PARCEO

Positionality: Building Community
Positionality Series, Part 2

The "Positionality: Building Community" curriculum was designed by the Participatory Action Research Center for Education Organizing (PARCEO), an independent center that supports community groups in their work and organizing. All of PARCEO's trainings are based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) and popular education which value and center the leadership and experiences of those most affected by injustice as we collectively work to affect change and build community power.

This training grew out of the needs of SAPNA, a PAR-based health organization (formerly Westchester Square Partnership) based in the Bronx, NYC. The SAPNA parent's group asked PARCEO to facilitate a workshop to explore how individuals from varied backgrounds and with different levels of participation in an organization could work together. PARCEO also worked with them to think about the role of the organization within the larger community.

"Positionality: Building Community" is the second part of the Positionality series, after "Positionality: Working Across Difference." "Building Community" considers social justice work at the individual level, the organizational level, and the community level. This training can be used with people and organizations working in their own community or those working with communities that may not be their own. Through group discussions and activities, participants explore and model the process of building community in an organizational setting.

Goal of this training: This training focuses on positionality and building community within an organizational context. Participants gain an understanding of how their individual experiences connect to the values of the organization and how to build a strong foundation that values all voices, experiences and differences. All of our workshops end with collective reflection, where participants have a chance to share what they learned from the training and what they hope to continue to explore after the training.

Objectives:
- Build connections and identify commonalities and difference through sharing stories
- Connect individual values to those of the group or organization in a collective way
- Analyze the role of an organization within the community it serves, or in which it resides
- Look at the process of building with an organization in ways that are rooted in PAR, social equity and change

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Positionality and Building Community
(2.5 hours)

Goal for this session: Participants build on the *Positionality: Working Across Difference* training and gain an understanding of how their individual experiences connect to the values of their organization. Participants see how building a foundation that values all voices and experiences allows their organization to be more reflective of the community.

Materials:
- Markers/pens
- Butcher/chart paper
- Collage materials: glue, scissors, newspaper, magazines, etc.
- Mission statements from participants' organizations
- Positionality Quote handout
- Why PAR handout

> Many activities have a number of **Guiding Questions**. These are there to support conversation, but don't feel the need to ask all of them. It may be helpful to choose a few of the most relevant questions and write them out on chart paper ahead of time.

Interactive Icebreaker Preparation
(5 minutes)

Action: Facilitators write session agenda and instructions for the interactive icebreaker on chart paper/board so that participants can start to work on their introduction pieces as they trickle in:

- *Create a paper-size poster to introduce yourself. Include your name, your organization/affiliation and a visual representation of a time you felt like you belonged to a group. Think about what made you feel that way.*

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Welcome and Introductions
(15-20 minutes)

Framing: Facilitators *welcome the group, guide introduction and icebreaker, and provide a brief overview of the training. Together the group develops discussion guidelines.*

<u>Welcome and Overview (15 min)</u>
Action: Facilitators welcome the group, guide introductions, go through the *group agenda,* and take questions.
Talking points: Facilitators ask participants to go around the room and share their paper-size poster with:
- Name
- Organization or affiliation to group
- A time you felt like part of a group and what made you feel that way

If your group already has guidelines from the Positionality: Working Across Difference training, briefly review them to see if anyone has anything to add.

<u>Discussion Guidelines (5 min)</u>

Action: Facilitators ask participants to brainstorm guidelines for how to engage with each other in this training. Facilitators take notes and refer back to the guidelines as needed throughout the training.

Connection to next activity: Participants consider their feelings or memories of belonging to a group in relation to their definitions of community.
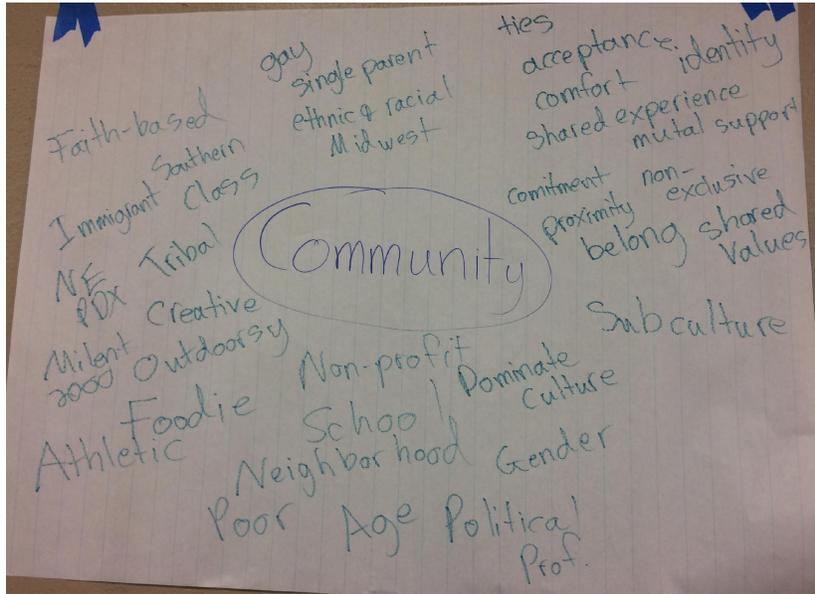
Defining Community
(15 min)

