Strengthening Technical Practice
PPL Strategic Learning Plan: Phase 2

Leveraging Evidence Team/ Cekan Consulting

Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research
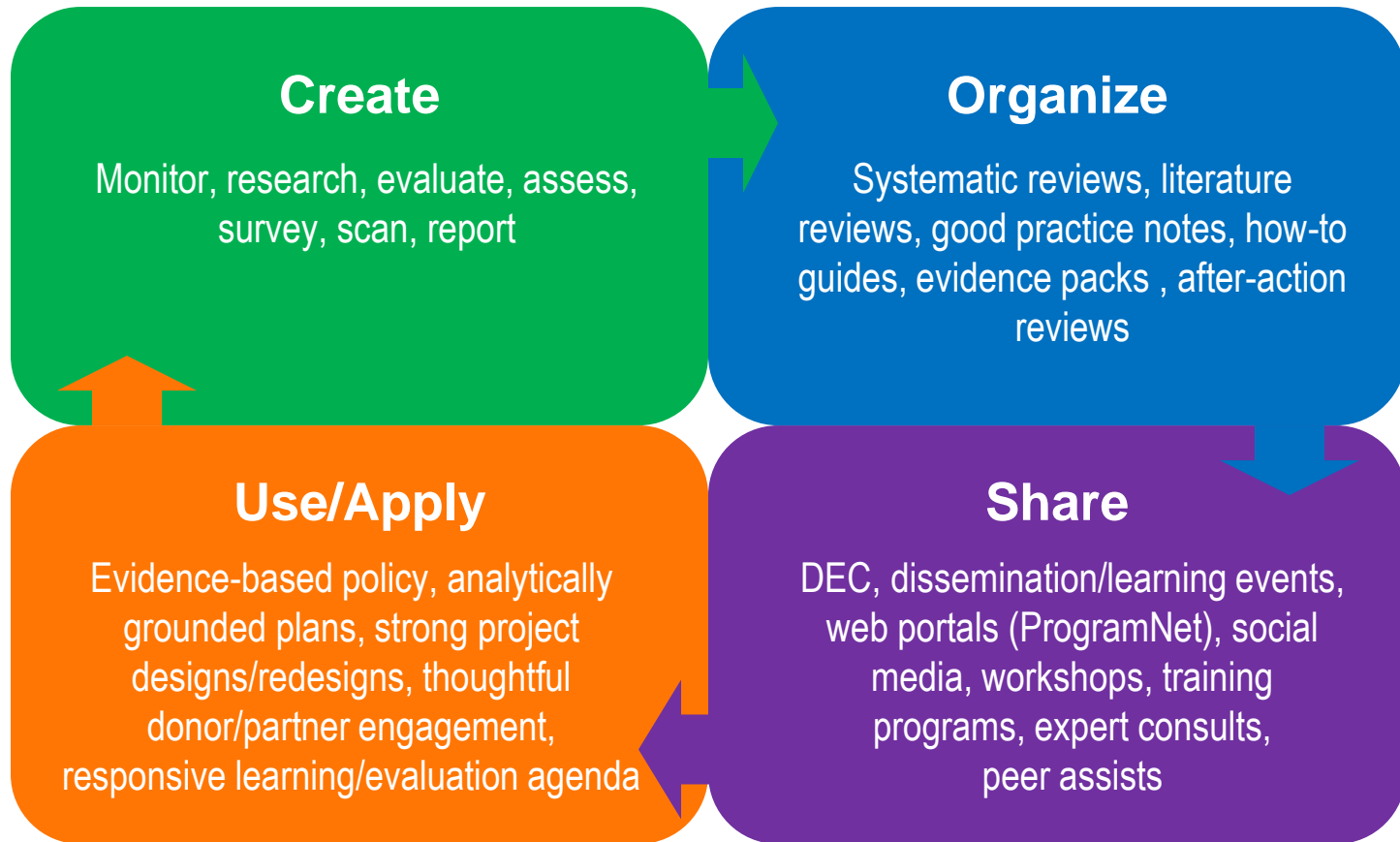
September 2012

- **Phase 1:**
Embedding Learning throughout the Program Cycle

- **Phase 2:**
Strengthening Technical Practice

- **Phase 3:**
Promoting and Support a Learning Culture

- **Technical Units** (bureaus, offices, cross-cutting groups) want to share evidence and knowledge

