

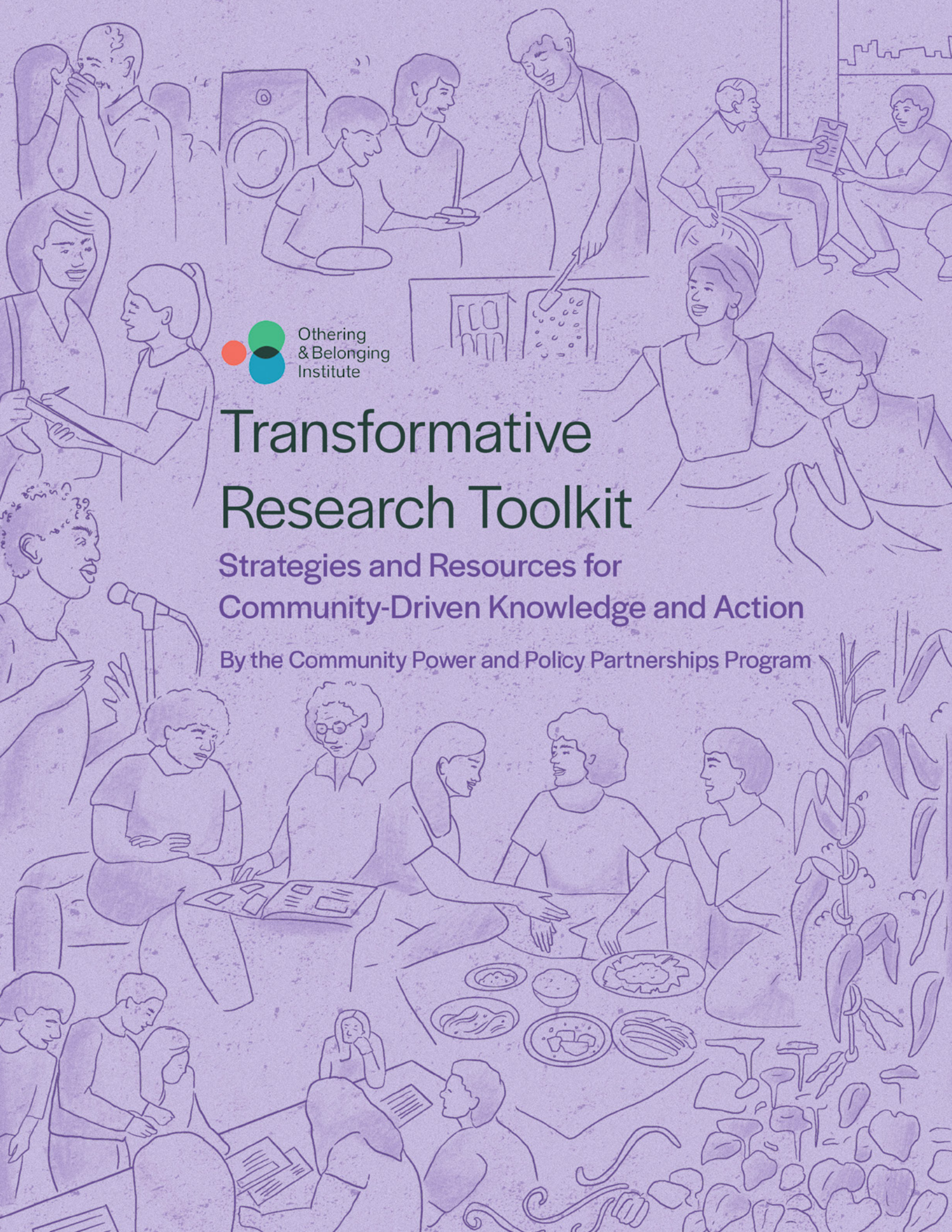


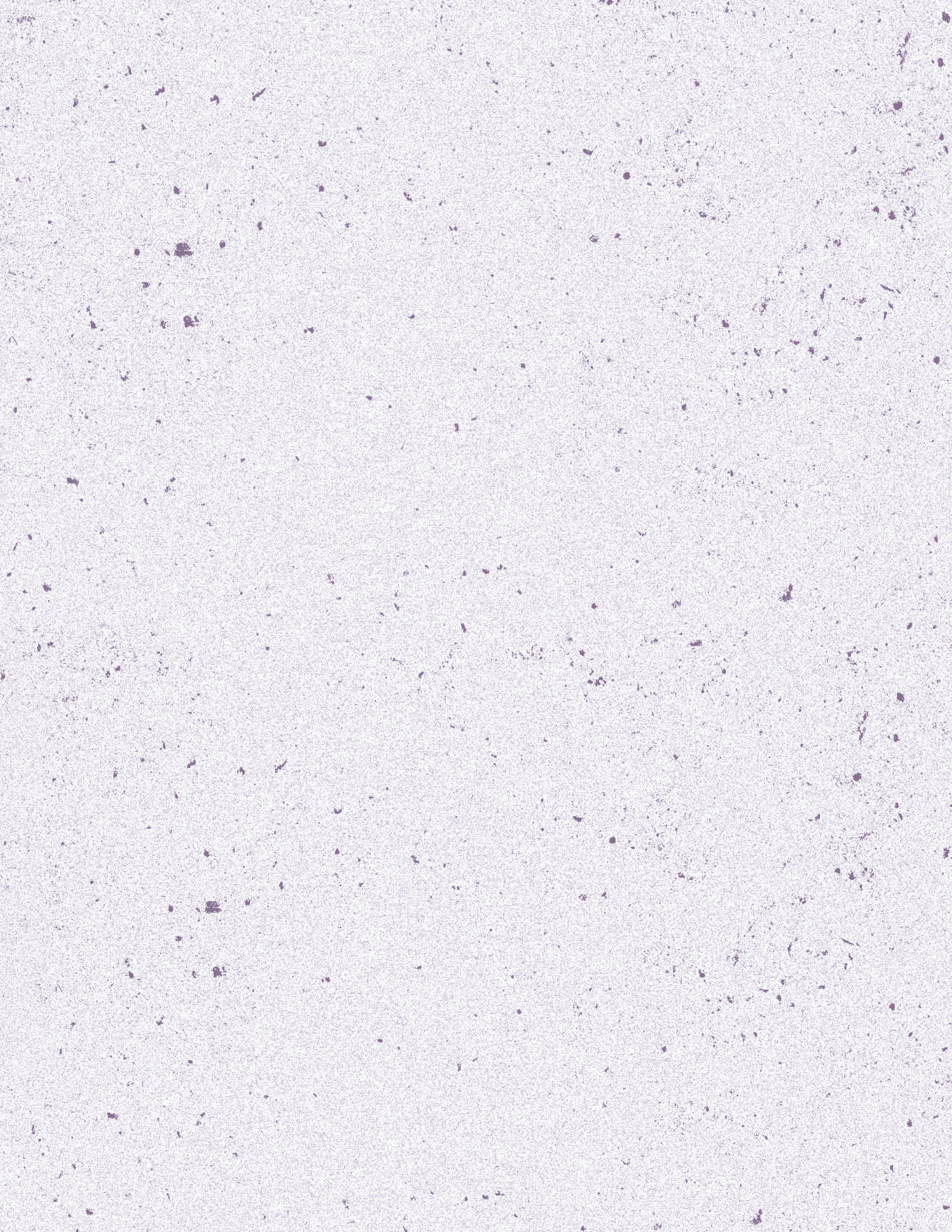
Othering
& Belonging
Institute

Transformative Research Toolkit

Strategies and Resources for
Community-Driven Knowledge and Action

By the Community Power and Policy Partnerships Program





The Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley, advances groundbreaking research, policy, and ideas that examine and remediate the processes of exclusion, marginalization, and structural inequality—what we call *othering*—to build a world based on inclusion, fairness, justice, and care for the earth—what we call *belonging*.

The Community Power and Policy Partnerships (CP3) Program at the Othering and Belonging Institute partners with community-based organizations and others to advance strategies through which members of marginalized communities have the resources, tools, and power to transform the structures that shape community wellbeing and belonging. We facilitate, and advise our partners in facilitating, participatory processes in which residents most impacted by issues of concern lead transformative change.

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Introduction



Scan this QR Code to access the Introduction section online.

Introduction

We have seen and participated in transformative research strategies that defeated proposed jail expansions, won millions of dollars for community-prioritized programs, and built new community-led organizations that changed a political landscape, among many other achievements. We use “transformative research” to refer to a wide range of processes where people center their lived experience and visions for social transformation, lead a process that systematically builds on this knowledge through investigation and learning rooted in their own ways of knowing, and take action to influence public narratives, policies, and power dynamics. In a nutshell, transformative research is any research process that positively transforms the people directly involved, the communities they are part of, and the structures shaping their lives. There are various names and frameworks used to describe similar work, which we discuss more fully in the third section, Principles and Frameworks for Transformative Research. When research is reclaimed and redesigned to put community knowledge and collective liberation at the center, it looks different in each place and time. Here we pull together underlying principles, practices, processes, and examples that can help guide new efforts.

This toolkit is intended for cultural workers, organizers, and community leaders. It is designed to support change strategies that involve participatory action research, community organizing, cultural strategy, popular education, or other processes that center local community knowledge. We call it a “toolkit” because its contents are meant to be used to aid individuals’ and communities’ work to transform public policy and systems, build power, and shift public narratives. Different tools within will be more useful and better suited to your needs at different times and for different sociopolitical contexts.

We created this toolkit over the last several years as a slow-cook process that boils down experience we’ve had over a couple decades. Many of the toolkit sections were initially created to fill partner requests around research or were generated from discussion about

We use “transformative research” to refer to a wide range of processes where people center their lived experience and visions for social transformation, lead a process that systematically builds on this knowledge through investigation and learning rooted in their own ways of knowing, and take action to influence public narratives, policies, and power dynamics.

the role of research (positive and negative) in communities. This toolkit is not an evaluation of the specific projects we engaged in over the years, nor does this toolkit speak for those organizations and artists. These offerings are from our experiences and analyses and reflect our perspectives. We share them humbly, knowing you surely have your own to add in. We hope you'll consider this toolkit as a bag of seeds to contemplate, choose, plant, and cultivate as they best feed you.

“Throughout this toolkit we talk about different ways of knowing, or knowledge systems. This emphasizes that all people don’t have the same way of understanding an experience. While a capitalist, rational, white and male knowledge system tends to dominate decision making in society, transformative research intentionally looks to disrupt this. See the section on Reclaiming Research for more on this.”

Overview

In the first three sections, we get into the ideas; in the last two sections, we offer more in-depth resources for how to carry out a transformative research process.

Understanding Transformative Research

The reasons to be skeptical of anything called “research” are plentiful; what has been done in the name of “research” has and continues to cause countless harms. In the first section, [Reclaiming Research](#), we name the harm that’s been done and offer a list of questions to facilitate conversations on the harm of research. The section then turns to concepts and questions for centering community knowledge and building on people’s own ways of surviving and thriving.

In the second section, [Cultural Strategy and Transformative Research](#), we turn to collaboration with artists and cultural practitioners that broadens ways of knowing to include the knowledge generated through creative and cultural practices. We outline how weaving in cultural strategy strengthens the reach, resonance, rigor, and regenerative potential of transformative research and may also require a shift in the role of the artist.

In the third section, [Principles and Frameworks for Transformative Research](#), we include several principles and frameworks adapted from other practitioners and some of our own. These are core concepts for thinking about an overall research process and situating it in your communities’ values, context, and goals.

Tools for Doing Transformative Research

In the fourth section, [Planning Your Research Process](#), we break down the research process into six phases and describe the decisions, resources, questions, and tips you may want to consider in each phase. This can be used to develop your work plan for a transformative research process, which will include the roles, relationships, planning, and activities you will carry out.

The final section of the toolkit, [Research Methods](#), is a deep dive into eight empirical methods for generating knowledge as part of a transformative research process: [power analysis, interviews, focus groups and structured discussion, surveys, policy analysis, mapping and spatial analysis, archival research, and ancestral ceremonies](#). For each method, we give an example of what it can look like, how it's done, what type of knowledge it can generate, how you can build relationships and people power, what roles and resources are needed, and how cultural strategy can be woven into the process.

Gratitude, Who We Are



We, the coauthors of this toolkit, have learned by doing—“making the road by walking”—to act and reflect on our actions as a collective over the last three years, and separately for many years before that.¹

The authors of this toolkit are movement builders, artists, and practitioners of PAR, justice research, cultural strategy, life-affirming approaches, collaborative

governance, popular education, and healing justice. We have worked in many sectors: housing, transportation, policy, labor, environmental justice, psychology, public health, communications, academia, dance, poetry, music, visual arts, and more. We are made up of diverse and intersecting identities: Black, Latine, Filipina, white cis and non-binary, queer and straight, spiritual, diasporic, and working class and professional class.

¹ Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

This toolkit is not our work alone, but a reflection of our experiences and relationships, some, but not all, of which we highlight here. As Antonio Gramsci wrote, we are made up of an infinity of traces. It is a process of ever-continuing radical consciousness to create an inventory of these traces and how they shape our lives and work. While it will be impossible to name all of these, we want to recognize in particular the gifts of Parceleras, GLITS, Casa Pueblo, the Village in Oakland, Three Walls, Southwest Folklife Alliance, Highlander Center, Friends of Peralta, Bay Peace, Civic Design Studio, Oakland Street Stylers, Lower Bottom Playaz, Chineze Mogbo, Chandra Christmas-Rouse, Safiya Eshe Gyasi, H.O.L.L.A!, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project, Safe Return Project, Richmond Listening Project, Sagaree Jain, Tera Johnson, Dalia Yedidia, Nicole Montojo, and Pauline Hassan Burkey.

We offer this toolkit out of deep respect and commitment to community organizers, culture bearers, artists, and knowledge holders who dedicate their lives to building with their communities toward a world that is more full of justice, belonging, and infinite forms of thriving. We hope you find it useful.

Background

This toolkit was developed during three years of supporting and working with organizers and artists doing transformative research connected to the Othering & Belonging Institute (OBI) at the University of California, Berkeley. The projects ranged from using surveys and radio programs to build out community solar projects, to film projects for intersectional disability justice. They included struggles to protect historical queer places, to cross-country road trips that uncover strategies of survival and resilience in unhoused communities, and sports-centered ways of engaging neighborhoods and places through gatherings and oral history.

These research projects were initiated via the Surdna Foundation's Thriving Cultures program, which supported BIPOC artists across the United States, including Puerto Rico, under the banner of Radical Imagination for Racial Justice. Three justice-oriented research organizations (Othering and Belonging Institute, Southwest Folklife Alliance, and the Highlander Center) were asked to support some of the funded artists and organizations interested in integrating participatory action research (PAR) in their efforts to advance racial justice in systems and structural change. For this reason, the toolkit has a particular emphasis on culture, art, and cultural strategy within PAR and transformative research.

Straddling the pandemic (2020–2023)—and all the related justice movements and struggles those years carried—we dealt with frequent disruptions, shifts in the winds,

and the incredible persistence and commitment of freedom struggles. In reflecting on and sharing our experience from this time, we hope to sharpen strategies and open new possibilities for transformation.

While most of our work (the authors of this toolkit) happens outside of formal academia, most of us have been trained, at least in part, in academic settings. This toolkit is also published by and organized within an academic institution. Given this, it is important to think critically and be proactive in addressing how academia continues to shape our work.

Even if no one on your research team is an academic or trained in academia, there are likely norms of rigor, validity, and foundational truths that have been inherited from the white, cis-male, Euro-American-centric academic culture. Without thinking about how we do research, it can erase community and cultural systems of knowing and feed an acceptance of white supremacy norms. To this end, in addition to recognizing harm, we can and should retheorize the lineages of research we use. There exists incredible efforts to make academic research more engaged, transparent, and with an ethos of solidarity. Others have struggled and pushed to raise the validity and power of community-based knowledge. It isn't perfect, but we see our work within this legacy of shifting power around whose knowledge matters, how research is done, and how it is applied for making change.

Reclaiming Research



Scan this QR Code to access the
Reclaiming Research section online.

Reclaiming Research

Forgetting is a tool of white supremacy. It keeps us from building on prior strategies led by our elders and ancestors.²

—Cara Page and Erica Woodland

I write to you about home, about our communities. I write to identify a persistent trend in research on Native communities, city communities, and other disenfranchised communities—what I call damage-centered research. I invite you to join me in re-visioning research in our communities not only to recognize the need to document the effects of oppression on our communities but also to consider the long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken.³

—Eve Tuck

If you are inviting your community into a transformative research process, having conversations about the harm that research has done and damage-centered research are important early steps. An analysis of damage-centered research can help establish a distinction between research as a process that can be decolonized, liberatory, or simply knowledge seeking and a formal research process that is not accountable to local community history, knowledge, and leadership, and is rooted in racist, sexist, or other oppressive assumptions. Local communities engaged in research will also very likely encounter critique of “unconventional or nontraditional” ways of knowing by dominant society, which may cause doubt.

2 Cara Page and Erica Woodland, *Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care and Safety* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2023).

3 Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities.” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Oct, 2009): 409-428, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/suspending-damage-letter-communities/docview/61828154/se-2>.

As we approach a research process, it can help to begin by asking a series of questions that help unpack our relationship to formal research processes:

- What have we experienced or learned from our elders about research done in our communities?
- What are the negative effects research has had on our communities?
- How has research been used to co-opt or remove community knowledge?
- How has research prevented our communities' responses and solutions to the challenges we face?
- How has harmful research taken away our communities' spirit of knowledge generation and curiosity?

We can also ask questions that help us reflect on research that has been positive:

- What types of research have had positive impacts in our communities?
- Who led these research initiatives?
- What did they do that was different from damage-centered research?
- What local, cultural, or Indigenous and traditional knowledges guided them?
- Who decided how the research was used?

Zooming out from our local communities, we must consider the broader question: How has research produced harm/violence against other communities across generations, geography, and identities? This helps us see how often dominant, formalized research processes reinforce a broader worldview based in white supremacist norms.

There are many forms of harmful research, such as:

- **Research exposing people to physical harm:** For example, gruesome gynecological experiments were conducted by James Marion Sims on enslaved Black women, who were denied anesthesia even though it was available. Nonetheless, Sims is referred to as the father of modern gynecology (see more on [medical racism and slavery](#), Vox).
- **Research attempting to justify racism and other harmful ideologies:** For example, scholarship supposedly proved the false concept that white people are a biologically superior race (see "[Naturalizing Social Differences](#)," Race: The Power of an Illusion).

- **Research that facilitated colonial dispossession:** For example, the Rwandan genocide has roots in work by colonial academic researchers who created a violent context of civil war by pitting tribes against one another.
- **Research that appropriates Indigenous knowledge as “discoveries”:** Many insights attributed to white Northern European and US academic scholarship are derived from knowledge stolen from Indigenous cosmology, myths and practices developed over thousands of years. For instance, corporations have used patent law to take ownership and exploit Indigenous knowledge and create pharmaceuticals and other products.⁴
- **Researchers that parachute into a community and take knowledge without reciprocity:** Many academics carry out interviews and surveys in communities then disappear with the data and do not report back or contribute to community-led efforts to address the issues being studied.

Even mentioning the word “research” often brings up past trauma, caution, and justified resistance in many community settings where harmful research has overshadowed beneficial and liberating forms of research. Far too much research has historically been done “on” or “for” BIPOC, queer people, people experiencing poverty, people with disabilities, and other communities, causing severe harm. Remembering the long journey of personal, collective, and systemic harm from research is a practice of reclaiming the process of knowledge generation. Reinforcing the importance of understanding Indigenous and local (her)history, practicing decolonization, and unlearning scientific racism are ways to reclaim knowledge and research as a practice of healing. In this way, healing justice reminds us that research is memory work.⁵ Recognizing the harm of academic scholarship includes the process of remembering and reimagining.

The harm of research reaches into our very identities and the foundational myths and history that inform them. For instance, in 1926, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, a self-taught Afrikan historian, challenged scientific racism by articulating that “the world is a lie,” in her seminal book *The Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire*. The book revealed hidden and buried wisdom of the great Cushite Empire that contributed to

4 For one recent example, see Marcos Vinício Chein Feres, “Biodiversity, Traditional Knowledge and Patent Rights: The Case Study of *Phyllomedusa Bicolor*,” *Revista Direito* 18, no. 1 (2002), <https://periodicos.fgv.br/revdireitogv/article/view/85701/80824>.

5 Cara Page and Erica Woodland, *Healing Justice Lineages* (North Atlantic Books, 2023).

developing many civilizations. The following statements can spark deeper discussion on where knowledge comes from:

- The Greeks are not the first philosophers of the world.
- Most of our current languages and words do not derive their origins from Latin and Greek culture.-
- Rome was not the first world civilization to build architectural structures connected to math, science, and culture.-
- Egypt or Kemet is not in the so-called Middle East, but it is in Africa.-
- Christopher Columbus didn't discover the "New World."-

Despite large, important, and varied bodies of radical scholarship by disabled, queer, Indigenous, feminist, and decolonial scholars, proactive interrogation of the impact of academic scholarship remains important. Notions of scientific rigor are sustained through institutional structures of white supremacy, patriarchal, Christianity empire ethics, rooted in population control and eugenics. Traditional academic scholarship and research reproduces scientific racism as truth that informs policy-makers and policies that affect the world and local communities. For example, traditional academic scholarship is rewarded with a points system—one that only assigns PAR a fraction of a point compared to more highly rewarded "double-blind" research studies. This impacts promotion structures within academia and also influences what is covered in the media or shapes policy development.

Reclaiming research places ancestral cosmology, spirituality, cultural tradition, and local community wisdom at the core of the collective inquiry process of trust building, testimony sharing, and knowledge generation for action. Reclaiming research as healing doesn't always feel good, but the struggle for reclaiming bears life-affirming fruit.

Cultural Strategy and Transformative Research



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Cultural Strategy section online.

Cultural Strategy and Transformative Research

Centering Cultural Knowledge: Methods of Surviving and Thriving

Centering cultural knowledge means turning to questions about what is helping a community survive and thrive. These methods of surviving and thriving get passed down and can be replicated and adapted to support healing generational harm and power building. Centering community knowledge may also require a critical look at types of community and cultural knowledge that create othering and oppression within a community and how to shift away from those. The following questions have helped us facilitate community analysis that recenters and cultivates your community's knowledge:

- Today and in the past, how have Indigenous peoples and local communities honored cultural systems of knowledge that support healing, belonging, and justice?
- How do Indigenous peoples and local communities develop knowledge systems that survive and thrive within this current historical context?
- What are the frameworks to critically analyze methods of survival toward the contributions of the people's freedom?
- What knowledge would help the community expand methods of surviving and thriving that are serving community wellness?
- How do communities analyze the strengths of communities as opposed to their problems?
- How do communities honor and revive ancestral traditions and cultural ways of knowing?
- How do community members center their mother's mother's consciousness? What knowledge shouldn't be shared outside of your community for danger of it being used to criminalize survival or extract resources and value?

