Making Evidence Use a Routine Part of Government

Innovations for Poverty Action

An Institutionalization Framework for Embedded Evidence Labs



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Introduction

Evidence- and data-informed policy design and implementation can improve the cost-effectiveness, reach, and impact of government programs, yet many investments in building this capacity do not outlast external support. Technical assistance ends, champions move on, and promising reforms stall. Governments therefore need institutional arrangements that make the generation and use of evidence a routine part of policy design and implementation at scale.

Since 2014, IPA has partnered with governments to address this challenge by co-designing Embedded Evidence Labs (Labs): permanent, in-house teams within government agencies that support evidence- and data-informed policy design, scaling, and implementation. IPA initially embeds staff alongside government counterparts and progressively transfers leadership as the Lab becomes integrated into government structures, processes, and routines. As of 2026, IPA supports 26 Labs across 10 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, working across agriculture, health, education, social protection, environment, employment, finance, gender, and justice.

This framework presents IPA's approach to establishing, strengthening, and institutionalizing Labs within government. Institutionalization is the process through which a government evidence function becomes effective, integral, routine, and sustainable in how an agency operates. The framework focuses on institutional conditions that governments and their partners can influence directly. Broader contextual factors, such as national political stability, also shape sustainability but lie outside its scope.

The approach recognizes that governments often already have functions and practices for generating and using evidence, but these may not always effectively support policy design and implementation[1]. Gaps can include weak processes linking evidence to decisions, limited human or information systems capacity, unclear institutional positioning and coordination, or insufficient resources. Rather than duplicating or replacing existing foundations, Labs build on and strengthen them, or help establish complementary functions where needed, to make evidence use more effective, systematic, and sustainable.



In November 2022, IPA held a Cross-Country Education Lab Learning Exchange in Kigali, Rwanda. Photo: IPA Rwanda

[1] Evidence functions may be housed in research, monitoring and evaluation, data and analytics, planning, innovation, delivery, or knowledge-management units, provided these functions support the generation, interpretation, or use of evidence in policy and implementation.

Drawing on more than a decade of IPA's cross-country experience, the framework is informed by research on the institutionalization of evidence-informed policymaking (Maeda et al., 2012; Zida et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2021; Kuchenmüller et al., 2022; Sempé, Pande, and Kelly, 2025), state capacity research on how governments build durable implementation capability (Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock, 2017), and review and discussion with policymakers and Government Lab leads through Cross-Country Learning Exchanges (CCLEs)[2].

Rather than serving as a detailed implementation manual, the framework provides a practical lens for diagnosing institutional gaps, guiding the design and strengthening of evidence functions, prioritizing investments and technical assistance, and assessing progress toward sustainable government ownership[3]. While grounded in the Embedded Evidence Labs model, its components and principles can also inform similar evidence functions within government.[4] Different actors can use the framework in complementary ways:

Figure 1. How Different Actors Can Use the Framework

Governments, implementers, and funders can use this framework in different ways and for different purposes. Each applies it from its own perspective, with a shared aim: an evidence function that government owns and sustains.

FOR GOVERNMENTS **Agency leadership and evidence function directors**	**FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PARTNERS** **Organizations providing technical assistance to governments**	**FOR FUNDERS**
• Governments use it to assess existing evidence systems, identify institutional gaps, and set priorities for strengthening. • They use it to design and strengthen the evidence function so that it connects government priorities and decisions with the generation, interpretation, and use of evidence, and to guide the institutional changes that sustain it over time.	• Technical assistance partners use it to understand the institutional context and identify where support adds value, building on existing structures and capabilities. • They use it to co-design and progressively strengthen the evidence function with government, and to manage the transition to government leadership, shifting from delivery to coaching, targeted technical assistance, and strategic partnership as government capability grows.	• Funders use it to identify institutional needs, set investment priorities, and target catalytic support where gaps and government demand align. • They use it to finance the design and strengthening of the evidence function, and to assess whether funding builds sustainable government capacity rather than parallel or externally dependent systems.

The framework is organized into four parts. The first explains why Embedded Labs matter, describing their two pathways to impact: improving policy design and implementation and strengthening government systems for sustained evidence use. The second sets out what needs to be institutionalized across four interdependent components: Process, Structure and Governance, Capacity, and Resources. The third explains how institutionalization happens through a phased, non-linear approach and seven guiding principles. The fourth shows what institutionalization looks like in practice, drawing on Labs across countries and sectors to illustrate how these components come together in different government contexts.

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[2] The CCLEs were held in Rwanda in 2023, Uganda and Peru in 2024, and Kenya in 2025, and brought together policymakers and government leads from agencies and government Labs across Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Philippines, Uganda, and Zambia.

[3] This framework is complemented by a broader set of operational tools used to support Lab design, implementation, monitoring, and institutionalization. These include, among others, an Evidence and Data Use Assessment, Lab Design and Institutionalization Guide, a Lab Implementation and Impact MEL Tool, and workplan templates. These tools are not reproduced in this document.

[4] This framework also contributes to a shared learning agenda on embedded evidence labs developed with the What Works Hub for Global Education, Jacobs Foundation, FCDO, J-PAL, the Education Endowment Foundation, and other partners. In particular, it contributes to understanding the institutional conditions and processes that enable Labs to become effective, embedded, and sustainable within government.



Representatives from IPA Philippines and the Department of Education's Office of the Undersecretary for Strategic Management (STRATMA) convened at the Education Sector Cross-Country Learning Exchange event in Nairobi, Kenya in 2025. Photo: IPA Philippines

1.How Embedded Labs Create Impact

Labs ultimately aim to improve people's lives by strengthening public policy. They support governments across the policy and implementation cycle: designing policies and programs, testing what works, adapting and scaling effective approaches, implementing them at scale with quality and reach, and strengthening the government systems needed to ensure effective and sustainable implementation.

These contributions operate through two complementary impact pathways: **improving policy design and implementation and strengthening government systems for the effective and sustained use of data and evidence.** The pathways are not mutually exclusive: the same Lab-supported project may improve a specific policy or program while also strengthening capabilities, systems, and routines that support evidence use across other government priorities over time.

1.1 Policy design and implementation pathway

Along the policy and implementation cycle described above, Labs work with government units on concrete policy and delivery challenges and apply the evidence tools best suited to each decision. Depending on the need, this can include impact evaluation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), descriptive analysis, predictive analytics, evidence synthesis, and other approaches that help governments design and test solutions, adapt them to context, scale effective approaches, and improve implementation over time. Figure 2 illustrates how this pathway operates in practice through selected examples from across the Lab portfolio.

Figure 2. Policy design and implementation pathway engagement examples

Designing, testing, and scaling evidence-informed policies			
Scaling STARS into a national teacher performance reform. Rwanda's Embedded Lab, with support from IPA and Gui2de, supported the government in using evidence to strengthen *imihigo*, the performance contracts for teachers, by linking teacher and headteacher performance to standardized measures of teaching practice and student learning, a government policy priority. The Lab and its partners helped test and refine alternative contract models and support their national implementation. In the 2025–26 school year, the revised *imihigo* contracts became national policy, reaching 3,548 schools and 107,411 primary and secondary teachers across a system serving nearly 3 million students.	**Scaling a national COVID-19 dropout prevention strategy.** MineduLab, Peru's Ministry of Education's Embedded Lab, helped design and test a low-cost strategy using a telenovela-style video series on the returns to education. The initial experiment reduced two-year dropout by 18.8 percent in urban areas. During COVID-19 school closures, the series was adapted for national television, reaching around 3 million public secondary students. A subsequent evaluation found a 6 percent reduction in dropout among families encouraged to watch the series, indicating that the intervention remained effective at scale (Gallego, Molina, & Neilson, 2025).	**Scaling a program to promote non-violent parenting.** Colombia's ICBF Lab supported the development, evaluation, and scale-up of a parenting program that reduced caregivers' acceptance of violent punishment, strengthened positive caregiving practices, and improved caregiver-child relationships. The program is expected to reach approximately 20,000 caregivers across 13 regions in 2026, with phased expansion to all 32 departments by 2030.	**Using evidence to strengthen science education policy and staffing.** Uganda's Education Policy Evidence Implementation Lab analyzed administrative and survey data to identify barriers to science learning, including shortages of qualified science teachers. The findings informed the Ministry of Education's decision to prioritize science teacher recruitment and shaped the issues paper for a new national science education policy, providing an evidence base for reforms to improve science teaching and learning.
Improving policy implementation			
Strengthening evidence-based consumer protection at the Central Bank of Nigeria. Nigeria's Consumer Protection Embedded Lab helped CBN strengthen its use of data and evidence for consumer protection, market monitoring, and financial literacy. Through diagnostics, MEL support, dashboards, consumer surveys, and capacity building, the Lab helped CBN move from tracking activities to using data to monitor risks and inform supervision. Lab-generated evidence has informed key regulatory frameworks, including the Consumer Protection Regulations, revised Agent Banking Guidelines, the National Financial Literacy Framework, and Nigeria Payments System Vision 2030.	**Strengthening school dropout prevention through MEL.** Côte d'Ivoire's Ed Lab supported the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Orientation and Scholarship (DOB) to strengthen implementation of its Personalized Student Monitoring program by developing and applying a structured MEL framework. Routine monitoring identified barriers in training materials, internet access, equipment, and transportation, which DOB used to adapt implementation. Training participation subsequently increased from around 80% to 90%, contributing to expanded capacity to identify and support students at risk of dropping out. DOB has incorporated the MEL approach into its routine management of the program.	**Using AI to target dropout prevention.** In the Philippines, DepEd's Embedded Lab developed SAGIP, a machine-learning tool that uses administrative data to identify students at risk of dropping out and the factors driving that risk. DepEd is integrating these insights into dropout-prevention efforts to help prioritize which students receive support and to test which low-cost interventions are most effective. The work is also informing how DepEd develops, tests, and deploys AI-based tools more broadly.	**Building a satellite-based environmental supervision system.** OEFA Innova strengthened environmental supervision by helping the agency develop and test a satellite-based monitoring tool that uses free satellite data and automated workflows to detect fires at dumpsites. The system allows OEFA to assess each of Peru's 808 municipalities up to three times per month, improving the agency's capacity for nationwide compliance oversight.

1.2 Government System Strengthening Pathway

The second pathway captures how Labs strengthen the **capabilities, systems, processes, and institutional arrangements that enable governments to generate and use evidence effectively and repeatedly over time.** This occurs through two related mechanisms.

First, Lab-supported projects can strengthen government capabilities and systems beyond the specific policy or program being supported. Delivering a project may require strengthening staff capabilities, improving coordination across units and information systems, establishing monitoring arrangements, or strengthening implementation processes. Once established, these capabilities and systems can support other government priorities over time, as illustrated in Box 1.

Box 1. Beyond the Project: How STARS Strengthened Government Systems

Scaling STARS required strengthening the Ministry of Education's information systems so that the reform could be implemented and monitored nationally. These systems form part of the government's broader data and evidence infrastructure and are now being used for other purposes, including implementing a remedial education program for students who are falling behind and developing an AI-enabled chatbot to improve teacher placement by providing applicants with personalized information on vacancies and placement likelihood.

