Section 2: Designing Your Research Project

Description:
This section is designed to assist you with the planning phase of your Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. The section includes activities that will enable your group to make informed decisions about starting a research project, developing research goals and questions, choosing a research method, and creating a plan and timeline to guide your research. It also includes tools that will help your team to design and plan your overall research project.

Activities:
A2.1: Developing Research Goals and Questions
A2.2: Choosing Your Research Method
A2.3: Developing Your Research Timeline

Tools:
T2.1: Guiding Questions for Developing Research Goals and Questions
T2.2: Guiding Questions for Choosing a Research Method
T2.3: PAR Menu of Methods
T2.4: Research Work Plan Template
T2.5: Research Timeline Template

ACTIVITY 2.1 RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZING

Activity 2.1: Developing Research Goals and Questions

Tools Needed:
Copies of Tool 2.1: Guiding Questions for Developing Research Goals and Questions

Materials Needed:
Butcher paper
Markers

Key Terms:
Research Goals
Research Question

Intended Audience:
Community Members

Time Needed:
1 hour

Purpose of Activity:
The purpose of this activity is to have participants discuss the goals and purpose of the research project. After you've discussed what the research is trying to accomplish and why your organization is doing it, the participants will come up with research questions that will guide the research process.

By the End of Activity Participants Will:
- Discuss the social or policy change you want to bring about through your research and campaign work
- Discuss why research is useful or relevant to your organization or campaign
- Determine the overarching questions you want to answer through your research

Before this Activity Participants Will Need to:
Be introduced to the basics of Participatory Action Research (PAR)
Decide that PAR is right for your organization

Part I: What and Why of PAR (20 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Provide a brief summary of your campaign to set the context for the discussion

2. Explain that today we will have a discussion about using participatory action research in our campaign. We are going to try to begin to develop goals and questions that can guide our research.

3. Write "What?" at the top of a piece of butcher paper, and go through the questions below with the participants. Record responses on butcher paper, and keep the paper for later. (If you have 7 or more participants you can break out into small groups).

What?
…is the social or policy change you want to bring about at the end of the day?
…are the overarching questions you want to answer through your research?
…information do you need to better understand and document the issues you are addressing?
…primary question do you want to answer with your research?

4. Once you've answered each "what?" question sufficiently, write "Why?" on a new sheet of butcher paper. Go through each of the questions below with participants. Record responses.

Why?
…is research useful or important for your organization? Will it be used…
…internally, to inform and assess needs in the community?
…externally, to mobilize and educate community members or elected officials around an issue?

ACTIVITY 2.1 RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZING

Part II: Developing Research Goals (20 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Put up a piece of butcher paper that says "Research Goals: What you want to accomplish with your research."

2. Facilitate a discussion based upon your group's answer to the "What" and "Why" questions that leads the group to establish the goals of the research and the research questions.

3. Ask the question: based on the answers to the "What" and "Why" questions, what are our goals for this research? What do we want to accomplish through doing this research?

4. Ask people to popcorn responses and record their responses on butcher paper.

5. Explain that now that we have some research goals, we need to frame those goals as questions in order to conduct research.

Part III: Developing Research Questions (20 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Frame the activity: explain that part of being a researcher is to ask questions and find answers. To design a research project you need to first figure out what big questions you want to answer. We will use our list of goals to figure out what questions we want to ask

2. Put up a piece of butcher paper that says: "Research Questions: What big questions do you want to answer with your research." Also write an example of a research question on the butcher paper. For example, if one of our goals is to document rapid development of luxury housing in our neighborhood, our question would be, "What is the current state of housing development in our neighborhood?"

3. Ask the question: based on the answers to the "What" and "Why" questions and the goals we just created, what big questions do we want to answer through our research?

4. Ask people to popcorn responses and record their responses on butcher paper.

5. Explain to the groups that these goals and questions will be the foundation for your research design and implementation.

Activity 2.2: Choosing Your Research Method

Tools Needed:
Copies of Tool 2.2: Guiding Questions for Choosing a Research Method

Copies of Tool 2.3: PAR Menu of Methods

Materials Needed:
Butcher paper
Markers
Pens
Post-it notes

Key Terms:
Quantitative Data
Qualitative Data
Survey
Interview
Focus Groups
Community Mapping
Community Visioning
Secondary Data
Media Review
Literature Review

Intended Audience:
Community Members or Organizers

Time Needed:
1.5 hours

Purpose of Activity:
This activity is designed to help organizers and members understand the various options for how they can conduct research and choose the research method(s) they will use.

