Center on Society and Health

SEED Method Toolkit for Stakeholder Engagement in Question Development and Prioritization

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Toolkit Assistance and Contact Information

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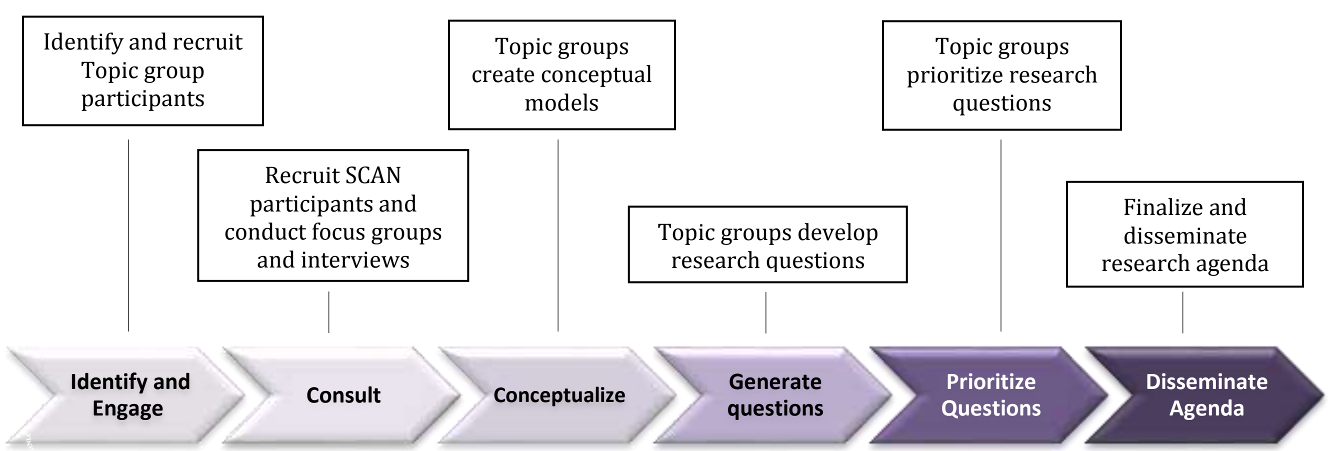
BACKGROUND: The SEED (Stakeholder Engagement in Question Development and Prioritization) Method provides a framework for PCOR (Patient Centered Outcomes Research) researchers to develop more robust stakeholder engagement and to collaboratively generate research questions. Research reported in this Toolkit was funded through a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Award (#1310-07664) in the Improving Methods for Conducting Patient-Centered Outcomes Research program. The Principal Investigator was Emily Zimmerman at Virginia Commonwealth University.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEED METHOD: The SEED Method is a stakeholder engagement methodology that combines participatory modeling and question development with a review of available evidence. The SEED Method employs a multilevel stakeholder model that is led within a participatory framework. Engagement encompasses three levels of participation:

1. Community-based participatory **Research Team** who collaboratively lead the project from beginning to end
2. Participatory **Topic Groups** of stakeholders brought together based on their experience and knowledge of the health-related topic that develop research questions
3. Consultative stakeholder participation through focus groups and interviews (**SCAN** participants)

The SEED method was designed to take place in six steps. In step 1 the Research Team identifies a focus area and conducts preliminary research to identify stakeholders and organize Topic Groups (see Figure). In step 2 the Research Team collaborates with the Topic groups to gather further data and gain the perspective of a broad range of stakeholders (SCAN participants) through focus groups and interviews. In step 3 the Topic groups take part in a facilitated concept mapping exercise designed to tap into stakeholders' experiences of why and how these factors are interrelated. In step 4 the Topic groups participate in a facilitated process to develop research questions. In step 5 they prioritize the questions and focus on ensuring that they are patient centered. In step 6 the research agenda is finalized and disseminated. The proposed process is not about seeking consensus but instead tapping into stakeholders' experiences to generate new insights and ideas, and then letting all stakeholders contribute to prioritizing those ideas. Unlike stakeholder involvement methods that simply query stakeholders to rank or rate issues, the proposed process engages stakeholders to place their lived experience -- and their understanding of the cultural and social context -- into an analytical framework. It increases patient-centeredness and validity by broadening and deepening stakeholder involvement.

