



'Pasos' beneficiaries inspect their bee-hives in Bolivia.

HANDBOOK 1

MODULE 5

Tools for Effective Project Planning in Community Development

Choosing the best type of intervention for your project

In **Modules 1-4** we discussed the basic stages of project planning. Now it's time to start designing the specific interventions that your project will use to address the problem. When choosing an appropriate intervention, it's important to identify all alternative options, not just the obvious ones that your team might think of first. This way, you can assess different intervention strategies according to pre-set criteria to help choose the best solution for you.

When completing this module, remember that the main goal is to identify **WHAT** you are going to do. The **HOW** you are going to implement it comes next in **Module 6** where we will use the 'Theory of Change Framework' to design an implementation strategy.



Download Resources

As you complete this module, refer to '**Resource 13 - Identify Interventions Checklist**' and '**Resource 14 - Solution Analysis Framework**' which can be found as downloads alongside this module on our website. Use these resources as templates when you are planning your own project.

Choosing an Appropriate Intervention

For any given development problem, there is generally a multitude of different solutions. Indeed, as the saying goes, 'there are many ways to skin a cat'. Taking the time to identify and then analyse your options against a specific set of criteria is essential to creating sustainable and durable development interventions.

Use this 5-step framework to guide you through the process of choosing the best initiative to solve your development problem.



Helpful Hint

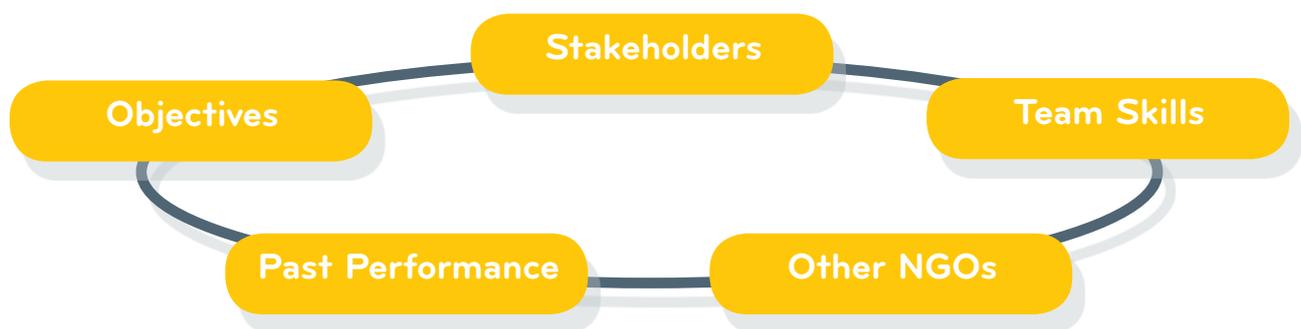
Whilst it is useful to consider interventions separately, your final project may consist of two, or even three, solutions all working together to help re-enforce your mission. For example: the combination of a hand hygiene education program with an infrastructure project to install water filtration systems are two distinct interventions, however they would work together to reduce the incidence of cholera in a remote community.



Brainstorming for possible solutions

By simultaneously looking at your objectives, stakeholders, team's skills, past performance and how other organisations have solved problems similar to yours, you can begin building a broad list of possible interventions. Try to list as many interventions as possible without thinking too much about how appropriate they are. The unrealistic ones will be eliminated in the next step.

There are five key factors to consider when looking for possible interventions that might achieve your organisations goal.



Objectives

Identify possible interventions by examining your objectives

Look at your objective tree and start making a list of all the different ways you could reach each one of your objectives:

Start by working within the different broad strategies you identified in your Alternative Analysis from Module 3. Brainstorm specific projects within these categories, to identify solutions that might meet multiple objectives in your tree at the same time.

Be critical: If an idea for a solution doesn't seem to address any of your objectives directly, it's probably not going to work.

