NAF Youth PAR Toolkit: Tools to Increase Youth Engagement and Youth Voice using Participatory Action Research (PAR)





A Toolkit to Increase Youth Engagement and Youth Voice in NAF Academies using Participatory Action Research

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Since 1980, NAF has partnered with communities and leaders in education, business, and non-profits to improve student outcomes through NAF academies, small learning communities in high schools. NAF wants to ensure that high school students across the United States are ready for college and careers. To support its work, NAF seeks to increase youth engagement and youth voices throughout its network. With participatory action research (PAR), a tool for youth engagement, NAF supports the creation of new spaces within academies for youth-centered approaches to knowledge and power-sharing to advance more equitable learning experiences and environments. NAF will use the insights gathered from PAR to support youth-informed and youth-led local decision-making and planning within NAF academies and share the organization's work externally.

NAF designed the PAR toolkit to aid adult allies and youth to increase youth engagement and youth voices in Academies to advance more equitable learning experiences and environments. The toolkit includes "how-to" guidance to meet diverse youth engagement, learning, and experience goals, from new ways to augment youth voice and the exchange of ideas to a complete, long-term PAR process in your NAF Academy, at school, or in your community.

Review the Orientation section below to help decide which section(s) of the toolkit are suitable for your goals (and youth's goals!). The toolkit includes materials for you to discuss PAR, share with others, and, most of all, use for youth informed or led action for change. The toolkit is divided into three sections:

- 1. Introduction to the NAF PAR Toolkit
- 2. Background on PAR or Participatory Action Research as a tool to increase youth engagement and youth voice
- 3. Orientation Toolkit overview of the three (3) sections and guidance on how to use the toolkit
 - a. Section One: Participatory Activities to Support Authentic Youth Engagement
 - b. Section Two: A Mini-PAR Process- Participatory Process to Support Youth-informed or Youth-led Solutions
 - c. Section Three: A Full PAR Project Youth-led Action for Change

Sections One through Three include links to tools and facilitator agendas to support implementation. We recommend you read the Background on PAR, regardless of your chosen PAR journey, to increase your awareness of the overall process, which guided the development of this toolkit. The introduction includes links to short explainer videos and a literature review on PAR with youth.



BACKGROUND ON PAR

What is Participatory Action Research and Why Should It Be Implemented with Youth in their Learning Environments?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) "is collaborative research, education, and action used to gather information to use for [a range of] issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it."¹

So why PAR and why PAR with youth? Youth-centered PAR is an "*innovative approach to positive youth and community development based on social justice principles in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them.*"² Youth-centered PAR is a process whereby youth are empowered as experts and, along with adult allies, co-develop learning experiences and environments that better address their needs and priorities. Adult allies can be researchers, educators, practitioners, business leaders, and community members.

The principles that drive PAR are:

- 1. Participation PAR advocates that those most affected by an issue, such as youth, be involved throughout the process.
- 2. Action-Orientation Action is achieved through a reflective cycle, whereby youth and their adult allies collect and analyze data on an issue, then determine what action should follow. The purpose of an action is to change or improve an issue being researched.
- 3. **Shared Ownership** PAR is driven by those with a stake in an issue. Outside stakeholders (such as researchers) can support youth and their adult allies, but youth and allies drive the process.

PAR can be used to develop or redesign career-readiness programs to meet diverse needs such as creating community-based employment opportunities for high-school students seeking to build 21st-century skill sets; providing educators and school administrators with affordable and accessible career and college readiness options for their scholars; supporting local businesses who need access to skilled local talent. Youth-centered PAR produces a more equitable educational experience for students.



¹ Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2007). Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place. Routledge.

² YPAR Hub, <u>http://yparhub.berkeley.edu</u>; last retrieved on April 16, 2020.

PAR as a Tool to Increase Youth Engagement and Youth Voice

"Youth engagement is about creating opportunities for young people to play meaningful roles in operational and governance issues, as well as in the decision- making structures of organizations. Youth engagement means that organizations partner with young people and engage them in the work of the organization.

The ideas and expertise of youth can contribute to improved services and programs and lead to better outcomes for children and youth. Organizations change and evolve when the individual employees adopt youth engagement into their daily practice.

[Organizational change] starts from shifting the practice of staff. For many people, this is a very new concept, so make sure that everyone really understands what youth engagement means at an organizational level!"³

Participatory Action Research "is collaborative research, education, and action used to gather information to use for [a range of] issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it."⁴

How is Participatory Action Research Implemented in Learning Environments?

