CRS CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES   COMPASS

Questions to Guide Project Partnering Decisions

These questions are intended to prompt thinking about partnerships throughout the stages of project design and to complement the ProPack I guidance on selecting partners, found in Table 2a under the "Planning project design" step). The relevant section of the table is noted in parentheses after each heading.

Table 2a: Checklist for partner collaboration and support in project design

Project design step	Partner collaboration and support issues	Yes/No
Planning project design	**Determining project actors** • Have you identified the most appropriate partners for this funding opportunity and its objectives according to added value and complementarity (e.g. technical capacity, sectoral expertise, local knowledge, reach, scale, network, reputation) or other criteria (e.g. donor preference for local versus INGO partners)? • Have you selected the optimal number of partners for this funding opportunity using a clear rationale? • Have you assessed partners' eligibility for the funding opportunity?	

A. Identifying potential project partners (Use with "Determining project actors")

Project-related partnerships are context-specific. In some cases, CRS partners drive and own the project design process and CRS plays a supporting role. In others, CRS leads discussions and negotiations to select the most appropriate partners based on the capacities needed for a project. The questions below are primarily for the latter model.

1. Have you considered CRS' typologies of relationships and the possible range of partnerships needed for the project?

2. Have you analyzed how many partners CRS can realistically accommodate within the (anticipated) project budget ceiling? Consider all types of sub-recipients, i.e. grants, contracts, consultancies.

3. What partnerships—both in-country and centrally coordinated (e.g., with academic institutions, corporate partners, etc.)—could be potentially leveraged or expanded for this project? Consider the perspectives of program and operations staff as well as other key stakeholders external to CRS.

   • What, if anything, do you need to know about these potential project partners to make sound partnering decisions?

   • Who is best placed to fill in any gaps in CRS' information about the suitability of potential partners?

4. Does donor intelligence indicate that including certain partners in CRS' application will improve our chances for success with the funding opportunity? Consider in-country institutions as well as donor preferences for local versus international organizations or public, private and academic partnerships.

5. What new partnerships might be worthwhile to consider, keeping in mind stakeholder analysis results? (See *ProPack I*, Chapter III, Sections 2.2 and 2.3 for guidance on stakeholder analysis.) Consider who has a potential interest in the project, an influence on the project, and relationships with other partners/stakeholders in the project.

6. For large projects: Is there any complementarity between CRS and another international organization that could be leveraged to justify a consortium?

7. Are there any partnerships with universities or businesses (including information and communications technology related businesses) that could increase design innovation and project impact?

Planning project design

Building partner relationships
- Have you engaged partners to discuss key funding opportunity information and implications should they wish to participate (e.g. eligibility requirements, proposal format)?
- Have you shared each partner's (including CRS') vision, mission and values?
- For projects with a consortium, have you discussed the *Consortium Alignment Framework for Excellence* (CAFE)(CRS 2008a) standards for management, finance and administrative procedures?
- For projects with a consortium, have partners agreed to the consortium structure, goals, roles and processes?
- If you have not yet finalized your decision to "team" with an organization, has a non-disclosure agreement been signed? If a teaming decision has been made, has a teaming agreement been signed? (competitive awards)

B. Building relationships with new partner organizations (Use with "Building partner relationships")

Building partner relationships can involve sensitive issues and have strategic implications. Engage the country representative and members of the senior management team in conversations with potential partners.

1. Have you clearly communicated to the prospective partner the next steps in CRS' partner decision-making process?

2. If CRS and the potential partner organization have decided to work together on the opportunity, have you communicated next steps and timelines in the project design and proposal development process?

> **Note:** Meetings with potential project partners are important relationship-building opportunities even if they do not result in a decision to work together on a funding opportunity. Partners are often approached by other organizations and share their impressions with donors, government and other stakeholders. Furthermore, a partner may not be a good fit for the *current* opportunity, but could be for other programming opportunities. Ensure CRS participants in such partner meetings bring a "big picture" perspective. Also consider cross-disciplinary teams of program and operations staff for these meetings, to ensure a comprehensive discussion of strengths, weaknesses and fit.

