Tool to consider values when setting research priorities: Manual for use

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Priority setting exercises are used to inform resource allocation. Consideration of values in priority setting is not automatic. Values are rarely made explicit and a systematic way of defining and considering values is generally lacking. Therefore, we have developed a value-oriented tool to be used while setting priorities for research (table 1). The tool's main purpose is to be used as a reminder of possible values to consider when composing potential research questions. It aims to facilitate transparent discussions, and to encourage priority-setting participants to question and document what they value most. The tool can be submitted as additional material to a priority setting publication in order to show how values were considered during the prioritization exercise.

How was the Tool Developed?

The values presented in the tool have been extracted from a mapping review of previous priority setting exercises in nutrition research. We coded relevant papers for values using qualitative content analysis and consensus processes [1]. Values have been defined as general descriptions of what matters in research (e.g. transparency) that are not quantifiable without translation into a specific norm (e.g. have research methods been reported in detail?). Values were coded inductively and clustered into bigger categories by associating them to overarching principles. The final categories were built through several discussion rounds among the authors and an online consultation round with external experts.

How to Use the Tool

The discussion table is intended to be used together with different priority-setting methods. The table is supposed to be used when reflecting on the priority setting exercise as a whole, and is not intended for use on each of the research options. It is important to note that the tool is open ended, and, as values are numerous and diverse in nature, users can add missing values they consider important for their topic.

1. Time of use

The table can be introduced at any point in the process. We propose a first use as early as possible in the process of defining priorities, when most options are still open. The tool can also be repeated when priorities have been defined, or when priorities are benchmarked to previous lists of priorities. In this manner, stakeholders may consult the tool again after priorities are decided to detect or highlight missed opportunities.

2. Considerations Before Use

The table is based on values found in past nutrition priority setting exercises. Anyone is free to value whatever he/she wants, and to reject other values. The list is suggestive in proposing values to consider, but it is certainly allowed (and probably necessary) to make choices, such as 'what is most important to *this specific priority list*', and 'what is most important to be applied in *that specific context*'? Furthermore, the tool is not necessarily exhaustive; stakeholder should feel free to add any missing values they consider relevant for their research topic.

In addition, the table should serve as a reminder to increase the richness of values proposed, but not as an evaluation tool. Its use should remain flexible, and the definitions chosen for each values should be understood as illustrative, but in no way decisive.

3. Instruction for Use

Stakeholders should sit together and go through the list of values together. In the table, values are organized into the three big categories: *Feasibility*, *Impact*, and *Accountability*. For each value, stakeholders should first reflect whether they consider the value relevant for their specific research topic (i.e., the 'Relevance' column).

When values are considered relevant, stakeholders may use the / 'Decision explanation/ points to consider' open comment box to detail further explanation in addressing the value, either by detailing which proposed research questions target the specific value or by elaborating how this value should be addressed in research on the topic.

Disagreements on 'what values are relevant' or 'what exactly should be understood under a specific value' are perfectly normal. Stakeholders are free to decide what is important to them and to others, or what should be understood under values that are intrinsically open to interpretation. When using the table, stakeholders should aim for an all partial instead of an impartial approach, and integrate disagreement in the core of the priority setting exercise. There is thus no need to aim for full consensus.

In case of uncertainty or disagreement on the relevance of a value, comments may be added to the 'Decision explanation/ points to consider' open comment box.

To increase interdisciplinary compatibility, stakeholders may add values they consider relevant for their particular topic (a few extra rows are added at the end of the table for this purpose).

References

1.   Elo, S. and H. Kyngas, *The qualitative content analysis process.* J Adv Nurs, 2008. **62**(1): p. 107-15.

Table 1 Value-oriented tool for priority setting exercises

Value		Relevance	Decision explanation/ points to consider
FEASIBILITY			
Answerable	The research hypothesis is both clear and has the potential to be answered	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Realistic	The infrastructure to undertake the research is considered (e.g., funding, expertise, sufficient prior knowledge, etc.)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
	The infrastructure necessary to deliver the applied research is considered (e.g., funding, expertise, network, etc.)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Supported	The necessary stakeholders (e.g., government, funders, researchers) commit to the implementation	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
	(Empty row to add a value)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
IMPACT			
Relevant	The research advances scientific knowledge and/or practice (e.g. definition, burden, scope) and is addressed at a suitable moment in time e.g. there is a sense of urgency	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Practice-oriented	Translation and implementation of research results are considered	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Accessible	The accessibility of the applied research (e.g., affordability, proximity, reachability) by the target population is maximised	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Effective	The research has the potential to achieve the desired outcomes	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Context-sensitive	Social or cultural disapproval by the target population **and** demands and preferences of the target population are taken into account	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Specific	Research is sufficiently targeted/focused to certain problems/populations/contexts)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Comprehensive	a wide range of relevant elements (scope, long term effects, contextual approach) are considered in the research.	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
	If applied, different approaches including preventive approaches are considered	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Empowering	The pure research enables the target population to promote their own health (e.g., through prevention, improved capacities for self-care)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Innovative	The research topics go beyond traditional methods, approaches and thinking around the topic	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
	(Empty row to add a value)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
ACCOUNTABILITY			
Reported	Dissemination of research findings beyond the research team is anticipated (e.g., publication, public presentation)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Transparent	Research data, methods and evidence are publicly reported	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Sound	The research uses appropriate, valid, and reliable methods	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Environmental Friendly	The research takes into account environmental sustainability and minimizes environmental harm	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Cost-effective	Efficient use of resources to achieve the maximum impact	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Sustainable	The applied research targets long-term improvements (e.g. Capacity-building, adaptability**)**	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Quality assured	The research has a monitoring and evaluation plan. the applied research has a monitoring and evaluation plan	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
Inclusive	The research adopts participatory approaches in which different stakeholders are represented If it is applied research, it is not increasing inequity in society and seeks to maximise fairness	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
	(Empty row to add a value)	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	
(Empty column to add a value)	*(Empty row to add a value)*	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High ☐ NA	

NA= Not Applicable