A typical PAR process is structured around three recurrent stages: planning, action-taking, and evaluation and reflection. PAR involves flexible research and program development methods that can be adapted to local needs. PAR usually involves multiple cycles (see the figure below).

- 1. **Planning** entails: youth-led diagnosis or identification of a salient issue at school or in the community; undertaking actions that will address an issue; preparing for knowledge-gathering efforts such as data collection.
- 2. Action-taking implements, for example, the piloting of a new internship program or career readiness curriculum or the execution of an event (e.g., a career fair or a community workshop).
- 3. Evaluation & Reflection take stock of the effects of action-taking through data collection and analysis and group reflection on the analysis of work and what findings mean for the next PAR cycle (e.g., starting with planning).

⁴ Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2007). Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place. Routledge.



³ The Youth Engagement Toolkit was produced in 2013 by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia



Participatory processes in formal and informal learning environments have been:

- Implemented in a range of educational or enhancement settings such as elective or required classes, during afterschool out-of-school (OST) programs, learning communities or in student leadership initiatives.
- Conducted over the course of a year or more (e.g., during the school year and over the summer).
- Held in situations in which youth and adult allies are trained in PAR.
- Focused on school-related issues or issues directly affecting youth.
- Initiated by adult allies, typically a university researcher or a representative from a community-based organization (CBO) or education non-profit.
- Chosen for the quality of the setting of and transactions within formal or informal learning.



Given PAR's research and program development methods – *participation, action-orientation, and shared ownership* – when adult allies conceptualize youth as assets and youth have the power to participate fully a program is more likely to succeed.

What Can Participatory Action Research do for Youth and their Learning Environments?

PAR affects youth and their learning environments in numerous ways. Youth-level outcomes are relevant to NAF's mission to ensure that high school students across the United States are college, career, and future-ready. PAR has been shown to:

- improve academic outcomes
- strengthen problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- increase awareness of and exposure to higher education
- foster civic engagement, civic identities, and political awareness
- promote intergenerational relationships

PAR can also improve formal or informal learning environments: "The opportunity to consider [issues] from the student's point of view can be beneficial, revealing points of school life that go unnoticed by adults but are significant to the students. Students can be a source of creative ideas for improving schools, improving student interest and participation."

What to Consider when Doing Participatory Action Research with Youth?

When deciding whether they are ready to implement youth-centered PAR processes, educators, administrators, and local business should ask:

- Are adult allies trusted by youth? Will they support and empower youth as agents for change? Are adult allies committed to participatory action-oriented and shared ownership processes? Will they be receptive to youth-led recommendations for change?
- Do pre-existing power structures within the learning environment allow for power-sharing? Will youth be permitted to lead the selection and diagnosis of the issue without authorities rejecting chosen themes? Will adultism hinder youth-centered PAR?
- Will youth be compensated for their efforts, financially, via credits, or other support (e.g., food during meetings, supplies to aid the process)? Learning environments should be designed to accommodate other aspects of the lives of young people and competing interests (e.g., caregiving, test preparation).



- Will administrators, principals, and other gatekeepers gladly accept youth-centered PAR? Are these stakeholders ready to leverage their power and influence to make PAR happen at their sites and connect youth to adult allies with resources?
- Will PAR fit into existing schedules? Can learning environments provide the time and flexibility needed for PAR to succeed? Will sites provide youth and adult allies with the space and materials to support participation and follow-through in the processes?

How can we get Started with Student Engagement?

Many PAR practices, activities, and tools have been developed, tested, and used effectively with youth in formal and informal learning environments. NAF hopes information summarized in the literature review will inform PAR planning and decision-making in its academies and organizational efforts.

NAF will use PAR to increase youth voice in the development of the organization's college and career readiness programs. At the same time, and as a result of their participation in the process, NAF hopes youth will amplify their readiness skills such as critical thinking and leadership. Also, NAF seeks a process through which it can embrace the diversity of its academy networks and increase shared ownership of information and its application to support youth, schools, and communities.

NAF recognizes the power imbalances that exist between adults and youth, within formal and informal learning environments, and between their governing bodies. As such, the organization envisions PAR as a mechanism for bringing together youth, educators, administrators, businesses, and community leaders to collaborate, share insights, and encourage youth-informed or youth-led decisions to improve or develop more effective college and career pathways.

More Details, Please!