- **Regional bureaus** are 'knowledge hubs' and want to share

- **Knowledge Management** specialists have explicit learning processes that are alike

- Current efforts **span the excellence spectrum**

- Bright spots exist where **learning champions** have **shareable practices** of what already works well

- **STP** will provide an **appreciative, collaborative environment** for further learning
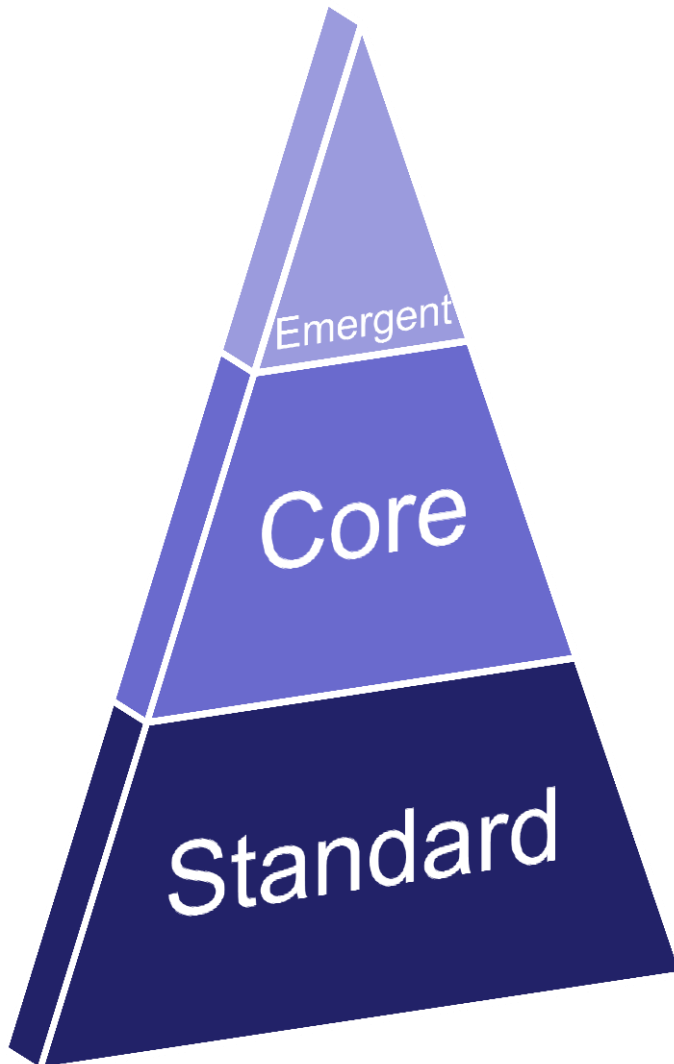
Create

Monitor, research, evaluate, assess, survey, scan, report

Organize

Systematic reviews, literature reviews, good practice notes, how-to guides, evidence packs , after-action reviews

Use/Apply

Evidence-based policy, analytically grounded plans, strong project designs/redesigns, thoughtful donor/partner engagement, responsive learning/evaluation agenda

Share

DEC, dissemination/learning events, web portals (ProgramNet), social media, workshops, training programs, expert consults, peer assists

Create

Did interviews with existing BCC staff within USAID, outside industry experts and researchers

Organize

Reviewed literature, wrote a report which compared public-private BCC efforts worldwide

Use

Redesigned BCC programs worldwide

Share

Got feedback on report's findings through presentations and discussions within GH and outside

What are the **kinds of knowledge that Technical Units have**, or need to create, organize, share and use to strengthen their technical practice?

- **Emergent** – research questions and learning developed to address new problems, fill gaps, further thought leadership

- **Core** – substantive content within each development practice area, distilled learning from existing content

- **Standard –** common knowledge for all USAID staff as part of the development practice area/discipline

Emergent

Core

Standard

Adapted from McKinsey

1. **Discover**
    -   Mapping of current learning practices/ processes
    -   Identify bright spots, learning champions and great work
    -   Document USAID-supported communities of practice
2. **Discuss**
    -   Launch thought leaders in Learning Speaker Series
    -   Create SILK network/ working group and celebrate
3. **Design/ Deliver**
    -   Select and implement 6-8 Learning Practices Models
    -   Examine learning practices in 3-4 units
4. **Disseminate**
    -   Circulate and deliver outcomes and discuss them
    -   Share learners' "cool things" work via USAID Knowledge Fair, webinars, and other online outreach and engagement
    -   Link to missions (Ph 1) and support bureaus (Ph 3)
5. **Determine**
    -   Test tools, assess learning improvement, evaluate
    -   Examine learning from Phase 2 pilot for scale-up

How is learning already taking place in USAID?

