



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

## Terms of Reference

Request for Proposals: Independent Evaluation of the  
Commonwealth of Learning Strategic Plan 2021–2027

## Table of Contents

1. Background and Context .....	4
2. Purpose .....	4
3. Objectives .....	5
4. Scope .....	5
5. Evaluation Design .....	6
5.1. Evaluation Framework .....	6
5.2. Methodology .....	6
5.3. Data Sources and Analytical Approaches.....	7
6. Governance and Quality Assurance.....	8
7. Ethical Considerations .....	8
8. Duration and Phasing .....	9
8.1. Inception Phase.....	9
8.2. Data Collection Phase .....	10
8.3. Data Analysis Phase .....	10
8.4. Reporting Phase .....	11
9. Structure of the Evaluation Report.....	11
9.1. Management Response and Public Dissemination .....	11
10. Deliverables and Dates.....	12
11. Required Expertise .....	12
12. Proposal Submission and Evaluation .....	13
12.1. Submission Requirements.....	13
12.2. Evaluation of Proposals .....	14
12.3. Ownership of Proposals.....	14
12.4. COL's Intentions.....	14
12.5. Conflict of Interest .....	14
12.6. Irrevocable Offer .....	15
12.7. Compensation .....	15
12.8. Flexibility in Implementation .....	15



13. Deadline and Contact ..... 15

Annex 1 – Corporate Evaluation Framework..... 16

# 1. Background and Context

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an Inter-Governmental Organisation established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987 to expand access to education and training through open, distance, and technology-enabled approaches. COL supports Member States in strengthening human resource development for economic, social, and sustainable development through scalable, cost-effective, and inclusive learning systems.

COL is accountable to a Board of Governors composed of representatives of Commonwealth Member States, as nominated by their governments.

COL's Strategic Plan 2021–2027<sup>1</sup> is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and related development priorities. It is organised around two sectors (Education and Skills) each containing several programme initiatives, and underpinned by cross-cutting priorities, including gender equality and technology-enabled learning. Alongside sectoral programming externally funded restricted projects extend COL's reach and support targeted interventions within and across sectors.

An independent Mid-Term Evaluation was completed in 2023 which, amongst its findings, highlighted that several initiatives had been implemented in relative isolation, limiting interlinkages across sectors and enabling mechanisms, and also recommended changes to Results Based Monitoring (RBM) practices. In response, COL introduced some collaborative projects to foster new working practices and strengthened RBM and other system enablers to improve portfolio coherence.

An independent Final Evaluation is now being commissioned, to assess the overall performance, coherence, strategic value, and future implications of the Strategic Plan 2021-2027 as it approaches completion, scheduled to take place between July 2026 and February 2027.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of the Final Corporate Evaluation is to provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of COL's institutional performance and strategic positioning under the Strategic Plan 2021–2027. It should generate forward-looking findings to inform the next strategic planning cycle. Specifically, the evaluation will:

---

<sup>1</sup> COL Strategic Plan 2021-2027 is available at <https://www.col.org/about/our-strategy>

- Build upon the findings of the Mid-Term Evaluation
- Assess COL's overall strategic performance and institutional contribution;
- Support accountability to Member States and partners;
- Inform the development of the next Strategic Plan; and
- Strengthen organisational learning and strategic decision-making.

### 3. Objectives

The evaluation will:

1. Build on the Mid-Term Evaluation findings and management response, assessing the overall effectiveness, coherence, inclusion, sustainability, and strategic value of the Strategic Plan 2021–2027;
2. Consider the extent to which recommendations from the Mid-Term Evaluation have been effectively addressed.
3. Synthesise evidence from initiative-level performance and results data to support corporate-level judgement;
4. Identify which approaches, modalities, and partnerships have generated the strongest results and strategic leverage and why;
5. Assess COL's contribution to policy change, institutional strengthening, and learner-level outcomes; and
6. Provide actionable and forward-looking recommendations for the next strategic period.

### 4. Scope

The evaluation will cover the implementation period of the Strategic Plan 2021–2027. It will assess the Strategic Plan as a corporate architecture, rather than as a collection of isolated activities. The evaluation will be desk-based, relying primarily on existing corporate and initiative-level evidence and performance data, complemented by targeted primary data collection where required.

The evaluation will consider change across three interconnected levels:

- Policy and regulatory change (systemic);
- Institutional systems, capacities, and practices (institutional); and
- Learner access, participation, progression, and outcomes (community & learners).

The scope will place particular emphasis on:

- Strategic coherence and leverage;
- Effectiveness of support to policy and institutional change;
- Inclusion and equity;
- Sustainability, institutionalisation, and scale; and
- Implications for future strategic prioritisation and investment.

## 5. Evaluation Design

### 5.1. Evaluation Framework

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the Final Evaluation Framework (Annex 1), which will serve as the mandatory guiding instrument for the evaluation design, implementation, and reporting. All deliverables, including the inception report, draft report, and final report, must demonstrate alignment with this Framework.

While the Framework defines the required analytical domains, pathways, evaluation questions and sub-questions, and architecture, the evaluation team will retain independence in methodological choices, including methods, sampling, analytical tools, interpretation, and formulation of findings and recommendations.

### 5.2. Methodology

The evaluation will adopt a theory-based, mixed-methods approach consistent with the Corporate Evaluation Framework and guided by COL's theory of change. It will combine quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess performance, examine causal pathways, and identify the contextual factors that enable or constrain results. Primary data collection will be used selectively for:

- Validation and triangulation of existing evidence;
- Gap-filling where critical evidence is missing; and
- Stakeholder interpretation of results, constraints, and strategic value.

The following principles will guide the methodology:

- Proportionality, ensuring the scope of inquiry is realistic and aligned with available evidence, time, and resources;
- Strategic utility, focusing on questions most relevant to the next strategic planning cycle; and
- Selectivity, using purposive case selection and thematic analysis to generate strategic insight from a manageable body of evidence.

