Conducting Participatory Research

This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.
Conducting Participatory Research

**Background**
Conducting Card Sorts
Conducting Photovoice Studies
Analyzing Findings
What is participatory research (PR)?

- “Encompasses research designs, methods, frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied for the purpose of action or change” (Vaughn and Jacquez)
- Leverages research methods or tools that encourage users’ genuine and meaningful participation in the research process
- Studies are guided primarily by the experiences and expertise of the user/participant rather than the researchers’ areas of interest

What are PR studies good for?

- **Learning directly from users** about their lived experiences or interactions with a service, space, program
- Developing **actions or recommendations** with direct input from users or members of your community
  - Participatory research is a “research-to-action” approach
- Fostering **partnerships** with users so that decision-making is shared at every stage of the assessment
What are PR studies *not* good for?

- Getting quantitative results
- Gathering evidence quickly
- Answering detailed questions about online interfaces
- Not a good method when researchers are not able to work directly with users
  - For the study to be participatory, users MUST have some power in decision-making and implementation
Types of participatory studies

User-Centered Design Research

- Iterative design that involves users in designing interfaces, services, or spaces intended for them
- Includes design thinking, participatory design research, human-centered design
- Examples: card sorts, charrettes, design thinking workshops

Community-Based Participatory Research

- Equitably includes all partners, including researchers and users/community members
- Often focused on health-related or other social issues
- Example: photovoice

Framing your participatory study

• Choose method based on **what you want to know**
  ○ *Example*: Students’ study habits, patterns, preferences for a new space = **Design workshop or charrette**
  ○ *Example*: Participants’ use of and feelings about campus services = **PhotoVoice, photo diary**
  ○ *Example*: Participants’ understanding and use of website links and menus = **Card sort**

• Nearly all research methods can be participatory if **co-designed and co-facilitated** with community members
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Background

**Conducting Card Sorts**

Conducting Photovoice Studies

Analyzing Findings
Card sorts

- Useful for learning more about how users engage with websites, including their **expectations and understanding**
  - Does the way the library site is structured make sense to users?
- Two basic types:
  - Open card sort
  - Closed card sort
- May include **physical cards** or **online tools**
- May take place **one-on-one** or in **groups**, **in person** or **online**, or in a **hybrid** setting (i.e., use an online platform but conduct the test in person)
Card sort types

● **Open card sorts**
  ○ Participants organize content into categories
  ○ Participants label categories themselves

● **Closed card sort**
  ○ Participants sort content into categories defined before the test
  ○ Participants share reactions to labels and groups developed by library staff — or other users (again, this is meant to be fully participatory!)
Card sort methods and tools

● **Low-tech**
  ○ Sticky notes, index cards
  ○ Hand-written or typed labels
  ○ Blank cards for participants to fill out themselves individually or in groups

● **Online (fee-based, some include free trial tests)**
  ○ Userlytics, www.userlytics.com/methodologies/
Tips for a successful card sort

- Identify the topics and pages to test
  - Consider heavily used content or pages you or your users consider problematic
- Limit your study to 30–40 topics or pages — these become your “cards”
  - Don’t forget to include blank cards for your participants to fill out
- Run a pilot test to be sure technology and set-up work well
- Encourage thinking aloud — remember that your participants are the experts!
- Involve participants in designing the type and format of the study (open, closed, combination; online, in-person, hybrid)
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Background
Conducting Card Sorts
**Conducting Photovoice Studies**
Analyzing Findings
Photovoice

- Qualitative **community-based** participatory research method that originated in global public health
- Participants take **photos** and **write short captions** in response to a series of prompts provided in advance
- Group views photos together at a scheduled time (60–90 minutes)
- Conversation is **driven by photo content**, not a script directed by a moderator
Sample photovoice prompts

- What makes you feel supported, safe, or like you belong on campus?
  - In the library?
- What makes you feel unsafe and unsupported on campus?
  - In the library?
- When you think about using the library, what comes to mind?
- What microaggressions or bias do you experience because of your race in the library, on campus, in our community?
Tips for a successful photovoice study

● Provide 1–3 weeks for participants to take and submit their pictures with short captions
  ○ Develop a simple online submission form, or use email

● Create a slideshow with each prompt and corresponding pictures and captions
  ○ Do not include participants’ names (participants may identify pictures they took during the discussion session if they wish)

● **Recruit moderators and note takers from the same community / identity group as the participants — and compensate them for their time**

● Audio record discussion sessions
  ○ Obtain consent to record the session and use photos for research purposes

● Provide incentives and snacks for participants
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Background
Conducting Card Sorts
Conducting Photovoice Studies
Analyzing Findings
Analyzing card sort data

- Prepare data for analysis after each test session
  - Photograph each card sort, or record numbers of cards after each test
- Record and analyze participant demographics
- Code and analyze participant comments during and following testing
- Pay close attention to the cards group together most frequently and the categories users developed for their groupings
- Involve participants in analysis or discussion of findings; work together to develop recommendations for improvement
Analyzing photovoice data

- Transcribe discussion sessions
- Closely read and tag interesting quotes in the transcripts
  - More than one person should do this if possible, and ideally, at least one participant would review and tag transcripts
- Consider using affinity diagramming to group quotes and topics
- Develop takeaways and recommendations based on themes
- Identify topics that require further consideration or research
Affinity diagrams

● Also known as affinity mapping
● A design thinking analysis technique used to synthesize and group data

● Process:
  ○ Write each finding on a sticky note
  ○ Group sticky notes by theme
  ○ Rank themes by importance
  ○ Record takeaways and recommendations for improvement
Following up on what you learned

- Record your findings in writing to **share with all stakeholders**
  - Doesn’t have to be a formal report
  - Include photos and quotations
- Develop **recommendations for improvement or follow-up**, and commit to fixing what you can
- Wherever possible, **involve participants** in decision-making and implementation
  - Collaborate to prioritize recommendations
  - Co-author reports, co-lead presentations, co-plan implementation
  - Celebrate successful implementations together
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