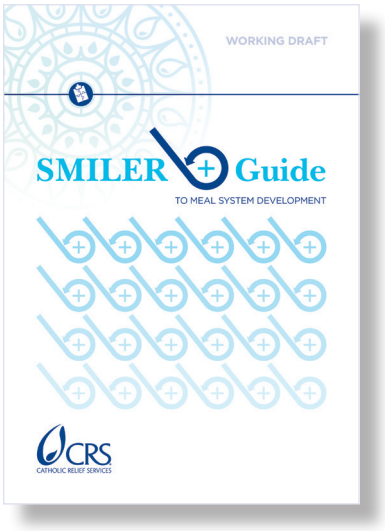
SMILER Guide

TO MEAL SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

CRS
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES



CRS
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the United States Catholic community. CRS' relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. CRS eases suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality.

Catholic Relief Services
228 West Lexington Street
Baltimore, MD 21201-3443 USA
1.888.277.7575
crs.org

Acknowledgments

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This guide is dedicated to the numerous CRS project and response teams who have shared their insights and aspirations during the revision process.

Acronyms

COP	chief of party
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DIP	Detailed Implementation Plan
DMP	data management plan
DQA	data quality assessment
FCRM	feedback, complaints and response mechanism
GAM	global agency metrics
GKIM	Global Knowledge Information Management
ICT	information and communications technology
ICT4D	information and communications technology for development
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
IR	intermediate result
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MEAL	monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
MPP	MEAL Policies and Procedures
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PIA	privacy impact assessment
PII	personally identifiable information
PIRS	Performance Indicator Reference Sheets
PIRT	Partner Indicator Reporting Table
PM	project manager
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PSDI	Participant and Service Delivery Indicator
RF	results framework
SMILER	Simple Measurement of Indicators for Learning and Evidence-based Reporting
SO	strategic objective
SOW	scope of work
ToC	theory of change
TOR	terms of reference

Contents

Contents (cont.)

GLOSSARY

Introduction

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) recognizes the critical role of monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, or MEAL, systems in program quality and impact. To respond to stakeholder information needs and inform strategic program design and adaptive management, quality MEAL systems collect reliable and timely data. To optimize their value, CRS believes that MEAL systems must be grounded in project design; built by MEAL and program staff with participation from partner organizations and key stakeholders; and updated during implementation as activities progress and information needs evolve. CRS' SMILER+ is a participatory process that enables teams to develop MEAL systems that are responsive to context and contribute to adaptive program management.

SMILER+ is a participatory process that enables teams to develop MEAL systems that are responsive to context and contribute to adaptive program management.

SMILER+

SMILER stands for Simple Measurement of Indicators for Learning and Evidence-based Reporting. The 2020 SMILER update has been rebranded SMILER+. The "plus" denotes both the new content included in the guide and the evolution from M&E to MEAL.

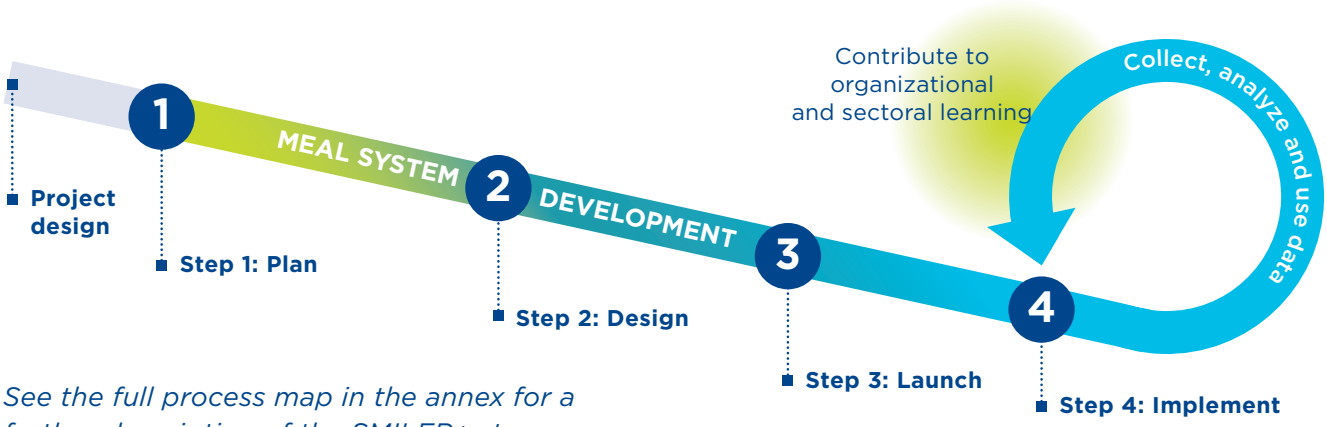
SMILER+ at a glance

- Prioritizes the information needs of key stakeholders in the development of the MEAL system.
- Maps the flow of monitoring data through collection, data management, analysis and use.
- Develops the foundation of feedback, complaints and response mechanisms that inform programmatic decisions and uphold safeguarding policies.
- Builds upon donor and agency MEAL requirements.
- Integrates Responsible Data Values & Principles into data collection and management.
- Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of MEAL and program staff for MEAL system set-up, implementation and use.
- Contributes to a strong enabling environment for MEAL by embedding key activities into program management.
- Focuses on project learning and data use for improved decision-making, accountability to stakeholders, and reports and communication products.

SMILER+ MEAL systems are developed during a project's start-up phase. CRS recommends that MEAL systems be designed in participatory workshops to benefit from the contributions of and interactions between MEAL and sectoral staff, and CRS and partner organizations. The length and focus of SMILER+ workshops will vary based on project context, but they often last five days and follow a recommended sequence to produce a common set of MEAL system components. SMILER+ workshops should be facilitated by an experienced MEAL staff person who is able to help teams adapt MEAL good practices and ensure quality workshop processes.

Prior to SMILER+ workshops, teams must ensure that project logic is well-defined and that MEAL is supported by appropriate budget allocation and staffing. After the SMILER+ workshop, teams will finalize data collection forms and implement action plans associated with rolling out the MEAL system to staff, stakeholders and communities. During implementation, CRS and partner staff are encouraged to reflect on the MEAL system itself in order to identify and address gaps in quality or utility.

SMILER+ process map



See the full process map in the annex for a further description of the SMILER+ steps.

As appropriate MEAL systems are responsive to context, SMILER+ is also intended to be adapted to the scope and scale of the project. SMILER+ will vary based on the inclusion of information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) or if existing MEAL forms are used in the MEAL system, for example. SMILER+ can also be applied outside of a workshop setting in an emergency response or in other contexts where workshops are not feasible.

MEAL system

The MEAL system is made up of people, processes, structures and resources that work together as an interconnecting whole to identify, generate, manage and analyze project data and feedback in order to inform management decisions, improve program quality, and meet stakeholder information needs.

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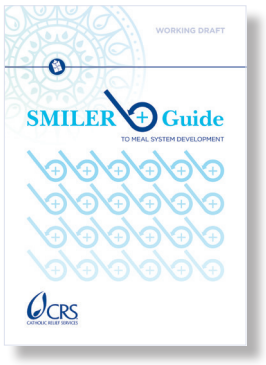
How to use the *SMILER+ Guide*



- *SMILER+ workshop participants* are encouraged to become familiar with each SMILER+ component and its role in the overall MEAL system.
- *Project teams (project managers and chiefs of party with MEAL coordinators)* should refer to the SMILER+ planning tool to plan and prepare for successful SMILER+ workshops.
- *SMILER+ facilitators* can use the facilitation manual and supporting materials to create workshop agendas and session plans appropriate to a range of project contexts.
- *MEAL practitioners* can benefit from including SMILER+ in their approach to MEAL system development and integrating SMILER+ components into their organization's toolkit.

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MEAL System Components

SMILER+ components

- Stakeholder communication plan
- Learning plan
- Data flow map(s)
- Feedback, complaints and response mechanism (FCRM) flowchart
- Data collection forms and instructions
- FCRM forms
- Reporting formats
- Reporting due dates table

This *SMILER+ Guide* explains each piece of the MEAL system and how they interact with others to create an integrated whole. Each section presents MEAL system components, organized by the steps in the SMILER+ process map, along with links to additional resources for further reference.