A realistic design is expected to include approximately 5-6 case studies, supplemented by thematic reviews of selected cross-cutting issues such as inclusion, sustainability, modality choice, or institutionalisation. The final number of case studies will be determined by the evaluation team in consultation with COL. Case selection should maximise analytical diversity rather than numerical representativeness. Illustrative case selection criteria may include:

- Representation across Education, Skills, and collaborative initiatives;
- Geographic diversity, including small states and Pacific contexts;
- Variation in governance conditions, institutional readiness, and digital capacity;
- A mix of advisory, catalytic, technical assistance, and direct delivery modalities;
- Availability of evidence /evaluability;
- Inclusion and gender relevance;
- Both mature and newer interventions; and
- Examples of stronger and weaker performance for comparative learning.

## 5.3. Data Sources and Analytical Approaches

### 5.3.1. Data Sources

It is expected that evaluation will draw on the following sources of evidence (not exhaustive):

- Mid-Term Evaluation and management response
- Evidence from initiative-level evaluations including:
  - Independently commissioned external evaluations of initiative activities aligned to the Corporate Evaluation Framework
  - Reflective self-assessments from COL staff (i.e., critical, anticipatory comments that help assess present performance as well as future implications, uncertainty, and contextual vulnerabilities)
- Performance monitoring data and programme records;
- Policy and regulatory documentation;
- Institutional governance and quality assurance records;
- Case studies and thematic analyses;
- Financial and operational data (where necessary); and
- Primary data generated through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and observations, where appropriate.

### 5.3.2. Analytical Approaches

The evaluation is expected to use a combination of the following approaches:

- Contribution analysis;
- Comparative cross-case analysis;
- Cross-pathway mapping;
- Sustainability and institutionalisation analysis; and
- Equity-focused analysis.

The evaluation team will apply systematic triangulation throughout data collection and analysis. Evidence from different sources, methods, and stakeholder groups will be compared to identify convergence, complementarity, and divergence. Corporate-level conclusions must be grounded in credible and verifiable evidence.

## 6. Governance and Quality Assurance

The evaluation will be overseen by an Evaluation Steering Committee, chaired by the COL Vice-President. The Committee will:

- Approve the inception report.
- Review draft deliverables.
- Safeguard the independence and methodological integrity of the evaluation;
- Facilitate access to relevant documentation and stakeholders.
- Ensure compliance with agreed quality assurance standards.

COL's Monitoring and Evaluation Manager will provide first-level quality assurance for major deliverables.

The remaining members of the Evaluation Steering Committee will provide a second level of quality assurance.

Final approval of deliverables will rest with the Chair of the Evaluation Committee or designate.

The evaluation team will be responsible for conducting internal quality assurance before the submission of all deliverables.

## 7. Ethical Considerations

The evaluation team will adhere to recognised ethical standards throughout the evaluation process. This includes:

- Informed consent and voluntary participation
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Do no harm
- Equity, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity
- Transparency and independence
- Responsible and evidence-based reporting

The evaluation team must ensure that methods and tools are culturally appropriate, accessible, and sensitive to power dynamics and the needs of diverse stakeholder groups.

## 8. Duration and Phasing

The evaluation phases are as follows:

### 8.1. Inception Phase

The inception phase is intended to ensure that the evaluation team develops a clear and comprehensive understanding of the evaluation objectives, as well as the requirements set out in this ToR and the Evaluation Framework. It also enables the team to translate these requirements into an appropriate evaluation methodology and a robust work plan, while identifying and proposing any necessary refinements or clarifications.

The work plan should set out the overall process for conducting the evaluation, including the data collection and analysis methods (including any additional primary data collection requirements) that will be used to address the evaluation questions. In particular, the team should assess whether the evaluation subject, context, scope, and questions are relevant and sufficiently nuanced for the purposes of the evaluation.

The inception phase begins with a kick-off session in which members of the Evaluation Steering Committee brief the evaluation team and outline the context in which the evaluation has been commissioned. Depending on the location of the evaluation team, these inception meetings may be held either remotely or face to face.

This phase includes an initial review of background documentation, together with discussions with key stakeholders (where necessary) to enable the evaluation team to develop a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns related to the intervention or theme under evaluation, as well as its implementation. The inception phase also serves to confirm and refine any preliminary approaches already set out in the technical proposal.

Independent external evaluations of initiative-level activities, aligned to the Corporate Evaluation Framework, will be in progress during this phase. Concept and design documents will be available pending results.

The evaluation team is expected to prepare a draft inception report which brings together the elements listed above, receive feedback from COL, and finalise the draft taking such feedback into consideration. Upon approval of the final inception report by the Evaluation Steering Committee, the report will constitute the agreement between COL and the evaluation team on the operational plan for the evaluation. Following this approval, the evaluation team will prepare a presentation of the preliminary evaluation findings based on the desk review documents including the performance-level evaluations.

## 8.2. Data Collection Phase

Data collection for the corporate evaluation will be undertaken in two interrelated stages. The first stage begins during the inception phase and focuses on the compilation, review and structuring of existing evidence from across the performance-results evaluations of its programmes. The second stage consists of targeted primary data collection to validate emerging findings, address evidence gaps and incorporate stakeholder perspectives that may not be fully captured in programme documentation and case study materials. In the second stage of data collection, the evaluation team will also examine any initiative-level performance results that were unavailable during the inception phase.

Primary data collection will be selective and purposive. It may include key informant interviews, small group discussions, and where appropriate short surveys. Data collection instruments will be developed on the basis of the evaluation questions and refined after the initial review of programme evidence. All interviews and surveys with the selected stakeholders, including beneficiaries, will be conducted virtually.

## 8.3. Data Analysis Phase

Data analysis will be iterative, theory-informed and explicitly designed to synthesise evidence from multiple programme case studies into coherent corporate-level findings. Since the evaluation draws principally on individual evidence from across COL programmes, the central analytical task is not only to assess each body of evidence on its own merits, but also to identify recurring patterns, divergences and explanatory factors across the portfolio as a whole.

The evaluation team needs to pay attention to the quality, consistency and limitations of the available evidence, recognising that the performance-level evaluations may differ in scope, maturity and methodological strength.

