

INQUIRY GAME

This activity can be used in a few different ways. It's a great team-builder by itself and can be used at any stage in the process. It is a simple and fun way to introduce participatory action research (PAR) and frame a longer conversation about what research is, who researches, who is researched, and why. Participants choose a question they are truly curious about and survey other participants in the room within a given time frame. They then share what they learned with the entire group in a circle.

PURPOSE

To define norms and expectations for how the group interacts.

To build community within a new group.

To introduce PAR and related concepts.

OUTCOMES

Shared clarity about key concepts.

TIME

10-30 minutes , depending on the size of your group

MATERIALS

Optional: Notebook paper and pens

SOURCE

Original exercise by Levana Saxon, Partners for Collaborative Change

FRAMING

While this can be used to develop basic skills around research, don't tell the participants that yet. The activity should feel light, easy and fun, with no stakes involved. You can draw correlations between what they did (that was likely fun) and the various stages of PAR. So, to frame this exercise - keep it simple. Say something like, *"Everyone will pick one question that you are genuinely curious about, and see how many people you can ask in _____ minutes"*.

PROCESS

- 1. Ask participants to think of an open-ended question** that they can ask the group. It should be something that they're genuinely curious about. Give a few examples. It can be anything, such as: What music has been released lately that I should be listening to? There are no bad questions for this exercise, except yes-or-no questions. Challenge them to ask open-ended questions.
- 2. Demonstrate the activity first.** Ask a volunteer a sample question, such as: I have too many commitments, what advice do you have for simplifying my life? The volunteer shares their answer and is then invited to ask you a question and you model a quick answer.
- 3. Participants now have 5-15 minutes** (or as much time as you want to give them) **to ask each other their questions.** Be specific about how many people they should talk with in that time period, and how long they have to talk with each person. Consider giving enough time for everyone to talk with everyone.

4. Remind people throughout to keep moving on to another person

throughout the exercise and let them know how much time they have left. This exercise generally slows way down after a while when questions lead to juicy discussions and participants will forget to keep moving on.

5. Call “time!” and invite everyone to stand or sit in a circle. Ask each person to think of a simple statement that conveys what they learned as accurately as possible. Each person then shares their question and their statement, which is their main finding.

6. After everyone has shared, explain the similarities of what they just did to actual PAR:

- a. They came up with a question that they were genuinely curious about. In PAR we start by choosing questions that personally matter to us.
- b. They likely made sure that the question they asked was something that people in the room could answer. In PAR we consider who we will be talking to when deciding our question and research method.
- c. They asked a lot of peers their question. In PAR, we conduct data collection like this, by talking with our peers.
- d. They quickly analyzed their data and came up with a summary of their findings. In PAR we look for patterns in what people said to develop our findings.
- e. They presented what they learned to the group. In PAR we share what we learn in reports, websites, presentations, etc.

Note: in this share-out, you can check for accuracy in reporting. For example, if someone asked: *Who is the best musician?* - their finding should not be: *Beyonce is the best musician* but instead *Most people in the room think that Beyonce is the best musician.*

REFLECTION

Reflect on the process. Some questions you can ask for reflection are:

- What questions were easy to answer?
- What questions were difficult?
- What research was the most interesting and why?
- Did anybody’s answers surprise you?
- Did your bias impact your summary?
- What part of the process did you enjoy and why?
- Do you think your community has knowledge that is valuable?
- Why do people rarely ask each other questions?
- Who are we told are the “experts” to our problems? Why?
- Who do we think of as researchers?
- Who do we think of as research subjects?
- Why do we do research?



VARIATIONS

Introductions and Check-ins: You can also combine this with a check-in or an introduction for a first meeting. For example you could ask each person to share their name, pronoun, other prompt (i.e. why are you here, how are you today, etc) and then what they learned.

Note-taking practice: Ask people to track answers to their questions with a pen and paper, which then provides a brief experience in note-taking. This variation is great when introducing the challenges with tracking or note-taking in an interview, focus group or Forum Theatre research scenario.