Second, institutionalizing the Lab establishes or strengthens a sustained evidence function within government. In some cases, this involves creating a new function; in others, it strengthens existing teams, mandates, processes, or systems so that evidence use becomes part of the agency's regular way of working. This can take different forms, including assigning government staff and resources, formalizing mandates, establishing recurring processes for identifying and responding to evidence needs, embedding tools and procedures into existing workflows, or locating responsibility within an established government unit. Together, these arrangements strengthen the Process, Structure and Governance, Capacity, and Resources needed for government to generate and use evidence repeatedly across changing priorities. The following sections illustrate how these dimensions have taken shape across different Labs and institutional contexts.

The framework therefore focuses primarily on this second mechanism: how a government evidence function can be established, strengthened, and sustained over time, while recognizing that individual Lab-supported projects can simultaneously strengthen broader government systems and capabilities.

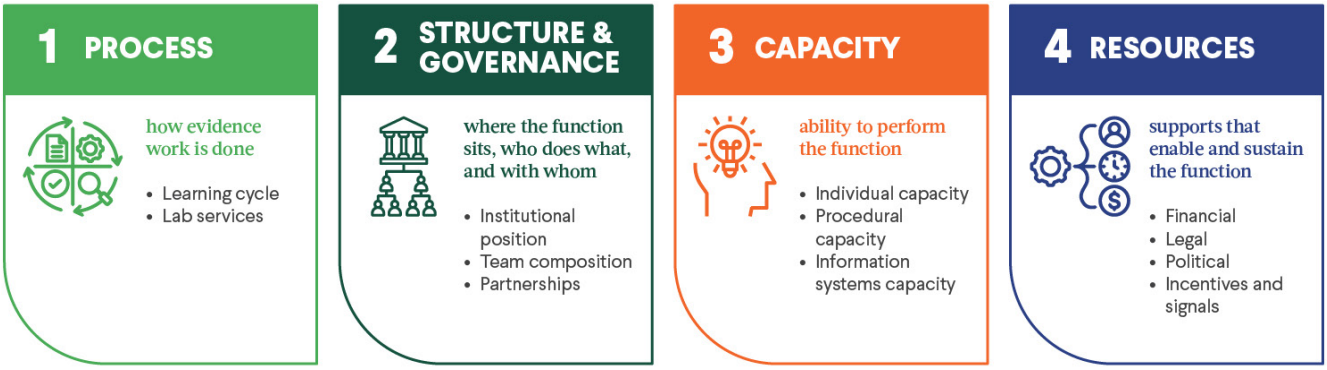


Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Rwanda Education Board, and Rwanda TVET Board attend a training held by the Rwanda Education Evidence Lab on the Teacher Management Information System (TMIS). Photo: gui²de and IPA Rwanda

2. What to Institutionalize: Core Components

The framework is structured around four interdependent components that should be addressed simultaneously, rather than sequentially, from the earliest stages of Lab design: **Process, Structure and Governance, Capacity, and Resources.** Each component comprises additional subcomponents that identify the institutional conditions and actionable levers through which evidence use can become embedded in routine policy and practice.

Figure 3. Core Components for Institutionalizing Evidence Use



The framework does not aim to classify every factor that influences institutionalization. Instead, its components and subcomponents represent actionable institutional levers that governments and their partners can deliberately strengthen, establish, or modify through a Lab's institutionalization strategy. The framework is therefore designed to guide action rather than provide a comprehensive explanatory model of everything that determines institutionalization.

Other factors remain important even when they are not components themselves. Mental models, demand for evidence, behaviors, or evidence culture may shape institutionalization or emerge as outcomes of it. These should be diagnosed as part of understanding the Lab's starting conditions and taken into account when designing the institutionalization strategy. Rather than assigning them to a single component, the framework addresses them through combinations of its institutional levers. For example, demand for evidence depends on Human Capacity to recognize evidence needs, processes through which those needs can be articulated, relationships that build trust and access, and Incentives and Signals that make evidence use expected. Similarly, evidence culture can evolve as evidence-use practices, routines, relationships, governance arrangements, and incentives become embedded.

Broader political, economic, and institutional conditions, such as political instability, fiscal crises, or public-sector rules that lie largely outside the actionable influence of the government agency and its partners, are treated as contextual factors. They should still be diagnosed and considered when designing and adapting the institutionalization strategy, but are not themselves components of the framework.



Attendees at the Latin America Cross-Country Learning Exchange event hosted by IPA in December 2024. Photo: Juan Hernandez-Agramonte

2.1. Process

Process refers to how the Lab helps government generate and use evidence to address policy challenges, including policy design, scale-up, and implementation at scale. It has two subcomponents: the **learning cycle**, which defines the sequence of steps through which the Lab works, from identifying government priorities to generating evidence and supporting action; and Lab services, which define the activities and forms of support provided across that cycle. Together, they provide a structured and repeatable approach to generating and using evidence.

Learning Cycle

The learning cycle defines the sequence of activities through which the Lab helps governments use evidence to improve policies and programs. **For the cycle to function effectively, it includes at least four core steps:** identifying policy or implementation priorities and engaging the stakeholders who will use the evidence to define the challenges and decisions it should inform; generating and analyzing evidence and data; translating findings into actionable implications; and supporting decision-makers in acting on them. While governments can adapt how each step is implemented to their institutional context, the core step should remain consistent.

The learning cycle provides a methodology for continuous policy improvement, repeating cycles for the same policy or program at different stages of its design and implementation ,for example, to inform initial design, guide scale-up, improve implementation at scale, or strengthen the government systems needed to sustain delivery. Each cycle can address one or more related decisions. The cycle also helps the Lab retain and organize evidence over time, allowing previous findings to be revisited and brought back into decision-making when new policy or implementation windows of opportunity emerge.

Why it matters: First, **evidence-to-action** - the cycle strengthens the pathway from evidence generation to policy and implementation by establishing a repeatable process in which the Lab and the policymakers who will use the evidence jointly identify priority challenges and the decisions and implementation processes the evidence is intended to inform. Defining this pathway from the outset helps connect evidence generation to action and ensure findings are available when relevant decision and implementation windows arise. Second, **work management** - the cycle provides a routine for organizing and managing the Lab's work. It supports prioritization, coordination, work planning, and portfolio management, helping the Lab organize multiple evidence activities.



Peru's Ministry of Education launched MineduLAB at Universidad del Pacífico in Lima, Peru in April 2016. Photo: IPA Peru

Example: MineduLab in Peru developed a structured annual cycle through which ministry units submit innovation proposals, the Lab team selects promising ideas and works with implementation units and research partners, including universities, to co-design and evaluate them, and the resulting evidence informs ministerial decisions (see Figure 4). The Lab groups projects into cycles and manages its portfolio by tracking the stage each project has reached. It is now implementing its fifth call for proposals and operates independently of IPA, with the ministry's Lab unit managing the full pipeline.

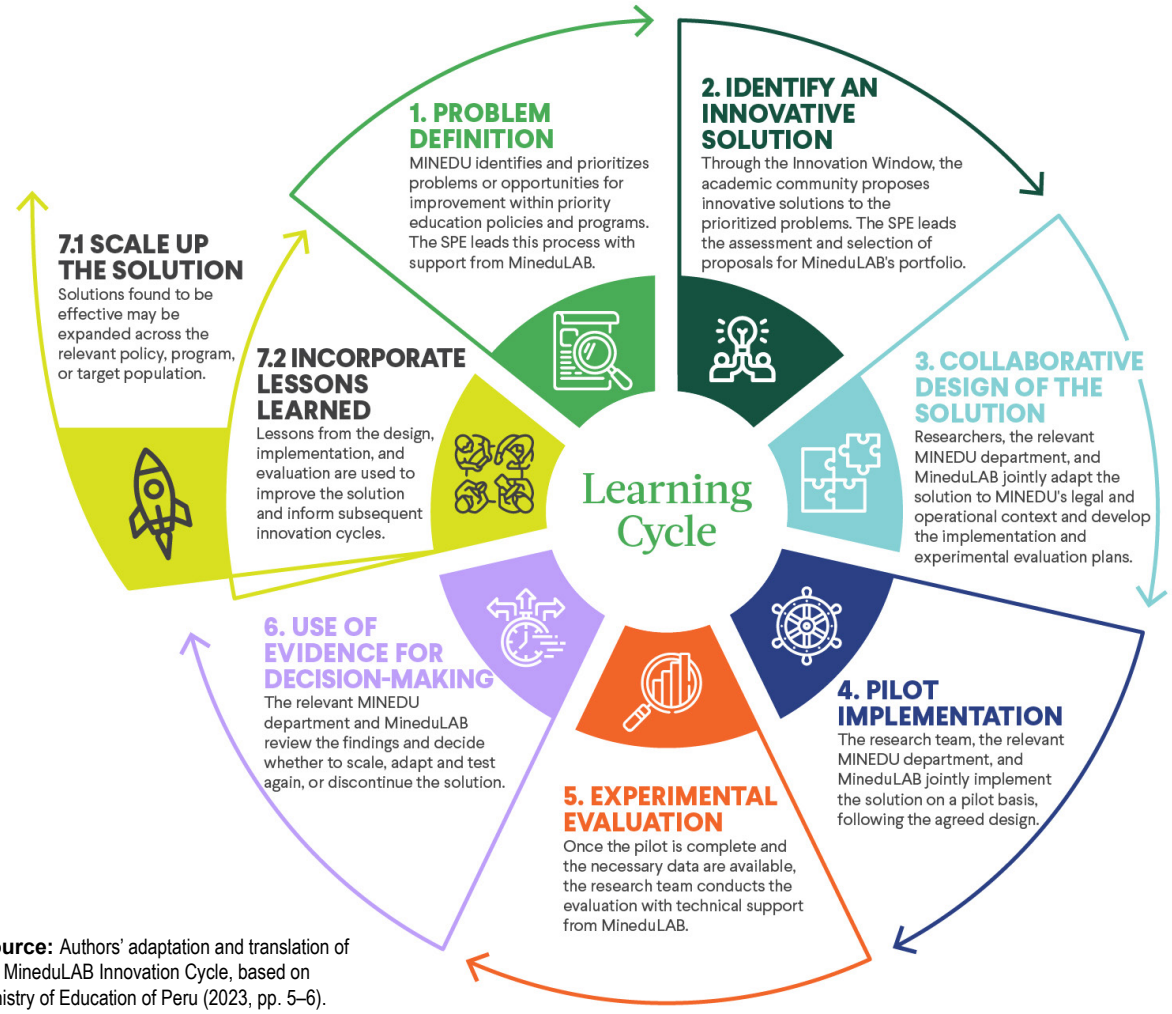
MineduLab also illustrates how evidence from one learning cycle can inform later decisions. In 2015, the Lab designed and evaluated a telenovela-style intervention that reduced school dropout. The Ministry began scaling it in 2018, but implementation stopped in 2019 as priorities and delivery arrangements changed. When COVID-19 school closures made dropout an urgent priority again in 2020, the Ministry revisited the earlier evidence and adapted the intervention for national television (Gallego, Molina, & Neilson, 2025). In this way, Labs can preserve evidence and reactivate it when new policy needs and opportunities emerge.

The cycle has remained consistent while evolving in response to experience and learning. Initially, MineduLab focused on priorities identified by senior leadership. It subsequently introduced mechanisms to incorporate priorities from policy implementation units, connecting immediate policy design and implementation needs more directly to the learning cycle. It has also incorporated additional methodologies, including qualitative methods, to strengthen the design of innovations (IPA, 2024).