Stakeholders

Identify possible interventions by examining your stakeholders

Think about the best fit for your primary beneficiaries:

- What types of projects are they likely to be enthusiastic about?
- Do these initiatives meet the needs and values identified by the local community?

Think about the types of projects that will inspire your key stakeholders to support your project.

Think about the specific types of support your stakeholders can provide your organisation and capitalise on that:

- **Example: If your project meets a specific government priority, you might be eligible for a government grant.**
- **Example: If your organisation has a good relationship with a local business, consider a project that maximises the support they could provide.**

Team Skills

Identify possible interventions by examining your team's skills

Think about the skills your team has and name solutions that work to these unique skill sets:

If you think a solution is going to be really effective but are worried that your team doesn't have the skills for it.

- Think about ways they can learn the skills, or
- Find someone who has the skills (by partnering with other non-profits, advertising for volunteers, recruiting new staff).

If you have the funds, consider outsourcing small, key elements of your work.

This can be the easiest and quickest ways to have specific, technical tasks completed by a skilled person.

Past Performance

Identify possible interventions by examining your past performance

Reflecting on past experiences is the key to success in the future. Ensure that you are looking back at your own evidence and previous performance.

After completing a project, take the time to reflect upon your work; think about what worked and what did not.

Other NGOs

Identify possible interventions by examining your neighbours

If the work you are seeking to undertake is completely new to you, look to other organisations:

- Often, they will readily share information publicly, whether through their own website or through associated networks.
- Research online, trawl social media (Linkedin can be especially useful for this) and explore media sources like Great Big Story, The Guardian Development or here on the Grassroots Collective to learn about new, innovative solutions to local problems.

Researching the results of particular projects can tell you a lot about tactics, approach and even feasibility.



Helpful Hint

Be as specific as possible when writing down possible solutions. This will make choosing the best option much easier as you have already done your research. Whilst researching and investing into solutions you may never use, takes time, it's still necessary in order to choose the best one.



Download Resource

You can find a template for this tool in; **'Resource 13 - Checklists for Identifying Possible Solutions'** which can be found as a download alongside this module on our website. Use this resource as a guide when planning your own community development project.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

Eliminating least appropriate solutions

Once you have a long list of possible solutions, you need to eliminate the least realistic ones. You can do this by using 'knock-out' criteria. These are existing limitations upon the size, type or scale of your project that organisations cannot change. These might mean eliminating solutions that:

- Are appropriate and valuable but are unable to be executed by your organisation because they are totally unaffordable.
- Are likely to collapse if you pull out your resources and move on to another project. This is not a sustainable intervention.
- Are appropriate and valuable, but your organisation has no understanding of the skills required to provide this type of solution.
- Are too risky given the current social or political context.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

Identify and thoroughly examine 3-5 solutions that best meet your project objectives

By eliminating unrealistic or unsustainable solutions, your team should be left with 3-5 possible interventions. Now your job is to detail these solutions, gathering as much information as you can to understand how each intervention will function within your community. You should consider:

- How well does the intervention solve your problem and meet your objective?
- Who will be involved in the intervention process?
- How will you fund the intervention?
- How sustainable is the intervention?
- How well will your organisation be able to undertake this intervention?

The aim of this step is to obtain a thorough understanding of the practicalities around executing each different intervention strategy in your community.

STEP 1

STEP 2

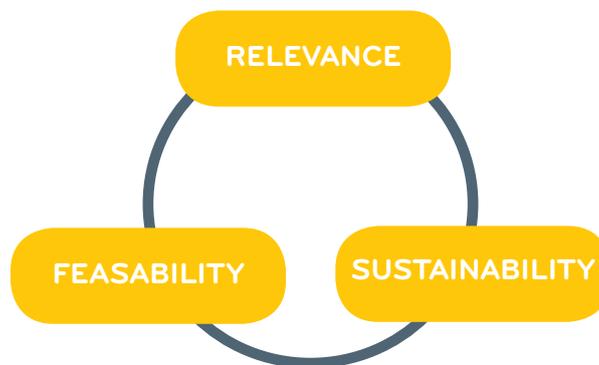
STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