This icon indicates information on responsible data principles.

This icon indicates good practices to improve the SMILER+ process and MEAL system quality.

This icon indicates information related specifically to supply chain management.

Internal firewalled resources are noted with a key symbol.

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MEAL in Project Design

During the project design phase, a number of key project decisions will provide the foundation for MEAL system development. The project theory of change and strategy will frame the MEAL system by mapping project logic and selecting indicators and measurement methods required to track progress, monitor assumptions, and understand contributions to project goals and sustainability.

Resources

- CRS Checklist for review of MEAL design documents

Theory of change

The theory of change, or ToC, is both a design process and a product.[1] The process involves analyzing a situation, recognizing the underlying causes of the problems or challenges faced, determining the desired long-term change, and working through the steps to achieve that change. The ToC product is represented by a graphic or flowchart illustrating the desired outcomes, where assumptions play a role in the pathways of change. It is often accompanied by a narrative.

The ToC integrates the contributions—from a range of actors—that are required to achieve the intended changes. It also identifies key assumptions underpinning the pathways of change. Every strategy includes assumptions about the context in which the proposed project will occur, often related to economic or social trends, government interventions, or the sustainability of behavior change. It is critical to identify these assumptions in the ToC and to monitor their validity over the life of the project.

The ToC then informs the project strategy and the selection of strategic objectives, goals and intermediate results within the larger context. As the ToC is being developed, questions may emerge that will drive learning and evaluation questions during implementation. Like many components of the MEAL system, the ToC is a living document and should be updated as the project team learns during implementation.

Resources

- *Practical Guidance on Developing a Project's Theory of Change*
- CRS *ProPack I* (2015), Chapter 5
- MEAL DPro: Theory of Change

Good practice: Monitor project risks

Understanding risks is critical to adaptive management and, depending on the nature of some project risks, it may be important to build some aspects of the monitoring of key risks into the project's MEAL system, to ensure the team has the information to make appropriate adjustments to risk management plans. See Compass Risk Template and Guidance.

1. Starr, L. 2019. *Theory of Change: Facilitator's Guide*. Washington, DC: TANGO International and The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program.

GLOSSARY

Results framework

The results framework, or RF, represents the linear logic of the project strategy by presenting the strategic objectives (SOs), intermediate results (IRs) and outputs needed for these changes to occur. It is a diagram that demonstrates the "how" and "why" of project design, and provides an opportunity to cross-check project logic. The RF is drawn from the theory of change as the team identifies what approaches and activities will (and will not) comprise the project strategy.

Resources

- CRS *ProPack I* (2015), Chapter 5
- MEAL DPro: Results Framework and Logframe

Proframe

The Proframe (Project Framework), or Logframe, documents the indicators needed to measure and understand change at each level of the results framework, and the means of measurement that will be used. The indicators in the Proframe should reflect donor requirements and CRS Global Results as well as those that meet community and stakeholder information needs. In addition, the use of standard indicators will enable teams to benefit from larger sectoral learning when it comes to measuring change. The Proframe also includes the key assumptions from the ToC that will be monitored during implementation.

The Proframe will include methods for monitoring and for evaluating progress and change. It is important that the monitoring methods will enable light monitoring and inform adaptive management during quarterly meetings and other reflection events. The monitoring and evaluation methods selected should reflect a balance of qualitative and quantitative data collection as appropriate to context and to the rigor of the MEAL system.

Light monitoring Light monitoring is "good enough" monitoring, resulting in timely and relevant data that enable staff to take action before it's too late.
— *Monitoring for Problem-Solving, Adaptive Management, Reporting and Learning*

Resources

- CRS *ProPack I* (2015), Chapter 7; Proframe job aid, Table 7d, p.106.
- CRS *Monitoring for Problem-Solving, Adaptive Management, Reporting and Learning*
- Compass Standard 2, Key action 2
- CRS *Supply Chain Management Handbook*: Supply Chain Monitoring
- MEAL DPro: Results Framework and Logframe

Supply chain management note: When the project includes a distribution component, supply chain indicators should be included in the Proframe to enable teams to refer to one central list of indicators and integrate monitoring activities where appropriate.

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Good practice: Monitoring critical assumptions

Monitoring the critical assumptions that underpin project logic enables teams to understand why change is or is not happening. The project team must be alert to surprises or unintended consequences that will arise in any given project. Monitoring assumptions may require additional data collection in some cases, but, in others, observations from field staff and identification of changes in context will be sufficient to determine whether key assumptions are not holding true.

MEAL narrative

The proposal's MEAL narrative documents the overall approach for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning by describing the principles and key activities associated with each. It is an opportunity to refer to CRS agency requirements, such as the MEAL Policies and Procedures, and Global Results, and state how the MEAL system will meet donor requirements. The MEAL narrative also provides a general description of the staffing structure in place across CRS and partner organization teams to support quality MEAL activities.

The MEAL narrative should describe key approaches associated with each element of the MEAL system as per the following:

- **Monitoring**: Methods of data collection for light monitoring to inform adaptive management as well as methods that will meet more rigorous reporting requirements; data management practices to ensure data quality and protect personally identifiable information as per CRS' Responsible Data Values & Principles; and plans for use of data during a range of reflection opportunities.
- **Evaluation**: Plans for establishing baseline data; the timing and purpose of midterm and final evaluations or reviews; key evaluation questions to inform evaluation design; and opportunities for stakeholder and community participation in evaluation events.
- **Accountability**: Feedback, complaints and response mechanisms; approaches for communication with stakeholders during the project cycle and close-out; and participation opportunities for community members.
- **Learning**: Learning questions and associated indicators and information sources; linkages to larger learning agendas; data visuals; and the timeline for meeting project-level learning needs.

Resources

- CRS *ProPack I* (2015), Chapter 10

GLOSSARY

MEAL budget

Careful budgeting for MEAL is essential to plan for the implementation of a quality MEAL system. The MEAL budget should reflect the activities described in the MEAL narrative and support appropriate staffing structures. ICT4D solutions should also be included, considering hardware and software purchases, and staffing and training needs. It is recommended that monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning activities are reflected separately within the project budget and, where feasible, that MEAL activities are integrated with other aspects of project implementation, such as field visits and development of communication materials, for greater efficiency and integration overall.

Resources

- CRS MEAL Policy 4: Budget
- MEAL Budget Checklist
- Compass Standard 3, Key action 4

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Step 1: Plan

During the project start-up phase, teams will validate and update project design documents, such as the theory of change, results framework and Proframe, based on any donor comments or changes to the project's planned activities, participants or requirements. The project team will use these to develop the SMILER+ MEAL system and ensure that it meets donor requirements and supports adaptive management. With strong project management support, these MEAL components will be integrated into the Detailed Implementation Plan, which will be cross-referenced with staffing plans and budgets, and the scopes and budgets of partner awards.

Good practice: MEAL requirements versus good practices

Consider how the MEAL system can apply good practices above and beyond the minimum donor requirements and applicable MEAL procedure requirements. Remember that these requirements are largely intended to set the minimum standard, and teams are encouraged to increase the frequency or depth of required MEAL activities as appropriate in order to add value and incorporate greater quality into the MEAL system.

Resources

- Compass Standard 7, Key action 1
- Compass Standard 7, Key action 2

MEAL requirements planning checklist

Teams will now identify the specific activities needed to meet the donor and agency MEAL requirements that were reflected in the proposal's MEAL narrative. The MEAL requirements planning checklist helps teams plan for the specific activities associated with donor and MEAL Policies and Procedures (MPP) requirements, along with a timeline and staff responsible, so that they can be incorporated into the MEAL system and project detailed implementation planning.

