RAPID PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN PORTLAND NON-PROFIT SETTING

SUSAN HALVERSON, TY BROWN, MATT BROCK, AJ FOUTS, RONDA FRASER, ALICE CAMACHO

HSD PROVIDER CONFERENCE 2025

OUR NEIGBORHOOD OF INITIATIVES

THE RAPID TRANSFORMATIVE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

MOTIVATIONS

- Susan seeking to contribute after child participated
- CI looking for ‘inside’ evaluation with those impacted

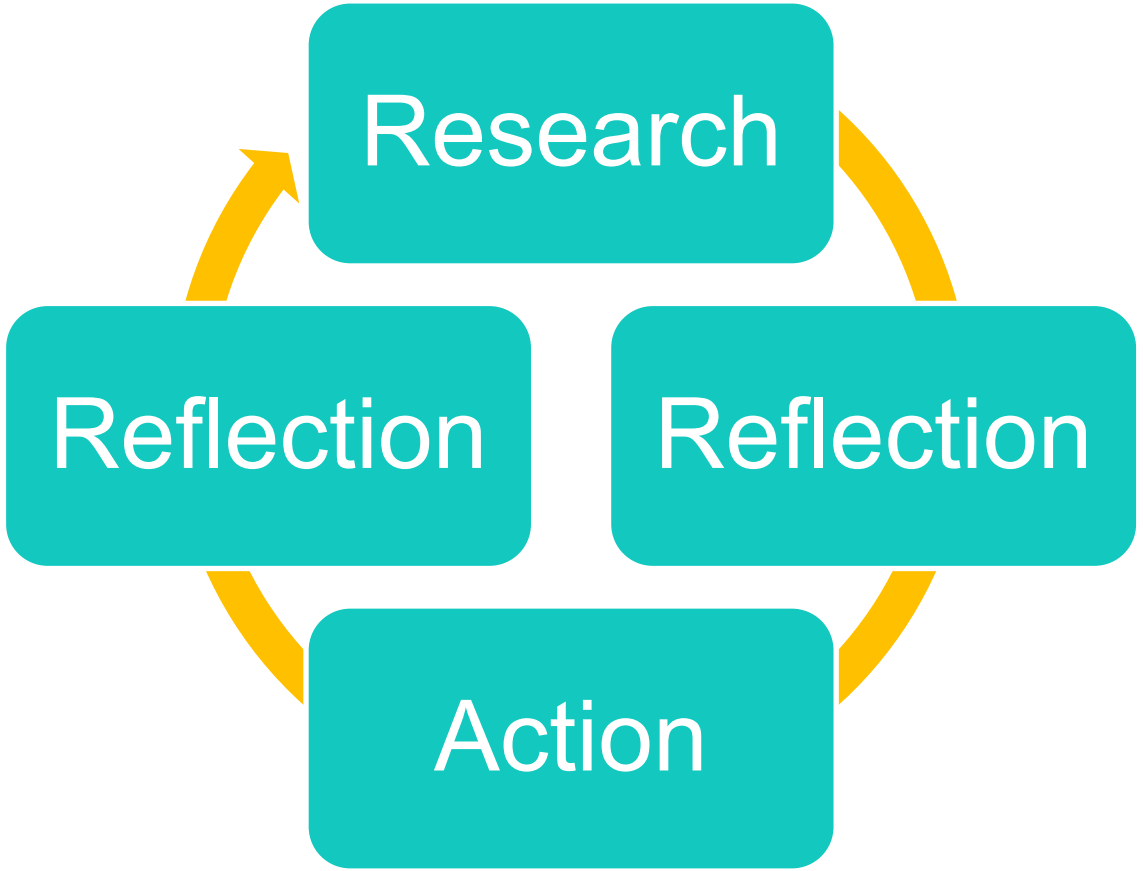
ORIENTATION TO THESE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Participatory Action Research

- Research *with* those most impacted, not research *on*
- Pairs “action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.” (Reason & Bradbury, 2006)

Transformative participatory evaluation (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998)

