

02 Module

DECIDING WHETHER TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL

About This Module

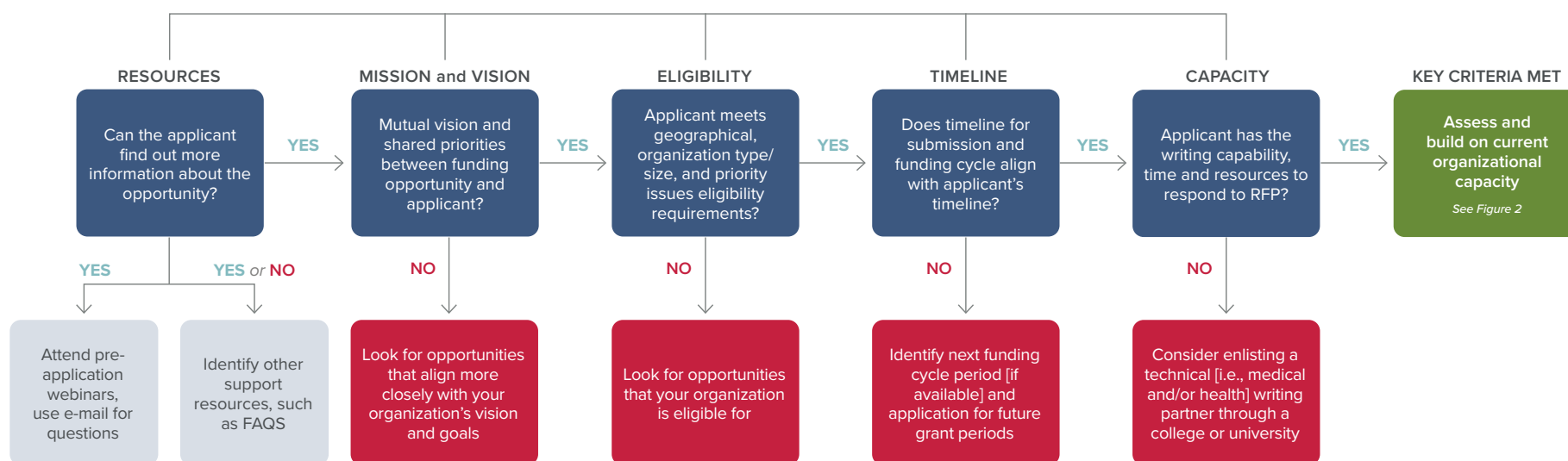
In deciding whether your organization will submit for a particular funding opportunity, you will need to assess whether your organization has the capacity to write a complete proposal and implement the research. You will weigh your organization's eligibility for the opportunity, the fit of the opportunity to what you would like to fund and the sustainability of what you propose beyond the initial funding opportunity. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) excel at making

the most of their available resources; still, you may be at capacity and will want to consider this carefully. By taking the time to carefully assess whether your organization will pursue this opportunity, you can identify areas that you can improve upon before you submit the proposal. This may help strengthen your proposal and help you avoid spending hours writing only to realize halfway through that it is not a good fit for you.



Figure 1 below provides an overview of the factors you may consider when making this decision. Each will be discussed in further detail followed by suggestions for increasing your organization's capacity to submit and implement a proposal.

Figure 1. Meeting Initial Criteria Five-Step Decision Tree



Consider Your Organization's Eligibility

Before beginning the proposal, consider the following:

- Is this a new opportunity or has the grant been offered previously? If not new, how does my organization or my proposed research project compare to those previously funded?
- Does my organization meet the size, geography, service area or other funding eligibility parameters elicited in the funder's RFP?

Figure 2: Key Elements for Assessing and Building On Current Organizational Capacity

Internal Capacity	Partnerships	Financial Standing	Other Resources
Skills and Experience - Grant-Writing - Research expertise (i.e., research design, data collection and analysis, reporting); Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) - Community relationships Availability - Proposed staff has bandwidth to take on the proposed work in addition to their present responsibilities. Leadership Buy-In - Organizational and/or community leaders can demonstrate support (e.g., letter of support, endorsement) of the proposed research project.	- Organization has engaged existing partnerships relevant to the proposed research project. - Organization can demonstrate history of effective partnering. - Organization has identified potential partnerships to support the proposed research project.	- Organization has calculated overall cost of proposed research project. - Organization can demonstrate intent to leverage the resources from the funding opportunity to access money from other sources to sustain proposed research project beyond initial funding. - Organization can demonstrate that the funding opportunity be sufficient to start and finish the research project entirely or that it has identified additional resources to make up the difference.	- Organization has or can secure any equipment, tools or software needed to execute proposed research project. - Organization demonstrates that it can access or easily collect any data necessary to support proposed research project. - Organization has access to a research determination and ethics review body (e.g., Institutional Review Board (IRB)).