- Created survey based on **Appreciative Inquiry**

- Introduced **Learning Cycle** as guidepost for common understanding and analysis

- Introduced **Knowledge Pyramid** (Standard-Core-Emergent)

- Sample Q's:
  - What are the best learning practices in your Office?
  - How would you use $1 million for USAID learning?
  - What are best incentives for learning?
  - What are examples of strong learning organizations outside and inside USAID?

Research Methodology

- Used Appreciative Inquiry
- Looked for broad bureau participation, inter-generational interviewees, and varied GS# levels
- "Daisy Chain" approach to identifying interviewees

Interview Statistics

- 79 interviews completed by PPL/LER and QED staff
  - 35 will be asked to be SILK Core members
- 49 offices represented
- 13 bureaus (technical and regional) and independent offices (e.g. OAPA, IDEA)
- 67 learning supporters identified but not interviewed

- What are the recurring learning issues, common elements, and critical insights – what were the _Headlines_?
    - We used a 'rolling up' process created by DCHA/ CMM
- What are Cool Things already happening?
- What are people Dreaming about?
- What are issues that overlap with missions' learning?
- What are the issues that need to be brought to HR, CIO, and M-Bureau's attention?

These will be written up in a report in the Fall of 2012.

Learning organizations rely on:

1. A supportive learning environment
2. Concrete learning processes and practices
3. Leadership behavior that reinforces learning

Peter Senge, 1994

Objectives of *Sharing Insights, Learning And Knowledge* (SILK):
- Create a 'space' that is a supportive learning environment for champions in which real-time bureau needs can be met by harnessing the power of other learners
- Solutions can be shared, new ones crafted and an identity created to further learning across USAID toward improving development outcomes.

Inputs:
- Provide an infusion of resources (technical, financial, intellectual, staff, technological/ logistical support), Speaker Series and their expert speaker advice, plus well-deserved recognition.

Expectations:
- They will determine how to collaborate, govern and organize
- They will be asked to create new Learning Improvers, share stories of 'cool things' and further learning at AID thru the STP pilot
- We will track their learning, knowledge sharing in a transparent process, documenting through monitoring outputs and outcomes

SILK is a group to be formed from **existing learning champions and supporters** already doing excellent and concrete learning work in USAID.

They have created existing **learning innovations** such as:
- CDCS/CLA process creation and launch by PPL
- Learning Alliances and GLEE gender sharing successes in BFS
- Vibrant partnerships for learning/research by GH and DCHA
- Distilled research for learning through effective retrospective analyses by E3

