Participatory Action Research

A guide for community-based organizations

    

Participation House Support Services
London and Area

Inclusive, evolving and ongoing evaluation

Participation House
SUPPORT SERVICES
London and Area

FOCUS
accreditation
FOCUS-Accredited Organization
2010 - 2013

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Introduction

"The effectiveness and sustainability of organizations is directly related to their ability to learn from their own experience."
-Community Development resource Association

Why was this guide written?

Participation House Support Services – London and Area (PH) embarked on a voluntary self-initiated project to evaluate the impact of their mission and principles of service on the individuals they support. The Quality Outcomes for People Committee, a committee established by the Board of Directors, considered a number of approaches before deciding on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to evaluation.

PAR has since been embedded into PH's organizational processes for purposes of evaluation, accountability and internal benchmarking of service excellence.

This guide was originally conceived:

- **to provide Participation House (PH) with a tool to continue to evaluate their programs in a practical, credible way.**

The Quality Outcomes for People Committee then decided to share their experiences and PAR methodology with other community-based organizations in the hopes of contributing knowledge to the larger field. The guide:

- shares the lessons learned at Participation House with other service agencies;
- provides a practical guide for agencies who wish to use this evaluation approach;
- describes an evaluation approach that is particularly relevant to, and focused on, the nonprofit community-based sector;
- documents an evaluation approach that responds to pressures of accountability, simplicity and responsiveness.

Who is this guide for?

- **This guide was primarily written for PH's Board and Staff so they could continue to evaluate their programs.**

- This guide can be useful to nonprofit community-based service organizations with limited funds to design and implement meaningful evaluations. The PAR method of evaluation has been adapted to the needs of these organizations so that accountability and continuous improvement can take place. This method is particularly suited to evaluations that benefit from being qualitative, responsive and participative. This method combines quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve both action and research results.

- This guide can be useful to sister organizations and funders in suggesting an evaluation method that is both practical and effective.

Participatory Action Research

What is it?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research method that is qualitative, quantitative and participative. It has as its twin goals the achievement of both action and research in the same evaluation method.

Participants (eg. individuals receiving service and family members) are involved in collecting and interpreting data. The data can be a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators. This combination strengthens the qualitative data, provides a deeper understanding of the quantitative data and leads to action more directly.

Participatory Action Research has a number of characteristics:
- Participative – consumers, staff, board and other stakeholders are involved as partners in the research process; invests in relationships between stakeholders;
- Qualitative – it focuses more on descriptions than numbers;
- Reflective – critical reflection on the process and outcomes are important features of the process;
- Responsive – it is able to respond to emerging issues which can lead to immediate action;
- Emergent and cyclical – the process takes place gradually over a number of cycles so that interpretations of data can be tested, challenged and refined.

Why is it useful?

- In some community or agency settings it may be difficult to use traditional evaluation-experimental-research methods.
- To achieve both understand (research) and action requires responsiveness to the situation and the people involved.
- Some questions and methods to answer these questions are imprecise in the social/human service sectors. PAR enables participants and researchers to learn from experiences and move towards a better understanding of elusive matters.
- The cyclic process of including planning, review and learning allows the collected data to be used critically for understanding and action.
- The quality of the evidence can be continually improved by using many sources of data collection.

Deciding to Do PAR

How to prepare

To Begin

- Research is the systematic collection and analysis of information. Research begins with a question: What is it that we want to know? How can we tell that what we are doing is having an impact? Do we want the information we need to make decisions and take action?

- We need to clarify the question we want to ask. Participation House asked the question: Are we fulfilling our promise (mission, quality outcomes) and obligations (principles of service) to the people we support?

- The decision to launch an evaluation process follows. This decision is usually made at the board and/or at senior management levels.

- Once the decision is made, a structure should be developed to oversee the process and report to the Board.

Who to involve

A Steering Committee

- Organize a committee, reporting to the Board of Directors, who will participate in and oversee the design, implementation, analysis and results of the PAR project (see Appendix A for sample terms of reference). PH named their committee *Quality Outcomes for People Committee* to reinforce the focus of their evaluation and accountability.