These analyses foster remembrance of local and Indigenous sacred science, drawing from histories of knowledge systems of civilization development, cosmology, and ancestors' traditions that are integral to local community healing and transformation.

Indigenous peoples and local communities have a long history of cultivating knowledge to innovate and sustain methods for surviving and thriving. There are examples from ancestors, such as Hawaiian performances conveying cartographic knowledge, and Navajo verbal maps and sand paintings.⁶ Enslaved West Africans brought to Brazil were banned from practicing their culture and martial arts but invented ways to embed knowledge of their cultural identity and self-defense in play and dance through capoeira. These forms of knowledge and methods of surviving and thriving, often but not exclusively held in what might today be considered “artistic” practices, were often banned or undermined by dominant institutions because of the ways the knowledge created openings for self-determination. The Black/American Maroons in the Americas and Caribbean (from Florida, Cuba, and Mexico) reclaimed research as a system of community inquiry to develop their community infrastructure of sustainability.

Connecting Cultural Knowledge to Cultural Strategy in Research

As organizers, we are rooted in deconstructing oppressive systems through action, power analysis, and campaigns. Depending on how you approach organizing, it can feel like there is precious little time to add research as well as cultural knowledge or artistic practices into something so urgent and concrete. People often ask, do we have capacity to work with an artist? What if they don’t follow the talking points or timeline exactly? How does this align with our organization’s mission?

“resonance leads to work that is more deeply rooted and engages people in ways where they keep coming back. Resonance can lead to belonging within our movements.”

Our experience has been that integrating cultural strategy into transformative research makes space for visioning, world building, and radical imagination. A shared, transformative vision deepens connectedness, motivation, and commitment; in other words, the *resonance* of our work. Resonance happens when two or more things align to create a greater reaction or impact than they have individually. This element of resonance leads to work that is more deeply rooted and engages people in ways where they keep coming back. Resonance can lead to belonging within our movements. As the Movement Generation’s [Just Transition principle](#) goes, “If it is not soulful, it is not strategic.”

⁶ Margaret Pearce and Renee Louis, “Mapping Indigenous Depth of Place,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (2008): 107–26, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.32.3.n7g22w816486567j>.

Where does your knowledge come from? How was it transmitted?

How do you decide what knowledge matters and what doesn't?

Transformative research is meant to inform, catalyze, and support action for collective liberation. The type of data or information—in other words, the things we notice or not as part of research—or noticings that are *allowed* to be part of a research process informs the type of action that comes from that. A cultural strategy within transformative research is a political decision to disrupt dominant knowledge forms by intentionally widening the field of “data,” the practices of analysis, and how they are shared or activated in the world. It is not a rejection of a systematic process of generating knowledge but an expansion that is complicated and nuanced, with attention to not only whose knowledge is valued but what knowledge and how that knowledge is generated.

Cultural strategy in transformative research is the intentional decision within your research process to acknowledge, validate, notice, and integrate knowledge, practices, and worldviews that have led to survival, continuity, and thriving in the context of racial capitalism and white supremacy. Integrating the arts, cultural practice, and vernacular ways of knowing and being—that is, the aesthetic, the emotional, the embodied, intuition, traditional knowledge, noticing, listening, and ritual, among others—is a strategic decision to shift power in a research process. It brings in practices (such as those outlined in the previous section) that have been deemed by dominant cultures as nonauthoritative and nonobjective and, therefore, not of value in shaping systems. It can, and should, also create greater transparency in the relationship between the “observer” and the “observed” by shifting who holds actionable “expertise.”

How Cultural Strategy Strengthens Transformative Research—The Four Rs

Hopefully, by this point you’ve bought into the idea of cultural strategy, or better yet, you’re a longtime practitioner. But how does cultural strategy strengthen *research* that aims to advance organizing goals? The four Rs framework can help orient your team to the value and possibility of this integration. It can also be a helpful way to assess the impact of your strategies.

<p>RIGOR Thorough and Accurate</p> <p>Cultural strategy in transformative research asks us to explore how various worldviews (or epistemologies) shape our research, revealing biases and value systems that can exclude or add valuable information and distort or strengthen conclusions. Integrating arts and culture methods (such as dance, somatics, poetry, or photography) allows access to an expanded range of data, information, and processes for drawing conclusions, which creates a more thorough and ultimately accurate process.</p> <p>Example: Scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) was told she wasn't doing "science" when she wanted to understand why flower colors were so beautiful near each other. Pursuing her research question led to a new understanding of the interaction between flower colors and bee vision.</p>	<p>RESONANCE Deep Alignment between the Research Process and People's Inner Experiences</p> <p>We are moved by narratives, by our hearts, spirit, emotion, and feelings - not through facts alone (the brain science backs this up!).⁷ We are also moved when things reflect and honor our individual and cultural experiences (see for example how important this is in civic engagement).⁸ Arts and cultural practice create greater accessibility and more sticky engagement through honoring and engaging the wider range of our experience as humans in each stage of the process.</p> <p>Example: A PAR group that used poetry as a central research method presented at a city council meeting with legal analysis, quantitative research on housing challenges, and poetry created from interviews. Appealing to the council on emotional, narrative and factual levels, the work was not only well received by the public, but the council unanimously voted to direct staff to take up action around the proposed policy ideas.</p>
<p>REACH Expanding Who is Engaged and Activated</p> <p>If a picture is worth a thousand words...is a dance on a bus that gathers rider views on transit justice worth a thousand? Arts and cultural practice are flexible and inventive in how to reach audiences, respondents, participants, and in sharing findings. This can expand reach, but it can also support more intentional reach to communities or individuals often excluded from a process.</p> <p>Example: The Morris Justice Project - a PAR collective focused on stop-and-frisk policing - wrote a handful of academic papers, but the first way they shared their research findings was through a building size projection and data performance in the neighborhood where the research had been collected.</p>  <p>https://morrisjustice.org/dear-nypd/</p>	<p>REGENERATION Seeking to Heal, Energize and Re/Connect</p> <p>A cultural strategy within PAR leads with, honors, and takes seriously practices, language, ways of being, and knowing that have long supported communities in the face of systemic oppression. The research process should (re)connect people to ancestral, under-attack, or even contemporary practices deemed "outside" of a research process to create regenerative power for participants throughout.</p> <p>Example: Parceleras - an intergenerational group of Afro-Caribbean women in Puerto Rico - are working to fight displacement in their communities while building community capacity as advocates, storytellers, and stewards of the land. Their research process consists of a series of community-led interviews to collect oral histories and a series of workshops rooted in radical imagination as a strategy to ideate the future of their communities.</p>  <p>https://www.parcelerasafrocaribenasp.org/pln</p>

4R's

7 Rachel D. Godsil, "Mind Sciences and Creating New Narratives," *Othering & Belonging Institute*, March 23, 2018, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/mind-sciences-and-creating-new-narratives>.

8 Lisa García Bedolla and Melissa R. Michelson, *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Where to Start?

What's the difference between doing a mural or open mic on its own versus doing a mural or open mic as part of a transformative research process?

Oftentimes when organizers and researchers integrate art or culture, it is to convey a message or idea through an outcome like a mural or poem. The integration of transformative research into an arts or cultural process starts by recognizing that there is knowledge being generated through arts and culture. For example, making two hundred dumplings could just be that, or it could allow for oral history gathering while making them. Often, you don't have to do anything dramatically different. Rather it is a shift in thinking about how to systematically gather knowledge throughout the arts and cultural process without turning it into an extractive or tokenizing experience. Shifting processes in this way can amplify the value and significance of *existing* practices.

As you begin to work with artists, cultural strategists, culture bearers, or creatives, here are some questions that can help you get started without adding too much extra work to your plate:

- What do you and your organization consider to be actionable knowledge or “data”? Where does this sense of validity come from? Is it useful or can it be expanded?
- What practices and knowledge forms are already present and vital to you and your community? Is there an existing arts or cultural practice in your organizing work that can contribute to knowledge generation and research?
- What barriers exist internally and externally to activating this type of work? What resources or partnerships could support this activation? What would you have to do to bridge cultural knowledge with the demands of dominant practices in policy-making?

A Shifting Role for Artists

It is worth saying directly to the artists: working within a transformative research process means you will also likely have to shift your practice. You will be part of a group, opening up questions about authorship and ownership and the legacy of who can “claim” the work. The process will also ask you to be intentional about the connection to action, something that artists can at times resist out of an aversion to being overly direct or instrumental. On the other hand, to not “erase” yourself as an artist, you must be able to say what your nonnegotiables are (what won’t you change in how you do your work?) and be acknowledged for your specific experience and expertise.

It is important to also reflect on your relationship to research—in other words, do you create from knowledge created by others or do you facilitate a process through your practice? Skills you can expect to use in a transformative research process include creative, artistic, and rooted forms of facilitation, documentation, reflection, and analysis. For example, you may be a skilled poet, but you might also have to build skills around facilitating writing for others, group analysis of a poem, or developing creative opportunities to bridge policy or research materials.

Principles and Frameworks for Transformative Research



Scan this QR Code to access the Principles section online.

Principles and Frameworks for Transformative Research

We use the term “transformative research”⁹ to encompass a range of strategies for knowledge generation. Here are some common foundational principles across our experiences working in a variety of communities:

1. **Community self-determination:** community members deciding who participates in what decisions that govern the research.
2. **Strategic action:** oriented toward public action for equitable structural change.
3. **Power building:** strengthens, deepens, and widens trusting relationships for shared commitment to transformation.
4. **Critical knowledge:** commitment to reflection and learning for the sake of critical understanding and decolonization.
5. **Epistemic equity:** honoring all forms of knowledge and centering lived experience.

Processes reflecting these principles can be transformative at multiple levels: the level of the individual, the group engaged in the work, organizations and institutions, and at a structural level.

Impact of Transformative Research at Multiple Levels

Level of Transformation	Description of Possibilities
Individual Transformation	Experience can transform a sense of power or agency, an understanding of the interaction between the world and self, and knowledge for changing community conditions.
Interpersonal and Group Transformation	The process can transform relationships, shared purpose and commitments, and power in relation to institutions and networks.
Institutional Transformation	Transformative research can result in new organizations designed and led by people directly impacted by the work, and bring about new or reformed policies and public investments.
Structural Transformation	Transformative research can shift public narratives and norms, and change how entire sectors interact with the community.

⁹ We do not seek to replace or delegitimize other terms or frameworks for research, nor do we want to gain status by coining a new term. We felt that the frameworks we were familiar with were not inclusive of all the practices and strategies that we see as valuable for community-led transformation. So we see “transformative research” as an umbrella term, an entry point to various frameworks for research oriented toward social transformation.

Here we have collected several trusted frameworks that we draw on in approaching a transformative research process. Some may fit better for you or your community.¹⁰ We encourage you to take what resonates but not try to use everything. If you have the energy and time, try something new, as these frameworks come from a variety of hard-earned experiences and they all work! Regardless of which framework best suits you, we encourage you to start with breathing as a metaphor to build a felt sense of what we mean by transformative research.

Breathing: A Metaphor and Grounding Activity



Just like we all breathe in and exhale, we all naturally and regularly take in information and use it to shape our actions. We observe, learn, and share our learnings from our experiences navigating our environment—this is a type of research, even if we may not intentionally be doing it. Breathing is innate, it is natural, and we do it without being conscious of it. In the same way, we learn and hold knowledge about how to survive and thrive, but it can be undervalued, and sometimes we don't have time or space to notice and value it.

At its core, transformative research is a process of *intentionally and consciously* taking in something from the world around us, and putting out something from inside us, like the cycle of mindful breathing in and breathing out. When we mindfully breathe in, we take in what is around us with awareness and purpose. This means listening to our community and families, and observing our social and physical environment with intention, a process for reflecting on what we hear and observe, and mindfulness about how this changes our actions. When we breathe in, we are transformed by what we take in; it gives us life. When we inhale, we allow our diaphragm to be expanded by our external world. We integrate it into our own warmth and chemistry.

Then we breathe out with awareness and purpose. The exhale carries what is inside of us out into the world. Breathing out is like expressing what we know. It is the action we take

¹⁰ There are many frameworks for participatory action research (PAR) and justice-oriented research. We have narrowed it down to ones that complement each other and reinforce transformative principles in ways we felt support creative application for communities. Other wonderful frameworks and steps to PAR are listed at the end of this section.

that turns what is inside us into a force blowing out into the world. We can breathe out intentionally to transform a part of the world we most care about.

Breathing has transformative healing potential when we slow down and give our attention and intention to it. Similarly, knowledge about how to thrive is more powerful if we bring our attention to it and create space to notice, reflect on, and share it. In this way, transformative research can be part of healing justice, facilitating transformation within us to build power for transformative change around us. Remembering our head-to-heart connection and cultivating that open channel between our minds and hearts is a powerful form of healing. It is a way to catalyze liberated knowledge and action.

Popular Education

*All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you.*¹¹
—Octavia Butler

There is a deep historical relationship between PAR and popular education. As practiced by the Highlander Research and Education Center, “Popular education is the process of bringing people together to share their lived experiences and build collective knowledge.”¹² This is a powerful way to build **epistemic equity** as people come to see that “between all of us, we know everything.”¹³ Brazilian founder of popular education, Paulo Freire, called participatory research “the educational component of the revolutionary process.”¹⁴

Self-determination in a research process means that community members with lived experience of the issue of concern are taking ownership of planning and carrying out research. This opens up the possibilities for transformative experiences as these community researchers “learn by doing,” cultivating critical knowledge within the research group. Those who have been part of a PAR process often say that the people who do the research are the ones who get the most out of it. Doing research transforms us. We gain new knowledge, new skills, and new relationships. This builds power and collective commitment for transformative change by creating understanding of our conditions and what it takes to change them.

11 Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993).

12 “Mission and Methodologies,” Highlander Research and Education Center, 2021, <https://highlandercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/methodologies-EN-color-1.pdf>.

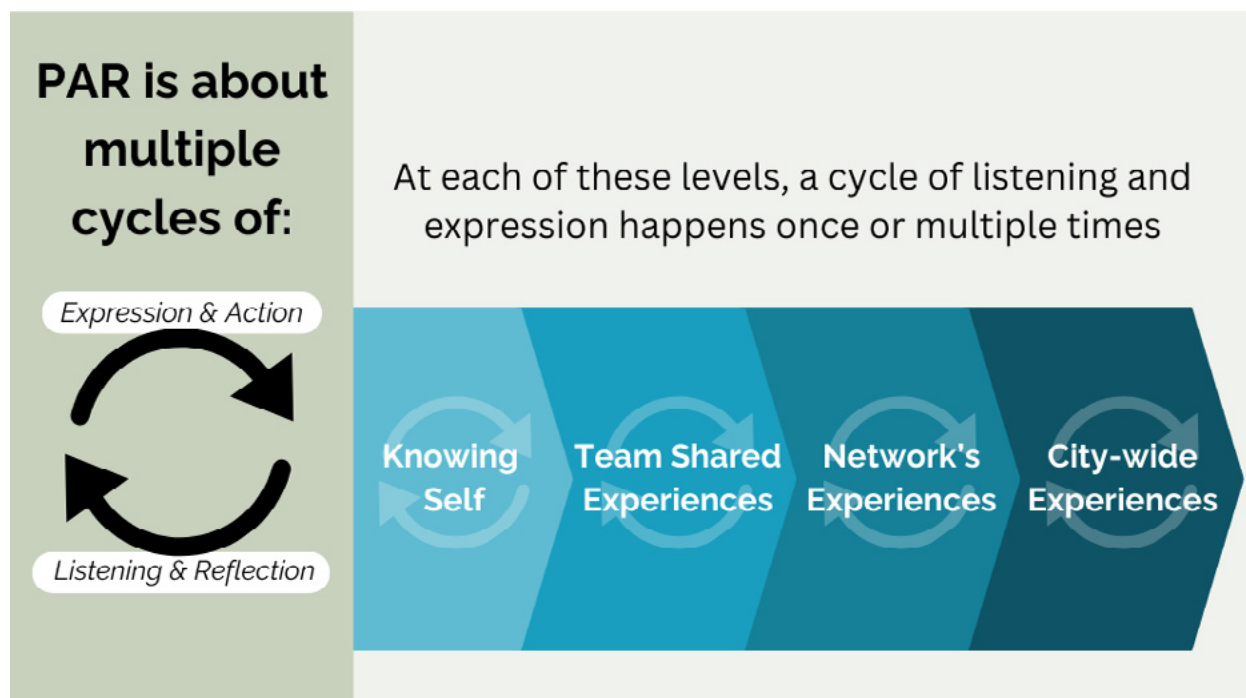
13 Ibid.

14 Paulo Freire and Myra Bergman Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1970).

Cycles of Action and Reflection

PAR is not a methodology, rather it reflects an “orientation to inquiry” focused on collective knowledge generation for **strategic action** on a specific issue facing a community.¹⁵ As opposed to a conventional research process where a lead researcher would predetermine a set of questions and ignore what actions could be taken, PAR invites community members to embark on a journey by alternating back and forth between action and reflection.

A PAR cycle of action and reflection can last five minutes or five years, and anything in between and beyond. In five minutes, two people can interview each other and plan an action arising from their collective analysis. That is a cycle. In five years, a community research team can survey a representative sample of people across an entire city, create reports and charts about trends in their city, and take action for structural change. That is a PAR cycle. The five-year research cycle will also have many five-minute cycles that are part of it along the way.



Cycles of action and reflection¹⁶

15 “Participatory Action Research and Evaluation,” Organizing Engagement, <https://organizingengagement.org/models/participatory-action-research-and-evaluation/>

16 This visual is an adaptation of the “Framework for Participatory Action-Research Praxiology” in *Nurtured by Knowledge*, 198, edited by Susan Smith, Dennis Willms, and Nancy A. Johnson.

One way to think about a powerful research process is to picture a spiral that starts at the individual level, then goes to the level of the team, then the network of people who the team is connected to, and then to the whole city or the population that the team is focused on learning about. At each of these levels, a cycle of listening and expression happens once or multiple times. For instance, at the individual level, the cycle might be each of us “listening to ourselves” by doing a timeline of major events in our lives, then expressing ourselves by presenting this timeline to the rest of the team. At the team level, we might all interview each other and then compare our responses, then express them by writing a collective poem about who we are as a collective. At each stage, we are collecting new information and expanding the strength of our analysis for collective, beneficial action.

Research Justice: Dismantling the Pyramid of Whose Knowledge Counts

What counts as knowledge? Whose knowledge has been valued as most legitimate?

These are political questions, and when we honor the many forms of knowledge that our communities have, we expand the possibilities for a more just world. Research justice is a framework put out by the DataCenter based on its decades of experience collaborating with social movements on research. In their extremely useful [Introduction to Research Justice](#) toolkit, the group redefines “research” and “expertise” as follows:

An important part of the path to Research Justice is debunking the myth that expertise is limited to formal education, or that research is a skill reserved for the advantaged few. People use research methods in their daily lives to acquire knowledge to improve their lives. They have expertise in both the problems they face and the solutions they need. This toolkit helps readers engage communities to recognize their own expertise.¹⁷

Research justice illuminates how the hierarchy of what types of knowledge are valued and legitimate shapes power and policy because it marginalizes the voices of people holding the less valued forms of knowledge. Figure 1 provides a visual of the dominant hierarchy of types of knowledge, compared to a research justice vision that values experiential, cultural and spiritual, and mainstream knowledge.

¹⁷ Reem Assil, Miho Kim, and Saba Waheed, *An Introduction to Research Justice* (Oakland: DataCenter, 2015), 5, https://www.powershift.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Intro_Research_Justice_Toolkit_FINAL1.pdf.

Figure 1. DataCenter’s research justice vision¹⁸



HANDOUT

Research Bingo!

Instruction: Go around the room and find a person that the question is relevant to, fill in their name and the answer to the question. If you get three in a row, you have ‘bingo!’.

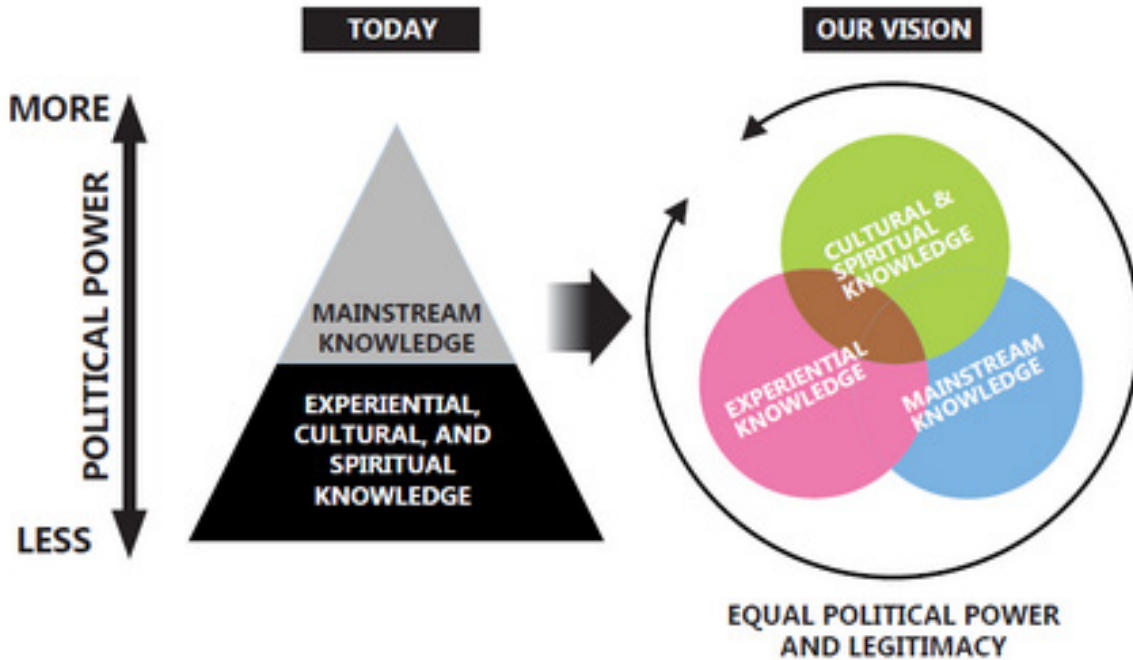
Note: You can’t go diagonal and you can’t fill in a person’s name more than once.

Have you ever...