For more information about PAR as a tool for youth engagement and youth voice, NAF has several resources:



| INCREASING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH VOICE IN NAF ACADEMIES USING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH | Youth Engagement and Participatory Action (PAR) Literature Review Brief NAF has compiled this summary of literature, practical considerations, and readiness tools and resources to help educators learn about and examine youth engagement and voice in classrooms, academies, and communities inform planning and implementation of approaches – like Participatory Action Research (PAR) to foster youth-adult collaboration for more equitable and effective learning conditions and outcomes |
|---|--|
| NAF PAR Toolkit: Youth Engagement + PAR 101 | Youth Engagement with PAR Video Series Want to learn the basics about youth engagement with PAR? This video introduces you to Participatory Action Research with young people. |
| NAF PAR Toolkit: What does it mean to be an Adult Ally in Youth PAR? | Who are Adult Allies and what do they do? This video identifies the roles adults can play as allies in PAR projects with youth and the characteristics of positive allyship. |
| NAF PAR Toolkit: How can we successfully implement PAR with Young People? | Are you interested in engaging youth in a participatory action research program? This video walks you through what works and what doesn't when implementing PAR. Learn about the Factors and Barriers to Successful PAR Implementation and review side-by-side graphics that summarize these key considerations. |
| NAF PAR Toolkit: Are you READY for Youth PAR? | This video identifies the next steps in planning for and engaging young people successfully. |



ORIENTATION - How to Use the NAF PAR Toolkit

We're excited to share resources and insights on augmenting youth voices for change! This section introduces you to NAF's PAR toolkit for authentic youth engagement in your NAF Academies, school classrooms, and beyond.

We designed the toolkit to meet various goals across diverse learning opportunities. Suppose your NAF Academy seeks to engage youth more authentically but does not have the time or resources for a long-term project. The NAF PAR toolkit can help! **We divided the toolkit into sections organized around specific youth engagement, learning, and experience goals.** The kit comprises structured group learning activity guides to support curriculum or in-class discussion, short-term commitments (i.e., weekend to month-long projects), and long-term projects requiring significant levels of youth engagement and youth voice to bring about change.

The Figure represents a continuum of practices and processes to support youth engagement and amplify youth voices for change and provides an excellent overview of how the toolkit meets diverse youth engagement, learning, and experience goals.

Which segment best meets your engagement, learning, and experience goals? Use the color-coded building blocks below to help you identify the resources on the subsequent section that best meets your goals.

Building Collaborative Practices

Select participatory activities that engage youth (with or without adults) in sharing their reflections on everyday experiences or specific issues, to explore ideas, gand ather and make sense of data, information and diverse insights. Great for very short-term engagement and learning experiences!

Developing a Culture Amplifying Youth Voice and Youth-informed Action Select participatory activities to encourage youth to take informed action to improve an issue in collaboration with adult allies and decision-makers. Excellent for shorter-term experiences like a weekend or month-long mini-PAR project.

Encouraging Youth-led Action for Change

Select the Full PAR process to guide youth, allies, and decision-makers in a full cycle of youth-led research and action for improvement. This is a long-term process (4-6 months +).



Matching the NAF PAR Toolkit to your Goals

The Table represents a way to match the NAF PAR toolkit resources to the color-coded youth engagement, learning, and experience goals you selected above. **Consider what you're looking to accomplish in partnership with young people.**

| I'm looking for: | This is where you will find it in the NAF PAR Toolkit: |
|---|---|
| A different way to have conversations with youth | Go to <u>Section One</u> : Participatory Activities to Support Authentic Youth Engagement |
| Opportunities to amplify youth voice in my Academy, classroom or other learning environment | |
| Ways to structure group learning opportunities in my Academy, classroom or other learning environment | |
| A rapid way to explore an issue or problem in | If you wish to explore an issue as part of your classroom curriculum or program, take a look at <u>Section One</u> : Participatory Activities to Support Authentic Youth Engagement |
| collaboration with youth | If you wish to explore an issue (in your classroom or program) and identify solutions with youth, go to Section Two : A Mini-PAR Process |
| A way to structure a short-term project* around a school or community issue identified by adults or youth and for which we want to find solutions collaboratively (* e.g., a weekend or monthly-long project) | Go to Section Two: A Mini-PAR Process |



| A unique opportunity for youth to develop | If you wish for the leadership opportunity to be a short-term project (e.g., one to two months), we recommend you review the resources available in <u>Section</u> <u>Two</u> : A Mini-PAR Process |
|---|--|
| leadership skills by collaboratively facilitating with adults a project to take action on a specific issue | If you wish to engage youth and adults in a longer-term project to bring about change at school or in the community (e.g., 3 months to 12 months), take a look at <u>Section Three</u> : A Full PAR Project. |
| | *Note that buy-in from leaders is necessary for the PAR project to be successful because they will need to integrate youth recommendation. |
| To engage youth authentically and amplify their | Head over to Section Three: A Full PAR Project |
| voices and actions to bring about a material change in the school or community | *Note that buy-in from leaders is necessary for the PAR project to be successful because they will need to integrate youth recommendation. |



