The Promise Of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

SJI SEATTLE JOBS INITIATIVE

Helping People. Changing Lives. community Action PARTNERSHIP AMERICA'S POVERTY FIGHTING NETWORK

Centering Participant Voices in Assessing Your Impact

Bri Nguyen and Eileen Calderon

Participant-Centered Design Team
at Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI)

NCAP SNAP E&T Webinar

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Who we are

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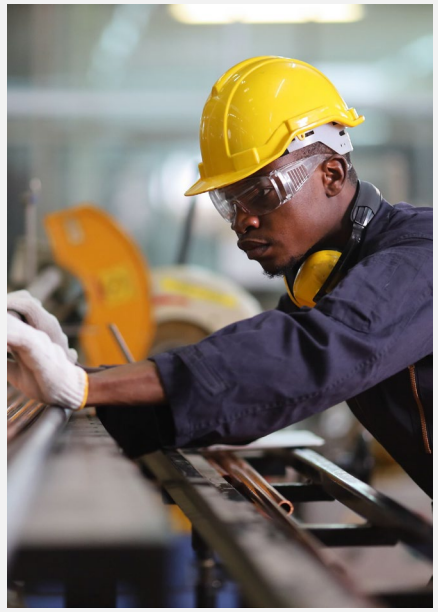
Senior Research & Project Consultant



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Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI)

Mission

SJI supports people from underinvested communities to build careers. By creating equitable workforce systems and developing impactful partnerships, we address structural racism.

What We Do

Direct services

SNAP E&T program development

Human-centered program improvement

Policy and research

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Participant-Centered Design Team at SJI

We work with community-based organizations, higher education institutions, and government agencies to **center participants and students** in all aspects of their work.

We specialize in **research, assessment, and collaborative design**, working with our partners to:

- Identify and close equity gaps
- Develop feasible solutions
- Improve outcomes and supports for participants

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How do you assess the impact of your program(s)?

a) We do in-house assessments or evaluations

b) We hire an external evaluator

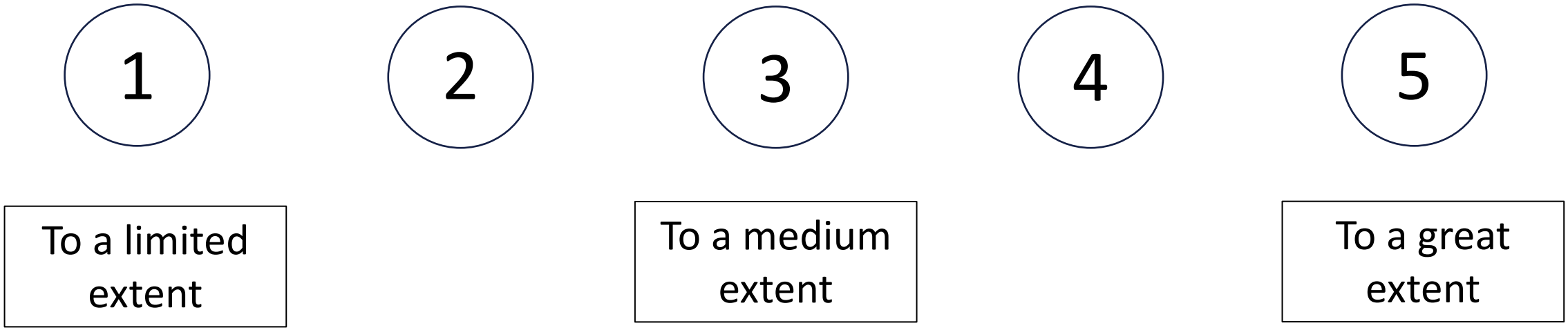
c) We review program data

d) We ask participants to provide feedback

e) Other

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To what extent are you engaging participants in assessing your impact?



Key question for today: How can you move a little further to the right on this scale?

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Agenda

1. Why center participant voices?
2. A little bit of context
3. How to do an assessment in a participant-centered way
    - 4 key steps
4. How to get started
5. Q&A

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Why center participant voices?