This represents one possible configuration of a Lab's learning cycle. MineduLab was established in a ministry that already had monitoring and evaluation functions and administrative systems developed primarily for monitoring. The institutional gap it sought to fill was therefore different: embedding evidence-informed innovation within the policy cycle. Its learning cycle was configured accordingly, bringing together implementation units and academic partners to co-design pilots and prospectively evaluate them using experimental methods. This context explains MineduLab's particular emphasis on innovation testing and experimental evaluation (Hernández-Agramonte & Espinoza Iglesias, 2023).

In other contexts, Labs may deploy different combinations of services within the same core learning cycle, including strengthening monitoring and information systems, conducting predictive analysis, identifying implementation bottlenecks, or supporting continuous improvement. These services can inform policy, implementation, or management decisions directly and do not necessarily involve a pilot or experimental evaluation.

Figure 4. MineduLab Learning Cycle



Source: Authors' adaptation and translation of the MineduLAB Innovation Cycle, based on Ministry of Education of Peru (2023, pp. 5–6).

Lab Services

Lab services are the specific activities and strategies the Lab implements across the learning cycle to help governments generate and apply evidence. They include evidence **generation and analysis**, such as monitoring, impact and process evaluation, descriptive and predictive analytics, and evidence synthesis; evidence **translation and dissemination**, including interpretation, production of actionable recommendations, tailored communication, or convening; **partnership and capacity strengthening,** including stakeholder engagement, training, and learning-by-doing; and **implementation and systems support,** such as strengthening MEL and information systems or translating evidence into implementation plans, operational guidance, budgets, and legal or regulatory frameworks.[5]

Table 1 provides illustrative examples of how different Lab services can support each stage of the learning cycle; it is not intended to be exhaustive. The specific services deployed depend on the decision or problem at hand, and the same stage may involve different combinations of services depending on context.

[5] This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Labs may provide additional services depending on the policy challenge, institutional context, and government needs.



Representatives from Peru's Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) attend a training held by IPA staff. Photo: IPA Peru

Table 1. Examples of Lab Services Across the Learning Cycle

Learning Cycle Stage	Examples of Lab Services
Identify priorities and learning needs	Research and learning agendas, stakeholder engagement, descriptive analytics, evidence synthesis
Generate evidence and data products	Impact and process evaluation, monitoring, predictive analytics, descriptive analytics, evidence synthesis, co-design, training in research methods; partnership with researchers from local or international universities
Translate and disseminate findings	Interpretation and recommendations, targeted dissemination, convening and facilitation, pause-and-reflect sessions
Support implementation	Establishing and facilitating steering committees and task forces, strengthening MEL and information systems, implementation planning, capacity strengthening

Why it matters: Moving from evidence to action requires combining research-based, relational, and systems-oriented approaches (Best and Holmes, 2010; Oliver et al., 2014). Different decisions require different combinations of services. Evidence synthesis and impact evaluation may inform policy design or scale-up, for example, while monitoring and learning routines can support implementation and continuous improvement. Partnerships and co-design help ensure that evidence responds to relevant decisions and that stakeholders are aligned around action, while capacity strengthening enables government actors to interpret and apply evidence in practice. In some cases, acting on evidence also requires changes to government systems and functions, such as information systems, budgets, operational guidance, or legal frameworks.

As discussed in Section 1, combining evidence generation with broader support can also strengthen government capabilities, processes, coordination, and institutional infrastructure beyond the specific policy or program being supported.



A teacher administers a STARS learning assessment to students in Rwanda. Photo: Timeless Studios

Example: Since 2019, the Rwanda Education Evidence Lab, with support from IPA and Gui2de, has helped scale-up of Supporting Teacher Achievement in Rwandan Schools (STARS), a teacher performance reform linking *imihigo*[6] contracts to student learning. Relational services have been central: the Lab serves as secretariat to a Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) -led task force that reviews evidence, agrees testing priorities, and coordinates implementation across Rwanda's National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA), Rwanda Education Board (REB), districts, inspectors, headteachers, and external partners. In parallel, the Lab developed learning agendas and used successive rounds of A/B testing to refine the contract model for scale, and is now supporting MEL for national implementation. Acting on this evidence also required strengthening government systems. The Lab co-developed CAMIS for student assessment data and TMIS for teacher management and supported their integration with identification, payroll, budgeting, and payment systems across the National ID Agency (NIDA), Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA), Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN), and commercial banks. It also supported legal and procedural changes, district-level processes, and the transition to digital contracts managed directly by the government. These investments now support functions beyond STARS, including teacher deployment and workforce planning, illustrating how Lab-supported projects can contribute to broader system strengthening (see Box 1).

What institutionalization looks like

- The agency runs the full learning cycle on a recurring basis with projects initiated in response to government demand and tied to the agency's decision making and implementation processes.
- The Lab can deploy an appropriate mix of research, relational, capacity-strengthening, and systems-oriented services across the learning cycle.

[6] *Imihigo* are performance contracts used by the Government of Rwanda to set, monitor, and assess specific targets for public institutions and officials.



Attendees at a capacity-building training held by the OEFA Embedded Evidence Lab in Peru/ Photo: OEFA

2.2. Structure and governance

The Lab's structure and governance define where it sits within government, who carries out and oversees its work, and the relationships and partnerships through which it operates. Together, these arrangements establish authority, decision rights, roles, responsibilities, accountability, and coordination within the Lab and across the wider system. This section addresses three dimensions: institutional positioning, team composition, and partnerships.

Institutional Positioning

Institutional positioning refers to the Lab's location within one or more government agencies, including its reporting lines, mandate, and decision-making authority. Where a relevant evidence function already exists, the Lab builds on and strengthens that function. Where it does not, the Lab is usually established as a team within an existing unit or directorate, or formally established as a dedicated unit. The appropriate arrangement depends on the agency's existing structures and whether they can be adapted to fulfill the Lab's role.

Why it matters: Institutional positioning shapes the Lab's ability to act effectively within the system. It determines whether the Lab is close enough to decision-making to inform and influence decisions in time, has the authority to access data and convene other units, can draw on specialized teams and expertise, and carries a mandate that other parts of the system recognize. For this reason, where to position the Lab should be grounded in a careful institutional analysis. In practice, Labs sometimes start where there is buy-in and authorization to operate, and move to a more fitting position as they demonstrate value[7].

Example: OEFA Innova, the Lab of the Environmental Assessment and Enforcement Agency in Peru is positioned within the Directorate of Policies and Strategies for Environmental Enforcement (DPEF), as a functional unit inside the Sub directorate of Policies and Regulatory Improvement (SMER). The host unit was selected through a structured assessment of candidates against five criteria co-designed with OEFA: functional capacity, influence, technical capacity, political support, and financial support. SMER was recommended over alternatives such as the Office of Planning and Budget because its functions were closely aligned with the Lab's mandate; its staffing and recruitment arrangements were conducive to building and sustaining a technically skilled team, including staff trained in impact evaluation methods; it had a mandate to coordinate policy improvement processes across OEFA directorates; and it benefited from political support through DPEF's strategic position within OEFA.

[7] Starting from an available rather than ideal institutional entry point can be a pragmatic choice, but operating without a stable organizational home creates trade-offs. Other units may be unclear about the Lab's mandate, position, and whether they should engage with its requests or act on its recommendations. This can weaken its legitimacy and make it harder to institutionalize its functions, build organizational learning, and improve processes through repetition.



Members of the Uganda Ed Lab team. Photo: IPA Uganda

Team Composition and Responsibilities

Team composition and responsibilities refers to the positions, profiles, roles, and distribution of responsibilities within the Lab, including who provides strategic oversight, who makes operational decisions, and who is accountable for delivery. An effective team typically combines complementary roles covering technical delivery, policy engagement, coordination, and management, with responsibilities clearly distributed across team members. This includes the core delivery team and any standing governance roles or bodies with defined responsibility for overseeing or managing the Lab. Specialized expertise and other support can be accessed through actors outside this core structure, which are addressed under Partnerships.

During the Lab's design and establishment phase, the composition of the team evolves. Initially, government staff work alongside embedded IPA staff. Over time, IPA gradually reduces its operational role as government counterparts assume greater leadership and the Lab's functions become institutionalized within the agency.

Why it matters: Team composition determines whether the Lab can carry out its functions effectively. The Lab needs sufficient technical expertise to generate credible evidence, relational and policy expertise to connect evidence to decisions, and clear roles and responsibilities to coordinate delivery. Distributing responsibilities across the team also reduces dependence on individual staff and strengthens continuity when personnel change (Alsofrom, Mnqayi, and Vorster, 2025).

Example: The Lab at Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports combines senior leadership, coordination, and technical delivery roles. Senior Ministry leadership, including the Permanent Secretary, provides strategic direction and alignment with national priorities. The Education Policy and Research Department (EPAR), as the host department, anchors the Lab within existing Ministry structures and leads the Lab Secretariat with collaborating departments. The Assistant Commissioner for Research and Innovation serves as Lab Lead, overseeing the workplan and engagement with government and partners, while the Principal Research Officer coordinates day-to-day operations, stakeholder engagement, activities, and follow-up. The Policy Research Steering Committee complements the core team by advising on research priorities, evidence generation, dissemination, and alignment with Top Management. Together, these roles give the Lab the leadership, technical, coordination, and policy engagement functions needed to deliver its learning cycle and sustain Ministry ownership. During the Lab's study of poor performance in science subjects, this division of responsibility operated in practice: Senior Management identified the issue as a priority, EPAR was tasked with investigating it, the Assistant Commissioner and Ed Lab team led the work while reporting regularly to departmental leadership, and the findings were subsequently brought back to Senior Management. Together, these arrangements distribute strategic oversight, operational coordination, and technical delivery across complementary roles.



In July 2026, the Laboratoire pour l'Éducation (Ed Lab) in Côte d'Ivoire held the second edition of the Open Days for the Use of Research and Innovation in Education (Journées Ouvertes pour l'Utilisation de la Recherche et de l'Innovation en Éducation, JOURIE) in Abidjan. Photo: IPA Côte d'Ivoire

Partnerships

Partnerships are the relationships and coordination arrangements, beyond its core structures, the Lab maintains within the agency, across government entities, and with external actors to support its work. Internally, the Lab engages through the learning cycle with units responsible for designing and implementing policy. It also works with enabling units - such as planning and budget, monitoring, and information-systems teams - to access data, align activities with institutional processes, and translate evidence into action[8]. Institutional positioning can facilitate these relationships by locating the Lab in a unit with the right mandate and internal connections, although additional mechanisms, such as joint working groups, data-sharing agreements, and co-design processes, may still be needed.

Externally, the Lab builds relationships with other government agencies, donors, universities, and technical partners. These partnerships can provide technical expertise, financial resources, political backing, and coordination across the wider system. Partners may also use the Lab as a shared platform for coordinating evidence, learning, and implementation support across the sector.

Why it matters: The Lab maintains the core capabilities needed to perform its functions, while partnerships extend its capacity and reach beyond what its own team can deliver alone. Technical partners contribute specialized methods and expertise that the Lab does not need to maintain in-house; financial partners provide resources for activities outside regular government budget lines; political champions and influential partners provide backing needed to act on evidence; and coordination partners help align efforts across a fragmented system. Strong partnerships with internal units also increase demand for the Lab's services and build buy-in across different parts of government.

These relationships can also strengthen the Lab's resilience, although they do not substitute for the institutional foundations needed for continuity. A formal mandate, budget, staffing, and internal capabilities anchor the Lab within government and make it more likely to persist. A broad and visible network of internal and external partners can reinforce this resilience by distributing support across multiple actors. When other government units and external partners value the Lab, dismantling it may become more difficult because doing so is more likely to generate resistance or political costs (Lewis, 2002; James et al., 2016).