Resources

- MEAL requirements planning checklist
- Donor MEAL Checklist Template

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MEAL plan

The MEAL plan documents the structures and processes that will be used for monitoring, analysis, evaluation and reporting progress toward achieving a project's performance and process indicators. The MEAL plan builds on the Proframe content and MEAL requirements planning checklist by adding specific indicator definitions and identifying the respondent(s) or data sources and persons responsible for data collection. To plan for analysis and use, the MEAL plan includes key comparison groups and identifies priority communication and reporting needs. In addition to Proframe indicators, the MEAL plan should include Participant and Service Delivery Indicators (PSDI) to support accurate and timely reporting of the project's reach and other contributions to CRS Global Results. Teams should include key assumptions in the MEAL plan to ensure these critical assumptions are actively monitored and included in ongoing reflection events. The Performance Management Plan (PMP) or Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS) may be used instead of the MEAL plan as per team preference or donor requirements.

Resources

- MEAL DPro: Performance Management Plan
- CRS *Supply Chain Management Handbook*: Supply Chain Monitoring
- CRS *Monitoring for Problem-Solving, Adaptive Management, Reporting and Learning*
- CRS *Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation*: Community Participation in M&E
- CRS ICT4D Knowledge and Innovation Resources
- CRS Global Results (including PSDI)

Good practice: Develop PIRS for SO and IR indicators

CRS recommends developing PIRS for higher-level indicators (strategic objectives and intermediate results) even when the donor does not require them, as it helps teams identify key assumptions in the theory of change and think critically about data collection systems and data analysis requirements.

Detailed Implementation Plan

During start-up, the project team will develop the annual Detailed Implementation Plan, or DIP, based on the activities schedule included in the proposal. This plan should include the activities in the MEAL plan, and ensure that the start (and end) of these activities reflects the timing of project implementation and aligns with plans for timely data use and decision-making. When the plan is developed in a start-up workshop setting, CRS and partner staff can clarify roles and responsibilities and often build greater ownership for MEAL activities as well as better integrate MEAL into larger project management approaches.

GLOSSARY

Good practice: Collaborate and reduce redundancy

By including supply chain monitoring in the Proframe and the DIP, teams can identify opportunities to collaborate or reduce redundancy in monitoring activities. For example, distributions may be an opportunity for the project team to conduct routine data collection and monitor satisfaction with services and goods delivered.

Resources

- Compass Standard 7, Key action 2

Indicator Performance Tracking Table

The Indicator Performance Tracking Table, or IPTT, is used to document quantitative performance indicators, set baseline values and targets, and track and reflect on progress toward targets during implementation. The table lists the indicators referenced in the award agreement, and an updated IPTT is an important part of the annual donor report. It should be updated with achievements and any changes in targets—if they are agreed upon with the donor—during implementation.

The IPTT should document targets associated with ongoing implementation and progress, in addition to those set for life-of-project achievements. When developing these targets, teams should consider the rate of change associated with each target, as well as any seasonal considerations in data collection to ensure monthly, quarterly or annual targets are appropriately allocated. In addition, the setting of the targets should reflect the sequence in the overall project strategy by noting which outputs must be completed, and to what degree, before higher-level changes in behaviors or outcomes can be expected, for example. It is recommended that the IPTT also includes the planned disaggregation for each indicator as per the MEAL plan (e.g., by sex, region).

Resources

- CRS *M&E ShortCuts: Using Performance Indicator Tracking Tables*
- CRS *ProPack I* (2015), Chapter 7
- *IPTT Guidelines: Guidelines and Tools for the Preparation and Use of IPTTs*

Good practice: Beyond MEAL plan indicators in the IPTT

It is common for DIP activities to require monitoring and thus be integrated into the IPTT along with other MEAL indicators. For example, the DIP activity 'quarterly project steering committee meetings comprised of government, local NGOs, and partners' may be tracked via the number of meetings and attendance at each meeting as part of the IPTT.

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Partner Indicator Reporting Table

The Partner Indicator Reporting Table, or PIRT, documents the indicators, targets and achievement of those targets for each partner organization. The PIRT combines the output indicators from the IPTT and process indicators from the DIP which reflect the scope of the partner organization's activities.

The PIRT is helpful in identifying how the work of each organization will contribute to DIP implementation and achievement of overall targets in the IPTT. Thus, it is essential that the DIP, PIRT and IPTT are aligned and updated during implementation. A completed PIRT is an important resource for partner-level reflection events and a component of ongoing partner reporting to CRS.

Resources

- PIRT template

MEAL system components checklist

The MEAL system components checklist identifies and organizes all the documents in a project's MEAL system. Each checklist will differ based on donor and agency MEAL requirements, priority MEAL good practices and specific data collection plans and other contextual factors. The checklist helps teams to ensure that each document is drafted and then finalized after review or testing.

Resources

- SMILER+ MEAL system components checklist template

Good practice: Update the MEAL system components checklist

It is helpful to maintain and update the MEAL system components checklist during implementation in order to manage the development of new data collection forms or incorporate changes into the system based on MEAL system review. By keeping the checklist current, it will remain a useful reference during annual review meetings or other opportunities to reflect on the MEAL system.

GLOSSARY

Country-level data compliance checklist

During project start-up, teams should plan for compliance with national data privacy and protection legislation. These laws exist to balance individuals' right to privacy and the ability of organizations to use collected data for a stated purpose. For example, during data collection, the law may require data collectors to obtain informed consent when capturing information from respondents. It is critical to 'do no harm' when collecting personally identifiable information (PII), especially where vulnerable populations are involved. The country-level data compliance checklist will assist staff in determining what national requirements exist for consent and data protection.[2]

Privacy impact assessments

Conducting a privacy impact assessment, or PIA, enables teams to identify risks to the privacy of project participants or other stakeholders, and to plan to mitigate those risks. The PIA is a useful resource when mapping the flow of project data, and ensuring that project data management systems meet agency, donor, and national and international regulations, such as the European Union General Data Protection Regulation.

Resources

- SMILER+ country-level data compliance checklist
- CRS Responsible Data Values & Principles
- CRS *Undertaking Privacy Impact Assessments: The Methodology*
- CRS Privacy Impact Assessment Template
- USAID Data Security Guidance: Protecting Beneficiaries
- ICRC *Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action*

FCRM planning worksheet

Feedback, complaints and response mechanisms, or FCRMs, are an important component of the CRS strategy to uphold safeguarding commitments and to increase accountability to participants and other community members. Through these mechanisms, the team can identify and address challenges or targeting errors, answer questions, improve programming quality, and provide a safe means for reporting any allegations of fraud or exploitation. FCRMs give greater voice to participants in ongoing decision-making, and support adaptive management practices.

Before the SMILER+ workshop, the team will select channels to be used in the FCRM, ensuring they are appropriate to local context, reflect community preferences, and meet agency and donor safeguarding policies and commitments. Strong FCRMs will include channels that are accessible to participants who cannot read or write, and to more vulnerable community members. Such FCRMs recognize the value of face-to-face feedback, complaint and response as an important complement to any ICT4D approach.

2. Teams may get resources on country-specific legislation from GKIM (where possible) and Country Legal Counsel.

GLOSSARY

In this worksheet, teams will describe the channels to be used, the resources needed to operate them, CRS and partner staff roles and responsibilities, and budgetary considerations.

Resources

- SMILER+ FCRM planning worksheet template
- CRS FCRM Guidance and Toolkit [pending]
- CRS *Guidance on M&E*: Community Participation in M&E

Good practice: Adapt and use existing FCRMs

Using FCRMs already in operation in the country program or by neighboring projects will enable teams to learn from local experience and build on what is already working well. This may increase the efficiency of FCRM management by using existing communication materials or databases. Sharing FCRMs enables country program leadership to reflect on larger trends in feedback and complaints received by diverse community members and to determine the overall country program response rate.

GLOSSARY

Step 2: Design

With key planning documents completed, the project team is ready to design its MEAL system to produce the timely data necessary for adaptive management and decision-making. Much of the design work is typically completed in a SMILER+ workshop within the first quarter after project start. The workshop is generally five days in length but may range from three to eight days depending on the scope of the project, the complexity of the MEAL system information needs, and the number of partners involved. By the end of the workshop, the team will have drafted a series of MEAL system components. It is important to note however that these components are usually drafted *but not finalized* during the workshop. For this reason, teams will also create the action plan during the SMILER+ workshop to direct the remaining design work.