<p>Asked a family member about your family’s history?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What did you learn that was new?</p>	<p>Learned how to cook a dish?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What did you learn that was new?</p>	<p>Read an article to learn about something happening in your neighborhood?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What did you learn that was new?</p>
<p>Learned a skill that involves using your hands?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What was the skill?</p>	<p>Viewed a report about your community?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What did you learn that was new?</p>	<p>Discussed with your friends an issue in your community?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What was the issue discussed?</p>
<p>Watched the news on TV to learn about what’s going on in another country?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What was something new you learned about the country?</p>	<p>Attended a cultural festival in your community?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What was something new you learned by attending?</p>	<p>Compared prices on something you wanted to buy?</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>What did you learn?</p>

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

Figure 2. Research justice bingo handout



Inequitable access to universities, data sources, and other research resources creates and perpetuates epistemic inequity. It means that communities left out of this infrastructure have less ability to mobilize their knowledge compared to the mainstream, or dominant forms of knowledge, like technical reports, professionally certified expertise, and statistical analysis. This is part of why reclaiming research is powerful—because it gives communities the means to produce **critical knowledge** like survey results or maps that are often treated as more valid by people with institutional power.

The [Introduction to Research Justice](#) toolkit provides workshop curricula, visuals, definitions, and other materials useful for facilitating a participatory process rooted in the research justice framework. The following bingo game (Figure 2) is a fun tool that is part of a workshop on centering community knowledge as expertise.

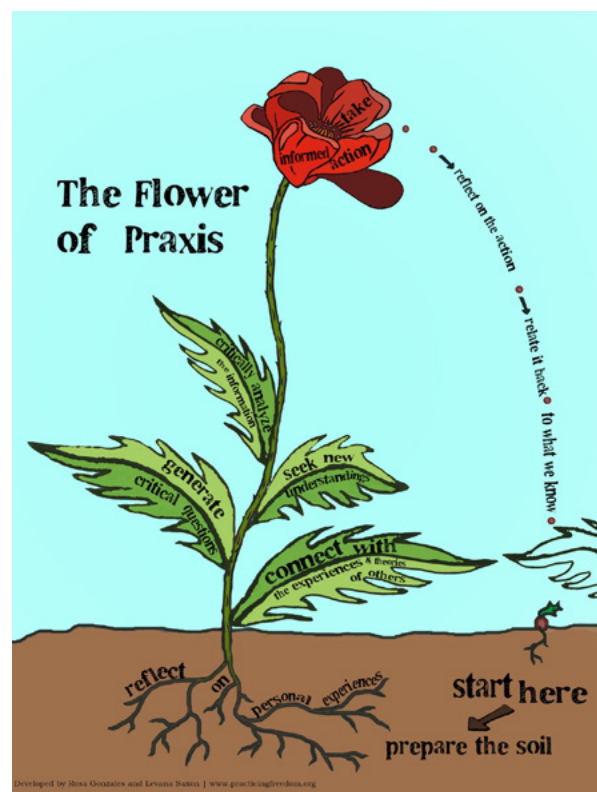
Tending a Flower: Planning a Generative Process

The Flower of Praxis is a tool developed by Partners for Collaborative Change that uses the cycle of a flower growing from seed to full bloom and back to seed as an analogy for a generative PAR process.¹⁹ We like this metaphor because as much as you talk or think or study how to grow a flower, at some point you have to do the actual work of applying your thinking. This is why it is called the Flower of Praxis, with praxis meaning the iterative process of taking deliberate action through moving between theory, reflection, and action.

¹⁹ See Partners for Collaborative Change, <http://www.collabchange.org/>.

The seed cannot grow and flourish on its own. Each part of the cycle requires mutuality and collective care from the soil, the sun, the bees, and other insects and from the seed and plant itself. Therefore, each of the steps below is cocreated and held by collective governance rather than by any one individual. The power is shared, and the benefits of the research and actions are shared. The cycle goes like this:

- **Preparing the soil—cultivating a fertile foundation for the work ahead:** This step is about building the readiness for a PAR process, including creating shared principles and values, identifying the focus of the work, outlining the where, who, when, and team and capacity building.
- **Sprouting and growing strong roots—personal and collective reflection:** This step is about learning from yourself and others about what issues and priorities you and your community have or want to address. This is also about internal and collaborative transformative growth. Uncover the nuances together to identify themes and goals for the work.
- **From seedling to small plant—generate critical questions and research design:** What big questions do you have that are important to find answers to in order to achieve your shared goal? These questions will guide the research. Who will you ask (sample)? How will you ask them (methods)? How will that translate into the tools you will use to collect your data?
- **Plant maturation—implementing your research plan:** This step involves applying your research tools to collect data, analyze your data for findings, and recommend action.
- **Plant blooms—taking informed and strategic action:** This step leads toward finding solutions in your community.
- **The flower is pollinated:** The fruits of your labor come to fruition, meaning real change has happened as a result of the research and action.
- **The flower goes to seed:** This is the phase where you turn inward to reflect on the lessons learned and reorient yourself, your team, and community to repeat the cycle. The seed is planted back into the soil, and the iterative process repeats.



By Rosa Gonzales and Levana Saxon,
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More Transformative Research Frameworks and Resources

There are many more frameworks and ways to approach PAR and other versions of transformative research. Often, people define their approach through an epistemic or worldview frame that explicitly names their knowledge system and political lineage. Here are a few frameworks and resources that we have worked with:

Framework	Description	Resources
Feminist PAR (FPAR)	“FPAR creates new forms of collaborative relationships essential to empower women and to amplify their voices and foster agency. FPAR is a political choice (as is all research) that starts with the belief that knowledge, data, and expertise is gendered, has been constructed to create privileged authorities, and that women have existing expertise that should frame policy decision-making.” ²⁰	“Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)” by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
Street PAR	<p>A methodological PAR framework that is led by folks that are “active in the streets or active in crime as a lifestyle, worldview, or cultural orientation..., and/or folk who are formerly incarcerated or returning [community members].”²¹ It centers street-identified people via their language; perspectives, lens, worldview, and assumptions; physical and social environment; and intersectional identities while recognizing their expert indigenous wisdom. Street PAR is also about reclaiming narratives about street-identified communities and building organizing power for structural change.</p> <p>Street PAR insists on practicing the most participatory form of PAR (i.e., not just having street-identified people collecting data), equitable compensation, and intentionally connecting street-identified BIPOC folks to community institutions to build power.</p>	“Street Participatory Action Research in Prison: A Methodology to Challenge Privilege and Power in Correctional Facilities” by Yasser Payne and Angela Bryant

20 “Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR),” *Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development*, <https://apwld.org/feminist-participatory-action-research-fpar/>

21 Yasser Payne, interview with Ashley Bohrer and Justin de Leon, *Pedagogies for Podcast*, podcast audio, November 11, 2021, <https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/podcasts/topics/street-participatory-action-research-methodology/>.

Framework	Description	Resources
Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)	CPAR focuses intentionally on questions of power and injustice, intersectionality, and action. CPAR views critical research as one more resource in, by, and for movements for justice. ²²	<p><i>Essentials of Critical Participatory Action Research</i>, by Michelle Fine and María Elena Torre</p> <p>Video conversation with authors of <i>Essentials of Critical Participatory Action Research</i>, by the American Psychological Association</p> <p>“Critical Participatory Action Research,” by Concordia Student-Run Food Group Research Project</p>
Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)	“YPAR is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them.” ²³	<p>“Community Futures. Community Lore: Stepping Stones” for youth participatory action research, by UC Davis</p> <p>UC Berkeley YPAR Hub</p>
Community-Engaged Scholarship	“Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.”	<p>“Guidelines for Evaluating Community-Engaged Scholarship in Academic Personnel Review,” by UCLA’s Social Sciences Division</p> <p>“Tenure and Promotion Resources for Community-Engaged Scholars,” by UCLA’s Center for Community Engagement</p>

22 Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre, “Essentials of Critical Participatory Action Research,” *American Psychological Association* (2021): 3-19, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000241-001>.

23 See “Why YPAR,” UC Berkeley YPAR Hub, <https://yparhub.berkeley.edu/why-ypar>.

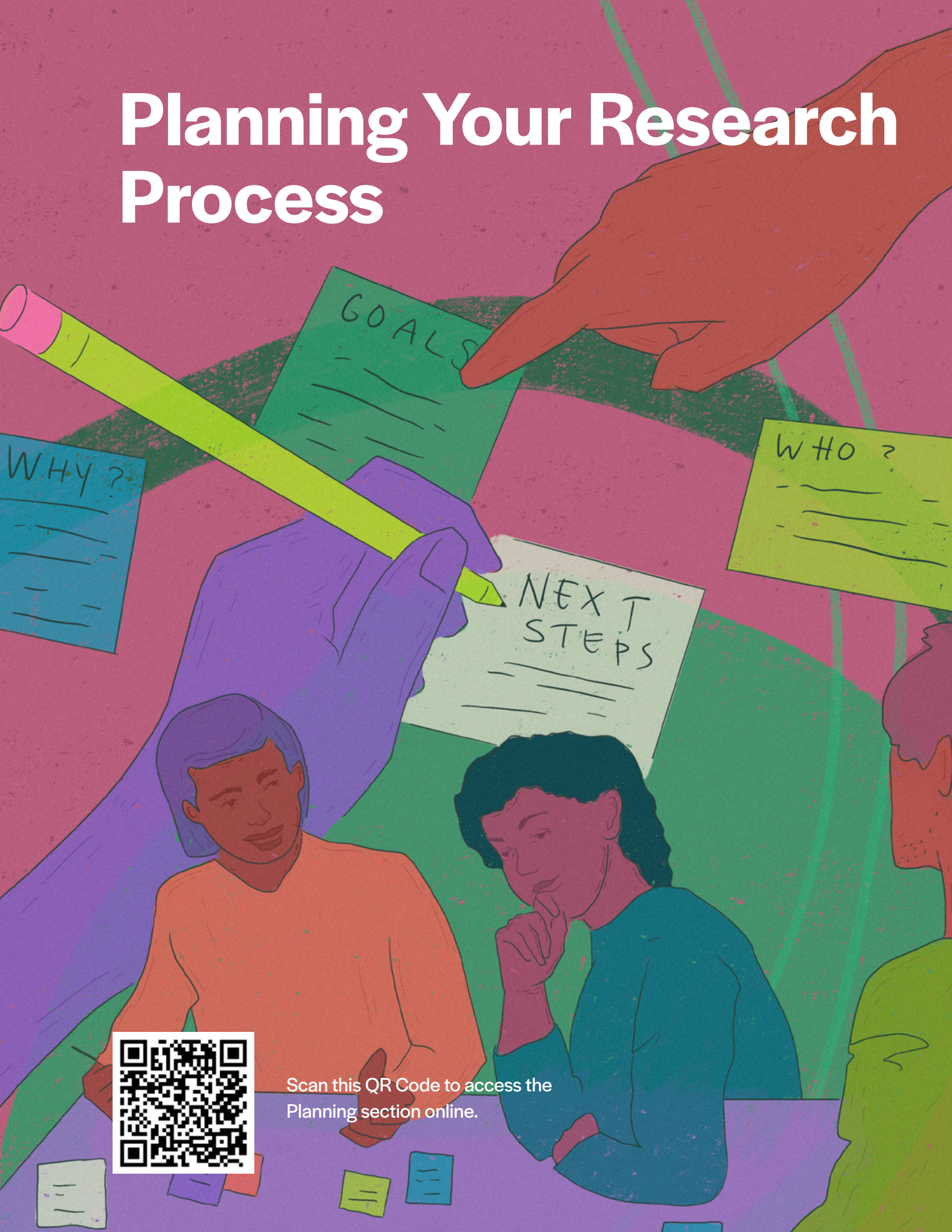
Here is a list of other PAR and justice-centered research resources. Many of these resources come out of academic institutions. While we recognize the need to continue to break down barriers that communities face in gaining access to university research and data resources, the following are powerful examples of the efforts made over the past several decades to do just that:

- [MIT COLAB: Participatory Action Research Maps: visualizations of PAR and processes by students](#)
- [Introduction to Research Justice](#)



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Planning Your Research Process

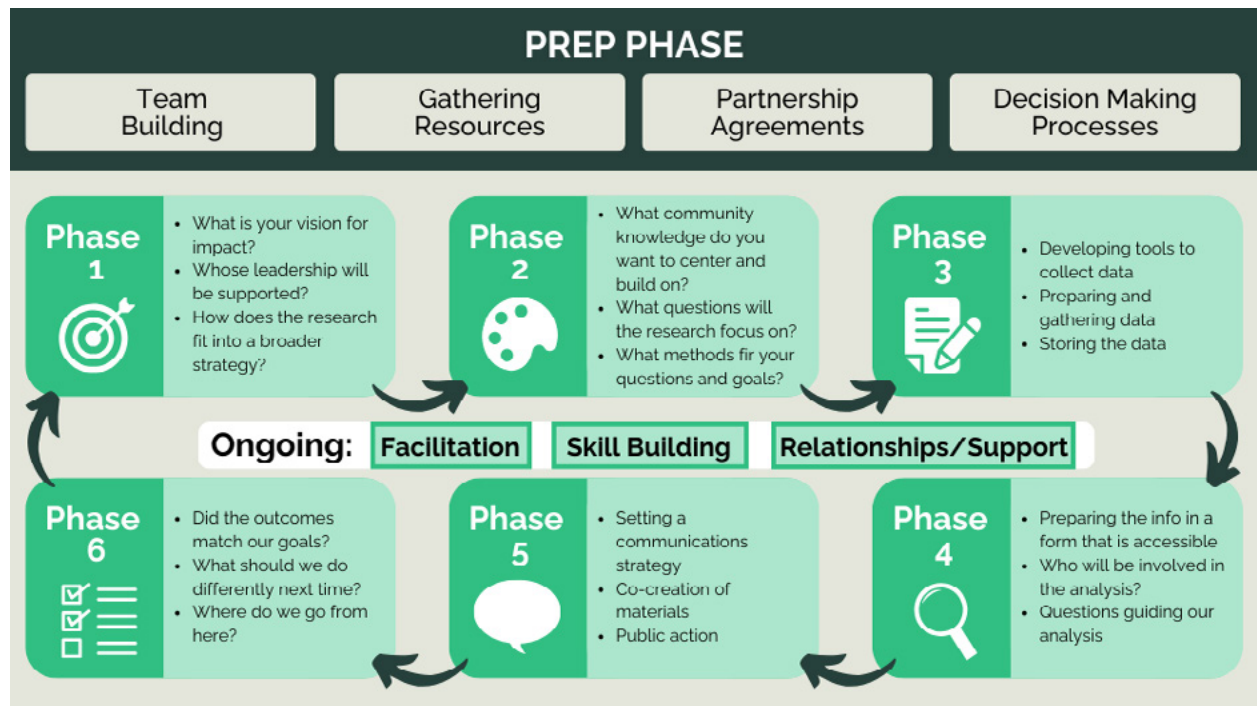


Scan this QR Code to access the Planning section online.

Planning Your Research Process

Regardless of the framework you and your team use to orient the work, understanding the stages and decision points in a research process can help everyone, including those with no formal training, guide the design and governance of your process. Each process is different, and each community will make unique decisions based on their own context and priorities. This section builds on the frameworks in the previous section by breaking down the stages in a research process, providing key questions and decisions to consider, tips on planning ahead, and resources and strategies that may be helpful.

Research Process Phases and Key Decisions



Phase 1: Setting Goals and Overall Strategy

You can start from wherever you are, even if it seems you don't have the team or the resources to have the impact you envision. This initial stage is about developing a vision for **why** you want to facilitate a research process, and **what values** will guide you. In this phase, you may be one person getting started or a small group that has come together. Research timelines and relationship timelines are not the same—the relationships have the ability to grow and last way beyond the research.

Vision and values: What is the vision you are inviting people to move toward? What values and principles will guide you along the way? Who will be centered in the decision-making and leadership of this process? What experiences are defining the people who will be centered?

Goals and desired impact: What impact would you like the research to have on your community and the world? What impact would you like the research to have on your team and the people involved in carrying out the research? What skills, relationships, and capacities do you want to gain? What actions can you and the partners be part of to contribute to your desired impact? How do you expect to be transformed by participating in this participatory research process?

Broader strategy: At this early stage, it can be helpful to do a **power analysis** (see Research Methods section) to gain clarity on who currently has power around the issue, what relationships you hope to strengthen, and who you are building power with. What campaigns or existing movements is this part of or connected to? How will your specific findings move forward a larger strategy of change?

Here is an example of a [planning worksheet](#) focused on a participatory research process that centers arts-based approaches to advancing racial justice. Feel free to adapt it to your situation!



Building a team, building trust: Building trusting and principled relationships within the team is a necessary foundation and ongoing process that is essential to collaboration. How will you begin to build relationships? What space will the group need to get to know each other? What are cultural practices that can be shared? In our experience, this can take a long time and may evolve throughout a research process. At times, a process must take a detour to repair trust if it has been broken. In the following table, we raise some of the issues that are important to discuss early as they can lead to conflict within a team if not addressed explicitly.

Key Topics to Discuss and Decide On with Collaborators

<p>Decision-making during the research process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What values and agreements will guide this team as it learns to work together? ▪ Who will be part of the planning and coordination of the research? ▪ What will be the decision-making roles and process? ▪ How will the group navigate power dynamics? How will you navigate personal and community politics? How will tensions, miscommunications, or conflicts be approached?
<p>Outreach and recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where are the people with the lived experience of the issues you’re focusing on, and how do you meet them where they are at? ▪ What obstacles might they face in accessing your project? How can you build trust with them or a trusted messenger? ▪ What experiences and readiness are you looking for people to come with? What are capacities they can grow into through their participation?
<p>Access and support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What challenges or obstacles do you and other community members face that might keep you from fully participating in and contributing to this project? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ language access, interpretation ▪ technical skills ▪ written word, writing ▪ childcare, travel, other logistics ▪ What could the research team do to address these challenges or obstacles?
<p>Resources and compensation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What financial and other resources will be available or needed for this project? ▪ How will people involved in the project be compensated? ▪ Who will be compensated for the labor they are putting into the process?
<p>Credit and representation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do you want to be recognized for your contributions to the research? ▪ Who will speak on behalf of the project? ▪ How can people “exit” the project in a healthy and intentional way if they need to? ▪ Who can write about the project in the future?
<p>Data ownership and privacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do you want to protect the privacy and confidentiality of people involved in the research? ▪ Who will own the data and make final decisions about how it will be used or shared now and in the future? ▪ What process does your team need to engage to have a shared understanding of the importance of data ownership and privacy?

Too often, people with degrees or professional training are compensated while people with lived experience are expected to work for free. Social movements have always required volunteers, but equitable distribution of resources and honoring lived experience means people bringing this experience should be compensated. This is especially important when economic hardship can keep some people from having the time to put into the project.

Ongoing Facilitation, Support, and Skill Building

Facilitation: Facilitation is the practice of posing questions, organizing conversations, and supporting a group of people to reach a shared goal they have for making a decision, gaining new understanding, or creating plans. Who will be planning and facilitating meetings and workshops? This can often default to the person with the most “authority” or the person who speaks the most. Building opportunities for shared facilitation or capacity building around facilitation can help share power and decision-making in the group. With that in mind, to make collective decisions that are strategic and have broad agreement with the team, the agendas and facilitation must offer structure and principles.

Skill building: What technical skills are needed for the community researchers to own, plan, and carry out the research in each stage? What training and advising will be needed, and who and how will this be offered? What skills are already on the team and in the community that might lend themselves to particular research methods? These questions are especially relevant when you decide on your research methods, which are explored in-depth in the Research Methods sections of this toolkit.

Support structures: What support is needed so that each member of the team can fully engage in the project? If issues outside of the project arise that create barriers for people to do the work, who is available to provide the support needed? This may be related to situations that arise in the lives of members of the team, such as losing housing, experiencing trauma, or dealing with other challenges. It is important to take time and extend support, which may look like helping someone connect to a service provider, providing mutual aid, or advocating alongside the person as they interact with public systems.

Related Resources

- *Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities*, by Robert Chambers, is a practical guide with many activities for facilitating participatory workshops and meetings. It provides tips, common mistakes, questions to ask yourself, and specific activities that can work as openings, energizers, and evaluations. It also includes insights on setting up the room, forming groups, and adjusting methods for larger groups of participants.
- *Moving Beyond Icebreakers*, by Stanley Pollack and Mary Fusoni, has over three hundred exercises for interactive workshops, organized into groups based on the purpose that they help achieve. The book also provides tips on designing interactive workshops, building agendas, and getting started with facilitation.
- *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, by Facilitating Power, provides a framework and practices for different levels of community power in a decision-making process.



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Partnership Agreements

Written agreements can formalize important decisions about roles, responsibilities, resources, and other key decisions. These are especially important when multiple organizations are collaborating or there is a difference in power or need to build trust between members of the collaborative. These agreements can take the form of a contract, which can be more legally binding and cover the distribution of funds. Or the agreement can be a less formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) or statement of principles of collaboration. It's also worth noting that some people may not want to work with written contracts because they come out of histories of racist property ownership or punitive outcomes. In these cases, building out a process for regular check-ins, tending relationships, and moving at “the speed of trust” is essential.

Template for Partnership Agreement

- **Goals for impact:** describes the impact that the partnership is committed to achieving. It could include specific products (e.g., reports, visuals, events), changes to community conditions (e.g., train five hundred residents in community air monitoring), or major activities (e.g., design and implement a community research project focused on prison abolition).
- **Principles and norms for how we will work together:** describes the way that the partners will relate to each other and approach the work. This can be high-level values (e.g., center the voices of the most impacted, prioritize healing) or ground rules (e.g., step up and step back, be hard on ideas but soft on people). Other issues it might address include how we will make decisions, how we will define and uphold confidentiality among the team and between those participating in the research, and how we will obtain consent from community members engaged in the project.
- **Roles:** describes who is going to fill the main roles in the project. It could identify a point person for each organization, a project lead, a person coordinating trainings and workshops, a technical assistance lead, a lead artist, etc.
- **Resources:** describes how money and other resources will be secured, held, and distributed. This can include commitments to joint fundraising, a specific breakdown of how much funding each partner will receive, or a set of principles about how any resources will be shared.
- **Data ownership and sharing:** describes how data will be gathered, stored, and shared to make sure any security, privacy, or data sovereignty needs are met. This can describe who is going to have access to specific datasets, who is allowed to make decisions about sharing data with others outside the project partners, or a decision-making process that will be followed before any data is shared outside the project.
- **Timeline:** describes the overall timeline for the project, the timing of any important milestones, or any principles or goals that require sensitivity to timing (e.g., a goal of having materials ready for the public at least two months before the city's next budget vote). Every PAR process comes to an end or a transition when the formal project concludes. Having discussions about the possibilities of relationship cultivation and transformation post-research process is important.

See [sample MOU](#) by the environmental justice organization West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project that was an agreement with their partner, the Environmental Defense Fund.

Collaborating with Academics and Technical Experts

Often, a PAR process may involve academics and technical experts. How you involve them in your team and process can have a major impact on the power dynamics, the capacity to finish the research project, and the usefulness of the research. Technical experts like academics, graduate students, or consultants can bring helpful capacity to design the research, process data gathered, and write up the findings. But these collaborations also require intention and care so that they do not replicate power imbalances, redirect the research away from your goals, or create other challenges.

