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# Incorporating Principles of UDL into Education Activities Guidance Note

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**Overview.** This Guidance Note aims to enable Missions and implementing partners (IPs) to concretely articulate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concepts within an education activity by focusing on how to incorporate the three principles of UDL: engagement, representation, and action and expression. This guidance is organized by common U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) education activity components, referred to as entry points: 1) supportive policies, 2) local partnerships, 3) professional development for instructional leaders, 4) teaching and learning materials, and 5) summative and formative assessment. For each entry point, there is a description of what it is, why it is important, and how Missions and IPs can incorporate UDL, with examples and guiding questions to help plan the integration of UDL into education activities. Guidance on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) applied to UDL are also included.

## I. Introduction

USAID envisions a world in which all children and youth have access to quality and inclusive education. Both the USAID Education Policy and the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education emphasize equity and inclusion for the most marginalized learners in accessing education and achieving improved learning outcomes. Inclusive education can be a driver of inclusive development outcomes by giving all learners the opportunity to develop the skills they need to thrive as contributing members of their societies.

**Inclusive education.** Having one system of education for all learners, at all levels (early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-secondary), with the provision of supports to meet the individual needs of learners. Inclusive education focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance, and achievement of all learners, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized.<sup>1</sup>

As part of making that vision a reality, USAID has committed to incorporating the principles of UDL for all learners in all new USAID education programs by 2026.<sup>2</sup> Incorporating UDL principles has the potential to create more inclusive learning environments and instruction in all USAID education activities, including basic education (i.e., early childhood, pre-primary, primary, and secondary), higher education, non-formal education, and youth workforce development (i.e., internships and technical and vocational education and training). USAID's Center for Education recognizes that Missions and IPs need guidance to understand and apply UDL principles in their context.

This Guidance Note includes six sections. Section 1 introduces USAID's commitment to UDL. Section 2 defines UDL and its key concepts. Section 3 articulates four considerations for the practical application of UDL to USAID education activities. Section 4 explains the entry points for incorporating UDL into USAID contexts by describing what each one is, why it is important, and providing examples and guiding questions to help Missions and IPs plan how to integrate UDL into education activities. Section 5 discusses applying M&E and CLA to UDL. Section 6 summarizes the key takeaways.

## II. Understanding UDL

[UDL is not a packaged intervention](#) like Teaching at the Right Level. Instead, UDL is a research-based framework that captures how people learn<sup>3</sup> and enables the design of more inclusive, accessible, and higher-quality education environments. It provides opportunities for all learners by proactively and intentionally removing barriers to learning environments and instruction for all learners in any subject at any level of the education system.

UDL promotes inclusive education because it provides guidance on designing more inclusive education environments. Although UDL is often associated with learners with disabilities and used to support marginalized populations, it intends to reduce barriers for all learners in all learning settings. Thus, learner variability is critical to the understanding and application of UDL. There is no average learner at whom to target instruction. Rather, each learner is unique in terms of their strengths, abilities, learning needs, interests, preferences, identity, and background.

The UDL framework as presented in the [CAST UDL Guidelines](#)—organized around the three UDL principles of engagement, representation, and action and expression—offer a starting point for applying the framework.

**Engagement.** This principle addresses the “why” of learning. Learners vary in the ways they are motivated to learn and engage. To remove barriers related to engagement, instructional leaders ask themselves how an activity sparks learners’ excitement and curiosity for learning. They can do this by:

- Providing choices that connect with different learners’ interests and increase the relevance and value of the material.
- Using supportive feedback to help learners sustain effort and persistence.
- Facilitating strategies to help learners manage their own motivation and self-regulation.

**Representation.** This principle addresses the “what” of learning. Learners vary in the ways they best perceive and understand information. To remove barriers related to representation, instructional leaders ask themselves how learners can interact with the content using multiple senses (e.g., auditory, visual). They can do this by:

- Providing options for how learners consume information and content, such as modifying the display of text.
- Explaining the meaning of new language, terms, or symbols.
- Supplying background knowledge to foster the comprehension of concepts and highlighting patterns.

**Action and Expression.** This principle addresses the “how” of learning. Learners vary in how they best show up in the learning environment and express their knowledge. To remove barriers related to action and expression, instructional leaders ask themselves whether learners have multiple ways to construct and communicate ideas. They can do this by:

- Providing options for physical action, including the use of assistive technology.
- Varying the ways to participate, communicate, and demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Supporting learners in monitoring their own progress and creating plans to build on knowledge.

The framework is not an exhaustive checklist. Rather, the framework is a tool for considering potential barriers to learning before delivering an activity. Being proactive in identifying these barriers and intentionally designing activities to address them will result in more accessible and effective learning experiences.

### III. The Case for Applying UDL in USAID Programming

While UDL may seem like a new concept, many USAID education activities have already incorporated UDL principles into their programming. The four adapted key considerations listed below encompass the practical case for applying UDL in USAID education activities. These considerations revolve around using UDL for all learners, applying UDL at any level or to any subject, fostering continuous improvement, and building on existing efforts.<sup>4</sup>

**UDL is for all learners.** UDL benefits all learners, including marginalized populations, such as girls, gender minorities, learners with disabilities, learners accessing education in crisis or conflict, learners residing in remote or rural areas, and learners who represent religious or ethnic minorities. The principles of UDL are applicable to any learning environment, including traditional classrooms, formal and non-formal learning environments, applied learning contexts (e.g., work-based learning, internships), remote learning, professional development, higher education settings, and youth workforce development programs.

