



*The following guide to designing a participatory action research project is a work in progress. As we are discovering for ourselves, here at the Environmental Youth Alliance, how to do it ourselves. Please excuse the text-heavy lack of interesting layout and pictures for now. You are invited to sneakily preview a literary map of where we've researched and where the action is to follow.....*

- 1. What's the PROBLEM?** Is there an issue in your community that frustrates many people? Is it something that could be changed if people were listened to? If the problem seems complex and there is a general feeling that not enough information exists to find the right solutions, then doing participatory research may be a good way to get people talking. And you may be able to gather some funds and resources together to address the issue as well.

Once a problem has been identified as a potential research project, try to come up with a STATEMENT or RESEARCH QUESTION that captures the problem and what the research project hopes to find out about it. You will revisit this question or statement many times, defining and re-defining it as you develop partnerships, recruit youth participants, design the workshops, run the workshops and analyze the results. This is a very important part of the "participatory" nature of the project. It will keep the research "REAL"!

When Youth Groups in Vancouver wanted to find all the health services in the city, they decided to start a project that would not only map out where young people could go but also research which health services were youth friendly. Voila, the youth health service mapping project!

3. **WHO does the Problem affect?** Identify BROADLY the “community” that is affected by the problem. They are the same people who will benefit from your research. Make it everyone’s research project by attempting to include those individuals who are affected by the problem but rarely asked their opinion about it.

“In the *Youth-Friendly Health Services Research* project (undertaken by the Environmental Youth Alliance and the Self Help Resource Association), the research team included several youth driven organizations working in the areas of health, culture and environment and a diversity of teen-aged youth, from different areas in Vancouver and from many cultural and economic backgrounds (such as street involved, immigrant and queer youth).” (PULL QUOTE).(Explain what the project is doing)

A “community” of people may share the same physical location (i.e. a neighborhood) or share similar life experiences (i.e. students with disabilities, gay, lesbian, transgendered or bisexual youth, youth from different ethnicities/cultures).

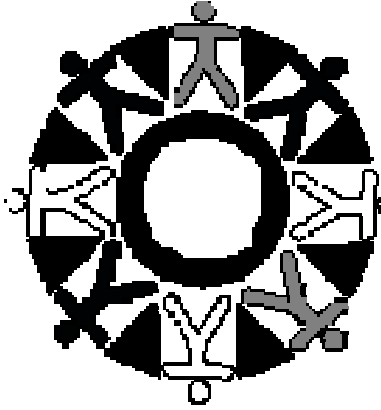


4. **Develop PARTNERSHIPS** with those organizations, institutions, or people who share a common interest to your research project. Compared to the traditional research process, the PAR process is even more time and resource consuming. So get help! Start looking for partners that will be able to provide different perspectives, resources (funding opportunities, staff time, photocopying, meeting space, workshop materials etc.) or contacts and access to decision-makers.

Who exactly is approached will depend on what is being researched. If the research project is to benefit the youth community, then youth-driven organizations are natural partners. Academic researchers (who are experienced with PAR) from a nearby university may also be interested in helping you. Departments of social work, child and youth care, psychology, health sciences, and the social sciences may be good places to seek mentors for your research.

“In the Youth-Friendly Health Research project there was a big group of partners. It included representatives from the Self Help Resource Association Kinex Youth Team, Environmental Youth Alliance Youth Mappers, Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, and Youthnet Vancouver (PULL OUT).”

Partners can be anyone that wants to help you or has a stake in your research. For example in the National Centre of Excellence on Youth Engagement there are both youth organization from across the country and university research departments that share a common research question; How are youth engaged in their communities.

**Yurt Circle:**

To establish trust and responsibility's within a group. To keep the circle stable & whole each person is responsible for supporting the whole!

**Description:**

The group forms a circle with an even number of players. Everyone faces the center, standing almost shoulder to shoulder and holding hands. Then, everyone goes around the circle saying in turn "In", "Out". If you say in you lean in and if you say out you lean out. On the count of three everyone switches. Ins go out and outs go in. The trick is not to fall, and to trust that others will not let you go.

- 4. Determine ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES.** The next big step is organizing who will do what. It's a lot easier in the long run if each partner is responsible for doing and sharing what they do best at the beginning of the research process, even though these roles may be changed later. For example, participating organizations may offer training in research skills, provide experienced staff members to help guide the process, lend research equipment, or simply give advice.