Good practice: Alternative work settings

SMILER+ MEAL systems may be developed in a range of work settings in small or emergency projects, for example, which may not have the time or resources for stand-alone workshops. To build the MEAL system in emergency responses, it may be appropriate to use an iterative process consisting of individual or small group work sessions focused on a core set of components until the situation stabilizes and response activities become more predictable.

Resources

- Compass Standard 7, Key action 4

Stakeholder communication plan

The MEAL stakeholder communication plan helps teams to recognize and meet a range of stakeholder information needs, thus building greater accountability to community members and other stakeholders. The analysis identifies key stakeholders and their information needs associated with understanding progress and project outcomes as well as with project information during start-up, implementation and close-out. The analysis consolidates the information needs of internal and external stakeholders—including donors, CRS project team and partners—and further identifies how information needs may differ within the community. For example, local community members might need information about project interventions and targeting criteria, how to access feedback channels, and plans for close-out or the handover of activities, while project staff might need information on changes in context, early assessment of intervention quality and participant satisfaction, appropriateness of targeting criteria, and effectiveness of feedback, complaints and response mechanisms.

The team then identifies the appropriate means of meeting these information needs, whether through formal reporting with donors or, for example, radio messages or community meetings. It is important that the range of communication approaches planned are appropriate to the diverse needs within the community and will reach, for example, community members who cannot read or write, or those without mobile phone access.

GLOSSARY

Resources

- SMILER+ stakeholder communication plan template
- MEAL DPro: Communication Plans
- CRS *Communication Toolbox*

Good practice: Use of data visualization

Data visualization is the graphic representation of data and may be a highly useful tool for communicating key project results to various audiences. For many people, visual information makes comparisons easier to understand. Simple data visualizations such as charts, tables and maps are useful for PMs to access information for their regular management decision-making. Other stakeholders may have requirements for the way data should be presented (for example, in a dashboard or reporting format).

Data flow maps

A data flow map illustrates the flow of data in a MEAL system from source and collection through management and use, as well as the corresponding frequency, timing and focal person(s) responsible for each step in the process. For each data element needed, the team will identify the data collection form(s) required and map how data will be stored, analyzed, communicated and used. All qualitative and quantitative indicators listed in the MEAL plan and information needed for the stakeholder communication plan will be reflected in the data flow maps.

CRS' data flow maps should capture the movement of data through the following stages and processes:

- **Data sources**: The individuals, group or existing database that will provide the data needed in the MEAL system.
- **Data collection tools**: The digital or paper forms or tools that will be used to gather data from identified sources.
- **Data storage**: The databases and other repositories that will store project data, including qualitative and quantitative data gathered from registration and monitoring activities.
- **Data analysis**: The process of transforming data from a variety of sources in a way that will inform decision-making and meet communication and reporting needs.
- **Data use**: Knowledge management processes and events associated with project-based learning and reflection.
- **Data reporting and communications**: The specific materials, reports and other approaches to disseminating information to meet stakeholder information needs, as per stakeholder communication planning.

GLOSSARY

The data flow maps identify the focal person(s) responsible for data transfer between each stage. This visualization of the MEAL system can help to identify opportunities for further collaboration between technical teams, and with supply chain management, to make data collection and management processes more efficient and data analysis and use more integrated. It may also identify points where, for example, the MEAL system may become overloaded or where the expectations for turnaround from data collection to use are unrealistic. Teams are encouraged to adjust the overall data flow in order to optimize efficiency of overall resources available.

Completed data flow maps are also critical inputs for the development of ICT4D MEAL solutions. In addition, ICT4D staff will use the data flow maps to advise on and assist with digitization of the proposed forms, manage the data—including personally identifiable information—and establish access protocols for data sharing among CRS staff and partners.

Good practice: Scaling data flow maps

Project teams should determine whether one integrated data flow map or individual data flow maps associated with each strategic objective, for example, will enable clearer visualization of the overall MEAL system and data flow. Projects with multiple objectives and numerous indicators may find multiple maps more effective to reflect the detail needed, but will then need to integrate the SO-level data flow maps into a project-wide data flow map and cross-check for potential efficiencies that could be achieved (data collection from the same audience at the same time using one instrument instead of two, for example).

Resources

- CRS ICT4D Knowledge and Innovation Resources
- SMILER+ Data flow map template

FCRM flowchart

The FCRM flowchart shows the flow of feedback and complaints as they are received, categorized and used by project teams and other stakeholders to inform appropriate referral or response. The flowchart shows the channels selected by the team along with the key feedback and complaints categories in order to manage feedback and complaints, ranging from requests for information to reports of targeting errors, to sensitive feedback associated with security issues, fraud or safeguarding.

After the flow is mapped, project teams identify the frequency and timing associated with each step as well as the focal person(s) responsible. The completed FCRM flowchart is a key resource for orienting CRS and partner staff and volunteers to their roles and responsibilities associated with the FCRM, and for specifying the management processes for sensitive feedback. As with other MEAL system components, the FCRM flowchart should be updated as the FCRM is adapted or improved during implementation.

GLOSSARY

Good practice: Supply chain management note

The community help desks available during distribution events and the post-distribution monitoring can both provide valuable sources of feedback. In turn, distribution events are good opportunities to communicate changes to distribution times or types of goods or respond to frequently asked questions.

Resources

- SMILER+ FCRM flowchart
- CRS FCRM Guidance and Toolkit [pending]
- CRS feedback and complaints categories
- MEAL DPro: Feedback and Response Mechanisms

Data collection forms

The team will design data collection forms that capture data associated with MEAL plan indicators and larger stakeholder information needs, and enable planned analysis and comparisons. The data flow maps(s) will have identified the data elements to be collected in the forms, and the MEAL plan will provide the key comparisons and data disaggregation to be supported in the demographic section of the forms and in other questions as relevant.

The development of data collection forms combines both MEAL and sectoral skill sets. MEAL good practice should inform question structure and clarity (e.g. skip logic and coded responses for quantitative data collection), while sectoral expertise will inform question phrasing and the development of coded responses.

While the forms are drafted during the SMILER+ workshop, they will not be final or ready for use until they have been reviewed, field-tested, and translated into local languages as needed. Teams planning to use ICT4D may start by developing paper forms or—depending on the technology selected and ICT4D capacity of the wider team—work directly onto the software.

Resources

- CRS *Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation*: Developing Qualitative Tools
- CRS *Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation*: Developing Quantitative Tools
- MEAL DPro: Quantitative Data Collection Tools
- MEAL DPro: Qualitative Data Collection Tools

Good practice: Data minimization

Data minimization is a key principle of responsible data use and directly applicable to the development of data collection forms. It holds that no data should be collected unless it is necessary for decision-making, communication or learning purposes. Teams should continually cross reference this principle when determining the number and types of questions included in the forms as well as how specific the prescribed responses should be. For example, teams may apply the data minimization principle by recording the age range of an individual instead of their exact age, or record a district name instead of a village name as part of the demographics. They may also decide that, for example, answers to some questions would be "nice to know" but not "need to know" given the project's plan for data analysis and use.

Instructions

Data collection instructions support data quality and consistency. These instructions should be written as the teams develop the data collection forms to ensure that the rationale and logic of the questions, response categories, and appropriate sequencing are all captured. These instructions state the data source or respondent(s) and person(s) responsible for data collection as well as the planned sampling and selection process for local data collection.

The instructions developed for each form should include a brief introduction to the project and data collection exercise, and procedures for obtaining consent or assent. It is also recommended that the instructions highlight approaches for maintaining data quality by including checks for completeness and accuracy, maintaining accurate field logs, and summarizing data collectors' observations at the conclusion of each interview, focus group, or other data collection event. These instructions provide the basis for the training of staff and volunteers on data collection processes as part of the MEAL system launch.

Good practice: Review by sector experts

After the SMILER+ workshop, the draft data collection forms and instructions are reviewed by relevant sector experts if did not help develop the draft tools. This will ensure the tools and instructions capture the information needed at the project level and contribute to larger agency-wide learning within the sector.