**Improving Social and Emotional Outcomes in Syria through UDL.** Alaa Zaza, the Programme Lead for the Manahel-Syria Education Programme, discusses the impact of UDL on Syrian education amid a decade-long conflict in [episode 62](#) of the podcast *UDL in 15 Minutes*. He describes the challenges teachers and learners face, emphasizing the program's focus on inclusive and high-quality learning opportunities. The conversation explores the implementation of UDL principles, the scaffolding of support for teachers, and the integration of psychosocial and child protection interventions in addressing the complex needs of learners in crisis.

**UDL applies at any level or subject.** UDL has applicability to any USAID education activity teaching any subject or skill in basic education, higher education, or youth workforce development. While most USAID education activities using UDL have been basic education reading activities, activities in higher education and youth workforce development have started to incorporate these principles. The Agency has also committed to incorporating UDL principles within internal professional development design and implementation.

**UDL fosters continuous improvement.** UDL informs instructional leaders' approach to instruction and the design of their learning environments. In applying UDL, instructional leaders will continue to adapt their environment and instructional approaches to meet the changing needs of existing learners or the needs of new learners. Therefore, there is no specific end point for an activity to perfect UDL's design and use; rather, it is an ongoing monitoring and adaptation process.

**UDL builds on existing efforts.** An activity might already have interventions that align with UDL concepts, but were not intentionally designed as UDL. An activity can build on existing efforts to use UDL in the local context or within the education system.

**UDL in Action: Locally Produced Examples.** [Ten videos](#) created by USAID's Inclusive Primary Education Activity in Cambodia talk through classroom-based shifts educators can make to align their practices with UDL.

## IV. Entry Points for UDL in USAID Programming

To apply the principles of UDL to USAID programming, consider five entry points (see Exhibit 1): 1) supportive policies, 2) local partnerships, 3) professional development for instructional leaders, 4) teaching and learning materials, and 5) summative and formative assessment. The UDL principles are at the center of the diagram because the entry points are structured around integrating them into activities. There is overlap among the UDL principles. For example, providing learners with individual choice for engagement is reinforced by offering visual and auditory alternatives for presenting information. These alternatives bolster learners' use of tools and technologies (high- or low-tech) to compose and communicate what they know. The rest of this section provides more details, examples, and guiding questions for incorporating UDL into the entry points. The text for each entry point in Exhibit 1 is clickable and will navigate to the applicable content in Section 4.

**Exhibit 1. USAID UDL Entry Points**





## Supportive Policies

Supportive policies are instrumental in advancing inclusive education and ensuring that all learners have equitable access to high-quality education. This can take many forms, including activities focused on developing inclusive education policies and analyzing the curriculum for incorporation of UDL principles.

**Promoting Inclusive Education Policies.** Inclusive education or youth policies developed by education ministries or other entities (e.g., ministries of youth/sports, ministries of labor, chambers of commerce, employer associations) are often vehicles for discussing the use of UDL and encouraging its wider adoption. Missions and IPs are encouraged to engage with central and subnational government units and other education actors to analyze the policy environment and identify areas to strengthen the enabling environment for schools and educators to implement UDL.

**Developing Inclusive Education Policies.** What does encouraging supportive policies look like in practice? Here are some examples from a USAID education activity and some national government initiatives.

- In Tajikistan, USAID's Learn Together Activity participated in an inclusive education working group that developed an inclusive education concept note with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education. The drafting of the note was an opportunity for the project to present on UDL and its importance at working group meetings, and to provide formal feedback suggesting UDL as an effective approach to inclusive education and implementation.
- The Government of Ghana adopted a national inclusive education policy that referenced UDL, which paved the way for a pilot project to demonstrate how UDL supports all learners, both those with and without disabilities, and the integration of UDL into preservice training for instructors.<sup>5</sup>

**Creating UDL-Aligned Curricula.** Aligning curricula with the UDL principles promotes inclusive education by meeting the needs of learners with diverse backgrounds and experiences. A UDL-aligned curriculum promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, self-regulation, and social and emotional skills to prepare learners for real world challenges. Missions and IPs are encouraged to consider whether curricula reflect the principles of UDL by including multiple means of representation (e.g., varied content formats, flexible learning resources), engagement (e.g., varied learning activities, options for skill development), and action and expression (e.g., diverse assessment methods, flexible modes of expression) in its design. UDL-aligned curricula include opportunities for collaborative learning, foster an inclusive culture where differences are celebrated, and recognize the importance of personalized learning. It is also important to consider whether curricula outline clear learning objectives and expectations and promote flexible instructional strategies that allow instructors to adapt their methods to address learners' individual needs.

**Promoting UDL-Aligned Curricula.** In Morocco, USAID’s Capacity Building and Curriculum Review Activity partnered with the Ministry of Education and its Curriculum Directorate to review the national curriculum for primary grades. Using a UDL rubric with 18 criteria organized by the UDL principles, the review examined teaching and learning materials, instructional activities, learning activities, teachers’ guides, training for instructors, and assessments.<sup>6</sup> It involved Ministry of Education staff dedicated to inclusive education and, once the work was complete, the group recommended steps Morocco could take to align its curriculum with UDL.

**Planning to Encourage Supportive Policies.** How can Missions and IPs encourage supportive policies in your context? Consider these guiding questions to determine the next steps. The UDL Guiding Questions present a tool format that you can use to engage in a discussion with your team and record your ideas and action items.

### Supportive Policies Guiding Questions

1. What is the current status of inclusive education policies and guidelines in the target region or country?
  - a. Are there existing policies that can be leveraged to support the incorporation of UDL?
  - b. Is there a need to advocate for new policies?
2. Who are the key stakeholders responsible for policy development and implementation, and how can you engage with them?
3. What strategies can be used to build awareness of and support for UDL among policymakers, education officials, and relevant government agencies?
4. What cultural context must be considered for the region or country?



