

DETERMINING READINESS: A DECISION MATRIX TOOL

“How can I determine if I am ready to implement my food enterprise?”

Created for: Entrepreneurs, project champions, economic development staff, and Nation development teams.

Purpose: To decide if the food project is ready to move from idea to action.

Scenario: Seeking to simplify layered decision-making



A community member wants to set up a market garden business, but realizes that it must move through layered decision-making in order to get approval from community leadership. Even strong business concepts can stall if internal alignment is unclear, timing is off, or risks or obstacles have not been identified early. Before seeking funding or devoting time and energy into building a formal business pitch deck, the entrepreneur (or project champion or economic development team) wants to get a sense as to whether or not the project is aligned, realistic, and ready for approval.

Overview

This tool is intended to help you assess the readiness of your business idea.

Questions that this tool works through include:

- ✓ 1) Is my project aligned with our community values and priorities?
- ✓ 2) What approval(s) will I need to move ahead and who needs to enable the approval(s)?
- ✓ 3) What support exists and what still needs strengthening - are we ready to launch the project?
- ✓ 4) Is the timing right to start this project?

Desired Outcome: This is a preparation tool that can help protect relationships, reduce political friction, and ensure that when you do move forward, your project narrative is grounded, realistic, and aligned with community priorities.

Context: Many strong ideas fail not because the product or concept is weak — but because governance roles are unclear, timing is off, or expectations haven't been aligned. This tool seeks at best to prevent this or at least save time and energy.

How To Use This Guide: There are four (4) exercise questions presented.

Additional guidance questions are then provided. These can be answered using a colour-coded scoring system.

While some examples are provided, be sure to run your own project through the same questions. Further direction is provided if you answer Yellow or Red.



GO



PAUSE



HOLD/STOP

If your project scores yellow or red:

Uncertainty doesn't mean the project is wrong. It usually means alignment hasn't happened yet and more information or work is needed.

Consider:

- **Booking a short meeting** with your Economic Development Manager, Band Manager, or governance lead to clarify who formally approves what. Ideally get this in writing in an email follow up.
 - Ask early: "What has caused projects like this to stall in the past?" Learning from others experiences is valuable.
- **Mapping out the approval pathway** step-by-step (e.g., staff → committee → Council → Band Council Resolution).
- **Speaking with someone who has successfully moved a business proposal through your community** Leadership's governance process and ask what they learned.
- If external consultants are involved, **ensuring they understand and respect internal protocols, timelines, and dynamics** before drafting materials.

Question 1: Is the project aligned with community values and priorities?

What are the community's values or strategic priorities?


- Understanding your community's stated values and priorities will be helpful in all stages of the project.
- Look into your community's Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) or other land use plans and strategic planning documents.
- See if there are parts of those plans that you can connect your proposed project to.

Consider - does your project align with community values around:

- Food security and/or food sovereignty?
- Revenue diversification?
- Employment or training of community members?
- Youth engagement?
- Cultural practices?
- Long-term land stewardship?
- Other _____

The project champion will need to be able to anticipate these concerns and have established answers backed by a clear understanding of community priorities. Consider your own food project and apply these colours to similar questions regarding community value alignment. If red or yellow, pause and clarify before seeking funding or approvals.

Scoring:

Strong alignment: GREEN 

Partial alignment: YELLOW 





Weak or unclear alignment: RED 

If unclear, strengthen your narrative before pitching.

Why this matters:

Projects that feel like individual ambition — rather than collective strategy — can often face resistance in communities.

If Your Answers to Community Alignment are Yellow or Red – consider:

-  Reframing the description of your project using language that reflects community priorities (food sovereignty, youth employment, land stewardship).
-  Meeting with one or two Elders or respected community members and asking: “What would strengthen this proposal or project description?”
-  Reviewing your Comprehensive Community Plan, economic development or land use plan and explicitly connect your project to those goals.
-  Asking yourself: Who benefits first? Who benefits long-term? Is that visible in the narrative?