GLOSSARY

Reporting formats

Reporting formats identify the required and recommended content to reflect donor agreements and stakeholder information needs. Reporting formats should provide a summary of activities completed, and targets and results achieved to date, community feedback received, any changes in context, general successes and challenges, and recommendations to improve the project, including the IPTT or PIRT as an annex. Reporting formats should be validated by MEAL and relevant sector leads before they are considered final.

Partner reporting formats should align with CRS reporting formats, integrating multiple partner reports. When distribution team leads are collecting both supply chain and project-related data, design teams ensure that the instructions and language on the form is sufficient for both purposes.

Resources

- Compass Standard 10, Key action 3
- Compass quarterly report template
- *IPTT Guidelines: Guidelines and Tools for the Preparation and Use of IPTTs*

Reporting due dates table

The reporting due dates table shows the timeline for key steps associated with submitting each report. To determine the timeline for reporting steps, work backwards from the date that CRS submits a report to the donor, planning for internal reviews and aggregation of partner reports (if needed), to the date that reports are submitted. Teams should plan for quarterly and annual review meetings before reporting deadlines so that reports capture the interpretation and recommendations generated at these events. The reporting due dates table can be included in the DIP and in partners' subawards for further integration with larger project management approaches.

Resources

SMILER+ reporting due dates table template

GLOSSARY

Learning plan

The learning plan presents project learning questions (and sub-questions) and identifies which indicators and other information sources will contribute to answering each question. The plan includes the data disaggregation and visuals that will aid analysis and interpretation, and the timeline for reflecting on each question through the life of the project.

Project-level learning often contributes to the larger agency or sectoral learning agenda while maintaining its local focus. Project evaluations contribute to learning by drawing out lessons learned to refine the theory of change and, in turn, learning plans help identify appropriate areas of focus for evaluation questions. All members of the project team, CRS and partners, MEAL and other project staff, are responsible for using data to inform ongoing decision-making and in project-based learning.

Good practice: Evolving learning plans

Learning questions should evolve during the life of the project as initial questions are answered and other learning needs arise. Quarterly and annual review meetings provide prime opportunities to update learning plans during larger project reflection on monitoring data, and feedback and complaints received.

Resources

- SMILER+ Learning plan template
- CRS *Learning with Purpose: Adding Value to Program Impact and Influence at Scale*
- MEAL DPro: Learning
- Compass Standard 11, Key action 1

MEAL support and resources table

Quality MEAL systems depend on sufficient staff capacity and resources, and appropriate MEAL budgeting, as well as clear roles and responsibilities associated with data collection, analysis and use. Once the MEAL system components are drafted, teams can clarify roles and responsibilities for CRS and partner MEAL and sectoral staff during implementation, and identify what support and resources each staff member will require to fulfill their role. These support needs may be reflected in a larger capacity-strengthening plan or addressed during training on the MEAL system itself. In addition, the team should embed MEAL support activities into the project's DIP to ensure project management support for MEAL capacity strengthening.

Resources:

- SMILER+ MEAL support and resources table template

GLOSSARY

Action plan

As the team creates drafts of MEAL system components, it is important to plan for review and field testing before each component is considered final. The action plan should reflect each step needed to bring drafts to final versions and to launch the MEAL system once final. The action plan template provides suggestions of common steps to complete MEAL system development, but each project should tailor the plan to its specific context and needs. The PM and the MEAL coordinator share responsibility for ensuring that the action plan is implemented.

Resources

- SMILER+ action plan template

Good practice: Quarterly checks on MEAL system development and implementation action plan

Until all items in the action plan have been completed, it is useful to revisit the action plan at each quarterly reflection event to review progress, discuss challenges, and determine any additional tasks that may be needed to move the process forward.

MEAL working group

The role of a MEAL working group is to support the finalization and launch of the MEAL system and then, during implementation, to convene as needed to address challenges or opportunities for system improvement that arise. The working group should also conduct the review of the MEAL system to address prior issues or concerns, and ensure the MEAL system reflects good practice. While for smaller projects these responsibilities are often assumed by project and MEAL staff directly, a MEAL working group is especially beneficial for larger projects, projects with multiple partners, and global and regional grants where these roles may not be a clearly defined in staff roles.

Good practice: Develop a MEAL working group scope of work

The team should develop a scope of work, or SOW, for the MEAL working group, which documents working group members, roles and responsibilities, tasks and timeline.

Working group members should include MEAL and non-MEAL CRS and partner staff, but may also include stakeholders with an interest or expertise in MEAL. If an ICT4D solution is required for the project, one working group member should have oversight of ICT4D, and a supply chain expert should be included for projects with a distribution element.

GLOSSARY

Data management plan

The project data management plan (DMP) articulates the procedures associated with data entry, storage, cleaning, archiving, retention, and destruction in accordance with donor and agency requirements and responsible data principles. MEAL and ICT4D staff will build the DMP based on risks (and benefits) identified to project data and the planned use of ICT4D in the MEAL system, specifically how staff will interact with selected digital solutions and access databases and visualization tools. The DMP should include a code book or definition file with all calculations planned for project data. The development of the DMP may generate recommendations to improve data quality and address risks to project data which should then be incorporated into the MEAL system components.

Good practice: De-identification of data

As many awards have open data requirements, project teams should plan to de-identify any MEAL data prior to analysis and sharing with partners, donors or other stakeholders. The project's MEAL team and ICT4D staff can assist with appropriate de-identification strategies.

CRS responsible data principles

These principles provide a foundation for how and why project teams protect data:

- Respect and protect an individual's personal data as an extension of their human dignity.
- Balance the right to be counted and heard with the right to privacy and security.
- Weigh the benefits and risks of using digital tools, platforms and data.
- Open data for the common good only after minimizing the risks.
- Prioritize local ownership and control of data for planning and decision-making.
- Work to educate, inform and engage our constituents in responsible data approaches.
- Take a preferential option for protecting and securing the data of the poor.
- Responsibly steward the data that is provided to us by our constituents.

Resources

- CRS Responsible Data Values & Principles
- CRS Privacy Impact Assessment Methodology
- CRS Data Privacy and Protection Guidelines
- CRS Privacy Impact Assessment Template
- CRS System Security Plan Template
- ELAN Data Starter Kit
- Oxfam Responsible Data Management training pack

GLOSSARY

Field-testing data collection tools

Forms must be translated into the local language(s) and internally reviewed by the project MEAL coordinator and sector specialists prior to use. Data collection forms are then tested with intended respondents to improve the wording and translation of questions, ensure lists are complete, check the logic and flow, and ensure the clarity of instructions. Based on the field test, revisions are made to the forms and instructions, and final versions of the forms are then digitized. Field-testing of the digital solution will follow, also called user acceptance testing, which involves testing the functionality of digital forms.

Good practice: Field-test data collection procedures

In addition to field-testing the forms, teams should field-test data collection procedures, including contacting respondents, logging data collection activities, completing forms per the instructions, transmitting data once collected, cleaning data, and storing data for later use.

GLOSSARY

Step 3: Launch

Once the MEAL components are finalized, the team will launch the MEAL system through training and orientation of staff, volunteers, community members and other stakeholders. CRS and partner staff should be trained on their roles and responsibilities related to MEAL system implementation, in addition to receiving a broader overview of key MEAL activities and methods. The orientation of community members and other stakeholders on the MEAL system should highlight the opportunities to engage in interpretation of results as well as how to access feedback, complaints and response mechanisms.

Good practice: Integrate orientation into wider project launch

MEAL system orientation and training can be integrated into wider project launch and communication efforts for greater efficiency and to present MEAL as part of integrated project activities

Train staff, partners and volunteers on the MEAL system

CRS staff, partners and volunteers should be oriented to the project MEAL system. It is important that they understand its overall purpose(s) and how their individual work contributes to common aims of data use and program quality as well as their role in data use and decision-making. Orientation for CRS and partner leadership should highlight opportunities for them to champion data use and check on larger feedback trends. Key resources for the orientation to the MEAL system include the MEAL plan, the data flow map and the stakeholder communication plan, the FCRM flowchart, and the content in the DIP related to MEAL.