SEED Method Process:



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SEED Method

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Table 1. Summary of SEED Method Steps

Step 1: Identify and Engage
The Community Research Team meets weekly to finalize the topic, review relevant data on the target population, conduct individual informational interviews and review data, complete the stakeholder matrices, and recruit Topic group participants. Fieldwork includes informational interviewing and recruitment of Topic group participants. The Topic groups have their kickoff meetings.
Step 2: Consult
The Topic groups meet to plan focus groups and interviews and to review results together with the Research Team. The Research Team meets weekly, conducts focus groups and interviews, prepares summaries, and develops logistics for step 3.
Step 3: Conceptualize
Each Topic group meets once to undergo training on building conceptual models. Topic groups meet a second time for a facilitated exercise in creating conceptual models, and the Research Team reconciles/finalizes the models. The Research Team prepares logistics for the next step.
Step 4: Generate Questions
Each Topic group reconvenes to review the full set of models (from all Topic groups) and participates in a facilitated exercise to prioritize pathways and relationships of interest and generate research questions. The Research Team prepares logistics for the next step.
Step 5: Prioritize Questions
Each Topic group reconvenes to prioritize research questions. The Research Team prepares logistics for the next step.
Step 6: Disseminate Agenda
The Research Team reviews related literature and/or conducts systematic reviews and finalizes the list of research questions. The Research Team finalizes and implements the dissemination plan and conducts presentations to stakeholders.

RESEARCH TEAM ACTIVITIES: The Research Team engages in the following activities throughout the SEED Method:

- Review of health statistics and demographic data of health topic
- Conduct informational interviews with local health care system representatives to learn about at-risk populations and where they receive services in the community
- Completion of Stakeholder Identification and Recruitment Matrices to identify and recruit Topic Group participants
- Facilitation of Topic Groups
- Data collection from SCAN participants

TOPIC GROUP ACTIVITIES: Topic Group participants are brought together based on their personal or professional experience with the health topic. They engage in a series of meetings throughout the project to build conceptual models that explore potential causal factors leading to the health topic, and develop and prioritize research questions

SCAN ACTIVITIES: Focus group and key informant interviews are conducted with additional stakeholders with personal or professional experiences with the health topic. These are meant to broaden Topic Group and Research Team members' understanding of the experiences of a diverse set of stakeholders.

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PREVIOUS DEMONSTRATIONS: Two demonstration of the SEED Method were conducted and focused on the following health topics:

- Richmond, VA: Dietary compliance for diabetes/hypertension[1]
- Martinsville, VA: Lung cancer outcomes

Research agendas were developed at each of these sites and were disseminated to a wide audience, including academic researchers and funding organizations.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT: We encourage Toolkit users to familiarize themselves with all the materials in the toolkit, and to adapt documents, tools, templates, and timelines to fit the specifics of your project. As such, many of the Toolkit items are presented as templates to be customized by users, including areas that require project-specific details such as the [health topic] of choice and [Research Team name]. These are presented in red font. In addition, throughout this Toolkit, you will find examples from the two SEED Method demonstration projects, including meeting agendas, presentation slides, timelines, and organizational documents. These are provided to orient users and illustrate final versions of project materials. Evaluation materials are provided for those who want to evaluate SEED Method processes or outcomes.

ADAPTING THE SEED METHOD: The SEED Method can be adapted for projects of varying scope in a variety of ways to fit the specifics of your project, including timeline and budget constraints:

Timeline: Here are the four recommended scenarios for scaling down the current SEED Method process and timeline, ranging from longest to shortest implementation time:

Scenarios	Stakeholder groups involved	Estimated Time required
Full SEED Method (as presented in toolkit)	Research team, Topic groups, SCAN participants	9-12 months
Abbreviated SEED Method	Research team, Topic groups	4 months
Topic group facilitated activities only, including conceptual modeling (#1), question development (#2), and question prioritization (#3)	Topic groups	6 weeks
Conceptual model training and conceptual modeling facilitated activity (#1) only	--	1 meeting

Stakeholders: Users can customize the stakeholders involved in the SEED method, including number of Topic groups and whether or not focus groups and interviews (SCAN) are conducted. In addition, composition of the Research Team may vary across sites and may include a CBPR team, existing research team, or expert panel to lead the process.

Deliverables: Although specifically created for the development of research questions, we also encourage users to consider alternative uses of the method, such as identifying research priorities

[1] Zimmerman EB, Cook SK, Haley AD, Woolf SH, Price SK, and The Engaging Richmond Team. A patient and provider research agenda on diabetes and hypertension management. Am J Prev Med. 2017; 53(1): 123-129.

or intervention ideas, policy decisions, or developing participatory models as part of a planning process for research projects.

Setting: The SEED Method does not need to be used and implemented by an academic research group – other researchers, organizations (community based, health systems), decision-makers, and project teams (coalitions) would be well suited for implementing the SEED Method.