As interest and uptake in patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR) increases, the rapid synthesis and dissemination of lessons learned from the field is needed. In February 2013, PCORI and AcademyHealth launched the PCORI Pilot Projects Learning Network (PPPLN) which connects the first cohort of researchers funded by PCORI and is committed to optimizing their learnings to rapidly advance PCOR. As a connector and network extender, AcademyHealth applies its knowledge about forming communities and fostering collaboration to this effort.

Creating a Learning Network

All members of the pilot project research teams, including their stakeholder partners, were invited to participate in the PPPLN. The PPPLN was designed to:

1. Actively scan for, harvest, and synthesize information from pilot projects;
2. Capture key themes with potential to inform PCOR;
3. Facilitate cross-project learning and collaboration; and,
4. Support dissemination.

To achieve these aims, we engaged in a number of activities, including:

- **Data collection and analysis**
  - Qualitative analysis of pilot project research plans to better understand their aims and needs;
  - Data collection on stakeholder engagement practices;
  - Progress monitoring
  - Review of interim reports and summary of shared challenges, experiences and areas for improvement;
  - Facilitation of information sharing and cross-project learning
  - Share and Tell Webinars, allowing researchers to present their progress and discuss common challenges;
  - Communication through Basecamp, an online platform enabling resource sharing and collaborative discussion;
  - Fostering collaboration
    - Collaborative projects based on common interests and experiences;
    - An in-person meeting in Washington, DC for cross-project networking, reflective and forward looking discussions on Years 1 & 2, and working sessions for the collaborative projects; and
  - Technical assistance (TA) and dissemination support
    - Support and TA for pilot projects during the dissemination process.

Achieving the Aims of the PPPLN

**AIM 1: ACTIVELY SCAN FOR, HARVEST AND SYNTHESIZE INFORMATION**

Prior to launching the PPPLN, we needed to better understand the pilot projects both individually and as a group. To do this, we conducted qualitative analyses of research plan focus areas and methods. This analysis has supported many activities and serves as the backbone of the PPPLN. It helped us to divide the PPPLN into four groups, which created smaller communities within the greater network to facilitate cross-project learning and identification of common themes.

**AIM 2: CAPTURE KEY THEMES WITH POTENTIAL TO INFORM PCOR**

An important function of the PPPLN is to capture information from pilot projects that may be useful to future researchers. In 2013, we surveyed pilot projects about their patient and other stakeholder engagement via a web-enabled tool. Full results will be disseminated via a forthcoming peer-reviewed manuscript.

**AIM 3: FACILITATE CROSS-PROJECT LEARNING AND COLLABORATION**

To promote enhanced discussion and products that will contribute to the field of PCOR, the PPPLN has fostered the development of several cross-project collaborations. These groups are using their pilot project experiences to document lessons learned, and produce guidance documents, presentations and other products that inform PCOR. These groups meet by phone on a regular basis and also met in person at the PPPLN Meeting in Washington, DC in March 2014; many have products forthcoming later this year.

**AIM 4: SUPPORT DISSEMINATION**

The PPPLN provides support throughout the dissemination process to help pilot projects “tell the stories behind their research” and why it matters. The PPPLN has also provided technical assistance related to dissemination on questions such as:

- How to bring clinical tools to market;
- How to translate research into policy, and how to disseminate research findings to varied audiences.

Lessons Learned

Over the past year and a half, we have noted several important factors that contribute to the success of a learning network. These include:

- Generating opportunities for projects to share insights and lessons learned;
- Creating a “safe” space to discuss challenges and seek peer advice;
- Engaging multiple members of the research team, not just the principal investigators;
- Using an multiple modes of communication; and,
- Creating opportunities for networking whenever possible.

Measuring Success in Year One

While the PPPLN is ongoing, preliminary indicators related to participation suggest that it has been a successful means for achieving its aims.

The success of the PPPLN is reflected in members’ participation, which was voluntary and not financially supported. The majority of projects have been engaged in the learning network through at least one activity. In particular, participation in the collaborative projects suggests that researchers appreciate how the PPPLN can contribute to the future of PCOR. At this point, more than 50 percent of projects are involved in a collaborative project.

Implications for Future Efforts

Practical and empirical evidence is needed to support the growth and evolution of PCOR. The PPPLN illustrates the value and potential benefits of active portfolio management in building the evidence base for PCOR, identifying practice and research gaps, and accelerating the dissemination and uptake of findings to advance the field. Future research funders and coordinators should consider the important role that a learning network can play in accelerating knowledge generation and sharing across awardees.

References & Acknowledgements

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