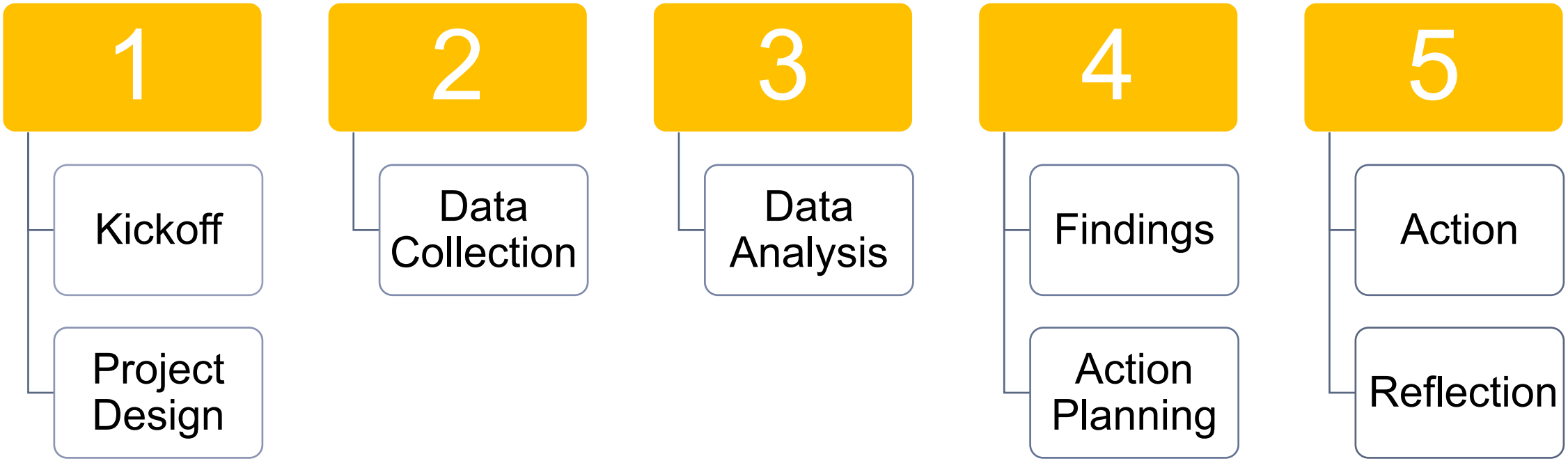
- Empowerment priority, utilization and improved validity secondary