- Bring together a variety of people with different skills and interests as well as a commitment to the organization. Committee members should include board, community and senior staff.

- Engage an external consultant to lend expertise, credibility and neutrality to the process. The consultant will guide the project and produce the resulting report.

Participants in the Research Partnership

- Identify who will be participating in the research. At PH the Committee identified the people they support as the focus of the evaluation. Family and staff assisted[1] as required. All became partners in the research.

- Consider involving neighbours, community members (stores, banks, community centres) and agencies as part of your research.

- Ensure that the selection of participants is random (especially in large organizations) and/or unbiased to avoid skewing the results. PH used a combination of: inviting people to volunteer to participate in the project; ensuring participants came from different homes and family situations; and including individuals with various capacities to communicate verbally. The selection process was reviewed by the external consultant and approved by the Board. PH hopes to engage most, if not all, individuals and families in this process over the next few years.

Steps in preparing for PAR

1. Think about what you want to learn: What questions do you have?

2. Decide how you can answer your questions.

3. Decide what you need to proceed.

4. Decide who should be involved in the evaluation.

5. Estimate the cost of doing the evaluation.

6. Develop a time frame and critical path.

7. Decide what to do with the findings.

1 Some staff and family members helped by facilitating the communication between the individuals (particularly someone who was nonverbal) and consultant.

Designing a PAR Project

How to develop a design

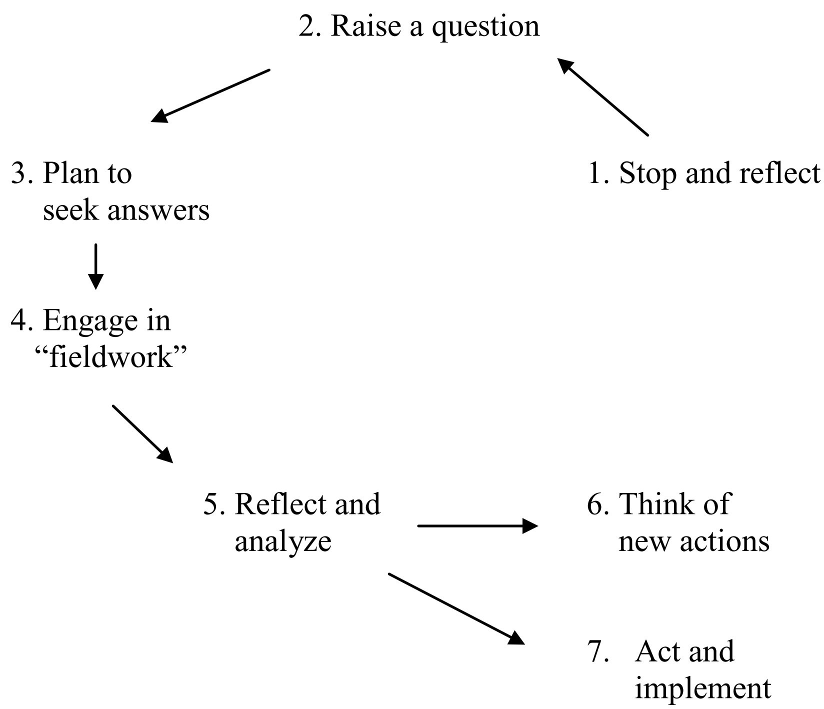
- The design outlines: the kind of information to collect and why; how to collect the information; and from whom (consider random selection) to collect the information.

- The design sets the framework for defining what the process is, how individuals participate in it and how the pieces fit together.

