally, there may be an area where a lot of **new evidence** has been produced, but USAID staff and our implementing partners might not necessarily be aware of it. For example, the field of behavioral economics and communications has exploded with practitioner-relevant research in the last ten years. The 2016 DRG Learning agenda posed the question: *In what ways are human rights awareness campaigns successful and what are their unintended negative consequences?* The [literature review](#) included a summary of the latest evidence about what makes for effective social and behavioral change campaigns, and the implications of this evidence for program implementation. Then the authors explored specific case studies of human rights campaigns, showing where they went right and wrong.