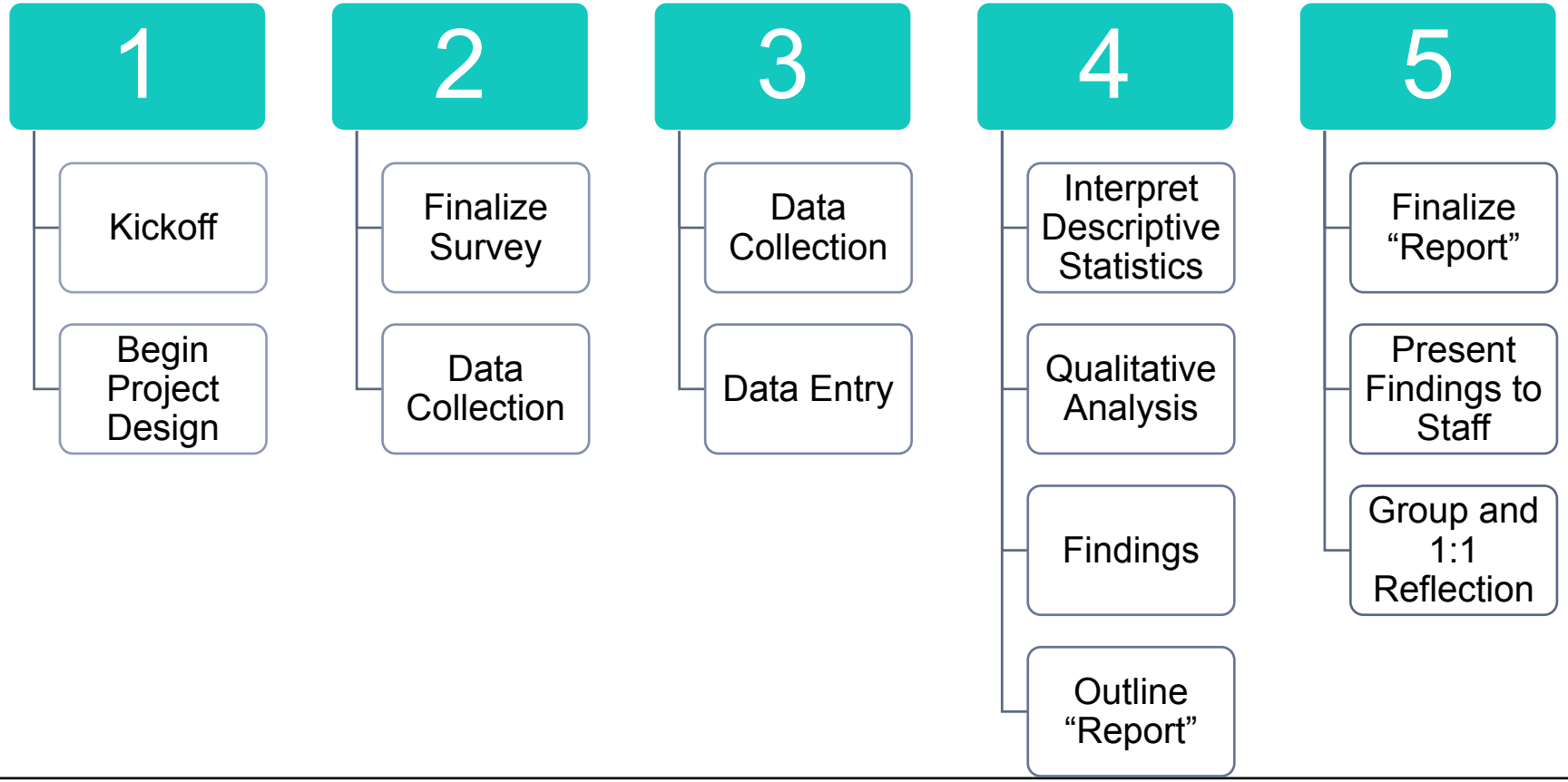
THE RESEARCH TEAM

INTERN RESEARCHERS	STUDENT RESEARCHERS	CI STAFF RESEARCHERS
• George • Ronda • Ana • Michael • Rebekah • Alice	• Susan • Rasheed	• Caleb • AJ • Doll • Ty • Summer • Leesly