### Local Partnerships

Building local partnerships is critical to enhancing understanding of UDL within the local context and promoting the sustainability of its design and use. Missions and IPs are encouraged to develop partnerships with national and local government units, civil society organizations (particularly those run by and for marginalized groups, including organizations of persons with disabilities and Indigenous-led organizations), and local IPs to support the incorporation of UDL into programming and the education system. Local partners have established community networks that they can leverage to engage parents, caregivers, employers, and other community members in supporting UDL and inclusive education initiatives. Missions and IPs can build strong partnerships by closely collaborating on technical activities, using strategies to intentionally foster working relationships, and promoting awareness of inclusive education.

**Collaborating on Technical Activities.** Missions and IPs can cultivate buy-in, promote sustainability, and create higher-quality, more effective deliverables by engaging with partners on technical activities. Collaboration brings varied skills, resources, and experiences together to apply the principles of UDL to meet diverse learning needs within the local education context. It also ensures that local expertise, insights, and cultural knowledge are incorporated into the design and implementation of UDL. In addition, feedback from contributors ensures that activities are responsive to the needs of the community. By using a collaborative approach, Missions and IPs can foster a shared sense of ownership and commitment to integrating UDL into the education framework.

**Working Together on Technical Activities.** What does collaboration on technical activities look like in practice? Here are examples from USAID education activities in Mali and Nepal, where IPs and ministries of the partner governments worked together on technical activities.

- In Mali, *Digital Books for Our Children* worked closely with the Ministry of Education and the Malian Language Institute on the selection, adaptation, translation, and creation of digital books for learners who are deaf. The activity submitted print books in French, and then the Ministry of Education reviewed and approved them or requested changes to adapt the content (i.e., text and images) for Mali. After approval, the Malian Institute of Language translated the texts into Soninké and Mamara. The activity used the translations to produce digital books that are accessible to deaf learners.
- In Nepal, Project LEARN embedded staff in the Center for Education and Human Resource Development within the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology. The embedded staff and their government colleagues jointly created teacher training on inclusive education and applying UDL in the classroom, as well as a range of teaching and learning materials to support UDL. The embedded staff were also able to enlist support for policy changes and advocate for the required approvals of training and materials.

**Fostering Working Relationships.** In addition to collaborating with partners on technical activities, building and strengthening working relationships with other stakeholder groups is critical to promoting widespread understanding and adoption of UDL. Missions and IPs are encouraged to establish open lines of communication and collaboration among stakeholders, including instructors, administrators, community leaders, families and caregivers, and other relevant partners. By intentionally creating spaces for regular communication and knowledge-sharing, Missions, IPs, and stakeholders can develop a common understanding of the UDL principles and their potential impact on the educational landscape of the country or region. Establishing communication mechanisms also allows for ongoing feedback and reflection, which promotes responsiveness to community needs and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. Investing in capacity-building opportunities that empower stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed to integrate UDL principles into education policies and practices can further strengthen collaboration.



**Strengthening Relationships in Malawi.** USAID's Reading for All Malawi project strengthened professional relationships across the directorates of the Ministry of Education to improve understanding of how inclusive education and UDL were cross-cutting and relevant to the work of the whole Ministry. This meant advising the Inclusive Education Directorate on training other directorates on inclusive education and disability concepts and practices, so they could be incorporated into their work. The activity included all the directorates in the training and meetings on inclusive education and UDL to ensure a shared understanding of how to improve practices across the Ministry.

**Building Awareness.** To strengthen inclusive education practices and integrate UDL principles into local education systems, it is imperative to address potential stigmas and negative attitudes toward marginalized populations. Conducting outreach to communities, instructors, employers, policymakers, and other key stakeholders can help dispel misconceptions and build buy-in. Engaging local partners in this process can increase awareness and garner support from the community. Promoting awareness of the value of inclusive education and how UDL can benefit all learners will help create a supportive environment.

**The Importance of Awareness and Visibility.** USAID's Middle East and North Africa Disability Inclusive Education Study reviewed national laws and policies for inclusive education.<sup>7</sup> Nearly all the study respondents said building awareness of persons with disabilities was necessary. The study identified several lessons learned and explored implications for designing and supporting related initiatives, such as public awareness campaigns about the importance of disability inclusive education, initiatives to improve awareness at the line ministries' management level and the school level, and initiatives to increase the involvement and visibility of persons with disabilities within the public and private sector.

**Planning to Build Local Partnerships.** How can you build local partnerships in your context? Consider these guiding questions to determine the next steps. The UDL Guiding Questions present a tool format that you can use to engage in a discussion with your team and record your ideas and action items.

## Local Partnerships Guiding Questions

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1. Are there any potential local partners or organizations with expertise in UDL or inclusive education practices? Who are they?
  - a. What common goals can you identify to foster collaboration with local partners?
2. What resources, expertise, or best practices can local partners contribute that would support UDL incorporation?
3. What strategies can be used to communicate and collaborate with local partners in a way that will build strong, respectful relationships?



### Professional Development for Instructional Leaders

Providing professional development builds the capacity of instructional leaders to intentionally design activities that use the principles of UDL to remove barriers to learning. Administrators and instructional leaders can play a unique and important role in fostering positive attitudes that encourage instructors to implement inclusive teaching practices. Professional development, including preservice and in-service training and professional coaching, can equip instructional leaders with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to effectively incorporate the UDL principles in their work. Professional development should model UDL so that instructional leaders not only learn the key concepts but also experience UDL firsthand to increase their understanding and appreciation of how it can create engaging and accessible learning environments.

#### PRESERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Inclusive education and the principles of UDL should be included in both preservice training for new instructional leaders and in-service training for experienced instructional leaders to ensure a comprehensive and continuous learning approach.

