Participatory Research: What it is and how it can strengthen your reentry program

Second Chance Month

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Presenters

- Rachel Swaner, Center for Court Innovation
- Monica Sheppard, RTI International
- Michael Cannon, Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership
- Elizabeth Johnston, Family Services of Montgomery County

Overview of Today's Webinar

- What is participatory research?
- Benefits to participatory researchers
- Benefits to reentry program evaluation
- Thinking through when, who, and challenges
- Incorporating participatory approaches into existing evaluations
- Real-world application





What Is Participatory Research?

- Who is an expert? People who have...
 - Knowledge through study in an academic setting
 - Knowledge through cultural practices and community history
 - Knowledge through personal experience
- Participatory research is an approach to knowledge creation that recognizes multiple forms of expertise from research professionals, communities, and people with lived experience
- *Involving as researchers* people with these different types of knowledge as it relates to the topic being studied
- For reentry programs: former participants, people who have been in jail or prison, family members who help loved ones return home

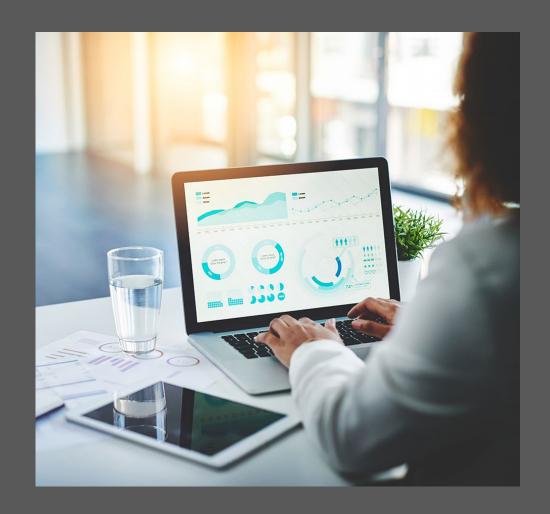
The Research Process



- Determining which outcomes are most important to measure to determine reentry program success
- Conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups with current and former reentry participants
- Presenting evaluation results to funders, program staff, and community members

Importance for Reentry Program Evaluation

- The power of evaluators
- Well-known impact of incarceration on
 - Employment and income
 - Health and mental health
 - Family relationships
 - Stigma
- Sustainability of funding may depend on evaluation results
- What matters most to the affected community?



Benefits to Participatory Researchers



- Provides meaningful jobs for people with lived experience
- Builds social capital
- Increases power for those affected by the criminal legal system
- Teaches analytic skills
- Offers opportunities for additional skill development
- Promotes the growth of leadership
- Trains participatory researchers

Benefits to the Research

- Transforming unequal power dynamics
- Asking different research questions
- Creating more culturally responsive data collection materials
- Improving reliability of measures
- Gaining access to previously hard-toreach populations more generalizable findings

- Eliciting more honest responses from research participants higher quality and more valid data
- Increasing the richness and nuance of interpretation of findings
- Making recommendations more likely to meet community needs
- Democratizing data
- Disseminating to new audiences

Identifying Outcomes That Matter to Communities

Sobriety

Trauma symptoms

Self-esteem

Self-efficacy

Family reunification

Support system

Housing stability

Quality of life

Life skills



When? Who?

When is participatory research a good fit?

- Time and resources available to properly train and acclimate participatory researchers
- Research and analysis relies on intimate knowledge of the community being studied
- Concern that the affected community would not otherwise participate in research activities

Who should be involved?

- Program participants
- People who have experienced incarceration
- Family members

- Those who interact with reentry population (faith-based leaders, service providers)
- Academics interested in reentry

Always Easy? No!

- Differing positions of power
- Token inclusion
- Who owns the data and findings?
- More time because of the need for:
 - Trust-building
 - Training
 - Joint decision-making
- Data collection in correctional facilities





What If My Evaluation Is Already Under Way?

- It's not too late!
- Smaller project to answer new or refine old research questions
- Sample project expansions could include primary data collection with participants or family members to understand...
 - Why participants have dropped out
 - What larger structural issues make it challenging to succeed even when fully engaged
 - What factors increase trust between participants and staff
 - Why there has been staff turnover
 - What family members think of the program
 - What additional services are desired

Application to Reentry Programs

- Some reentry programs have already hired people with lived experience as program staff
- Experiences from Chicago Workforce Partnership and Family Services of Montgomery County:
 - Background and role
 - How lived experience has benefited their reentry program
 - How working at a reentry program has benefited them
 - Challenges incorporating someone with lived experience
 - How lived experience could benefit the evaluation
 - New outcomes not captured in existing research
 - Benefits of credible messenger conducting interviews and surveys
 - Different types of dissemination





Participatory Research & Racial Equity Research Briefs



Participatory Research



Cultural Responsiveness



Racial Equity and Recidivism



Risk Assessment & Racial Bias

Thank you!

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