HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OVERVIEW

As an Agency-wide learning agenda, the [USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda](#) comprises a collection of ten prioritized learning questions (see Table 1) developed by USAID staff and higher education stakeholders across technical sectors, led by USAID's Center for Education. The learning agenda is intended to guide the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of evidence to inform higher education programming strategic planning, activity design, and professional development. Its implementation and use are expected to result in better programming decisions and improved outcomes.

To address the questions posed by the Higher Education Learning Agenda, USAID's Center for Education will produce new evidence, review and organize existing data and research, and promote the understanding and use of conclusions and recommendations to the USAID Higher Education community and the broader higher education ecosystem of USAID partners and research institutions. To advance these goals, USAID anticipates supporting new and ongoing research, situational analyses, literature reviews, case studies, peer-to-peer learning, and program and impact evaluations. However, we know that USAID resources alone are not enough to address the effort needed to fully advance this learning agenda. Therefore, the Center for Education will engage both internal and external stakeholders in its implementation.

This implementation plan provides a blueprint for operationalizing the learning agenda to advance learning by leveraging USAID investments and partnering with implementing partners and the larger higher education research community. It serves to orient stakeholders and potential partners and assist in coordination. The plan focuses on the first two years of implementation and may be updated periodically.

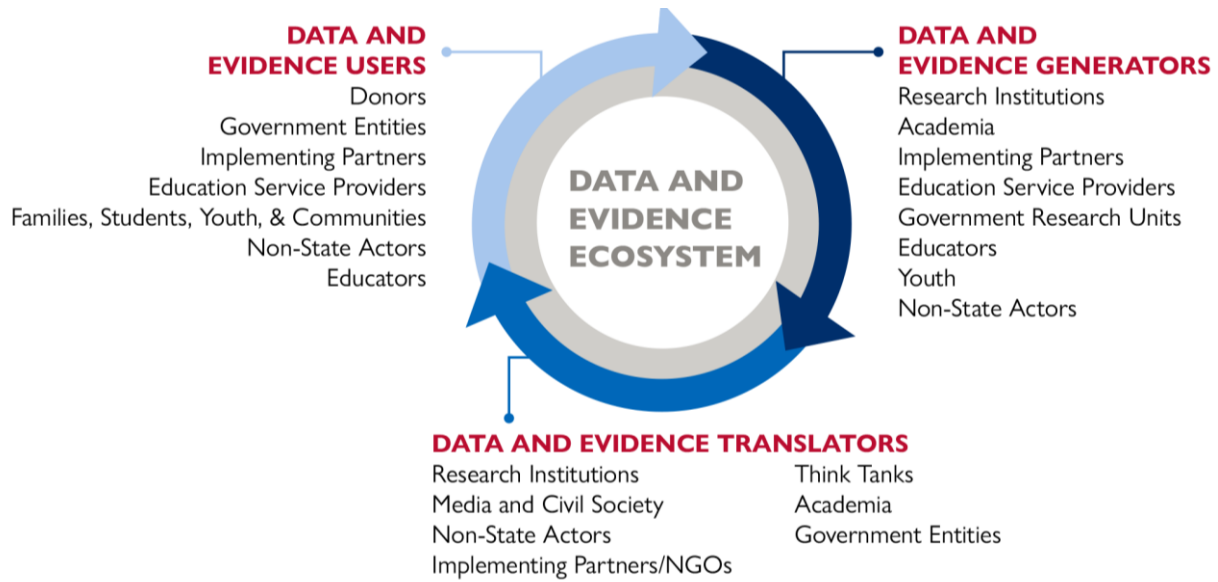TABLE 1: HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AGENDA QUESTIONS AND THEMES

NO.	QUESTION	THEME
1	How can higher education systems and institutions become more strategic in planning, implementing and monitoring core activities (e.g., enrollment, academic programs, research, and outreach)?	Management and Financing of Systems and Institutions
2	How can financing of higher education systems and institutions become more sustainable?	