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Centering participants increases program effectiveness

More participant centered

- ✓ Programs are **aligned** with participant and community needs and interests
- ✓ Interventions are **culturally appropriate** and responsive
- ✓ **Better insight into gaps in services** and how to address them
- ✓ **Better insight into structural and systemic inequities** and how to address them
- ✓ Increased **impact** (more effective programs)

Less participant centered

- Programs are **based on assumptions** rather than the actual needs and interests of participants and the community
- Interventions may **lack cultural appropriateness** or relevancy
- Program practices may **unintentionally reinforce barriers** to participation or successful outcomes
- Increased **risk of programs being less aligned, less relevant, and less effective**

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Case study

A workforce development agency had lower completion rates among groups they wanted to engage. Why?

Staff

"We aren't communicating the value, or they don't understand it."

"We aren't offering the right career paths."

"People don't want to work."

Participants

"I called but no one got back to me."

"I couldn't get childcare/ transportation, so I had to stop going."

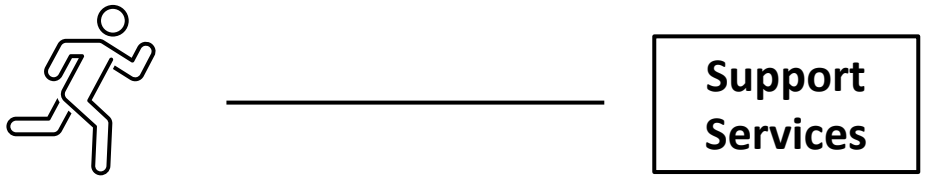
"I was excited about this program, but it seemed more geared toward what works for them and not what works for people like me."

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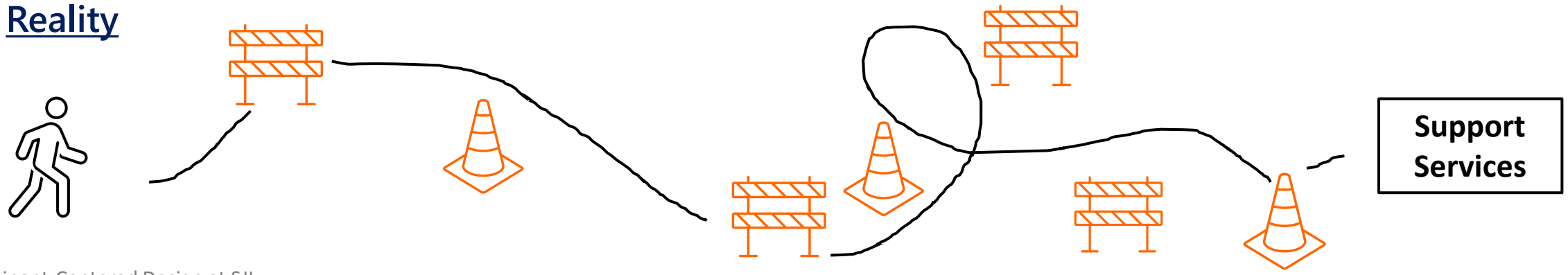
Illuminating gaps between program assumptions and participant realities

- Participant voices can illuminate gaps and obstacles that hinder people from accessing and benefiting from services and supports
- Key question: are these gaps and obstacles exacerbating the inequities that we are trying to reduce?

