



# Achieving the Balancing Act: BalanceD-MERL Framework

**American Evaluation Association Annual Conference**

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# TO DO: ADAPT as needed below

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## Acknowledgement

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## Disclaimer

*This study/ report/ audio/ visual/other information/ media product (specify) is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of [insert recipient/subgrantee name] and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*



# Every Day Struggles

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Organizations struggle with structuring and integrating design, monitoring, evaluation and research activities with strategic management processes that are meant to utilize evidence gathered for management decision-making and organizational learning.

- **Project tradeoffs:** Due to complex contexts, interventions and resource constraints.
- **D-MERL isolation:** D-MERL seen as simply data collection. Does not inform adaptive project management.
- **Shortcomings in organizational capability in D-MERL:** Organizational and program effectiveness depend on the capabilities of people and efficiency of their processes and systems.
- **Management and leadership commitment:** Compliance and financial management focus vs. systematic management approach and value placed on learning and development.
- **Impacts on:** Methodology processes and data utilization.



# Tensions

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Projects and teams wrestle with determining when and how to measure impact, choosing right methodological approaches or integrating D-MERL processes that fulfill the need for credibility, relevance, right-size, responsible engagement of stakeholders or the level of appropriate utilization.

- Why the tension?



- Funding
- Staffing and staff competencies
- Time constraints
- Limited collaboration across teams, projects, and organizational levels
- Insufficiencies at policy levels, determination of roles and responsibilities, and clear procedures in place



# Falling Short

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D-MERL efforts are frequently not suited to the specific needs and/or context of a project. As such, efforts are weak, lack application, do not lead to change, or are burdensome for the beneficiaries. When programs or organizations prioritize one aspect of D-MERL at the expense of others, the following can occur:

- Unsuitable program strategies with untested assumptions
- Insensitive or inadequate engagements with beneficiaries and primary intended users
- Mismatch between efforts and the specific needs of stakeholders
- Compromises in evidence quality and integrity
- Poor program management leading to inefficiencies



# A Bridge to Balance D-MERL

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Deliberate balanced integration across all aspects of D-MERL can enable better use of monitoring, evaluation, and research leading to a team's ability to rapidly learn and incorporate findings. This creates sustainable improvements in the program and helps alleviate unintended consequences.

The consortium seeks to help programs and teams improve their level of 'balance' across their D-MERL practices using 4 key principles:

- Relevant
- Responsible
- Right-sized
- Trustworthy



# The Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Innovations Program

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**What:** source, co-create, and co-design innovative MERL solutions on traditional approaches in complex environments