Identifying specific criteria to assess your final options

The criteria that your organisation uses to assess the appropriateness of each possible solution comes down to three key themes:



These are guiding themes that will help you choose the specific criteria by which you assess your 3-5 remaining solutions. It is important to remember that these are not the criteria themselves. Instead, these themes should be used as a guide to help **you identify your own specific criteria relevant to your project.**

Below, we will explore the three themes – relevance, feasibility, sustainability - individually to help you identify specific criteria for your project. The aim is to create a list of relevant criteria for your project objectives and the 3-5 solutions you are assessing.

If you are having trouble identifying criteria during this step, try to think about:

- **Social criteria:** Distribution of costs and benefits, gender issues, socio-cultural constraints, local involvement and motivation;
- **Environmental criteria:** Environmental effects, environmental costs versus benefits;
- **Technical criteria:** Appropriateness, use of local resources, market suitability;
- **Institutional criteria:** Capacity, capability, technical assistance;
- **Economic criteria:** Economic return, cost effectiveness;
- **Financial criteria:** Costs, financial sustainability, foreign exchange needs;



Helpful Hint

It is important that throughout this process, you consult with the community and involve beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. They may have a very different opinion upon how a different project might work and how relevant, feasible and sustainable it might be.

RELEVANCE

Aim is to identify:

How well does each proposed initiative meet your organisation's objectives?

If a project does not directly meet multiple objectives outlined on your Objective Tree, it's probably not the right option.

Remember to:

Involve community members when assessing relevance.

- Beneficiaries **MUST** perceive it as relevant to meeting the objectives, otherwise they are unlikely to engage with the project.
- Community members might not always see the value of a given activity, it's important to provide ample information and be patient in explaining the benefits (or even design an education program to accompany your solution).

Remember to:

Involve other stakeholders to ensure impartiality of your assessment.

- It can be difficult to appraise something that you have been intimately involved in producing, simply because you are so close to the content and its background that you fail to be objective.
- Someone outside the project planning team can see obvious discrepancies, assumptions, omissions and oversights
- Community members are a great option here.



Example:

An organisation seeking to reduce the deaths of coffee plantations in a community is assessing possible solutions, two of which include netting over the plantations to stop birds eating the plants or using a natural pesticide to kill of insects. After speaking to local farmers, they are told that birds don't actually visit these coffee plantations because they are high up in the mountains.

A criterion to assess relevance here would be: Efficacy at reducing plant deaths.

In this example, a netting option would poorly meet this criterion, whilst a pesticide program might score highly.

FEASIBILITY

Aim is to identify:

How realistic and practical each initiative is?

Feasibility can have many different aspects:

- Economic feasibility: Can you afford to provide this project?
- Skills feasibility: Does your team have the necessary skills to undertake this project?
- Time feasibility: Does your team have the time to devote to this project?
- Experience feasibility: Has your NGO done a similar project to this before? If it was successful, there is a good chance this one will be, too.

Remember to:

Consider risks:

- What is the likelihood that the project will be successful?
- How complex is the project?
- Could the project fall foul of politics? Does it require approval from a government office that might oppose the project?
- Does your project rely upon one or two key stakeholders who might be donating their time or money? If they were to pull out, do you have a back-up or will the project collapse?

Remember to:

Do some research and ask other NGOs:

- They will most likely be able to tell you about the troubles or roadblocks they experienced on a similar project.



Example:

An organisation hoping to provide irrigation systems for farmers in a rural Chilean community is assessing different suppliers to use. They have run similar programs previously using an Argentine supplier to provide improved systems. They are assessing three options: one is from the same supplier whilst the other two are from new suppliers. The Argentine supplier they have used previously uses expensive, high quality material, however they have a good relationship with this supplier. The other two suppliers are much cheaper, however they have no relationship with them. They have a small budget and want to have the greatest impact for their money.

