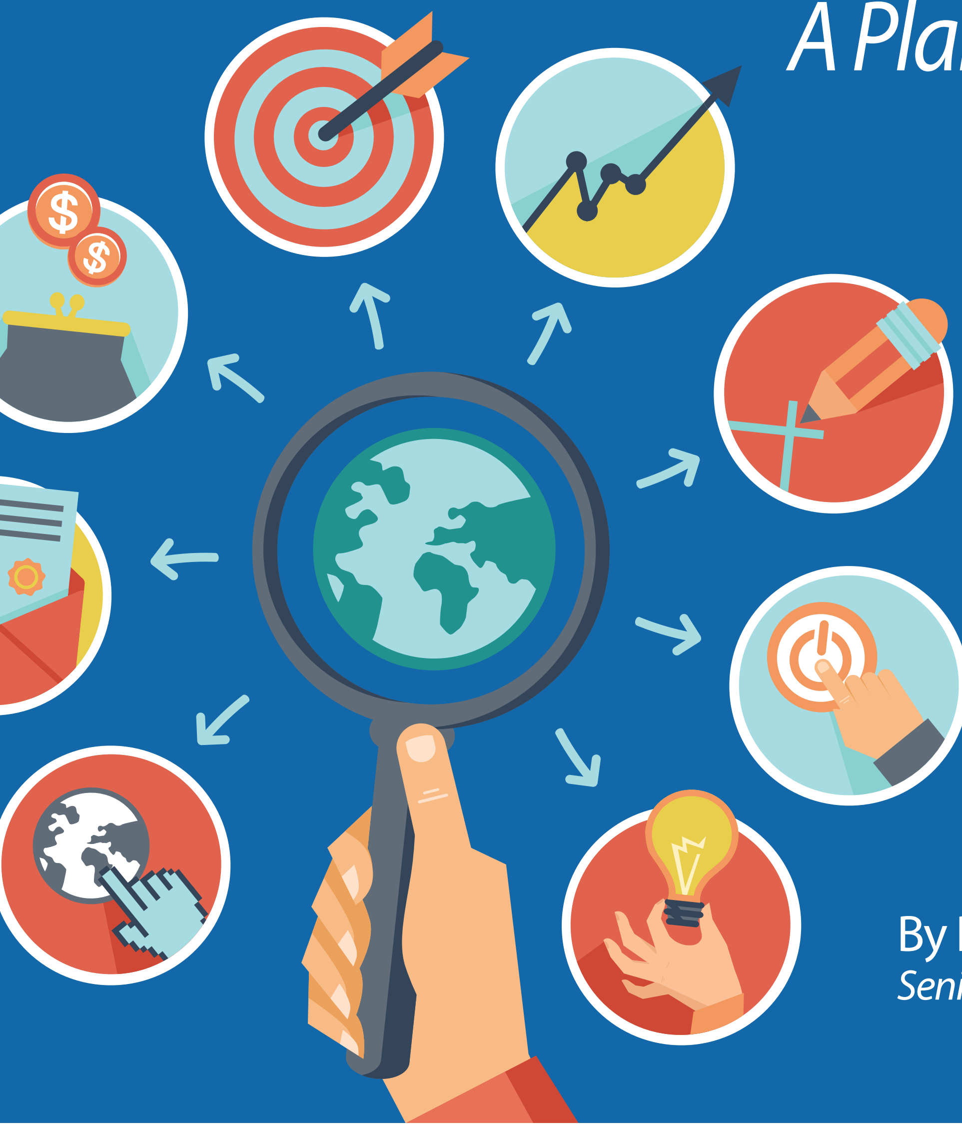
# Getting Started With Decision-Focused Research:

## *A Planning Guide*



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# What is Decision-Focused Research?

*Decision-focused research starts with the end in mind—information to inform discussions about the decisions you are facing.*

Decision-focused research can help you understand an issue, identify potential alternatives for addressing that issue and gauge the potential impact of alternative courses of action.

This planning guide will get you started on the process of thinking through your research project. Your researcher can help guide you along the way.