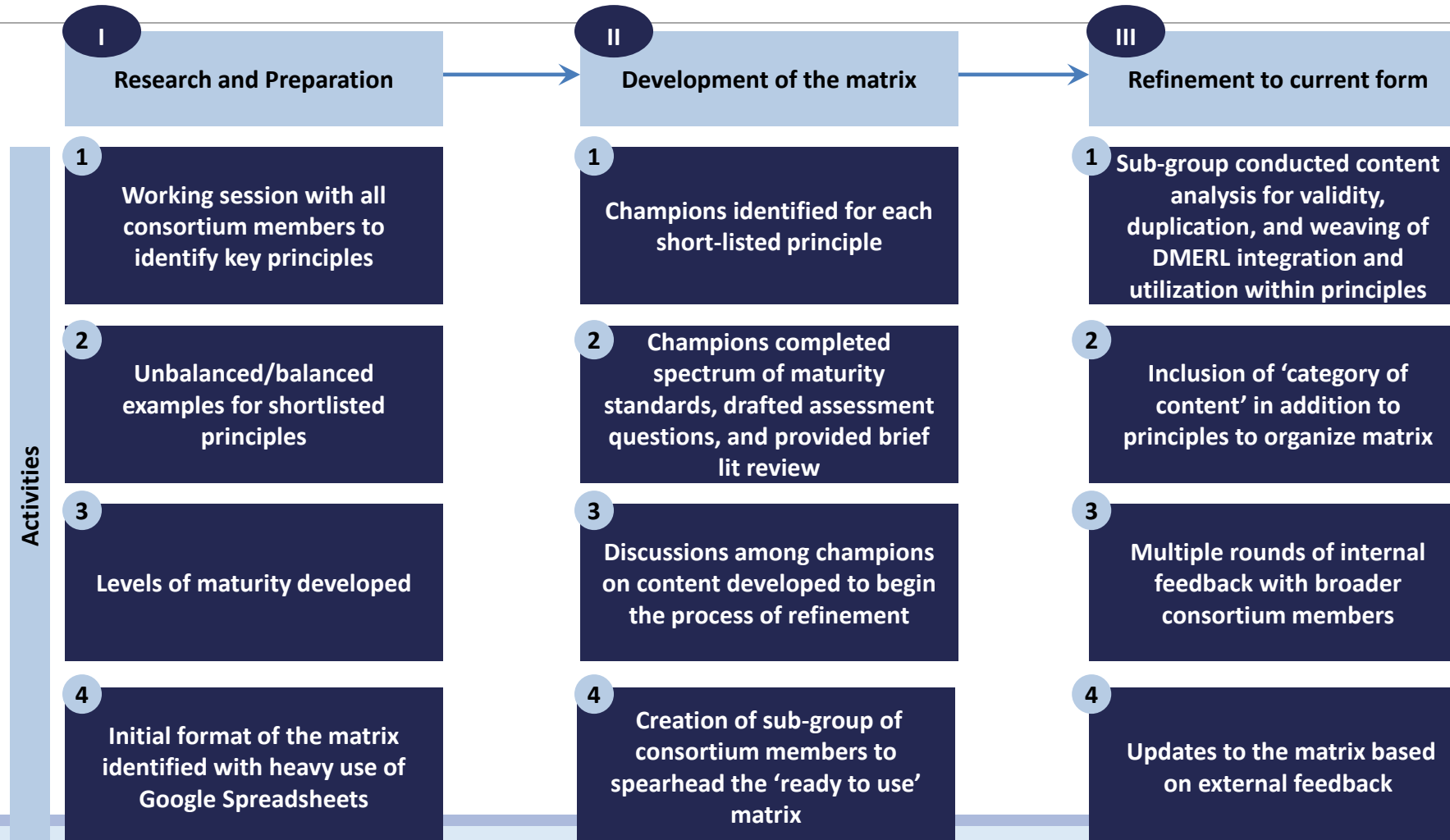
**Why:** address 3 challenges: 1) increase developmental impact, 2) use cutting edge approaches and 3) demonstrate value-add

**How:** 5 mechanisms with 17 organizations

- 5 consortium members on BalanceD-MERL
- Innovations tested through technical assistance with **STRONG** emphasis on learning
- “Piloting innovative solutions to improve international development program and evaluation design at USAID”- Fri, Oct 28, 2016 (01:45 PM - 03:15 PM)



# The BalanceD-MERL matrix was developed over the course of four months with dedicated effort from all consortium members





# Maturity Matrices

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We have developed a short and long form matrix to assess D-MERL status

Presents four levels of maturity, across four principles

4x4 Matrix also created

- Compressed version as an introduction



# Maturity Matrix (by Principle)

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<b>Level 1: Unbalanced</b>	<b>Level 2: Emergent</b>	<b>Level 3: Balanced</b>	<b>Level 4: Sustained</b>
<b>Relevant</b>			
<b>Right-sized</b>			
<b>Trustworthy</b>			
<b>Responsible</b>			



# Maturity Matrix (by Category)

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Level 1: Unbalanced	Level 2: Emergent	Level 3: Balanced	Level 4: Sustained
Strategy and Focus			
Stakeholders			
Methods			
Data			
Reporting			
Enabling environment			

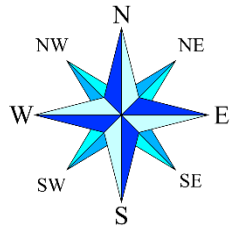


Level 1: Unbalanced	Level 2: Emergent	Level 3: Balanced	Level 4: Sustained
<b>Strategy and Focus</b>			
No theory of change, strategy or design	Incomplete theory of change, strategy and design	Theory of change informs study strategy and design	Theory of change fully aligned with org. study agendas / strategy.
Compliance focus	Focus shifting from compliance to management	Focus on primary intended users (PIUs) needs and program management	
Activities unplanned	Activities inconsistently integrated into program	Integrated activities consistently executed	
No contextualization	Limited contextualization	Local contextualization	Contextualization is predictive
No procedures to govern how data is used	Some procedures to govern use of data	Procedures govern consistent use of data.	Procedures governing the use of data are audited.
Intuitive or incidental (informal) learning	Retrospective learning	Prospective learning	Action learning informs emergent theory of change, study questions and design



# From Self-Assessment to Deep Dive

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## Plan the Dive

- Directional Self-Assessment



## Dive the Wreck

- Bare Minimum external assessment of DMERL scope



## Wreck the Plan

- Full deep dive external assessment of DMERL scope, including organizational barriers and enablers



# Discussion & Questions

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