#### Provide Trainings On UDL

Preservice and in-service training for instructional leaders is a critical entry point for UDL in USAID programming. Preservice training can take place in teacher training colleges or alternative training programs for other instructional leaders. In-service training can also be offered as part of professional development to current instructional leaders. It is important that training on UDL be offered to all instructional leaders, rather than only offered to those studying special education or focusing on learners with disabilities. In addition to the principles, there are concepts for accessible and inclusive learning environments embedded within the framework that are important for instructional leaders to understand: learner variability, access, flexibility, lesson goal, choice, and rigor.<sup>8,9</sup> The [UDL Tapestry](#) defines these concepts.

Preservice and in-service training should also cover Universal Design for Assessment (UDA) for summative and formative assessments. Please see the [Summative and Formative Assessments](#) section for more information about UDA.

**UDL in Action: STEAM Centers across Algeria.** Yacine Hakmi and Ashraf Meguellati discuss preservice training on applying UDL through World Learning’s STEAM Centers in Algeria in [episode 66](#) of the podcast *UDL in 15 Minutes*. World Learning’s STEAM Centers aim to strengthen teachers’ abilities to apply the UDL Guidelines and create inclusive classrooms for learners of all abilities and backgrounds. Since 2016, some 450 graduates from across Algeria have participated in a six-day, hands-on training followed by an average of 35 hours of supervised practicums. The practicum experience can happen in one of the nine partner STEAM Hubs across the country, with teacher trainees applying UDL strategies to plan and lead STEAM education workshops with learners ages 6 through 28 under the supervision of experienced, UDL-trained mentors.

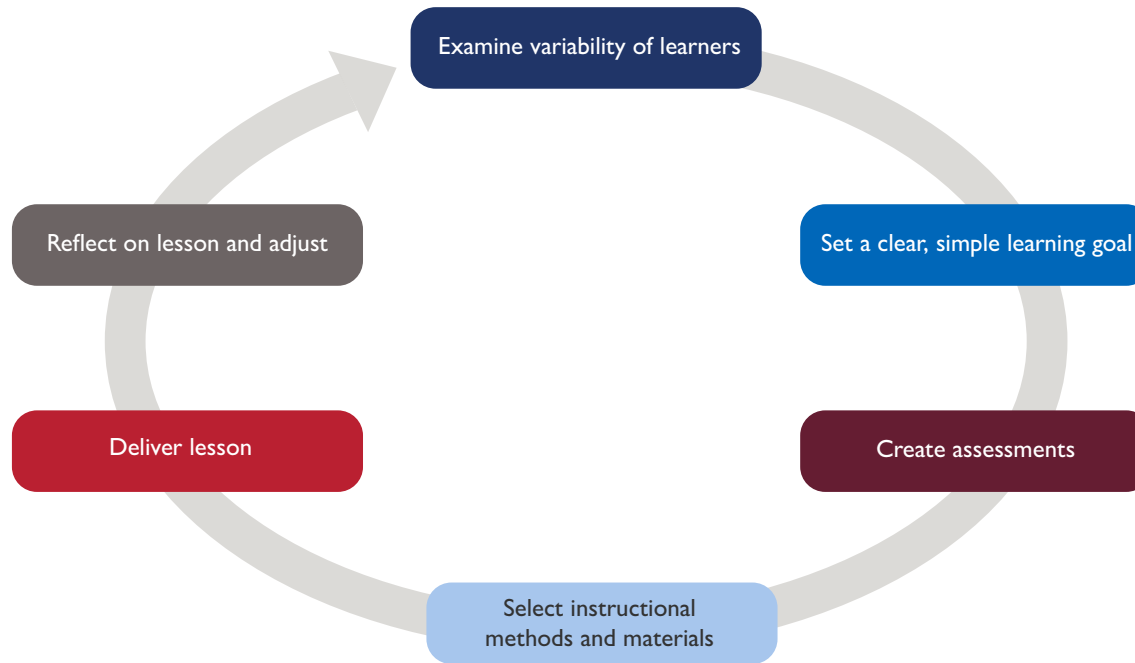
Training participants are largely preservice teachers pursuing graduate study in scientific fields. The predominant motivation for joining the course is to contribute to modernizing Algerian classrooms. Traditional Algerian teaching methods typically favor rote learning of theory, with instruction conducted in classical Arabic or French—neither of which is the native language of most learners. This classical approach creates enduring barriers to learner engagement and participation in learning. Graduates of the UDL teacher training in Algeria are able to create hands-on learning opportunities that remove the language barrier and feature a high rate of learner engagement as a core feature of the learning process.

### **Apply UDL Principles to USAID-Supported Trainings**

A UDL training for instructional leaders is an important opportunity to model UDL in action. When providing UDL-focused professional development, it is important to incorporate the UDL principles to make learning relevant, meaningful, and effective for the instructional leaders themselves. Ensure that the training design includes plans for generating and maintaining instructional leaders’ interest, providing information in different media, and offering options to demonstrate learning. Experiencing UDL as a learner prepares instructional leaders to plan for its use in their own instructional practices. The core process of implementing the UDL principles when designing professional development training is the same that could be used by instructors of children and youth in other education settings.

The UDL Design Cycle in Exhibit 2 suggests a practical process for applying UDL in a learning environment or experience, including professional development trainings for instructional leaders.<sup>10,11</sup> At its most basic level, UDL entails intentional design. First, the instructional leader examines the variability of the learners. Next, the instructional leader sets a clear, simple learning goal, optimally with learner input. Within the articulation of the goal, the instructional leader reflects on the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the goal and identifies specific barriers to learning in the learning environment or instruction that are relevant to their learners. Then, the instructional leader creates assessments, selects instructional methods and materials, and delivers the lesson. During these three steps, the instructional leader uses the UDL framework to modify the learning environment or instruction to remove the identified barriers by providing options for how learners can engage, represent, and express content. In the final step, the instructional leader reflects on the lesson and adjusts it by continuing to remove barriers and provide options for learners.