- Principles of design:

- collect the same type of information from everyone;
- respect the organization's rules of confidentiality (see Appendix B);
- involve the Steering Committee and others in critical discussion and reflection;
- form conclusions based on data;
- recognize the knowledge and experience of those people who direct and do the work as well as those who are the users (eg. people who are supported and their families);
- ensure the process is fair and perceived as fair to participants;
- recognize that although any question can be asked, the respondents (i.e. participants) must be connected to the issue – eg. consumers, staff, community members and others may be primary or secondary participants in the process depending on the question raised;
- ensure the evaluation is useful to the people who are delivering the services and governing the organization;
- use a constructive approach to answer why and how well the organization/program/ service is succeeding in doing what it has set out to do, where it is falling short and how it can improve.

Steps in the PAR process*



*adapted from Yoland Wadsworth

Each of the steps identified is connected to PH's process and experiences.

Steps in PAR	The PH Experience
1. Stop and reflect on current actions and practices.	1. PH reflected on whether it was achieving its mission and values.
2. Raise a question.	2. Are we succeeding at implementing our Principles of Service?
3. Plan to seek answers to the question(s) – start a process of questioning and reflecting by involving others who could and should be involved.	3. The Quality outcomes for People Committee began this process and designed the PAR project.
4. Engage in "fieldwork". Design the "fieldwork" in ways that are accessible to the participants in the research – eg. use stories, cameras/videos, observations, drawings.	4. An external consultant with the assistance of Committee and Board members conducted interactive interviews and documented what people thought and knew about the questions raised. PH used stories and observations to collect some of the information.
5. Reflect and analyze – develop deeper understandings and more useful theories about what you are evaluating in order to produce new knowledge that can improve action and/or practice.	5. PH's Quality Outcomes for People Committee did much of this reflection with the guidance of the consultant.
6. Think of new actions and further areas of research – changing your actions becomes part of the evaluation/research process. Then another cycle of research beings.	6. Some operational changes were made as soon as awareness was raised. The Committee made recommendations to the Board.
7. Act on and implement the findings.	7. An Implementation Committee was established by the Board to recommend implementation strategies.

Carrying Out a PAR Project

Pilot Test

It is generally useful to conduct a smaller version, i.e. pilot test, of the PAR Project before implementing the project. The Steering Committee can then refine and improve its methods before implementing the full project.

Identifying Multiple Sources of Data

Multiple sources of data ensure a more accurate evaluation.

1. Define the question and the outcomes you are looking for.
2. Identify the indicators of success in achieving the outcomes.
3. Identify multiple sources of evidence that could be collected to answer the question raised (see Appendix C for a useful chart).

Data Collection Tools

A number of data collection tools are available. Some of these tools can be found in the appendices identified.

- Face Sheet (Appendix D)
- Open-ended interviews (Appendix E) and Themes (Appendix F)
- Questionnaires to guide stories (Appendix G)
- Case studies – i.e. descriptions of existing situations
- Focus groups (Appendix H)
- Observations
- Surveys
- Individual Service Agreements (ISA) and Person Centred Plans (PCP)
- Staff logs
- Complaints
- Inventories
- Statistics (examples include: staff turnover, number of vans, length of stay in home, individuals with/without family members, number of days in hospital)
- Results of other research evaluation processes and surveys already conducted
- Accreditation
- Reports and audits

Collecting Data

- Develop a plan for collecting data with preferred tools (see above), identifying participants and developing a schedule. Consider a combination of methodologies – eg. individual interviews, focus groups, statistical data – to evaluate processes and outcomes.
- Implement the plan.
- Document the results in a report.

Analyzing the Data

- Review the documented results with the Steering Committee.
- Reflect on the interpretation and meaning of the results.
- Identify and analyze patterns.
- Draw conclusions in answer to the original questions.
- Raise areas for further study – identify other data to be collected.

Analyzing the Data – a PH illustration

- Issues raised during the interview phase were compared wherever possible with actual quantitative data in a chart.

- At times the issues raised were supported by perceptions rather than data.