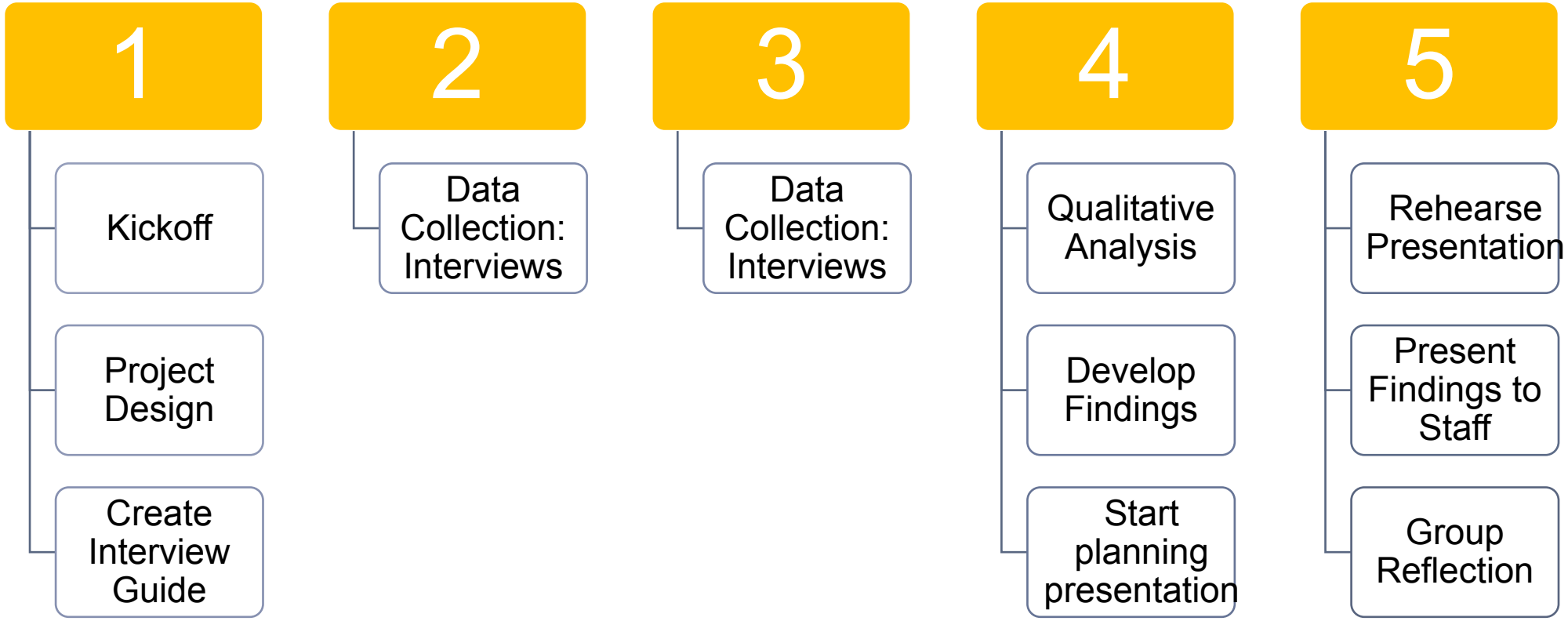
PLANNED OVERVIEW OF 5 DAYS



ACTUAL OVERVIEW OF 5 DAYS: INTERN PROGRAM RESEARCH



ACTUAL OVERVIEW OF 5 DAYS: HOUSING PROGRAM RESEARCH



PLANNED VS. ACTUAL ACTIVITIES

	Goals	Actual
Day 1: Kickoff & Design	Start building relationships & shared understanding Identify 'shared felt concern' and create RQ(s) Create research plan: stakeholder engagement & accountability, methods, instruments, population, sample, recruitment, protecting participants	Start building relationships Build shared understanding of project Identify shared felt concern and create research questions Create research plan (except finalizing instrument)
Day 2: Data collection	Data collection best practices Data collection role plays Collect data	Finalize instrument Data collection best practices Collect data
Day 3: Data Analysis	Data entry, if needed Data cleaning Identify themes from qualitative data Descriptive statistics from quantitative data	Collect data Data entry A couple of descriptive statistics
Day 4: Findings, Action Planning	Create findings Create recommendations Create action plan Create "report"	Qualitative coding & theme identification Interpret descriptive statistics Create findings, recommendations Create action plan Outline report
Day 5: Action, Reflection	Action prep (role plays, etc.) Action TBD End of project reflection	Finalize report (summary of findings & recommendations) Rehearse presentation Present findings & recommendations to CI staff End of project reflection 1:1 interviews with intern researchers and some CI staff

Research Question & Method (Internship)

Our research question was:

- How safe or unsafe do interns feel?
  - Are interns dropping out because of safety?
  - When do interns feel safe/unsafe?
  - What safety measures do intern supervisors and interns have (CPR, Narcan, epi-pen, first aid)?
  - Are adequate resources allocated to intern safety?

The methods we used were:

- Survey through Google Forms, Printed
- Respondents received a backpack or lunch bag
- Responses entered into digital form afterwards
- Used google forms summary to see results and make suggestions

Results (Internship)

Suggestion from researchers

- interns felt generally safe and supported
- most danger felt while actively working
- over half of interns didn't know where to find a first aid kit
- some hesitation to report instances of harassment and safety concerns

Changes we made as a result

- continue to prioritize relationship building
- update orientation procedure to go over more safety guidance, add more labels around work trucks
- added a walk-around of a work truck to the orientation, added in step each day where lead points out where in that truck they can find first aid kit
- enacted low-barrier anonymous reporting system

Research Question & Method (Housing)

Our research question was:

- What supports help neighbors sustain their housing?
- What threatens the sustainability of neighbors' housing?
- How confident do neighbors feel that they will be able to sustain their housing?