## Exhibit 2. UDL Design Cycle



**Generating and Maintaining Interest.** To employ UDL in professional development, facilitators first communicate the purpose and criteria for success to the instructional leaders. The instructional leaders also articulate their goals for professional development, and the facilitators connect the learning to those goals and participants’ experiences to ensure it has relevance and value to them. Professional development programming should feature choices and allow active exploration of topics. It is important to create a learning environment where participants feel safe taking risks and making mistakes. Trainers can build trust by showing empathy and support and making personal connections with participants.

**Providing Information in Different Media.** Facilitators of professional development can present information in multiple ways, such as using slides with text, images, and/or videos. They could also use posters, handouts, guest presentations, audio recordings, or local materials. Instructional leaders can then choose how they want to consume the information. Facilitators can also provide an opportunity for instructional leaders to take on facilitation roles and become “learner experts.” Modeling flexibility and choices through both positive examples and instances that illustrate what UDL is not can be a powerful way to build instructors’ confidence in UDL implementation.

**Offering Options to Demonstrate Learning.** Facilitators of professional development can provide instructional leaders with varying methods to respond to questions and demonstrate their knowledge. This could take many forms, including giving a presentation to the group, demonstrating a lesson, performing a skit, creating an illustration or other visual product, revising an existing lesson plan to integrate UDL principles, or providing written or verbal answers to questions.

## PROFESSIONAL COACHING

Coaching supports instructional leaders to apply what they learn about UDL in training to their instruction and activities with learners through ongoing support and feedback. Coaching involves a partnership between the coach and the instructional leader: the coach observes the instructional leader teaching lessons, and then they both share their observations on the instruction. In most cases, coaching should not have a connection to job performance evaluations, but be focused on continuous improvement. The coach and instructional leader discuss how to improve learner outcomes through UDL principles. In the post-observation conversations, the coach should cite specific engagement examples from the lesson that highlight the instructional leader's successes as well as opportunities for growth. The coach should also ask the instructional leader how they prefer to receive feedback and what resource modalities are most useful.

**Interesting and Involving Learners.** During the observation, the coach looks for instances when the instructional leader uses the lesson or environment to cultivate learners' interest by providing choices, making content relevant to learners' experiences, and minimizing classroom distractions. The coach also looks for examples of how the lesson or learning environment sustains interest by providing scaffolding activities, presenting opportunities for learners to collaborate in pairs or groups, and offering clear feedback focused on the process of achieving the lesson goal. The coach watches whether the instructional leader sets achievable expectations for learners, offers them coping strategies, and guides them to assess their learning. During the post-observation conversation, the coach asks for the instructional leader's perspective on learner engagement. This starts the discussion on modeling best practices and helps the coach identify the instructional leader's proficiency with and understanding of engagement.

**Communicating Content and Building Comprehension.** The coach considers how the instructional leader presents the content of the lesson. This starts with the way the instructional leader facilitates learners' perception of information through opportunities to choose how written information is displayed with different colors, writing implements, fonts, and text size. It includes the use of pictures, videos, and physical objects to illustrate lesson content. The coach examines how the instructional leader provides support to interpret text, formulas, or symbols, and enables understanding across multiple languages. The coach reviews the lesson for examples of the instructional leader building learners' comprehension by referencing background knowledge; highlighting critical patterns, ideas, or relationships; giving learners rubrics or checklists to help process new information; offering opportunities for learners to make sense of new knowledge through categorizing and summarizing; and allowing learners to apply new knowledge to another context. During the post-observation conversation, the coach models representation by offering feedback through diverse modalities.

**Enabling Expression of Knowledge and Skills.** The coach focuses on how the instructional leader gives learners opportunities to demonstrate what they know. Initially, the coach looks for examples where learners can use alternatives to writing, such as low-tech (e.g., drawing, dancing, talking, storytelling, storyboards, and physical demonstration) and high-tech (e.g., tablet- or computer-based software using speech-to-text) assistive technology. The observation examines how the instructional leader enables learners to communicate information by giving them opportunities to practice and encouraging the use of pictures, drawings, items, and role-play to express knowledge. Finally, the coach reviews how the instructional leader promotes executive functions, such as when learners set appropriate goals, receive support in developing learning strategies, and assume monitoring of their learning. During the post-observation conversation, instructional leaders have opportunities to identify growth and improvements in their practices. Coaches can encourage instructional leaders to monitor their own progress toward their goals and express this in a variety of ways.

**Planning for Professional Development.** Ready to start planning UDL-focused professional development? Consider these guiding questions to determine the next steps. The UDL Guiding Questions present a tool format that you can use to engage in a discussion with your team and record your ideas and action items.

### Professional Development for Instructional Leaders Guiding Questions

1. What professional development opportunities do instructional leaders currently have?
2. How can you assess the readiness and specific needs of instructional leaders related to incorporating the UDL principles?
3. Once needs are identified, what training and support mechanisms can be provided to instructional leaders?
4. How can you generate and sustain instructional leaders' interest in incorporating the UDL principles?
5. How can you evaluate the effectiveness of professional development in building capacity to incorporate UDL?