## 8.4. Reporting Phase

The reporting phase brings together the findings of the evaluation team in a concise analytical evaluation report. The main outputs of the reporting phase are the draft and final evaluation reports. In this phase, the evaluation team is responsible for delivering a timely evaluation report that meets COL quality standards requirements including the content, validity, format, and length.

Upon the submission of the draft evaluation report, the evaluation team will present the report's findings, conclusions, and recommendations, and facilitate discussions to promote shared learning, gather feedback, and support the collaborative development of the final evaluation recommendations. Following COL's feedback on the draft evaluation report, the evaluation team will prepare the final evaluation report and present the final findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned to COL.

## 9. Structure of the Evaluation Report

The corporate evaluation report should be structured to reflect the corporate nature of the evaluation, the four evaluation domains, and the progression from evidence synthesis to strategic judgement. Rather than presenting a series of case studies, the report should provide an integrated strategic assessment of the Strategic Plan. The main body of the report may be organised as follows: Executive Summary; Introduction; Evaluation Context and Strategic Framework; Evaluation Methodology (including data sources, sampling, stakeholder identification and consultation, analytical approaches, evaluation ethics, data quality assurance, limitations, risks, and mitigation measures); Findings; Cross-Cutting Strategic Synthesis; Conclusions; Lessons Learned; and Strategic Recommendations for the Next Strategic Plan.

In addition to the final report the evaluation team should prepare a slide deck capturing key findings and strategic recommendations and include one presentation to the COL Board of Governors within the workplan.

### 9.1. Management Response and Public Dissemination

COL will develop a formal management response to the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. This response may be published alongside the evaluation report on COL's website to ensure transparency, accountability, and learning.

## 10. Deliverables and Dates

The Table below presents the evaluation deliverables and dates. evaluation team is expected to provide the following deliverables:

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Start of the evaluation	Briefing with the Evaluation Steering Committee, and begin desk review.	02 July 2026
Draft Inception Report	Draft inception report presenting the refined methodology, evaluation matrix, evidence mapping, sampling approach, data collection tools, analytical approach, risks and mitigation measures, and detailed work plan.	15 August 2026
Final Inception Report	Inception report revised in response to COL's feedback and approved by the Evaluation Steering Committee.	31 August 2026
Presentation of Preliminary Findings	Presentation of preliminary findings based on the review of documents, performance evaluations, and early analysis.	30 November 2026
Draft Evaluation Report	Draft evaluation report setting out findings, conclusions, lessons learned, and strategic recommendations, taking into account available initiative evaluations.	31 January 2027
Presentation of Draft Evaluation Findings	Presentation and discussion of draft findings, conclusions, and recommendations with COL stakeholders.	31 January 2027
Final Evaluation Report	Final evaluation report incorporating COL feedback and meeting agreed quality standards.	28 February 2027
Presentation of Final Findings	Final presentation of the evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned.	28 February 2027
Presentation of Findings to COL Board of Governors	High-level presentation of the evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned.	May / June 2027 (date TBC)

## 11. Required Expertise

The evaluation team is expected to comprise a small team of senior experts capable of assessing parallel workstreams within the Strategic Plan. Collectively, the team should demonstrate:

- **Technical expertise in open and distance learning, OER, and TEL:** Demonstrated knowledge and experience in open, flexible, and distance learning models; OER policy and practice; technology-enabled learning; and digital learning systems, including in low- and middle-income contexts. Experience evaluating digital transformation in education and skills development is highly desirable.
- **Experience evaluating intergovernmental or multi-country organisations:** Substantial experience conducting evaluations of international, intergovernmental, or multi-country

programmes, including the ability to assess programmes operating across different governance, policy, and institutional environments.

- **Systems-level and institutional analysis:** Strong analytical capacity in organisational performance, institutional effectiveness, systems change, governance, partnerships, and strategic positioning.
- **Gender-responsive and inclusion-focused evaluation:** Demonstrated ability to integrate gender equality, disability inclusion, and broader equity considerations into evaluation design, data collection, analysis, and reporting.
- **Advanced mixed-methods evaluation expertise:** Strong expertise in theory-based evaluation, theories of change, contribution analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods, triangulation, and synthesis of complex evidence into clear and actionable findings.

## 12. Proposal Submission and Evaluation

### 12.1. Submission Requirements

Bidders must propose a team of qualified professionals with complementary expertise to undertake the evaluation. **Proposals should come from Commonwealth countries.**

The proposal should include the following:

#### 12.1.1. Technical Proposal

- This refers to the approach, methodology, level of effort, timeline and must include rigorous, contextually relevant, and a methodologically sound approach to generate credible, actionable evidence aligned with the evaluation's purpose and key research questions as framed per Annex 1. It should also spell out the sampling strategy and procedures where possible.

#### 12.1.2. Team Composition and CVs

- Detail the composition of the proposed team, including how members' expertise fits to the criteria outlined in section 11 above.

#### 12.1.3. Financial Proposal

- This refers to a budget breakdown and must substantiate value for money.
- The total budget available for this evaluation is no more than CAD 150,000. Bidders are expected to submit a financial proposal within this ceiling.

#### 12.1.4. References

- Please provide at least three references from relevant previous evaluations from international agencies.

### 12.2. Evaluation of Proposals

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Submission of all requested documentation
- Relevant prior experience
- Technical Proposal including proposed methodology in accordance with the Evaluation Framework (see Annex 1)
- References
- Financial proposal

Technical proposals will be evaluated first, and those who are shortlisted will be evaluated for their financial proposals.

This will be followed by interviews with the shortlisted candidates taking both technical and financial proposals into consideration.

### 12.3. Ownership of Proposals

All proposals become the property of COL. Proposals will be treated as confidential and used solely for purposes related to this Request for Proposals (RFP). COL is headquartered at 505 Burrard Street, Suite 1650, Vancouver, BC V7X 1M6, Canada.

### 12.4. COL's Intentions

COL aims to obtain the offer most suitable and advantageous to its requirements. COL reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to accept or reject any proposal, including non-compliant proposals, or to reject all proposals.

### 12.5. Conflict of Interest

Proponents must disclose any real or potential conflict of interest. A conflict of interest is any situation or relationship that gives a real or perceived unfair advantage or that violates the proponent's own standards. Non-disclosure may result in disqualification or termination of agreements.