NO.	QUESTION	THEME
3	How can the viability and effectiveness of online and other forms of distance education be improved?	Academic Programs
4	How can skills or competencies (e.g., technical and soft skills) for employability best be identified, analyzed, and incorporated into curricula, teaching, and learning?	
5	How can the practice and culture of teaching become more learner-centered?	
6	How can higher education systems and higher education institutions (HEIs) play a more active role in developing and strengthening national and regional innovation ecosystems?	Research and Innovation
7	How can HEIs collaborate more effectively with the private sector to enhance the relevance and quality of teaching and learning, and of research and innovation?	HEI Outreach and Engagement
8	How can USAID best partner with HEIs to make use of local knowledge and expertise?	
9	How can higher education access, retention, and completion rates be improved for underrepresented populations (e.g., women, indigenous and marginalized populations, and people with disabilities)?	Access, Equity, and Student Services
10	What institutional and behavioral changes are needed to improve gender awareness and gender equity?	

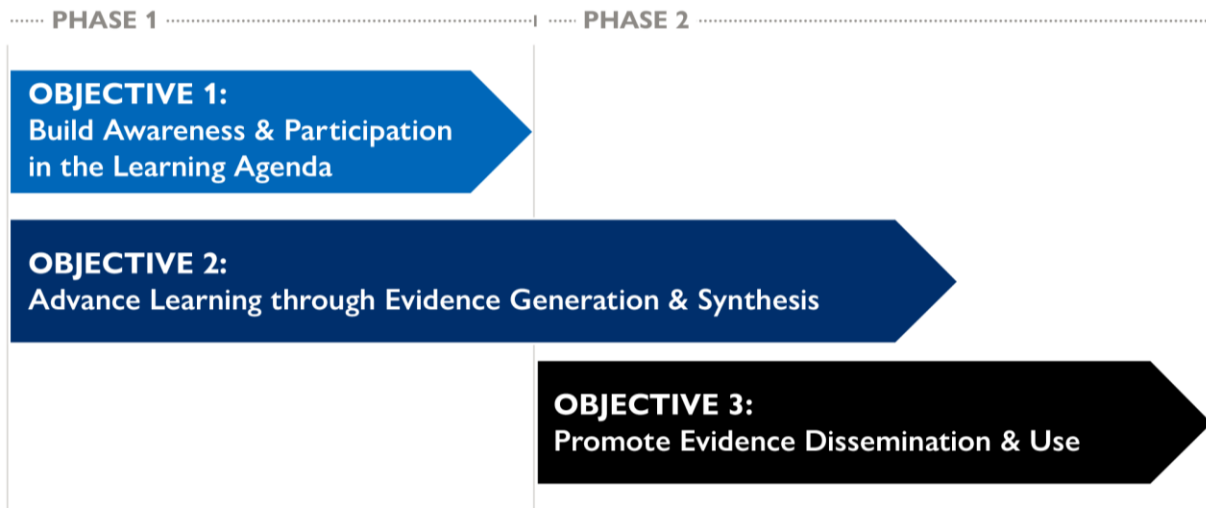**Implementing the Higher Education Learning Agenda**

Implementation of the USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda will require activating the data and evidence ecosystem (shown in Figure 1) to influence the practice of a wide range of evidence stakeholders. While limited resources prevent direct engagement with all evidence generators, translators, and users, the intention of this implementation plan is to engage key stakeholders who can influence broader change within the system. With coordination from USAID/Washington through the Center for Education, implementation will directly engage with USAID staff in Washington and Missions, USAID implementing partners, and the larger global higher education research community to find opportunities to collaborate and coordinate efforts. A wider range of evidence stakeholders will be reached through evidence dissemination and use efforts.

FIGURE 1: DATA AND EVIDENCE ECOSYSTEM

DATA AND EVIDENCE USERS
Donors
Government Entities
Implementing Partners
Education Service Providers
Families, Students, Youth, & Communities
Non-State Actors
Educators

DATA AND EVIDENCE GENERATORS
Research Institutions
Academia
Implementing Partners
Education Service Providers
Government Research Units
Educators
Youth
Non-State Actors

DATA AND EVIDENCE ECOSYSTEM

DATA AND EVIDENCE TRANSLATORS
Research Institutions   Think Tanks
Media and Civil Society   Academia
Non-State Actors   Government Entities
Implementing Partners/NGOs

The Center for Education will activate the evidence ecosystem through activities and partnerships in support of three objectives, which will occur over two overlapping phases (see Figure 2). During Phase 1, USAID/Washington will work to build awareness of the Higher Education Learning Agenda and begin to advance learning by working internally and with partners to design activities that generate and synthesize learning. Evidence generation and synthesis will continue in Phase 2, alongside additional efforts to promote evidence dissemination and use. These phases are not linear but circular, as future years of implementation may necessitate additional awareness building. Illustrative plans for each of these objectives are detailed below.