You can learn more about decision-focused research from our ebook available at: http://bit.ly/2ibvyRf

# Step 1: Conduct Background Review

## Information Relevant to the Environment and Issues

A background review assembles all relevant information about the issues, which will be useful for your researcher as well as a good refresher for internal use. A fresh review of this information will help develop the project purpose and research requirements.

### *Critical Questions*

- Is relevant secondary research available? (Secondary research is existing information from third-party resources, such as trade publications or syndicated marketing research reports.)
- Who should we talk with for input into the research?
- What assumptions do we have about the issues in this research?
- How reliable is the information we currently have available?

### *Examples:*

- Previous association research
- Purchased syndicated reports from sources such as http://marketresearch.com
- U.S. government resources and data, such as is available at the U.S. Department of Labor of the U.S. Census Bureau
- Discussions with association staff members in various functional roles, such as finance, membership and government relations

## The Decision-Focused Research Plan

*Step 1:*
**Conduct Background Review**

*Step 2:*
**Define Purpose**

*Step 3:*
**Identify Information Requirements**

*Step 4:*
**Select Methodology**

*Step 5:*
**Develop Sample and Analysis Plan**

*Step 6:*
**Create Timeline**

# Step 2: Define Purpose

## Decisions that Need to Be Made

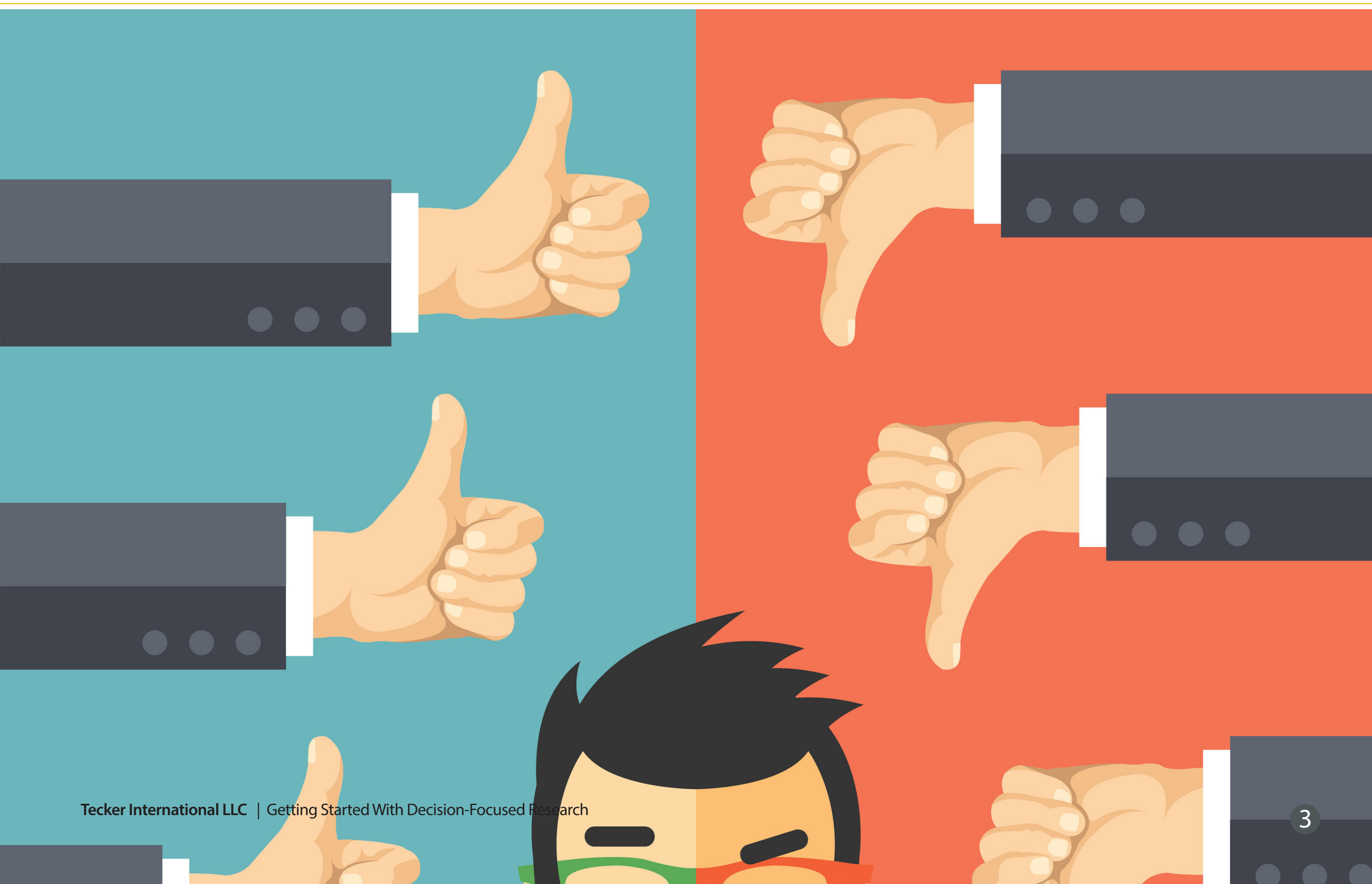
Getting a crystal clear understanding of the purpose of the research is the most important step in the research planning process. Being specific about the exact decisions you need to make could involve dialogue with different stakeholders. Take the time to do this part right.