Assess Your Capacity To Respond To The RFP

A. Organizational capacity:

- a. **Grant-Writing:** Does my organization have an experienced and available grant-writer to prepare the proposal? With your expertise, experience and this manual, could it be you or someone on your team?
- b. **Research capability:** Does my organization or our partners have experience conducting a research project? Do we have experience with:
 - i. Data collection and data management. Have you ever gathered information and numbers from your program to assess your current capacity and look for ways to improve operations or be more efficient?
 - ii. Data analysis
 - iii. Human subjects research requirements (e.g., institutional review board (IRB) approval). An academic partner can be helpful in this area, and there are other resources to help fill this requirement if you are not familiar with it.
- c. **Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR):** Does my organization have experience conducting research that involves community members in each stage of the process? Has your organization or staff ever helped a community partner or university with its research? Do we have:
 - i. Community ties, relationships and social or political standing
 - ii. Understanding and awareness of the social and health systems and structures relevant to the proposed research project and the community
 - iii. A plan for communicating and presenting results to various audiences, such as at workshops or conferences, or preparing annual reports

B. Staffing

- a. If the organization has the skills set(s) necessary for the proposed endeavor, do the personnel have the capacity to take on the proposed work in addition to their present responsibilities?
- b. Is my organization prepared to allocate adequate staff time to implement the project?

C. Leadership buy-in

- a. Which leadership figures in your organization or community need to buy into your proposed research project for you to succeed?
- b. How can you demonstrate that you have support from your leadership and board of directors?



Assess Partnerships

Partnerships are integral to the CBPR approach. Collaboration with other entities who have research skills enables communities to carry out research apart from academic or other professional organizations such that the research data comes directly from the community and the results go directly back to the people most affected by the problem or need being studied. Partnerships can also mitigate gaps in skills and knowledge in a community-based research project.

Potential questions:

- What existing partnerships does my organization have that are relevant to the proposed research project?
- What potential partnerships might my organization be able to cultivate to support the proposed project?
- Do I have the need and resources to bring subject matter experts on board to advise on the proposed research?

Take Stock Of Other Resource Needs

- Does my organization have, or do we have access to any equipment, tools or software needed to execute the project?
- Can my organization access or easily collect any data that we propose to use or gather? Can we do it in a timely manner?

Assess Finances

- How much will this project cost my organization?
- Will the funding opportunity be sufficient for my organization to start and finish the project entirely? If not, does my organization have other resources to complete the work?
- Can my organization demonstrate in our proposal that the project is sustainable or scalable once the funding stream has ended? Can my organization speak to the lasting difference the information the research generates will make to our community?

Capacity Assessment

Review the results of your assessment with your project team and leadership. Are there areas in which your capacity is lower than you would like for this opportunity? Look through those elements and discuss whether they are significant enough to prevent you from submitting a proposal.

Below are some additional suggestions to assess your organization's capacity to implement the research project that you plan to propose:

- If your staff does not have sufficient data management or analysis skills, could you plan to make room in your budget for a data analyst to be hired for the number of hours needed for that task?
- If none of your staff is able to dedicate 100% of time to this project, could you have two people who could shift 50% of their responsibilities elsewhere? Or could you hire a new employee for the length of the grant period?

- If you do not initially have support from your organization's leadership, could you identify the reason for the hesitancy? Could you find common ground in supporting this project?
- If you haven't established a partnership with an academic institution to work with you in implementing this research project:

- › Does anyone on your staff have contacts at an academic institution in a department that would be interested in this project? If there are no existing networks and relationships you can leverage, could you reach out to local universities, colleges and research institutions to explore potential collaborations; or reach out to faculty members or researchers whose work aligns with your organization's mission and goals?
- › What other partnerships would strengthen your ability to conduct this research?

- If your organization does not have access to the equipment, tools or software needed to execute the project, could you ask your partners if they have it?
- If your entire project is not sustainable, are there elements of the project that can be sustained? Consider whether the project will increase community capacity to conduct research or offer services to the population of interest. Will the project create a sustainable infrastructure for maintaining partnerships beyond the duration of a single research project, fostering ongoing collaboration and capacity building within the community? Will the results of the research project lead to larger scale projects or be replicated in other communities?

Reasons To Decide Not To Submit A Proposal

While many barriers to submitting a strong proposal can be overcome, in some cases, the best decision may be to pass on a particular funding opportunity and continue looking for a good match. Some common justifications for not writing a proposal are:

- **Lack of support from leadership:** The organization's leadership may decide they want to devote their resources elsewhere rather than using staff time to write the proposal and carry out the research project. Alternatively, leadership has not rejected the project, but they are not giving it support. However, it is essential that you have strong support from your organization's leadership.
- **The submission window is closing too soon for you to write a quality proposal:** You are better off looking at the funder's website to see if there are other open or upcoming opportunities rather than trying to write a proposal within an unrealistic timeframe.
- **Mismatch between the public health need and your organization's mission:** If the RFP describes a public health problem that or scope of work that is similar to, but not exactly aligned with what you are proposing, you may be tempted to submit a proposal. This is not advisable. Funding opportunities have very specific parameters, and your research project must fit within them.
- **Lack of community or academic partnerships:** CBPR requires the participation of community members at each stage of the research process, so you will need strong, established partnerships in the community.

If you decide this is not the right opportunity for you, continue to explore research grant opportunities until you find one that aligns with your organization's mission, goals and capacity.