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[8] How the Lab engages implementation units is usually defined as part of the Lab's process (see previous section).

Example: The Lab of the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation (MENA) in Côte d'Ivoire partners with the Groupe Local pour les Partenaires en Éducation (GLPE), a coordination body of education sector donors including the French Development Agency, UNICEF, the World Bank, the Millennium Challenge Account, and the Brookings Center for Universal Education. GLPE members have engaged with the Lab across each phase of its development: helping identify systemic gaps during scoping, shaping the workplan during design, and contributing to ongoing activities such as the research advisory group and studies repository during implementation. The GLPE's monthly meetings also provide a platform to align with other programs, including integrating impact evaluations conducted by members into the Lab's workplan. The Lab's broader partnerships have also helped secure external funding for a competitive research fund based on priorities identified through its Research and Learning Agenda. Together, these relationships give the Lab access to technical expertise and financing, align its work with broader sector priorities, and strengthen its place in the education evidence ecosystem.



Barbara Sparrow, Country Director for IPA Peru, presents at a Lab workshop attended by officials with Peru's Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP). Photo: IPA Peru

What institutionalization looks like

- The Lab has a formal and recognized institutional home, with defined reporting lines, mandate, and decision-making authority.
- The Lab team consists of government staff with defined roles, responsibilities, oversight and accountability arrangements, competency profiles, and provisions for continuity and succession.
- The Lab maintains durable internal and external partnerships, supported by coordination mechanisms where needed, that provide technical expertise, resources, political support, and resilience over time.



IPA Nigeria has partnered with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to establish an Embedded Evidence Lab within the CBN's Consumer Protection Department. Photo: IPA Nigeria

2.3. Capacity

Capacity refers to the ability of the Lab team to produce evidence and support its use; policy and implementation teams to identify evidence needs, interpret findings, and act on them; senior decision-makers to understand and engage with evidence; and the agency to produce and manage data for research, learning, and policy. The framework organizes these abilities into three complementary dimensions that are particularly important for effective evidence use: human capacity, procedural capacity, and information systems capacity[9].

Human Capacity

Human capacity refers to the knowledge, skills, experience, and dispositions of the people who generate, interpret, support, and use evidence (UNDP, 2009; Barreto et al., 2023). Knowledge is what people know: research and evaluation methods, the evidence base in their sector, and how decisions are actually made in their agency. Skills are what people can do with that knowledge, including designing studies, appraising evidence quality, communicating findings to non-technical audiences, and brokering relationships between evidence producers and users. Experience is the practical, largely tacit knowledge that accumulates through doing the work. It includes understanding how procedures, budgets, relationships, and institutional processes function in practice, which formal training alone cannot provide (Scott 1998, cited in Gilson et al.). Dispositions are the attitudes and orientations that shape whether and how knowledge, skills, and experience are applied. They include valuing evidence and learning, professionalism, persistence, trust in those who produce evidence, and alertness to decisions where evidence is relevant and available.

Human capacity is needed across the actors involved in the evidence-to-action process: within the Lab team, which must be able to deliver the Lab's services; within policy and implementation teams, which must be able to identify evidence needs, interpret findings, and act on them; and among senior decision-makers and other authorizing actors, who need to understand and engage with evidence in policy and implementation decisions.

Government can build the human capacity it needs among existing staff, bring it into the team through recruitment, or access specialized capacity externally through partnerships or contracting. These choices affect where knowledge and experience accumulate and, therefore, what capacity remains within government when external support ends.

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[9] This definition draws on UNDP's broad conception of capacity, which considers capacity at the individual, organizational, and enabling-environment levels (UNDP, 2009). These levels do not map directly onto the Capacity component of this framework because capacity-related conditions cut across several framework components. In particular, many of the broader organizational and enabling conditions considered within UNDP's approach, such as institutional arrangements, policies and legal frameworks, incentives, political conditions, and access to resources, are addressed elsewhere in this framework. For analytical and practical purposes, the Capacity component therefore focuses on three complementary dimensions particularly relevant to carrying out evidence-use functions: human capacity, procedural capacity, and information systems capacity, broadly reflecting a people–process–technology perspective on organizational effectiveness rooted in Leavitt (1965).

When capacity is developed internally, its different elements require different approaches. Knowledge can be strengthened through formal instruction and exposure to relevant sector evidence. Skills require opportunities to apply knowledge in practice and receive feedback, including through learning by doing on live Lab projects, mentorship, peer learning, and peer review. Experience develops through repeated application in real institutional contexts, making sustained opportunities to perform these functions and staff retention particularly important. Secondments, mentoring, and codified handovers can help transfer accumulated knowledge and practical know-how when staff change. Dispositions can evolve through experience, socialization, and repeated exposure to evidence-informed practice, while their application also depends on institutional conditions such as leadership, incentives, recognition, workload, career progression, and team design.

Human capacity therefore cannot be strengthened in isolation from the other components of the framework. Team composition and partnerships shape where capacity resides and develops; Procedural Capacity helps retain and transfer it when individuals change; and Resources affect whether capable staff can be recruited, retained, and motivated over time.

Why it matters: Human capacity determines whether the evidence-to-action process functions effectively. Within the Lab, knowledge, skills, and experience shape the quality, relevance, and usability of the evidence and support provided. Among policy and implementation teams, human capacity shapes whether evidence needs are recognized, useful questions are formulated, findings are interpreted, and evidence is applied in practice. Among senior decision-makers and other authorizing actors, it influences whether evidence is understood, assessed, and meaningfully considered in policy and implementation decisions. Human capacity therefore shapes both the supply of evidence and demand for its use: actors who understand how evidence is generated and what it can contribute are better able to request it, assess its credibility, and engage with findings that challenge existing assumptions (Sempé, Pande, and Kelly, 2025).

Dispositions matter because knowledge and skills do not automatically translate into consistent practice. Persistence, professionalism, commitment to public service, and integrity can help staff sustain high-quality work despite bureaucratic obstacles and weak professional incentives. Also, Mnqayi, and Vorster (2025), for example, found that staff commitment and integrity were central to the credibility and sustained output of a government-led research unit in South Africa. Their findings also illustrate the risks of relying heavily on particular individuals, reinforcing the importance of the complementary institutional arrangements discussed elsewhere in the framework.

Example: The Consumer Protection Lab at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the ICBF Lab at Colombia´s Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) illustrate complementary approaches to building human capacity through learning by doing. At CBN, capacity assessments identified specific gaps in areas such as data cleaning, analysis, visualization, and survey design. The Lab combined structured training with applied analytical projects, in which CBN staff conducted analyses and produced outputs with feedback and coaching from IPA. At ICBF, capacity strengthening has focused on progressively transferring responsibility through successive learning cycles: IPA initially leads while ICBF staff co-pilot activities such as learning agendas, MEL, data analysis, and pause-and-reflect sessions; in subsequent iterations, ICBF leads while IPA shifts to a supporting role. Together, the cases show how human capacity can be built by combining targeted skill development with repeated application and progressively greater responsibility. In both cases, the approach has progressed from capacity building to demonstrated application: CBN staff now independently design and implement MEL plans, while by 2025 ICBF staff were independently leading learning agendas and research designs and had selected and initiated three new Lab projects.



In February 2026, Côte d'Ivoire's Education Lab held a"Coffee Chat" Session on data management and analysis using Excel, as part of a series of interactive capacity-building sessions designed to strengthen the technical skills of Ed Lab members and key technical actors within the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA). Photo: Jean Luc Yao

Procedural Capacity

Procedural capacity refers to the agency's ability to carry out the learning cycle and deliver the Lab's services consistently and repeatedly, supported by codified tools, guidelines, procedures, and routines. These include, first, procedures for producing and translating evidence, such as templates for developing a Theory of Change, protocols for data analysis, guidelines for communicating findings, and standard operating procedures for carrying out the learning cycle. Second, they include routines that connect evidence to policy and implementation decisions, such as evidence-request workflows, formal evidence-review points in program approval or revision, alignment with planning and budget cycles, and requirements or routines for applying findings to program improvement. Procedural capacity is interdependent with the other components of the framework, for example codified procedures help retain and transfer knowledge when staff change.

Why it matters: Procedural capacity helps turn individual knowledge and experience into repeatable institutional practice and reduces dependence on particular individuals. When procedures and routines are established and documented, teams can maintain quality standards, transfer knowledge more easily when staff change, and continue operating through staff and leadership turnover. When evidence requests, review points, and use of findings are integrated into planning, budgeting, program approval, and implementation processes, evidence becomes part of how decisions are routinely made rather than an ad hoc input dependent on particular individuals.

Example: In Côte d'Ivoire, MENA's Ed Lab supported the Directorate of Orientation and Scholarships (DOB) to turn its existing monitoring activities for the Personalized Student Monitoring program into a repeatable monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) process. After a three-day training, DOB developed a MEL framework that sets out the program's theory of change, learning questions, indicators, and data-collection methods, and specifies how findings feed back into implementation. In the 2024-25 academic year, DOB applied the framework through document reviews, supervision observations, and interviews. These routines revealed problems with training materials, participants' internet access, and the accessibility of training venues. DOB worked with the Ministry to redesign the training strategy, and attendance rose from about 80 percent to 90 percent. The findings also contributed to the Cabinet's 2025 decision to scale the program nationwide. DOB now runs these MEL routines independently and plans to use them to improve DOB CONNECT, the platform that supports the program's continuous student monitoring.

Information Systems Capacity

Information systems capacity refers to the agency's ability to produce, manage, access, and use reliable data through effective information systems for evidence generation, learning, and implementation monitoring. This depends on the availability, quality, accessibility, and technical functionality of administrative data, registries, monitoring systems, and other information infrastructure. Because the Lab and other government teams rely on these systems to generate and use evidence, strengthening them (or supporting establishing new ones) often becomes an important part of Lab-supported work.

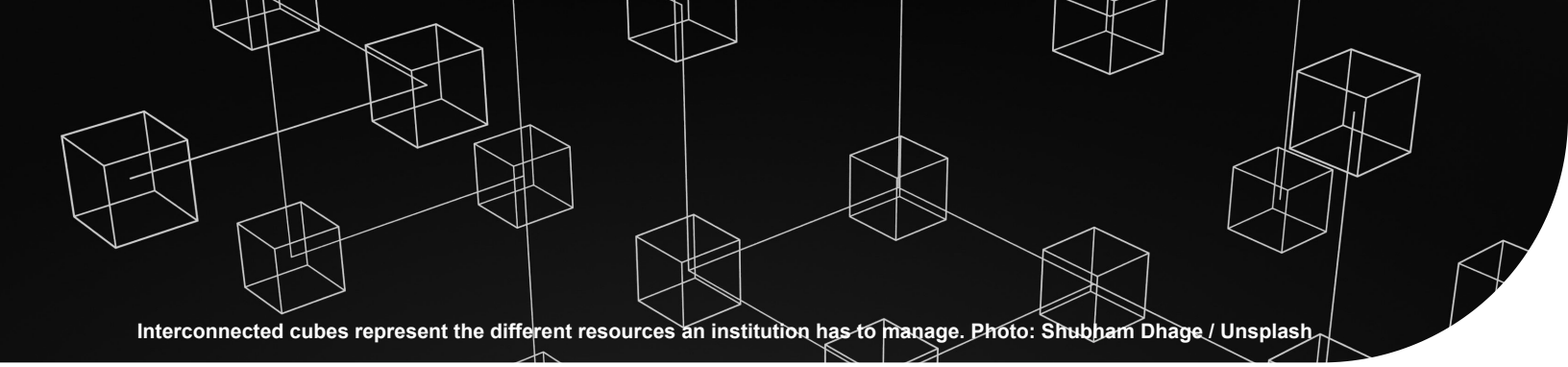
Information systems capacity is also interdependent with the other components of the framework. Human capacity determines whether staff can manage and analyze the data; Procedural Capacity establishes routines for collecting, validating, analyzing, and using it; and Structure and Governance determines issues such as data ownership, access rights, responsibilities, and data-sharing arrangements. Resources, in turn, affect whether information systems can be maintained and upgraded over time.