Assumptions



Reality

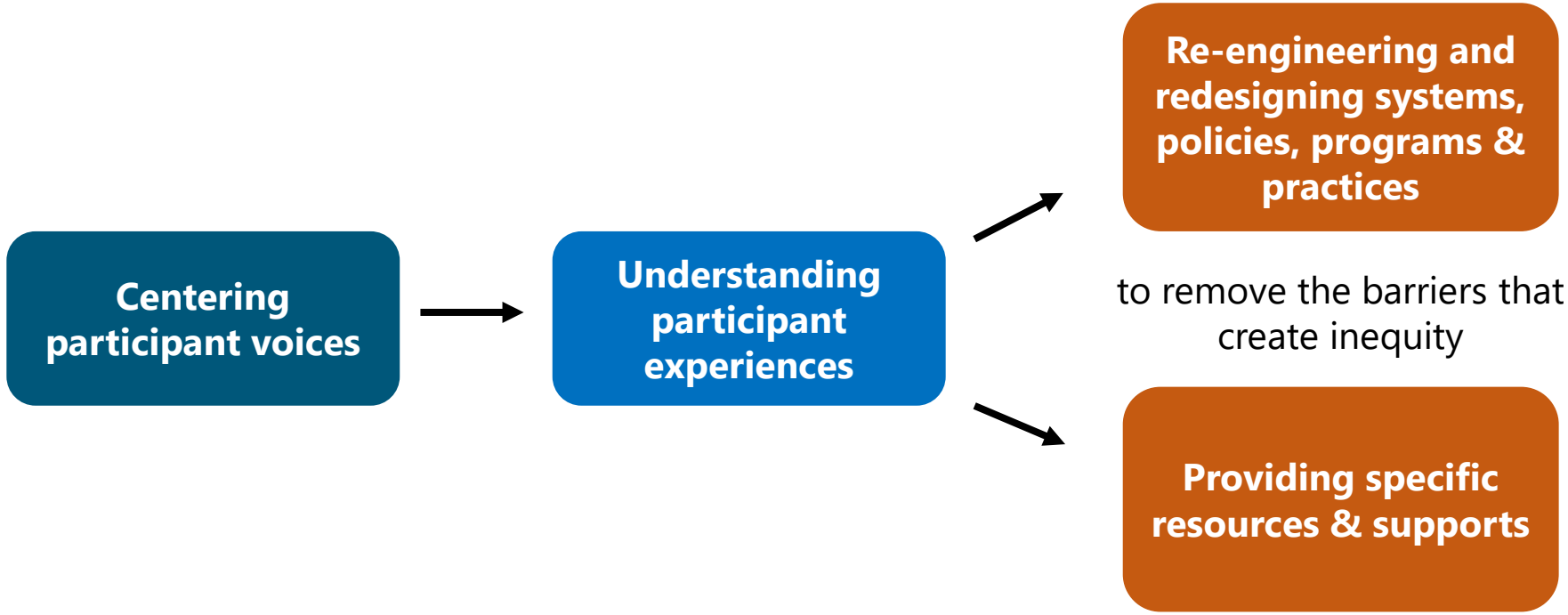


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Centering participant voices is a key component of advancing equity

Advancing equity:

- Achieving equal outcomes
- Removing the barriers that create inequity by re-engineering and redesigning systems, policies, programs, and practices
- Providing specific, tailored resources and supports to participants according to their individual needs



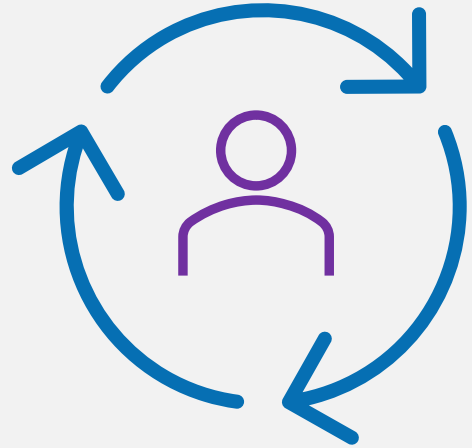
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A little bit of context