Reflection Exercise

If your business plan emphasizes profits for you, or export revenue, also articulate how it will support community members, food security, or stewardship. Leadership often looks for layered benefits.

**Complete the sentence:
“My food project idea will benefit the community the following ways...”**

List a few likely questions that leadership may raise about your project:

- Question 1 _____
- Question 2 _____
- Question 3 _____

Key consideration:

Is Indian Reserve (IR) land the right location for your project?

For some projects, operating on federal IR land can strengthen sovereignty, employment, and community control.

For others, IR land can represent regulatory constraints, infrastructure gaps, or zoning that may create barriers.

This is not necessarily a political consideration, but it may be a strategic one.

Consider:

- Does operating on IR land align with long-term food sovereignty goals?
- Are the food enterprise activities compatible with neighbours (e.g., noises, smells, traffic, etc.)?
- Are there regulatory advantages or disadvantages to operating on IR land (e.g., taxation, inspection, zoning)?
- Is infrastructure (water, power, roads, internet) sufficient?
- Would operating nearby — within a municipality or regional district — reduce cost, administrative steps, or regulatory burdens - or increase it?
- Would operating on IR land better align with community values?
- Is a hybrid model possible (e.g., production on Nation land but processing off-site)?

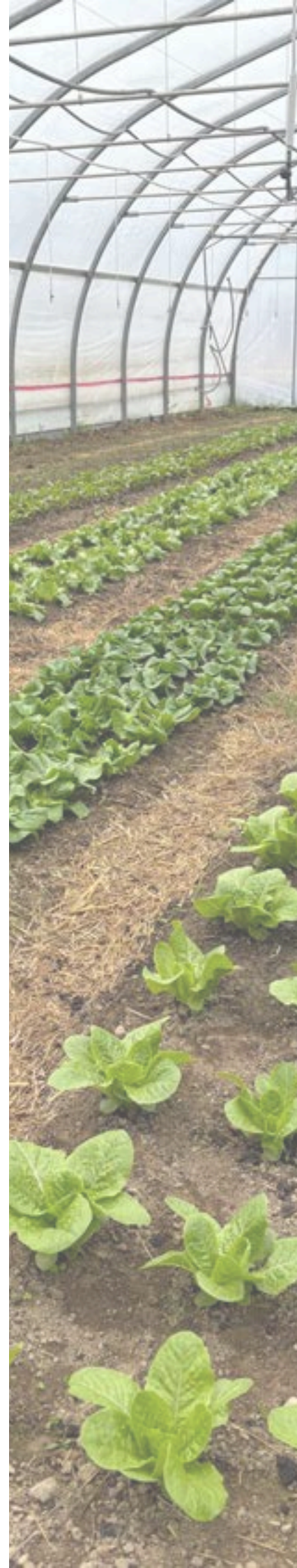
Reflection Exercise - weigh the barriers and benefits to operating your project on IR lands. Can barriers be addressed — or should the location be reconsidered?


Write one sentence:

“Operating on IR land strengthens this project because...”

or

“We should reconsider location because...”





Question 2. Project approvals: who is responsible for which steps?

Before you present (or “pitch”) the project to community leadership or to an external funder, ask: **Who must approve this internally?**

In some First Nations communities that may include:

- Chief & Council
- Economic Development Corporation (EDC) Board
- Lands Department
- Cultural Department
- Finance team
- Community members
- Elders advisory
- A Band Council Resolution (BCR)

Why this matters: If you approach potential supporters before you have reached alignment with community leadership, the project may risk:


- Political pushback
- Delays in signing agreements
- Community resistance
- Reputational harm

Scenario: Greenhouse Secures Expansion Grant

A greenhouse expansion is planned on IR lands and an external grant is secured by the project leader who is employed by the First Nations Economic Development Organization and has been tasked with developing a food project.

However, Council raises concerns about water-use priorities and land designation - things that were not discussed in early planning.

Studies, reports and decisions must be made with multiple departments. Without early alignment, the project can stall while key grant dates approach and pass.



Question 3. Is the project fully supported and ready to be launched?