Framing: Participants establish an understanding of what, where and who is included in their definitions and conceptions of community. Participants consider how their communities are represented by the outside, think about the idea of "insider vs. outsider," and if there are times when those lines are blurred.

Action: Facilitators explain activity (using the framing above); write the word "Community" on a board/large paper and list participant responses to the word.

Talking point: **Facilitators** lead a discussion based on these **Guiding Questions** and write down participant responses:

- What comes to mind when you hear this word?
- What communities do you belong to?
- How are your communities represented?

Connection to next activity: *Participants think about the different places, relationships, definitions, and meanings of community and represent these further.*

Visual Activity: Community Representation
(30 minutes)

Framing: *Keeping in mind the potential fluidity of belonging to multiple communities and categories such as insider/outsider, participants create a visual representation of their community. This activity can focus on the individual's own community, work community, or the community that their group or organization works with, acknowledging that these categories may not be different.*

Talking Point: In small groups, participants create a collage or drawing of their community, work community, or the community that they work with or in. Consider the **Defining Community** exercise and these **Guiding Questions**:

- Are there strong memories that you have from your community?
- What is a place you enjoy or a place that has meaning in your community?
- Who are the people that make up your community?
- What are some of the collective values in your community?
- What are some of the differences within your community?
- What are some strengths in your community?
- What are some challenges in your community?

Action: Facilitators pass out collage materials (chart paper, markers, glue, scissors and newspapers/magazines) and break participants into small groups. In groups, participants make a collage of their community based on the **Guiding Questions**, above. After completing the collage, participants share their images and describe what they portrayed with the larger group. Groups may also post their collages on the wall for the remainder of the session.

Connection to next activity: Participants consider conditions for collaboration and what it means to do work within their own or with another community.

"Nothing about us without us is for us"
(20 minutes)

Framing: Using the principles of PAR from the Positionality: Working Across Difference training, participants consider their roles, the concept of insider/outsider, and the differences between engaging in a process <u>with</u> a community versus <u>for</u> a community.

*Have extra copies of the **Overview of PAR Handout**. You may want to review the basic principles as a group before discussing the quotes*

Action: Facilitators pass out the Positionality Quote Handout and split participants into pairs to discuss the quotes and **Guiding Questions**. Encourage pairs to jot down a few thoughts or questions from their conversation.

Talking Points: Facilitators write **Guiding Questions** for pairs to consider in their small-group discussion, keeping in mind PAR principles**:**
- What are your initial reactions to the quotes? What stands out to you?
- Does one quote in particular resonate with you or your work?
- What motivates you to engage with communities in the ways you do?
- What type of borders or boundaries do you see in your community/community you work with?
- How do you understand boundary crossing in relation to your work?
- How do you, or how does your work, relate to the quote: "Nothing about us without us is for us"?

Action: After pairs share their responses to the quotes with the larger group, facilitators ask participants to write on post-it notes a question or thought that the discussion raised about their work or their organization. They can post the notes on a wall or by the community collages for others to read during the break.

Connection to next activity: *Participants consider the role of their organization within the broader context of organizing and social justice work. Participants explore how their community connects with the organization and how the community's voice, strengths, and values are reflected in the organization.*

Break
(10 minutes)

History of the Organization
(10-20 minutes)

Framing: Through a group discussion, participants develop a collective understanding of the mission, values, and history of their organization. Participants critically analyze how their own identities contribute to their organization.

Action: Participants look at their organization's mission (handout/description on website, etc.). If this doesn't exist, allow 10 minutes to discuss and write out the organization's mission, vision, and goals.

Depending on the size of the group and the amount of shared institutional knowledge, it might be helpful to break participants into small groups for this activity.