They analyze and reinforce useful **sharing** practices:
- AFR prioritized 4 areas of knowledge sharing
- BFS has created the respected Agrilinks community modeled on E3's Microlinks
- E3 on FRAMEWEB, ABCG, BATS, and GH's K4Health knowledge exchange
- M/CIO has created AidMap for disseminating USAID's work
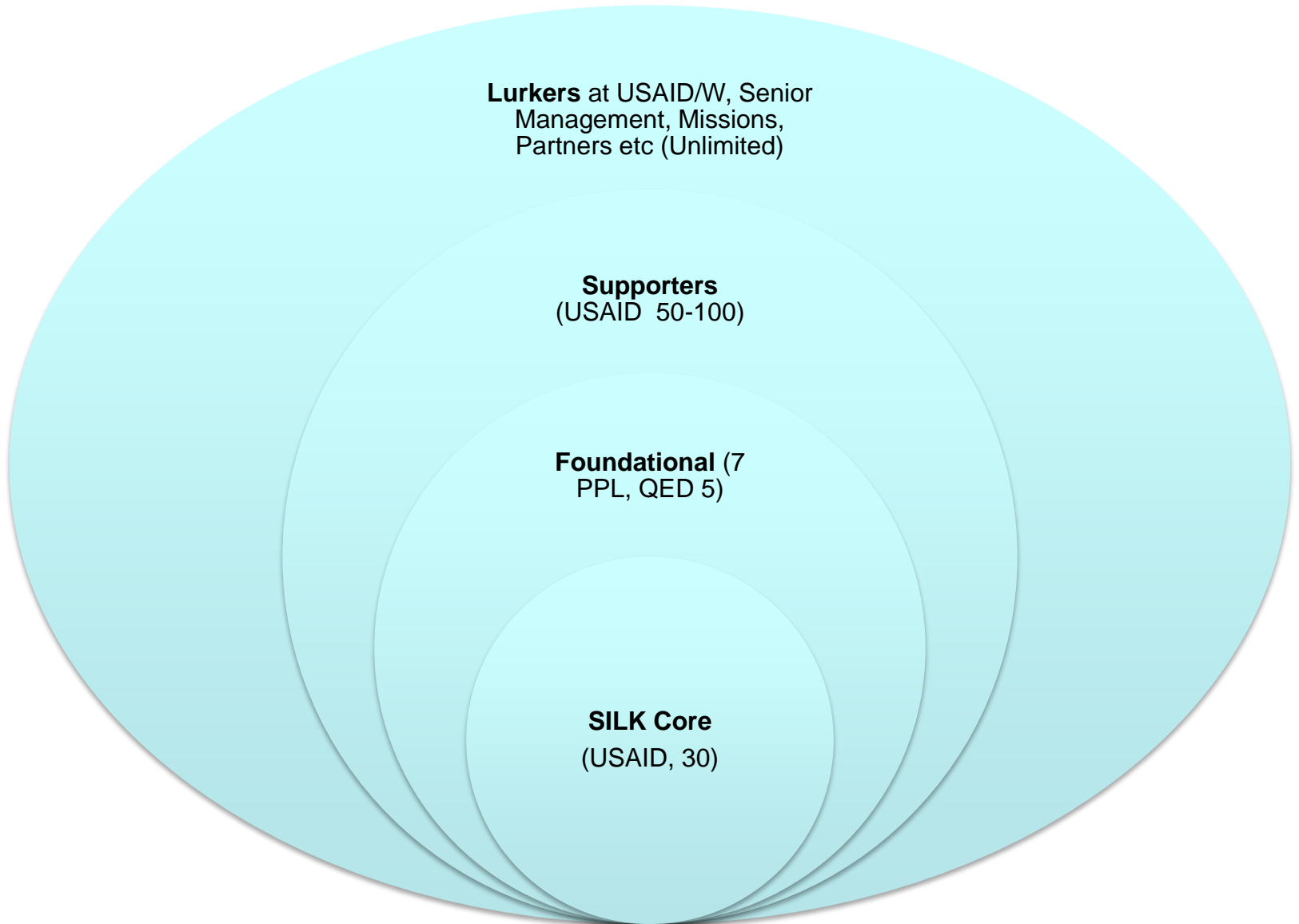- … and many more

Learning Organizations also require supportive management, **the bedrock that fosters learning** and celebrates learners in their bureaus/ offices/ teams.

This **management bedrock is key to transforming streams of learning** by supporting their staff's learning!