There are some common challenges related to working with academic researchers to be aware of and address. In terms of time frame, academics typically work within a semester-to-semester calendar, so they may be under pressure to finish a project during a semester or before the semester starts. Second, universities usually value academic publications, not community reports or public actions, so academics feel pressure to publish articles about the research they do. This pressure pushes them to focus on questions relevant to “the literature” (the current debates among academics), which may differ from the questions the community has prioritized.

There are benefits to working with academics: they can bring needed technical expertise, critical concepts, and teaching skills. They usually don’t charge a fee, and they have access to and knowledge about libraries, databases, and other technical experts. They can also lend credibility to whatever is published or presented to the public.

See the UCLA Social Sciences Division’s [“Guidelines for Evaluating Community-Engaged Scholarship in Academic Personnel Review,”](#) which is a helpful resource when establishing partnerships with academics.


Data Ownership and Use

While it may seem like a conversation that can wait, decisions about who has access to and uses the data gathered can help you define roles in your research team, choose which research tools are appropriate, and ensure your community that the research is being carefully planned to avoid any harm that could come about.

Data ownership is complicated by the common use of digital technologies created by corporations that regularly gather data on user behavior and use it to predict, influence, and profit from people’s future behavior. This economic structure, known as surveillance capitalism²⁴ or data capitalism,²⁵ drives corporations to attempt to gather ever more detailed data about ever more people.

24 Poiesis, “What is Surveillance Capitalism?” *YouTube*, December 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcADchWhwUk>.

25 “Data Capitalism,” *Data for Black Lives* (2021), <https://datacapitalism.d4bl.org/#toc>.

You can choose which ownership rights you would like to hold over the original work that you put out. Creative Commons is an international framework with several different types of rights that you can select and then use their language and symbols to declare those rights. For instance, this toolkit is licensed under Creative Commons license [BY-NC-SA](#), which stands for “Attribution, Non-commercial, Share-Alike”. This license requires that reusers give credit to the creator. It allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, for noncommercial purposes only. If others modify or adapt the material, they must license the modified material under identical terms. This type of license is represented by this symbol: 

The [Detroit Community Technology Project](#) has guides, curriculum, and examples of strategies for community-designed and owned technology, including “[Our Data Bodies](#),” a popular education curriculum focused on data, surveillance, and community safety.

The “[Surveillance Self-Defense](#)” guide by the Electronic Frontier Foundation has a series of explainers to understand key concepts, practical guides for ensuring data security, and scenarios for thinking through how to defend against surveillance.

There are three fundamental questions to consider in thinking through data ownership:

- Who will have access to the data while it is being gathered, stored, and analyzed?
- What will the data be allowed to be used for?
- How will you make decisions about data security and use?

Phase 2: Deciding on Research Questions and Methods

Deciding on research methods is about orienting your research toward what you need to most powerfully move toward transformation. To build power and change systems, we often need several types of knowledge. Unless you have endless resources and time, you have to prioritize.

The [Research Methods](#) section in this toolkit gives in-depth guidance on eight different methods. Before you skip ahead to that section, you may want to think about what your overall goals are and think about how different methods compare. The following table starts with the ingredient for transformation, or what you need to catalyze action or organizing work. The second column lists what types of knowledge help create this ingredient. Column three points you toward suggested research methods.

As you go through the table, keep in mind that you might have secondary goals such as building relationships with your community or strategic “validity” or “legitimacy.” These considerations can help you fine-tune your choice of research method.

Ingredients for Transformation and Related Research Methods

Ingredient for Transformation	Knowledge Needed	Research Methods
Analyzing the issue or problem in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community members’ testimonies about what are the most urgent problems ▪ Data on the existing problem, how widespread it is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-depth interviews ▪ Survey ▪ Participatory mapping ▪ Open mics and ancestral ceremonies ▪ Census and other agency data analysis
Root cause analysis of what is causing the problems in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of existing policies and institutional practices related to the issue ▪ Analysis of public budgets related to the issue ▪ History of what forces created the problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral history interviews or focus groups of community elders ▪ Interviews with policy experts, agency staff, and advocates ▪ Budget analysis ▪ Archival research
Analyzing potential solutions and policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community members’ visions for new systems ▪ Analysis of other communities’ responses to similar issues ▪ Analysis of academic or professional recommendations of policy solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arts-based visioning workshops ▪ Review of case studies of community with similar issue ▪ Site visits to communities with similar issue ▪ Interviews of policy experts and advocates
Power networks and decision-making processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Charting the power that various people and groups have over the decision to adopt solutions ▪ Analysis of formal decision-making processes and laws to identify point of leverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Power mapping ▪ Interviews with legal and policy experts
Accountable implementation of policies and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the impact in the community that the policy is supposed to have? What is the actual impact? ▪ What are the institutional processes, roles, and people involved in implementing the policy or program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviews with impacted community members and agency staff ▪ Legal analysis comparing the written policy to actual implementation
Public narratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the arguments that people make or might make against your proposed transformation? ▪ What are the “big lies” that are told about your community that are holding back progress on this issue? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviews with stakeholders and influencers ▪ Analysis of media coverage ▪ Survey on public opinions

Phase 3: Collecting Data

The Research Methods section of this toolkit gives more detail about how to use specific methods for data collection, but the basic components of collecting data are:

- Developing the tools:** Taking time to carefully develop, try out, and refine your research tool will help avoid a later moment when you might regret not asking a particular question. Examples of tools are the list of questions for oral history interviews, the base map for participatory mapping, or the criteria you use to select sites to visit to learn about potential solutions.
- Preparing to gather data:** Preparation includes training and practicing gathering data.
- Gathering data:** This is where you want to be as methodical as possible, sticking to your plan and consciously adjusting it if needed.
- Storing data:** Keep the data safe from being accidentally erased or altered, or from being accessed by someone who doesn't have permission to see it. See our discussion of data ownership for more nuance on this.



Richmond Listening Project

Phase 4: Analyzing Data

Analyzing the data is when the group makes meaning out of what the collected information shows. This can be an ongoing process of reflection over multiple sessions or even over several years. You might ask something like, “What does it mean that X percent of people said that Z was true?” Or “Why do we think that all of the X are located in this area?” This is where you are looking to hear and affirm community narratives that make sense of and use the data. It is key to be honest about ways that the data might surprise or go against some assumptions.

Processing and Visualizing Data

Raw data is generally too vast for it to be a good resource for community reflection. Showing a spreadsheet at a community workshop can bore and intimidate people. So there is often a step where a trusted subset of your team will process raw data so that the essential information is synthesized and made accessible. It can also be the stage when academics “disconnect” from people who don’t have this training. If you are able, this is a great place to build the capacity of the entire team, or for the person who processed the data to show how they did it so that the process itself can be demystified. Synthesized data can include:

- summary statistics
- themes and quotes
- maps or charts
- specific stories
- slideshows

Facilitating Community Analysis

To gather fellow community members to discuss how everyone interprets the data, it is helpful to prepare interactive formats and give everyone ample time to think about and express their interpretation in multiple ways. Some examples of this are:

- **Gallery walk:** In this activity, posters with visuals of the data are put up around a room like in an art gallery. Participants walk around the room and talk about what they notice and write notes next to each poster.
- **Family Feud:** Just like in the TV game show *Family Feud*, ask participants to guess what answers were given to survey questions. It can be a fun, interactive way to review survey findings, followed by a discussion.
- **Small discussion groups:** sometimes the best approach is simply gathering in groups of three to five people to look over the data and discuss it using some guiding questions.

Phase 5: Public Action

Setting a Communications Strategy

Congrats! You planned and did the research with your team, and now you have relevant new data. Your group is in a powerful position to take action. But before you do, it is worth developing a communications strategy that allows you to be clear about who you most want to reach, the best way to reach them, and who will be the messengers. This is a good time to revisit your [power mapping](#), which clarifies who the key decision-makers are, who has power, and who needs to be educated and mobilized.

A communications strategy has a few basic elements:

- audience: who will receive the message
- messages: what is being communicated
- messengers: who will get it out
- strategy: how you will get it out
- work plan: for internal planning and deadlines

See [Communication Tools](#) by Spitfire for useful tools for writing a communications strategy.

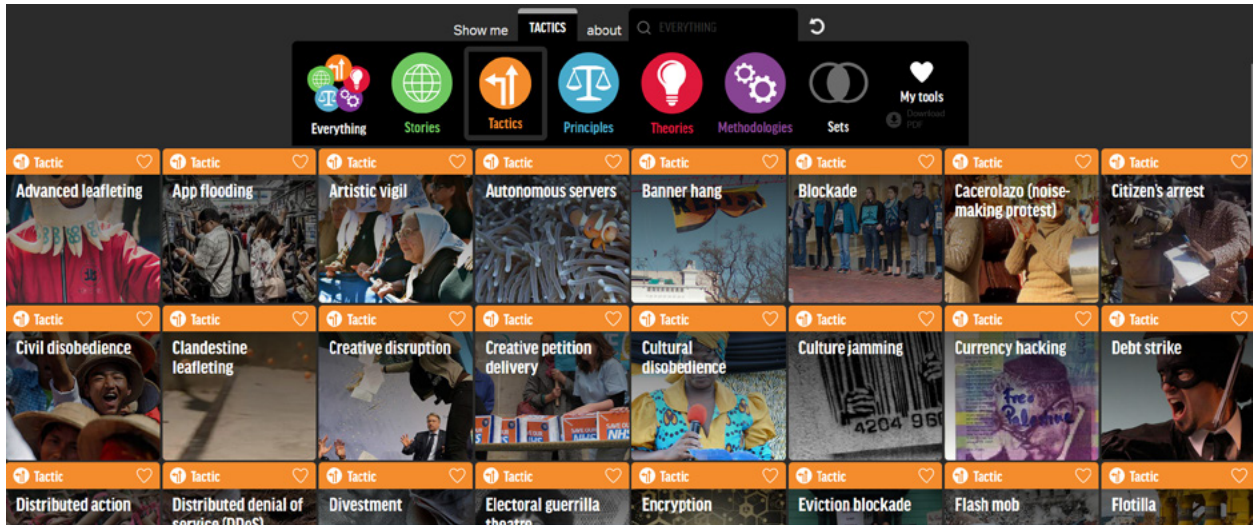
Cocreation of Action Materials

A community workshop agenda, report, fact sheet, flyer, or other materials are more powerful if they are created through a collaborative process. Once you have decided on a communications strategy, you can start making the materials you will use in that strategy. A basic process for cocreation of materials is:

1. Decide on roles for who is doing the writing, feedback, visual design, etc.
2. Begin initial writing or creation to develop a draft
3. Solicit feedback from specific people who review the draft
4. Discuss the feedback
5. Revise the draft to create a final draft
6. Decide if the final draft needs anything else before it is distributed (go back to the previous step if it's not ready)

Collective Action

There are millions of types of collective actions (for ideas, see [Beautiful Trouble Toolbox](#)). How does the action embody the message that the group wants to send? How are the research findings shared in an accessible and compelling way? How does the action reach the people who most need to be reached? How will the impact of the action be measured?



Beautiful Trouble Toolbox

Phase 6: Evaluation of Impact and Lessons Learned

At this point, we are often tired and feeling pulled into other work, so it's tempting to skip a real evaluation of impact and lessons learned. You have done your research, learned from it, and taken action with it. What did you learn from the process? What has the impact been? What was made possible in the world? What makes sense to focus on next? Who do you want to share these lessons learned with?

Questions to reflect on your impact:

- What new knowledge was created?
- What relationships were created or strengthened?
- What opportunities for policy or institutional change have appeared?
- How did public narratives about the issues and community shift?
- Were there any unintended or unexpected consequences?

Questions to explore next steps:

- What did your community find the most exciting, validating, or meaningful? Why? How do you continue to offer that type of experience to the community?
- What does this experience show about how the strategies worked or didn't work?
- What new opportunities have emerged for advancing community solutions that embody the world you envision?
- Who wasn't "in the room" that should be in the room next time?
- What would you include again in a research process (what did you do well)? What do you need to adjust in future processes?

Ancestral Ceremonies



Scan this QR Code to access the
Ancestral Ceremonies section online.

Ancestral Ceremonies

After thirteen months of critical PAR “camp”—cotraining and learning, strategy building, healing with each other (good enough), and building (deep enough) relationships and a (close enough) collective analysis—H.O.L.L.A! program organizers and a cadre of eight Black youth and one white youth created a grassroots-movement-based participatory format for ancestral ceremonies called H.O.L.L.A!’s Healing Justice Movement Circle Process.²⁶

The ceremony engages Black youth and communities of color in a process of healing interpersonal relationships to sustain and build spirit and collective hope for grassroots movement building. H.O.L.L.A!’s Healing Justice Movement Circle Process is a ritual of shared and mutual vulnerability, storytelling, Afrikan artistic expression, and cultural ceremony so that relationship building can take and sustain root. The process incorporates hip-hop, poetry, vibration, incense, sage, media, activities, interactive one-on-one dialogues, and group circles into a healing circle ritual or ceremony to discuss violence, the power of youth organizing, collective healing, and liberation.

Ancestral ceremonies are rituals rooted in the traditions of the ancestors (i.e., spirit). These ceremonies honor Afrikan, Indigenous, and local community members’ (her) historical relationships to land, body, and spirit. Ancestral ceremonies engage spiritual,²⁷ psychological,²⁸ and emotional healing²⁹ as epistemology or as a knowledge system. They create sacred spaces to communicate with the spirit world about personal, social, political, and professional realities and energies. They also allow individuals within a community to be in a space of authenticity; accepting what is true within this world as well as what is true in other realms of spirit and realities of consciousness.

The pedagogy of ancestral ceremonies is a process of connecting to the invisible, as an intentional practice to locate yourself to truly and honestly see others or to know others or to find the other within you. Ancestral ceremonies are cultural ritual, tactics, and methods related to cosmology, ontology, and epistemology to connect humanity, and all living things, to spirit. They are rituals in which the local community and people call in spirit (i.e., ancestors) to be the driver of activities³⁰ or, said differently, allow spirit to be the generator

26 How Our Lives Link Altogether! (H.O.L.L.A!) is a grassroots organization based in New York City that creates pathways and spaces for healthy cultural, social, spiritual, and political development for Black/Afrikan youth and communities of color to fight against and heal from the war on the seven neighborhoods in NYC that historically feed over 75% of the New York State prison system.

27 Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, “The Return to the Sacred Path: Healing from historical trauma and historical unresolved grief among the Lakota,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 1995.

28 Shawn A. Ginwright, *Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Urban Activists and Teachers Are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart* (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

29 bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).

30 Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community* (New York: J. P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999).

of culture and knowledge production within the participatory and communal process. Ancestral ceremonies sustain joy, culture, and methods of survival and resurrection.

Types of Knowledge Ancestral Ceremonies Generate

H.O.L.L.A!’s Healing Justice Movement Circle Process was politically and theoretically situated to study learnings at the intersections of multiple youth experiences, generational knowledge, and community-specific approaches to healing. Ancestral ceremonies assisted participants with reaching their dreams, connecting culturally with others, nurturing dreams of liberation, embodying new ways to be human, and practicing the “how” of healing. These ceremonies were important in H.O.L.L.A!’s participatory research process for providing hope and spirit to individuals and communities committed to grassroots organizing for collective healing and liberation.

To learn and study this process, H.O.L.L.A! conducted participatory data analysis—critical ethnographic, thematic coding and grounded theory. The analysis yielded six key findings of interpersonal healing to sustain and build a grassroots movement.

1. Wisdom from Ancestors and Elders sustains youth development and healing.
2. Journeying, through community learning, gives youth the ability to heal each other and with each other.
3. Grassroots and community specific rituals for survival and healing are important for healing youth in the process of building/sustaining movements (i.e., community and society development);
4. The Art of Cultivating Vulnerability as Emotional Knowledge for Healing;
5. Hope and Spirit to Build/Sustain Grassroots Movement by providing energy needed to sustain healing, organizing, and interpersonal relationships along the journey (i.e., grassroots movement building and radical healing process); and
6. Building grassroots movement in itself is a source of personal and communal healing that spans across generations, identities, social context, and the visible and invisible worlds.

These areas of knowledge were developed by integrating a community assessment survey and workshop evaluation process with the ancestral ceremonies. The assessment survey was shared with participants before the process started. The evaluation was given after the closing ceremony (Assata Shakur Black Liberation Chant).

H.O.L.L.A! developed the assessment survey with the advice and feedback from community members and academic experts. After six months together, H.O.L.L.A! began to examine survey development within academic literature. H.O.L.L.A! studied the Morris Justice Project’s “Polling for Justice,”³¹ the “What’s Your Issue” survey,³² the *Community Assessment to Study the Philadelphia “Negro Problem,”*³³ and *The People’s Report*³⁴ to better understand survey construction. H.O.L.L.A! began crafting their assessment, and many drafts were sent out to local community organizers, university students, PAR scholars, and seniors and elders for feedback, revision, and to deepen the analysis. After many rounds and ten months of dialogue and engagement on survey questions and factors development, H.O.L.L.A! completed a survey to assess youth of color experiences and expressions of historical, structural, and interpersonal violence, and youth desires to heal. The final version included three sections or factors:

1. If willing, please share experiences of structural and interpersonal harm.
2. If willing, please share desires to heal from structural and interpersonal harm.
3. If willing, please share who you are.

H.O.L.L.A! developed an evaluation with the advice and feedback from multiple tiers of community members and elders. The primary emphasis of the evaluation was to center feedback from other Black youth and communities of color who experienced H.O.L.L.A!’s Healing Justice Movement Circle Process. H.O.L.L.A! wanted to find out what went well and what did not go well during the process, as well as if anyone was committed to join the movement. In addition, the evaluation was created to learn if any healing took place, and if so, in which form. The final evaluation was one page and asked eight questions.

How Ancestral Ceremonies Can Build Relationships and People Power

This intimate practice of ancestral ceremonies with self, spirit, and community helps to build internal power within people and within the internal relationships of people who are engaged in the grassroots movements for collective healing and liberation. Ancestral ceremonies support individuals, communities, and spirits to see each other beyond this material world, and assist individuals and communities to connect to ancestors as a source of wisdom and power³⁵. Ancestral ceremonies are useful in participatory

31 Madeline Fox, “The Knowing Body: Participatory Artistic-Embodied Methodologies for Re-Imagining Adolescence,” *CUNY Academic Works* (2014).

32 M. Fine, M. E. Torre, D. M. Frost, and A. L. Cabana, “Queer Solidarities: New Activisms Erupting at the Intersection of Structural Precarity and Radical Misrecognition,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2018): 608–30, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspv6i2.905>.

33 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899).

34 Y. A. Payne, “The People’s Report: The link between structural violence and crime in Wilmington, Delaware,” 2013, https://www.thepeoplesreport.com/images/pdf/The_Peoples_Report_final_draft_9-12-13.pdf.

35 Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community*.

processes because “our souls and spirits require rituals to stay whole.”³⁶ Ancestral ceremonies aid Afrikan,³⁷ Indigenous, and local communities of color in identifying obstacles and problem-solving solutions they may see because of human limitations.



How Our Lives Link Altogether!

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

To build power through ancestral ceremonies, H.O.L.L.A! began outreaching to youth throughout NYC to organize relationship healing and preparing to launch their Healing Justice Movement Circle Process. To begin, H.O.L.L.A! compiled a list of eighty potential sites, locations, and organizations where Black youth hang out at. H.O.L.L.A! contacted each site and consequently led over seventy healing circles (some organizations experienced two to four circles each) from December 2016 to June 2019, servicing a wide range of organizations and institutions, including Rikers Island, community-based organizations, social services agencies, and schools. As H.O.L.L.A! began facilitating their Healing Justice Movement Circle Process across the city, word spread and people from inside and outside NYC began reaching out to engage in a ceremony.

Every ancestral ceremony has its own unique flow, properties, community, and needs specific to resources, times, people, and spirit. Before going into an ancestral ceremony process of individual and collective healing, we are often asked to think about our ancestors and the questions they posed to us years ago. One such question is, “Are you

36 Sobonfu Somé, *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient Teachings in the Ways of Relationships* (Harper Collins, 2000).

37 Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community*.

sure that you want to be well?”³⁸ There are many more questions to ask, but you, your community, and ancestors are best situated to know what is needed to ground your spirit for the journey.³⁹

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Ancestral ceremonies “are a dance with spirit, the soul’s way of interacting with the other worlds, the human psyche’s opportunity to develop a relationship with the symbols of this world and the spirits of the other.”⁴⁰

There are many types of ancestral ceremonies at different levels of community and self and self-community.⁴¹ It is important to recognize what is and is not an ancestral ceremony. Symbols are a key element of ancestral ceremonies. Symbols help connect the material world to the spirit, ancestor, invisible world(s). Healing Justice Circles’ talking pieces and altars are examples of symbols. Spirit, children, elders, youth, and adults are all welcome to ancestral ceremonies.



How Our Lives Link Altogether!

38 Toni Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (London: Penguin Books, 2021).

39 Tanya Smith Brice and Denise McLane-Davison, “The Strength of Black families: The elusive ties of perspective and praxis in social work education,” *University of Kansas Libraries* (2020), <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/30253>.

40 Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community*.

41 Ibid

Ancestral ceremonies have their own unique energies, spirits, and ancestors driving the relationships, expressions, and activities. People and community participating, facilitating, and invoking ancestral ceremonies determine the elements needed, time commitment, and values to make the ritual work. These ceremonies require intentions and stated purposes. They take the form of Afrikan, Indigenous, and local communities' practices of prayer, folklore, religion (infused with indignity), rap ciphering, healing circling, poetry, drumming, dancing, radical imagination, murals, movement building and sustaining (i.e., organizing), smudging, and much more. Anytime people gather, under the protection of spirit, that triggers an emotional energy aimed toward bringing the people tightly together or to bring a person more tightly together with themselves, an ancestral ceremony of one type or another is in effect.⁴²

Weaving Cultural Strategy

To participate in ancestral ceremonies (i.e., ritual) is to know a whole line of ancestors are behind you.⁴³ The practices of ancestral ceremonies are integral to the healing of researchers and local communities. Grassroots movement-building frameworks of scholarship and other critical frameworks honor Afrikan, Indigenous, and local communities' methods and praxis of knowledge production to help ground the researcher spirit throughout the research engagement and activities. Ancestral ceremonies require researchers, practitioners, and community members to pause from hyperproductive professionalism to dive into self-purging, historical study, and emotional rebalancing that is directly connected to rigorous empirical study and personal transformation,⁴⁴ which is needed to develop further praxis within the field of scholarship and beyond. These ceremonies as a pedagogical praxis allow space for researchers and organizers to connect to their own purpose within the research process and have the opportunity to align their own purpose with multiple purposes of those they research with.⁴⁵

42 Ibid.

43 Somé, *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient Teachings in the Ways of Relationships*.

44 hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*.