What's in the NAF PAR Toolkit - List of Activities

The NAF PAR toolkit contains a wealth of resources to build collaborative practices, develop a culture amplifying youth voice, and support youth-led action for change in your Academies, schools, or communities. The table below overviews a youth PAR project from start to finish and lists activities for each essential step with descriptions of how each aligns with specific youth engagement, learning, and experience goals. **Click the underlined type to access the resources (hyperlinks).**

| I'm looking to support: | Recommended NAF PAR Toolkit Resources: |
|--|---|
| | Getting Started Resources |
| Increase awareness of Youth PAR Help explain Youth PAR to colleagues and youth Planning a Youth PAR process or components of a PAR process | NAF's YPAR Literature Review Overview of PAR as a tool for youth engagement (Executive Summary and full report) NAF's 4-part PAR explainer videos Each video is under 5 minutes: Youth Engagement and PAR 101 What does it mean to be an adult ally in youth PAR How can we successfully implement PAR with young people? Are you ready for youth PAR? Defining Participatory Action Research To collaboratively construct an informal definition of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and assemble an initial idea of the process your group might follow during your PAR work. Examples of Youth PAR Projects Journey Map - Youth researchers' reflections on NAF PAR Pilot at Wenonah High School, Birmingham, AL Summary: Wenonah AOHT PAR Project - NAF summary of the PAR Pilot at Wenonah High School, Birmingham, AL UC Berkeley YPAR Hub project spotlight |



| Adult reflections on youth engagement at my Academy or school | NAF's Youth Engagement Adult Readiness Tool The NAF Youth Engagement Readiness Tool will help organizations rate their current youth engagement practices and understand their areas of strength and areas for improvement. The Tool should be completed by educators and school/district leaders who are adult allies directly supporting the PAR process. We understand Youth Engagement Adult Readiness Tool might be a heavy lift, so a quick alternative is to complete our NAF Adult Readiness Fish and Boulders Activity. |
|---|--|
| Adult-youth or peer-to-peer relationship building | UC Berkeley's YPAR Hub - <u>Team building resources</u> "Lead fun icebreakers, help the team get to know each other, explore verbal and non-verbal communication styles, build trust and develop a process for decision making." |
| Increase awareness of who makes decisions in projects | UC Berkeley's YPAR Hub <u>Youth adult power sharing</u> To develop a working model of the youth and adult relationships for your program or project and increase awareness of power and who makes decisions. |
| | Issue Defining & Exploration Resources |
| Youth collaborative exploration of everyday experiences or current issues | NAF's Issue Identification Facilitation Guide This activity aims to support youth in identifying an issue (at school or in the community) that is important to them and, if doing a mini-PAR or complete PAR, would be the focus of the project. You cannot do PAR without first selecting an issue! Looking for an activity to supplement Issue Identification? Or maybe for something you can do quickly or as part of other planned classroom or program activities? We have excellent participatory activity guides to consider: (see Additional Resources) Graffiti Wall Temperature Gauge |



| Youth collective analysis and critical thinking about why an issue or phenomenon exists | NAF's <u>Root Cause Analysis</u> Facilitation Guide A root cause analysis aims to engage youth in diagnosing the selected (YPAR) issue by determining what is causing or driving it based on lived experiences. For our root cause analysis, we use the "Five Whys Method." Looking for an activity to supplement Issue Identification? Or maybe for something you can do quickly or as part of other planned classroom or program activities? We have excellent participatory activity guides to consider: (see <u>Additional Resources</u>) <u>Graffiti Wall</u> <u>Force Field Analysis</u> <u>Fish and Boulders</u> |
|---|---|
| | Planning Resources |
| The collaborative development of research questions Youth identification of various perspectives Decide on and plan actions with youth | NAF's <u>6Ws- Asking Questions</u> Facilitation Guide We use the "6 Ws" to generate a list of questions to guide and inform what actions are possible. For the issue you have selected, what do we need to know? Think about this in terms of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW." Looking for an activity to supplement Issue Identification? Or maybe for something you can do quickly or as part of other planned classroom or program activities? We have excellent participatory activity guides to consider: (see Additional Resources) Graffiti Wall NAF's Deciding and Planning on What Action to Take Facilitation Guide |
| | We guide decision-making around three actions: (1) research to gather information and address any gaps in knowledge, (2) planning a debrief to share with decision-makers what youth have learned to date from the PAR process (with or without doing additional research), (3) planning an event to share information with peers, community members. |
| | Action-Taking Resources |



