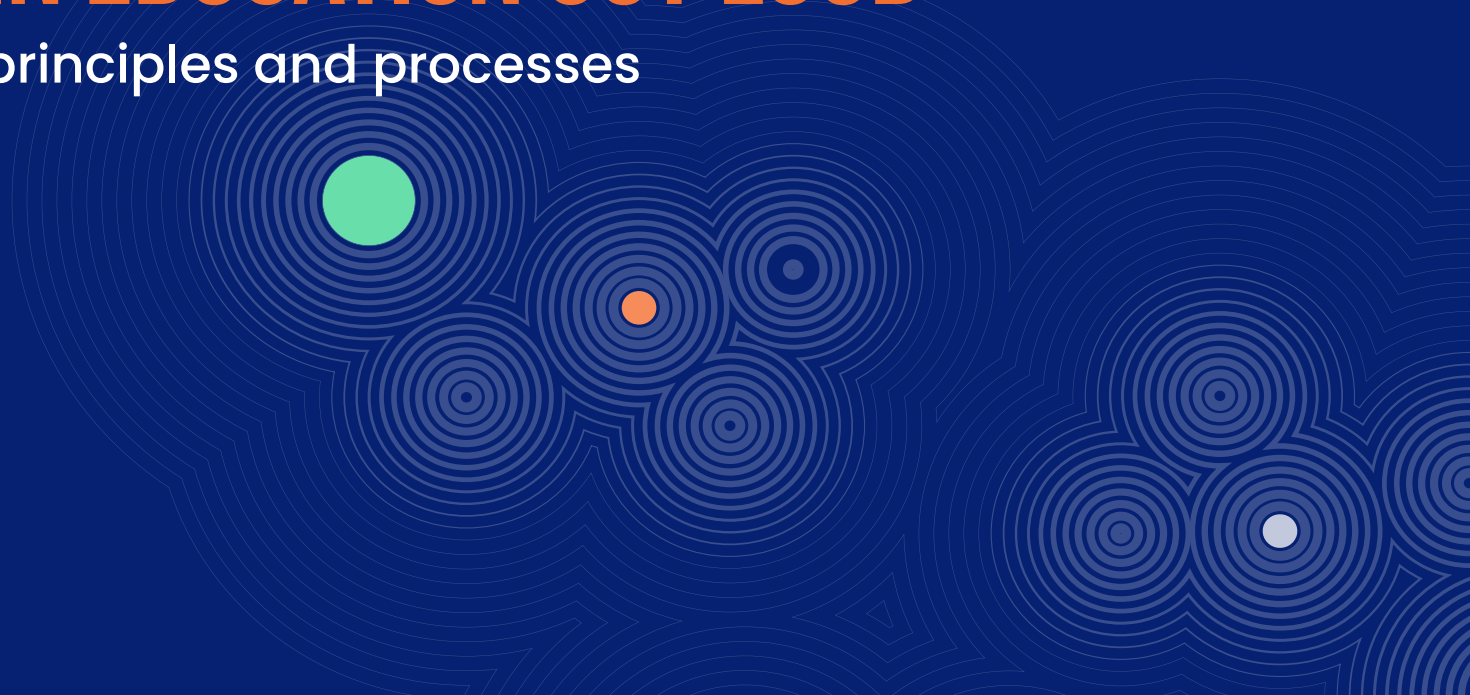# ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION OUT LOUD

principles and processes

Adaptive management is an important and powerful way to maximise the impact of Education Out Loud (EOL) activities, and ensure that civil society action on education reform stays relevant.

In this guide we explain what we mean by adaptive management and why it is important, links with other processes, and the practical ways that grantees supported by EOL can change their plans to respond to a changing world.

The guide aims to support and encourage EOL grantees and EOL management units to embrace adaptive management approaches.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT?

For EOL, adaptive management is about the ways that we change our strategies, plans, and activities to respond to external changes or new information or knowledge. This involves a regular process of reviewing whether we, as civil society organisations, are still doing the right things to achieve our aims.

The principles of adaptive management apply across EOL. For EOL management units they apply to programme design, grant management, and learning practices. For grantees, they apply to the strategies, projects and activities that EOL funds.

We know that grantees already make these kinds of changes regularly. The purpose of this guidance is to emphasise the importance of adaptive practices and the flexibility to make changes to strategies and plans.

WHAT DOES ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT LOOK LIKE FOR EOL?

Working adaptively allows us to put in practice what we learn during our work, improve what we do, and embrace new opportunities.

- Adjusting plans and strategies to grasp opportunities
- Learning from experience – both successes and failures
- Reflecting on who we are trying to influence, and how best to reach them
- Regularly taking time to pause and reflect on what we are doing, why, and how it's working
- Learning from others, and adjusting plans based on that
- Revisiting advocacy plans when things change in the political context
- Innovating, testing and experimenting to get greater impact

TWO TYPES OF ADAPTATION

1. REACTIVE ADAPTATION

Some changes during project implementation can be described as working flexibly – reacting to changes in what is possible, or the new situation we find ourselves in. The changes take place when something else changes first.