Talking Points: Facilitators guide discussion on the organization's history and how one's individual identities and experiences fit into the organization using **Guiding Questions**:

- What was the process of developing the mission/vision? How did issues of race, class, gender, ability, and equity enter this process?
- How do different voices shape the mission or organization's work?
- How is decision making shared within the organization?
- What is the process of making change within the organization?
- Sometimes one's personal views are not reflected in the organization's mission, values or vision. How do you deal with this? Are there ways to change this?

Connection to next activity: While considering an organization's mission, think about how the community is part of shaping and enacting the mission.

Role of the Organization in the Community
(15 minutes)

Framing: Working in small groups, participants consider the role of the organization within the community and how the organization builds relationships with other communities.

Talking Points: Facilitators break participants into small groups to discuss the relationship between the organization and others. It may make sense to divide groups based on focus areas or roles within the organization or community. Ask one person in each group to be the notetaker.

Guiding Questions:

- How does the organization currently connect with people in the community?
- How are different voices and experiences integrated into the everyday activities of the organization?
- What role does the community have in the organization?
- What role does the organization have in the community?
- Are there other groups or individuals that do similar work or have similar missions and goals?
- Is it important to connect with other organizations or groups in the community? Why or why not?
- How can the organization make relationships with other groups or community members stronger?

Connection to next activity: Using the notes from the small group discussions, and drawing on previous group activities and discussions, participants think about the links between the individual, the organization, and the community.

Connecting the Individual to the Organization and the Community
(20 minutes)

Framing: Through a visual sketch, participants draw together all of the conversations from the training to see the connections between the individual, the organization, and the community.

Actions: Facilitators give participants a few minutes to look over the notes and questions they have written down throughout the training; guide a discussion and takes notes on chart paper creating links to show how individuals connect to the organization and then to the larger community. Write: Individual, Organization, Community on chart paper. Based on responses generated from the discussion, create links between terms and categories.

Talking Points: Facilitators guide this visual note-taking exercise that ties together the different elements from the training. This activity shows the connections between the individual and the organization and the community.

Guiding Questions:
- What are some issues within the community?
- What are some issues that are currently being addressed in the community and how?
- What other groups work in the community?
- How do your values connect to the values of the organization?
- How do the values of the organization connect to the community?
- What is the process for connecting the values of an individual and the community to the values of the organization?
- How does your organization connect with/to other organizations?
- How do you negotiate individual and group differences without imposing values or opinions on others?
- What are ways of working <u>with </u>the community vs. <u>for </u>the community

Connection to next activity: The session closes with an open discussion to address any questions, issues, or ideas that came out of the training.

Closing

(5 minutes)

Talking Points: Facilitators ask participants to take a moment to think about and then share their response to one of the **Guiding Questions**:

- How does this training affects your work process?
- What is one thing that you are taking with you?
- What is one thing you will be thinking about more?
- Are there any questions that come to mind?
- Is there anything that you would like to add to the training?

Action: Participants go around the circle, each sharing a question or comment about the session.

> It maybe useful to spend time as a group looking at the additional questions in the Positionality and Equity Handout.

Agenda
Positionality: Building Community

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Defining and Depicting Community

3. What is Community Building?

4. History of the Organization

5. Role of the Organization in the Community

6. Bring it all Together

7. Closing

PARCEO

What is PAR?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a framework for engaging in research and organizing for social justice that is rooted in a community's own knowledge, wisdom, and experience. PAR recognizes that those most impacted by systemic injustice are in the best position to understand and analyze their needs and challenges and to organize for social change.

In a PAR-generated process:
The outcomes can take many shapes and forms depending on what the group determines together, but it is the group's own agenda and not someone else's.

We engage in collective research and organizing to build community and make change.

The work is about generating and building knowledge together in order to define the change we seek to make. This begins with telling our own stories, which centers our own experiences.

Community members are recognized as experts, and all participants are considered both teachers and learners. Too often, outside "experts" come in to identify and address a community's problems, and PAR challenges this notion of who has the expertise.

We work intentionally and always think carefully about whose voices are being heard, who is making decisions, and how we are moving forward. We consider our roles, position, and privilege in relation to changing conditions of injustice.

Like popular education, it is a broad framework that is participatory, collective, critical, and reflective, building from the work of Orlando Fals-Borda, Paulo Freire, and many others. It is not a neutral process and actively builds community strength and leadership to change unjust conditions.

Positionality Quotes

"If you have come to help, you're wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together.
  -Australian aboriginal activists group

"Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation."
  -Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

"Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections."
  -Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

"As Paulo Freire shows us so well in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us. And which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships."
  -Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

"In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever completely or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders."
  -Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes Revisited*