| Event & Debrief-related Actions How to plan an event as your PAR action Guide youth to communicate ideas or recommendations to adults and decision makers Public speaking | UC Berkeley's YPAR Hub: • Speaking to powerful people • Engaging your school principal • Developing an Elevator pitch • presentation skills • public speaking skills • communicating with difficult people • Event planning | |
|--|--|--|
| Research-related Actions | NAF's Gathering Information Facilitation Guide | |
| Data collection | To inform youth researchers and adult allies on the different ways of gathering information in a participatory action research project and help them to develop (information gathering) tools. | |
| Fun, interactive activities adults or youth could implement to facilitate a focus group or workshop A different way to explore an issue | NAF's <u>Making Sense of the Information Gathered</u> Facilitation Guide Making sense is a systematic process to organize information in order to make it easier to use, analyze its patterns, and interpret its meanings" collectively. What is the <u>Data Saying Worksheet</u> | |
| or topic | UC Berkeley's YPAR Hub Data and adultism in decision-making | |
| How to design and implement surveys, interviews, focus groups | Check-out NAF's archive of fun, interactive, participatory activities under Additional Resources | |
| Reflection & Evaluation Resources | | |
| Post Event and Debrief Evaluation | Post Event and Debrief Evaluation If you hosted an event or a debrief as part of your action-taking, consider using one of the tools above to gather feedback on the effectiveness of your event/debrief (i.e., evaluate your event or debrief). Please refer to the <u>PAR Sense Making Facilitator Agenda</u> for ideas on how to collaboratively review the post-event and debrief data. | |



| | Excellent external resources from the Y-PAE Hub:⁵ (review the resources and select the ones appropriate to your needs and resources). And don't forget the great communication resources under <u>Event and Debrief-related Actions.</u> Evaluating the progress of your project <u>Outcome evaluation</u> |
|--|---|
| Post-Experience Evaluation Evaluate and reflect on the PAR experience with youth Opportunity to learn from youth experiences with PAR and make improvements | Post PAR Experience evaluation & reflection with youth researchers Facilitator Agenda To debrief with youth about their NAF PAR project experience. We evaluate our projects to ensure that youth researchers have positive experiences and progress towards our project's goals. Evaluation and reflection provide us with information to project improvements. |
| | Additional Resources |
| Participatory Activities to Consider: | <u>W³ (What, So What, What Now)</u> - External resource from Liberating Structures <u>Appreciative Interviews</u> - External resource from Liberating Structures <u>Body Mapping and Road Journey and Storyboards</u>, - Designed to capture what participants have gained due to their engagement in the program (or class, shared experience). <u>Candy Voting (or Candy Survey</u>) - Ideal for evaluating an event/gathering or asking a large group of people questions about a specific issue! <u>Community Mapping activity</u> - Allows us to gather and map-out information about various issues or areas of inquiry. And there are more mapping resources <u>here</u>. <u>Fish & Boulders</u> - Allows participants and facilitators to discuss what changes they would like made to the program, their journey to achieving a common goal, or the realities they face relative to a specific issue. <u>Force Field or Vision Analysis</u> - Helps participants collaboratively explore a particular issue or context and reflect on a collective vision or group aspirations. |

⁵ YPAR Hub at University of California, Berkeley - <u>http://yparhub.berkeley.edu</u>



| | • | <u>Graffiti walls</u> - A Graffiti Wall allows participants to share their ideas or opinions in response a simple prompt. <u>Human Survey</u> - A quick and easy way to survey a group of participants about a range of topics, including their awareness, experiences, and sentiments about an issue. <u>Temperature Gauge</u> - Designed to capture participants' high points/most satisfying and low points/least enjoyable moments in a program, event or other shared experience. |
|--|---|--|
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