- Staff turnover was a case in point:
  - Some family members perceived a high turnover rate in their son/daughter/sibling's home when staff had actually moved to another part of the agency.
  - When examined more closely "turnover" presented itself as a complex issue with several facets:

1. PH's growth created opportunities for internal staff movement and promotion – staff did not "turnover" at the agency level although they may have moved from one home to another.
2. Some "turnover" is inevitable when it is a temporary summer student or college/university student.
3. Maternity leaves create another type of "temporary turnover".
4. Staff who work primarily weekends and evenings often apply for positions offering day shifts.
5. Family members may have unrealistic expectations of what "reasonable" turnover represents; staff will move more quickly from weekend/evening positions.
6. Some turnover is important in order to keep staff and agency fresh.
7. Staff leaving during the probationary period may reflect a positive screening system.

  - The Committee reflected on this issue and identified some actions that could be taken in response to family members' concerns:

1. Hold transfer interviews with staff to understand why they moved to another part of the organization (better pay, full time vs. part-time employment, better hours, etc.). Develop strategies in response to findings.
2. Develop strategies to better meet the individual's and family member's needs for consistency in relationships.
3. Modify expectations by introducing staff in different ways – eg. "This is Mary, a summer student, who will be with us for only two months".
4. Communicate findings to individuals and family members to align perceptions with reality.

Moving forward

- Make recommendations to the Board (the sponsoring group).
- Identify new actions and/or areas of research.
- Evaluate the process and improve methods of evaluation.
- Evaluate the impact/outcomes of the PAR process.
- Start the cycle again.

Accountability

- Include a process the Board can use to implement the recommendations.
- Identify a communications plan for the Board to report the results of the process to the interested constituencies.
- Identify a process and time line for evaluating the impact of the PAR process.

Communicating the Results of a PAR Project

Whom to send the report (or summary) to

- Submit to Board for approval and action;
- Share report with management and staff;
- Distribute to the participants in the process;
- Share with funders;
- Share with interested groups and sister agencies;
- Identify others.

What to include in the report

- Decide on how the results will be reported. Consider who it is for, what you want to tell them and what they need to know.
- Agree on an outline of the report including:
  - executive summary,
  - introduction and background,
  - evaluation methodology,
  - analysis of results,
  - conclusion and recommendations,
  - appendices of interview questions, data collected, committee members and other relevant information.

Keeping track of recommended actions

- Develop an action plan for the Board based on the PAR results. This level of detail helps the Board take the required steps to implement the recommendations.
- Communicate the Board's next steps to participants.
- Commit to reporting on progress made on the action plans – i.e. being accountable.

Evaluation

What to evaluate

To close the loop on the PAR process, evaluate both the process and the outcome.

Process: How well did the process and methodology work in achieving your goals?

Outcome: What positive impact or change in services/organization have you seen as a result of the process?

How to evaluate

Process: The Steering Committee can reflect on and analyze the process by engaging in a focused discussion of the positive and negative aspects of the process. The conclusions and lessons learned will inform the next PAR process.

Outcome: The Board, with the help of the Steering Committee, can compare changes made with the recommendations for action. Once a baseline has been established the Board, staff and other stakeholders can monitor improvements or deterioration in the initial situation.

Summary

The lessons learned by PH as a result of engaging in Participatory Action Research are offered here to inform those who will be using this approach.

1. **Data**

   a) Try to include, collect and analyze as much quantitative data that is already available. Incorporate the data into the PAR process.
   b) Identify quantitative data that could be useful for more in depth research and understanding. Often the need for specific data emerges during the PAR process.
   c) Try to compare and/or contrast the qualitative with the quantitative data.
   d) Continue to zoom in on the layers of information as if "peeling an onion".

2. **Confidentiality and Safety**

   a) Ensure that participants have confidential and safe ways to express their views.
   b) Consider offering choices such as:
   - speaking to a consultant or Committee member in private;
   - leaving a stamped, addressed envelope and form to be sent in anonymously or with identification.

3. **Action**

   a) Respond as soon as possible to the information and insights you acquire – you do not have to wait for the final report before taking action.
   b) Include accounts of any actions taken during the process in the final report.