### Teaching and Learning Materials

Teaching and learning materials (TLMs) are the physical or digital tools and resources that instructors use to facilitate the teaching and learning process in education activities. TLMs can vary widely based on the context, but may include lesson plans and curriculum guides, textbooks and workbooks, supplementary readers and storybooks, activity sheets, games, educational technology, pictures or videos, models or physical objects, and manipulatives. It is important to use a variety of TLMs appropriate for the context, content, and learners, and to have an appropriate number of TLMs based on class size, age, and learner needs. The intentional use of TLMs that offer learners choice promotes engagement, representation, and action and expression that are consistent with UDL. It also supports better learning. Accessible, relevant, and flexible TLMs can generate interest, promote understanding, and help learners demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For additional information, see the [Guidance for Promoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in Educational Materials](#).

**Generating Interest with Accessible TLMs.** The content of TLMs is important for capturing and sustaining learners' interest. Intentionally designing TLMs to incorporate the UDL principles will respect the diverse needs of learners by providing multiple means of representation, such as text, visuals, audio, and interactive elements. In addition, TLMs that resonate with learners' experiences and are culturally relevant are more accessible. When learners can relate what they are learning to their own lives, they are more likely to be engaged and invested, because they can see the applicability and significance. High-tech TLMs, such as digital storybooks, can enhance engagement, but there are many creative and effective low-tech options as well.

**Accessible and Relevant Low- and High-Tech TLMs.** How have TLMs incorporated the principle of engagement? Here are examples from USAID education activities in Liberia, Mali, and Tajikistan that developed high- and low-tech TLMs for learners.

- The Digital Stories for Our Children program in Mali developed digital books by selecting genres and storylines that were interesting to learners and ensuring that the text and images were appropriate for learners' age, culture, and language. The content reflected the learners' world and experiences. Stories targeted at deaf learners in Mali represented the deaf experience in family life.
- The Learn Together Activity in Tajikistan uses learning cards containing visuals and tasks that ask learners to complete projects at home. Encouraging learners to be creative promotes engagement.
- Transforming the Education System for Teachers and Students in Liberia creates low-tech TLMs using bottle caps for math and cardboard for letter cards.

**Promoting Understanding with Flexible TLMs.** TLMs gain value when they embrace flexibility to allow every learner to access the content being covered in ways that respect their unique learning needs and strengths. Flexible TLMs may incorporate audio, video, and text and have customizable features that allow learners to engage with the materials in various ways. For example, digital books may give learners the options to enlarge text, highlight words to get definitions, or play audio. This adaptability accommodates diverse learning needs and encourages learners to take ownership of their learning. Although high-tech TLMs provide many options for customization, low-tech TLMs are accessible and effective alternatives. Low-tech TLMs may include manipulatives (e.g., counting beads, geometric shapes, letter tiles), art supplies, science experiment kits that use household materials, flashcards, whiteboards or chalkboards, and board games or puzzles. Low-tech TLMs can also encourage creativity and engagement. For example, learners may be challenged to identify math manipulation tools for a counting activity that could include rocks, sticks, or other items accessible in their environment.

**Flexible Low- and High-Tech TLMs.** How have TLMs incorporated the principle of representation? Here are examples from USAID education activities in the Pacific and Tajikistan that created high- and low-tech TLMs with flexibility for learners' uses of the materials.

- The digital books Project TREE designed for deaf learners have a feature that removes the text so the learner can focus on the sign language within the book. This kind of feature demonstrates flexibility—the digital book changes formats based on learners' needs—and accessibility by communicating the story through text, sign language, audio, and video.
- In Tajikistan, the Learn Together Activity uses blocks to accessibly teach math concepts; the Activity also introduced the “magic string,” a woolen string with different letters threaded onto it, to teach blending letter sounds. These types of low-tech materials provide flexible, accessible, and affordable options.

**Demonstrating Knowledge and Skills with TLMs.** TLMs not only help learners acquire knowledge, but also offer them opportunities to practice their skills and demonstrate what they know. Demonstration is a powerful form of assessment because it involves learners actively engaging with TLMs to apply what they have learned. TLMs also allow for differentiated assessment, since learners can choose methods that align with their strengths. Learners may demonstrate their learning through a variety of high-tech (e.g., digital presentations, digital portfolios, educational apps) or low-tech (e.g., poster presentations, hands-on projects, storytelling or skits, debates or discussions) methods.

**Demonstrating Knowledge and Skills with Low- and High-Tech TLMs.** How have TLMs incorporated the principle of action and expression? Here are examples from USAID education activities in Mali and Nepal that had TLMs which supported learners to demonstrate what they learned.

- Digital video books produced in Mali by Digital Stories for Our Children had accessibility features for deaf learners and featured comprehension questions at the end of stories.
- In Nepal, Project LEARN employed a large cube called a “comprehension block” to ask learners to respond to questions verbally after reading or listening to stories. The block had a comprehension question on each face. It targeted comprehension because many learners struggled with this skill.

**Planning for Accessible, Relevant, and Flexible TLMs.** Consider these guiding questions to determine the next steps. The UDL Guiding Questions present a tool format that you can use to engage in a discussion with your team and record your ideas and action items.

### Teaching and Learning Materials Guiding Questions

1. What types of TLMs are currently being used in education activities in the target region or country?
2. How can you assess the alignment of existing TLMs with the UDL principles?
3. What strategies can be used to create TLMs that are flexible and promote accessibility for diverse learners, or adapt existing TLMs?
4. What resources are available to support creating or adapting TLMs?





## Summative and Formative Assessment

Assessments give instructors feedback to show how well learners understood what they were taught. Instructors incorporating UDL into their learning environment and instruction can use assessment feedback to alter their teaching and determine whether learners are mastering knowledge and skills. Summative and formative assessments are part of UDL. Summative assessment evaluates what content and skills a learner has learned related to a topic; it often assigns a score or grade in relation to a performance standard or benchmark. In contrast, formative assessment allows instructors and learners to track learning and enables the instructor to provide feedback based on the outcome of the assessment and modify their instruction. Formative assessment covers small portions of content, while summative assessment covers an entire unit, chapter, or grading period.