45 Cynthia B. Dillard, Daa'lyah Abdur-Rashid, and Cynthia A. Tyson, "My Soul Is a Witness: Affirming Pedagogies of the Spirit," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 13, no. 5 (2000): 447–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050156404>.



How Our Lives Link Altogether!

Related Resources

- [The BREATHE Collective](#)
- [Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice](#)
- [Urban Peace Movement](#)
- [Black Women’s BluePrint](#)



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Archival Research



Scan this QR Code to access the
Archival Research section online.

Archival Research

The People’s Riisearch Archive is an ongoing project that aims to collect, compile, share, and mobilize materials about the queer history of People’s Beach at Jacob Riis Park in Neponsit, Queens, New York City, in the wake of significant changes to the beach’s built environment. Official decision-making and information-sharing processes have prioritized nearby homeowners and often failed to effectively include a largely nonresidential community of queer beachgoers.

Participatory archival research is often used to build collective knowledge about lived experiences of collective and institutional-scale events like a social movement, migration history, the passage of a law or policy, or life in a particular place or among people of a shared identity. Archival research generates knowledge about historical contexts in the present day, helping build knowledge about processes of change and how we got where we are today.

The People’s Riisearch Archive recognizes the role that archival materials have played in making claims to the space outside of formal ownership and seeks to compile archival materials into a digital “community archive hub.” While property records (a form of archiving that represents one particular way of relating to land) are often used to demonstrate claims to a place, community organizers and advocates have mobilized archival evidence from as early as the 1940s to make historical claims to the beach as a sacred space of queer gathering.

Participants in the project include representatives and members of a local organization, GLITS; a university-center partner, OBI; a team of “riisearchers”; and a wider community of beachgoers. Participants may locate relevant materials in existing institutional archives or publications and share the location of those materials; interview queer elders about their experiences on and memories of the beach; record their own memories in an on-site audio recording booth installation (“oral futures booth”); contribute their own photographs, event flyers, stories, and other ephemera related to the beach’s social space; and annotate, respond to, make art about, and otherwise engage with such materials through installations, workshops, and online submissions.

A beachgoer makes an audio recording on the beach, responding to the prompt “Share a memory you want to shape Riis’s future.”

Types of Knowledge Archival Research Generates

Traditionally, archives have acted as evidence-based enforcers of dominant or exclusive stories of why things are the way they are today. But broadly understood, an archive can be about anything that people direct enough resources toward preserving. For example, an archive might give evidence about:

- the life of an individual (e.g., the *Robert Moses Papers* at the New York Public Library or the *Octavia E. Butler: Telling My Stories* collection at The Huntington)
- the experiences and actions of a community or the people organizing around a particular identity (e.g., [the Lesbian Herstory Archives](#), which houses materials about lesbians and their communities, or [Building a Black Archive](#), which focuses on Black Diasporic communities in Canada)
- an event or social movement (e.g., the [#searchunderoccupy](#) exhibit, which focused on the Occupy Wall Street movement, or social movements more generally as is the case with [Interference Archive](#))
- a cultural practice or artform (e.g., [New York Quilt Project](#))

As you can see, archival research might involve drawing on multiple archival sources. As such, the potential knowledge generated from archival research, in terms of subject areas, is quite vast.

Participatory archival research is adept at making connections between the present-day and historical moments or recognizing the present as future history. Participatory archival research can, then, act like a time machine, allowing participants to connect to the past by interacting with preserved materials and connect to the future by preserving contemporary materials so future community members, organizers, activists, cultural



Beautiful Trouble Toolbox

workers, historians, and other interested people may access them. As such, participatory archival research can help build intergenerational knowledge. It is particularly useful when navigating displacements or generational disruptions and when considering people, identities, histories, practices, and narratives that have been under- or misrepresented, undervalued, obscured, and otherwise denied resources.

How Archival Research Can Build Relationships and People Power

Understanding the root causes of present-day problems is an essential part of communities knowing their power. Archival research is a method for making visible the artifacts of the past that illuminate how things got to be the way they are in the present. The hiding or destruction of evidence does not need to be overt or intentional to have an impact on a community's ability to provide evidence of their efforts and activities. But loss of evidence can be considered a violent erasure of the histories and peoples which they represent. If an institution floods, or a community center downsizes and lets go of old materials, or a family photo album is lost in a fire, the histories of these times and places cannot easily be reproduced.

When potential or existing archives are damaged, undervalued, or improperly preserved, what's often left are oppressive surveillance and capital-driven archives such as police records, court proceedings, and property records. Participatory archival research is often responsive to this and aims to both consider the material needs of preservation of existing archives and document and preserve memories and materials as sources of evidence for future needs.

As archival research often generates collective knowledge about a community, culture, and place, it is particularly well suited for building intergenerational relationships and a sense of belonging and connection. The act of gathering, sorting through, and otherwise relating to archival materials together collectivizes this experience and provides ample ground for reflection and relationship building among participants. Living archives and other models that invite ongoing commentary from participants also use the archive as a forum for conversation among contributors over time. Archives about a community redistribute narrative authority away from top-down institutions.

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

Care for archival materials can be challenging. Have you ever struggled to find your own birth certificate, pay stub, or maybe even a favorite photo on your phone? Maybe you have opened an old notebook and noticed some of the ink was faded or water

damaged, brought out an external hard drive only to realize you didn't have a matching port on your computer, or lost access to a social media account. Effective archiving is supported by resources like time, physical and digital storage space with protection from the elements, tech equipment capable of reading relevant data formats, backups of files, and organizational strategies like tags, descriptions, and finding guides. Robust archiving requires institutional and collective care, as is the case with government, university, museum, corporate, organizational, community, and participatory archives, as well as initiatives directed toward supporting people in preserving, organizing, and making long-term plans for their personal archives.

The archive and the process of archiving should not be considered a finished product. At its best, archiving is open to new information about past events and acknowledges limitations that may have contributed to existing evidence.

A document with a list of questions that will help you to identify the resources needed to build an archive, open an existing archive to deeper participation, and engage in participatory research through archival materials can be found in the Related Resources section.

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Myth 1: Power over = objectivity and authority

A critical PAR approach to archival research invites curiosity about how power impacts what is preserved (and what is not) and attempts to transform myths of objectivity. Universities, libraries, and government institutions are authorities on neither truth nor value despite projections of dominance and legitimacy. Their exclusions prevent robust, textured, and collective knowledge making.

It is essential to maintain a critical eye on sources. Read between the lines for evidence of resistance to modes of surveillance and documentation that end up archived, validate people's knowledge and sense of expertise regarding their embodied experiences, and navigate or challenge access restrictions.

Myth 2: Permanence

While archives are intended to be preserved, physical and digital materials alike are subject to damage and degradation. They might be impacted by environmental and climate injustices such as floods and fires. Changes in institutional capacity might also leave an archive vulnerable to a decrease in or loss of care. Additionally, changes in the present impact the meanings of archived materials—for instance, the destruction of a landmark might give new meaning to an image including it.

This means participatory researchers should include making long-term plans for passing something down and transferring care, storing backups of materials, building in processes for iterative description and commentary, and fighting for safer and more just conditions for all. This will ensure that people have access to the materials needed to care for themselves and sources of evidence of their living.

Myth 3: Archives are all organized with participatory researchers in mind

Organizational strategies may and often do differ from participatory research imperatives and community needs in ways that can make searching for materials for specific ends difficult. While finding guides may be helpful, consider asking librarians, archivists, and people who have researched the collection for support. Bring a notebook and, if allowed, a camera to support documentation of what you do come across in an archive so that you can share it with others and reflect later.

Weaving in Cultural Strategy

The reclaiming and rethinking of archives through research has been impactful within social justice movements and in the public more broadly, as evidenced by backlash “culture wars” over the interpretation of Black history, queer history, Asian American history, and more. Grounding in what we know today of how we interpret, navigate, create love and joy, and survive the world can provide insight into existing historical archives, as well as insight into abundant gaps that have erased and flattened historically othered people. Toni Morrison’s landmark novel *Beloved*, for example, derives from Morrison’s creative inquiry into a newspaper clipping. Likewise, your PAR group can build upon evidence pulled from archival research through collage, writing, fiction, and letter writing to deepen and create complexity in the interpretation, opening up new questions and lines of inquiry in the process.

Archival research can also be a source of community reconnection and advocacy, as evidenced by the work of the Texas Freedom Colonies Project. Freedom colony descendants led a process to document the hundreds of small, often off-the-grid free towns established by Black Americans in Texas after emancipation. Many of these processes involve the integration of oral history, storytelling, and other folklore practices in conversation with the presence of bits of evidence found in the archives—be they official or familial.

To bring greater relevance to researchers, your PAR team may also want to think about your work in relation to future archives and the importance of documenting your own process in the way you want to leave it for future researchers and families.

Related Resources

Participatory archival research:

- [Memory Lab Network](#)
- [Build Your Archive](#)
- “[Questions for Building an Archive](#)” contains a list of questions to help you identify the resources needed to build an archive, open an existing archive to deeper participation, and engage in participatory research through archival materials.
- “[Your Personal Archiving Project: Where Do You Start?](#)” Library of Congress Blogs
- [Collections Care](#) guides by the Library of Congress provide basic information on care, handling, and storage of collections of paper, photographs, audiovisual formats, and other materials.
- [Digitization for Everybody](#) is a course about the present state of standards and recommended best practices for creating high-quality digital still images of textual documents, photographs, graphics, and other “flat” cultural heritage resources.
- [Documenting the Now](#) develops open-source tools and community-centered practices that support the ethical collection, use, and preservation of publicly available content shared on web and social media.
- [StoryCorps DIY](#) is a set of multimedia, self-paced courses for community organizations seeking to embed storytelling into their work.

Participatory archival projects:

- [Building a Black Archive](#)
- [Texas Freedom Colonies Project](#)
- [Queering the Map](#)
- [Queer Maps](#)
- [Stories of Care and Control](#) by Healing Histories Project
- [NYC Trans Oral History Project](#)



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Interviews



Scan this QR Code to access the Interviews section online.



Interviews

Interviews are useful for gathering stories, deeply held beliefs, metaphors, and other knowledge and building one-to-one relationships with the community. Interviews are often thought of as a direct, simple, and trustworthy research form. Part of their trustworthiness is based on an interview's emphasis on a spoken answer. Artists can play with this format by bringing in other forms of expression (movement, visuals, poetic responses), creating more comfortable and intimate contexts, and bringing interviewees into the process of developing or interpreting the interview questions. This supports interviewees and storytellers in sharing their authentic feelings, as opposed to what they *think* they should feel (social desirability bias) while also expanding the notion of what "data" is and how it can be collected. This expands the types of knowledge to draw from when understanding and solving a problem.

A Black and Brown queer-led effort called [MoralDocs](#) in Providence, Rhode Island, used interviews as part of a research-based, cultural strategy process focused on abolition and health justice in their community. Vatic Kuumba and Shey Rivera were the leading artists of the collaborative, which was made up of system-impacted community members and artists and PrYSM, an abolitionist, youth base-building organization. The group also sought support from a PAR and health justice consultant and longtime community ally, Justice Alchemy. The group conducted interviews with community members to gain insights into their community's experiences with public safety and law enforcement systems. They also facilitated a meditative visualization activity asking community members to imagine their visions for a healthful, liberated future.

The interviews uncovered knowledge on dynamics with community members and the police and fire departments. They also held space for storytellers to share their stories, emotions, and desires on their own terms while also staying focused on the priorities established through prior aspects of the project. The visualization activity built experiential capacity for storytellers to imagine a generative, expansive, healthful, and liberated future. Bringing this into the research method intentionally weaved life-affirming ways of knowing into the process that otherwise may not have been uncovered.



Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)

With the storytellers' consent, the collaborative used the interview data, survey data, and secondary research to bring fictionalized versions of the community members' narratives to life on screen via a collaboratively written multimedia series. The series envisioned what it might look like to achieve a safe, healthy, and liberated Providence in the not-so-distant future. Additionally, the group organized to gain access to and influence a public safety department's assessment process and report done by a consulting firm working for the city. The group used the data from the report and their own interviews and secondary data to put out a narrative of what the city needed from a frontline community perspective. This effort helped substantiate the need for reallocation of funds from punitive and militaristic measures to life-affirming, health justice, and community-led programming.

What Type of Knowledge Interviewing Generates

Interviews provide knowledge on the underlying processes, dynamics, emotions, and histories that other methods, like surveys and focus groups, do not. Interviews offer an opportunity to collect in-depth, tender perspectives expressed in people's own language and logic. They can generate collective knowledge from day-to-day and lifetime experiences by centering community voices and expertise. The data is not generalizable to a broader population because the sample size is small and intentionally not

randomized. For example, interviews will not give you reliable data about what percentage of people feel a certain way or have experienced a specific event. However, because PAR projects are led by community leaders determining their own research priorities for action in their own community, you may decide that the depth of why people are experiencing something is more important than data on how widespread an experience is.

How Interviews Can Build Relationships and People Power

Interviews create an opportunity to establish and deepen relationships, build community leadership, and create a point of contact to link people with organizing networks. One effective way organizers can use interviews is to generate testimonies that can be told as part of a campaign and media strategy. Interviews can also preserve community history and records and assert community narratives that dispel assumptions and stereotypes that dominant media and society project on you and your community.

Interview data can also build shared knowledge to foster community healing while strengthening community capacity for organizing. When an individual is given the opportunity to take space to tell their story, it can activate “power within,” and in sharing community stories (if consent is given), it can cultivate trust and empathy among participants. Storytellers may decide to join the PAR team and project. Having community members learn how to interview, process data, and analyze it is another way interviews can help build power in a PAR process. These skills equip community members to lead their own research on their community and to bring these transferable skills to other parts of their lives.

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

To honor the storytellers and ensure a quality analysis, it’s important to budget enough time to hold the interviews (typically two hours) and to analyze data. You will need ample time (more time than you’ll think) for planning, recruitment, conducting interviews, processing and analyzing data, and reporting out the learnings. Interviewers can have varying skill levels depending on the interview design you use (see below Figure 3).

Overall, an interview is a low-cost, generally accessible research method as you will only need an accessible, inviting place, a recording device, a computer, an ability to print transcripts, and, ideally, multiple computer screens for ease of transcript review and analysis. You may also need translation and an interpreter if interviewers do not speak the same language as the people being interviewed.

Interviewers require sensitivity, compassion, and healthy boundaries. For example, when discussing traumatic and sensitive topics, interviewers should bring a high level

of emotional intelligence and skills in discussing painful topics with consent, care, and respect. You may experience vicarious trauma by virtue of holding space for your storytellers and interviewees. So, it is important to use self-care practices as interviewers for your own well-being.

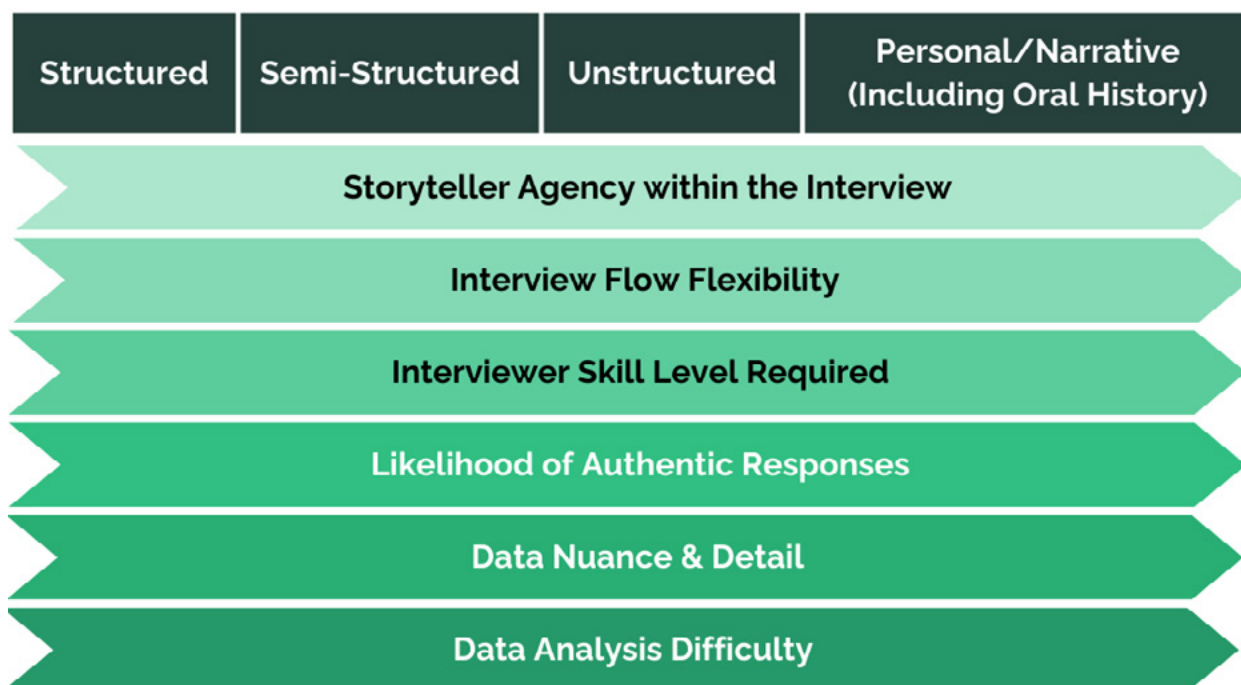
If you use transcription tools like Zoom’s auto-transcribe setting or Otter.ai, it will significantly reduce the time it takes to process the data, though it will still require a transcriber to review and correct any mistakes from the auto-transcription. For the analysis process, while not necessary, you can also use coding software like NVivo, MAXQDA, Dedoose, or Taguette. You’ll also need capacity and understanding in data privacy, protection, and storage.

Interview Question Design

Choose an interview design based on a research strategy that considers community context, values, principles, priorities, resources, and capacities of the PAR effort. The interview design includes structured, semistructured, unstructured, and personal narrative interviews.

Structured interviews are useful for specific data collection, while semistructured interviews strike a balance between flexibility and focused questions. Unstructured and personal narrative interviews give participants agency and control over the conversation.

Figure 3: Spectrum of interview types and associated characteristics



PAR processes typically lend themselves to using interview types that center the storyteller's instincts, agency, and control over the pace and flow of the interview. However, it depends on the timing, sequence, and context in which the research method is being used. For example, if there is already an understanding of the issue at play and the purpose is to hone in on some specific aspects within it to inform survey data or the larger narrative, more structured interviews may be most appropriate. Also, as described in the MoralDocs' example, semistructured interviews allow for artists and cultural strategists to provide creative prompts and activities for interviewees while also providing open-ended space for interviewees to share what's in their hearts and minds.

Conducting the Interviews

Create a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages interviewees to share authentically and openly. Keep your questions clear and concise, and try not to ask two questions in one or use double negatives. Lean on your existing skills in holding one-to-ones and bring your other community weaving strengths in conducting PAR interviews. This is a great time for leadership development in training up community interviewers. This can also further connections across community members as a result of community members interviewing each other while also collecting data for the PAR effort.

Lastly, just as with other forms of research, receiving informed consent, outlining how the data will be used, and providing a space where participants can stop at any time in the interview is essential.

Processing the Data

Participatory data processing often includes community members transcribing interviews. It is a generally accessible activity, and it gives people a chance to spend time listening to their fellow community members' stories. Another important way to center community ownership over the research is to share back completed transcriptions to interviewees to review and make any adjustments to what they said.

Analyzing the Data

Analyzing the data begins with listening to and reading transcripts and identifying quotes and themes. Sometimes it is worthwhile to create a list of codes based on the themes you're most interested in, and then go through the transcripts and mark places where each code or theme is discussed. One process for collaborative analysis includes having a diverse, smaller analysis team that collects the quotes and themes and shares them out to the larger team for discussion. Depending on the context of the research and community, you may also identify significant decision points in the analysis process to

share with community members or community representatives before going to the next analysis step. This is one way to minimize biases within the smaller PAR team, ground truth learnings, and continue to deepen community leadership and investment to the project.

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Unconscious bias can influence an interview process when the interviews ask questions in ways that reproduce beliefs rooted in white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, and othering. The framing of a question can suggest what is an appropriate answer, which is where the bias of the interviewer can shape the responses. While movement builders aim to decolonize and unlearn dominant ways of being, sometimes we can fall into a habit that doesn't align with our beliefs (decolonizing is a lifelong, daily practice!). With interviews, it is easy to unintentionally insert or project our viewpoints into what the storyteller is sharing, and this can also play out in the analysis and sense-making stage.

Keeping in mind the positionality of yourself and the group is a good way to increase awareness on how habits and dominant ways of being might inadvertently show up throughout the PAR process so that you can course correct as needed. Collaborative processes with a diverse team is an effective way to mitigate unconscious biases because the group can share data interpretations across other individuals' responses with differing positionalities. This can involve practice runs of interviews to see how different people respond to the questions.

Weaving in Cultural Strategy



In one interview process about trusting city government, the research team used metaphor questions to ask about residents' relationship to government. The use of metaphor opened up interviewees' storytelling for added complexity. For example, when asked directly about how they thought about government, a resident said, "I don't pay any attention to it." When asked what metaphor it was, they shared that it was like a mango, which they had experienced as an overhyped fruit, expensive and too hard to get when it tastes good. This metaphor opens up further questions about dominant narratives about government, accessibility, and timeliness of services.

The dancer Bill T. Jones has used movement-based responses to explore experiences of people living with terminal illnesses. The interviewees then become choreographers and dancers as they collaborate to create group pieces out of this initial “interview.” The poet Ciera-Jevae Gordon interpreted interviews she conducted around displacement through a [book of poems](#), identifying overlaps through themes in the poems and creating a transparent “research interpretation” through her artistic intervention. Finally, the artist Brett Cook usually develops a set of interview questions by asking all of the interviewees to contribute one or two questions around a theme.

Related Resources

- [“Qualitative Interview Questions: Guidance for Novice Researchers”](#) by Rosanne E. Roberts, *The Qualitative Report*
- [Research for Justice Interview Toolkit](#) by DataCenter
- [Oral History Resource Guide for English Language Learners](#) by Voice of Witness



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Focus Groups and Structured Discussions



Scan this QR Code to access the Focus Groups section online.

Focus Groups and Structured Discussions

In Montgomery County, Maryland, a racial and climate justice effort of BIPOC, multi-faith, community leaders, community-based organizations, and government allies used a series of structured discussions to decide on their collective approach to achieving transformative change in the county. Focus groups and structured discussions use dialogue to uncover a group of individuals' opinions or experiences about a particular inquiry. A facilitator (or multiple facilitators) guides the discussion that collectively generates knowledge across participants using questions that are rooted in the PAR inquiry and purpose and are carried out in a process that affirms participants' lived experiences. Structurally, focus groups have a small number of people (typically five to eight) and aim to set an accessible, welcoming, culturally relevant, and nonthreatening environment.