The methods we used were:

- In-person interviews conducted by participant researchers
- Population to be interviewed: neighbors currently between 6 and 12 months into CI housing subsidy (total of 51 potential interviewees)
- Interviews set up by CI staff, house calls and in office

Results (Housing)

Suggestion from researchers

- work opportunities are key to housing stability
- personal attributes support housing stability
- legal issues as barrier to housing stability
- high housing costs as a barrier to housing stability

Changes we made as a result

- enhanced connections to CI's internship program, goodwill and worksource
- CI to establish connections to hoarding resources, enhance workflow for retention specialists to prioritize assisting neighbor's personal growth
- enhance relationship with nearby Rosewood Initiative/Community DA, invest in longer-term rental support for long-term legal barriers
- clearer communication re post-subsidy costs

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT THIS MODEL OF EVALUATION

In what ways can a rapid PAR evaluation of homelessness services in East Portland empower participants and produce useful findings for a local service provider?

RESEARCH ABOUT A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

- Evaluating Cultivate Initiatives' workforce development intern program
- Evaluation team comprised of staff, interns, and PSU students
- Five days, 6 hours per day
- Intern evaluators paid each day

RESEARCH

- Case study of the PAR evaluation
- RQ: In what ways can a rapid PAR evaluation of homelessness services in East Portland empower participants and produce useful findings for a local service provider?
- Less participatory –
  - Susan developed RQs, approach, & instruments
  - Most co-evaluators chose to participate in analysis and dissemination, unpaid

RESEARCH DATA + METHODS

1. DAILY AND END-OF-PROJECT GROUP REFLECTIONS
2. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS
3. FACILITATOR NOTES

THE PROCESS OF COLLABORATIVELY EVALUATING TRANSFORMED ALL OF US

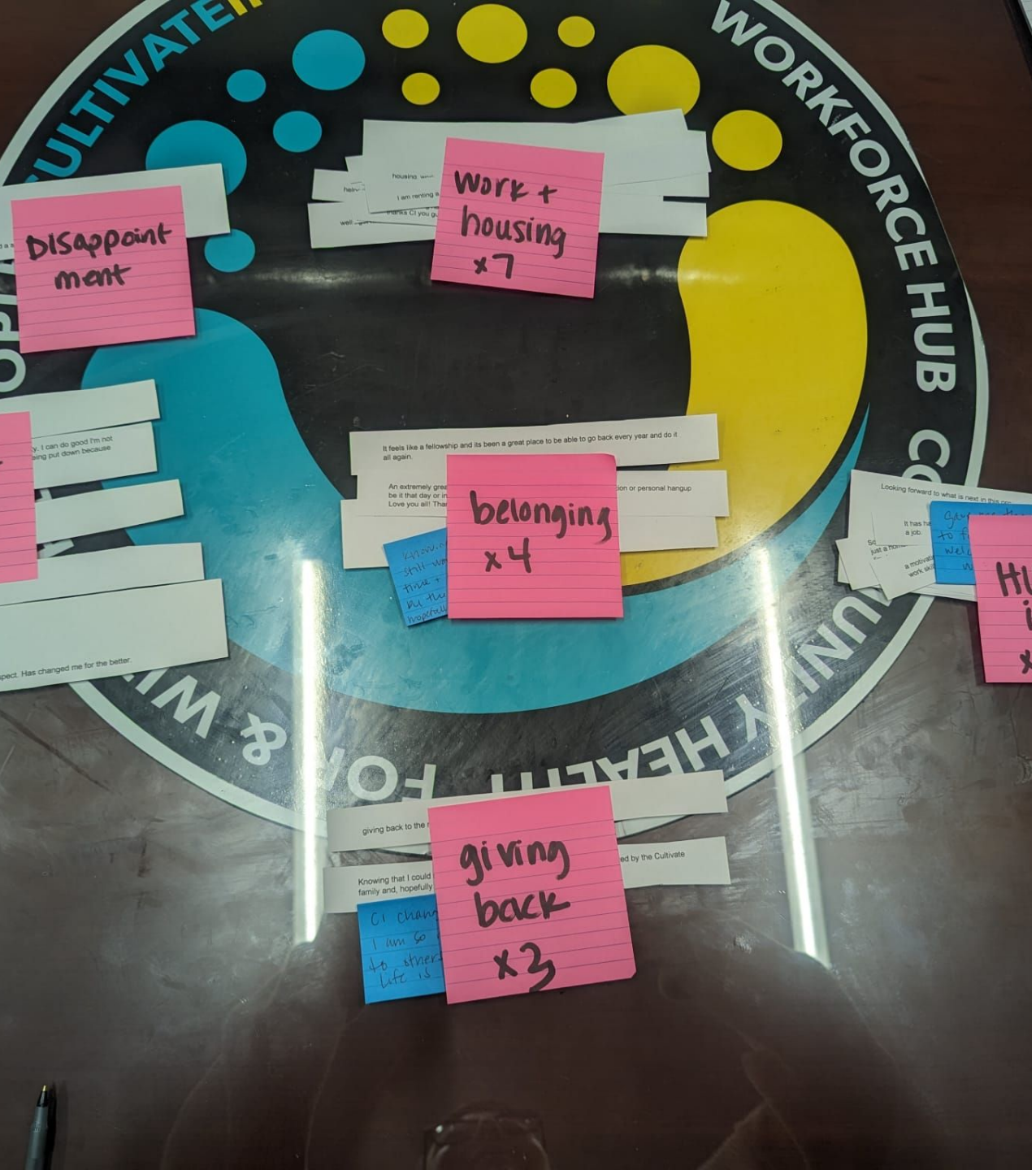
WE FELT A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT + CONTRIBUTION