### *Critical Questions*

- How will we use the information from this research?
- What are the decisions we will make based on this research?
- How will we know if we are successful in the research? *(Note: This is different than getting the research results you want. Success is defined by getting the right information to make your decisions.)*

### *Examples:*

- We will explore potential issues related to our proposed merger with XYC Association.
- We will determine the future of legacy professional development programs.
- We will measure which of our strategic initiatives members find most important to the profession and to their careers.
- We will create member personas to help our membership and marketing staff better reach and serve members.



# Step 3: Identify Information Requirements

## Information Needed to Make Those Decisions

Information requirements list the specific information you plan to gather in the research. These are research questions. Your researcher will recommend the best way to word questions in your questionnaire or other research guide to get the answers you seek.

### *Critical Questions*

- What information do we need to collect from each participant to assist in demographic subgroup analysis or other analysis of the survey data?
- Is each of these questions necessary for the purpose of this research?

### *Examples:*

- What are the behaviors, opinions and emotions surrounding the certification program in the profession?
- What are the actionable variables about our members we can collect to create member personas?
- What type of member is least likely to renew membership?

**Read more about decision-focused research at:**

http://bit.ly/2ibvyRf

# Step 4: Select Methodology

## Plan to Collect the Information

There are two broad approaches to primary research—quantitative research, such as online surveys, and qualitative research, such as focus groups, interviews or ethnography. The type of information you seek will determine which approach you should use. If your questions are exploratory, if they begin with "how," what," or "why" with no clear idea of the range of specific choices, then you need qualitative research. If you have enough information and are ready to quantify the problem in a way that you can project to the population of interest, you need quantitative research. You may find that you need both—qualitative research to understand the context and range of issues and quantitative research to understand the prevalence of problem.

Using the decisions and information requirement examples above:

- Qualitative research: We will explore potential issues related to our proposed merger with XYC Association.
- Quantitative research: We will determine the future of legacy professional development programs based on member usage and program ratings.
- Quantitative research: We will measure which of our strategic initiatives members find most important to the profession and to their careers.
- Quantitative and qualitative research: What are the behaviors, opinions and emotions surrounding the new certification program in profession?
- Quantitative research: What are the actionable variables about our members we can collect to create member personas?
- Quantitative and/or qualitative research: What type of member is least likely to renew membership?

More information on qualitative versus quantitative research is available in our ebook *Decision-Focused Research for Association Executives* at http://bit.ly/2ibvyRf.

# Step 5: Develop Sample and Analysis Plan

## Identify Participants and How the Data Will Be Analyzed

The sample plan specifies exactly who and how many people will be needed for your research project. The analysis plan will specify how the final data from the research will be analyzed. For example, survey data may include subgroup analysis based on member type or years as a member.