In Montgomery County, the passion for change was overflowing within the community, yet the base building and place-based organizing infrastructure in the county was limited. Knowing that investing in a sustainable community infrastructure is essential for community self-determination, a handful of group members, with the support of a PAR facilitator, organized a series of structured discussions to identify community assets and needs. Belonging and power building rose to the top in order for the community to build capacity and social infrastructure to make racial and climate justice real.

From there, the group underwent a series of interactive, life-affirming focus groups and structured discussions to build shared definitions, align on community priorities, create a transformative vision, and explore how to go about realizing that vision. Using an iterative focus group and structured discussion method gave the group flexibility to explore rather than operating from predetermined parameters that stakeholders may be bringing into the collaborative. It also gave the process enough structure to support the group in building governance capacity and community member leadership.

Meetings and activities also included collaboratively analyzing meeting data and making decisions using consensus-based practices. With a strong foundation established, the group is focused on cocreating a racial and climate-justice popular education initiative in frontline communities that cultivates capacity. The multi-stakeholder process also successfully secured a \$300,000 community justice fund from the county government that renews each year to continue the work.

What Type of Knowledge Focus Groups and Structured Discussions Generate

By holding skillfully facilitated group discussions, you can not only learn about what individuals think or feel about something, but also you can generate more creative ideas on an issue than in an individual interview. This is because during the discussion, the group can learn from one another in real time. Also, learning how folks respond to and are influenced by each other provides insight on how language and framing of justice and equity issues plays out among people, offering a window into how it might play out in the broader community. More meaning is made by analyzing the focus group data, typically across three or more focus groups or structured discussions.

Some specific ways to use focus groups include:

- guiding a community visioning processes
- building a menu of community priorities
- exploring nuances around identified community priorities
- brainstorming potential solutions to an issue
- gaining insights to inform decision-making

How Focus Groups Can Build Relationships and People Power

Focus groups are an opportunity to cultivate connections and peer learning and to spark shared purpose or calls to action. Focus groups allow organizers to stack functions to collect data to identify the best actions for positive change. They can also reduce feelings of isolation and the false and harmful narrative that people are alone or that the marginalization they experience is something they must simply endure or address on their own. It can activate a sense of “power within” and “power with” in bringing people together to talk about a shared issue in their community.

Focus groups can also bring people together who already know each other, depending on the research purpose and design. This can build power by deepening relationships, and the structured, focused discussion holds intentional time and space for people to hear each other’s perspectives when they may not have made intentional time for this type of discussion otherwise. In a context where they are experiencing an activity together, it builds a sense of community, which is not necessarily the case for interviews.

Focus groups and structured discussions can lead to recruiting members and cultivating a bigger movement for the cause. As people connect over shared values, priorities, lived

experiences, and more, it can inspire people to get involved, ranging from staying aware of the effort to joining into the PAR process more intentionally.

Don't forget to include a sign-up sheet for people who are interested in learning more or getting involved after the focus group!

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

On the one hand, focus groups are time consuming when it comes to planning, prep, and logistics. On the other hand, they can save time in comparison to interviews once they are planned out because you are able to gain a lot of perspectives at once rather than one at a time. They are complex discussions and require a skilled facilitator or moderator and an environment that is welcoming, life-affirming, and supports generative dialogue and at least one notetaker. Materials and tools needed are the focus group guiding questions, a recording and transcription tool such as Otter.ai (if consent is given to record), notetaking materials, any interactive materials for the discussion, and food. For analysis, qualitative analysis computer software programs such as Taguette or Dedoose can be helpful, but low-tech processes also work!

Focus Group Questioning Design

Depending on the context and how you plan to use the data from the focus groups, the questioning strategy could be a topic guide or a questioning route. A topic guide is an outline of the topics to be discussed in the focus group with phrases or words that cue the facilitator throughout the session. A questioning route is more like a script that is meant to be followed consistently across focus groups. The questions are written in a particular sequence in conversational sentences. A topic guide can be advantageous when the focus is to uncover nuances and ideas. It allows the facilitator to hit all of the key topic areas, but in a way that meets participants where they are in their dialogue in real time. A questioning route can be helpful when you need rigorous consistency across focus groups, such as understanding what language resonates for a campaign or if the crux of your data is from focus groups and you don't want your opposition to poke holes in your research and solutions.

In developing the questions, keep the PAR project purpose top of mind to guide you as it is easy to develop too many questions and get distracted by the complexity of the issue you are examining. Typically, questioning flow includes opening, introductory, transition, key, and closing questions. Each category has a specific purpose to facilitate the flow of the discussion. Sticking to ten to twelve questions total for a two-hour discussion is a solid rule of thumb. They should be open-ended, concise, clear, and engaging.

Once you develop your questioning design, it's a good idea to try at least one dry-run focus group with family or friends. Focus groups take a lot of time to orchestrate, and you don't want to do all of that labor just to find out that your questions are confusing or don't actually get at what you are trying to learn. Once you start your focus groups, changing your questions limits your ability to compare and contrast data across focus groups.

Connecting the heart and mind in your questions is a good idea since we may rationalize what we think about something, but we often learn our internalized beliefs and values through connecting to our feelings. Creative questions that involve interactive activities, such as drawing pictures and visualizing, can connect to the heart.

Conducting Focus Groups

Participatory focus groups and structured discussions should aim to set up a life-affirming environment. The questions are also coming from people who have similar lived experiences or identities, so they often are relevant and easy for focus group participants to understand and respond to. Make sure to practice the question flow and plan ahead for how much time to spend on each question and the pacing of the questions. Having a skilled facilitator who is rooted in the community is ideal as this can deepen a sense of trust and willingness to be vulnerable and honest for participants. Active listening is essential, and laying out ground rules for participants to also actively listen is important too. For ease of data organization after the focus groups, make sure to have a system for how you plan to take notes across all notetakers. Lastly, be flexible and adaptable. Just like organizing, focus groups can be unpredictable.

Processing the Data

Processing the data means putting the focus group notes and transcripts into an organized place (Google Drive works well) to ready them for group analysis. It also includes cleaning up the notes and transcripts so that they can be easily understood and accurately represent what was said.

Analyzing the Data

Collaboratively analyzing qualitative data is a laborious and rewarding process. It is an incredible way to deepen a shared understanding of the issues at hand and what your community is saying about them. You can start by having the PAR team review transcripts and notes. Sometimes this isn't possible, or accessible for all participants, so you might need to build in shared work time to get comfortable with the transcripts together.

Having a few people take on a deeper analysis of looking at themes and patterns and identifying quotes that exemplify those patterns can be an effective approach. But it is important that this doesn't revert to only the "most experienced" or "most academic" people in the room.

Then, bring together the larger team again to review the themes and patterns the small team identified. This supports a more inclusive, rigorous process and can minimize any unintended biases. Additionally, you might decide to share a preliminary summary of themes with the broader group (including focus group participants) so they can offer questions to elucidate further analysis and learnings.

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Underestimating: With focus groups, the cost, time, and level of coordination required are key areas that get underestimated. Clear planning, adopting a stance of flexibility and iteration, and most importantly, being really grounded and aligned on the purpose of the research are great ways to mitigate the tendency to underestimate focus groups and structured discussions. Taking time to set clear team roles and to build trust can alleviate confusion that often emerges in the context of underestimating.

Coordination and maintaining consistency: Focus groups require a lot of coordination in setting up, in building aligned approaches (if multiple facilitators are holding the focus groups), and in the analysis stage. Coordination is important because it ensures consistency across the PAR team when doing your research. Alignment and purpose clarity are key. Organizers are typically well versed in coordination, so bringing that skill to ensure your focus groups maintain consistency is a great way to leverage existing capacities.

Additionally, during a focus group, be prepared for things to not go as planned. This includes unexpected silence or limited sharing, conflict, environmental disruptions (e.g., weather, traffic, community emergency), and more. Again, bringing your organizing skills can enable PAR processes to be more successful and adaptive than dominant academic approaches to research.

Weaving in Cultural Strategy

From a cultural strategy standpoint, storytellers know that the setting is a vital and revealing character in any story. Settings can be intimidating, familiar, playful, severe, scary, warm, nostalgic, and much more. Focus groups can learn from this by paying attention to the setting they are creating—something artists are adept at doing as a way to get into deeper knowledge generation and sharing.

For example, in her play *Mirrors in Every Corner*, playwright Chinaka Hodge set the most dynamic and honest conversations about race dynamics within a Black family in Oakland at the card table as they played Spades. The community-engaged artist Rick Lowe has been known for spending a good part of his days at a dominoes table with neighborhood residents.

Other collectives have used intergenerational meal prep as a way to discuss elders' stories about war and migration. In one particularly elaborate example, the artist collective Wochenklausur held structured discussions between elected officials, sex workers, and advocates in the metaphorically neutral zone of a boat on a lake (they were successful in securing permanent housing for the sex workers).



Wochenklausur, "Boat Colloquies".

Related Resources

- [“The Basics: Focus Groups, Listening Sessions and Interviews”](#) by Kris Johnson and Hani Mohamed of Communities of Opportunity and Communities Count
- [“Community Toolbox: Conducting Focus Groups”](#) by the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas
- [“Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews,”](#) by Richard A. Krueger, is a concise resource with specific steps and tips on conducting group interviews.



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Mapping and Spatial Analysis



Scan this QR Code to access the Mapping and Spatial Analysis section online.

Mapping and Spatial Analysis

Mapping is a powerful methodology for critical analysis of why places are the way they are, developing a vision for transformation rooted in a connection to land and community governance of territory. For example, in Valle del Cauca, Colombia, in 1999, there was a devastating flood caused by deforestation. But it reflected deeper problems of an extractive economy, negligent government, and weakly organized people living at the margin of the river and along the steep mountainsides. In response, community leaders organized over various years to analyze and plan their economy, watershed, food systems, land use patterns, power, and governance systems. Mapping was the main methodology for developing and documenting community knowledge. They made maps of the past, the present, and their desired future. They made maps of the whole region, maps of each household's land, and maps of neighborhoods.

*We drew a great green zone, a field, a big park where kids could go play so that they don't play in the street...beautiful trees, a good health center, an educational institution that is well funded and well organized with everything. So in the map, you give form to the dreams just the way we wish every day that it would be.*⁴⁶

— Fundación Vital, 2008



Participatory Mapping Workshop, Fundación Vital

⁴⁶ Fundación Vital is the local organization that facilitated this mapping and organizing process. Fundación Vital partnered with Eli Moore to create a documentary, *Que Viva La Montaña*, and research paper, "Mapping for Social Change: the Radical Pedagogy of Participatory Mapping in Valle del Cauca, Colombia."

What Is Mapping?

Maps tell a political, social, and historical story about a place—where people and things happen—and show patterns that help us understand why they are happening in some places and not others. Most problems have a spatial dimension—they are concentrated in some areas—whether we are concerned with incarceration rates or evictions or polluted air or locations of safe neighborhood spaces. Maps can be more accessible than text or numbers because they are visual and are often perceived as credible (partly because of their history as tools of official government knowledge).

*Mapping is a simple activity that can lead to profound shifts in thought and the ignition of critical consciousness because mapping activities simultaneously draw on and challenge our most deep-seated experiential knowledge.*⁴⁷

—Altha Cravey, 2000

Movements for social transformation have created and used maps to facilitate popular education, participatory planning, future visioning, territorial governance, advocacy for policy change, and other ends. Versions of this have been called countermapping, radical cartography, participatory mapping, indigenous mapping, and other terms.

Types of Knowledge Mapping Generates

Maps are political and have been used throughout history in various contexts, including within European colonization of the global world. Maps take countless forms that reflect the priorities of the mapmakers and the intended map users. To plan and create your maps, these are the key elements:

Themes: What is your map about? What does it show? Maps always make some things visible and other things invisible. The themes you chose to make visible will tell a story about what’s important. Some maps show that something is missing, like a map of grocery stores that shows how some neighborhoods don’t have any. Some maps show rates, like the rate of public funds per student in different school districts.

Symbols and legend: The symbols you use are the language of your map, the way people will know what they are looking at. Making symbols that are easy to understand for the people who will be using the map is key to making it accessible. People have

⁴⁷ Altha J. Cravey, Thomas A. Arcury, and Sara A. Quandt, “Mapping as a Means of Farmworker Education and Empowerment,” *The Journal of Geography* 99, no. 6 (2007): 229–237, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221340008978973>.

associations with certain colors and symbols—like red being a color for problems, and green being a color for resources—so the colors and symbols you choose may connect what you are mapping with those associations.

Scale: Scale refers to how zoomed in or zoomed out the map is compared to reality. Is it most important to show your map at the city, watershed, country, or globe level? This depends on what problem you are focused on and your analysis of why it is occurring.

Data source: The data for your map can come from people’s lived experiences, such as maps made by a group of people mapping the areas where they feel safe in their neighborhood. Data can come from public agencies, like a map of 911 emergency calls or locations of youth programs.

Time: Maps can be made of the past, present, or potential future. Multiple maps of different moments in time can show how something changed over time and help people analyze why the change occurred.

How Mapping Can Build Relationships and People Power

Making maps can be a participatory process that facilitates collective dialogue, sharing of experiences, and critical analysis among the participants. It develops a shared analysis of community assets and a shared vision for transformation when participants gather around a base map, such as a map of the streets and parks in your city, and mark on the map where there are resources the community could enhance. Participants can also connect personal lived experience to a collective experience and shared identity by making individual maps and then gathering as a group to compare and combine these maps, such as maps of the origin places where people’s family members migrated from.

*Freedom is a place...How do we make such a place over and over again?
What are its limits, and why do they matter?⁴⁸*

—Ruth Wilson Gilmore

48 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography* (Verso, 2022), 91.

Seeing yourself on a map can be another source of power. When maps are reclaimed by communities organizing for justice, they focus on the stories, dreams, and needs of community members. For example, a [community mapping project in 1970s Detroit](#) mapped where babies had been bitten by rats, a powerful testimony to a lived experience of substandard housing. Maps can also show the otherwise hidden actions of powerful people and institutions. For instance, the [Evictor Book](#) is a mapping project that shows data on landlords' evictions of tenants.

A famous saying among cartographers is that maps always lie. The point is that every map has to omit or twist some parts of reality in order to squeeze the countless details and dimensions of reality into a two-dimensional piece of paper or computer screen. Which parts of reality are made invisible will reflect the values and priorities of the mapmakers.

Maps have been used countless times to invade, plunder, and harm people and places, from the colonial maps used to take possession of Indigenous peoples' land, to the redlining maps used to exclude Black and other people of color from home loans. These maps devalue, stigmatize, and make invisible the experiences and dignity of everyday people, instead making visible the resources that those in power want to control. **Critical map literacy** is “vigilance to the inherently political nature of the mapping process, no matter who is involved or how the mapping will be ‘performed.’”⁴⁹ Who made the maps and what are their interests? What is not shown in the maps? What story is being told and what are other stories that interpret the maps? These are questions for critical map literacy.

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

Maps can be made as simply as drawing by hand on top of a base map of streets or other features, or as elaborate as interactive, online maps that have datasets linked to them through a Geographic Information System (GIS). To decide which mapping technology to use, consider these questions:

- Who will be making the maps and what technical mapmaking capacity and time do they have?
- Who will be reading and using the maps and what qualities will the maps need to have to be most useful, credible, and accessible?
- What type of map will provide the analysis you need? Is there a need to layer different types of maps and look at the relationship between the layers?

49 Jay T. Johnson, Renee Pualani Louis, and Albertus Hadi Pramono, “Facing the Future: Encouraging Critical Cartographic Literacies in Indigenous Communities,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 80–98, <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/729>.

Hand-drawn maps: With colored pencils and a base map printed on poster-size paper, a group can decide what themes they want to map, create a legend of their symbols, and draw onto the map the knowledge they want to represent.

Google Maps and Google Earth: These free tools allow you to create maps online, share them, and have other people add to them through the Internet. You can create map symbols that have pop-out boxes with text and links to more information. A few hours of learning from online videos is often enough training to begin using these tools.

QGIS: This free software can be used to make almost any type of map, incorporate large datasets, create maps with multiple layers and analyze the relationship between what's on each layer, and more. Often a class or training course is needed to be able to gain the skills to use this software.

Other maps: There are countless types of maps to find or create. Historical maps show how a place was in the past. Land use maps show the different types of ways people are using land. Parcel maps show who owns what land. On and on.

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Narratives matter: A map can only say so much, so making sense of it will require a narrative that goes beyond what is visible on the map. For instance, a map of poverty rates and race can show how people of color are experiencing more severe poverty, but the question of why this is happening will require a broader analysis and narrative about the root causes. If you do not take time to craft your own narrative, the people who see the map can misinterpret it, such as people who look at the map of poverty and race and conclude that people of color should work harder.

Be careful what you make visible: Putting something on a map and sharing the map makes the location visible to whoever ends up with that map. This is often beneficial but sometimes can create vulnerability. For instance, a project mapping the sacred sites of an Indigenous community was careful to limit access to the data and maps so that people who might go to the sites without permission or the right intentions would not be able to use the maps.

Weaving in Cultural Strategy



Mapping Resistance: The Young Lords in El Barrio by Miguel Luciano

Artists have used mapping to shift how people view and relate to place by bringing maps “off the page,” focusing on maps as storytelling tools, or mapping everything from relationships to dreams to concepts. Fifty years after the Young Lords in East Harlem, the [artist Miguel Luciano collaborated with Young Lords’ photographer Hiram Maristany](#) to map out key places in the Young Lords’ history by mounting mural-size reprints of his original photos as counternarratives in the rapidly changing neighborhood. The housing group City Life/Vida Urbana activated redlining maps by [using a baseball line chalker](#) to map the racist insurance policy lines throughout Boston on the sidewalk. This public mapping action served as a political education and organizing tool, expanding the reach of their work. In one community process that brought together groups with interracial tension, each member of the group narrated and drew their own map in front of the group, sharing their life history in the neighborhood, revealing shared relationships and assets and building common trust. The [Prison Industrial Complex \(PIC\) map](#) created by the artist Ashley Hunt has been used as a popular education tool by Critical Resistance and others to map out the many relationships, sectors, and beneficiaries of the PIC to give a more rigorous understanding of the role of incarceration.

Related Resources

- *Mapping Our Land: A Guide to Making Maps of Our Own Communities and Traditional Lands*, by Alix Flavelle, is a useful guide on the step-by-step process of planning and carrying out a participatory mapping project. It includes sections on preparing the community, guiding the planning with questions, making sketch maps and base maps, and using topographic maps, compasses, and GPS devices. It also covers how to integrate community knowledge from interviews into maps and tips on using final maps for advocacy and planning.
- “[Mapping for Change: Practice, Technologies and Communication](#),” by the International Institute for Environment and Development, is a collection of case studies from various countries on how communities used mapping. It covers critical issues and concepts for ensuring community-driven processes, preventing harmful use of community maps, and other issues related to mapping and participatory GIS.
- *Making Maps: A Visual Guide to Map Design for GIS*, by John Krygier and Denis Wood, is a practical guide for planning and carrying out a mapping process. It provides useful concepts, visual examples, and tips on designing maps that best fit your community’s needs and goals.
- *Counterpoints*, by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, is a collection of maps, short essays, and images from various activists in the San Francisco Bay Area. It shows powerful examples of maps that make visible what has been marginalized, such as maps of police killings and evictions.
- “[Indigenous Mapping Bibliography](#),” by the Ethnographic Mapping Lab at the University of Victoria, is a list of articles, books, and materials that provide a wide range of perspectives and guidance on Indigenous mapping processes.
- “[Case Studies: Community Mapping](#),” by PolicyLink, offers practical guidance, examples, and data sources for using mapping to analyze and advocate for equitable economic development.



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Policy Analysis



Scan this QR Code to access the Policy Analysis section online.

Policy Analysis

In 1966, a small and committed group of revolutionaries in Oakland, California, decided to intervene against police brutality and harassment in their community. After researching the laws on self-defense and carrying guns in public (this is policy analysis!), Huey Newton and Bobby Seale found that they could carry weapons openly while observing police interactions with community members. From this interpretation of the policy and action, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense jumped into the national spotlight, becoming one of the most influential organizing groups of the twentieth century.

Policy analysis involves understanding how an existing or future policy impacts a community and how to change it in service of larger goals. Policy analysis can require many different pieces of research, but there are questions to ground in first.

First, what is your political framework for policy analysis? Agreeing on your framework can save you from conflict within your team and coalition and guard against unintended consequences. For example, a rent-relief policy might help people who can't pay rent stay in their homes by using public dollars to pay landlords and cover any gaps. If your framework is antidisplacement, this policy might be aligned as it focuses primarily on keeping people in their homes. If your framework is social housing, you might instead push for a policy that enables the government to buy apartments and keep them affordable ([as happened in Berlin](#)). If your framework is community-controlled housing, your policy might provide money to community land trusts to buy out landlords and keep people in their homes in a permanently affordable way ([as happened in Oakland](#)). Ultimately, they are all aimed at keeping people in their homes, but they have trade-offs depending on your framework for analysis.

Second, where are you in a policy process? Here are some common steps:

1. Identifying the problem and analyzing the root cause
2. Visioning and brainstorming policy solutions
3. Researching existing laws and policies relevant to local context
4. Learning about examples of relevant policies from other communities and advocates
5. Designing a new local policy that fits the local needs and the city's capacity for implementation
6. Writing an ordinance or resolution

7. Developing a city plan for the implementation of a new policy
8. Evaluating how the implementation of a policy is going
9. Organizing to amend or overturn an existing policy

Now that you have those questions settled, here is some of what your PAR group might get into:

- **Community assessment and impact:** What need or vision would the policy fulfill? What is the policy’s impact? What numbers and stories will you use to back up your arguments about the policy?
 - This could involve demographic analysis (e.g., how many people are unhoused in a neighborhood or how many people will this policy impact in a city) or community surveys or [interviews](#) (e.g., people’s experience with barriers to permanent housing).
- **Comparison policies:** What are similar policies in other jurisdictions? Who helped develop them? What are their impacts?
 - National legal or organizing groups can be helpful here for identifying “sibling” policies in development or contention and their process for organizing a successful win. They can also help you understand what to replicate and what not to replicate—both in the actual policy and in the organizing work around it.
- **Understanding government infrastructure:** How do different government actors and departments work together to pass and implement a policy?
 - Conversations with city staff allies, such as aides for elected officials or staff of city departments named in the policy itself, or veteran policy organizers can be helpful here. They can provide orientations to government processes that will be hard to understand via online research. Attending meetings by city council, school boards, and planning commissions can be especially helpful for understanding the interpersonal dynamics and rules (spoken and unspoken) of how things get done where you live.
- **Money tracking:** Where does the funding come from and who benefits monetarily from the policy?
 - Public government has a transparent budget process, and policies themselves should say their impact on the budget. You can access public budgets online through a Google search. Tracking who benefits from a policy can take a bit more creativity. Running through the complete scenario of what it takes to implement a

policy can give you some more insight into this, especially if it requires more city staff time, an outside contractor, or the purchase of materials. For example, body cameras require an increase in police department budgets and profit for a specific vendor.

