



A practical guide for implementing a human rights and reproductive justice approach to research and partnerships

The following guide lays out a theoretical frame for and offers practical ways to ensure you are conducting rigorous research that centers human rights and reproductive justice. The guiding principles include:

- **Respect.** Research should be designed and implemented with rigor and transparency, in partnership with constituencies*.
- **Mutual accountability.** Partnerships should be equitable, collaborative, and explicitly disrupt assumptions about expertise.
- **Shared power.** Research processes should be creative, constantly question assumptions, and build power among partners and constituencies.
- **Making impact.** Research results should impact the lives of the constituencies involved through changes in policy, practice, and public opinion.

In order to ensure your research centers human rights and reproductive justice, six key decision points must be considered in every research process: Planning, Design, Partnership, Funding, Ethics, and Dissemination.

The questions below serve as a guide to thinking through and acting upon these **six key decision points**. This is not meant to be prescriptive, but rather serve as a helpful tool to begin conversations with partners about new (and existing) research projects, and to assist research teams in designing research that centers human rights and reproductive justice:

1. Planning

- a. Why are you doing this work? (Does everyone agree?)
- b. Who identified the need?
- c. Is the research question consistent with your mission, vision, values, and principles of research?
- d. Who are the partners, constituencies, stakeholders, and audiences for the research?
- e. How has the research question been identified? Has it been generated by/with the constituency involved in the research? Are there other communities or stakeholders who should weigh in?
- f. How will the results of the research impact the lives of the communities and/or constituencies involved?
- g. How have your research partners been identified? Are there other partners/constituencies who should be involved or consulted?
- h. Has a timeline been established that all partners agree on?
- i. Do all partners understand any potential challenges/hurdles and the need for flexibility around timeline?

2. Design

- a. What methodology/study design/analysis plan is the most appropriate to answer the specific research question? Are there embedded assumptions about knowledge/expertise that need to be challenged?
- b. Has your partner been involved in the study design process? Can/should you invest in capacity building so that your partners can lead the study design process?
- c. Has your partner been involved in the design of an analysis plan? Can/should you invest in capacity building so that your partners can lead all or part of the analysis?
- d. Do all research partners fully understand the various elements of the research methodology (study design and analysis plan)?
- e. Has an agreement been reached to determine a system of providing feedback on all elements of the study from all research partners? Assess concerns from all parties.
- f. Is the proposed research methodology the most helpful to the specific community, constituency, and/or target audience?
- g. If the most “scientifically ideal” methodology is not possible due to time/resource constraints, or partner concerns, what alternative methodologies are available? Answer the above questions for the alternative methodologies.
- h. Are there restrictions to your design based on your funding?

3. Partnership

- a. Have roles and responsibilities for all stages of the research process (including proposal writing, study design, data collection, analysis, dissemination, etc.) among partners been discussed and decided upon?
- b. Do those roles and responsibilities take into account shared power and decision making, and knowledge and information transfer among all partners?
- c. How will the project be funded?
- d. What roles/responsibilities does each partner have in seeking/managing funds?
- e. Are the finances transparent among all partners?
- f. Have the power dynamics related to finances been discussed?

4. Funding

- a. Is the funder aligned with your research principles? If not, did you engage the funder in a discussion about your approach and ensure sufficient alignment?
- b. Are there restrictions attached to funding which impact any of the other five key decision points? How can these restrictions be addressed to ensure that you are staying true to your mission and values?
- c. Do your partners wish to develop their own relationship with your funders? If so, how can you support them to do so?
- d. Are all relevant project teams (research, development, and communications, finance) aligned about the goal and design of the proposed research projects?

5. Ethics

- a. Have ethical processes, practices, and responsibilities been discussed, and expertise shared among all study partners?
- b. How and where will ethical approval be sought?
- c. Do your partners have relationships with in-country IRBs?

- d. Does seeking in-country ethical approval pose a risk for your partners? If so, are all partners comfortable with receiving ethical approval from a non-local IRB?

6. Dissemination

- a. What mechanisms of dissemination are the most likely to have the greatest impact? Do those mechanisms of dissemination align with the mechanisms of dissemination that are most valuable to all study partners?
- b. Have all partners voiced potential concerns about dissemination of results?
- c. Have roles and responsibilities for dissemination of results been established? Do these roles take into account legitimizing different types of knowledge (i.e., experiential knowledge, scientific knowledge)?
- d. Are there dissemination priorities for any partners and have those been integrated into the dissemination plan (translations, research paper, media attention, community meeting, etc.)?
- e. Is there a plan in place to ensure that results are fed back to participants and constituencies?

*When we use the word “constituencies” we refer both to the communities involved in and whom we hope will benefit from the research, as well as grassroots groups, advocates, policymakers, and community leaders who might play a vital role in ensuring the research is useful and leads to real change in community members’ lives.