4. **Accountability**

   a) Include clear practical recommendations in the final report for Board to respond to and take action on.
   b) Develop an implementation plan to assist the Board in its meaningful response to the research.
   c) Identify the constituencies that should receive a summary report. Follow up to ensure the summary is distributed.

5. **Follow Up and Evaluation**

   a) Identify the next round of the continuous PAR process.
   b) Schedule an evaluation (see Appendix I) of the impact of the PAR process including a review of which recommendations were implemented.

References

Dick, B. (1997)	*Qualitative evaluation for program improvement,* Resource Papers in Action Research
Ellis, Diana et al. (1990)	*Keeping on Track: An evaluation Guide for Community Groups,* Women's Research Centre, Vancouver
Hart, E. and Bond, M. (1995)	*Action-Research for Health and Social Care,* Open University Press
McGill, I. and Beatty, L. (1995)	*Action Learning: a guide for professional management and educational development,* Kogan Page
Newman, Judith (2000)	*Action research: A brief overview,* Forum: Qualitative Social Research
Wadsworth, Yoland (1998)	*What is Participatory Action Research?* Action Research International

APPENDIX A

PAR Steering Committee Terms of Reference

- SAMPLE -

Purpose:

To design, implement and oversee a participatory action research project that considers a particular question. The PAR Steering Committee will be comprised of board, staff and community members. The Committee will meet regularly with the PAR consultant in order to:

1. Raise and discuss matters regarding the design and use of information collected for the project.

2. Monitor the overall process and modify if necessary.

3. Review the data and findings of the process. Analyze and discuss the implications.

4. Be the official information link between the Board and the consultant and between the Board and community.

5. Report to the Board on a regular basis.

The PAR Steering Committee will be responsible for making recommendations to the Board based on the results of the process. In addition, the Committee will outline an implementation plan for the Board to consider when it approves the recommendations.

The PAR Steering Committee will engage the community as appropriate to the PAR process.

The PAR Steering Committee recognizes that part of the research process is to influence change.

APPENDIX B
Confidentiality

- Confidentiality in evaluation and research is important and discussions about protecting confidentiality should be taken very seriously. Keeping information confidential is a measure of respect for participants and is especially important if your group wants to use the evaluation findings for ongoing action and improving services. Assure people that they won't suffer any consequences if they choose not to answer your questions. Also assure them you will respect their confidentiality.

  Protect the confidentiality of your participants at all times during and after the evaluation process. If you promise anyone confidentiality, you must *always* protect it.

- If participants name places, people and things about themselves that will identify them, you must remove or alter those details when you write the final report.

  Sometimes the naming of people, services or facts is relevant to the evaluation. In these cases be sure to check first with the people involved. It may be proper to allow identification of the services, although you may wish to delete references to actual staff.

- Decide on the method you want to use to code your participants. There are a number of options. You can give them made-up names or use numbers, letters, or a combination of numbers and letters. Write their code name/number next to their actual name on the master list and from that point on, use the code to identify the interview or any documentation related to that person. Make a habit of referring to the participants by the code even if you remember you they are.

- As you locate participants, develop a master list with their name, code, address and phone number on it. Keep the number of people who have access to the master list to an absolute minimum.

- When the evaluation process is complete, you may wish to include a list of demographics about the informants as an appendix. The items used in the demographics are usually collected on a face sheet (see Appendix D) at the time of, or prior to, the interview.

APPENDIX C

Analysis
Sample of Sources of Evidence from PH Process

The analysis is presented in chart form matching Principles of Service (the question that was raised for evaluation) with Indicators and with Evidence of desirable outcomes – i.e. Principles of Service.

1. Focal Principle: "We believe in encouraging and assisting individuals to make their own decisions, including the supports that are right for them."

Note: The principles were divided into a series of outcomes.