- “I think we did pretty good for barely two weeks and a half. Essentially four days and then today we did the thing, but I think it’s pretty good to gather all that data to make the survey, gather the data, and be ready to put a presentation out that went as well as it did.”

  –Intern evaluator

- “I hope they feel proud of the work, and I know that they did at the end. I hope that pride stays.”

  - Staff evaluator



WE GAINED SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

- “At least for my own personal self, it shows my worth more than just brawn, it’s brains. And brains is brawn, really, when you think about it. Pen is mightier than the sword.”

  –Intern researcher

- “I think it will help me as a researcher moving forward.”

  –Student researcher

WE GAINED NEW PERSPECTIVES

- “I think it has provided some different outlooks. I mean, the news and different media sources paints this picture of people that are homeless or houseless or whatever term you want to use. Going through this experience allowed me to get another perspective.”

  –Student researcher

- “I think that this project changed my ideas about who can be a researcher. I’ve always believed that anybody can do research, but I don’t think I really felt it until I saw it.”

  –Student researcher

- “Just relax. It is a very enjoyable experience. You find out about a lot about other people. We find out a lot about yourself. I think, anyway. I did. [Interviewer: Like what?] Well, just that some of my fears and my concerns are the same as other peoples’ and we're all individuals, but in a lot of ways we're all the same when it comes to a lot of things. We just want to be treated respectfully.”