## 12.6. Irrevocable Offer

By submitting a proposal, proponents make a valid and irrevocable offer open for acceptance by COL for 30 days following the closing date of June 4, 2026.

## 12.7. Compensation

Proponents acknowledge that no claim for compensation arises from participating in this RFP. Submission constitutes agreement to this condition.

## 12.8. Flexibility in Implementation

The evaluation may encounter constraints, including the availability of key stakeholders, logistical challenges, and evolving contextual factors. COL reserves the right to adjust, scale, or discontinue aspects of the planned phases based on feasibility, emerging findings, or strategic priorities. Any such adjustments will be carefully managed to ensure that the evaluation remains comprehensive, rigorous, and able to meet its objectives.

## 13. Deadline and Contact

The following timelines should be adhered to, and the project's contact information is also provided for any questions that the evaluation team may have:

**Deadline for questions:** May 29, 2026

**Proposal submission deadline:** June 5, 2026

**Anticipated start date:** July 2, 2026

**Contact information:**

For any *questions*: [vpoffice@col.org](mailto:vpoffice@col.org)

For proposal *submissions*: [vpoffice@col.org](mailto:vpoffice@col.org)

## Annex 1 – Corporate Evaluation Framework

### 1. Context and Programme Architecture

COL's mandate as an intergovernmental organisation is to expand access to equitable quality learning through open, distance and technology-enabled approaches in support of sustainable development across the Commonwealth. The evaluation framework, therefore, reflects both operational objectives and the broader normative responsibilities entrusted to the organisation by its member states.

The 2021–2027 Strategic Plan is implemented through a programme architecture that organises activities and interventions across thematic sectors and enabling mechanisms. The programme architecture sets out the formal structure through which COL delivers its mandate across the Commonwealth. It shows how activities are organised across the two principal sectors—Education and Skills—while incorporating externally funded projects, regional initiatives and cross-cutting system enablers and collaborative programmes.

Within the **Education sector**, COL activities include open schooling, teacher education, higher education, and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The **Skills sector** encompasses initiatives such as Skills for Work, Lifelong Learning for Farmers, Gender Equality, and Girls Inspire. Alongside these sectoral programmes, externally funded projects constitute a significant component of the portfolio. Supported by development partners and other funding agencies, they extend COL's reach and enable targeted interventions, operating either within individual sectors or across them.

The 2023 Mid-Term Evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2021–2027 assessed that several initiatives were implemented in relative isolation, thereby limiting systematic interlinkages across sectors and enabling mechanisms. Subsequently, some collaborative projects, including Micro-Credentials, Women in STEM (WISE), Future Skills, Sustainable Business Models, Teacher/Trainers in the Loop, and Graduate Employability, were designed to reinforce sectoral as well as inter-sectoral interventions. In addition, cross-cutting and system enablers—including Gender Mainstreaming, Technology-Enabled Learning, and Knowledge and Communication Services—have also been reshaped to support systemic coherence in some cases.

The diagram below shows COL's programmatic architecture for its current strategic plan. COL's programme architecture provides both the organisational logic through which its strategic priorities are implemented and a basis for evaluating whether the strategy functioned as an integrated system in practice. For the final corporate evaluation, this architecture is not merely descriptive. It is itself an object of analysis, because it embodies

assumptions about coherence, mutual reinforcement, integration and strategic leverage across the portfolio. It will examine the extent to which those assumptions were conceptually sound and effectively operationalised.



## 2. Purpose of the Evaluation Framework

The Evaluation Framework sets out the conceptual, analytical and methodological basis for assessing COL's Strategic Plan 2021–2027 as a corporate exercise intended to inform the next strategic planning cycle. Its purpose is to support a rigorous and evidence-based assessment of the Strategic Plan's overall validity, coherence, strategic value and contribution to change across policy, institutional, and learner levels. It will also consider how well the strategy was conceived and how it can be strengthened in the future.

The framework is designed to serve both **accountability** and **organisational learning**. It will assess the extent to which the Strategic Plan has contributed to stronger policy and regulatory conditions, improved institutional capacities and practices, and more equitable and sustainable gains in learner access, participation, progression and outcomes.

As a corporate evaluation, its purpose is to generate well-founded corporate judgement on the Strategic Plan as a whole, not to produce exhaustive coverage of the full portfolio. It will therefore establish a selective and strategic approach to the use of evidence, enabling the evaluation to generate higher-order judgement on what has worked, under what conditions, with what strategic value, and with what implications for COL's next strategic period.

## 3. Scope and Intended Use

The evaluation will prioritise areas of enquiry that are most relevant to strategic decision-making for the next cycle. It will therefore make intentional choices about what to examine in depth, what to review more selectively, and what to exclude from detailed analysis. These decisions are not merely practical since they also shape the types of claims the evaluation can credibly make and the lessons it can generate.