Why it matters: Information systems capacity determines whether evidence can be generated and used routinely, reliably, and at relatively low cost. When administrative data are timely, accessible, and sufficiently high quality, the Lab and other government teams can monitor implementation, identify bottlenecks, produce analysis, and support decisions without relying on new data collection for every question. These foundations also enable more advanced uses of data, including predictive analytics and AI-supported tools. Information systems can also make evidence more usable in day-to-day management through dashboards, reports, and feedback loops, including for middle-tier actors such as district education offices or regional health authorities. Without this infrastructure, evidence generation is slower, more expensive, more dependent on ad hoc exercises, and less likely to align with decision windows.

Example: The Rwanda Education Evidence Lab, with support from IPA and Gui2de, has strengthened information systems capacity by co-developing two national data platforms: the Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS) and the Teacher Management Information System (TMIS). The Lab introduced enhancements such as data validation, automated dashboards, and integration with government systems, enabling CAMIS to cover 89 percent of schools with more than 158 million assessment data points and TMIS to manage data for more than 100,000 teachers. This infrastructure supports routine, low-cost analysis without requiring new data collection for each project and is also used to implement and monitor the teacher performance-contract reform.

What institutionalization looks like

- Government staff have the knowledge, skills, and experience to lead the learning cycle; policy and implementation teams can identify evidence needs, interpret findings, and apply them; and relevant decision-makers can meaningfully engage with evidence.
- Procedures and routines for producing, translating, and using evidence are formally adopted and integrated into relevant policy and implementation processes, enabling continuity when staff change.
- The agency has reliable and authorized access to administrative data and functional information systems that support routine analysis, learning, and decision-making.



Interconnected cubes represent the different resources an institution has to manage. Photo: Shubham Dhage / Unsplash

2.4. Resources

Resources are the financial, legal, political, and incentive-based supports that enable the Lab to operate effectively and sustain its functions over time. Financial resources fund the Lab's team and activities; legal resources provide formal recognition, mandate, and institutional anchoring; political resources provide the backing and influence needed to operate and institutionalize the Lab; and incentives and signals help make evidence generation and use expected in day-to-day work. Together, these resources affect whether the Lab can maintain its functions through budget pressures, leadership transitions, and shifting priorities. This section addresses four dimensions: financial resources, legal resources, political resources, and incentives and signals.

Financial Resources

Financial resources refer to the funding needed to maintain the Lab team and carry out its core activities. In IPA-supported Labs, financing often follows a gradual co-funding transition. In early phases, external donors may fund IPA staff and technical assistance, while government contributes staff time, data, facilities, and other in-kind resources. As the Lab demonstrates value and government ownership increases, government progressively assumes responsibility for core costs, for example, by replacing externally funded staff with government positions, financing Lab activities, and incorporating the Lab into regular budget lines. The aim is predictable government financing for core functions, potentially supplemented by external funding for specific projects, specialized expertise, or new initiatives.

Why it matters: Reliable financing allows the Lab to maintain its team, carry out the learning cycle, and continue operating beyond individual projects or external funding cycles. A gradual transition can reduce risk for both governments and external funders: governments can test and refine the model before making substantial long-term commitments, while funders can support its development against milestones toward financial sustainability. Progressive government financing can also strengthen ownership and accountability by making continued support increasingly dependent on the Lab demonstrating value to the agency.

Example: ICBF Lab shows how financing can gradually shift from donor support toward government ownership. It began in 2022 with externally funded IPA staff and in-kind ICBF contributions, then progressively moved to government-hired staff, government-funded activities, and an annual budget allocation of about US$100,000. Donor funding now supports specific evidence-generation work rather than core operations, while Resolution No. 5000 (2024) formalized the Lab within ICBF's planning and budget cycle. A complementary strategy is illustrated by Kenya's Education Evidence Hub, which was incorporated into the NESSP 2023–2027, with KES 14 million allocated for its establishment and operationalization. This connects the Hub's financing to the Ministry of Education's strategic planning process, while external funding provides complementary technical assistance.



In December 2024, IPA signed an inter-institutional technical assistance agreement with Peru's Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) to ensure the successful establishment and operation, of an Embedded Lab. Photo: IPA Peru

Legal Resources

Legal resources refer to the formal administrative, strategic, legal, and regulatory instruments that recognize, authorize, and help anchor the Lab within government. These instruments may establish or document the Lab's mandate, objectives, functions, institutional position, core processes, and access to financial or other resources. They vary in formality and durability, from internal directives and strategic documents, which may be easier to establish or revise, to ministerial resolutions, regulations, or decrees, which may provide stronger institutional anchoring but require greater effort to secure.

Why it matters: Legal resources give the Lab formal legitimacy and reduce its dependence on informal arrangements or individual champions. They can establish a recognized mandate, reinforce its institutional position and authority, and provide a basis for accessing data, convening other units, and securing staff and financial resources. Formal anchoring can also strengthen continuity across leadership and political transitions by making the Lab and its core functions part of the agency's institutional architecture. Where legal or administrative instruments formalize established processes, they can further reinforce continuity by giving those practices institutional authority rather than leaving them dependent on the individuals who introduced them.

A caveat on adaptability: Formalization increases durability but can reduce flexibility. Labs should therefore sequence what they formalize. The Lab's mandate, objectives, functions, institutional position, and access to resources can often be anchored relatively early, while detailed operating procedures should generally be formalized only after they have been tested and refined. Ideally, core institutional arrangements are established through sufficiently durable instruments, while detailed procedures remain in guidelines or standard operating procedures that can be updated more easily.

Example: MIMP Lab in Peru, focused on gender and vulnerable populations, secured Ministerial Resolution No. 393-2023-MIMP, which formalizes the Lab within the Office of Policy Monitoring and Evaluation (OMEP). The resolution gives the Lab an official mandate, defines its structure and functions, and provides a formal basis for accessing ministry resources. This legal anchoring strengthens the Lab's continuity across political transitions and reduces its dependence on individual champions.

Political Resources

Political resources refer to the backing of internal and external actors with sufficient authority or influence to authorize, champion, and mobilize support for the Lab and its work. These actors may include technical directors, senior officials, ministers, and influential external partners. Political support can be cultivated through demonstrated value, strategic communication, alignment with government priorities, and sustained relationships with champions and users of the Lab's services. Labs may also face resistance where evidence challenges existing interests, discretion, or preferred policies, so institutionalization requires managing opposition as well as building support (Dong, 2023).

Political resources are closely connected to other components of the framework. Political backing can help secure formal mandates under Legal Resources, budget commitments under Financial Resources, and staffing and institutional arrangements under Structure and Governance. In turn, demonstrated value through the Lab's Process and demand from government units can build and reinforce political support.

Why it matters: Political support enables both the Lab's day-to-day work and its institutionalization. Champions can provide the authorization and influence needed for other units to engage with the Lab, facilitate access to decision-makers and resources, and increase demand for its services. Political backing can also help secure more durable commitments, including formal mandates, government staffing, and budget allocations. Building support across multiple levels reduces dependence on a single champion and strengthens the Lab's resilience when leadership or political priorities change (Zida et al., 2018). External partners can also provide political backing, but this should complement rather than substitute for internal government support.



IPA staff working with government partners in Colombia. Photo: IPA Colombia

Example: MineduLab illustrates how political support can be built through demonstrated value and reinforced through visible recognition. When Jaime Saavedra was appointed Minister of Education in 2013, he delayed MineduLab's formal launch while the team implemented three initial pilots that demonstrated that the model was feasible and could generate useful evidence at low cost. Formal mandate did not precede proof of value: early authorization to experiment created space for the Lab to demonstrate value, which in turn helped build the political support needed for stronger formal commitments. This does not imply that formal anchoring is not important, but rather that the appropriate timing of formalization may depend on the Lab's stage of development. The proof of value helped build the credibility needed for MineduLab's subsequent formal mandate and access to government resources, and awards for innovation in public management and education policy later helped to increase its visibility.

Incentives and signals

Incentives and signals are the formal and informal rewards, consequences, expectations, and cues that shape whether and how staff generate, share, and use evidence in their work. Formal incentives can include performance expectations, reporting requirements, recruitment and promotion criteria, and recognition. Informal signals include what leaders ask for in meetings, which analyses receive attention from senior decision-makers, and how leaders respond when evidence challenges a preferred position. Where Human Capacity captures individuals' dispositions toward evidence, incentives and signals capture the institutional conditions that reinforce or discourage evidence-use behavior.

Incentives and signals are interdependent with other components of the framework. Reporting requirements and review processes may be embedded under Procedural Capacity; leadership signals and performance expectations depend partly on Structure and Governance; and financial rewards, career progression, and recognition depend on Resources.

Why it matters: Even when evidence, tools, and processes are available, staff may not use them if evidence use is not expected, rewarded, or connected to their day-to-day responsibilities. When leaders request evidence, planning processes require evidence inputs, teams are recognized for using data, and evidence helps staff perform their responsibilities, evidence use becomes more integrated into routine work. Incentives such as career progression and recognition can also help sustain human capacity by supporting the recruitment, motivation, and retention of capable staff over time.

Example: Labs in Nigeria and Uganda illustrate how evidence use can be reinforced through both formal managerial expectations and leadership signals. At the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Consumer Protection Lab contributed to a shift from reporting primarily on activities toward reporting whether those activities were producing intended outcomes. Managers increasingly reviewed these results as part of performance discussions, creating an expectation that teams use evidence to demonstrate results. While standard operating procedures helped embed the reporting practice, the incentive came from what managers required, reviewed, and acted on.

The Lab at Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports has contributed to similar expectations through repeated engagement with senior leaders around live policy and implementation questions. As leaders engaged with evidence through research and learning activities, policy dialogues, and technical support, they increasingly requested evidence and challenged unsupported assumptions. For example, the Senior Management Team questioned elements of the proposed school meals program costing where evidence from the Ugandan context was insufficient and requested analysis of retirement, recruitment, training, and deployment before considering responses to teacher shortages. These behaviors signal to staff that policy proposals are expected to be grounded in relevant evidence. Together, the cases illustrate how Labs can help make evidence use expected through both formal managerial requirements and the signals leaders send through what they ask for, scrutinize, and act on.

What institutionalization looks like

- Core Lab costs are covered through regular government budget lines, with external funding supplementary rather than essential.
- The Lab's mandate and functions are formalized in legal or administrative instruments that support durability across political cycles.
- Political support is distributed across multiple levels, converted into durable institutional commitments, and sustained through leadership transitions and when evidence challenges existing preferences.
- Evidence use is reinforced through reporting requirements, performance expectations, planning processes, leadership signals, or other institutional incentives rather than resting on individual goodwill.