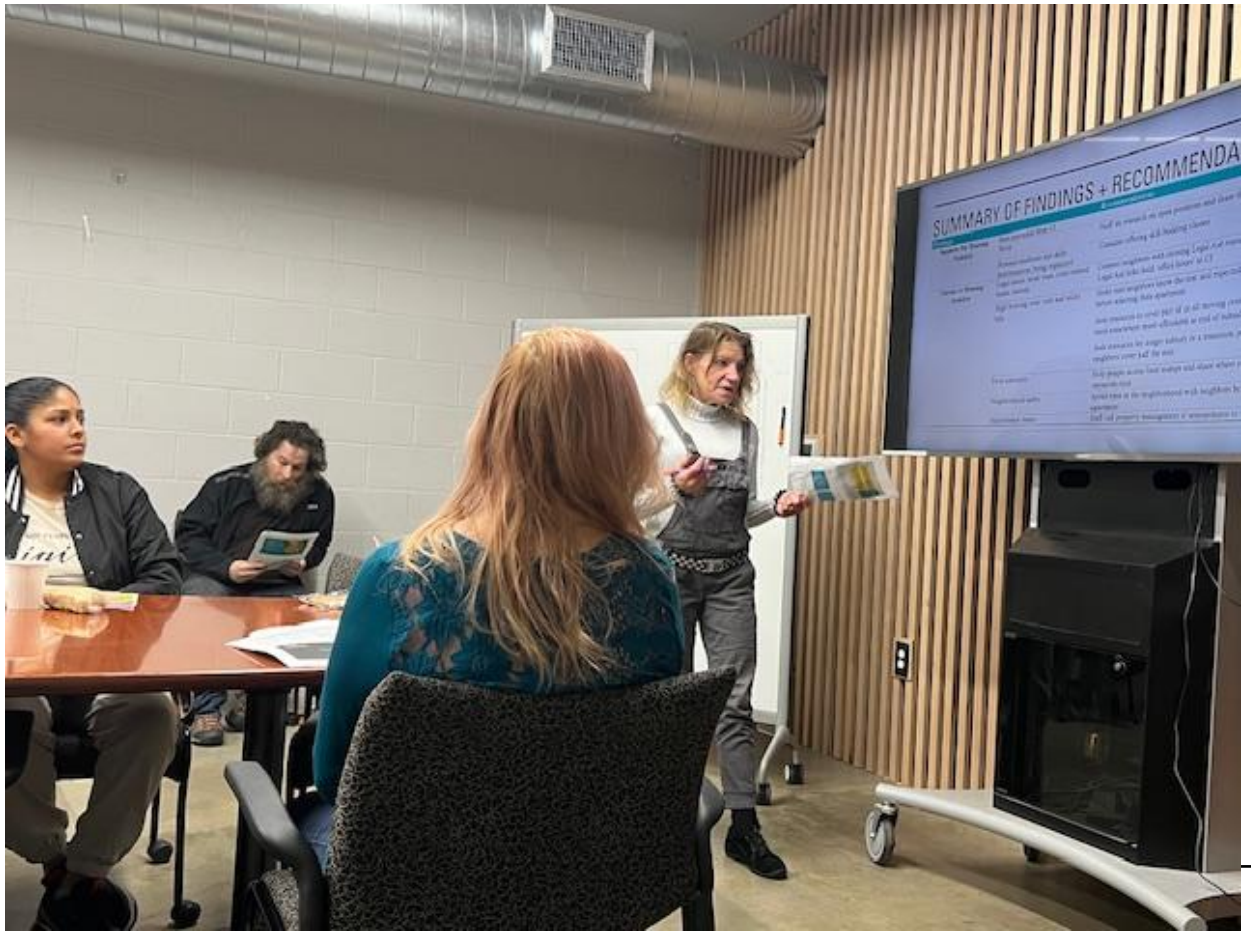
  –Intern researcher

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS WERE USEFUL FOR CULTIVATE INITIATIVES

RESEARCH FINDINGS ARE TRUSTWORTHY

- Increased validity because those former and current program participants were involved at every step

CI LEARNED ACTIONABLE INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR PROGRAM



- It “definitely brought things to light in how we could implement a few improvements.”

  –Staff researcher

- The findings are “affirming in some of the areas that we think we’re strong in and affirming in some of the areas we know we’re lacking.”

  – Staff researcher

LIMITATIONS OF PAR EVALUATIONS IN NON-PROFIT SETTING

In what ways was Cultivate Initiatives uniquely organized for a Rapid Participatory Action Research model to succeed?

Good relationships with former interns

- pre-existing relationships between staff and community members participating in CI programming

Unique budget and structure

- existing in-house programming utilized to pay researchers a decent wage

CI prioritizes flexibility and innovation

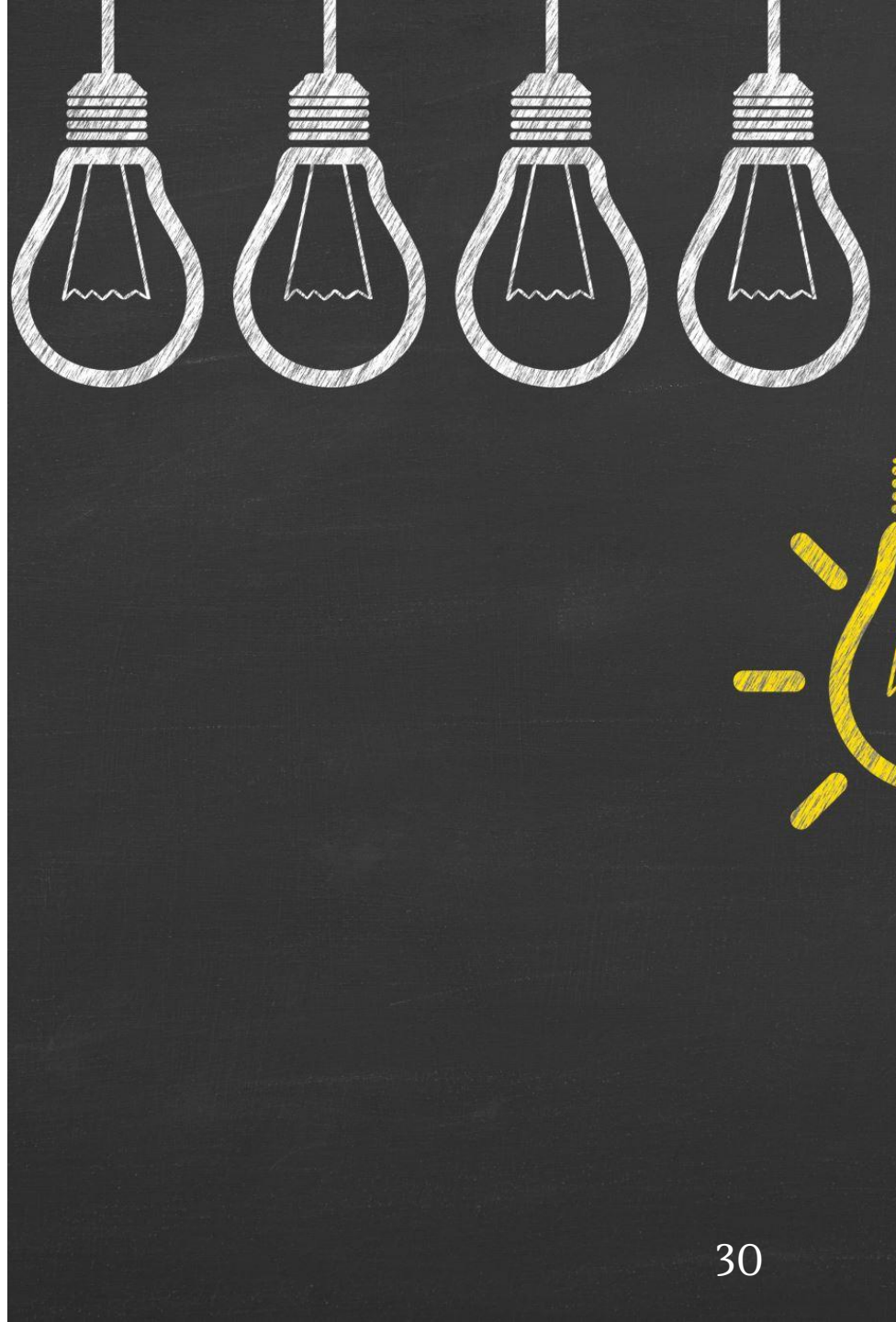
- culture of transformation over transaction

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

- Evaluation 3: Safe Rest Village in Summer 2025
  - Additional evaluations a few times a year
- Test alternate structures (10 half days? Staggered hours for data collection?)
  - Retain speed – do not want it to become “a slog”
- Researchers from first two evaluations as co-facilitators in future evaluations
  - Then they take the lead on facilitation and Susan steps into role of technical support for facilitators
- Use this model to push back on funders’ evaluation or reporting requirements
- Evaluate public policies

CONCLUSIONS

- Met primary goal: empowering staff and participant researchers – and students, too!
- Met secondary goal: gathering useful and trustworthy information for CI about the internship and housing programs
- Limits to transferability: CI's unique structure and culture
- Implication: A rapid PAR evaluation of homelessness services in East Portland can empower participants and produce useful findings for a local service provider, in at least some contexts.



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THANK YOU

Participant Researchers

- Alice Camacho
- Ronda Fraser

PSU Researcher

- Susan Halverson

Staff Members

- Aj Fouts
- Summer Hausman
- Ty Brown

SCAN ME

CULTIVATE INITIATIVES

#FORANDWITHTHEPEOPLE