"The *Youth-Friendly Health Services Research* project drew on the expertise and people power of four youth-driven groups. The following lists some of these, along with the strengths they shared:

- a. Self Help Resource Association Kinex Youth Team: facilitators, facilitation training, youth community contacts, and health services contacts.
- b. Environmental Youth Alliance Youth Mappers: facilitators, facilitation training, youth community contacts, and community mapping knowledge.
- c. Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement: facilitators, research process development, funding, video documentation, and participatory action research training.
- d. YouthNet Vancouver: facilitators, youth mental health contacts and knowledge (PULL OUT)."

**5. Set out the research OBJECTIVES.** These objectives are the goals of the research project and need to be relevant to each partner and the youth populations they represent. Be flexible in your research design and know that you are building a framework for incoming youth who will want to change what you have begun in order to feel like its their project too. IT IS ALL RIGHT TO HAVE THE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS OF A PROJECT CHANGE AS IT GOES ALONG \_ THIS IS WHAT WE MEAN BY PARTICIPATORY.

### **Consensus Decision making**

is a process for group decision-making. It is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.

"In the *Youth-Friendly Health Services Research* project the youth organizational partners set the following objectives: to involve/support less involved youth, improve youth access to health services, train and build research capacity amongst young people, and build understanding of PAR and its potential to make change. When the teen youth participants entered the scene, they added the following changes: more representation from boys and youth from different cultural backgrounds, meeting space location in a quiet area, participation from more youth in their age group" (PULL OUT).

**Gather your RESOURCES.** *Research and community development grants are available from a variety of government and non-government organizations, the challenge is framing your research project to fit into their criteria. This will involve putting together a funding proposal, including a work plan and budget. This is where partnering with more established groups comes in handy if you are less experienced in fundraising.*

6. **Vee haff vays to make youth TALK.** Normally called the research METHODOLOGY, we as youth mappers recommend a series of fun and playful, youth-friendly workshops with good youth facilitators, ice-breakers, energizers, snacks, lots of floor and table space, coloured markers galore, honouraria for anyone volunteering their time, and most importantly - mapping exercises. These mapping exercises are designed to elicit information through drawing, writing, and talking.

Designing a workshop is a good way to put these exercises in action. One important thing to think about at this stage is how many youth should be involved. A project that focuses on a small geographical area or an issue that affects a very specific population could have as few as 10 participants. In order to research a broader area or issue, it is important to have more numbers as well as a diverse range of participants involved. We have done research with 4 participants and with over 300. Either way, community mapping is a research methodology that allows for "qualitative" investigation. It is the youth "experiences" not the statistics of the youth that matters here. Each workshop should ideally have 2 facilitators and between 6 and 20 youth participants so as to maintain a cozy atmosphere and allow for some group mapping and discussion.

"What is qualitative research? This type of research uses open-ended questions to explore feelings, attitudes, opinions, and the behavior of participants. It usually involves conducting interviews, focus groups or workshops (Pull Out)"

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**methodology**

Pronunciation: "me-th&-'dä-l&-jE

Function: noun

Etymology: New Latin *methodologia*, from Latin *methodus* + *-logia* -logy

Date: 1800

1 : a body of methods , rules, and postulates employed by a discipline : a particular procedure or set of procedures

2 : **basically it means how you do what you do. You use a methodology for everything from brushing your teeth to deciding where you are going to eat lunch.**

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**8. Empowering youth facilitators with research training.** Youth facilitators are an overlooked treasure in our society! With the ability to relate to other youth and model leadership in the community, youth consultations should always be led and designed by youth facilitators. Sometimes they have formal training, others are just plain experienced. If they can make you laugh, find creative ways to engage you and make you forget you are actually thinking and working hard, if you sense that they honour your experiences, if they can make you care and they try hard to make the space comfortable to your needs – then you have found a very special youth facilitator.

The fortunate thing is most youth-driven organizations have quite a few of those special people around. For various mapping projects, we gathered youth facilitators from the youth-driven community and gave them specific training in mapping and PAR. It is advised that you do a practice run of your workshop session with a group of youth facilitators (and possibly participants too) so you can test drive your methodology, discuss the purpose of the project, allow for questions and refining of the project design, and give the facilitators a chance to participate in the workshop before they have to go out and run it.

- 9. Find participants.** Identify and recruit the youth who will be participants in the research project. A broad diversity of youth should be involved – not just from friends or partner organizations . Those that belong to a recreational club, out-of-school group, or drop-in are good candidates for being interested in participating and usually have a youth worker who can help set up a time and place for the workshop.