3. How to Institutionalize: A Phased Approach

The previous section described **what needs to be institutionalized**: the Lab's Process, Structure and Governance, Capacity, and Resources. This section explains **how institutionalization happens.**

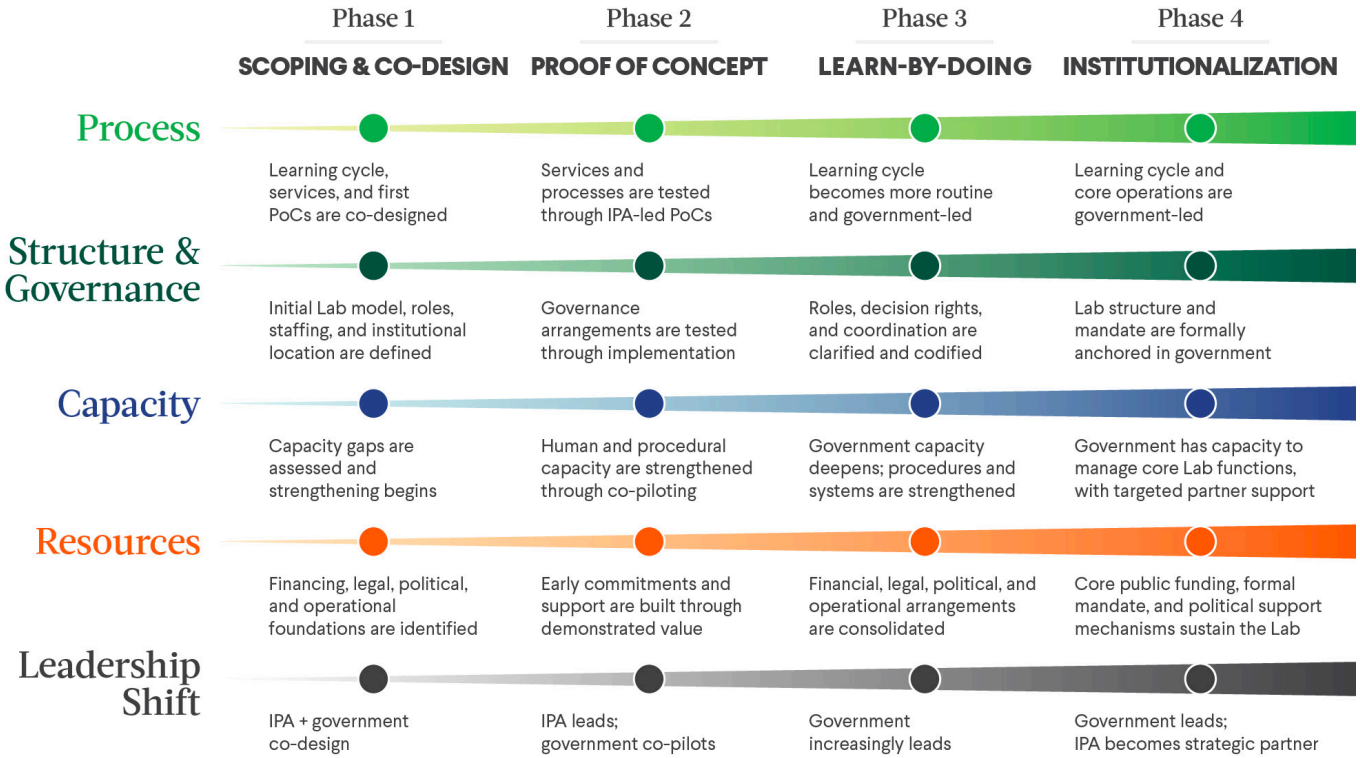
The framework proposes four phases through which these components are progressively developed and strengthened. Institutionalizing a Lab is a gradual process of adapting to context, demonstrating value, building government ownership, and embedding the Lab's functions in government. The phases provide a practical way to structure this gradual process, setting out milestones against which progress toward institutionalization can be assessed without implying a rigid or linear sequence. This section also presents seven principles that guide institutionalization across different contexts.

Phased approach

The four phases are **Scoping and Co-Design, Proof of Concept, Learn-by-Doing, and Institutionalization**. Early phases focus on understanding starting conditions, determining how the Lab should be structured and adapted to the institutional context, and establishing the capacities and arrangements needed for implementation; later phases deepen government ownership, formalize arrangements that have proven effective, and strengthen their durability. Figure 5 describes each phase and how the Lab, government ownership, and IPA's role evolve across them.

Figure 5. A Phased Approach to Institutionalizing Evidence Use

The Lab develops through overlapping phases while four institutional components are progressively strengthened.



The **phases overlap** because activities such as capacity strengthening, institutional arrangements, financing, and political support often continue across phases. Transitions are therefore gradual rather than fixed. Progress across the four components also occurs in parallel, but not necessarily at the same speed. The pace of progress depends on the institution's starting conditions and on opportunities that arise, such as available financing or policy windows. Progress in one component may also depend on progress in another. For example, for government staff to eventually lead the learning cycle, the Process component must first be designed and refined, while staff need opportunities to develop Human Capacity through training and learning-by-doing.

The process is also **non-linear.** Learning from implementation may require revisiting earlier design choices, while changes in government priorities, structures, or ways of working may require adapting arrangements that had already been established (see the MineduLab case study in Section 2.1). Reaching the final phase therefore **does not guarantee permanent sustainability**: institutionalization can weaken or reverse as conditions change and requires continued strengthening and adaptation over time.

Although the framework provides a common set of components and phases, institutionalization is **context-specific**. It should begin with an assessment of the institutional context and starting conditions, build on existing structures, processes, and capacities where possible, and tailor the institutionalization strategy to the agency's level of readiness.

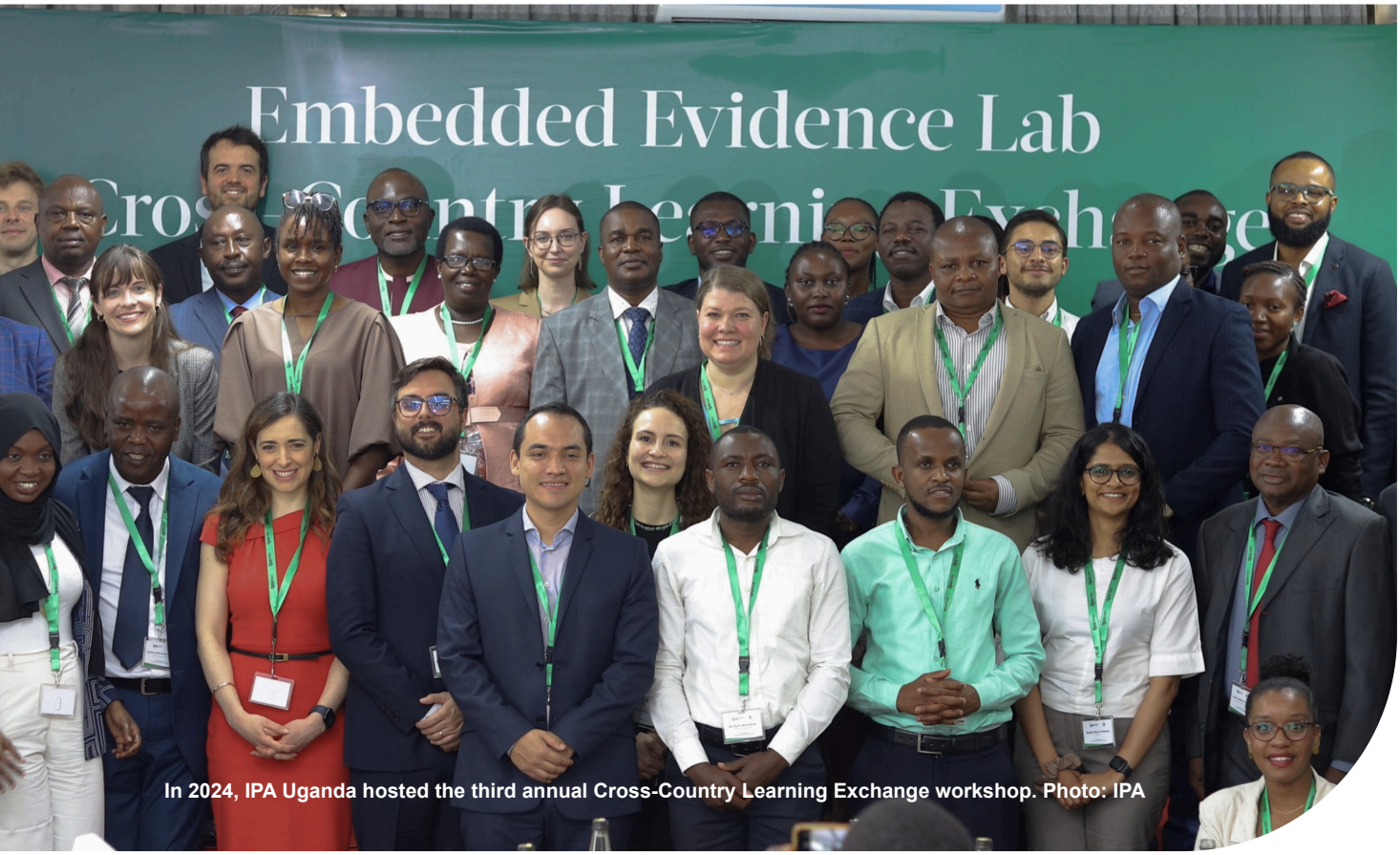
Guiding principles for institutionalization across the phased approach

The phased approach describes how the Lab develops over time, including how government ownership increases and IPA's role evolves. The principles below complement this pathway by guiding institutionalization throughout the process. They are cross-cutting and apply across all phases rather than being tied to any single one.

1. **Co-design for institutional fit and ownership.** Institutionalization should be considered from the beginning of Lab design rather than deferred to a later stage. An initial understanding of the agency's institutional strengths, gaps, and constraints helps ensure that the Lab builds on existing capabilities and addresses the conditions that may limit its sustainability. Co-design combines external technical expertise with government counterparts' institutional knowledge, helping ensure that design choices are technically sound, politically viable, and suited to the institutional context. It also builds the shared understanding and early government ownership needed for later institutionalization.
2. **Learn by doing through proofs of concept.** Labs develop through Proofs of Concept (PoCs) that test and refine the Lab model before full formalization. PoCs allow the Lab to demonstrate value, generate early demand, and adapt its services, workflows, and partnerships to the host institution's priorities and constraints. Each iteration helps the Lab fit the institution's logic rather than importing a fixed model. Government counterparts progressively take the lead through learning-by-doing, strengthening the capabilities needed to sustain the Lab over time.[11]
3. **Embed the Lab in government systems and routines.** Labs should be embedded in existing government structures and routines, including planning, budgeting, staffing, information systems, reporting processes, and decision-making cycles. As ways of working are tested and refined, they should increasingly be incorporated into government-owned processes and procedures, strengthening the Procedural Capacity needed for them to persist beyond particular individuals.

[11] This applies both to the Lab team learning to deliver services and to the policy and implementation units learning to use evidence, particularly when a PoC is tied to a process those units deliver.