Principles of Service/Outcomes	Indicators	Evidence
1.1 Participation in determining services	• consumers are asked for their preferences by staff • consultation and planning with individual, family, friends, external advocates, internal staff (in above order of priority)	• interviews x 10 - individuals and family members confirmed participation • Person Centred Plan (PCP) • Staff Logs
1.2 Services meet needs as defined by consumers within PH mandate	• matching goals to outcomes • joint problem-solving • open communication	• interviews x 10 - confirmed this principle • activity calendars/visuals • Person Centred Plans (PCP) • Individual Service Agreements (ISA)
1.3 Consumers have rights	• consumers know their rights • mechanism exists/used to complain and appeal • consumers educated	• individuals noted their ability to go to or complain to staff and family members • family members felt comfortable going to or complaining to staff and senior managers

APPENDIX C

2. Aspects of other Principles

Principles of Service/Outcomes	Indicators	Evidence
2.1 Independent decision-making	• consumers are self-directed and make choice – personal preferences (involvement of family, friends, external advocates, internal staff)	• interviews x 10 • PCP • Staff Logs • activity calendars and binder room and home décor
2.2 Participation in community life	• contacts with different individuals • exposure to different settings	• interviews x 10 indicated: daily exposure to stores, jobs, banks, malls, church, friends, volunteering, theatre, baseball, etc.
2.3 Strengthen family of choice relationships to provide support and advocacy	• contacts with family members • involvement in hiring and evaluating staff • support from senior staff • awareness of rights	• 1 out of 10 people was without any family connection • 7 out of 10 people had family members present for the interviews who were very involved in planning
2.4 Interdependent, mutually supportive and responsible community – individual has equal opportunities to be a community members	• welcoming community response • community affected in positive way • participation in community life	• area for further research – via community interviews and stories
2.5 Enriched environment	• participation in physical, educational and recreational environments • comparison with institutional environment	• options for individual choice were present • observation of physical surroundings: home décor, personal touches, individual's photos, crafts everywhere • participation in daily living activities in small groups or pairs
2.6 Services evaluated	• formal process of evaluation • consumers have opportunity to give input • knowledge of how to contact senior manager and board members	• Ministry compliance procedures • ISAs • PAR process

APPENDIX D
Face Sheet

- SAMPLE -

A face sheet can be used to collect descriptive information to complement the interview guide, themes or questionnaire. Make sure, however, that you know why you are asking for information – i.e. How is it going to help the evaluation?

Code Name:

Interviewer(s):

Place of Interview:

Time: Start: Finish:

Why chosen (if relevant):

Interest in PAR project:

Number of years receiving service:

Age group:

History (important highlights – eg. lived in institution for 20 years, no immediately family):

Other:

APPENDIX E

Guidelines for Open-Ended Interviews

Before you start

1. Make arrangements to interview the participants.

2. When requesting the interview, say how much time you think the interview will take. Be sure the person knows that if he or she chooses not to be involved, it will not affect the services s/he receives in any way.

3. Plan to have the guides for *interviews, themes and questionnaires* close at hand so you can refer to them comfortably. Review the guides beforehand so you are familiar with the questions. When you are writing the final notes include the question you actually asked with each response. During the interview it is more efficient simply to write the number or letter of the question beside the response rather than writing out the whole question. Any question you've asked in addition to those in the guides must be recorded and included in the final write-up.

4. Do not use a tape recorder. The process of writing/typing encourages you, the interviewer, to pay close attention to what is being said and stops you from going off on tangents.

5. Decide on the code name or number to be used for each interview, to preserve the anonymity of the people interviewed.

As you begin

1. Introduce the project and yourself. You may use a handout – a brief written description – as a basis for introduction.

2. Affirm the confidentiality of the interview – explain how you will protect confidentiality.

3. At the start of the interview describe briefly what kinds of topics will be covered in the interview itself.

APPENDIX E

4. Ask the participant to tell you the necessary data for the *face sheet* which accompanies each interview. Depending on the project, the face sheet data will include some or all of the following: age, geographic area participant lives in, education, history, family, number of years receiving service.

   Sometimes filling out the face sheet before you begin the actual interview helps to loosen things up. However some interviewers feel more comfortable asking these kinds of questions at the close of the interview after trust has been established.