Going out to the youth is preferred over bringing the youth to your organization's offices. They are more comfortable in their own setting and there is a higher chance of a good turn-out. Outreach to participants can be done through partner organization contacts with the drop-in groups, etc. or through public outreach (posters, community announcements on radio, TV, newspapers). Participation should be on a voluntary basis and an honourarium should be offered.

**10. Set up workshops.** Its time to prepare materials and activities for the workshop. We suggest using mapping, where participants write, draw or use whatever other media feel comfortable with to express their knowledge visually, as a technique for engaging participants and recording information. The openness of this technique almost always sparks the creativity of participants—something everyone has—and even sparks the creation of new information as people share and work together.

In order to set up the mapping process, first prepare the map templates or “base maps” (if you will design and use templates). Map templates are a pre-drawn, basic format that has been designed to help a discussion group organize their answers spatially. See Appendix 1 for sample templates. Having a template makes it easier for the follow-up workshop activity (research analysis or “coding”) which is to organize all the mapped information and reflect upon what it all means. Mapping produces a lot of data and it will take a long time to group the data and to find trends. Using no template at all is like asking a very open-ended question. Sometimes that is desirable: “*What does a healthy youth look like?*”.

Experimenting with using templates and blank sheets to answer different questions within the same workshop is okay too. Try to be consistent with what map format is used for which question or else the answers may look very different from group to group. The materials you will need are: big pieces of unlined chart paper (with pre-drawn templates if you are using them), big tip colour markers (several sets), and a set of guidelines for the workshop on poster paper. You can brainstorm new guidelines with each group if you like but the main ones to be covered are: respect, no answer is wrong, active listening, confidentiality, honour each person’s experiences,



**11. Conduct workshops.** There are at least two kinds of workshops to be held – one is for **meeting with the groups of youth and gathering information with them**, the next is to get together with a subset of all the people involved for the **analysis of the results**. A subset can be a voluntary group of youth and facilitators, with one or two representatives from each of the first workshop sessions. The reason for the smaller groups is that it is easier to work with.

“For the *Youth-Friendly Health Services Research* project, we did five information-gathering workshops (each one with a different youth population) and there were about 50 youth participants involved in total. During those first workshops, we asked for a youth representative from each of the groups to come to a follow-up data analysis workshop. The data analysis workshop also was joined by about 6 facilitators and another facilitator designed and led the workshop. If you are working with a smaller group of researchers (participants + facilitators), then you may want to keep the same group throughout information-gathering and analysis stages. The data analysis can also be broken up into two different workshops: Coding and Analyzing Results.” (PULL OUT)

**12. Organizing the information: Coding.** You will find that a lot of information is gathered from mapping. Each map will have between 10 and 100 things drawn, chicken-scratched, written, graffitied, et cetera, onto it. The more the better, but remember that this makes the coding job bigger too.

One tool that we like to use to record all this information is sticky notes—it's good to have a large supply so try to get them donated from a large stationary store. Break up into smaller groups and have everybody copy down onto the stickies each entry that was made on the map. One piece of information; whether it be a word, a phrase, or a picture, per sticky.

Have each group organize the stickies into piles of things they feel are similar and then give each pile a category name (or code). For each map, the groups should come together and present their categories of stickies. Through consensus (another tool in the handy skill-set of the facilitator ), the groups should be assisted in combining same/similar categories of stickies and forming a large collectively built list of categories. The number of the stickies in each category can be counted and listed beside each category name. The meaning of these numbers may be discussed and decided upon in the Analyzing Results workshop.

A clear tie-in to the "mapping" metaphor is to call the compiled list of categories a LEGEND. Any drawings that belong to each category can be considered for use in designing an ICON (symbol) to represent the whole category. Just like a roadmap it has a tent symbol for describing an area where camping can take place. The legend can be a fun and visual way to keep the creativity of mapping a vital part of the results and it will also be a useful presentation tool later on.

