

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING POLICY

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Responsible Team	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning at HQ				
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POLICY

1. Purpose

Mercy Corps believes that strong monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) contributes to improved program quality, performance, results and impact; advances Mercy Corps’ mission; and increases accountability to program stakeholders. The MEL Policy clarifies Mercy Corps’ fundamental expectations regarding MEL practices in all stages of the program management cycle (see Program Management Policy). The Minimum Standards outlined in the MEL Policy are consistent with Program Management Policy Minimum Standards and are integrated within the Program Management Policy.

The MEL Policy outlines the elements (referred to as “Minimum Standards” below) necessary to promote a culture of learning and innovation within the scope of every program and across the agency, based on credible evidence derived from program implementation. With adherence to the MEL Policy, our programs will be better positioned to define and measure success, identify challenges for improvement and learning, generate higher quality programmatic evidence, and use that evidence to drive greater lasting impact in the world.

As part of good program management, the MEL Minimum Standards will help all programs to:

- Ensure that strong MEL is adequately planned and resourced;
- Establish an effective MEL system to monitor and evaluate program implementation;
- Generate credible evidence to understand and substantiate impact;
- Use evidence generated through program monitoring and evaluation to learn about and improve current and future programming;
- Support accountability, meet donor expectations, and mitigate data quality risks, including passing data quality assessments (DQAs); and
- Improve and maintain Mercy Corps’ reputation as a thought leader internally and externally through reporting program results to stakeholders.

The MEL Minimum Standards outlined in this policy are accompanied by Guidance Notes defining and clarifying the key elements and considerations of each standard. Additional guidance documents, templates/ tools, and examples for implementing these Minimum Standards are housed in the [MEL](#)

[Wiki](#). Appropriate hyperlinks to the source documents are provided in Section 4 - MEL Minimum Standards Matrix.

2. Scope and Application

2.1. Policy Application

This policy applies to Mercy Corps Global, Mercy Corps Europe, Mercy Corps Netherlands, and their subsidiaries and affiliate organizations (collectively "Mercy Corps"); Members of Mercy Corps' Boards of Directors, officers, management, team members, seconded employees, interns, and volunteers (collectively "Team Members").

This Policy is applicable to all programs that meet the definition of a program as outlined in the Program Management Policy.

If program donors have specific requirements, templates/ formats, and/ or similar standards, donor requirements take precedence. In the absence of donor requirements, or if the donor requirements are less stringent than those of Mercy Corps, then Mercy Corps Minimum Standards apply.

2.2. Policy Exceptions and Modifications

The default should always be that the minimum standards in this policy will be followed, and that how a standard will be met is unique to each program and operating contexts. However, there may be circumstances where an exemption(s) to a specific standard is appropriate. While program teams are encouraged to meet the standards in the manner that is most appropriate for the program and operating contexts, exemptions can be approved when clearly justified.

Situations that are not appropriate for an exemption, and should instead be addressed by adapting standards to the context or program, include:

- Short term programs; and,
- Programs in humanitarian, complex, rapid onset, or remote programming/ reduced access contexts.

Any country, entity, team, or program seeking an exception or modification to a Minimum Standard, part of a standard, or any other element in this policy should follow the modification processes of the Program Management Policy.

NOTE: Certain MEL Minimum Standards will not be considered for exemptions or modifications because they are either defining criteria of a program or are mission critical. These include **STANDARD 1**, **STANDARD 2**, **STANDARD 8**, and **STANDARD 9**.

3. MEL Minimum Standards

3.1. Program Design

STANDARD 1: All proposals must include at least one type of logic model clearly articulating the rationale, logical pathways, and key assumptions for achieving the

program's outcomes and objectives as stated in the theory of change (TOC).

STANDARD 2: A final, internal performance review must be planned and budgeted on all proposals.

STANDARD 3: Budget for MEL must be at least 5% of the total award budget.

3.2. Program Planning

STANDARD 4: A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan must be prepared and reviewed for all programs. A M&E Plan, at minimum, includes the following components: 1) a Logic Model (see Standard 1), 2) an Indicator Plan built in or uploaded to TolaData, reflecting sex and age disaggregation (SADD) for relevant indicators, and 3) plans for monitoring, data quality, data protection, and evaluations.