**Applying Universal Design for Assessment.** UDA removes barriers that are unrelated to the content to make assessments accessible for all learners. Examples of barriers in assessments include familiarity with words or concepts imbued with cultural meaning, and visual or sensory information like color, font, or text size.<sup>12</sup> Exhibit 3 describes UDA's seven elements.

### Exhibit 3. Elements of Universal Design for Assessment<sup>13,14, 15</sup>

Element	Description
Inclusive assessment population	Tests are designed to allow the participation of all learners in the target population regardless of disability status, language, gender, etc.
Precisely-defined constructs	Test constructs are clearly designed and remove irrelevant cognitive, sensory, emotional, and physical barriers
Accessible, non-biased items	Test items are free of content that may be biased against certain groups; all learners in the target population have equal probability of answering correctly
Amenable to accommodations	Test allows for accommodations without changing constructs
Simple, clear, and intuitive instructions and procedures	Test instructions and protocols are simple, clear, and easy to understand, regardless of learners' experience, knowledge, or language skills
Maximum readability and comprehensibility	Test uses plain language, well-constructed sentences, and contains minimal organizational complexity (e.g., limited sentence length, avoiding of unnecessary or difficult words)
Maximum legibility	Test items, instructions, tables, figures, and illustrations should be easy to decipher and interpret (e.g., large font, color contrast, sufficient spacing)

**Giving All Learners Options to Demonstrate Knowledge and Skills.** Universally designed summative and formative assessments offer learners options for responding (e.g., pen/paper, computer, assistive technology, video or audio recording). For timed assessments, learners receive accommodations such as extended time and breaks. Assessments also support learners in communicating information through devices or multiple media. In addition, formative assessments can promote learner choice and self-efficacy. Sharing the results of formative assessments with learners can foster a collaborative relationship between learners and instructors, and empower learners to identify their goals and areas for improvement. This can encourage learners to take an active role in their learning, creating a sense of ownership. Summative assessments satisfy the quality criteria of validity, reliability, fairness, authenticity, and flexibility.<sup>16</sup>

**Accessible and Flexible Assessment.** How can assessment accommodate learners to express what they know in different ways? Here is one example from a USAID education activity in Rwanda and another from RTI International that provide learners with options to express what they know outside of traditional assessment formats.

- The Rwanda Basic Education Board developed its Local Early Grade Reading Assessment (LEGRA) as a summative assessment to measure the reading skills of early primary learners. USAID's Tunoze Gusoma modified LEGRA for learners who are deaf, learners who are blind, and learners who are neurodivergent, so it could measure their reading skills. The modifications made the assessment accessible by allowing learners to choose how to respond to questions. The assessment became more flexible as its format and administration became responsive to learners' needs.
- RTI International uses its tablet-based application Tangerine Teach to conduct formative assessments that provide opportunities for learners to express what they know that go beyond multiple-choice questions. Tangerine Teach supports video for recording responses and pictures for capturing a learner's drawings. The application suggests new strategies that instructors can use for learners to practice skills they have not mastered. It makes formative assessment more accessible by supporting more ways to ask learners questions and capture examples of their responses. Tangerine Teach makes the formative assessment more flexible by diversifying the format and allowing learners to respond to questions in a way that is relevant to them.

**Planning for Accessible and Flexible Assessment.** How can you ensure that all learners have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills? Consider these guiding questions to determine the next steps. The UDL Guiding Questions present a tool format that you can use to engage in a discussion with your team and record your ideas and action items.

## Summative and Formative Assessment Guiding Questions

1. What are the current assessment practices in education activities and how do they align with the UDL principles?
2. What strategies can be used to create or adapt assessments to recognize learner variability and give all learners options to demonstrate their knowledge and skills?
3. How can you assess the impact of UDL-aligned assessments on learner outcomes and engagement?

## V. Monitoring, Evaluation, Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

While UDL is not a packaged intervention with a series of associated outputs and outcomes to measure, there are several measurement activities that can provide important information about a UDL-aligned activity. These activities include evaluating UDL outcomes, tracking and reporting on UDL-aligned indicators, collecting constituent feedback, using implementation research, and implementing CLA activities.

**UDL Outcomes.** Activities can monitor and evaluate UDL-aligned programming by examining outcomes for learners and instructional leaders. Recent research suggests a broad range of UDL outcomes for learners and instructional leaders (see box).<sup>17</sup> In particular, learner outcomes for agency, motivation, and participation/engagement are useful as proxies for measuring whether learners are becoming expert learners as described under UDL. Instructional leader outcomes include content area knowledge about UDL and pedagogical knowledge on how to incorporate learner variability into lesson design. Classroom practices concern the application of engagement, representation, and action and expression in lessons.

While the research suggests a range of learner and instructional leader outcomes related to behavior and learning, activities interested in measuring learning outcomes should measure relevant learning outcomes such as literacy, numeracy, social and emotional learning skills, soft skills, and higher education learning outcomes. Beyond learners' outcomes, measuring instructional leaders' outcomes is useful when an activity has a significant professional development component.