- **Text analysis and evaluation:** What does the actual policy say and allow for in practice?
 - [Municode](#) is a great resource for accessing the actual text of a policy. Local newspapers will often carry a summary, but it's important to do your own reading of the complete policy. Doing group-based reading analysis can be helpful for creating clarity on what the policy does or doesn't do. Comparing similar policies can also show how subtle changes in language can create major differences in implementation.
- **Policy versus practice:** How does the language of the policy differ from the practice and implementation?
 - Policies should name who is responsible for implementing them. Government staff often have a degree of wiggle room on how this happens. Assessing what elements of the policy are practice-based or in the language (via a text analysis) can help narrow where you want to take action. For example, is a new housing policy implemented by the planning department, code enforcement, or a special project of the mayor's office?
- **Power mapping:** Who has the power to pass or amend the policy? Are they in favor or support? Who has the power to change how the policy is practiced? Are they in favor or support?

Types of Knowledge Policy Analysis Generates

Community needs: Many policy analysis processes begin with a community needs assessment or a community-generated question, which helps raise new and important questions that can support strategic action around policy for years to come. For example, [the Green Haven Think Tank \(1971\)](#) was a group of incarcerated men who developed "[The Non-Traditional Approach to Criminal & Social Justice](#)" to research the policy roots of racial and geographic discrepancies in incarceration in New York City, leading to early foundations of action around the impacts of mass incarceration.

Community impact analysis: Policy analysis can also document or project future impacts of policy—numbers and story-based—as crucial evidence in advocacy efforts, giving a more complete picture of issues. In considering a rent control law in a California city for example, organizers had to more deeply understand how many people were

renters, what they were paying, how it would impact small landlords, and what types of units would qualify to better understand their potential for support.

Understanding existing policies: In researching policy, you may discover that policies already exist, previously existed, or are legally not possible. In the rent control example, it was important to review other local and state policies to have a foundation to build on and not replicate mistakes.

Political landscape: The power mapping and coalition building that policy advocacy requires can also create a better understanding of the political landscape, what is possible now, what might be possible in the future, and what kinds of gaps in the organizing ecosystem exist. For example, a policy analysis process might reveal a divided city council, indicating the need to elect a new city council member or shift to a ballot approach.

How Policy Analysis Can Build Relationships and People Power

At some point, policy analysis will likely require the strengthening or creation of new relationships, which can build strategic power through coalitions, proximity to decision-makers, or the activation of the broader public. This can come through building relationships with elected officials, city staff, or other organizing groups that have a shared interest in a policy. Policy efforts and analysis can also be activated at a broader scale (see the previous Black Panther example) because they often are tied to a concrete outcome or need. It's important to remember that this can also create inversions of expectations—for example, a policy passes but is watered down at the last minute or even loses. This can lead to disillusionment among the people involved in the organizing process. Addressing this by building deeper relationships and placing your group's work within a larger context of struggle is important for navigating expectations.

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

At its most basic, policy analysis can involve a group-based reading of the text to generate a shared understanding of a policy. But the larger arc of policy analysis—which can include community needs assessment and visioning, [power mapping](#), organizing, and monitoring—**can take years** and the resources of multiple organizations. For this reason, it is important to do your research on how the policy relates to your more deeply held political strategy and theory of change. For example, Critical Resistance created [a tool](#) for the abolition of the prison industrial complex to assess if the policy is something to pursue further. Assessing both the policy and your resources can also help shape your tactics,

which might include collaboration with policy-makers, community organizing and direct action, a lawsuit, or a ballot initiative. Each of these has its own timelines, challenges, and resource needs. Last, policy requires engaging different skill sets and expertise, especially lawyers at some point along the process. Working with people who will share their knowledge of the field can strengthen your group's capacity.

Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps in policing

These charts break down the difference between reformist reforms which continue or expand the reach of policing, and abolitionist steps that work to chip away and reduce its overall impact. As we struggle to decrease the power of policing there are also positive and pro-active investments we can make in community health and well-being.

DOES THIS...	reduce funding to police?	challenge the notion that police increase safety?	reduce tools / tactics / technology police have at their disposal?	reduce the scale of policing?
BODY CAMERAS	INCREASES. Equipping police officers with body cameras will require more money going toward police budgets.	NO. Body cameras are pitched as making police more accountable, increasing the idea that policing, done "right," makes people safe.	INCREASES. Body cameras provide the police with another tool, increasing surveillance and increasing police budgets to acquire more gadgets.	INCREASES. Body cameras are based on the idea that police who do not use "excessive force" are less threatening. But police can turn off body cameras and, when used, footage often doesn't have the impact that community members want, or is used for surveillance.
COMMUNITY POLICING	NO. Advocates of community policing argue that departments will have to hire more cops to be in neighborhoods and in the community.	NO. This is based on the belief that policing is focused on keeping people safe, and the violence of policing is caused by a "breakdown of trust" with the community.	INCREASES. Cops are trained in additional tactics and approaches.	NO. More community police means that the scale of policing will increase, particularly in Black, Brown, poor neighborhoods, where there is perceived "mistrust."
MORE TRAINING	NO. More training will require more funding and resources going to police to develop and run trainings.	NO. This furthers the belief that better training would ensure that we can rely on police for safety, and that instances of police harm and violence occur because of lack of training.	INCREASES all of these.	NO. This will increase the scope of policing, given the type of training. For instance, some advocate for police to be trained on how to respond to mental health crises, furthering the idea that police are the go to for every kind of problem.
CIVILIAN REVIEW / OVERSIGHT BOARDS	NO. In some cases, there would be an increase in funding, whereas in other cases, there would be no change.	NO. Overseeing the police through a board presumes that cases of excessive force, killing, lying, planting false information, etc. are exceptional occurrences rather than part of the daily violence of policing.	NO. Some argue for Civilian Review Boards "with teeth," the power to make decisions and take away policing tools and tactics. However, a board with that level of power has never existed despite 50+ years of organizing for them.	NO. This further entrenches policing as a legitimate, reformable system, with a "community" mandate. Some boards, tasked with overseeing them, become structurally invested in their existence.
"JAIL KILLER COPS": PROSECUTE POLICE WHO HAVE KILLED AND ABUSED CIVILIANS.	NO. Prosecuting police does not lead to changes in funding or resourcing police.	NO. Individualizing police violence creates a false distinction between "good police" (who keep us safe), and "bad police" (who are unusual cases), rather than challenging the assumption that policing creates safety or examining policing as systemic violence.	NO. Often, media attention in high profile cases leads to more resources and technology, including body cameras and "training."	NO. This reinforces the prison industrial complex by portraying killer/ corrupt cops as "bad apples" rather than part of a regular system of violence, and reinforces the idea that prosecution and prison serve real justice.

RESISTANCE * 510.444.0484 * criticalresistance.org

Critical Resistance: Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps in policing

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Unintended consequences: Because policies need to be practiced, there is a lot of room for a good policy to go bad. Policies can also trigger unexpected actions by other departments that might not have been considered or shifts in an economic or political landscape. For example, when a public health-focused policy required lead testing as a way to protect young children, it unwittingly led to the evictions of some families as housing code violations were uncovered while testing for lead.

Passing does not mean implementation: The passing of a policy doesn't mean it will happen in real life! Researchers in marine conservation have identified this as the [policy placebo effect](#), where the passing of policies generally makes people think something is being done about an issue, even if it hasn't produced any real material change. Including some way to monitor the implementation of a policy can be equally important to get one passed. Similarly, a policy might get overturned or amended down the line. Ultimately, policies are only as strong as those who support or oppose them and how they are practiced over time.

Tending relationships: Policies go through a highly politicized and technocratic process to be born. They also often take a long time to pass. Residents often don't get the final say on what gets included or taken out of a policy at the last minute, or they may step away from a process before it is completed, which can lead to co-optation and fracture in relationships. Framing expectations and having conversations around the likelihood of compromise and the amount of time required to pass policies can be extremely helpful for sticking together through these changes.

Weaving in Cultural Strategy

Policy may as well be a specific language guarded for interpretation by a select few. Written in the language of governance and designed with future legal challenges in mind, policy can be off-putting and confusing. Worse yet, policies are often hard to find and read at all. Finding ways to interpret policy in ways that expand accessibility and reclaim some of the power from the authoritative language can strengthen the reach and relevance of a PAR process. Inspired by know-your-rights murals in Brooklyn about filming police, one PAR process interpreted two new housing laws in their city through a know-your-rights mural, highlighting key and accessible language from the mural and creating a visually compelling symbol of the laws. In another process, participants interpreted a law through blackout poems; poems written by taking the policy and crossing out words until a poem is left that distills the core meaning. This can also reclaim some elements of agency and

power. For example, after reading through the Texas law banning critical race theory, a group wrote nine-word poems using six words from the policy and adding three of their own. The group reflected that initially reading the law was depressing and difficult, but the poetic reinterpretation was parallel to how they hoped to take action. Importantly, it also allowed them to read through the law closely, which very few had done previously.

Related Resources

- [*Speaking Truth, Creating Power: A guide to policy work for community-based participatory research practitioners*](#) is a useful and thorough guide for doing PAR and policy work, complete with worksheets, challenges, partnership considerations, and further resources.
- “[*The Non-Traditional Approach to Criminal & Social Justice*](#),” by Green Haven Think Tank, provides the history of the first-ever published scholarship, analysis, and empirical research to collectively study race, geography and local Black/Afrikan communities, and the criminal justice (punishment) system integratively and simultaneously together.



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Power Analysis



Scan this QR Code to access the
Power Analysis section online.

Power Analysis

Power analysis and power mapping visualize the relationships between different stakeholders, which can include and are not limited to organizations, individuals, elected officials, coalitions, and schools. These relationships are analyzed based on decision-making power and the position the person or group takes toward your goal, or positionality.

Upon mapping stakeholders, the tool can be then used to identify clusters of stakeholders with similarities in their positionality or power. These clusters are then used to inform your group's strategy for building relationships, educating people, and transforming power dynamics.

Types of Knowledge That Power Mapping Generates

First and foremost, it is important to have a conversation about power. What is power? Power is commonly described with a negative connotation and is often used to refer to a form of authority, control, manipulation, or domination. The power we are most familiar with can be described as “power over,” where an institution or person has direct control over the behavior of others. It can become difficult to identify the institution or person holding the power when they have been exercising that power over a long period of time.

- **“Power over”** is the ability to influence a person's or a community's behavior, perception, resources, access, opportunities, and safety over time. Power over is enforced through violence or the threat of violence or through reward (profit, protection).

The book *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics* summarizes the ways in which power can be reframed in a positive manner:

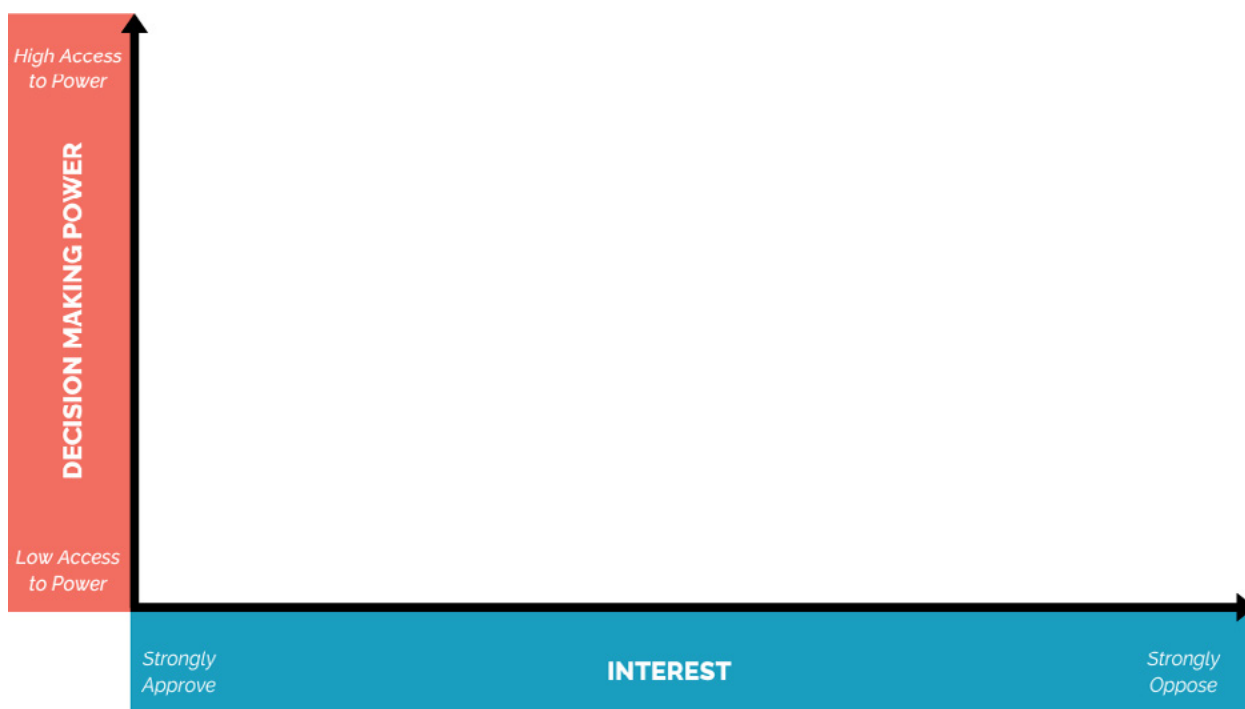
- **“Power to”** is about being able to act. It can begin with the awareness that it is possible to act and can grow in the process of taking action, developing skills and capacities, and realizing that one can effect change.
- **“Power with”** describes collective action, or solidarity, and includes both the psychological and political power that comes from being united. “Power with” is often used to describe how those faced with overt or covert domination can act to address their situation: from joining together with others, through building shared understandings, to planning and taking collective action.

- **“Power within”** describes the sense of confidence, dignity, and self-esteem that comes from gaining awareness of your situation and realizing the possibility of doing something about it. “Power within” is a core idea in gender analysis, popular education, psychology, and many approaches to empowerment.⁵⁰

The Power Map

The first step in creating a power map is to define the goal, vision, or interest that you are going to focus on in your analysis. You will be analyzing how people and groups relate to this goal. Are they opposed to it? Indifferent? Strongly supportive?

The power map is a chart that has two dimensions to place each person or entity on the map: their power to influence achieving your goal, and the degree to which they agree or disagree with the goal. Let’s talk about the x-axis (horizontal line): this axis focuses on how strongly someone supports or opposes your goal. The y-axis (vertical line) measures the amount of power a person or organization has in order to push your work forward or back.



50 Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics* (Practical Action Publishing, 2007), <https://justassociates.org/all-resources/a-new-weave-of-power-people-politics-the-action-guide-for-advocacy-and-citizen-participation/>.

Note: There are different approaches to constructing the actual visual representation of the map. For more examples, refer to the Related Resources section.

Prior to power mapping, you have already established relationships with community members and other people involved in this work. The map should be cocreated alongside those community members. Beginning with an empty map, use the following questions to guide your conversation to determine who should be a part of the map:

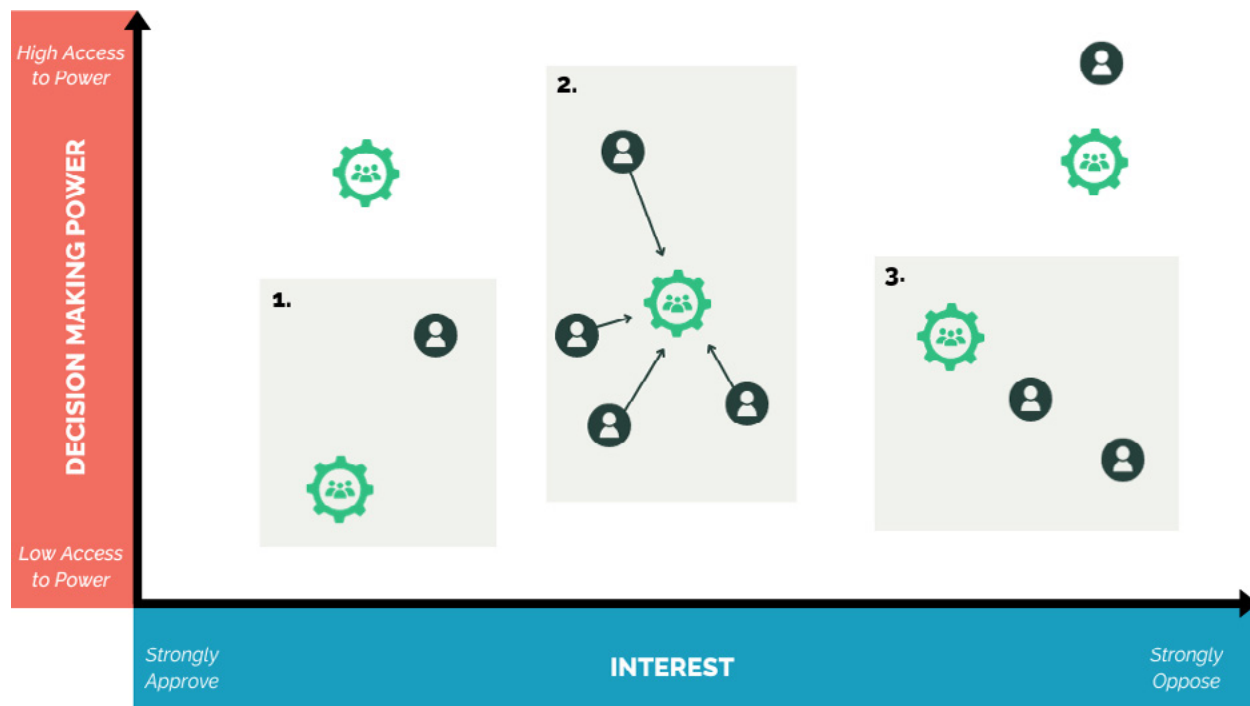
- Who are all of the types of individuals or organizations that have a voice in the problem you want to solve?
- Who is directly impacted by this work? Who is indirectly impacted by this work?
- Who supports the goal we want to achieve?
- Who opposes the goal we want to achieve?

Go through the questions one by one and decide where to put them on the power map. For this analysis, you can rely on the knowledge of the people in the room, or you can incorporate additional methods for gathering relevant information. Some organizers carry out [interviews](#) of knowledgeable people in their region, asking them questions about who has influence and what their interests are. This approach can provide a more accurate power analysis because it integrates information that may be missing from your core group. Another option is to look at data on campaign contributions, public statements in the media, or other records showing what influence and interest people have demonstrated.

Note: Given our different definitions of power earlier, there may be debate around what kind of power you are discussing here and what different kinds of power can do for achieving the goal. This is a good opportunity to talk about what it means to build different kinds of power.

Analysis of Clusters and Networks

After placing individuals and organizations on the map, you might be able to see some patterns and relationships. You might also have noticed that there are a couple of places on the map that are empty. This is where an additional layer of research might be needed by asking, What do we know about the people on the map? Who is still missing that we should add?



Organizations are represented by the light green circles, individuals by the dark green circles, and clusters of power by the shaded gray squares.

In some cases, you might see a cluster of individuals and organizations. We want to focus on connecting the dots between these clusters to understand the power relationships among the networks.

How Power Analysis Can Build Relationships and People Power

Power mapping can enhance your group's understanding of the political context and your ability to think strategically. It can also build trust and shared understanding between participants in the group as they work together to develop each step of the research, discussion, and mapping process. As you identify key stakeholders and clusters, power

mapping can facilitate the creation of new relationships with attention to power: Who is the key council person or city staff to build with? What organizations are already well-placed to affect this issue and how can you support them? By clarifying where to focus your group's work, it builds your group's power through more intentional action to advance your goals. Power analysis can be facilitated through interviewing, base-building dialogues, *cafecitos*, oral histories, and other formal and informal research processes that can be used to identify stakeholders that should be added to the map.

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

Depending on an organization's capacity and financial resources, a power mapping activity can be done in a workshop, over a series of workshops and training, or as part of an initial phase in the larger context of the work. Power mapping activities are meant to be iterative and interactive. Some materials you will need to complete a power map include sticky notes, butcher paper, tape, markers or color pencils or pens, and thread.

Power mapping activities can also be completed digitally. Here are some software and platforms that can be used to create an interactive, yet digital, power map:

- Google Jamboard (free)
- Miro (free option, other advanced features will require a subscription)
- PowerPoint (free, will require Microsoft Office)

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Things change! This tool is a point-in-time visualization of power dynamics. Power maps are never complete; your map will change depending on the length of the work, power maps, policy, and cultural shifts. As a result, it is important to stay in relationships with stakeholders mapped. Power is constantly changing and shifting, so there's always room to update a power map. Additionally, knowing when to end an iteration of a power map can be challenging given that power dynamics are constantly changing and shifting and essentially everyone might be affected by the problem or issue that is trying to be solved.

Differing analyses: Within your group, you may have different perspectives about the interests and decision-making power of a person or organization. Additionally, members may have differing definitions of power and the relevance of stakeholders mapped, or folks might define decision-making power differently. It can be helpful to take time to discuss and make sure that this isn't creating wedges in your group.

Check your tools: While a power map may serve as an organizing tool, it is important to not allow the map to dictate the entire trajectory of the work. There are going to be external forces that might affect power relations that are not going to be in your purview.

Getting specific enough: Power maps are strongest when they are specific. In other words, name names! Make sure to differentiate in the map between individuals and organizations. For example, you might classify individuals as circles and organizations as squares. If you are naming organizations, you might want to then research who the key person is at the organization: is it the executive director, a key member, or the chair of the board?

Weaving in Cultural Strategy

As noted, one way to integrate cultural strategy in a power mapping process is to simultaneously “map” other types of power that are being built or could be further built in the process of discussing power.

One way to do this is to reflect on the struggle, joy, sacrifices, and love of ancestors and elders that have created the conditions from which your PAR group is doing the work today. What types of power did they create or return to that might not fit on your power map? How is your process building on these sources of power (such as ritual, religious, or spiritual practice) even if they don’t contribute to a direct campaign goal? By naming and discussing these sources of power, you connect your process to a longer thread of action. You also remind yourselves that although a campaign outcome may not directly impact the individual PAR researchers, it is contributing to larger shifts in power. For example, in a PAR process that successfully increased tenant power, one PAR researcher reflected on how the process gave them a deep love for their city (power within, place-based power), which committed them to continue to fight for it and its people. Because their situation changed, they didn’t benefit directly from the policy win, but they benefited by building other types of power.