STANDARD 5: A Learning Plan must be developed for every program.

STANDARD 6: A MEL Technology Plan must be completed for every program and signed off by Country MEL (or other designated team members in the absence of Country MEL) before implementing a technology solution for data collection, storage, protection, analysis, or visualization.

STANDARD 7: MEL deliverables - at minimum, monitoring activities, evaluations, learning events and initiatives, quarterly/ annual reviews, and Data Quality Assessments (DQAs) - must be included in the Program Implementation Plan (PIP).

STANDARD 8: As part of the Program File, MEL folders for indicators must be created and structured to store all raw and analytic datasets/ evidence, data collection tools, analysis workbooks, and related documentation. (See Standard 9 for de-identification of sensitive data.)

STANDARD 9: All program data must be collected, stored, and destroyed in accordance with the Mercy Corps Responsible Data Policy and donor-specific requirements. This includes obtaining voluntary, informed consent, de-identifying data, and/ or providing assurances that data enabling the identification of program participants (PII) is stored securely and only accessible to authorized Mercy Corps team members.

3.3. Program Implementation

STANDARD 10: Results for all indicators must be updated regularly in TolaData to fulfill the program's monitoring, evaluation, and learning needs, as outlined in the M&E, Learning, and Technology Plans (see Standards 4-6). Supporting evidence must be properly linked in TolaData.

STANDARD 11: All programs must regularly conduct, document, and follow up on internal DQAs every 6 months on at least 5% of the indicators that have completed two rounds of data collection and analysis.

STANDARD 12: Program teams must conduct quarterly program review sessions using an up-to-date Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT) from TolaData to understand progress against baselines and stated targets. Identified changes to the logic model or indicators, including definitions, targets, and/ or data collection, quality, protection, or analysis methods/ tools must be reflected in TolaData.

STANDARD 13: Scopes of Work (SOWs) for planned MEL-related studies, evaluations, and assessments must be completed at least 3 months prior to the planned data collection training start date. All SOWs must adhere to Mercy Corps guidance.

3.4. Program Closure

STANDARD 14: A final, internal performance review must be conducted for all programs and findings shared with Mercy Corps, local partners/ stakeholders, and program participants. The final, internal performance review report must include final measurements on all indicators and documentation of lessons learned.

STANDARD 15: All data and information in MEL folders (see Standard 8) and in TolaData (see Standard 10) must be up-to-date and securely stored (see Standard 9). The MEL folders and TolaData must be signed-off as complete per the Grant Final 90 Days Meeting Checklist.

4. MEL Minimum Standards Matrix

The following matrix provides links to guidance notes for each standard, which describe available or planned resources, guidelines, and templates within the [MEL Wiki](#) to aid in the implementation of each standard. The matrix also identifies persons accountable and responsible (see section 7) for implementing each standard, and exception approval authority for each standard.

Program Life Cycle Phase	MEL Minimum Standards	Supporting Guidance Documents and Resources	Accountable Persons & Recommended Responsible Persons	Modification / Exception Approval Authority
Program Design	STANDARD 1: All proposals must include at least one type of logic model clearly articulating the rationale, logical pathways, and key assumptions for achieving the program's outcomes and objectives as stated in the theory of change (TOC).	Standard 1: Logic Model Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Proposal Lead Recommended Responsible: MEL Lead on the Proposal	No exceptions allowed
	STANDARD 2: A final, internal performance review must be planned and budgeted on all proposals.	Standard 2: Final Internal Performance Review Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Proposal Lead, Budget Lead, Country Director Recommended Responsible: MEL Lead on the Proposal	No exceptions allowed
	STANDARD 3: Budget for MEL must be at least 5% of the total award budget.	Standard 3: MEL Budget Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Proposal Lead, Budget Lead, Country Director Recommended Responsible: MEL Lead on the Proposal	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
Program Planning	STANDARD 4: A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan must be prepared and reviewed for all programs. A M&E	Standard 4: M&E Plan Guidance Note	Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party	Follow Program Management

