



Participatory Action Research (PAR)

What is Participatory Action Research and why is it important?

Participatory action research (PAR) is a scientific research method through which community members undergo research training and perform a critical analysis of an issue that affects their lives. The purpose of a PAR is both to find a lasting solution that addresses the issue and develop member-researchers' political consciousness, and critical thinking, analysis, and interpersonal skills. PAR is a transformative experience for both member-researchers and the larger community, and offers a different perspective on social issues to the wider world.

Who uses it?

PAR researchers are community members. As researchers in this process, they bring their own experience to the table as they conduct an inquiry into their communities and lives. Peer researchers direct the entire process of research and data analysis, which includes:

- identifying themes
- collecting data
- coding data
- triangulating the data between different sources or methods of data collection

How do you use it?

A PAR process uses a number of tools, depending on the goal and capacity of researchers. These tools may include developing learning questions; designing data collection instruments; and

conducting data collection through instruments that can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Surveys - Short and quick questionnaires that get to the point of the issue quickly, usually in 10 questions or fewer. Surveys can be taken by the surveyed alone or with the surveyor.
- Interviews - Longer, in-depth questionnaires that require a cooperative interaction between an interviewer and interviewee. Interviews usually take at least 10 minutes to conduct.
- Ethnographic observation - A process whereby researchers will visit a specific location, such as a school, intersection, classroom, church, and watch people in these areas very closely. Researchers will examine how people interact with each other.
- Community mapping - Performed after an ethnographic observation, a community mapping exercise invites researchers to draw a “map” of the observation site based on their personal experiences
- Relationship mapping - To understand power dynamics and social interactions from a structural point of view, researchers detail—or map out—the different influences in their lives, such as community institutions, friends and family, and one’s own self.
- Site visits - Researchers visit another site that may be demographically similar or entirely different from their own site, but has achieved a similar goal to that of PAR researchers. For example, if you were conducting PAR on high school dropout rates, you would visit schools with high graduation rates in another community, city, state, or even country.

What are PAR best practices?

- Choose your community-based researchers strategically. Make sure that the researchers are affected by the issue and/or live in the area affected by the issue. For example, if your research is to examine neighborhood foreclosures, make sure that your researchers have either experienced foreclosure themselves, been directly affected by a foreclosure, or live in a neighborhood that has experienced foreclosure.
- Plan out the PAR. PAR can be as in-depth as your organization/group wants it to be. Make sure that there is enough time to fully complete the PAR process. For example, you will need to train researchers to develop and use each skill before they can use them. It’s important to be realistic about how long it will take to build the capacity of researchers through training and skills development.

Where can I get more information?

Visit <http://www.voyceproject.org/> to read more about how Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) uses PAR in their youth organizing work.