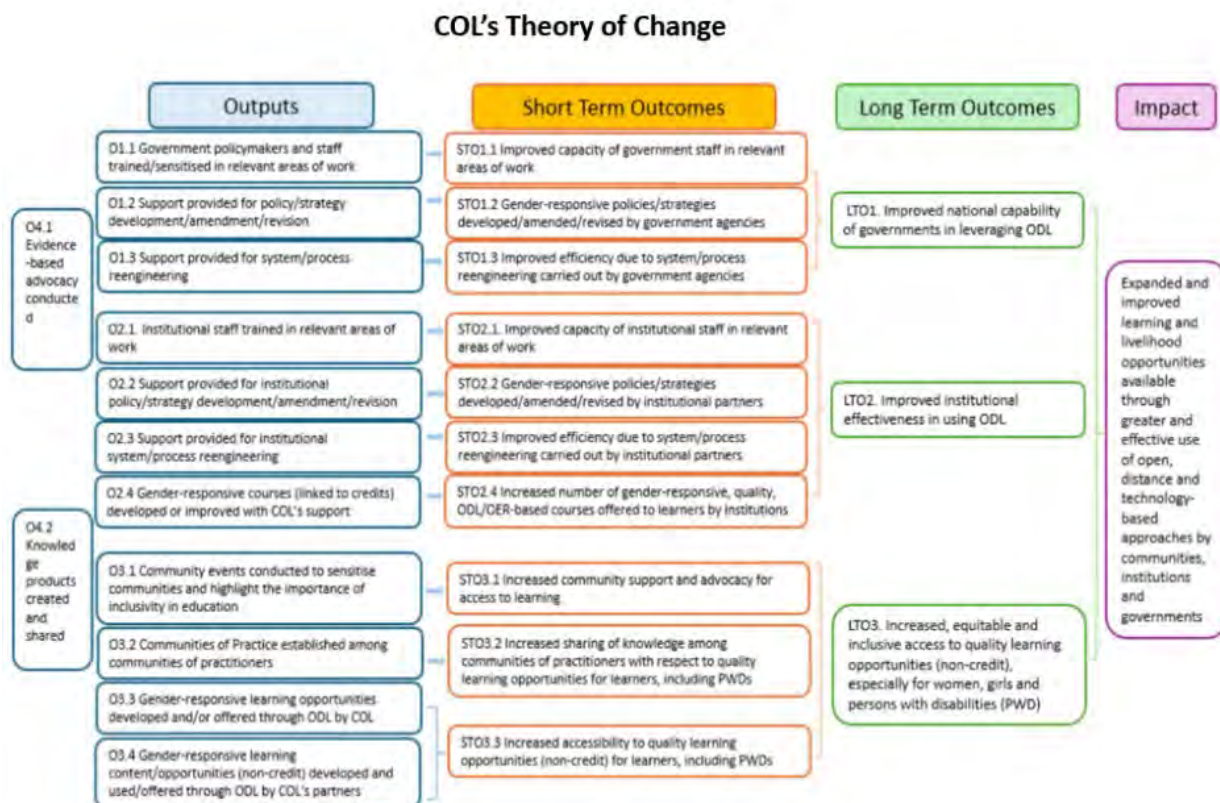
The following scope decisions therefore guide the framework:

- It will focus on the Strategic Plan as a corporate architecture rather than on isolated activities
- It will rely substantially on existing initiative-level evidence rather than attempting a fresh assessment of all interventions
- It will examine change across systemic, institutional and learner pathways, while recognising that not all parts of the portfolio will generate evidence at each level
- It will emphasise strategic coherence, comparative advantage, sustainability, scale and future value rather than only retrospective performance review

## 4. Conceptual Foundations

### 4.1 Theory of Change

The corporate evaluation framework is anchored in COL's revised Theory of Change (ToC)<sup>1</sup> shown below, and the 2021–2027 Strategic Plan. It draws on the organisation's articulated results chain, which links outputs, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes, and impact. The framework translates this logic into a structured approach for assessing strategic coherence, contribution, sustainability, and future strategic value. It builds upon COL's established monitoring and evaluation system. The framework assesses programme implementation while examining how interventions have contributed to policy development, strengthened institutional systems, and expanded equitable access to quality learning.



### 4.2 Pathways of Change & Organising Principles

The evaluation framework is structured around three interconnected pathways of change:

1. **Systemic** – policy, regulatory, and national capacity level;
2. **Institutional** – organisational systems, capacities and delivery models;
3. **Community and learner** – access, participation, progression and benefit for learners and communities.

Inclusivity and systemic coherence serve as organising principles throughout the framework. Inclusivity ensures that gender equality, disability inclusion, the participation of marginalised groups, and equity are addressed across all domains. Systemic coherence focuses on the alignment and functional connections among policy, institutional systems, and learner-level outcomes as a basis for sustainable change.

Impact is conceptualised as vertically integrated. This means that policy shifts, institutional systems, and learner outcomes are treated as interconnected elements within a chain of influence. This verticality is not assumed to be linear or exclusively top-down. The evaluation will examine downward pathways of influence, from policy to institutional practice to learner outcomes. It will also assess upward feedback loops in which learner experience, implementation evidence, and institutional learning inform policy, strategy, and system adaptation.

Sustained impact is defined as change embedded in national frameworks, organisational systems and learner practices, leading to durable improvements in access, quality and resilience across COL's areas of work. The framework therefore adopts a systems-change perspective, assessing not only performance within each pathway but also the extent to which the Strategic Plan has supported integrated, scalable and lasting transformation.

## 5. Analytical Structure of the Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework is conceived as a single integrated model comprising two complementary analytical dimensions:

- a) the performance–results dimension, and
- b) the corporate–strategic dimension.

The **performance–results dimension** constitutes the core empirical foundation of the evaluation. It will assess individual initiatives and collaborative programmes. It will examine implementation performance including outputs and outcomes delivered and target achievement, and results achieved at policy, institutional, and learner levels as appropriate to the intervention. It will also assess the extent to which inclusion and equity considerations were reflected in programme design and delivery, and the strength of evidence regarding sustainability, institutionalisation, replication, adaptation, and scale. The purpose of this dimension is to generate robust, systematic, and comparable findings on performance and contribution.

The **corporate–strategic dimension** will then use this body of initiative-level evidence to assess the Strategic Plan at an aggregate level. It will examine the overall coherence of the

Strategic Plan, the extent to which it reflects COL's mandate, positioning, and comparative advantage, the appropriateness of the principal delivery modalities adopted, the degree to which interventions generated leverage beyond their immediate scope, and the extent to which the portfolio demonstrates potential for systems-level influence and scalable transformation. The corporate-level analysis is thus interpretive and synthetic in nature, deriving broader strategic judgements from the accumulated evidence rather than directing the assessment of individual initiative performance.

Accordingly, the relationship between the two dimensions is hierarchical and cumulative. This approach ensures that initiative-level evidence serves as the foundation for corporate-level synthesis and strategic judgment.