Planning project design

Discussing and reviewing partner capacity
- Have you vetted new partners in accordance with CRS guidance and protocols?
- Have you assessed risks for potential A-133 collaborators (*Sub-recipient Pre-Teaming Risk Assessment for A-133 partners*)?
- In light of the funding opportunity requirements and findings from existing organizational assessments (partner profiles, HOCAI, sub-recipient financial management, intelligence or other sources), have you:
  - Analyzed the opportunities and risks related to partner capacity in order to make the partnership decision?
  - Engaged partners to discuss their technical and organizational strengths?

C. Assessing partner capacity (Use with "Discussing and reviewing partner capacity")

> **Note:** For organizations that are current or past CRS partners, existing information and assessments may inform this analysis of partner capacity. However, it is still important to meet with partners in person to discuss capacities and update capacity assessments as needed. For example, a partner may have experienced changes in organizational leadership or project portfolios that have affected its capacities. CRS' decision to partner should be based on the most current information available.

D. Confirming and managing partnering arrangements (Use with "Building partner relationships")

1. For competitive funding opportunities: Have you signed a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with any organization with whom you discussed project details for a competitive funding opportunity? (If necessary, provide a courtesy translation of the NDA into the local language.)

> **Note**: NDAs are typically used during preliminary project discussions to protect any strategic information discussed from being shared externally. NDAs can be signed with individuals and organizations whether or not they eventually become partners to the project. Even with a signed NDA, CRS should be careful about what type of information and what level of detail to disclose during early conversations.

2. For competitive funding opportunities: Have you signed a teaming agreement with each partner, outlining their roles in the project and expectations for project design and proposal development?

> **Note**: Many partners regard a teaming agreement as a formality, but it is an important tool for communicating responsibilities. Discuss the meaning of each point in the agreement, particularly decision-making processes and structures related to the project design, what documents the partner must prepare (capacity statement, budget, etc.), and anticipated time commitments related to project design. If necessary, translate the teaming agreement.

3. For opportunities for which CRS is engaged in capture planning: Have you signed a pre-teaming agreement to formalize the partnering commitments even before the solicitation is released?

4. For contracts/requests for proposals (RFPs): Have you engaged HQ in the teaming agreement process?

5. For a university partnership: Have you reviewed and followed the guidance in the University Engagement Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document?

6. For private sector partnerships: Have you followed the IDEA Guidance on Fit Analysis and Risk Review Tools?

7. For a functional partnership (see typologies of relationships): Have you conducted a competitive bidding process and determined whether the proposed partner meets competitive selection criteria?

> **Note:** Most functional partners provide a strategic product or service. If the value of that service exceeds $1,000, CRS must carry out a competitive bidding process or provide a "sole-source justification" for selecting a functional partner outside of a competitive bidding process. Common services provided by functional partners include MEAL-related services (MEAL plan, baseline evaluation, impact evaluation); information and communication technology products/services (such as mobile money providers); and training (curriculum development or delivery). If there is no sole-source justification for selecting a functional partner, there are three options to consider. Each has management and competitiveness considerations, summarized below:

Summary of options for identifying "functional partners" to deliver a project good or service

	Option	Pros	Cons
1	Conduct a competitive bidding process as part of partner selection, prior to project design.	Allows CRS to fully engage the partner in project design and name the partner in the proposal document.	• Can be time-consuming at a time when there are many competing priorities and tight deadlines. • Developing the scope of work can be challenging without a clear project design.
2	Conduct a competitive bidding process after the award but invite the potential partner to **participate** in project design sessions (after signing an NDA).	• Allows CRS to benefit from the expertise of the potential partner in project design. • Allows the potential partner to inform project design. • Offers more time for the procurement process.	• CRS cannot name the partner in the proposal. • The potential partner might invest time in the design process but not ultimately be selected to provide the good or service. (Be sure to discuss this possibility with the partner in advance.)
3	Conduct a competitive bidding process after the award but **do not include** the potential partner in project design.	• Follows all procurement procedures. • Offers more time for the procurement process.	• CRS cannot name the partner or any proprietary products or services in the proposal. • CRS is not able to tap into the partner's knowledge and experience to inform design.

If there is justification for a sole-source procurement, be sure to complete the sole-source justification memo prior to signing a teaming agreement and engaging the partner in project design (see Sole-Source Authorization Form in Procure2Pay).