This may seem like an obvious consideration at any stage of planning, but this is where realism matters. Support relates to both project champions as well as funding.

Ask yourself and your team:

- Who will manage daily operations?
- Is there previous experience with food projects?
- Is there skilled labour available?
- Is housing available for staff (in rural areas)?
- Have revenues and expenses (cash flow) been clearly calculated?
- Are costs around delivery/distribution and retailer margins factored in?

No matter how keen you are to get a project off the ground, if support gaps are ignored, profitability disappears.

Consider your own food project and apply these colours to consider what constraints exist, and therefore what support is needed.

Scoring:

Operationally realistic: GREEN ●

Gaps identified and manageable: YELLOW ●

Significant unaddressed gaps: RED ●

If yellow, proceed with caution and seek out support early on. If red, solve operations before pitching.

If Your Answers Regarding Project Support are Yellow or Red – consider:

- ✓ Asking a trusted financial professional or experienced food entrepreneur to walk through your numbers with you.
- ✓ Talking to staff at the education department about training and skills development opportunities.
- ✓ Examining risk: what happens to our bottom line if sales are lower than expected? What if input costs are higher than expected?
- ✓ Confirming working capital is available for payment cycles that could be 60-90 days.

Scenario: First Nations Rancher Expanding into Meat Processing

An Indigenous rancher has previously sold her livestock at an auction but wants to expand into meat processing to create branded packaged beef products in order to increase revenue margins.

However, she has identified the following constraints:

- The nearest inspected meat processing facility is 4 hours away.
- Cold chain logistics are expensive and she didn't account for them in her business plan.
- Skilled meat cutters are scarce and she can't locate anyone to fill that role.

Each of these constraints can be considered as a need for support that could cost money. In this example it is transportation, cold storage, and skilled labour.

She scores RED ● and decides to pause her plans until she can secure support.

Question 4. Is the timing right to start this project?

Timing can influence how smoothly a project moves forward. Strong ideas are more likely to gain support when conditions are aligned.

Consider:

- Is an election cycle approaching that may affect decision-making timelines?
- Is leadership transitioning, and how might that shape priorities?
- Is there a high rate of staff turnover that may influence the approvals process?
- Are major infrastructure or community projects planned or already underway?
- Are grant deadlines impacting the pace of this proposal?


Why this matters: Urgency driven by grants can often lead to rushed proposals and governance strain.

Consider your own food project and apply these same sorts of questions.

Scoring:

Conditions aligned: GREEN 

Some instability: YELLOW 

Poor timing: RED 

Sometimes the most strategic move is to wait for business conditions to improve.

Scenario: An Exciting Grant Opportunity for a Community Farm

A Nation's farm manager identifies a grant with a three-week application deadline that could support the expansion of food production for the community. However, Council is in the middle of an election and a strategic planning cycle. Bringing forward a proposal during an already full governance season may limit the depth of discussion or clarity of roles and motivate Leadership to push decision-making until after the funding deadline passes. Rather than rushing, request a brief check-in with Band staff to understand Council's timeline, explore whether the project can be framed within the strategic planning conversation, and determine whether a phased approach would strengthen support.

If Your Answers Regarding Timing are Yellow or Red – consider:


- ✓ Asking leadership: “Is this the right time for this conversation (project)?”
- ✓ Identifying whether the urgency is grant-driven or strategy-driven.
- ✓ Breaking the project into phases instead of launching full scale.
- ✓ Piloting at a smaller level to build proof before requesting major capital.


Final Readiness Assessment Summary


Consider the colours you assigned as you moved through the four question sections:

- Were they mostly green?
- Were several red?

Consider the following in your decision to move ahead or not:

Mostly GREEN: Proceed to build pitch 

A few YELLOW: Refine before pitching 

Several RED: Considering pausing and reassessing 

Complete one of these sentences:

“Our project is ready because...”

or

“We need to strengthen the following aspects of our project in order to be ready...”

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Examples used through this toolkit have been gathered with permission or from public-facing documents and websites.

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