By the End of Activity Participants Will:
- Finalize research goals and questions
- Understand relevant research methods
- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods
- Decide the research method appropriate for your group

Before this Activity Participants Will Need to:
Develop research goals and research questions

Part I: Nailing Down your Research Goals and Questions (15 minutes)

1. Frame the activity in the context of your campaign: now that we've decided to do participatory research we need to dig into how to do it. There are a bunch of different ways we can conduct research so we need to explore these different research methods.

2. Put up the butcher paper with "Research Goals" and "Research Questions" from Section 2, Activity 1.

3. Ask the group, is anything missing?

4. Wrap it up: Summarize what has been said and explain that these goals and questions will help to determine which methods you will use to conduct your research.

Part II: Brainstorm as a Big Group (25 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions:
1. Explain that now that we have determined some of our goals and research questions, we need to dig into how to do the research.

2. Next, facilitate a discussion that answers the questions: how do we do the research, when do we do it and where? Record responses on butcher paper, and keep butcher paper for Part 3 (This can also be done in break-out groups).

ACTIVITY 2.2 RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZING

How?
…can you document or better understand the issue? Do you need "hard" numbers (quantitative data) and/or stories of personal experience (qualitative data) or both?
…are you going to give legs to your research?

What action strategies could you employ to make the research and report as impactful as possible?

Who?
…are the stakeholders in the issue? Who has interest? Who is affected?
…needs to have their voice be heard?
…are you trying to influence? Who has power over the issue?
…is your target audience (community members, elected officials, media)?
…will collect your data?

Where?
…can you find the people you need to talk to get your data?
…can you find existing information that is relevant to your research?
…can you go for support and assistance (nonprofits, universities, government agencies)?

Part II: Understanding the Research Methods (35 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Choose 3-4 methods that you think are the most relevant to your project (from Tool T2.1 PAR Menu of Methods).
2. Break the participants into 3-4 groups and assign one method that you've chosen to each group.
3. Pass out Tool T2.1 "PAR Menu of Methods" to each group.
4. Tell each group to read over the description for the method they have been assigned and give them 5-7 minutes to make up a skit for that method. Encourage them to be creative.
5. Have each small group perform their skit.
6. After each skit, facilitate a discussion with the full group. Ask the group: what did you see in the skit? What do you think are the pros and cons of that method for our work? Record the pros and cons list on butcher paper.

Part III: Decide Your Research Method (20 Minutes)

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Place the butcher papers from each A2.2 activity next to each other at the focal point of the room.
2. First, ask a volunteer to read your responses to the "How" "Who" and "Where" questions from the first activity to remind everyone of your initial conversations.
3. Facilitate a discussion: now that we know more about each of the possible research methods, which methods align with the groups responses to the "How", "Who" and "Where" questions?
4. Make a decision about which method(s) make the most sense for your project. Record the methods you choose to put into your research workplan (see Tool 2.3).

Activity 2.3: Developing Your Research Plan and Timeline

Tools Needed:
Tool 2.4: Research Timeline Template

Materials Needed:
Butcher paper
Markers
Pens

Key Terms:
Sample
Data Report Back
Policy Recommendation

Intended Audience:
Members and Organizers that will be active in research process

Time Needed:
1 hour

Purpose of Activity:
This activity is designed to enable your research team to sit together and plan out the remaining steps of your research project. Through the activity, participants will devise a timeline that will map out all of the necessary steps in your project, and will specify who is going to be responsible for each step of the project. By the end of the activity you will have created a research timeline that you can use to guide the rest of your project.

By the End of this Activity Participants Will:
- Map out all of the steps of your research project in a timeline
- Decide who is going to do what and when they are going to do it
- Create a system of accountability for your research project

Before this Activity Participants Will Need to:
Have been introduced to the basics of Participatory Action Research (PAR)
Have created the research goals and questions for your project
Have decided on your research method

Part I: Creating Your Research Plan and Timeline (1 hour)

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Before the meeting prepare the room.a. Prepare two pieces of butcher paper in advance;

Butcher Paper 1: a list of the main steps in PAR (listed below),

Butcher Paper 2: recreate the table below on large sheets of butcher paper big enough so that you can write in each box. Depending on the specifics of your project you may need to modify this table.

Place the two pieces of butcher paper next to each other at the front of the room with the PAR steps to the left of the table.

