



OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

# PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

## An Equitable Approach to Community Engagement

Engaging individuals and communities to deliberate and problem solve advances equity and fairness, and also serves as a basis for a participatory and thriving democracy.<sup>1</sup> AmeriCorps works toward this vision by supporting and increasing the civic engagement and volunteerism of people of all ages and backgrounds, thereby strengthening civil society and communities across the United States and its territories.

Through research grants, AmeriCorps Research and Evaluation funds **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH** to engage communities to problem solve and produce more meaningful and impactful research. This cutting-edge methodology engages the community, leverages local expertise, builds knowledge, capacity, and connections, and makes research more relevant to the needs of the community. As a result, the participatory process produces more equitable and actionable solutions and can improve our democratic processes.

In addition to these pillars, the framework calls upon researchers, community members, and other stakeholders engaged in this work to employ several principles, including:

- Collaboration
- Co-learning
- Flexibility
- Power sharing
- Relationship building
- Teamwork
- Deliberation

<sup>1</sup>Fung, A., & Wright, E. O. (2003). *Deepening democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance* (Vol. 4). Verso.

## WHAT IS THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH FRAMEWORK?

The participatory research framework is built on three pillars.



### COMMUNITY

Community members are actively involved in the research



### RESEARCH

The research team systematically gathers information on community-identified issues



### ACTION

Community stakeholders take actionable steps based on research findings

## SO HOW DOES AMERICORPS FIT IN?

AmeriCorps amplifies participatory research through technical assistance and grant-making opportunities. These grants are investigating topics and developing solutions for societal issues such as:

- Equitable economic development in urban and rural communities
- Increasing civic engagement of youth, adults, and seniors representing different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds
- Increasing the resilience of communities prone to natural disasters
- Tackling youth homelessness, food insecurity, and the opioid crisis

AmeriCorps is also connecting communities conducting participatory research with its national service programs to assist in tackling the community-identified priorities.

## WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

Check out the participatory research videos, webinars, and Community Conversations grantee profiles for:

- More information about the AmeriCorps-funded institutions of higher education and their community partners that are using a participatory research approach
- Additional project resources such as videos, technical assistance material about participatory research in several languages, briefs, published articles, etc.

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Learn more about the work of AmeriCorps Research and Evaluation grantees at [AMERICORPS.GOV/RESEARCH-EVALUATION](https://AMERICORPS.GOV/RESEARCH-EVALUATION) or by contacting [EVALUATION@CNS.GOV](mailto:EVALUATION@CNS.GOV).



Our goal is to tackle this particular project by equipping residents with ... strategies that they can use to engage stakeholders like politicians, developers, policy makers ... If they can get their ear, if they can get their heart, if they can get them to understand what's going on in their community and the impact that these decisions are making, then we believe they can make a difference."

– **Shannah Tharp Gilliam, Ph.D.**  
Children's Village in Pittsburgh



Doing this type of research, which is participatory action research, in my community specifically is very, very different and a lot more personal. Instead of us just being people on the outside that are collecting surveys or things like that, we're actually in the community doing interviews and events ... And this is where I spent my entire life ... So the people in the community are seeing all these familiar faces and these people that can actually relate to them ... So when we're doing this action, it's a lot different than just being behind the scenes."

– **Yesenia Valentin**  
Smith College