5. Tell participants that you will be writing notes in the interview.

6. Remember to focus on the descriptions – the interview is a way for the participants to tell their stories.

During the interview

1. Try to write the participant's actual words as much as possible. Writing in the first person helps, i.e. using "I" not "she" or "he".

2. The interview is a conversation, so relate to the participant in that way. Listen carefully. Go where the participant leads but be disciplined so you don't go off on tangents – or stay off for very long. This means at times you may have to say, "That's an interesting point but let's get back to ..."

3. If participants seem uncomfortable, try to discover the sources of discomfort. Is it your manner or do they misunderstand the project? Perhaps participants feel that what they want to say is not acceptable. Make it clear that there are no right or wrong statements.

4. Don't worry about silence. Wait for the participant to decide what to say. Often what comes after the silence is very significant.

5. It is important that participants focus on their own experience. If they are talking about everyone else but themselves, try interjecting, "How do you feel about that?" or "What did you do?"

6. Draw out the information by using more questions and asking for clarification. You can say, "Could you tell me more about that?" or "What do you mean?" Sometimes it is helpful to use your own knowledge to assist you with a question, for example, "Some people say..." or "Some people have experienced..."

APPENDIX E

7. If participants do not want to discuss a certain topic or question, do not push. Instead try to find out why they don't want to talk about it and record this in your notes. Reassure them that it's OK to pass on a question.

8. At the close of the interview ask participants how they feel. Depending on the topic, interviews can be upsetting. At the very least participants may feel vulnerable at having shared so much information.

9. Tell participants that they can get in touch with you if they think of anything else to add. Thank participants for their time, for the information, and for agreeing to be interviewed.

After the interview

1. Summarize and type up your interview notes as soon as possible after the interview, preferably on the same day. The longer you wait the more likely you are to forget.

2. Write a thank-you note to the participants.

Adapted from:
"Keeping on Track – An Evaluation Guide
For Community Groups" – Ellis, Diana et al. 1990.

APPENDIX F

Themes – Focus of Interviews

Build a list of key topics or themes that you will be following.

Try to cover all those topics or themes in the interview with each person.

Gather the participants' thoughts, knowledge and experience of how the theme areas have been affected by the agency's services or activities. For example:

- health needs
- other needs (social/economic/spiritual)
- access to professional care
- housing
- support networks (friends, family)
- transportation
- shopping
- recreation
- nutrition
- community interaction
- other

APPENDIX G

Questionnaire to Guide Stories

Focus of Interviews

Example: Are we meeting the principle?

> ***"We believe that consumers have the right to participate in determining services to meet their needs."***

Question Guide

1. **Place**:

   a) How long have you lived here?
   b) What do you like about living here?
   c) What is it about your neighbourhood that makes it special?
   d) What could be improved in your home?

2. **People:**

a) Who are the people that you know and spend time with (eg. family members, staff, community)?
b) What is special about each of these people?
c) How long have you known them?
d) Where did you meet them?

3. **Activities:**

   a) What are your favourite memories of having a good time?
   b) What do you do with the people you know? With staff?
   c) What do you do by yourself?
   d) What do you do well that many people don't know about?
   e) What do you do in the community?
   f) How do you decide what you're going to do every day?
   g) Do you get help in planning activities? If yes, from whom?

4. **Complaints:**

a) What makes you feel sad, mad or frustrated?
b) What do you do, and who do you go to, to solve any problems?
c) What do you do when you don't like something a staff person did?

5. **Future:**

   a) What are some of the things you would like to do if you could?
   b) What is stopping you from being able to do these things?
   c) What help do you need, and from whom, to do what you want to?