Your researcher will work with you to develop a sample and analysis plan.

### *Critical Questions*

- Who or what groups of people are likely to have the information we need?
- What is the most efficient way of reaching these people?
- What is the availability, cost and accuracy of the sample we need?
- What response rate can we expect?
- How critical is the decisions we need to make based on this research? *(The more critical the decision, the higher level of reliability you need in your research.)*

# Step 6: Create Timeline

## Timeframe and Milestones for Completing the Research

The research timeline should specify specific dates or date ranges for major activities, such as questionnaire developments, programming, testing, fielding and report writing.

### *Critical Questions*

- When do we need the information from this research?
- How much time will it take for us to get input and approval from leaders in the association?
- How will we distribute and structure discussions about the research results?
- Will we share the information from this research with members?

# About Tecker International

Tecker International, LLC, can help you make the decisions for where you want your association to go. Tecker International has helped more than 2,500 organizations with research, strategy development, marketing and infrastructure realignment. For information about how a Tecker consultant can help with your association's research, contact Robin Wedewer at rwedewer@tecker.com or (410) 414-5718.

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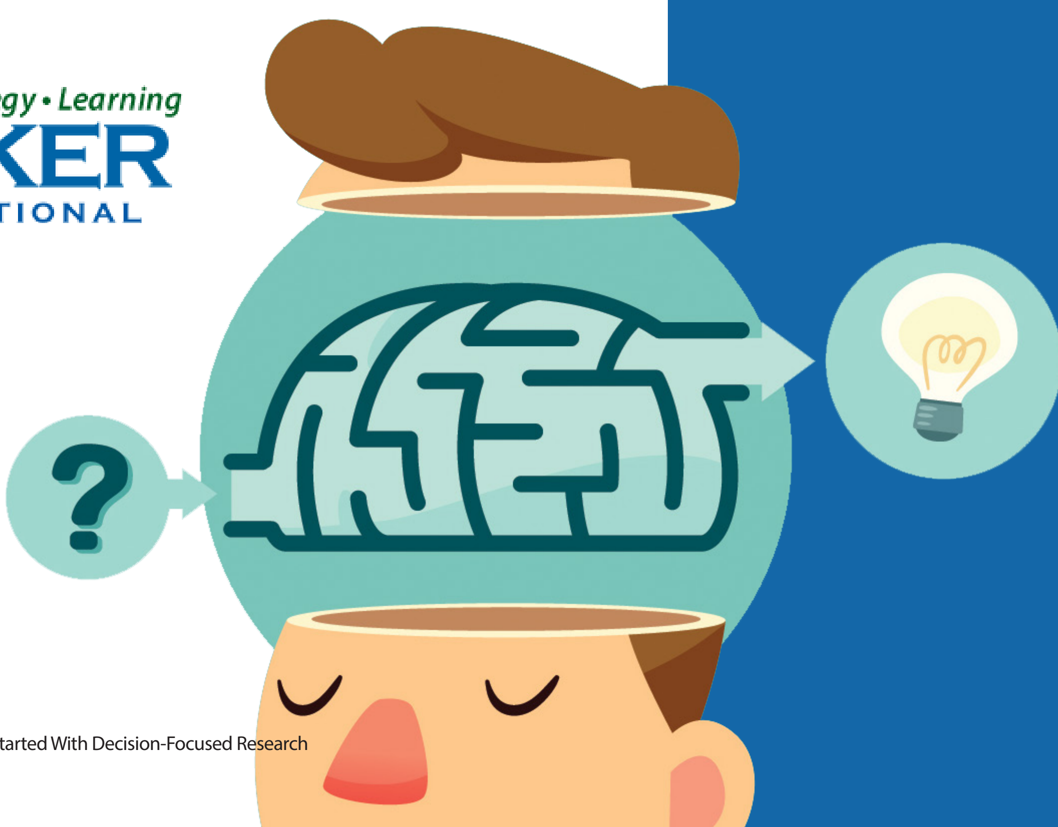


## Contact Us

We would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about your member or other stakeholder research.

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