Fill out the first three steps (Organizing Goal, Research Question, and Research Plan) in the table if you have already done them. Fill out any other steps that you have already discussed or figured out (for example you might have chosen someone to design the research instruments).

1. Introduce the activity; today we are going to create our research plan. By the end of the meeting we will have completed a timeline of the research steps and will have split up who will do what.

2. Describe the butcher paper sheets you have created and explain that you will be using these sheets to create your timeline.

3. Go through each of the PAR steps that you will use for your project and fill out the what, when and who of each step with participants.

4. After you've completed the table, take a moment to congratulate everyone as you have now finished the planning stages of your research project!

5. Keep all of the Butcher Paper sheets you created and use them to type up your Research Plan (see Tool 2.4 and T2.5: Template for Research Work Plan and Research Timeline Template).

Tool 2.1: Guiding Questions for Developing Research Goals and Questions

WHAT…

…is the social or policy change you want to bring about at the end of the day?

____

____

…are your organizing goals, and how can this research be helpful achieving these goals?

____

____

…information do you need to better understand and document the issues you are addressing?

____

____

WHY…

…is research useful or important for your organization?

____

____

… internally, to inform and assess needs in the community? YES NO

Explain

____

… externally, to mobilize and educate community members around an issue?
YES NO

…to support a specific policy campaign or influence policy and public debate around an issue?
YES NO

HOW…

… can you document or better understand the issue? Do you need "hard" numbers (quantitative data) or stories of personal experience (qualitative data)?
Quantitative Qualitative Both

____

____

____

____

… are you going to give legs to your research? What action strategies could you employ to make the research and report as effective as possible? ______________

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WHO…

… are the stakeholders in the issue? Who has interest, who is affected?

____

____

… needs their voice to be heard?

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…are you trying to influence? Who has power over the issue?

____

____

…is your target audience (community members, elected officials, media)?

____

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…will collect your data?

____

____

WHERE…

… can you go to for information and other existing data?

____

____

…can you go for support and assistance (non-profits, universities, government agencies)?

____

____

WHEN…

… is the right time to do research? ______________

____

...in your campaign?

...in the political context?

...in your organization?

Tool 2.3: Participatory Action Research (PAR) Menu of Methods

Surveys- Surveys ask specific questions and tend to include short answer, multiple-choice, and scaled-answer questions. Surveys can be done online, through the mail, and can be written and filled out in person. The most effective way to conduct surveys in support of organizing is in an in person "interview style" so that the surveyor can make personal connections with the respondent. Surveys are helpful for getting information or data from a wider group of people and are better for getting quantitative information like numbers, than they are for getting qualitative information, like people's stories. Surveys can be helpful when making policy demands because elected officials, policymakers and the media tend to respond to hard numbers.

Interviews- Interviews are guided conversations about a specific topic, are often done one-on-one, and tend to use open-ended questions in order to get in-depth explanations. Interviews are useful when you want to get more specific, detailed information than you would get from a survey and you want to get deeper into people's experiences and personal stories. Interviews are appropriate when dealing with sensitive or personal information that people may not be comfortable writing on a survey or sharing in a group setting (such as a focus group). Interviews can also assist the organizing outreach process because they facilitate one-to-one interaction, but they can be more time intensive then surveys.

Focus Groups- Are small group sessions (7-12 people) that are led by a facilitator in order to obtain opinions based on the research question. Like interviews, focus groups are good for getting qualitative data, and are an effective way to get people's personal stories, testimonies, and experiences from a group setting. They can also be useful for delving deeper into a specific issue or research question not fully addressed by another method. Focus groups can be useful in allowing participants to bounce ideas and stories off of each other. Due to the group setting, they can also be more challenging than interviews for discussing sensitive topics.

Community Mapping/Canvassing- Is a process of documenting and visually presenting trends or patterns in a given community. Community maps and canvassing can be used to document many physical, spatial dynamics of a neighborhood from new construction sites, to new luxury condos, to green spaces, to new businesses, to vacant lots, etc. This is an effective tool for tracking physical changes in a neighborhood, and specifically as a way to document the impact of gentrification on a neighborhood.

Community Visioning- Is a process where group of community members come together to develop an alternative vision or proposal for the future of their community. Visioning can be used to develop public policy demands and can be particularly useful when communities are working to impact the physical development of their community. This can also be useful for groups working to influence a particular issue or policy.

Mystery Shopping—Is a process where community members posing as customers call or visit businesses and document their experience and observations. Usually mystery shoppers have a specific set of criteria they are looking for when they visit or call a business. This is a good way to document employment practices, compliance with labor laws, and consumer fraud.

