

Adaptive Management

October 2025



About the Partnerships Insight Series

The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform (Partnerships Platform) works with partners to provide a suite of flexible, fit-for-purpose services that support development investments in governance, stability and resilience in the region. Partners include the Australian and Pacific governments and services range from recruitment, procurement and grants, to monitoring and evaluation, research and training, advisory support, and program design and management.

The Partnership Insights series is informed by the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) function of the Partnerships Platform Support Unit. Each issue focuses on a specific theme and is designed to provide evidence-based insights into effective development approaches. By sharing insights we aim to contribute knowledge, prompt discussions and, ultimately, support stronger development approaches and outcomes.

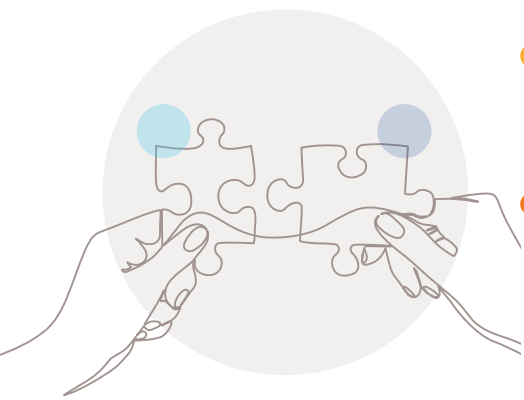
A considered approach to adaptive management



Figure 1. The Partnerships Platform approach to adaptive management.

The Partnerships Platform implements an adaptive management approach through a continuous cycle of adaptive learning and implementation as outlined in Figure 1, which incorporates the following steps:

- **Plan**
Setting plans and strategies.
- **Do**
Action these plans and strategies.
- **Evaluate**
Monitor and evaluation against plans, strategies and indicators.



Adjust

Adapt and adjust plans, strategies and implementation in response to context and evidence.

Culture

Across the Partnerships Platform, this continuous cycle of adaptive learning and implementation is responsive to and informed by cross-cultural awareness and values. It recognises that different cultural values will shape and define the type of capacity considered important for capacity development and/or strengthening.

The Partnerships Platform's approach to adaptive management closely aligns with the 4 elements outlined in the DT Global Adaptive Management Guidance Note: flexibility, responsiveness, purposive learning and culture.¹



Reflections and engagement

A Reflections and Engagement Cycle (REC) Framework was developed by the Partnerships Platform Support Unit as a practical adaptive management approach that ensured regular information exchange between key stakeholders. The REC was specifically developed to enable effective remote adaptive program management. After one year of implementation, the REC has been found to be a practical and valuable tool and was adjusted to further meet the information and engagement needs of the Support Unit and stakeholders. A toolkit was developed to support the implementation of the REC, including strengthening the collection, verification, and documentation of data for MEL purposes.

The systematic information exchange through the REC has proven crucial to enabling the Partnerships Platform to: adapt and learn across all countries and within changing contexts; respond flexibly to the needs of partner and the Australian governments; build relationships; triangulate data; and continually make contributions towards the performance indicators and outcomes of partner governments, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Partnerships Platform. In the REC, communication, information and learning exchange are broken down into engagement and reflection events with personnel, DFAT and partner government counterparts.



Adaptive management supports retention

Taking an adaptive management approach has been key to the Partnerships Platform's strong record of retaining personnel in what can be challenging professional roles. Through maintaining a flexible approach, listening to and responding to personnel and partner feedback, regularly reviewing recruitment strategies and adopting a country-level focus, the Partnerships Platform has created an environment where personnel feel supported, heard and valued. As a result, personnel retention rates have remained consistently high at 91% or higher per year.



¹ Available at: <https://dt-global.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/dt-global-guidance-note-introduction-to-adaptive-management.pdf>

Adaptive management insights

The Partnerships Platform MEL and adaptation system is designed to capture evidence of effective adaptive management approaches to supporting locally-led development. The below lessons have been drawn from this evidence, with examples provided to demonstrate what this looks like in practice.

Lesson 1

Terms of Reference (ToR) and work plans should be treated as living documents, regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in context and circumstances on the ground. This flexibility ensures that activities remain relevant, aligned with emerging needs, and responsive to shifting priorities, ultimately improving the effectiveness and impact of support provided.

When the enabling environment changes, such as shifting government priorities, reallocation of resources, or the absence of key counterparts, it is important for the program to proactively re-engage with government partners. This should prompt a review of the work plan and the focus of the technical support role to ensure continued relevance and impact.

A strong example of this adaptive approach occurred in Kiribati, where an opportunity emerged for one of the Partnerships Platform personnel, who was initially

assigned to support one government department to also extend support to another division. This development was a positive reflection of the quality and relevance of the technical assistance provided. The adaptive response demonstrated by this individual not only broadened the scope of support, but also strengthened coordination and collaboration between the 2 departments. As a result, the ToR was revised to reflect the expanded focus on capacity building across both departments.



Lesson 2

Establishing a structured approach that intentionally incorporates time for regular reflection is critical for maintaining focus and effectiveness. When this is aligned with streamlined processes for data collection, triangulation and feedback loops, it enables timely identification of areas requiring intervention or adjustment and ensures that those changes are documented. Without such structures in place, activities risk drifting off-course, and valuable opportunities for improvement may be overlooked.