## 6. Evaluation Domains and Rationale

To ensure feasibility and strategic clarity, the corporate evaluation will be structured around four broad evaluation domains, rather than attempting to assess a larger number of overlapping domains separately. Taken together, these four domains provide a concise but comprehensive structure for the corporate evaluation, while reducing overlap and making the overall design more manageable. The domains are as follows:

1. **Strategic Coherence and Leverage:** This domain examines whether COL generated coherence across policy shifts, institutional change and learner-level outcomes, and where it created the greatest strategic leverage for systemic impact. The rationale for this domain is that the central corporate question is not simply whether individual initiatives performed well, but whether the Strategic Plan functioned as a coherent strategic architecture. It responds directly to the concern, raised in the Mid-Term Evaluation, that parts of the portfolio were implemented in relative isolation.
2. **Effectiveness of Support to Policy and Institutional Change:** This domain examines the extent to which COL contributed to credible and consequential change in policy frameworks, institutional systems, and delivery capacity. It also assesses which forms of support were most effective under different conditions. The rationale for combining policy and institutional change into one domain is that, at the corporate level, these issues are closely linked and are best assessed together rather than as multiple separate lines of enquiry. This domain also enables analysis of operating modalities, including advisory, catalytic, technical assistance and direct support approaches.
3. **Inclusion and Equity:** This domain examines whether inclusion has moved beyond policy commitment and programme intent to become visible in institutional practice and learner-level results. The rationale for keeping inclusion as a

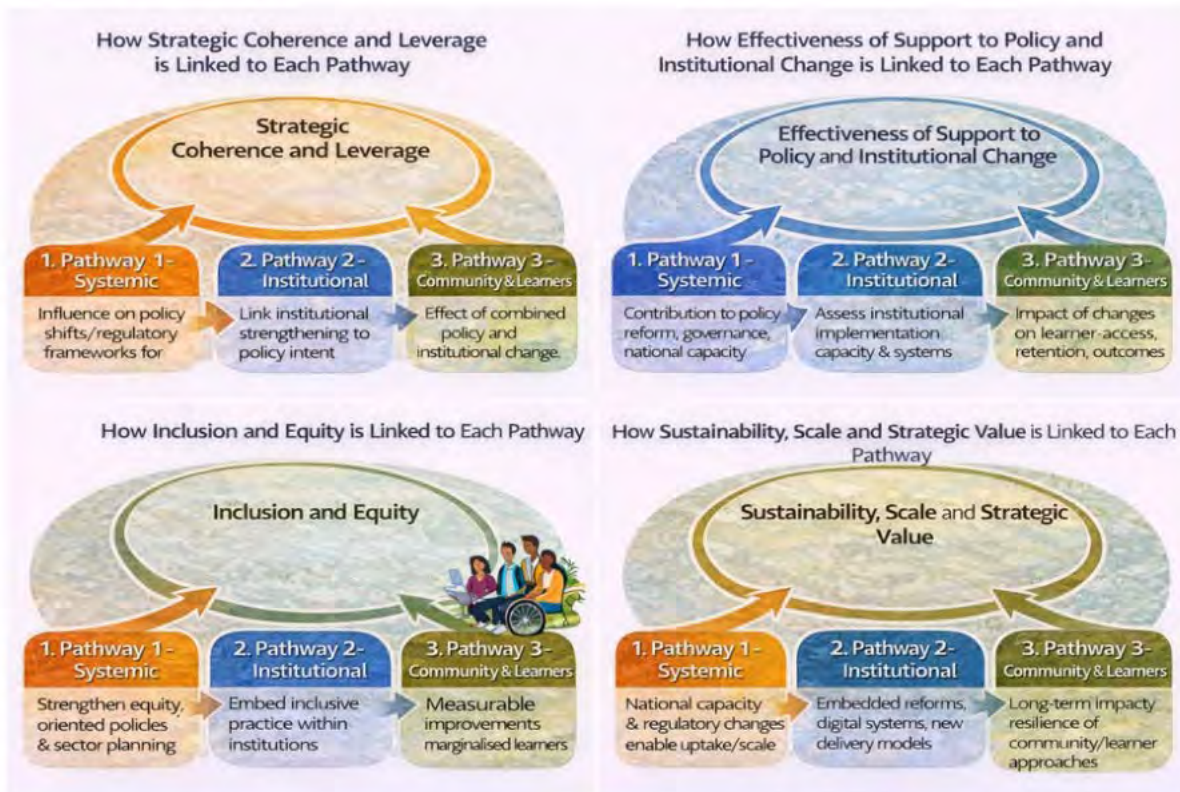
standalone domain is that it is central to COL's mandate and should not be treated only as a cross-cutting theme. This ensures explicit examination of whether women and girls, boys and men, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups benefited substantively from COL-supported work.

4. **Sustainability, Scale and Strategic Value:** This domain examines which COL-supported approaches and modalities have demonstrated the strongest evidence of sustainability, institutionalisation or scale, and what this implies for future strategic prioritisation and investment. The rationale for this domain is that the final evaluation is intended not only to judge past results, but also to inform future strategic choices. It therefore needs to identify which models appear most durable, adaptable, and strategically valuable for the next cycle.

Evaluation domains are examined across the three pathways of change to assess both pathway-specific change and the interactions between them. These pathways will guide analysis, but they will not be treated as requiring equal empirical coverage in every part of the portfolio. Rather, they will provide an analytical structure for assessing pathway-specific performance and cross-level interaction. This is important because the corporate evaluation is concerned not only with whether change occurred within particular initiatives, but also whether policy reform influenced institutional practice, and whether institutional transformation affected learner participation and outcomes. It also aims to assess whether implementation experience fed back into broader policy and system learning.

The diagram below illustrates how the four evaluation domains are connected to COL's three pathways of change: systemic, institutional, and community and learners. It is designed to show how each domain can be examined across these pathways to assess coherence, contribution, inclusion, sustainability, and strategic value across the overall Theory of Change.

## The Integrated Evaluation Framework for the Final Evaluation of the COL Strategic Plan



### 7. Core Evaluation Questions and Sub-Questions

The following are the core evaluation questions and sub-questions aligned to the evaluation domains.

#### 1. Strategic Coherence and Leverage

**Core question:** To what extent has COL contributed to achieving coherence across policy shifts, institutional change and learner-level outcomes, and where has it generated the greatest strategic leverage for systemic impact?

