

04 Module

FOCUSING YOUR RESEARCH

About This Module

The research approach section of your proposal presents an opportunity to describe the scope and feasibility of your research design within the specified timeframe and budget outlined in the Request for Proposal (RFP). While this toolkit does not provide instruction in Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods, it outlines the basic components of a research proposal.

Determining which question(s) you will address in your study is the most fundamental element of a research proposal. The research question(s) will focus your project and ensure that your research findings are relevant and useful. In this module, we will learn how to:

- 01. Formulate research questions from a broad topic.
- **02.** Identify measurable study objectives.
- 03. Identify and choose data source(s), how to collect and manage that data and how to use the data to address the research question or questions.

The pyramid chart below depicts the research process, from identifying an issue to disseminating your findings. Take a minute to look through the framework as a whole before you begin developing your research questions. MOI Writing Narrat

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Community-Based Research Framework



01. Communicate!

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- 02. Thoughtfully and compliantly collect, analyze, and report data
- 03. Design your scientific approach to define clear endpoints
- 04. Define opportunity and research questions
- 05. Identify gaps and define your opportunity in partnership with the people you serve. Become familiar with the landscape and your community, listen to stakeholders, identify pain points, and translate these to the challenges that you want to solve.

Recommendations for Real-World Study Protocol

- Present clear, detailed and measurable objectives
- Delineate a strong scientific approach that is operationally feasible
- Include description of the variables chosen to estimate the outcomes of interest
- Include potential covariates
 or confounding factors
- Include ethical and regulatory considerations (in compliance with International Council for Harmonisation [ICH] Good Clinical Practice [GCP]' and/or Good Pharmacoepidemiology Practice [GPP] guidelines')
- Adhere to sponsor standards; comply with internal policies and good documentation practices (GDP)
- Allow for the anticipation of issues and upfront agreements to all study objectives and procedures

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Research Objective

Before formulating your main research question or questions, define your research objective. A research objective is a statement of the purpose and aims of your study. The research objective identifies why your organization is interested in carrying out the research. A research objective may be any or all of the following:

Descriptive: The research will result in a detailed picture of a public health issue or community.

Example: "To describe the resources available within and attributes of the [COMMUNITY] for HIV care."

• Exploratory: The study seeks to deepen understanding of a topic that is new or poorly understood.

Example: "To identify barriers to HIV testing and care in [COMMUNITY]."

• Explanatory: The study looks to explain causes or reasons for things.

Example: "To examine the relationship between having health insurance and receiving HIV care in [COMMUNITY]."

• Evaluative: The study looks to evaluate an existing or proposed intervention or initiative. Example: "To evaluate whether our mobile testing initiative is reaching the prioritized population and those benefiting from the service in our community."

Research Questions

In CBPR, the community and the researchers co-develop the research questions and co-design how to answer the questions. Once you have stated your research objective, work with your community to formulate a research question or questions that are focused, feasible to answer and will result in useful and actionable information.

Now it is time to develop your research question(s) from the research objective you have decided on:

- Include details to narrow the focus. In what city or geographical area will you conduct your research? What is the population you will study? What timeframe will you study?
- Be measurable. Is this a question you can address with available, accessible data sources?
- Be ethical. Will addressing your research question put anyone in an unfair or uncomfortable situation?
- Aim to generate findings that are practical and actionable for the community.
- Lead to other questions. Questions with a yes-or-no answer, or that may be answered with a single data point, are not good research questions.

Example Research Questions

Research objective: To evaluate whether our mobile testing initiative is reaching the intended beneficiaries in our community and those in need of services.

Potential questions:

How and to what extent has our mobile testing initiative increased access to testing and care for trans persons in the community?

Who has the testing initiative reached outside of the trans experience in [CITY]?

What was the experience of those who have been tested through the initiative?

Is the initiative operating as intended?

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Research Goals

Research goals or end points are the intended or targeted outcomes of the research. The objectives or end points should be **SMART**:

- **Specific:** The objective or end point should state specifically what you would like to achieve.
- **Measurable:** The objective or end point should include measurable criteria for determining outcomes.
- Achievable: The objective or end point should be realistic and doable.
- **Relevant:** The objective or end point is relevant to the community's priorities and needs.
- **Time-Bound:** The objective or end point should include the timeframe for achieving it.

Descriptive or exploratory research objectives, by their open-ended nature, might not have measurable goals. In this case, your proposal will not include specific goals but will specify the data sources and methodology you will use to answer your research question and any subquestions.