In addition, training will be required for CRS staff, partners and volunteers on the MEAL system based on their roles and responsibilities during MEAL system implementation. The training should reflect the specific capacity needs identified during MEAL system design discussions. The training is also an opportunity to speak to the principles of responsible data and data quality to give greater meaning to ongoing quality checks and to frame FCRM activities within safeguarding policies and principles. Training of data collectors will depend on the approach for data collection used and may be combined with field testing of the tool in some contexts.

Good practice: Data collection simulation

Training of data collectors should include role play and field-tests of the data collection tools with community members so data collectors become very comfortable with the tools and are able to use them to collect quality data.

Resources

- CRS *Guidance on Designing and Delivering Effective Training Events*

GLOSSARY

Orient the community and other stakeholders

It is critical to orient community members and leaders and other stakeholders—such as local government and donors—on how to provide feedback and complaints using FCRMs, other opportunities to participate in MEAL activities, and what information they can expect from the project, and when. The stakeholder communication plan will serve as a key resource in identifying the communication means, timing and content to share with key stakeholders. Communication activities with community members should take into account varying information needs and varying levels of access to communications by different groups.

Resources

- CRS *Communication Toolbox*

GLOSSARY

Step 4: Implement

During project implementation, the MEAL system operates to track progress, support learning, contribute to adaptive management, and meet larger stakeholder information needs. The project team should reflect on the MEAL system during larger project review meetings, to address any challenges or gaps, and evolve MEAL tools and approaches to meet changing information and learning needs.

At the end of the project, the project team will close the MEAL system (as part of larger project close-out) by archiving de-identified datasets, conducting evaluations and reviews, meeting reporting requirements and sharing lessons learned with internal and external stakeholders.

Data quality assurance

Data quality refers to the accuracy of collected information, and focuses on ensuring that the process of data capture, verification and analysis is of a high standard.[3] Quality data is critical to effective adaptive management, monitoring and evaluating program outcomes, and building an evidence base for future project strategies.

Regular field visits, including field-level spot checks, provide opportunities to observe data collection procedures and identify any data quality concerns. Data quality issues should be documented in trip reports and addressed during ongoing project meetings and through further training and support as needed.

Data quality assessments, or DQAs, provide a comprehensive approach to identifying data quality issues and improving data collection processes. The DQA will typically use five criteria to assess the quality of the indicator, the data collection instruments and methods, database management, and the actual data collected: validity, integrity, reliability, timeliness and precision. The DQA should be designed to address any concerns identified through ongoing quality checks or concerns raised by the team. Ideally, for greater objectivity, the DQA is led by an independent team within the country program or an external group.

Resources

- USAID *Data Quality Assessment Checklist*
- MEASURE Evaluation *Data Quality Review Toolkit*
- USAID *Performance Monitoring & Evaluation Tips: Conducting Data Quality Assessments*
- The Global Fund Data Quality Tools

3. Pact. 2014. *Field Guide for Data Quality Management.* Washington, DC: PACT, p. 1-1.

GLOSSARY

Data use

As part of MEAL system design, the team will have identified key opportunities for data use. These opportunities will include quarterly and annual review meetings as well as other key events associated with the project timeline. During these meetings, CRS and partner MEAL and project staff will reflect on MEAL data (including community feedback) as well as a range of other information sources to track progress, check assumptions and identify any quality issues. The interpretation during these meetings will inform adaptive management practices and contribute to strong and effective project reporting.

Resources

- Compass Standard 11, Key action 3
- Compass Standard 11, Key action 4
- MEAL DPro: Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Visualization

Annual MEAL system review

Teams should conduct an annual review of the MEAL system in order to: (1) identify any data quality issues and steps to remedy them, (2) identify timely changes to the MEAL system and ensure it continues to meet stakeholder information needs, and inform adaptive management, (3) confirm compliance with the MPPs and donor requirements, (4) check the effectiveness of the FCRM in terms of accessibility and value to the community, and (5) identify any capacity building and resource needs to improve the system implementation and data use.

Good practice: Conduct MEAL system review immediately after DQA

Conduct a MEAL system review annually immediately after a DQA. In some cases, it may be appropriate to conduct a DQA as part of the MEAL system review process. The DQA will identify data quality issues and provides recommendations to refine the MEAL system.

The MEAL system review begins with the development of review questions by the project team or MEAL working group. The review questions should reflect concerns or issues identified during implementation or aims to improve data quality and use. The MEAL system review will also include the overall functionality of any digital solution, to identify where it can be improved and whether there are any issues or new developments with the digital platforms or technology that is being used. The MEAL system review will require a participatory discussion of how to address challenges identified and should result in an action plan to update all MEAL system components, communicate changes to stakeholders, and retrain staff and volunteers as needed. The MEAL system review may be a stand-alone event or part of the annual review meeting as time allows.

GLOSSARY

Good practice: Ongoing training on MEAL

After project start-up, the team should plan additional training of new staff and volunteers who join the project, respond to team requests for refresher training, and address quality issues that may arise. Incorporate these sessions into other project meetings, and consider virtual check-ins or remote calls where appropriate.

Resources

- CRS MEAL System Review Tool

MEAL system close-out

At project close-out, MEAL system data is used to meet all final reporting requirements, MEAL system components are archived for future learning, datasets are de-identified and archived or scheduled for destruction, and the project team builds capacity for handover of any MEAL activities or FCRMs to partners or to local actors. Incorporate MEAL close-out activities into larger project close-out steps.

Resources

- Compass Standard 18: Learning from and leveraging results during close-out.

GLOSSARY

Conclusion

It is through monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning that we understand the results of development and humanitarian work, make improvements to current and future projects, and ultimately increase the quality and reach of our support to the communities we serve.

SMILER+ MEAL systems plan for accountability and learning from the onset of MEAL system development so that project teams can ensure the right monitoring and evaluation data is being collected, analyzed and reported to MEAL stakeholders, and that opportunities for adaptive management are built into the MEAL system. When project teams know what is not working well, they can identify course corrections to achieve desired outcomes. Such adaptations improve project performance, resulting in better lives for communities.

Developing a MEAL system is an iterative process: with each component that is developed, project teams review capacity and resources, revisit roles and responsibilities for planned MEAL activities, and update MEAL documentation. The contexts in which projects operate vary widely, and the SMILER+ approach is flexible to meet those differing needs and to provide value, whatever the context. Including relevant stakeholders in SMILER+ will help to create a strong enabling environment for MEAL.

SMILER+ provides a roadmap for strong MEAL system development and meaningful integration between MEAL system components. It is further intended to inspire teams to seek new approaches to increasing data use by stakeholders or to giving greater voice to participants in donor reporting and project decision-making. As the field of MEAL continues to evolve to reflect new learning and insights into understanding change, SMILER+ will similarly grow to incorporate new practices, tools and templates in its resources.