Attracting the right personnel remains one of the Partnerships Platform's most significant risks. Once the right individuals are identified and embedded effectively in their roles, it becomes critical to retain them. The program's efforts to adapt and support personnel are deliberate and strategic, and are designed to ensure that, once skilled individuals are onboarded, they understand and can align their work with program goals. This increases retention rates and meaningful contributions over time. For instance, in response to personnel feedback that they would like deeper engagement from the Partnerships Platform Support Unit, the REC was developed and integrated into standard practice.

The REC is the key approach the Partnerships Platform employs to support DFAT, partner governments and personnel to continually and collaboratively monitor the context of the partnerships, and adjust to achieve long-term program goals and objectives. The Support Unit also adjusts implementation priorities based on learnings generated through the REC process.

REC engagements also identified a need to strengthen the program's efforts to retain high-quality personnel. Informed by these insights, the program adapted and introduced a series of targeted strategies aimed at attracting and retaining the right candidates, including: revising the remuneration terms and conditions; advocating to DFAT for longer-term contracts to provide greater job security; offering leave fares; increasing support through Country Leads; and introducing screening interviews to improve candidate selection.



Lesson 3

Effective engagement with Pacific counterparts requires an adaptive approach that recognises cultural values and ways of working.

The Partnerships Platform employs a strengths-based, cultural values-informed approach to understanding and contributing to locally-led capacity development. The Support Unit engaged the services of Deborah Rhodes,² an international development cooperation consultant with significant experience in supporting capacity strengthening approaches and partnerships in Asian and Pacific countries, to support the establishment of a capacity development approach that could be applied across Partnerships Platform-supported activities and countries.

By seeking to consider the cultural values and way-of-working of our Pacific partners, the Partnerships Platform aims to be more responsive to capacity

development needs that may fall outside conventional areas.

For example, in Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru, Development Specialists embedded within the Australian High Commissions provide enabling support for the management and delivery of Australia's overseas development assistance program. These Development Specialists have been supporting the capacity development of locally-engaged DFAT staff through a range of tailored methods, including workshops, training sessions, mentoring and one-on-one support. Their approach recognises the importance of cultural values and local ways of working, ensuring that learning is relevant, practical

² For more information or to contact Deborah Rhodes, visit: <https://leadershipstrategies.com.au/about/>

and grounded in context. These efforts aim to strengthen staff confidence and capability in areas such as report writing, gender equality, disability and social inclusion, and monitoring and evaluation, while remaining flexible and responsive to the specific needs of each country.

The Partnerships Platform adapted its delivery approach by adopting a country-level focus. This included assigning dedicated roles, such as Country Leads, Senior Program Officers and Partnerships Officers, to each country. This strategy has proven effective in fostering the relationships and cultural understanding essential for the successful implementation of the Partnerships Platform across all countries.

Further, in the early stages of engagement, it may be appropriate for advisers to lead on setting assignment context and guiding discussions. However, as relationships mature, it is essential to adapt and create space for counterparts to lead, ask questions and challenge ideas. This shift not only reflects

increasing confidence but also reflects true ownership and leadership by local partners. For instance, in FSM, the Education Adviser's capacity building approach evolved from providing modelling and guided support to empowering the curriculum team to independently deliver tasks.

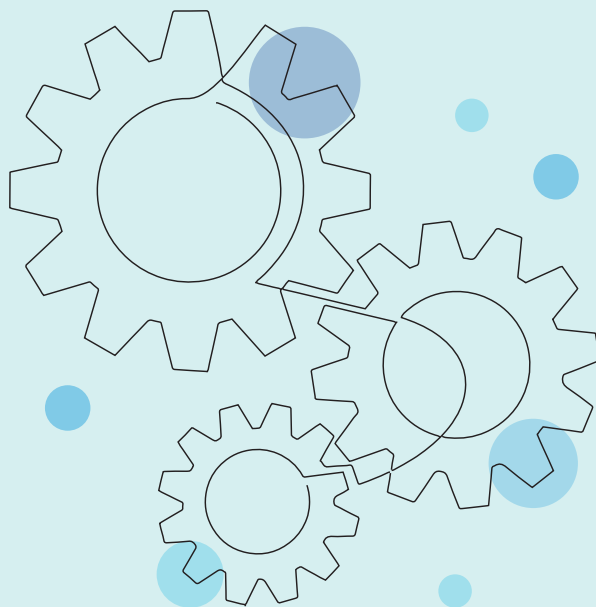
In Kiribati, a train-the-trainer approach proved to be the most effective method for building local capacity. Instead of training individuals, the FMIS Specialist focused on training a nominated internal group, providing them with the skills and support needed to independently deliver training sessions, including in the local language and outside of the Ministry of Finance. This strategy leverages national staff for all coordination and communication with line ministries and management, allowing the FMIS Specialist to concentrate on the quality of the training, strengthening the capabilities of the trainers, and refining training materials. This promotes sustainability, local ownership and broader reach of technical knowledge.

Methodology

Evidence and lessons shared in the Partnerships Insights series are collected through a range of channels and activities, including:

- Partnerships Platform personnel reports.
- Partnerships Platform personnel interviews.
- Partner Pacific government representative interviews.
- In-country visits and observations.
- Roundtable discussions with Partnerships Platform, Pacific and Australian government personnel.

Data is collected, collated and verified by the Partnerships Platform Support Unit monitoring, evaluation, research and learning team, with lessons captured, collated and packaged for dissemination with the Support Unit's communications team.



The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform supports Australia and partner Pacific countries as they continue working together to build a stable, prosperous and secure region. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform provides Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Cook Islands with a suite of flexible, fit-for-purpose services that support development investments in governance, stability and resilience. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform is supported by the Australian Government and managed by DT Global.