6. What advice would you give the agency if it had $500,000 to spend to improve its services?

7. Is there anything else you want to tell us?

8. If you think of anything else that you want to share, please send it to us in this stamped, addressed envelope.

APPENDIX H

Focus Groups

Characteristics

- The use of focus groups has been gaining in popularity over the recent past. Focus groups are used as a qualitative way to acquire a comprehensive understanding of a particular issue.
- Focus groups are an applied research method useful for exploration and discovery.
- Focus groups are group interviews. They are a way of listening to people and learning from them.
- Each focus group generally has six to ten participants with similar interests and/or backgrounds.
- Focus groups generally take 1 ½ to 2 hours.
- A facilitator guides the group interview using a specific set of questions to focus the discussion.
- Recruiting participants is time-consuming but must be done carefully to ensure the "right" mix of group members.
- Choosing a comfortable environment is an important aspect of this method – i.e. comfortable chairs, well lighted, adequate space, beverages and snacks, etc.
- Focus groups are useful in gaining insight into the feelings of people who would be most affected by issues or proposed changes.

Questions

- Asking the right questions can yield information useful to analysis.
- When designing interview questions for focus groups consider these guidelines:
  - Use open-ended questions.
  - Avoid questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no".
  - Use "think back questions which take people back to their own experiences.
  - Use different types of questions.
  - Focus the questions.

APPENDIX H

Facilitator

- The role of the facilitator is a critical one. The facilitator must have good interpersonal skills and personal qualities as well as being a good listener, non-judgemental and adaptable.

- The facilitator sets the context of the focus group by:

  - explaining the purpose of the focus group;
  - setting the ground rules to assist individual participation;
  - reassuring participants about the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation;
  - stating the purpose of note-taking and recording;

- often an ice breaker is used to help everyone get acquainted.

Recording the Discussion

- Several techniques can be used to record the discussion:

  - video recording,
  - audio recording,
  - manual or laptop note taking,
  - flip chart recording,
  - multiple methods.

Summarizing and Analyzing

- Once the notes have been summarized, conclusions can be drawn in conjunction with other research results.

APPENDIX I

Evaluation of PAR's Impact

Continual reflection and learning is key to ensuring a successful organization. Once your agency has completed its PAR project, allow six to twelve months before reflecting on whether there have been any changes as a result.

This reflection or evaluation process should be a simple one. In essence it asks questions based on the results of the PAR process. Some sample questions for reflection are:

1. Has the Board and/or Senior Management implemented the recommendations emerging from the PAR process?
    - Why or why not?
2. What actions and/or changes have we seen in the areas that were identified by the participants in the process?
3. What quantitative data have we begun to collect as a result of the PAR process?
4. Has the PAR process been embedded in how we evaluate our services?
    - Why or why not?

The Board and Senior Management should take the lead in establishing an organizational culture of reflecting on the results and processes of its actions and commitments.

Mission Statement

Mission: Participation House Supports individuals with developmental and/or physical needs to live in their own homes, participate in the community, and enjoy life with family and friends.

Support Principles

We believe...

- being a valued, participating member of a community improves quality of life.
- everyone has the right to live with dignity in an enriching environment.
- in encouraging and assisting individuals to make their own decisions, including the supports that are right for them.
- family and friends play an important role in supporting and advocating for loved ones.
- in supporting individuals to strengthen their relationships with family and friends.
- in the development of communities that are interdependent, mutually supportive, and responsive to the needs of all members.
- individuals have the right to those supports necessary to be active and valued members of the community.
- funding should be based on the individual's needs.
- continuous quality improvement and innovation are integral to improving support.

Note: these statements are Board driven; they represent commitments to the individuals we support.

Operational Principles

We believe...

- trust, honesty and mutual respect are fundamental for people to work together effectively.
- teamwork and participation are essential and promote belonging, self-worth and commitment.
- creativity and innovation are necessary to achieve excellence.
- in the expression and discussion of differing views.
- every staff member has valuable contributions to make to the organization and a responsibility to support individuals in their growth and development.
- delegation of responsibility must be accompanied by the associated authority to make decisions.
- supported individuals affected by a decision must be involved in the decision making process.
- in recognizing the efforts and achievements of staff members.

Note: these statements represent Management commitments.

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