

# Youth participatory action research



Participatory action research is an approach that promotes community engagement in research and evaluation in support of social change. Youth participatory action research (YPAR) can be facilitated in community, school, and university settings.

## Participatory action research

Through active participation in research, youth develop critical skills while addressing issues that matter deeply to their communities. Past research with teens and young adults, including Latin@ youth, shows YPAR promotes civic participation and supports youth on pathways to academic and career success. Research on YPAR (Anyon et al., 2018 ; Ozer, 2015) highlights the following outcomes for participating youth:



Increased sense of agency, community participation, and leadership



Increased opportunity to reflect on the root causes of social problems



Change in attitudes or behaviors about social issues studied, such as drug use and bullying

## Photovoice

YPAR can take many forms and use traditional research methods like collecting survey data or conducting interviews. Photovoice is one YPAR method where youth use storytelling via taking photos and writing narratives to document issues impacting their communities (Wang & Burris, 1997). According to research (Banyard et al., 2022; Macias et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020 ), participation in photovoice supports:



Reflection on healthy and unhealthy relationships



Cultural identity development



Photography skills and narrative development



Connection to violence prevention organizations, local communities, caring adults, community leaders, and policy makers



## Youth engagement

Youth engaged in YPAR can also gain applied research and professional experience. If you are organizing your own YPAR project, consider offering career development sessions (such as resume workshops) or other mentorship opportunities. Beyond recruitment, take time to build trust and genuinely connect with youth, honor their lived expertise, and create spaces where they feel heard, safe, and respected. Build incentives into the work youth contribute as researchers and research participants, such as gift cards or cameras.

Past research suggests engagement in data collection may be easier than data analysis or dissemination. Regardless, you should strategize on how you will engage youth at every stage of research. Here are other best practices to consider in your planning: (Anyon et al., 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997; Yang et al., 2020):

- The recommended group size for common YPAR methods is 10 youth or less
- YPAR projects typically involve meeting with youth one or two times per week for five or more weeks

Contact [researchandevaluation@esperanzaunited.com](mailto:researchandevaluation@esperanzaunited.com) for training, tools, and resources on YPAR and Photovoice.

## References

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