A criterion to assess feasibility here could be: **Financial Affordability**. Another could be: **Likelihood of gaining a discount from the supplier**. In this example, the Argentine supplier would poorly meet the first criteria, but would score more highly in the second.

SUSTAINABILITY

Aim is to identify:

How long will the positive effects of each initiative last once you are gone?

You need to assess the type of long-term relief your project can provide to your beneficiaries and the community.

Remember to:

Consider how likely it is that the community will take on ownership of the project and keep it going?

- Are they ready to undertake any periodic maintenance or innovation themselves?
- Can you involve local community members from the beginning of the project and train them so you can hand it over at a later date?

Remember that:

Whilst your organisation might be based within the community, your attention might turn to other projects in the future.

- If you were to withdraw your resources or staff from the project, would it continue to function?



Example:

An organisation seeking to provide an ambulance in a rural Indian community is assessing possible vehicles to use. They are comparing a German, Japanese and Chinese produced vehicle. Because it is a vulnerable community, most people use Chinese cars. Although they often breakdown, local mechanics are adept at repairing them.

A criterion to assess sustainability here could be: Ease of repairing vehicle locally. Another criterion could be: How often it will likely require repair?

Whilst the Chinese vehicle would score highly for the first criteria, it would perform poorly against the second. On the other hand, the German vehicle is far less likely to breakdown, however it would be difficult to repair in the community.



Choosing the best solution using a Solution Analysis Framework

Now that you have a list of your criteria, it is time to apply them to a Solution Analysis Framework in order to identify the best possible intervention for your project. This is a four-step process.

1. Place your problem and the possible solutions on the left-hand side of the table
2. Place your criteria along the top of the table
3. Now give each possible solution a ranking of 1-10 based upon how well it meets that criteria
 - Ensure that 1 represents a poor outcome and 10 represents a positive outcome.
 - Example: For initial cost, 1 would be the most expensive and 10 would be the least expensive
4. Once you have completed this process for all your solutions and criteria, you can add up all the numbers in your table and use that as a guide to help you choose the most appropriate solution. Usually, the solution with the highest number in total is the one with the most positive outcome.



Example: Solution Analysis Framework

An example Solution Analysis Framework can be found below. This analysis compares the relevance, feasibility and sustainability of three different cook stoves to replace wooden cook stoves in a rural Indian community.

Problem	Proposed Solution	Initial Cost	Ease of Maintenance	Cooking Efficiency	Ease of Use	Longevity	Environmental Impact	Total
Unsafe and Inefficient Cooking Practices	Biogas Stove	8	8	6	10	10	1	43
	Solar Stove	6	6	2	6	6	10	36
	Improved Cook Stove	4	10	10	10	8	6	48

The reference key for the previous Solution Analysis Framework Example is outlined here:

- Initial cost – most expensive (1) to least expensive (10)
- Ease of maintenance – difficult (1) to easy (10)
- Cooking efficiency – slowest to cook (1) to quickest to cook (10)
- Ease of Use – most difficult (1) to easiest (10)
- Longevity – most fragile (1) to most robust (10)
- Environmental impact – most negative (1) to most positive (10)

This example identifies that the improved cook stove is likely the most appropriate solution to help improve cooking practices in this rural Indian village.

Finishing up

At the end of this process, you should have decided upon what your project will look like! Congratulations! You now know the 'WHAT'. Next, it's time to work out HOW to successfully implement your project using the Theory of Change framework in **Module 6**.



Download Resource

You can find a template for this tool in; '**Resource 14 – Solution Analysis Framework**' which can be found as a download alongside this module on our website. Use this resource as a guide when planning your own development project.

This resource was produced by Grassroots Collective.

This is Module 5 of our 9-part handbook for project planning. Find the full handbook at: www.thegrassrootscollective.org/grassroots-hub

Have a question about project planning for community development or want to learn about how we can support your organisation on its mission? Contact us at: info@thegrassrootscollective.org

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