#### Sub-questions

- Where is there credible evidence that COL linked policy change, institutional strengthening, and learner-level results in mutually reinforcing ways?
- Which COL interventions have demonstrated multiplier effects across multiple pathways (policy, institutional and learner levels)?
- Which types of support, partnerships or intervention combinations generated the greatest strategic leverage across these levels?
- Where have linkages remained weak or fragmented, and what does this imply for future strategic integration and prioritisation?

## 2. Effectiveness of Support to Policy and Institutional Change

**Core question:** How and to what extent has COL contributed to policy and institutional changes that are credible, durable and consequential, and which forms and modalities of support have been most effective under different conditions?

### Sub-questions

- To what extent, and in what ways, has COL strengthened institutional implementation capacity and meaningful change in policy frameworks?
- Which forms of support or delivery modalities were most effective in producing durable change, and under what conditions?
- What key constraints have reduced effectiveness, in what contexts have they arisen, and what do they suggest for future programme design and choice of delivery modality?
- To what extent are monitoring and evaluation systems embedded within governance and implementation structures, and how effectively do they generate evidence and feedback loops to strengthen policy execution, institutional performance, and equitable learner outcomes?

## 3. Inclusion and Equity

**Core question:** How has COL contributed to strengthening inclusive and equitable participation across policy, institutional and learner levels, particularly for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups?

### Sub-questions

- How has COL influenced the integration of equity, gender-responsiveness and inclusion within national and sectoral policy frameworks?
- In what ways has COL supported institutions to operationalise inclusive practices, including accessible design, flexible delivery modalities and strengthened learner support systems?
- What contribution has COL made to improving access, retention, completion and learning outcomes among women/girls, men/boys, people with disabilities and other marginalised populations?
- How effectively has COL facilitated alignment and coherence between national policy commitments and institutional-level implementation of inclusive approaches?

#### 4. Sustainability, Scale and Strategic Value

**Core question:** Which COL-supported approaches have demonstrated the strongest evidence of sustainability, institutionalisation or scale, and what does this imply for future strategic prioritisation and investment?

##### Sub-questions

- Which changes supported by COL show the clearest evidence of sustainability or institutionalisation beyond the life of specific initiatives?
- What evidence exists of sustained improvements in learner progression, employability, and broader socio-economic outcomes associated with COL's contribution?
- What institutional change processes supported by COL (e.g., digital transformation, quality assurance improvements, new delivery models) have resulted in measurable improvements in access, quality or efficiency?
- Which approaches or models show the strongest potential for adaptation, replication or scale, and under what enabling conditions?
- What do these findings imply for future prioritisation, resource allocation and modality choices?

The following matrix aligns the four evaluation domains and their core questions with the three pathways of change in COL's theory of change, while highlighting the interdependencies across pathways that shape the overall results. The final column captures cross-pathway interdependencies, recognising that change at one level is often contingent on progress at others and that strategic value lies not only in results at each level, but also in how these levels connect. Cross-cutting considerations such as gender equality, disability inclusion, contextual responsiveness, and modality of support are reflected across all four domains.

## The Evaluation Domains and Core Questions Aligned to COL's Theory of Change

Evaluation Domain	Core question	Pathway 1 – Systemic	Pathway 2 – Institutional	Pathway 3 – Community & Learners	Cross-pathway focus & inter-dependencies
<b>1. Strategic coherence and leverage</b>	<b>To what extent has COL contributed to achieving coherence across policy shifts, institutional change and learner-level outcomes, and where has it generated the greatest strategic leverage for systemic impact?</b>	Examines whether COL influenced system change coherence, policy alignment, regulatory leverage, sector strategies, partnerships, and national capacities in ways that created leverage beyond isolated initiatives. It also considers whether policy shifts created enabling conditions for institutional uptake and downstream learner benefit.	Examines whether institutional strengthening was strategically linked to policy intent and whether organisational systems, capacities, and delivery models translated upstream change into improved implementation.	Examines whether learner-level access, participation, retention, completion, progression, and benefit reflect the integration of learner-level outcomes arising from policy and institutional change.	This is the main integration domain and is foundational to all other domains. It assesses whether COL's Strategic Plan functioned as a coherent architecture of change linking policy, institutions, and learner results in mutually reinforcing ways. It also recognises that misalignment at any level weakens system-wide impact and reduces the potential for multiplier effects.



<p><b>2. Effectiveness of support to policy and institutional change</b></p>	<p><b>How and to what extent has COL contributed to policy and institutional changes that are credible, durable and consequential, and which forms and modalities of support have been most effective under different conditions?</b></p>	<p>Examines COL’s contribution to policy effectiveness, governance arrangements, national capacity, enabling environments, and the regulatory conditions needed for implementation. It also considers whether monitoring and evaluation systems were embedded within governance structures to support policy execution and accountability.</p>	<p>Examines institutional implementation capacity, implementation systems, organisational processes, quality assurance, digital and delivery models, and the operationalisation of reforms. It also considers how evidence, monitoring, and feedback loops strengthened institutional performance and adaptive implementation.</p>	<p>Examines whether policy and institutional changes led to credible improvements in learner access, participation, retention, completion, quality of experience, and benefit, including more equitable learner outcomes.</p>	<p>This domain assesses how change moves from policy to practice. It compares the effectiveness of advisory, catalytic, technical assistance, and direct support modalities under different conditions, and examines how evidence and feedback loops connect policy reform, institutional performance, and learner-level results. It recognises that policy effectiveness depends on institutional capacity and contextual responsiveness.</p>
--	---	--	--	---	--



<b>3. Inclusion and equity</b>	<b>How has COL contributed to strengthening inclusive and equitable participation across policy, institutional and learner levels, particularly for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups?</b>	Examines whether COL strengthened inclusive and equity-oriented policy frameworks, national strategies, and sector planning processes that address structural barriers to participation and embed gender responsiveness, disability inclusion, and broader equity commitments.	Examines whether institutions operationalised inclusive practice through gender-responsive and accessible systems, flexible delivery modalities, inclusive systems, strengthened learner support, and gender-responsive or disability-inclusive implementation.	Examines whether women and girls, men and boys, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups experienced equitable learner participation and outcomes including improvements in access, retention, completion, learning outcomes, and broader participation benefits.	Inclusion is both a standalone domain and a cross-pathway concern. This domain examines whether national inclusion commitments were translated into institutional practice and then into equitable learner-level results. It emphasises that equity must be structurally embedded across policy, systems, and learner experience if outcomes are to be both credible and durable.
--------------------------------	---	--	---	--	---