4. **Earn formal commitments progressively.** Institutionalization requires the host institution to commit progressively more to the Lab. This often begins with an authorizing environment (Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock, 2017) such as leadership signals, permission to experiment, access to data, or informal support from key units. Early results from PoCs help build the credibility needed to negotiate formal commitments, including budget lines, dedicated staff, legal or strategic mandates, and political endorsement.
5. **Manage the politics actively.** Political dynamics must be actively managed throughout the institutionalization process. Labs need to align their work with government priorities, cultivate champions, and build coalitions. This includes shaping a portfolio that balances technically important questions with politically salient priorities, identifying and acting on windows of opportunity, and sustaining support through leadership transitions.
6. **Strengthen institutionalization continuously.** Institutionalization and ownership deepen over time. As capacity, leadership, and resources grow, IPA transitions from leading operations to playing a more strategic partner role. However, institutionalization is not a one-time achievement. It must be continuously strengthened, monitored, and adapted as political priorities, institutional structures, staff, and resource conditions change, while preserving the Lab's ability to learn and evolve rather than locking in a fixed model (see the MineduLab case study in Section 2.1).
7. **Engage the broader evidence ecosystem.** Institutionalization within government does not mean that the Lab operates alone. A government-led Lab is strengthened by its ability to engage the broader policy and evidence ecosystem around government priorities. Partners can contribute specialized expertise, research collaboration, financing, implementation support, and political legitimacy. These relationships help the Lab work more effectively, align sector priorities, and sustain evidence use over time. Ecosystem engagement makes institutionalization stronger and more resilient.



In 2024, IPA Uganda hosted the third annual Cross-Country Learning Exchange workshop. Photo: IPA

Case Study: MineduLab's Gradual Institutionalization

MineduLab's establishment followed a gradual process that moved from co-design and proof of concept, to government leadership and formal institutionalization. During **Scoping and Co-Design**, beginning in 2014, IPA and J-PAL staff were embedded within Peru's Ministry of Education and worked alongside government officials to design the Lab's structure, processes, and initial innovation cycle. The team selected three initial Proofs of Concept: *Choosing a Better Future*, which used telenovela-style videos to reduce student dropout by addressing students' perceptions of the returns to education; behavioral text messages to improve school principals' implementation of the school maintenance program; and a growth mindset intervention designed to improve student learning.

During the **Proof of Concept** phase, IPA and J-PAL led implementation while ministry teams co-piloted the projects. Rather than launching the Lab immediately, Minister Jaime Saavedra required the team to first demonstrate that the model was feasible and could improve policy implementation. The projects were therefore used not only to generate evidence, but also to test and refine the Lab's processes, resource requirements, partnerships, and innovation cycle.

The proofs of concept delivered that demonstration quickly. Behavioral text messages to school principals reduced gaps in reporting of maintenance expenditures by 15 percent and in the withdrawal of maintenance funds by 10 percent. The Ministry estimated that every US$1 spent generated about US$800 in maintenance funding reported as used, and the National Program for Educational Infrastructure (PRONIED) incorporated the messages into its regular operations. *Choosing a Better Future* reduced student dropout by 18 percent, and the growth mindset intervention increased mathematics learning by 0.12 standard deviations at a cost of US$0.2 per student. Together, these projects demonstrated that rigorous experimentation could generate practical improvements in both implementation and student outcomes at very low cost, and could be embedded within existing government systems and scaled through regular operations.

During **Learn-by-Doing**, government counterparts progressively assumed responsibility for managing the Lab while embedded IPA and J-PAL staff transferred their roles to an expanded ministry team. IPA and J-PAL complemented the experience government counterparts had gained during the previous phase through targeted training, after which government staff increasingly took the lead in project implementation, with continued coaching and technical support from IPA and J-PAL. After two years of implementation, iter and institutionalization work, Saavedra officially launched MineduLab in April 2016.

During the subsequent **Institutionalization** phase, the Ministry anchored a team of four impact-evaluation specialists within its Office of Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation and established a recurring process through which implementation units submit priorities and work with external researchers to design and evaluate innovations. In 2017, Directive No. 005-2017-MINEDU/SG-SPE, approved through RSG No. 219-2017-MINEDU, formalized MineduLab's mandate and core processes as a government mechanism for generating evidence to improve education policy.

As of September 2026, MineduLab has remained active under 10 presidents and 18 education ministers. It has developed 14 innovations through five innovation windows, evaluated 12 through randomized controlled trials, and identified four with positive results; three have been scaled and one remains under discussion for scale-up.

Its resilience reflects several mutually reinforcing elements of institutionalization: a formal institutional position and mandate under **Structure and Governance and Legal Resources**; a permanent government technical team under **Capacity and Team Composition**; a recurring innovation cycle under **Process and Procedural Capacity**; systematic partnerships with researchers and national and international organizations; and a low-cost model supported by existing implementation structures and administrative data. Together, these arrangements reduced dependence on individual champions and helped MineduLab withstand repeated budget and leadership transitions.

Common risks of failure

Institutionalization is not automatic. Common risks include continued dependence on external staff or funding, with government counterparts treating Lab work as a donor project rather than a government function. They may focus narrowly on generating evidence and underinvest in the institutional changes needed to implement it. And they may lose momentum when individual champions move on, particularly if the Lab has not built broader political support or formal institutional anchoring. The core components, phased approach and guiding principles described above are intended to help governments and their partners anticipate and manage these risks from the earliest stages of Lab design.

Case Study: ProcuraLab - When ownership does not translate into institutionalization

ProcuraLab, created with Colombia's Office of the Attorney General, supported evidence generation and innovation on corruption and human rights. The Lab had strong ownership from senior leadership and the team assigned to it, and the government itself mobilized resources to support its work. However, ProcuraLab was established largely as a special initiative within the Attorney General's office rather than as a permanent function anchored in a stable organizational unit. While a small group of advisers actively drove the Lab, its responsibilities were not progressively assigned to permanent directorates or positions within the institution. When the administration changed, the team and its institutional mandate disappeared, and the Lab ceased operating. The case shows that ownership, even when accompanied by government resources, is not sufficient for institutionalization if it remains tied to individual champions or temporary structures. Sustaining a Lab requires translating that ownership into permanent roles, responsibilities, processes, and organizational structures that can survive leadership transitions.



MIMP officials and IPA Peru staff. Photo: IPA



Attendees at a STARS Year 1 dissemination event. Photo: gui²de and IPA Rwanda

4. Institutionalization in Practice

This section examines how institutionalization has progressed across nine Embedded Evidence Labs operating in different sectors and institutional contexts. Table 2 brings together selected indicators of progress across the framework's components, alongside their portfolios, years of operation, and experience through political and organizational change. It is intended to illustrate broader trends in institutionalization rather than provide a comprehensive assessment. Taken together, the cases reveal several recurring features of how Labs become embedded and sustained within government systems.

Labs have continued operating through political and organizational change. For example, MineduLab has continued through ten presidents and 18 education ministers; CBN through two presidents and two CBN governors; and MENA through two ministers and a ministry restructuring. Continuity beyond the tenure of initial champions suggests that the function is becoming less dependent on particular individuals and more sustainable over time.

Labs institutionalize a common evidence-to-action function while tailoring their services to government decisions. Methods vary with the problem and decision at hand. Rwanda combined A/B testing and MEL with a government task force and stronger data systems to refine and scale STARS; Côte d'Ivoire used MEL to address implementation bottlenecks; CBN uses surveys, Natural Language Processing and social media data, and analytics for financial-sector supervision; Uganda combined administrative data and research to inform teacher recruitment and science education policy; and the Philippines is using predictive analytics to identify students at risk of dropping out. What becomes routine, therefore, is not a particular method but a recurring process for connecting government priorities with appropriate evidence and translating it into action.

Through these projects, Labs can also strengthen wider government systems and evidence-use practices. In Rwanda, information systems strengthened through STARS are now supporting teacher deployment and workforce planning (see section 2.1). Table 2 shows similar spillovers: CBN has incorporated MEL routines into departmental management and OEFA has developed an information system using satellite imagery. Capabilities, procedures, and infrastructure developed through individual projects can therefore become reusable institutional assets that support evidence use beyond a single intervention.

Routinization helps move Labs from individual projects toward an institutionalized function while creating opportunities for learning-by-doing. All Labs have active portfolios and recurring mechanisms for responding to government evidence needs. As these mechanisms are repeated, they can be refined and codified into procedures and tools; Table 2 includes project-selection processes, evidence-review forums, standardized evaluation tools, MEL frameworks, and other recurring practices. Repetition also enables government counterparts to learn by doing. At ICBF, for example, staff moved from co-piloting learning-cycle activities with IPA to leading a subsequent iteration with IPA in a supporting role.

Government ownership becomes increasingly visible as responsibility is backed by staff, resources, and institutional commitments. Across the nine Labs, governments have assigned 41 staff, between two and eight per Lab - and all contribute resources to Lab teams and activities. MineduLab has a formal directive; ICBF, OEFA, and MIMP have formal resolutions; Kenya is recognized in the NESSP and operates under Terms of Reference approved by the Principal Secretary; and others are anchored through departmental structures, strategic plans, or administrative arrangements. These commitments reduce dependence on external staff, funding, or individual champions. Government ownership, however, does not mean operating alone: all Labs continue to work with universities, research organizations, funders, or technical partners. Institutionalization therefore means government ownership of the core function and decisions, while external partners can continue to provide specialized expertise, research collaboration, or complementary resources.

Institutionalization does not require a single organizational model. Labs occupy different institutional homes and organize demand in different ways. MineduLab uses an annual innovation call; CBN annual planning sessions; MENA and Uganda Research and Learning Agendas; and ICBF, OEFA, and MIMP rely more on demand-driven identification supplemented by periodic priority-setting or innovation scouting. Institutional homes range from monitoring and evaluation and planning offices to research, data, policy, and regulatory-improvement units, while formal anchoring ranges from directives and resolutions to sector plans and departmental arrangements. The common feature is therefore the evidence-to-action function, not a particular organizational structure.

Progress is uneven, takes time, and may require revisiting earlier arrangements. The Labs in Table 2 have been operating for between two and ten years, underscoring that institutionalization develops through sustained engagement alongside project delivery. Time creates opportunities to implement multiple projects, refine routines, build government experience, and secure institutional commitments. However, Labs of similar ages still show different combinations of institutionalization features, suggesting that progress also depends on their starting conditions, institutional context, and the nature and continuity of support available throughout the process. Progress can also require adaptation: Kenya, for example, changed the Hub's institutional location while continuing to operate through senior leadership turnover. ICBF Lab similarly evolved from its initial location within the early childhood area to its current position in the Planning and Control Directorate. Institutionalization is therefore better understood as an uneven, cumulative, and adaptive process than as a fixed sequence of milestones.