Glossary

For other MEAL terms, please see the CRS MEAL Glossary

Term	Definition
Accountability	How an organization responds to and balances the needs of all stakeholders—including participants and other community members, donors, partners and the organization itself—in its decision-making and activities, and delivers against this commitment.
Adaptive management	An approach to working on complex problems or contexts which focuses on acting, sensing and responding: it assumes solutions cannot be completely known in advance and, therefore, that interventions cannot be planned out in full ahead of time. (O'Donnell 2016)
Assent	As children and youth under the age of majority cannot legally consent to participate in data collection activities, but youth over the age of 10 or 12 can generally understand the process and risks of participating in data collection, it may be appropriate to ask youths over the age of 10 to assent to participate. Using the same process as for adult respondents (*see* informed consent), those who are under the legal age of majority who agree to participate in data collection provide assent. Depending on national laws or regulations or the sensitivity of the data being collected, parental consent may also be required (see *parental consent*). (OCFT 2018)
Communication plan	A document that records the approach that a project will use to communicate key information and MEAL findings with communities and other stakeholders. It helps ensure systematic information sharing and two-way communication. (Adapted from CRS 2013)
Complaint	A specific grievance by anyone who has been negatively affected by an organization's action or who believes that an organization has failed to meet a stated commitment (CHS 2019).
Data element	A data element is any unit of data defined for processing, for example, a key indicator (the number of participants), but also any demographic categories (sex, age, mother tongue, etc.) or project designation (site, cohort, etc.) by which it might be analyzed.
Data quality assessment (DQA)	A process that provides an in-depth appraisal of data quality and M&E systems in selected projects. Ideally, the assessment is led by an independent third party. (Adapted from The Global Fund 2014)
Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP)	The document that will guide managers in project implementation that includes detailed timelines for the implementation of project activities and other information, such as the person(s) responsible for an activity, to support project management. (Adapted from CRS 2015)

Term	Definition
Evaluation	A periodic, systematic assessment of a project's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability on a defined population. Evaluation draws from data collected via the monitoring system, as well as any other more detailed data (e.g., from additional surveys or studies) gathered to understand specific aspects of the project in greater depth. The term in the CRS context often implies the engagement of an external third party to act as team leader. (CRS 2007)
Feedback	The information sent to an entity (individual or group) about its prior behavior so that the entity may adjust its current and future behavior to achieve the desired result (CHS 2019).
Feedback categories	Categories of feedback reflect the nature and content of the feedback received, whether sensitive or programmatic, and are used to determine the appropriate steps for processing, using and responding to the feedback received.
Feedback and complaints channel	The specific communications tool to be used to collect feedback and complaints from various stakeholders, for example, a hotline or comment box, or face-to-face.
Feedback, complaints and response mechanism (FCRM)	The system through which a project or response collects, documents, responds to and learns from stakeholder feedback and complaints.
ICT4D	The application of information and communication technologies for development. Similarly, ICT4E and ICT4MEAL are the application of such technologies in emergency settings or for the specific purpose of supporting MEAL activities, respectively. (Adapted from Heeks 2009)
Indicator	A quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. (OECD 2002)
Indicator analysis	A process that assesses the indicators that are expected to be collected on a digital platform. It determines what digital forms will be used to collect data for each indicator. Digital forms are like paper forms in their purpose for data collection, but are designed to fit how the digital platform visualizes data entry fields.
Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT)	A simple, standardized way of presenting M&E project data; the IPTT is the table used to track, document, and display indicator performance data. Although individual donors may specify the formats they want projects to use, most tracking tables include a list of all official project performance indicators, baseline values and benchmarks of these indicators, and targets for each indicator. Representative data is included in the IPTT during the life of the project in order to calculate achievements against initial targets. (McMillan et al. 2008)

Term	Definition
Informed consent	At the point of data capture, participants should be informed (in a way that is clear and intelligible to them, regardless of literacy level, mother tongue, etc.) of the nature of the data being collected, with whom it will be shared, who is responsible for its secure use, what the potential risks and benefits of sharing data are, how they can withdraw from the program should they not wish their personal data to be used for the purposes described and be provided with the opportunity to question the data collector regarding the data collection process and the use of the data. Having thus been informed, those who have attained the legal age of majority who then agree to participate in data collection provide informed consent. (OCFT 2018)
Knowledge management	The planning, organizing, motivating and controlling of people, processes and systems in an organization to ensure that its knowledge-related assets are improved and effectively employed. These assets include knowledge in printed documents, stored electronically (e.g. CRS Global) employees' knowledge, team/community knowledge and knowledge embedded in organization's products, processes and relationships. (King 2009)
Learning	Project-level learning contributes to agency-level learning by determining how common strategies and agency good practices apply in different contexts and how their adaptation can address challenges and reflect local priorities, thus informing the refinement of agency strategies based on project-level evidence.
Learning event	The intentional use of monitoring or evaluation data to improve ongoing or future programming or to generate lessons learned. Reflection events are generally held with a variety of stakeholders and may range from short meetings to events lasting several days. (Adapted from CRS 2012)
Learning question	A key question based on unknowns in the theory of change, the answer to which will help make adjustments to programming to better achieve the goals set out for the project.
Light monitoring	The application of simple, qualitative monitoring tools with a small sample of participants and/or community members to check whether any problems exist, recognizing that any sign of a possible issue would trigger more in-depth monitoring, typically during routine site visits or other regularly scheduled project activities.
MEAL narrative	The text in the project proposal that describes planned MEAL activities.
MEAL operating manual	The centralized documentation (soft or hard copy) of key project MEAL documents ranging from MEAL design documents to final evaluations.

Term	Definition
MEAL plan	A document that builds upon a project's Proframe to detail in tabular format the key MEAL requirements for each indicator and assumption thereby enabling projects to collect comparable data over time. Within the MEAL plan, indicators are defined and summary information is provided for how data will be collected, analyzed and reported, and the respective allocation of responsibilities for each. The MEAL plan contributes to stronger performance management (*see* Performance Management Plan) and to better transparency and accountability within and outside of CRS.
MEAL system	The project's system of people, processes, structures and resources, that work together as an interconnecting whole to identify, generate, manage and analyze programmatic information that is communicated to specified audiences.
Monitoring	The systematic collection, analysis and documentation of information about progress towards achieving project objectives and changes in operational contexts in order to inform timely decision making and contribute to project accountability and learning.
Parental consent	As children and youth under the age of majority cannot legally consent to participate in data collection activities, and young children are generally not capable of understanding the process and risks of participating in data collection, data collectors may be required to ask parents for permission to allow children to participate in data collection. Using the same process as for adult respondents (*see* informed consent), parents can consent to their children's participation. However, it is not always necessary or appropriate to obtain parental consent. For example, data collection activities that occur in schools as part of the normal education process (testing, for example) do not require consent. It is also not appropriate to request parental consent when collecting data about activities in which the parents are responsible for or complicit in endangering their children, such as child labor. Additional external review at the country level by child protection experts may be more appropriate in those cases. (OCFT 2018)
Participant	A person who receives goods or services from a project or response with further definition provided by the donor or the CRS PSDI catalogue (see MPP 2.3).
Participant and Service Delivery Indicators	PSDI are the collection of prescribed information that the agency uses to monitor the scale of its interventions. The set of data include the names of participants, their age, gender, location, and the assistance they received. The data is then organized into a standardized system that can track and compare the services CRS is providing—not only from project to project but also from country program to country program. This system enables CRS to document who its projects are reaching, what services they are receiving, and how well the projects are reaching the people CRS intends to assist.

Term	Definition
Partner	An organization with which CRS is in a relationship based on mutual commitment and complementary purpose and values that is often supported by shared resources and which results in positive change and increased social justice. (CRS partnership documentation)
Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS)	A tool USAID uses to define performance indicators; it is key to ensuring indicator data quality and consistency. (USAID 2016)
Performance Management Plan (PMP)	A tool designed to assist in the setting up and managing of the process of monitoring, analyzing, evaluating, and reporting progress toward achieving a project's strategic objectives. In contrast to the MEAL plan (See MEAL plan), the PMP has a broader scope and, critically, would include explicit plans for both accountability and for learning. The PMP organizes performance management tasks and data over the life of a program. It is intended to be a living document that is developed, used, and updated by project staff. Specifically, it: i) Articulates plans for accountability and learning; ii) Supports institutional memory of definitions, assumptions, and decisions; iii) Alerts staff to imminent tasks, such as data collection, data quality assessments, and evaluation planning; and, iv) Provides documentation to help mitigate audit risks. (USAID 2010)
Performance monitoring	The systematic collection, analysis and documentation of information about progress toward achieving project objectives and changes in operational contexts in order to inform timely decision-making and contribute to project accountability and learning.
Personally identifiable information (PII)	Any data that directly or indirectly identifies or can be used on its own or with other information to identify, contact or locate a single person or identify an individual in context. For example, a name, national ID number, address, biometric information, date of birth. PII includes both direct and indirect identifiers, which, when taken together could allow for identification of an individual (such as street address, gender, age, name, bank account number).
Proframe	A logical planning tool for generating a project or program framework. The Proframe provides information about not only higher-level objectives, but also outputs and activities, the performance indicators, and the critical assumptions that have been made about project performance and plans. (Adapted from CRS 2015)
Response channel	The specific communications tool to be used to respond to various stakeholders who have submitted feedback or complaints, for example, direct email, a frequently asked questions sheet, or a community meeting.
Results framework	An easy-to-read diagram that gives a snapshot of the top levels of a project's objectives hierarchy (means-to-end relationship). It describes the change the project wants to bring about (strategic objectives), why this change is important (goal) and what needs to happen (intermediate results) for this change to occur.
Scope of work (SOW)	The division of work to be performed under a contract in the completion of an activity, typically broken into specific tasks with deadlines.