For example, budget changes might be needed to reflect changing costs, or activities might no longer be possible.

2. PROACTIVE ADAPTATION

Some changes are more strategic. These changes come from learning what works and doesn't, and anticipating opportunities.

For example, new opportunities for influencing education policy may emerge that lead to changes in advocacy activities, or we might want to try out advocacy and influencing strategies that are new to us but have worked elsewhere.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT & LEARNING
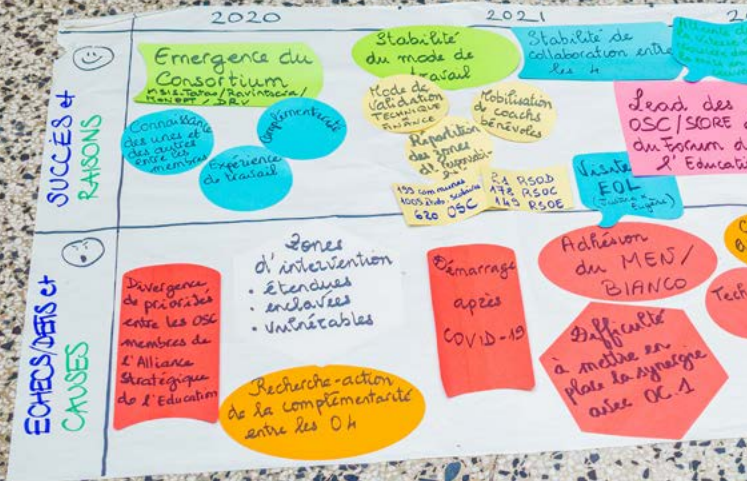
Both kinds of adaptation are supported by having a culture of continuous reflection on what is working, what is not working, and why.

Proactive adaptation can also be stimulated by learning from experience, or from the work of others.

This means that increasing our ability to adapt also rests on having strong learning mechanisms and practices – which some refer to as 'feedback loops' from between one set of actions and the next. This implies building in a culture of learning in our organisations.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT & MONITORING & EVALUATION

Some monitoring and evaluation activities are focused on accountability, and demonstrating impact. Other monitoring activities and data collected can support shorter-term adaptations.

Monitoring and evaluation approaches that support adaptation emphasise outcome measurements over inputs or outputs, and data and indicators that give a more 'real-time' sense of what is working. They also take into account unexpected outcomes or where things have not worked as planned. If things haven't worked the important thing is to show learning from that experience.

In that way, monitoring and evaluation systems should be designed for learning – and not only accountability.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND RISK

Adaptive management approaches can play a very important role in mitigating the risks associated with organisations and their project activities. This is because they allow re-thinking and re-planning based on changing levels of risk, and changes in what is possible or safe. Risks can both increase and decrease at different times.

Reflection and feedback loops should include how the risks involved in activities are changing, and adjustments to plans might require changes to risk registers.

WHEN MIGHT ADAPTATIONS BE NEEDED IN GRANTEE PLANS & ACTIVITIES?

There are a number triggers for adaptations to be made to strategies and activities. Some examples and illustrations are:

New opportunities to work on particular issues, with new stakeholders or actors, or parts of government, or to use different advocacy strategies.

Example: A new committee has been set up to look at girl's education, so new strategies are needed to reach and influence members of that committee with civil society evidence.

Shifts in possibilities - activities that are no longer going to work due to changes in the context.

Example: A change in minister has changed the government's priorities, so activities need to be re-targeted.

New advocacy needs – for example crises or political events.

Example: An environmental crisis has closed schools and displaced many learners and teachers, so advocacy is needed on ensuring they are accepted in new schools or that alternative learning spaces are created.

Learning what works and what doesn't - changes based on your experience in trying particular approaches or strategies.

Example: A community-based monitoring project shows that they get better results when learners themselves are involved in gathering data, but this is more expensive to enable, so future projects and budgets are adjusted.

Experimenting with new approaches because you think they might work, or they have worked elsewhere.

Example: Other organisations have successfully used a commitment tracker to monitor government commitments. They are using this tool to engage decision-makers in Townhall meetings. This is something you'd like to try.

WHAT ADAPTATIONS BY GRANTEES NEED APPROVAL, AND FROM WHERE?

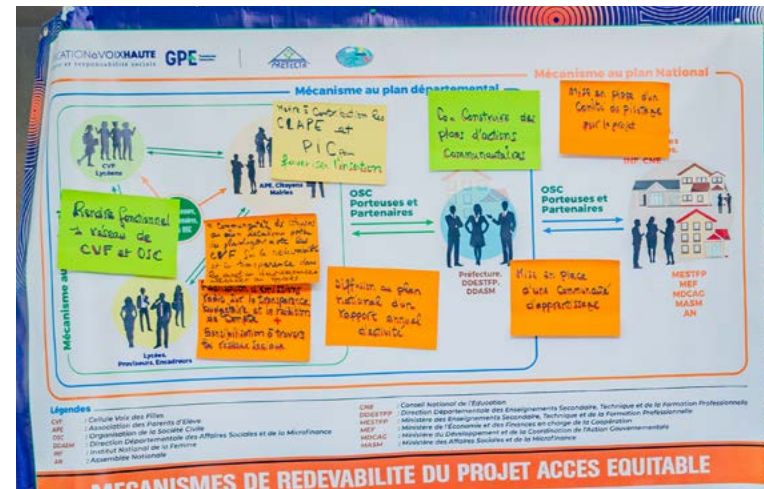**Level 1: Adaptations that do not require approval**
As long as the overall objectives remain the same, there are many things that grantees can adjust and adapt in their projects without approval from EOL management units. Learning from making these changes is reported in the grantees' biannual report.

