



Activity 1.1: Breaking Down Stereotypes of Researchers

Materials Needed

Paper
Writing utensils
Poker chips (or pennies, paper clips, or jelly beans)
Butcher paper with definitions of types of knowledge

Key Terms

Community knowledge
Knowledge from experience
Academic knowledge

Intended Participants

Members and staff of your organization

Time Needed

45 minutes

Purpose of Activity

This activity is designed to challenge the stereotypes that are commonly held about research and researchers in order to reframe research as a process in which everyone can and should participate. Participants will be introduced to the basic philosophy behind Participatory Action Research: that those most impacted by an issue should be able to design and conduct research about their community.

By the End of Activity Participants Will

- Be able to break down stereotypes about research and expertise
- Learn that various types of knowledge exist within the group
- Learn that community knowledge and research is critical to changing policy and building power

Part I: “What does a researcher look like?” (20 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions

1. Make sure everyone has a sheet of paper and a pen.
2. Ask each person to take a few minutes to draw a picture responding to the question: “What does a researcher look like?”
3. After everyone has drawn something, ask for a few volunteers to show what they’ve drawn (if the group is big you can have each person share their drawing with their neighbor).
4. Popcorn questions: What/who did they draw? Where is the researcher located? How are they doing their research? Is the researcher from the community? How does this drawing compare to what other people drew?
5. Record responses on butcher paper.
6. Analyze commonalities with the group. What did you come up with?
7. Get to the point: in this society the “experts” control knowledge & information, when most of us think of researchers we think of some expert cooped up in a room, at a far distance from the community. But what do those researchers really know about what’s happening in our neighborhoods and communities? Is that the kind of research we need?
8. (Transition) Explain that next activity will allow us to explore these questions more.



Part II: Chip Toss Activity (25 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions

Everyone stand in a circle. Each person gets a hand full of chips (paperclips or pennies can work). Facilitator will read a statement. Tell participants that if the statement applies to you, throw a chip into the center of the circle:

1. I have talked with my neighbors about conditions in the neighborhood.
2. I have read local newspapers.
3. I have surveyed my friends or community about an important issue.
4. I've broken down something complicated into simple terms when I've talked to people.
5. I have advocated for myself or a family member.
6. I have met with elected officials about an issue in my community.
7. I have been stopped or detained by immigrant officials or police.
8. I have been denied rights given to most people in this country.
9. I have been a leader in my community.

Add a few that are specific to the issue you are working on. For example if you are working on gentrification:

10. I have observed changes in the community such as new luxury condos and high-end shops and restaurants.
11. I have seen neighbors, family, or friends move out of my neighborhood because they could not afford to live there.

Facilitators Instructions

A. Explain that the pile of chips represents all the types of knowledge and ways of getting information that come from our daily lives. Everyone in the room already has plenty of knowledge, experience and skills to get information. And as a community we can support each other with different skills and can tap into our collective knowledge. And that's all that research is. Everyone here is an expert on their own life experiences. All people do research in some form or another in their daily lives. It's a matter of recognizing what you already do as research. Ask participants for comments and questions.

B. Explain that we can break down "information" through three different types of knowledge (have definitions on butcher paper)

- Community Knowledge—cultural practices and wisdom passed down for generations.
- Knowledge from Experience—what we learn and know from living and doing it.
- Academic Knowledge—published facts and data produced by research "professionals" usually from outside the community.

C. Summarize and discuss: Gathering community knowledge and knowledge from experience is the best way to get a picture of what's really happening in our communities. Instead of allowing academics and policy makers to define the problems and solutions in our community, we need to do our own research, so that we can create policies that address what's really happening in our communities.

D. Transition: this type of research is sometimes called "Participatory Action Research." Next we are going to dig into the steps of how to do this kind of research in more detail.