Term	Definition
Simple Measurement of Indicators for Learning and Evidence-based Reporting (SMILER+)	A comprehensive and practical approach to develop an M&E system first used in 2015; the objectives and their indicators are linked to a system to collect, analyze and report on data. The 2018-2019 update to SMILER+ includes new guidance on accountability, responsible data practices, and project learning. SMILER+ includes mechanisms to turn data into useful knowledge that supports adaptive management and accountability to the community and ensures that all staff have a clear understanding of the project and their roles in MEAL. A key part of the process of developing a SMILER+ MEAL system is typically the SMILER+ workshop. The primary output is the M&E operating manual for the project. (CRS 2010)
Stakeholders	Individuals, groups and institutions important to the success of the project. Project stakeholders have an interest in or an influence over a project. Interest involves what stakeholders might gain or lose in the project, their expectations or the resources they commit. Influence refers to power that stakeholders have over a project, such as decision-making authority. Stakeholders include those directly affected by the project (e.g. out-of-school girls, a collaborative partner, a government service) and those with power to influence the project (e.g. religious leader, national government institutions, CRS staff at all levels, and donors). (CRS 2015)
Standard indicator	An indicator that has already been created for use in a particular field, such as food security, peacebuilding, or water and sanitation. It is useful because it has been tested for quality and is globally recognized as a good measurement. Often, donors and organizations require the use of certain standard indicators so that they can compare data across projects and programs. (MEAL DPro)
Terms of reference (TOR)	A document that provides an important overview of what is expected in an evaluation. In an external evaluation, the TOR document provides the basis for a contractual arrangement between the commissioners of an evaluation and a consultant/evaluation team, and establishes the parameters against which the success of an evaluation assignment can be assessed. (Better Evaluation)
Theory of change (ToC)	An explicit statement that makes clear how and why you and others expect or assume that certain actions will produce desired changes in the environment where the project will be implemented. A robust ToC draws from research-based theories, conceptual frameworks and/or deep experience and lessons learned – and not from leaps of faith and assumptions. A ToC is a concise, explicit explanation of: "If we do X, then Y, because Z. (Funnel and Rogers 2011, Babbitt et al. 2013)

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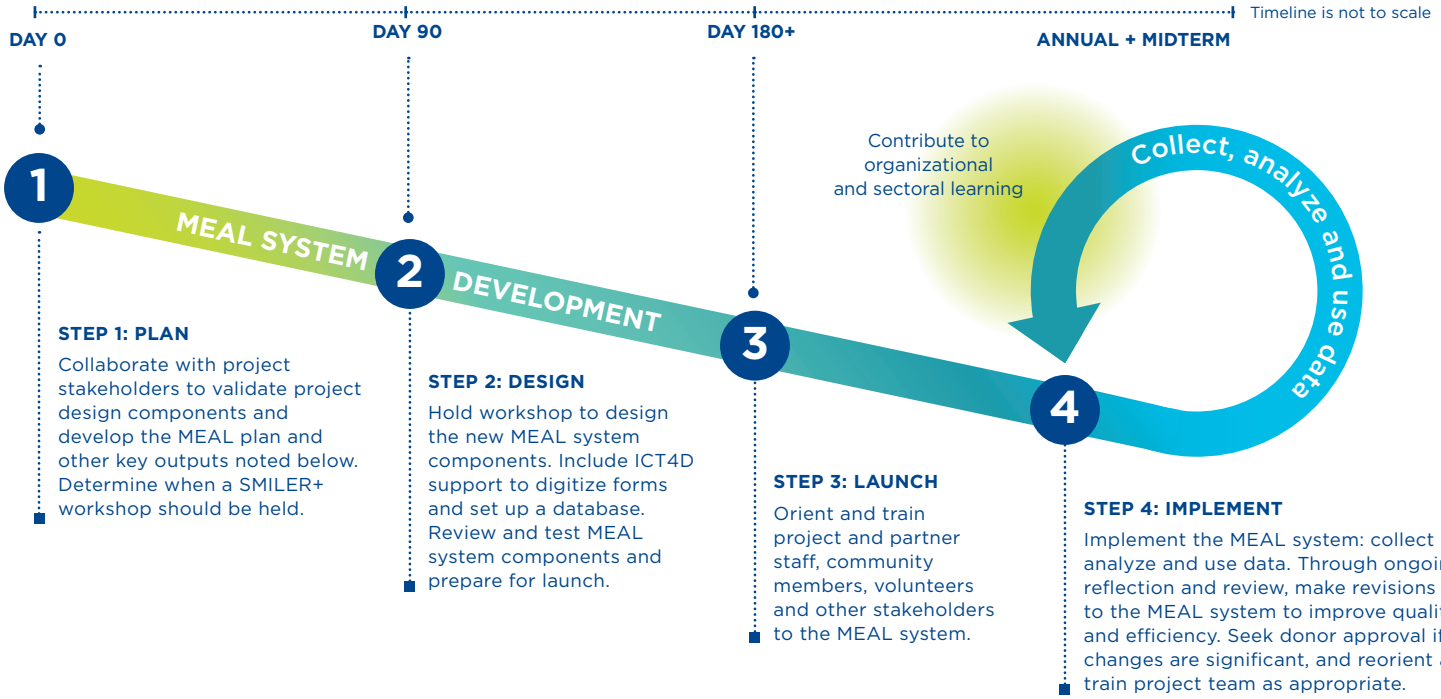
SMILER+ MEAL System Development Process Map

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

EXAMPLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT CYCLE

DESIGN PROJECT → SUBMIT PROPOSAL AND SECURE FUNDING → START UP PROJECT → IMPLEMENT PROJECT → CLOSE OUT PROJECT → IDENTIFY NEED AND OPPORTUNITY



STEP 1: PLAN

Collaborate with project stakeholders to validate project design components and develop the MEAL plan and other key outputs noted below. Determine when a SMILER+ workshop should be held.

STEP 2: DESIGN

Hold workshop to design the new MEAL system components. Include ICT4D support to digitize forms and set up a database. Review and test MEAL system components and prepare for launch.

STEP 3: LAUNCH

Orient and train project and partner staff, community members, volunteers and other stakeholders to the MEAL system.

STEP 4: IMPLEMENT

Implement the MEAL system: collect analyze and use data. Through ongoing reflection and review, make revisions to the MEAL system to improve quality and efficiency. Seek donor approval if changes are significant, and reorient and train project team as appropriate.

PROJECT DESIGN OUTPUTS

- Theory of change (ToC)
- Results framework (RF)
- Proframe (or logframe)
- MEAL narrative
- MEAL budget

STEP 1 OUTPUTS

- MEAL policy requirements checklists
- MEAL plan (PMP or PIRS)
- Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP)
- Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT)
- Partner Indicator Reporting Table
- MEAL system components checklist
- Country-level data compliance checklist
- Feedback, complaints and response mechanism planning worksheet
- Learning questions

STEP 2 OUTPUTS

- Stakeholder communication plan
- Data flow map(s)
- Feedback, complaints and response mechanism flowchart
- Data collection forms and instructions
- Learning plan
- Reporting formats
- Reporting due dates table

KEY RESOURCES FOR ALL STEPS

- Guide to the MEAL DPro
- CRS Responsible Data Value and Principles
- *SMILER+ Facilitation Manual*
- *ProPack I*
- *Guidance on monitoring and evaluation*
- MEAL Policies and Procedures
- Compass: CRS Project Management Standards

CRS
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES