

JOHS Provider Conference

June 6, 2025

Notes from Session: [Rapid Participatory Action Research in Portland Non-Profit Setting]

Presenters: Susan Halverson, Ty Brown, Matt Brock, AJ Fouts, Ronda Fraser, Alice Camacho

Moderators: Jenna Kivanc

Notetaker: Alyssa Plesser

-Main Points from Session Overview/Presentation (high level; detail not required):

- Two rounds of program evaluation with Cultivate Initiatives - Internship and Housing Retention
- Motivations - program evaluation required for funding, wanting to learn more about the success of the program, from cultivates perspective there was interest in always improving programming
 - Cultivate Initiatives - wanted feedback from the community we serve and be responsive to that feedback
- Participatory Action Research:
 - Research WITH those most impacted
 - Action + reflection + research + reflection
 - Transformative participatory evaluation - empowerment is the priority and utilization for the research is secondary
- Research team included people with lived experience and who had been through CI programs. Ensured that they also included someone on the research team whose primary language was not English.
- What they planned to do:
 - 5 days - very tight timeline; but using internal funds to pay researchers for time; could only pay folks five days a year
 - Day 1: kick off and project design
 - Day 2: data collection
 - Day 3: data analysis
 - Day 4: Findings and action planning - how to improve programming
 - Day 5: Action and Reflection
- Actual Overview of the 5 days:
 - Internship program
 - Day 1: Kick off and began project design

- Day 2: finalize survey and data collection - started talking to interns at the building at the time
 - Day 3: Data collection and data entry
 - Day 4: interpret descriptive statistics, qualitative analysis, findings, outline “report”
 - Day 5: finalized report, present to staff, group and 1:1 reflection
- Housing
 - Day 1: kick off, project design, create interview guide
 - Day 2: data collection: interviews
 - Day 3: data collection - interviews
 - Day 4: analysis, develop findings, start planning presentation
 - Day 5: rehearse, present to staff, group reflection
- Were able to accomplish the research project in 5 days but there are differences between the goals and what actually happened - there is a need to be adaptable and the process might not go in the order you expect or the timeframe you expect
- Research Question and Method - see slides for questions and methods
 - Respondents received incentives for their time that related to workforce development
- Housing evaluation
 - Work opportunities are key to housing and it takes time to help build those skills and work opportunities. For a RRH program quick connection is critical
 - Creating clear expectations for staff and workflows to be able to best support participants
 - Clear communication with participants around what responsibilities there are to have independence post subsidy. Implemented 3, 6, and 9 month benchmarks
- What we learned about the model of evaluation
 - Experimentation to try to do this in 5 days, 6 hours per day
 - Intern evaluators were paid in cash at the end of each workday
 - Most co-evaluators chose to participate in the analysis and dissemination, unpaid
 - Data used to evaluate the model:
 - Daily group reflections and end of project group reflection
 - Individual interviews
 - Facilitator notes
- Process of collaboratively evaluating transformed all of us
 - Understand the need for human connection
 - Learning acknowledgement and patience

- Neighbors in east multnomah county and gresham just want a place to live that is safe, supported, and full of opportunity
- Being dedicated to services that are more transformational and not transactional
- Felt a sense of accomplishment and contribution
- Gained skills and confidence in research and other skills
- Gained perspective
- Research finds are trustworthy
 - Increased validity because those former and current program participants were involved at every step of the way
- CI learned actionable information about their program
 - Brought things to light in how improvements could be implemented
 - Findings are affirming in areas we are strong in and areas we are lacking
 - Being able to get clear feedback creates a focus point on what needs to be improved based on first-person feedback vs. things that the program/organization that we “think” we are
- Limitations
 - CI has unique context that made the model work well for them
 - Good relationships with former interns → a lot of pre-existing relationships between staff and community members; knew about people and their personalities and skills and knew what would make them good researchers
 - Unique budget and structure
 - Existing in-house funding allowed CI to pay researchers for their time
 - CI prioritizes flexibility and innovation “scrappy and nimble”
- Future possibilities
 - Evaluation 3: Safe Rest Village in Summer 2025 and have evaluations a few times a year to keep CI in check
 - Want to check alternate structures e.g. 10 half days, staggered hours for data collection
 - Growing staff skills and neighbors skills
 - Use this model to push back on funders’ evaluation reporting requirements
 - Evaluate public policies

-Questions/Answers (summarization):

- Are there projects at CI that you considered evaluating that you felt did not suit this model and if so what is an example?
 - Personally think that due to unique structure and culture there was no hitches to constructing it

- Doctoral student came to them with how the project could be set up well
- Need to have the right tools in place, staff and researchers who are willing to do the work then it can happen
- After completing the first iteration with the internship program, there was a lot of excitement but concern around the housing program
 - Privacy concerns and confidentiality concerns and had to change the research design a bit to fit the housing program
 - Making course corrections and recognition of the different structure of the program
 - E.g. having researchers go to the neighbors and because of confidentiality concerns a staff went with them
- Will you take this to contractors to show them the research and potentially how to change contract language or outcomes
 - Funders are open to hearing concerns and ask about the concerns of neighbors
 - Good relationship and partnerships with funders to improve the program and to continue to get funding
 - Because this is measurable and we can bring it to funders it gives more room for negotiation with funders - funders are open to those possibilities
- One of the things that researchers are worried about is what we got wrong and how are people going to analyze it. Are you worried that you missed anything or misinterpreted anything or how did you attend to that?
 - These are all relatively small programs
 - Intern program eval - 31 surveys from the pool of people who had done the internship
 - While people were collecting surveys, data was being entered
 - Validating at the same time you are analyzing them
 - Excel work was in between workdays, these were not consecutive work days - background work happened in between the five days
 - T, TH, T, TH, T
 - Worry that things were missed but felt some information was better than no information
 - Want to continue doing these with slightly different research questions and analyzing different components
 - EX: weird finding of women feeling safer than men → could have been a fluke of sample or because women always feel unsafe
 - Validating the responses right away - so true because participant researchers often knew the people who were completing the survey with them because they're of the community so in the moment when they were doing the survey that was one additional level of check to ensure the

information that is being gathered is accurate as possible and that would not be possible if it was an outsider doing the surveys - intern researchers knew 90% of the participants and knew who to go to that could fill them out and be accurate and that is why they were so excited to make a difference because they know participants

- From an organizational perspective how often would you want to do this?
 - Organizational perspective the source of funds we use the pay researchers is based on the calendar year so we could not work the same researchers twice in one calendar year
 - There is a small exit survey that we ask neighbors to participate in when that is optional
 - Many of the changes that are made are longer term changes
 - Answer: yearly is a good metric
 - Answer: as often as possible - overall the empowering experience that the researchers had is the reason to do it as much as possible; helps staff be able to understand the program that they are running - as a manager you need to progress the program and progress the staff and having more information helps to progress the program
 - Answer: depends on the program; cycles of evaluation → making changes → changes making impact → evaluating again
- Has this research model been used in PDX or in the scope of non-profits?
 - Lots of folks that do participatory action research
 - Have not seen the compressed timeline happen before - this was unique for the CI model
 - Some organizations are doing participatory research and participatory evaluation
- Finding any avenues possible to learn new skills. What does it look like from here to support folks in getting academic skills that are sometimes not always accessible to people that are unhoused
 - EX: George was the other participant researcher in the intern project. Before the research George got into housing and then after the research he got a full time job with cultivate initiatives. It changed his life dramatically. Changed all the researchers job's dramatically. He is now the breadwinner and he does his finances and peers have never seen George be like that before.
 - Want more training programs for interns - this research has set ground work for future training. People need time to demonstrate skills and their desires and needs.
 - Want other training and events to try to get folks utilize these skills
 - More collaborations with other organizations to bring other skill building

- More patience and understanding about why folks are coming to receive the skills
- Being accountable to a structure that works for the participants

-Main Discussion Points not captured above:

- Cultivate initiatives refer to program participants as “neighbors”
- Most of the contracts with the HSD are for RRH

**-Takeaways or Follow-Ups for JOHS
(expectations/priorities/recommendations/etc):**

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