FIGURE 2: PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AGENDA

PHASE 1   PHASE 2

OBJECTIVE 1:
Build Awareness & Participation in the Learning Agenda

OBJECTIVE 2:
Advance Learning through Evidence Generation & Synthesis

OBJECTIVE 3:
Promote Evidence Dissemination & Use

Objective 1: Build Awareness of the USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda

The Center for Education will build awareness of the USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda with both internal and external stakeholders through a variety of methods. This will include:

- Raising awareness of USAID staff and stakeholders, including the USAID Higher Education Working Group and USAID Education Sector Council.

- Development of standardized language for inclusion in notices of funding opportunities.

- Professional development for USAID education sector staff, including modules or information on advancing learning agendas.

- Outreach external to USAID through email lists, including the [Higher Education Champions list](#), maintained by USAID.

- Outreach to HEIs with Global Communities of Practice, such as faculty and graduate student researchers interested in international research.

- Outreach to consortia and higher education associations.

Objective 2: Advance Learning through Evidence Generation, Synthesis and Translation

To advance learning and build the knowledge base for specific learning questions, the Center for Education will promote new evidence generation and synthesis through primary and secondary research by working with internal mechanisms and collaborative partnerships with Missions, researchers, and implementing partners. Internally, the Center for Education is advancing learning by:

- Supporting primary research for learning agenda questions through the Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE) cooperative agreement.

- Developing summaries of evidence for learning agenda questions through the Data and Evidence for Education Programs (DEEP) contract.

- Recruiting Virtual Federal Service Interns for the 2021-–2022 Academic Year to support additional research efforts.

The Center for Education is also looking to partner with others on evidence generation. Missions can build research and evaluations into higher education activity design, in support of both the Agency-wide learning agenda and Mission learning questions. Leveraging new and existing Communities of Practices (CoPs)— such as those under Higher Education for Engagement and Transformation (HEET, launching under the Youth Power 2 Learning and Evaluation award) and an envisioned CoP under the Leading Through Learning Global Platform (LTLGP)—can foster additional collaborations. Researchers and implementing partners are strongly encouraged to work with USAID to co-design research in support of the learning agenda; some specific requests and calls for information and research are anticipated, but open enquiries are also welcome.

Objective 3: Promote Dissemination and Use

For the Higher Education Learning Agenda to be effective and result in both advancing the evidence base for higher education programming and improving practice, evidence must be widely understood and applied. To accomplish this goal, the Center for Education will promote the use of evidence generated and synthesized under this learning agenda by first disseminating findings through online channels and learning events to internal and external stakeholders. Outreach will include existing online groups and networks, including the USAID Higher Education Working Group, USAID Education Sector Council, and Higher Education Champions List, as well as new and established COPs. Additional networks, platforms, and dissemination channels will be engaged, especially those reaching research institutions and implementing partners. We anticipate holding at least one learning summit to share partner knowledge and accelerate progress and learning across stakeholders.

Use and application of knowledge will be encouraged through USAID programming. Missions and implementing partners will be encouraged to use findings in activity design and to include research and learning that contributes to advancing the Higher Education Learning Agenda. The Center for Education will also provide targeted technical assistance to missions and OUs in support of this objective. Progress will be assessed through regular pause and reflect sessions, annual reviews, and periodic updates to the Evidence Review.

PARTNER WITH US
If you are interested in exploring research and learning synergies and partnerships that contribute to building the global evidence base, please consider partnering with USAID to advance the Higher Education Learning Agenda. More information is available through stakeholder-specific fact sheets that detail opportunities for partnerships:

Fact Sheet for USAID Missions and Operating Units

Fact Sheet for Implementing Partners

Fact Sheet for Researchers and Research Institutions

CONTACT us at helearning@usaid.gov. We want to know what you are doing, support you in doing it better, and develop collaborative partnerships to advance mutual goals and learning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
To learn more about the USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda, please see the recent Evidence Review, Evidence Gap Map, and Learning Agenda Summary and Recommendations Brief on the EducationLinks website.