	Plan, at minimum, includes the following components: 1) a Logic Model (see Standard 1), 2) an Indicator Plan built in or uploaded to TolaData, reflecting sex and age disaggregation (SADD) for relevant indicators, and 3) plans for monitoring, data quality, data protection, and evaluations.	with links to additional resources.	Recommended Responsible: Program MEL Lead	Policy modification process
	STANDARD 5: A Learning Plan must be developed for every program.	Standard 5: Learning Plan Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party Recommended Responsible: Program MEL, Research, or Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Lead	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	STANDARD 6: A MEL Technology Plan must be completed for every program and signed off by Country MEL (or another designated team member in the absence of Country MEL) before implementing a technology solution for data collection, storage, protection, analysis, or visualization.	Standard 6: MEL Technology Plan Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party Recommended Responsible: Program MEL/T4D/IT Lead	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	STANDARD 7: MEL deliverables - at minimum, monitoring activities, evaluations, learning events and initiatives, quarterly / annual reviews, and Data Quality Assessments (DQAs) - must be included in the Program Implementation Plan (PIP).	Standard 7: MEL Deliverables Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party Recommended Responsible: Program MEL Lead	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	STANDARD 8: As part of the Program File, MEL folders for indicators must be created and structured to store all raw and analytic datasets / evidence, data collection tools, analysis workbooks, and related documentation. (See Standard 9 for de-identification of sensitive data.)	Standard 8: MEL Filing Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party Recommended Responsible: Program MEL or Knowledge Management (KM) Lead	No exceptions allowed
	STANDARD 9: All program data must be collected, stored, and destroyed in accordance with the Mercy Corps Responsible Data Policy and donor-specific requirements. This includes obtaining voluntary, informed consent, de-identifying data, and/ or providing assurances that data enabling the identification of program participants (PII) is stored securely and only accessible to authorized Mercy Corps team members.	Standard 9: Data Privacy and Security Guidance Note with links to additional resources.	Accountable: Country Director, or Director of Programs and Program Manager or Chief of Party Recommended Responsible: Program MEL or KM Lead	No exceptions allowed

Program Implementation	<p>STANDARD 10: Results for all indicators must be updated regularly in TolaData to fulfill the program's monitoring, evaluation, and learning needs, as outlined in the M&E, Learning, and Technology Plans (see Standards 4-6). Supporting evidence must be properly linked in TolaData.</p>	<p>Standard 10: TolaData Results and Evidence Guidance Note with links to additional resources.</p>	<p>Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party, and Program MEL Lead</p> <p>Recommended Responsible: MEL and Program Team Members; and Partners, if applicable</p>	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	<p>STANDARD 11: All programs must regularly conduct, document, and follow-up on internal DQAs every 6 months on at least 5% of the indicators that have completed two rounds of data collection and analysis.</p>	<p>Standard 11: Data Quality Audit / Assessment Guidance Note with links to additional resources.</p>	<p>Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party</p> <p>Recommended Responsible: Program MEL Lead</p>	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	<p>STANDARD 12: Program teams must conduct quarterly program review sessions using an up-to-date Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT) from TolaData to understand progress against baselines and stated targets. Identified changes to the logic model or indicators, including definitions, targets, and/ or data collection, quality, protection, or analysis methods/ tools must be reflected in TolaData.</p>	<p>Standard 12: Quarterly MEL Review Sessions Guidance Note with links to additional resources.</p>	<p>Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party</p> <p>Recommended Responsible: Program MEL or CLA Lead</p>	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	<p>STANDARD 13: Scopes of Work (SOWs) for planned MEL-related studies, evaluations, and assessments must be completed at least 3 months prior to the planned data collection training start date. All SOWs must adhere to Mercy Corps guidance.</p>	<p>Standard 13: MEL SOWs Guidance Note with links to additional resources.</p>	<p>Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party</p> <p>Recommended Responsible: Program MEL Lead</p>	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
	<p>STANDARD 14: A final, internal performance review must be conducted for all programs and findings shared with Mercy Corps, local partners/ stakeholders, and program participants. The final, internal performance review report must include final measurements on all indicators and documentation of lessons learned.</p>	<p>Standard 14: Final Internal Performance Review Guidance Note with links to additional resources.</p>	<p>Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party</p> <p>Recommended Responsible: Program MEL Lead</p>	Follow Program Management Policy modification process
Program Closure	<p>STANDARD 15: All data and information in MEL folders (see Standard 8) and in TolaData (see Standard 10) must be up-to-date and securely stored (see Standard 9). The MEL folders and TolaData must be signed-off as complete per the Final 90-Day Checklist.</p>	<p>Standard 15: Final MEL Data and Information Review Guidance Note with links to additional resources.</p>	<p>Accountable: Program Manager or Chief of Party and Program MEL Lead</p> <p>Recommended Responsible: MEL and Program Team Members; and Partners, if applicable</p>	Follow Program Management Policy modification process