In discussing power, a PAR group can also identify the types of power they want to intentionally build through the process. This might mean the integration of traditional knowledge in a process, the intentional deepening of relationships through shared meals, or opening every meeting with a short group dance activity that connects people to each other and their roots. Maybe this dance activity relies on heteronormative roles and the group decides to reclaim it by queering it. The cultural strategy invitation is to think about how you are building power within a longer culturally specific context that comes before and lives after a finite PAR process.

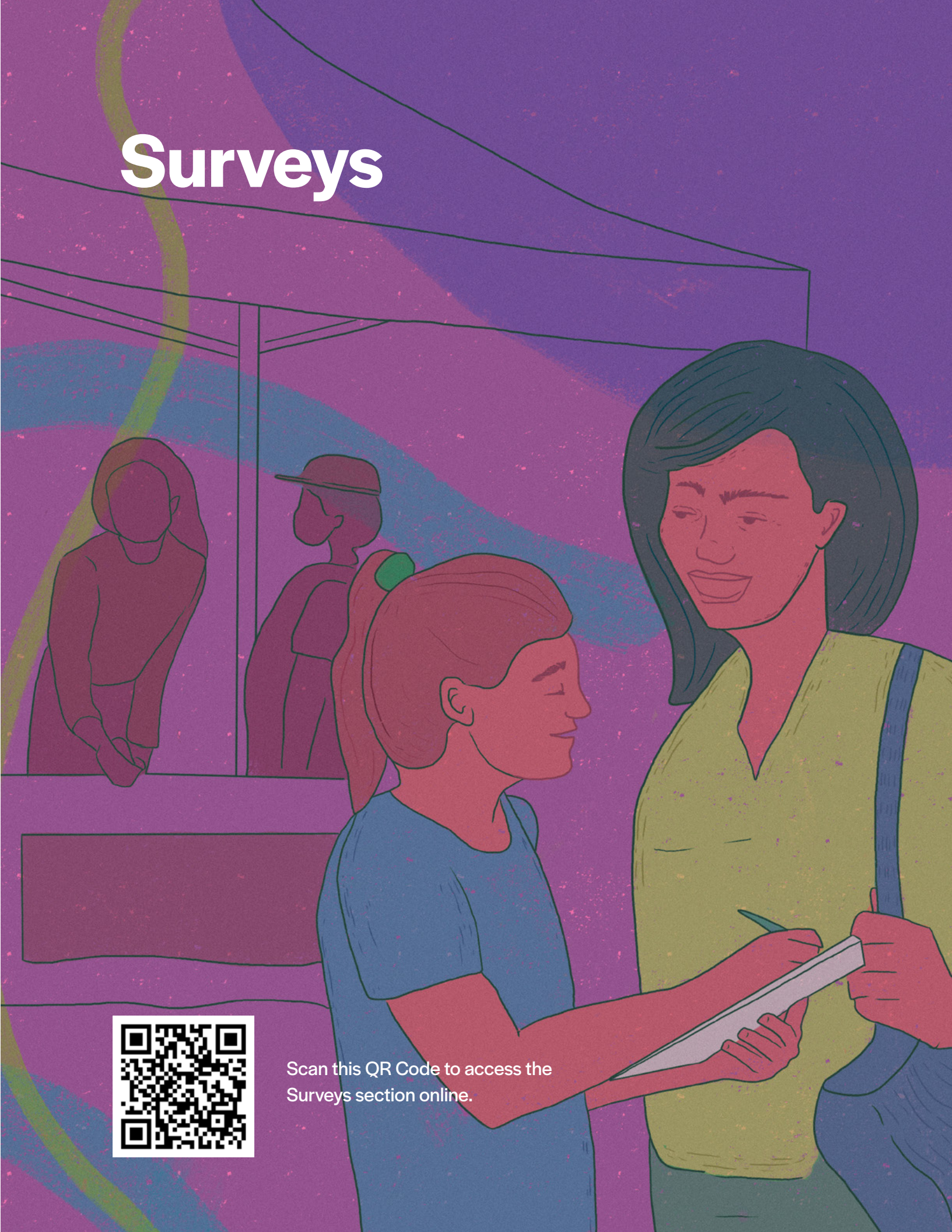
Related Resources

- [“How to Lead a Workshop for Stakeholder Mapping”](#) by Hayley Pontia, Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation
- [“Map the Power: Research for the Resistance”](#) by LittleSis
- [“Stakeholder Mapping”](#) by the Reproductive Health National Training Center
- [“Strategic Concept in Organizing and Policy Education”](#) by Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education



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Surveys



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Surveys section online.

Surveys

In Richmond, California, a community with a large oil refinery, community organizers needed to generate knowledge about how a range of residents had experienced the effects of the refinery, what they believed about its benefits and harms, and how they felt about the possibility of the refinery closing in the future.

To do this, they created a dozen questions with multiple choice and short answer responses, put the questions into an online and print format, and carried out a survey of several hundred residents through in-person encounters, social media posts, emails, and word of mouth. They then held a community event to present the findings back to the community and plan actions to advance environmental justice and for a just transition.⁵¹



Richmond Listening Project

What Type of Knowledge Surveys Generate

Surveys generate knowledge about how widely felt something is and what portions of a community have specific experiences or beliefs. Surveys are useful for building knowledge grounded in the experience of people directly impacted by an issue and

51 “Sharing Our Stories & Amplifying Our Voices,” Richmond Listening Project, <https://www.richmondlisteningproject.org/>.

showing with numbers how widespread an experience is. Too often in community advocacy, a person’s testimony is disregarded by people in positions of power who argue that the community member’s experience is just one anecdote and doesn’t reflect a wider problem worthy of public action. In the example above, individual testimonies about the impact of the refinery are often ignored because the refinery is perceived as benefiting a “silent majority” through providing jobs and charitable grants. A survey can speak back to this perception of a silent majority.

Surveys allow you to see who else in the community shares the experience and create evidence showing it is not just one person’s view. A group of formerly incarcerated residents was faced with this challenge as they advocated for public investments in housing, transitional employment, and other resources for people coming home from incarceration. The Safe Return Project designed a survey to document the challenges facing people recently released and found that 78% were unemployed, among other alarming findings.⁵²

In another example, organizers were hearing complaints of restaurant workers being unpaid in San Francisco, something notoriously difficult to document and prove. Organizers worked with restaurant workers and academics to create a PAR process led and administered by the workers, reaching over four hundred workers and leading to workers winning back pay.⁵³

At the height of stop-and-frisk policies in New York City, a PAR collective in the South Bronx formed to understand how invasive—and (un)successful—the policy was in preventing violent crime. The group of residents, academics, and organizers developed a survey and administered it to over one thousand residents of blocks most impacted by the policy. The collective designed a “back pocket report” that contained high-level findings and could be handed out easily. Their data was part of the legal challenge to the policy and helped to shift the narrative that the policy itself created a sense of unsafety rather than the residents of the area.⁵⁴

How Surveys Can Build Relationships and People Power

Surveys give you the chance to have many conversations with the people whose experience you want to document and amplify. This is an opportunity for a new relationship, but survey interviews are highly structured, so they aren’t the best way to build a deeply felt connection. Surveys rely on the survey questions being asked the same

52 “Speaking Truth on Coming Home,” Safe Return Project, https://www.dropbox.com/s/enj8zo4g2k39nf1/Speaking%20the%20truth%20on%20coming%20home%20reentry_report3.pdf?dl=0.

53 “SF Gate—Survey Finds ‘Wage Theft’ at Chinatown Eateries,” *Chinese Progressive Association*, September 17, 2010, <https://cpasf.org/media-resources/sfgate-survey-finds-wage-theft-at-chinatown-eateries/>.

54 “Report,” *Morris Justice Project*, <https://morrisjustice.org/reports/>.

way each time without the survey interviewer saying how they feel about the questions. In a written survey, the answerer may not have any opportunity to build connections at all.

Surveys allow you to ask questions that focus on a deeply felt and otherwise silenced experience or perspective. For instance, the Safe Return Project team asked this question to gather information about people’s experience getting support before their transition back to the community:

Thinking about the information or services you received prior to your release (from incarceration), how would you rate them on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is extremely helpful and 1 is not helpful at all for your transition back to the community.

[CIRCLE ONE] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Internalized oppression and isolation can lead to a belief that the harm and challenges a person faces are unique to their individual situation and caused by their actions alone. A survey—and especially a group-based process of analysis—can show that many people also have had a particular experience, affirming that people who have had the experience are not alone and busting the myth that their struggle is caused by their own individual actions.

Time, Capacity and Resources, and Tools Needed

Surveys seem simple but typically take a lot more time than expected (even with Google Forms). Really, they do! There are several steps in a survey research process:

- 1. Survey questionnaire design:** It is worth taking time to do several drafts and try out your survey questionnaire before you start using it. Once you start conducting a survey, you can’t go back and change survey questions without compromising the responses you’ve gathered. If you are doing research to support advocacy, it is especially important that all respondents are asked the same questions, in the same way, to ensure consistency in your findings because your opposition will try to cast doubt on your survey methods.
- 2. Conducting the survey:** Participatory surveys have the strength that the people carrying out the survey have lived experiences and identities similar to the people being surveyed. This can help establish trust and openness. Conducting effective surveys requires strong skills in listening, following a protocol about how questions are asked, taking notes, and keeping records of the responses. Training by doing dry-run practice activities is valuable.

- 3. Processing the data:** Once you have survey responses gathered, you need to put them all into a spreadsheet to be able to analyze them. Care must be taken not to mistakenly enter the wrong information or delete information from the spreadsheet. If you use an online survey tool for the survey, this step is easier because it is automated. It's a good idea to save a copy of the raw data, unedited, just in case something goes wrong in the analysis and some data gets erased.
- 4. Analyzing the data:** There is a joke that you can make any number say what you want it to say—the same is true for survey data. Analyzing data in a group can create opportunities to build meaning and cross-check different interpretations of your findings. It may also provide ideas for advocacy, narrative efforts, or future survey iterations. At a minimum, you should plan for more than one review of the data by multiple people.

More detail on each of these steps is available in Related Resources at the end of this section.

Online survey tools: Tools such as Survey Monkey and Google Forms can be great for ease of processing and analysis, for sharing information digitally, and even for surveys administered in person, with your team entering responses as they survey someone. Increasingly, QR codes are a great way for people to answer surveys on their phone wherever they are. Make sure to create and test your draft in a separate document before transferring it to your survey tool for ease of updating and sharing. In general, the free options can get you pretty far (you can use image questions in Google Forms for example, or create a spreadsheet or graphs quickly while analyzing). But depending on the number of your survey takers and the back-end analysis options you want, you should decide early in your process if you want to work with a paid tool like Survey Monkey.

Pitfalls, Challenges, and Myths

Underestimating: Surveys are more time consuming (and often more expensive) to develop, administer, and analyze than most people expect. It can take many iterations to get your questions right through testing and editing, hours and hours to administer it (especially if it's an in-person survey), and if you have a lot of responses, it takes time to go through them.

Identifying how many people to survey: Your team should develop a clear idea of how many takers you will need to give your findings the oomph needed to impact change. For example, impacting a city-wide policy that affects all residents will need hundreds if not a thousand respondents who represent what the city looks like. If you're working on

something specific to a portion of a community to inform the next steps in your campaign or organizing, you may only need a dozen or more. If you can look at comparable, successful surveys to the one you are developing, this can help give a sense of the numbers needed.

Not clearly identifying who you want to take your survey: Say you are doing a survey about community support or lack of support for policing, but you only survey young people in the neighborhood. Unless you are specifically looking to understand young people’s perspectives, your opposition will poke holes in your survey saying you ignored adults and seniors. Designing a way to have a “representative” set of survey takers (for example, mirroring the demographic data of the population who takes your survey) can strengthen the “validity” and power of your survey.

Weaving in Cultural Strategy

Surveys represent one of the most impersonal research tools, but this can be shifted in several ways, adding both rigor and resonance to the process. In designing surveys, authors often take on a certain “voice” and tone. Paying attention to this in how your group writes the questions and answers can create resonance for survey takers while also paying attention to nuance in language and meaning that might create misinterpretations. And while surveys are often designed to give us a quick overview and quantitative data through scales or multiple-choice questions, you can also design in spaces in the “margins” for people to add in their own notes or drawings. Questions also don’t have to only be written: survey makers can use photos or visuals that they take or make themselves, questions that use metaphors, or even audio.

Another key part of the process is creating an interpretation and analysis process that welcomes people in and allows for trusting dialogue around this. Discussing in groups (projecting results or printing out multiple copies) is a simple way to open up understanding and build connections. Finally, it is important to have accessible and rapid ways to share back findings, even if they are in process. The Morris Justice Project, a PAR collective in the South Bronx, did this periodically throughout their process by hosting “sidewalk science” installations, putting up data and results in the areas where the data was collected, and sharing back survey findings in a report that could be folded to fit in your pocket.



Morris Justice Project, Sidewalk Science

Related Resources

- *How to Conduct Your Own Survey*, by Priscilla Salant and Don A. Dillman, is a book with practical guidance on designing and carrying out a survey.
- “[Power to Our People, Participatory Research Kit: Creating Surveys](#),” by DataCenter, is a kit for organizers that gives criteria for deciding whether a survey will be useful given your goals, time, and people-power capacity. It is geared toward participatory research and centers impacted people as the drivers of the research process.
- “[Community Toolbox: Conducting Surveys](#),” by the Center for Community Health and Development, describes techniques for designing and carrying out a survey.



Scan this QR code to access these resources online.

Glossary



Scan this QR Code to access the
Glossary section online.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Ancestral ceremonies	a dance with spirit, the soul's way of interacting with the other worlds, the human psyche's opportunity to develop a relationship with the symbols of this world and the spirits of the other ⁵⁵
Archival research	research that involves searching for and gathering information and evidence from original archives ⁵⁶
Belonging	having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of political, social, and cultural structures, including the right to both contribute to and make demands upon society and political institutions ⁵⁷
Cis-heteropatriarchy	a term used to describe the ways in which cisgenderism, heterosexism, and patriarchy simultaneously privilege cisgender, heterosexual men and dehumanize women, LGBTQ+ people, and gender non-conforming individuals ⁵⁸
Collective Liberation	The understanding that no one is free until we are all free. The struggle for healing and justice for everyone. ⁵⁹
Community governance	community participation, engagement, and decision-making in public matters; related to terms such as local governance, social governance, network governance, and participatory governance ⁶⁰ . Does not necessarily refer to interaction with government and can happen at a variety of scales from a block to an identity group.
Community needs assessment	a systematic process of understanding the most pressing needs of your community
Cosmology	beliefs about the origin of the universe ⁶¹
Critical map literacy	vigilance to the inherently political nature of the mapping process, no matter who is involved or how the mapping will be "performed" ⁶²

55 Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community.

56 LexisNexis, "What Is Archival Research?" LexisNexis France, <https://internationalsales.lexisnexis.com/glossary/research/archival-research>.

57 "Our Story," Othering & Belonging Institute, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/our-story>.

58 Sage A. Mauldin, Disrupting Cisheteropatriarchy in Society and the Workplace: The Role of HRD Education. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 25 no. 4, (2023): 279-287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15234223231191815>

59 "Terminology", Organizing White Men for Collective Liberation, <https://www.owmcl.org/terminology/>

60 Vicky Totikidis, Anona Armstrong, and Ronald Francis, "The Concept of Community Governance: A Preliminary Review," ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37376941_The_concept_of_community_governance_a_preliminary_review.

61 Joel Primack, "Cosmology and Culture," *Cosmology and Culture*, http://physics.ucsc.edu/cosmo/primack_abrams/COSMO.HTM.

62 Jay T. Johnson, Renee Pualani Louis, and Albertus Hadi Pramono, "Facing the Future: Encouraging Critical Cartographic Literacies In Indigenous Communities," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 80-98, <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/729>.

Term	Definition
Cultural strategy	the intentional decision within social change efforts to acknowledge, validate, notice, and integrate knowledge, practices, and worldviews that have led to survival, continuity, and thriving in the context of racial capitalism and white supremacy
Culture bearers	a person who is deeply rooted in the layers of their heritage, to the degree that they are confident in transmitting the eligible parts of their culture to others ⁶³
Data	a collection of items of information ⁶⁴
Evidence	any fact, information, or data provided by a research study ⁶⁵
Generalizable	describes findings from a study that can be applied to a larger population or different circumstance ⁶⁶
Geographic Information System (GIS)	a computer system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on Earth's surface ⁶⁷
Healing justice	the practice of reimagining wholeness at the intersection of intergenerational trauma, current structures of oppression, and a generative and cocreated future ⁶⁸
Indigenous sacred science	the long history of knowledge(s) systems of civilization development, cosmology, and ancestors' traditions
Internalized oppression	members of oppressed groups internalize the negative stereotypes, self-doubt, and powerlessness imposed by colonial, racist, and other actors and systems advancing social hierarchy and domination ⁶⁹
Law	a rule of conduct or action prescribed or formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority ⁷⁰
Life-affirming	indicating that life has value. ⁷¹ Evokes energy and creativity

63 "Culture Bearer Pathways," The Rhapsody Project, <https://www.therhapsodyproject.org/culture-bearer-pathways>

64 "Data," in *A Dictionary of Epidemiology* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

65 "What Is Evidence?," The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, <https://www.csp.org.uk/professional-clinical/clinical-evidence/evidence-based-practice/what-evidence>.

66 "Generalizability," The Sociology Dictionary, <https://sociologydictionary.org/generalizability/>

67 "GIS (Geographic Information System)," Education, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/geographic-information-system-gis/>.

68 "Healing Justice for Equity," Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing, <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/healing-justice-equity>.

69 E. J. David and Annie O. Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression, and so What?," *Internalized Oppression*, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1891/9780826199263.0001>.

70 *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "law," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/law>.

71 "Life-Affirming," Encyclopædia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/life%E2%80%93affirming>.

Term	Definition
Methods of survival	a frame for community analysis that support healing of the generational harm and injustices
Ordinance	a law set forth by a governmental authority ⁷²
Participatory action research (PAR)	a collective process of investigation, knowledge generation, and action for social transformation
Pedagogy	the art, science, or profession of teaching ⁷³ and learning
Praxis	practical application of a theory and the evolution of theory learned through its practical application
Policy	a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures, especially of a governmental body ⁷⁴
Policy analysis	a research-based process of understanding past, current, or future impacts of a policy on a community, public government, environment, or specific group
Policy placebo effect	a finding that the passing of policies can make people think something is being done about an issue, even if it hasn't produced any real material change or the policy hasn't been implemented
Popular education	facilitating learning by centering people's lived experience and knowledge and fostering people's development of their own language, theory, and political engagement in the world ⁷⁵
Positionality	the disclosure of how an author's racial, gender, class, or other self-identifications, experiences, and privileges influence research methods ⁷⁶
Power mapping	the visualization of the relationships between different stakeholders' power and interests related to a specific issue, decision, or campaign

72 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "ordinance," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ordinance>.

73 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "pedagogy," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pedagogy>.

74 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "policy," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy>.

75 Paulo Freire and Myra Bergman Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

76 Mark Fathi Massoud, "The Price of Positionality: Assessing the Benefits and Burdens of Self-identification in Research Methods," *Journal of Law and Society* 49, no. S1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/jols.12372>.

Term	Definition
Power over	a term that describes collective action or solidarity and includes both the psychological and political power that comes from being united ⁷⁷
Power to	the ability to act, which can begin with the awareness that it is possible to act and can grow in the process of taking action, developing skills and capacities, and realizing that one can effect change ⁷⁸
Power with	a term that describes collective action or solidarity and includes both the psychological and political power that comes from being united ⁷⁹
Power within	describes the sense of confidence, dignity, and self-esteem that comes from gaining awareness of one's situation and realizing the possibility of doing something about it ⁸⁰
Randomized	the result of assigning participants to treatment and control groups, assuming that each participant has an equal chance of being assigned to any group ⁸¹
Reach	expanding who is engaged and activated in research and who has access to the findings
Resolution	legislation introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, but unlike bills, it may be limited in effect to the Congress or one of its chambers ⁸²
Resonance	deep alignment between the research process and people's inner experiences
Rigor	thorough and accurate study design, data collection, and interpretation phases of research
Sample size	the number of participants or observations included in a study ⁸³

77 Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* (Rugby, 2007).

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Minsoo Kang, Brian G. Ragan, and Jae-Hyeon Park, "Issues in Outcomes Research: An Overview of Randomization Techniques for Clinical Trials," *Journal of Athletic Training* 43, no. 2 (2008): 215–21, <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-43.2.215>.

82 "Congressional Information on the Library of Congress Web Site," Congressional Information on the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/congress/congress-glossary.html>.

83 "Sample Size and Power," Institute for Work & Health, <https://www.iwh.on.ca/what-researchers-mean-by/sample-size-and-power>.

Term	Definition
Scientific racism	a historical pattern of ideologies that generate pseudoscientific racist beliefs ⁸⁴
Secondary data	using existing data generated by large government institutions, health-care facilities, etc., as part of organizational record keeping, and the data is then extracted from more varied data files ⁸⁵
Social desirability bias	the tendency of research subjects to choose responses they believe are more socially desirable or acceptable rather than choosing responses that are reflective of their true thoughts or feelings ⁸⁶
Social movement	a loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values ⁸⁷
Stakeholders	people or organizations that have an interest in your research project or affect, or are affected by its outcomes ⁸⁸
Technical experts	people, such as academics, graduate students, or professional consultants, with specialized skills to use tools or techniques for carrying out research activities
Technocratic	relating to or involving scientific or technological solutions proposed or developed by experts in science or technology who generally hold decision-making power in society
Traditional knowledge	knowledge, know-how, skills, and practices that are developed, sustained, and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity ⁸⁹
Transformative research	a range of processes where people center their lived experience and visions for social transformation, lead a process that systematically builds on this knowledge through investigation and learning rooted in their own ways of knowing, and take action to influence public narratives, policies, and power dynamics toward collective liberation

84 "Scientific Racism," Genome.gov, <https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Scientific-Racism>.

85 "Research Guides: Public Health Research Guide: Primary & Secondary Data Definitions," Research Guides at Benedictine University Library, <https://researchguides.ben.edu/c.php?g=282050&p=4036581>.

86 Pamela Grimm, "Social Desirability Bias," *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing*, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316568.wiem02057>.

87 L. M. Killian, Neil J. Smelser, and Ralph H. Turner, "social movement." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-movement>.

88 "Research Project Stakeholders," Vitae, <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/leadership-development-for-principal-investigators-pis/leading-a-research-project/applying-for-research-funding/research-project-stakeholders>.

89 Traditional Knowledge," WIPO, accessed October 24, 2023, <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/tk/>.