Study Design

Your study design will describe your data sources and the approach(es) you will take to address your research question(s). As you identify your data sources and your design, you may find yourself adjusting your research question(s) to ensure alignment between what you are asking and what you can feasibly answer.

CBPR projects use a variety of data sources to answer research questions, and using a mixed-methods approach incorporating more than one data type is often useful in providing different perspectives on your research questions. As you read through the methods below, consider which data types will best answer your research questions, what data you will realistically be able to collect and the cultural appropriateness of collecting that data within your population of interest.

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative research collects numerical, multiple choice and other data that has set responses. It is useful when collecting data from a large number of people or when there are only a few possible answers. For example, did you go to the eastside clinic or the westside clinic? Are you 18 and over or under 18? The advantage of this approach is that it takes less time for the participants to fill out, and it is less time consuming to analyze.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods use openended questions which allow for more in-depth responses. They're usually given to a smaller group of participants as they take longer to administer and analyze but provide deeper insights into their experiences.

Because both methods have their advantages, they are often used in combination.

As you write up your study design, address this question: "What are the limitations or assumptions of the research?" This will help you to focus your design and promote actionable results.

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Data Collection Methods

You can use **survey questionnaires** to gather information from the subjects of your research question, your community or your program participants. Surveys can provide descriptive information to address your research question, while protecting the anonymity of the survey respondents. In your proposal, you will want to describe:

- To whom you will administer the survey
- How many participants you are targeting for the survey
- How you will ensure that the survey is reaching the balance of people who can provide you with a complete picture
- Who will analyze the survey results
- How you will ensure data
 integrity and security

Group or individual interviews with knowledgeable persons or persons most affected by the question you are trying to answer can yield rich insights on how things work in the context in which you are carrying out your study. If you use interviews as an approach for your research question, you will want to lay out in your proposal who you will interview, how many people you will interview, who will conduct and analyze the results of the interviews and how you will ensure that your interview questions are appropriate and will elicit the information you want.

Structured observation can be a useful approach for understanding whether an initiative or intervention is being implemented as intended. In your proposal, indicate who or what you will observe, how you will structure and record the observations and how the observations will help you to answer your research question.

Data Management And Analysis. In your proposal, demonstrate that you have the time and the resources to collect, analyze and appropriately manage the data that will answer your research question. Your project plan should state who will own the data collected and ensure that it will be stored securely. One way to demonstrate this is through a data analysis or management plan. This can be a simple matrix organizing your multiple data sources, timeline and persons responsible. See Figure 1 for an example.

Data Management Plans (DMPs) are created to describe the data to be analyzed, data storage and access parameters, and plans for data destruction or archival. Like data analysis plans, a DMP is a planning document created prior to data collection and analysis.

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Common Elements Of A DMP:

- Dataset title
- Study type/design •
- Frequency of data collection (i.e., monthly, quarterly)
- Responsible person/contact information
- Description of standards for collecting data
- If data are to be released, description of level of access to data (i.e., free public access, restricted access, no access) and when it will be made available (i.e., with peer-reviewed publication)
- Procedures for data security, privacy/confidentiality such as removal of personally identifiable information (PII), data use agreements, website security, etc.
- Description of the established standards used to ensure usability and interoperability of data (e.g., ICD codes, CSV files, etc.)
- Description of documentation that will be available for analysis (e.g., data dictionary, sample code)
- Description of plans for archival and long-term data preservation

Ethics, Privacy And Confidentiality

All research must respect and protect the personal data of others. In your DMP, include procedures for data security and privacy. Additionally, check with your institution and/or research partners on whether an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review or ethics committee review is needed to pursue the research. These processes can sometimes take months to undergo and usually require details regarding how data will be collected, stored and shared.

In traditional research, an IRB or other ethical review board is responsible for ensuring that the research approach protects the research participants' rights. If your research team has an academic partner, you may be able to use that institution's IRB to vet your research project. You can also engage an independent review board for your project.



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Reminders For Writing The Research Methods Section:

- **01.** Use your proposal outline and writing template (Module 3).
- **02.** Keep an eye on the proposal writing calendar you developed (Module 3) and adjust as needed.
- **03.** Use the specific language in the RFP you are responding to.
- 04. Reinforce your proposal themes where appropriate. For example, note if your methodology is unique or innovative. Detail prior experience with this type of research.
- 05. Put a check mark on the "Proposal Requirement Checklist" (Module
 1) when you have developed each requested element in this section.



Figure 1. Example Data Management Plan

Research Questions and/ or Hypotheses	Data Source	Collection Timeline	Who Is Responsible	Analysis and Communication Timeline