Table 2. Lab Profiles: Indicators of Institutionalization in Practice

MineduLab	CBN Data Office	EEH Kenya	MENA EdLab	MoES Lab	DepEd Lab	ICBFLab	OEFA Innova	MIMPLab
Country Peru	**Country** Nigeria	**Country** Kenya	**Country** Cote d'Ivoire	**Country** Uganda	**Country** The Philippines	**Country** Colombia	**Country** Peru	**Country** Peru
Sector Education	**Sector** Financial Inclusion and Consumer Protection	**Sector** Education	**Sector** Education	**Sector** Education	**Sector** Education	**Sector** Early childhood, Youth and Family	**Sector** Environment	**Sector** Gender & Social Protection
Institution Ministry of Education	**Institution** Central Bank of Nigeria	**Institution** Ministry of Education	**Institution** Ministry of National Education and Literacy	**Institution** Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES)	**Institution** Department of Education	**Institution** Colombian Institute of Family Welfare	**Institution** Environmental Evaluation and Enforcement Agency	**Institution** Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations
Years of operation 10 years	**Years of operation** 4 years	**Years of operation** 5 years	**Years of operation** 3 years	**Years of operation** 3 years	**Years of operation** 2 years	**Years of operation** 4 years	**Years of operation** 2 years	**Years of operation** 2 years
Institutionali-zation in practice Continued through 10 presidents and 18 ministers	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Continued through 2 presidents and 2 CBN governors	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Continued through Cabinet Secretary and Principal Secretary transitions	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Continued through 2 ministers and a 2026 ministry restructuring process	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Resilience to leadership turnover has not yet been tested, as senior political leadership has remained stable since the Lab's establishment .	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Has adapted through 3 internal organizational restructurings, maintaining the evidence function while adjusting the Lab's structure.	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Continued through 2 presidents and 3 ICBF directors while government staffing, financing and processes have progressively deepened.	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Continued through 3 presidents and 3 OEFA presidents, while moving from an earlier behavioral initiative that did not persist toward a more institutionally anchored model.	**Institutionali-zation in practice** Continued through 3 presidents and 6 ministers
Portfolio - projects Current 2 Completed 14	**Portfolio - projects** Current 4 Completed 7	**Portfolio - projects** Current 3 Completed 3	**Portfolio - projects** Current 4 Completed 1	**Portfolio - projects** Current 6 Completed 1	**Portfolio - projects** Current 4 Completed 1	**Portfolio - projects** Current 3 Completed 15	**Portfolio - projects** Current 8 Completed 2	**Portfolio - projects** Current 5 Completed 1

Note: Information reflects the status of each Lab as of September 2026. "Current projects" refers to active projects.

Table 2. Lab Profiles: Indicators of Institutionalization in Practice

MineduLab	CBN Data Office	EEH Kenya	MENA EdLab	MoES Lab	DepEd Lab	ICBFLab	OEFA Innova	MIMPLab
Process								
Illustrative project Tested low-cost SMS reminders with PRONIED to improve school-maintenance management, reducing gaps in expenditure reporting by 15% and in fund withdrawals by 10%; PRONIED subsequently incorporated the messages into regular operations.	**Illustrative project** Developed consumer-protection surveys and complaints dashboards to identify emerging risks and inform CBN supervision and regulation.	**Illustrative project** Conducted evidence syntheses that informed the NESSP 2023–2027, the 2025 Gender Policy in Education, Training & Research, and the draft Teacher Education and Training Policy.	**Illustrative project** Supported DOB to develop and apply an MEL framework for the Personalized Student Monitoring program, using implementation data to identify and address delivery bottlenecks.	**Illustrative project** Analyzed payroll and HR data to identify teacher attrition patterns and predictors, informing discussions on teacher incentives, career progression, and deployment policies.	**Illustrative project** Developed SAGIP, a machine-learning tool using administrative data to identify students at risk of dropping out and inform targeted prevention strategies.	**Illustrative project** Evaluated *Heal to Grow (Sanar para Crecer)*, a mindfulness-based program for early childhood workers, and supported its adaptation and nationwide scale-up after positive effects on workers' socio-emotional well-being and mindfulness skills	**Illustrative project** Designed educational and WhatsApp interventions to increase citizen use of OEFA's Reporta Residuos app and improve municipal responses to reported waste accumulation.	**Illustrative project** Strengthened SISGAE to improve monitoring of the Ministry's conditional cash-transfer program.
Recurring cycle Annual call for proposals addressing implementation units priorities	**Recurring cycle** Annual planning sessions to identify needs and prioritize the Lab's support	**Recurring cycle** The Lab is in the process of defining its operating cycle	**Recurring cycle** Research and Learning Agenda feeds a recurring cycle of challenge identification, evidence generation and application	**Recurring cycle** The Lab is defining its recurring cycle around the Research and Learning Agenda and aligning it with government planning processes.	**Recurring cycle** The co-designed cycle uses DepEd's Research and Evaluation Agenda to identify learning opportunities, co-design solutions, generate evidence and support action.	**Recurring cycle** On-demand project identification, annual update of programmatic priorities and matching with potential projects	**Recurring cycle** On-demand project identification, complemented by annual or biannual service promotion and innovation scouting activities	**Recurring cycle** On-demand project identification, complemented by annual or biannual service promotion and innovation scouting activities

MineduLab	CBN Data Office	EEH Kenya	MENA EdLab	MoES Lab	DepEd Lab	ICBFLab	OEFA Innova	MIMPLab
Structure and governance								
Institutional position Office of Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation (OSEE)	**Institutional position** Consumer Protection and Financial Inclusion Department	**Institutional position** Kenya Education Management Information System (KEMIS) Directorate, State Department for Basic Education	**Institutional position** Direction des Études, des Stratégies, de la Planification et des Statistiques (DESPS)	**Institutional position** Education Policy and Research Department (EPAR)	**Institutional position** Hosted by Monitoring and Evaluation Office (MEO)	**Institutional position** Planning and Control Directorate	**Institutional position** Deputy Directorate of Policies and Regulatory Improvement	**Institutional position** Office of Policy Monitoring and Evaluation (OMEP)
Gov't Staff 4	**Gov't Staff** 5	**Gov't Staff** 3	**Gov't Staff** 8	**Gov't Staff** 2 + 6 departmental representatives	**Gov't Staff** 8	**Gov't Staff** 4	**Gov't Staff** 5	**Gov't Staff** 2
Partnerships MIT, Vanderbilt, World Bank, U. of Pacífico, U. of Rosario, Pontificia Catholic University of Chile, GRADE, FORGE, IPA, J-PAL	**Partnerships** Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; EFInA; GIZ; U. of Sheffield; U. of Pacífico., IPA	**Partnerships** LEGO Foundation, IPA,EdTech Hub, Zizi Afrique/Mizizi, WWHGE, FCDO	**Partnerships** Jacobs Foundation, World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, AVSI Foundation, IPA	**Partnerships** LEGO Foundation, IPA, UNICEF, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	**Partnerships** WWHGE-Oxford, University of Michigan, IPA	**Partnerships** LEGO Foundation, NYU, IDB, U. de los Andes, Equimundo, Fundación Apapacho, IPA	**Partnerships** FID, Southern Methodist, U. of Pacífico, U. of Piura, IPA, J-PAL	**Partnerships** Princeton University, U. of Minnesota, Wake Forest U., U.of Montevideo, IPA, J-PAL
Capacity								
Procedural Established operating procedures that define MineduLab's processes, roles, and governance arrangements.	**Procedural** Embedded MEL frameworks and routines into departmental planning and program management so teams routinely track outcomes and use evidence to improve programs	**Procedural** MEL plan template and accompanying tools to guide consistent monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities	**Procedural** DESPS procedure manual validated; Developed MEL plan template and accompanying tools to guide consistent monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities	**Procedural** Monthly Brown Bag sessions as a recurring forum for ministry teams to review evidence and connect findings to policy and implementation decisions.	**Procedural** Standardized evaluation plans and monitoring tools	**Procedural** Formally embedded a set of evidence-informed policy design and learning tools into its official service design and redesign procedure, making them the standard for services across the institution.	**Procedural** OEFA Innova refined a repeatable workflow for designing, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based regulatory interventions.	**Procedural** MEL plan template and accompanying tools to guide consistent monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities

MineduLab	CBN Data Office	EEH Kenya	MENA EdLab	MoES Lab	DepEd Lab	ICBFLab	OEFA Innova	MIMPLab
Capacity								
Information systems The Lab leverages multiple information systems to conduct evaluations such as SIAGIE, ECE, WASICHAY, NEXUS	**Information systems** The Lab developed a new information system that uses social media data and NLP to monitor the market	**Information systems** Completed a data-capacity assessment with DQAS, identifying gaps in data collection, analysis, reporting, governance, and integration with NEMIS to inform data-system strengthening.	**Information systems** Online data system under development to digitize data collection for CLEF, PRSEB, and PATEB	**Information systems** Uses and strengthens government administrative systems such as TELA	**Information systems** Uses LIS, BEIS, and NSBI data for predictive analytics	**Information systems** The Lab strengthened the management indicator reporting system to improve the disaggregation and traceability of reported data.	**Information systems** The Lab built an information system that uses satellite imagery processed through an algorithm to detect fires at dumpsites.	**Information systems** The Lab strengthened the SISGAE information system to support monitoring of the conditional cash transfer program.
Resources								
Funded by Government Lab team, workshops	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops	**Funded by Government** Lab team, workshops, data collection
Legal Framework Directive No. 005-2017-MINEDU/SG-SPE (2017)	**Legal Framework** Embedded in the documentation defining the Operational structure of the Department	**Legal Framework** Embedded in the NESSP 2023–2027, with co-created Terms of Reference approved by the Principal Secretary in March 2024	**Legal Framework** Ed Lab included in the 2026–2030 National Development Plan; ministerial order pending	**Legal Framework** Embedded in the Operational structure of EPAR; an operational manual and further formalization arrangements are under development	**Legal Framework** Formalization arrangements are under development	**Legal Framework** Resolution No. 5000 (2024) Presidential Decree 1430-2025	**Legal Framework** Resolution No. 00018-2025-OEFA/PCD (2025)	**Legal Framework** Ministerial Resolution No. 393-2023-MIMP (2023)



Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Rwanda Education Board, and Rwanda TVET Board attend a training held by the Rwanda Education Evidence Lab on the Teacher Management Information System (TMIS). Photo: gui²de and IPA Rwanda

5. Conclusion

Evidence is more likely to improve public policy when governments can generate, interpret, and use it as part of their regular work. Individual studies, technical-assistance projects, and committed champions can demonstrate what is possible, but are unlikely on their own to sustain evidence use through changing priorities, leadership, and financing. The objective of an Embedded Evidence Lab is to establish or strengthen a government evidence function that can repeatedly connect evidence to policy design, scaling, and implementation.

This framework argues that institutionalizing this function requires complementary foundations across Process, Structure and Governance, Capacity, and Resources. These components provide a practical way to diagnose what is needed for the function to operate effectively and endure: recurring processes that connect government priorities with evidence and action; institutional arrangements that provide authority, accountability, and relationships; the human, procedural, and information-systems capacity to perform the function; and the financial, legal, political, and incentive-based supports needed to sustain it.

The experiences examined in this framework also point to a different way of thinking about institutionalization. The goal is not to replicate a particular Lab model or reach a single formal milestone, but to progressively embed the evidence function in ways that fit each institution. This requires sustained engagement: using real policy and implementation work to demonstrate value, learn by doing, refine and routinize ways of working, strengthen government ownership, and adapt institutional arrangements as conditions change. External partners can continue to contribute specialized expertise and resources, while government increasingly owns the priorities, core processes, and decisions.

For governments and their partners, the central question therefore shifts from whether a Lab has been established to whether its evidence function can operate effectively, repeatedly, and sustainably in practice. For funders, this implies supporting the institutionalization pathway rather than a sequence of stand-alone evidence projects, allowing time for experimentation and learning, investing in institutional foundations alongside evidence generation, and enabling external support to evolve as government ownership grows. Ultimately, the challenge extends beyond Embedded Evidence Labs: it is how to make evidence use part of the ordinary machinery of government.

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