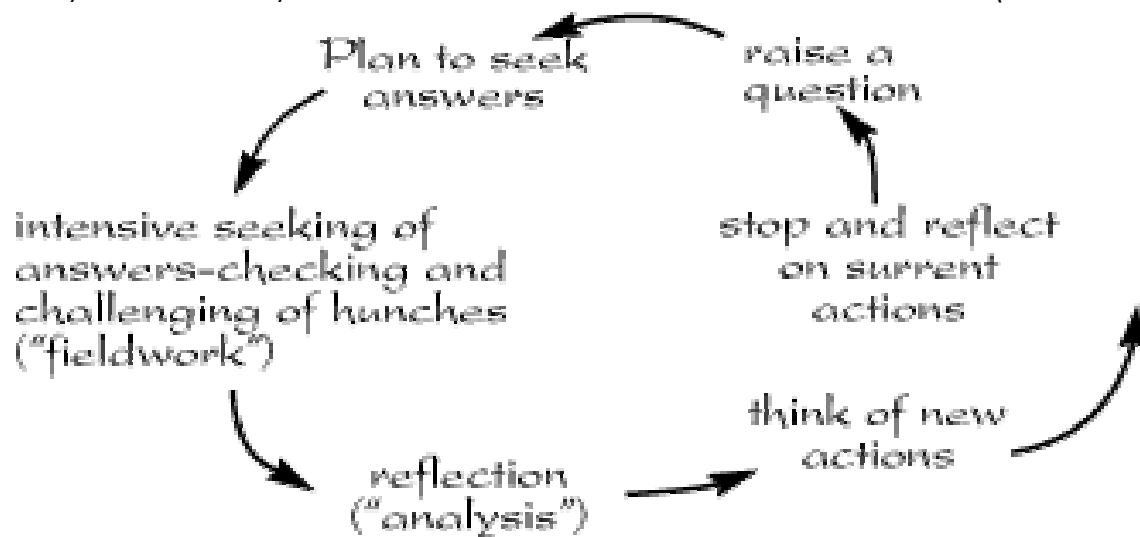


**13. What does it all mean? Analysis & the research question.** Now that we have all the data organized before us, and we know a whole lot more about what a whole bunch of youth think about a certain topic – let's go back AGAIN to the research question. Open a discussion (allot at least an hour) to explore how the results support or don't support the research question. Does the research question even fit with what was found out during the mapping? How could the research question be adjusted so that it more accurately reflects the answers? What new statement could be made with all the new information? Were there some categories that had a high number of responses? Which categories were they and why did youth think it so important? What was less important and why?

Besides the content of the information which must be looked into, there is also the matter of the research design and methodology. Have a break, some snacks and an energizer before going into a discussion (1/2 hour to 1 hour) about the research process and the workshops themselves. What was well done and what could be improved? Good.

**What should we do with the new information?** Decide realistic short-term and long-term goals of the research. It is important to report back the results to every single one of the youth who was involved and to invite them to make suggestions as to what they would like to see done with the info. Throughout the process, there will be some youth who are more interested than others, who will go on to play larger roles in the project. They can be officially asked to sit in as a YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (YAC).

"The 5 youth who took part in the coding/analysis of the *Youth-Friendly Health Services Research* project became a YAC for our project. They wanted to make presentations to health officials and to develop powerful visual aids with the results of the project. They also wanted to create a directory or map of what was learnt about health resources and make it available to youth. Above all, they wanted to continue the research project as they felt there was more to learn and more to share. We are now in the process of getting together the funds to embark on a phase 2 of the project and have 25% leftover funding in order to ACT upon what the youth advisory council wants to do with the current results." (PULL OUT)



**14. Let's get some ACTION!** What resources, such as funding and people, are needed to translate research into action? Do up a budget and allocate adequate and skilled human resources to work with the youth participants in achieving ACTION. Help them to develop the presentation materials they need. They may need all your mapping supplies or a design-capable computer and graphic artist mentor. Set a timeline and help to set up meetings with decision-makers. Go with them to meet with the decision-makers, take photos and write an article about the presentations and try to get it published in local youth magazines and send it to newspapers. Keep in mind that young people also have very busy lives and often not a lot of money. Do you have enough money in your budget to continue giving honoraria to active youth participants?

Involving youth in the fundraising, budgeting, decision-making, and planning of current and future research activities is also recommended. Do not be disappointed if the youth take a step back or cannot do all the things they planned to do. It is your job to help them to do what can be done and be encouraging and understanding of the realities of being a youth.

**Victoria, BC. 2002.** Community mapper's got involved in the **United Nations children's conference on the environment**. We worked a community mapping piece into the agenda (2 hours a day) and with the help of over 60 volunteer facilitator's and 400 10-12 year olds from 90 country's we created a list of challenges for the world leaders. Through community mapping activities that we designed, we worked with the youth to express their views and experiences on important environmental issues. Eventually 3 child delegates from this conference went to Johannesburg, South Africa to the **WSSD conference** where they (on the main stage) presented the challenges to the audience of world leaders and environmental activists from around the globe.

**15. Go on, go for it! The world deserves to hear from you!** And don't hesitate to call or email us if you would like to have some help in starting off a research project!

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