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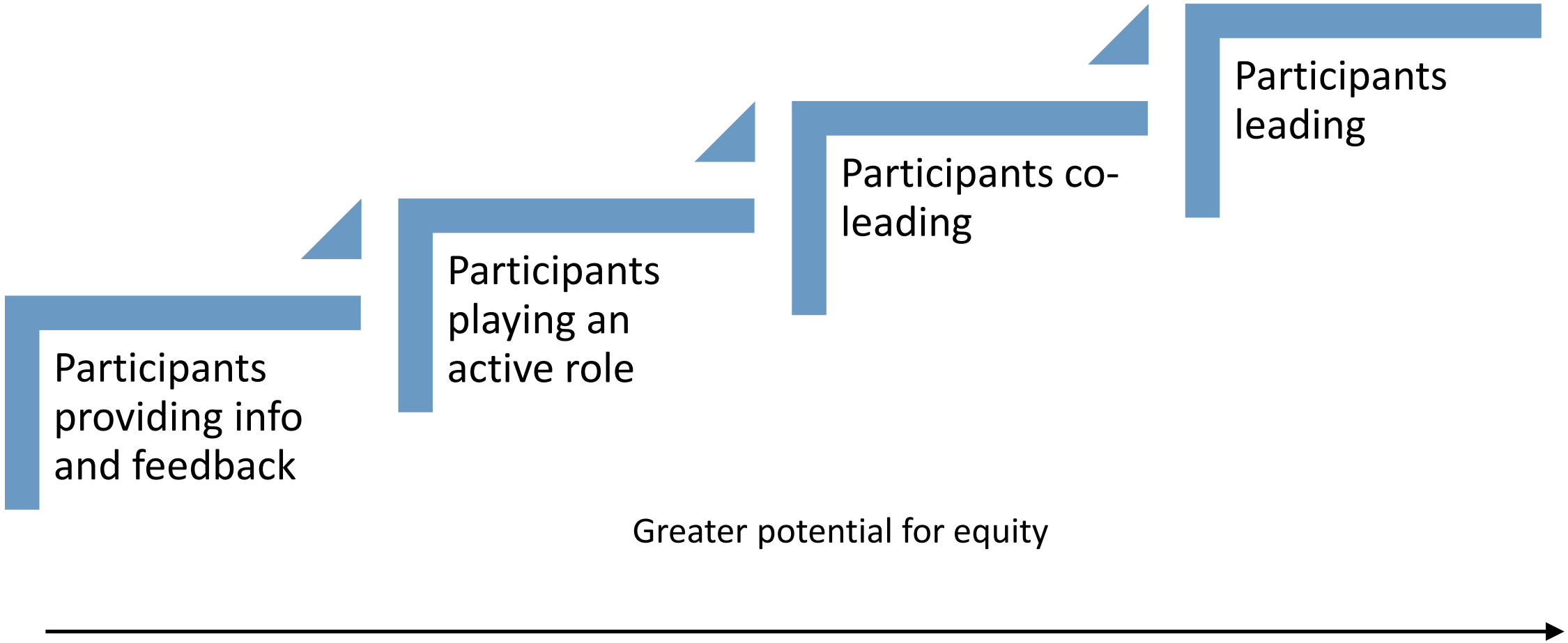
What does it mean to *center* participant voices in assessing your impact?



It means **intentionally prioritizing participants' authentic input and participation** in assessing what effects your program produces and where improvements could be made.

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Participant involvement exists on a spectrum



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Think of a program or area that you would like to assess and note it down

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Conducting a participant-centered program assessment

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What are the key steps in a program assessment?

How could participants be involved in each step?



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Step 1: Planning your assessment

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Step 1: Planning your assessment

1. Determine your **area of focus** and **what you want to know**.

Area of focus

- Participant experience
- Participant outcomes

Want to know (assessment questions)

- How did participants experience our program/services? What would they emphasize and/or change?
- Did our program/services have the effects we/participants hoped for?
- Did it have unforeseen effects?
- Are some people deriving more benefit than others?
- Why did we get the results that we did?

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Engaging participant voices in the planning process

Example questions to ask participants:

- What questions do you think we should ask in our program assessment? If you were us, what would you suggest we look at?
- What does success look like to you?
- What are you hoping to learn/gain from this program?

Tip:

Participants are your customers and experts on their experience—plan with this in mind!





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Step 1: Planning your assessment (continued)

2. Describe your program and how it is supposed to work.
Identify how you measure progress and success (the data you collect).