**UDL Outcomes for Learners.** Agency, motivation, participation/engagement, attendance, discipline referrals, learner assessments, promotion, retention, special education referrals

**UDL Outcomes for Instructional Leaders.** Content area knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, self-efficacy, classroom practices

**UDL-Aligned Indicators.** Activities should rely on standard foreign assistance indicators to the extent possible. Though [USAID’s standard foreign assistance indicators for education](#) and [positive youth development indicators](#) are not specific to UDL, they measure learning and educational outcomes for several groups of learners, which indicate if all learners are benefitting similarly from USAID programming. In particular, there are standard indicators applicable to accessible TLMs, learning outcomes, professional development, and strengthened local partners. Where standard indicators do not exist, activities may develop custom indicators, which can measure barriers to learning and learner’s perceptions. Exhibit 4 presents standard and custom indicators useful for activities integrating UDL principles; however, the indicators presented are not exhaustive—meaning activities could employ other standard and custom indicators for measuring UDL.

**Professional Development Indicators.** The Transforming the Education System for Teachers and Students in Liberia Activity monitors the number of preservice teacher training faculty who are trained on UDL as well as the number of learner-teachers who take the Activity’s UDL course during preservice teacher training. These indicators are aligned to standard indicator ES.1-6.

**Exhibit 4. UDL-Aligned Indicators for USAID Education Activities**

Category	Indicators(s) (custom indicators are illustrative)
Accessible TLMs	ES.1-10. Number of primary or secondary textbooks and other teaching and learning materials TLMs provided with USG assistance.
Barriers to learning	Custom. Percentage of teachers who demonstrate identifying a barrier to learning in their environment or instruction. Custom. Percentage of teachers who demonstrate removing a barrier to learning in their environment or instruction.
Learners’ perceptions	Custom. Percentage of learners receiving UDL-based instruction who report instructional leaders using a clear, relevant lesson goal. Custom. Percentage of learners receiving UDL-based instruction who report instructional leaders using flexible teaching methods and materials. Custom. Percentage of learners receiving UDL-based instruction who report instructional leaders using timely progress monitoring.
Learning outcomes	ES.1-1. Percentage of learners targeted for USG assistance who attain a minimum grade-level proficiency in reading skills. EG.6-13. Percentage of individuals with improved soft skills following participation in USG-assisted workforce development programs.

Category	Indicators(s) (custom indicators are illustrative)
Professional development	ES.1-6. Number of educators who complete professional development activities with USG assistance. ES.1-12. Number of education administrators and officials who complete professional development activities with USG assistance.
Strengthened local partners	ES.2-54. Number of USG-supported partnerships that address regional, national, and/or local development objectives through or with higher education institutions. CBLD-9. Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance.

Learners' perceptions of the learning environment and instruction are quantifiable through learner self-assessments that offer another valuable perspective on UDL. See Annex 3 for an example of a learner self-report tool for secondary-level learners.<sup>18</sup>

**Constituent Feedback.** The achievement of targets for indicators is not the only way to monitor and evaluate performance. Collecting feedback through focus groups, interviews, and open-ended survey questions from government officials, administrators, instructional leaders, and local partners provides information about UDL's implementation and its effect on schools and learners. For example, feedback from government officials and civil society organizations can provide insight into adapting how the activity fosters working relationships or collaborates on technical activities to build local partnerships. Also, feedback from instructional leaders could reveal views of the relevance and quality of professional development leading to changes that make the design and use of UDL more effective.

**Implementation Research.** [Implementation research](#) examines how and why an activity works or fails. It goes beyond M&E to investigate questions related to stakeholder perceptions, how the context affects implementation, and how to adapt the activity based on the way it interacts with stakeholders and context. Planning for implementation research occurs from the beginning of the activity. An activity integrating UDL principles might study the behaviors and perceptions of instructional leaders to understand how to encourage stronger adoption and use of professional development on the design and use of UDL.

**Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting.** [CLA](#) supports the adaptation of how an activity integrates UDL principles. Activities can use after-action reviews and team meetings for internal pause-and-reflect activities to understand outcomes, successes, and challenges. For example, an internal pause-and-reflect could indicate that TLMs need additional features to become flexible and accessible to learners. Hosting learning events and fostering communities of practice can gather inputs from UDL stakeholders, such as government officials, civil society organizations, and instructional leaders. These inputs can inform adjustments to implementation and give stakeholders a greater voice in the activity. For example, feedback from government officials could influence the types and content of capacity strengthening opportunities needed for integrating UDL. An activity can use what it learns from its M&E as well as pause-and-reflect sessions to adapt its incorporation of UDL principles. For example, an indicator could show that not enough learners think instructional leaders are using flexible materials and materials, so a pause-and-reflect session would identify ways for coaching to provide more support to instructional leaders on their design and use of UDL.

## VI. Conclusion

This Guidance Note attempts to provide Missions and IPs with an understanding of how to incorporate UDL into activity design and implementation. The CAST UDL Guidelines are the foundational reference for conceptualizing and applying UDL in a learning environment. At a high level, UDL is structured around the principles of engagement, representation, and action and expression. The Guidance Note introduces five entry points for Missions and IPs to incorporate UDL into USAID education activities:

- Supportive policies;
- Local partnerships;
- Professional development for instructional leaders;
- Teaching and learning materials; and
- Summative and formative assessment.

Within each entry point, there are suggested actions for the design and use of UDL for education activities. The information is supplemented by illustrative examples from USAID education activities that have already attempted to integrate UDL. Each entry point contains guiding questions that enable Missions and IPs to reflect on how they can reflect UDL within their activity.

Ultimately, the design and use of UDL principles in USAID's education activities holds great potential for creating more inclusive learning environments and promoting learning outcomes. UDL helps to remove barriers in the learning environment and instruction through choices that foster learners' engagement, representation, and expression. In doing so, USAID's commitment to integrating UDL principles in all new education programs by 2026 supports the Agency's greater policy principles of equitable and inclusive education for all.

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## VII. Annex: UDL Tools and Resources

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