<p><b>4. Sustainability, scale and strategic value</b></p>	<p><b>Which COL-supported approaches have demonstrated the strongest evidence of sustainability, institutionalisation or scale, and what does this imply for future strategic prioritisation and investment?</b></p>	<p>Examines whether policy gains, national capacity, regulatory changes, and enabling conditions are likely to endure beyond specific initiatives and support wider uptake, adaptation, replication, or scale. It includes attention to long-term policy and fiscal anchoring.</p>	<p>Examines whether organisational reforms, digital transformation, quality assurance improvements, and new delivery models have been embedded within institutions and have improved access, quality, efficiency, and long-term resilience. It also considers embedded governance and quality assurance systems as foundations for institutionalisation.</p>	<p>Examines whether gains in learner access, progression, employability, and broader socio-economic outcomes appear likely to persist over time including durable learner progression and socioeconomic impact, and whether benefits are reaching wider or new groups through adapted or scaled approaches</p>	<p>This is a forward-looking synthesis domain. It identifies which COL-supported models and modalities appear most durable, adaptable, scalable, and strategically valuable across pathways, and what this implies for future prioritisation, resource allocation, modality choice, and investment in the next strategic cycle.</p>
--	--	--	--	--	---

## 8. Methodological Orientation

The evaluation will use a mixed-methods design with a strong emphasis on existing evidence. Example sources include: the Strategic Plan and theory of change materials; programme documents, annual and country reports; case studies; evidence from performance-results evaluations and self-reflective notes<sup>2</sup>; prior COL evaluations and reviews; partner and institutional documentation; and interviews with COL staff, government counterparts, institutional leaders, implementing partners and selected stakeholders.

The methodology will be guided by the principles of: i) proportionality, with the scope and level of enquiry aligned to available resources and the realistic availability of robust evidence; ii) strategic utility, by focusing on questions most relevant to the next strategic planning cycle; and iii) selectivity, through purposive case selection and thematic analysis to generate strategic insight from a manageable body of evidence.

Primary data collection will be used for: i) validation, to test and triangulate findings from existing secondary sources; ii) gap-filling, to address critical evidence gaps in areas of high strategic importance and, where necessary, rebuild the trajectory of change; and iii) stakeholder interpretation, to understand how different stakeholders interpret results, constraints, enabling factors and strategic value.

The evaluation will adopt a purposive sampling strategy designed to generate strategic insight from a limited but credible set of cases supported by thematic reviews on cross-cutting issues such as inclusion, sustainability or modality choice, based on the evaluation resources. The value of the sampling will lie in its analytical diversity, not its numerical representativeness. Selection criteria may include: representation across both Education and Skills and collaborative projects; geographical diversity, including small states and Pacific contexts; variation in governance conditions, institutional readiness and digital capacity; sufficient evidence and evaluability; a mix of advisory, catalytic, technical assistance and direct delivery modalities; both mature and newer interventions as well as collaborative programmes; and examples of stronger and weaker performance for comparative learning.

## 9. Evidence Synthesis and Corporate Judgement

The corporate evaluation will synthesise initiative-level evidence to reach judgements across four interrelated dimensions: *delivery performance*, *results performance*, *strategic performance*, and *prospective performance*. Together, these dimensions will help assess whether interventions produced credible results at policy, institutional, or learner levels. They will also allow an examination of whether interventions were implemented effectively,

addressed priority needs, aligned with COL's comparative advantage, and show sufficient promise for future investment through sustainability, adaptation, or scale.

Each **initiative-level** assessment will produce a concise, evidence-based summary covering relevance, quality of implementation, results achieved, performance against targets, inclusion and equity, sustainability, potential for adaptation or scale, and key lessons. It will also briefly describe the initiative's contribution pathway, principal modalities of support, enabling and constraining factors, strength of evidence, and overall strategic value. Each evaluation will also include reflective notes – critical and forward-looking observations that help to interpret current performance while drawing attention to future implication, uncertainty and unforeseen contextual shifts. Taken together, the initiative-level assessments should provide sufficient evidence across these dimensions to support subsequent comparative synthesis and categorisation in the corporate evaluation.

At the **corporate level**, these findings will be brought together through a common assessment framework. Delivery performance will assess how well interventions were implemented, including the extent to which they were appropriately adapted and achieved adequate reach and quality. Results performance will assess the strength and credibility of evidence that meaningful change occurred. Strategic performance will consider the extent to which interventions responded to priority needs, aligned with COL's mandate and comparative advantage, and generated broader leverage. Prospective performance will examine whether results appear durable, institutionalised, adaptable, or scalable, and therefore relevant to future strategic investment.

On this basis, the evaluation may group areas of work into broad strategic categories such as **high strategic value, promising but requiring refinement, context-dependent models**, and **low strategic return**. In doing so, the synthesis will move beyond a binary judgement of whether an intervention worked to assess the quality of implementation, responsiveness to priority needs, alignment with COL's comparative strengths, and the credibility of the case for continued or expanded investment. The analysis will remain contribution-focused, assessing the strength and plausibility of COL's contribution rather than seeking direct attribution in complex systems.

The final evaluation should produce not only findings and recommendations, but also a set of forward-looking strategic judgements to inform the next plan. In particular, it should help COL answer questions such as:

- What should COL continue because it is clearly valuable and effective?
- What should COL do differently because current models are producing mixed results?

- What should COL scale because it shows strong relevance, sustainability and replication potential?
- What should COL target more selectively because effectiveness depends heavily on context?
- What should COL deprioritise because the strategic return appears low?
- What organisational capabilities, partnerships and evidence systems require strengthening for the next strategic period?
- What new or emerging opportunities should COL prioritise in the next strategic period because they align strongly with its mandate, comparative advantage and the evolving needs of member states?