5. Related Policies, Procedures, and Guidance

- 5.1. Related Policies - Internal to Mercy Corps:
 - 5.1.1. Program Management Policy, including:
 - 5.1.1.1. [Program Record Retention and Archiving Policy](#)
 - 5.1.2. [Responsible Data Policy](#)
 - 5.1.3. Data Destruction Policy - *to be developed by data protection working group*
 - 5.1.4. [GESI Strategy](#)
 - 5.1.5. [FP3](#)
- 5.2. Related Policies - External to Mercy Corps:
 - 5.2.1. [IATI](#)
 - 5.2.2. [GDPR](#)
 - 5.2.3. [USAID Open Data Policy](#) and [Data Development Library](#)
- 5.3. Related MEL Guidance:
 - 5.3.1. [MEL Wiki](#)
 - 5.3.2. [MER MSA](#)
 - 5.3.3. [TolaWiki](#)

6. Definitions and Acronyms

6.1. Key Definitions:

Glossary of Program Management Terminology - *to be linked*
[Glossary of MEL Terminology](#)

6.2. Acronyms:

CLA – Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
DQAs – Data Quality Assessments or Audits
FP3 – Field Procurement Policies and Procedures
GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation
GESI – Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HQ – Headquarters
IATI – International Aid Transparency Initiative
IPTT – Indicator Performance Tracking Table
IT – Information Technology
KM – Knowledge Management
M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL – Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MER MSA – Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Master Service Agreement
PII – Personally Identifiable Information

PIP – Program Implementation Plan
 SADD – Sex and Age Disaggregated Data
 SOW – Scope of Work
 T4D – Technology for Development
 TOC – Theory of Change
 USAID – United States Agency for International Development

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation of the MEL Policy will require engagement both from MEL and program team members with differing roles and responsibilities. Section 4 identifies two key roles: Accountable and Recommended Responsible.

“Accountable” refers to those who ensure that a MEL Policy standard is upheld. Accountable parties vary by standard and include program leadership, proposal leadership, and portfolio leadership. However, since these Minimum Standards function at a program-level and are specific to individual programs, and since MEL is a function of Program Management, Program Managers (or Chiefs of Party) are ultimately accountable for these standards. This accountability then extends through supervisory channels to include Country Directors and Deputy Country Directors and/ or Directors of Programs, or equivalent team members in the case of regional or HQ-managed programs.

“Responsible” refers to those who carry out the work of implementing a MEL Policy standard. For example, recommended responsible persons lead in designing and assuring quality in the creation and execution of the M&E Plan or DQAs. Since structures differ across countries, the individual who can fulfill these functions may vary; therefore, the guidance allows some flexibility to appoint recommended responsible persons. However, responsibility for the implementation of standards generally lies with proposal and program MEL leadership, and sometimes also includes other program or partner team members.

All programs must follow Mercy Corps’ Program Management Policy modification process, unless otherwise noted or a modification/ exception is approved. If a program is unable to comply with specific policy requirements, the formal modification/ exception process must be followed as outlined in section 2.2 Policy Exceptions and Modifications.

8. Policy Governance

Responsible Team	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) HQ Team
Policy Owner	Senior Director, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)
Policy Approver	Executive Team
Executive Sponsor	Senior Vice President - Programs

Last Reviewed	February 2021
Next Review Date	February 2023