Secondary data- Is data that comes from someone else's research. This is distinct from "primary data" which is original data that you collect through your own research in the field. Secondary data is helpful for getting background information that will complement the ground-level information that comes from people's experiences (primary data). It can also be helpful to do a bit of secondary data collection before you begin your primary data collection in order to focus your research questions and help you to develop your research instruments (such as surveys and interview guides). Secondary data can come from a variety of public and private sources, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, city and state agencies, research organizations and academic institutions.

Media Review: A systematic review of a certain number of news articles or clips from a variety of sources about a specific topic to uncover the most common words or themes that emerge. This can be used as background research to help inform your research design and can also be used on its own to give you data about how a specific issue is being presented or framed in the media.

Literature Review: This is a review of existing articles, academic studies or reports in order to find out what information already exists about the topic you are exploring. This can be part of your secondary research; can help inform your research questions and can help you identify gaps in research and information on a given issue.

TOOL 2.4 RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZING

Tool 2.4: Research Plan Template

Why is This Tool Useful?
This tool will help to document your research plan and methodology. It is also useful in developing a workplan, timeline and accountability mechanism for your project to make sure that each member of your research team is doing the work they have committed to doing and are keeping up with deadlines. This can also be helpful in putting together proposals for funding or other support because you will have all the information about your project in one place. Below is a template for a research plan. Sections can be shifted and deleted as needed.

Name of Organization(s):
Name of Research Project:
Date:

Background
This section should include some background information about the social issue that your research will address and/ or the campaign that your research will support.

Overview of project
This section should provide a brief overview of the research project including what issue you are addressing and why, what information you plan to collect, whom you are collecting the information from and how you are collecting information (See Tools 2.1 and 2.2).

Goals of project
This section should include a bulleted list of what you hope to achieve through doing this research project. Some examples include:
- To gather current and detailed data from our community.
- To develop skills and leadership of members.
- To build the base of members in our organization.
- To educate elected officials about our organization's campaign.

Research Questions:
This should include a bulleted list of the overarching questions you hope to answer through your research. Research questions are different from survey or interview questions because they are broad and can help to guide the more specific questions you will ask in your surveys, interviews, focus groups, canvassing Tool, etc. Some examples include:
- What is the impact of poor housing conditions on residents of Chinatown?
- What types of benefits are workers getting and what are they not getting from their employers?
- How do various policies and procedures at methadone programs affect participant's access to methadone?
- What is the current state of luxury housing development in low-income communities of color in NYC?

Methodology/Research Components
This section should include all the methods you will use to answer your research questions along with a short description for each method. Below are some examples, but you should feel free to chose other methods (see Tool 2.3)

1. Short survey. This short survey will be focused on collecting updated and detailed data on x, y and z. The goal will be to collect 500 surveys. The surveys will be translated into Spanish and French languages and administered by members of our organization.

2. In Depth Interviews: Members and organizers will conduct in depth interviews with 5-10 workers in order to collect qualitative data about x and y and to show z.

3. Secondary Research: Members will conduct an analysis of current literature and data to support the findings from field research.

4. Media Review: Members will review 100 articles found in local newspapers in the last three years that include the word "public housing" in the headline. Researchers will identify the most prevalent words and themes in these articles.

Project Output
This section should include a few sentences about what you will create at the end of this project. This could be a report, a 1 or 2 page summary of your findings, a map, a video, etc.

How the PAR project will support community organizing
This section should explain how your research will support and be integrated into your organizing campaign. Will your research help with leadership development? Help to build your base? Help to garner media attention about a policy issue you are fighting for?

Timeline
This table should include all of the different tasks that you will need to complete for the research project, along with who will be responsible for completing the task and by what date. The tasks will differ depending on which methods you chose but Tool 2.5 will provide a template as a place to start.

Tool 2.5: Research Timeline Template

	What	When	Who
	What is the research task that needs to be done?	By when does it need to be complete?	Who will be the point person/ organization to make sure this task get done?
Develop Research Goals			
Develop Research Question(s)			
Choose Research Method(s)(i.e. survey, focus group, interviews, etc.)			
Create Research Plan			
Create Research Plan			
Design Research Instru-ments			
Select Your Sample			
Collect Your Data (based on research methods you chose)			
Enter Your Data			
Analyze Your Data			
Data Report Back			
Develop Policy Recom-mendations			
Package the Report for the Public/Develop Com-munications Plan			
Release the Report			