Level 2: Adaptations that require RMU approval
There are other adaptations that require simple approval from the EOL Regional Management Units, to make sure that the same objectives are being followed.

Level 3: Adaptations that require Grant Agreement Addendum
A very small number of adaptations require a change to the Grant Agreement between EOL and the grantee, but these are also possible.

See the following flowchart for details on what can change and what to do within the three levels of project adaptation.

LEVEL 1: ADAPTATIONS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE APPROVAL

What to change/adapt?	Which level of change/adaptation?	How to request /inform about the change?	Where to document the change?	Requires change in grantee proposal documents (Y/N)?
Specific Activities/ Outcomes	Change in and between specific activities below grantee budget reallocation threshold of 10%.	Inform RMU Send new PIP	Project Implementation Plan Next Financial report	NO
Approach, methodology, way of doing things	Changes in methods/approach of implementation in specific activities or series of activities below grantee budget reallocation threshold of 10%.	Inform RMU Send new PIP	Next Biannual Report: Section 3: Contextual, programmatic and organisational changes and risk management Section 6: Lessons learnt	NO
Stakeholders	Changes in stakeholders to involve in specific activities/outcomes below grantee budget reallocation threshold of 10%.	Inform RMU	Next Biannual Report: Section 3: Contextual, programmatic and organisational changes and risk management Section 6: Lessons learnt	NO
Learning Plan	Change in Learning areas or ways to implement them.	Inform RMU	Next Biannual Report: Section 4.6 on learning Revised Learning Plan	NO
Budget	Budget reallocations within/between specific outcomes below grantee threshold of 10%. Cost category division need to be maintained.	Inform RMU	Next Financial report Revised Budget	NO

LEVEL 2: ADAPTATIONS THAT REQUIRE RMU APPROVAL

What to change/adapt?	Which level of change/adaptation?	How to request /inform about the change?	Where to document the change?	Requires change in grantee proposal documents (Y/N)?
Specific Activities/ Outcomes	Change within or between series of activities/specific outcomes above grantee budget threshold of 10%.	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Project Implementation Plan Next Financial Report Revised budget	YES Project Budget
Budget	Changes in budget adjustments of 10% or above on the subtotal level/specific outcomes level on an annual basis.	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Financial Report Revised budget	YES Project Budget
Risk Matrix	Change in organisational, programme or contextual risks or change in risk level.	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Next biannual report Revised Risk Matrix	YES Risk Matrix
Results Framework	Change of objectives, outcomes, outputs, indicators or targets	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Revised RFW	YES RFW/MFW Narrative Proposal: Executive summary + Section 2
Theory of Change & Overall Strategy	Change in flow of change process in the TOC, but not change to overall purpose of project.	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Revised narrative proposal and TOC diagram if affected Revised RFW if affected Revised Risk Matrix if affected Revised budget if affected	YES Narrtive Proposal: Section 2 and relevant sections where TOC is mentioned + RFW/MFW + Risk matrix +Budget
Other	Change in lead grantee contact person, key management responsible people, signatories to bank accounts, or change in actual bank account.	Mail to RMU	Bank letter/bank confirmation Annex B (of GA)	NO

LEVEL 3: ADAPTATIONS THAT REQUIRE GRANT AGREEMENT ADDENDUM

What to change/adapt?	Which level of change/adaptation?	How to request /inform about the change?	Where to document the change?	Requires change in grantee proposal documents (Y/N)?
Theory of Change & Overall Strategy	Complete change in strategy that changes overall purpose of project	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Grant Agreement addendum Annex D (of GA): Signed adapted Project Proposals documents.	YES Narrative Proposal: Section 2 (TOC & strategy) and other relevant sections where mentioned + RFW +Risk Matrix
Consortium/ Alliance Composition	Change of lead grantee or alliance members	Grantee Project Adaptation Form to RMU	Grant Agreement addendum Annex D (of GA): Signed Project Proposal documents	YES Narrative Proposal: Information about applicant + section 6 +Budget +Risk matrix

Education Out Loud is Global Partnership for Education's fund for civil society advocacy and accountability in education. The programme aims to strengthen civil society's capacity to engage in education sector planning, policy dialogue and monitoring, and to promote transparency and accountability in national education policies, as well as create a stronger global and regional enabling environment for civil society advocacy and transparency efforts in education.

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