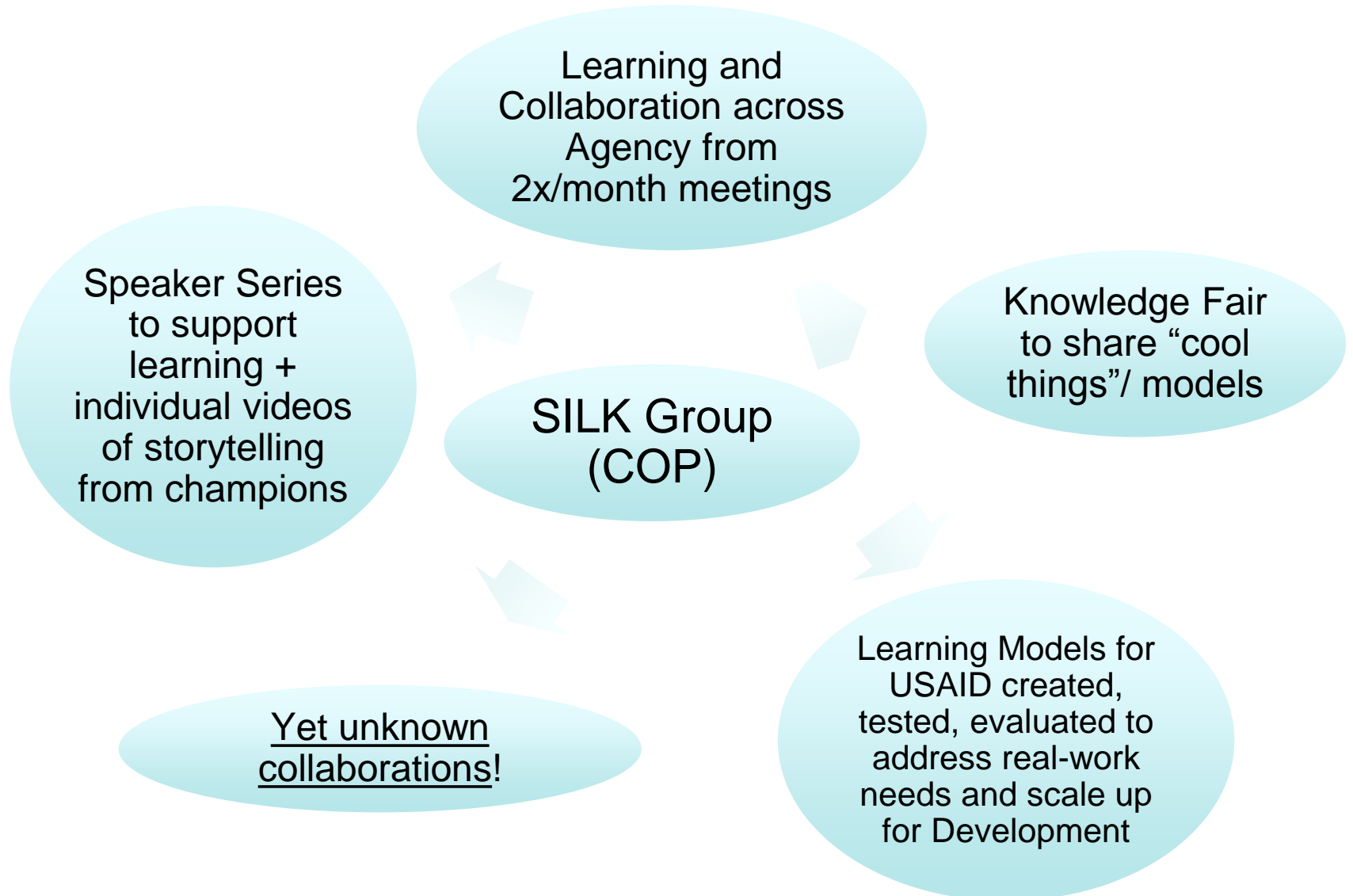**Lurkers** at USAID/W, Senior Management, Missions, Partners etc (Unlimited)

Supporters
(USAID 50-100)

Foundational (7 PPL, QED 5)

SILK Core
(USAID, 30)

Learning and Collaboration across Agency from 2x/month meetings

Speaker Series to support learning + individual videos of storytelling from champions

SILK Group (COP)

Knowledge Fair to share "cool things"/ models

Yet unknown collaborations!

Learning Models for USAID created, tested, evaluated to address real-work needs and scale up for Development

1. Support an **Enabling Environment** through senior management recognition and systems and staffing revisions to put **learners at the center**, facilitating development outcomes

2. Support all phases of the Strategic Learning Plan through celebrating the best **internal learning champions in HQ and field,** provide **expert advisors' input, share with partners**

3. Further a **Culture of Learning** and learning-centric development through a celebratory, drumbeat approach across the Agency through **Principles and Strategies for Learning**

4. **Map organizational learning** practices/processes for key technical units and **identify elements of standard and core knowledge**

5. **Identify policy, operational solutions to further learning**

6. **Test concepts and tools** to be a part of the long-term approach to furthering what is already great, and learning from what isn't

7. **Test a capacity-building/internal consulting model** for a long-term approach to increasing learning throughout all levels of AID

Get your feedback and suggestions…