Example: A logic model is one way to describe a program



Resources needed to operate program	What the program does to achieve its outcomes	Concrete results of the activities	How participants are affected by their participation

Indicators

Amount of resources used	Descriptions, logs, or reports of activities, participants (numbers, percents)	Logs or reports of actual activities, results delivered (numbers, percents)	Participant knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, intentions

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Example indicators for an employment and training program

Short- and long-term outcomes	Example indicators
1. Participants have improved job skills	1. #/% of participants passing job skills assessments
2. Participants go on interviews	2. # of job interviews per participant
3. Participants have improved confidence; are satisfied with the services	3. #/% of participants who report improved confidence; satisfaction with the services
4. Participants find employment	4. #/% of participants who find employment
5. Participants have increased earnings, sustainable employment	5. #/% of participants still working after X months, avg hourly wage of participants who became employed, #/% receiving health care benefits

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Important notes and tips

- You don’t have to have a logic model (this format may not be the best fit)
- A simple description of your program, how it is supposed to work, what its goals/intended outcomes are, and how you measure success is sufficient
- Ideally, you should plan for program assessment from the very beginning so that you and your partners and stakeholders can align on how to measure impact and effectiveness and make sure you are collecting the data you need

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Step 2: Designing your assessment

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Step 2: Designing your assessment

1. Determine **what data and information** you will need to answer your assessment questions

Qualitative Data

- Can describe people's **perceptions and motivations**
- Can help you understand the participant experience
- Can help you understand the **"why"** or **"how"** behind choices, behaviors, and/or results
- Can help you understand if your programs are meeting community and participant needs

Quantitative Data

- Can be **quantified, counted or measured**; represented by numbers
- Can answer **"what"** questions
- Can tell you how many, how much, or how often
- Can be analyzed with statistical analysis

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Step 2: Designing your assessment (continued)

Back to some of our earlier examples:

Want to know (assessment questions)	
• How did participants experience our program/services?	**Qualitative** + **Quantitative**
• Did our program/services have the effects we/participants hoped for?	**Qualitative** + **Quantitative**
• Did it have unforeseen effects?	**Qualitative** + **Quantitative**
• Are some people deriving more benefit than others?	**Qualitative** + **Quantitative**
• Why did we get the results that we did?	**Qualitative** + **Quantitative**

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Step 2: Designing your assessment (continued)

2. Determine **how you will gather** the data and information you need

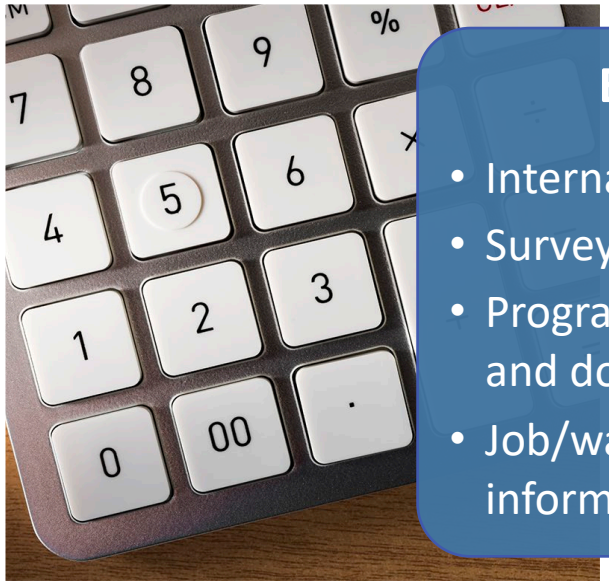
Qualitative Data Sources



Examples:

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Conversation and observation
- **Many informal options!**

Quantitative Data Sources



Examples:

- Internal database
- Surveys
- Program records, logs, and documentation
- Job/wage data and information

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Engagement level examples

Participants providing information and feedback	Participants in an active role	Participants as partners (co-creators, co-leaders)	Participants as leaders
• Surveys • Focus groups/group activities • Interviews • Informal conversations • Workshops/events/ activities	• Focus groups/group activities • Interviews • Informal conversations • Advisory board or workgroup • Participants involved in data collection and analysis/interpretation	**Ongoing, regular participation** in designing and conducting assessments and associated improvements, and are **involved in decision making**	Participants have **the resources and authority to make decisions** regarding the design, process, and outcomes of assessments in ways that align with their priorities and values

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Example data collection table (excerpt)

Assessment Question	Data Collection Method	Data Sources
1. How did participants experience our program/services?	Participant-made photo gallery/journals and group discussion	Participants
2. Did our program/services have the effects we/participants hoped for? **3. Did it have unforeseen effects?**	Individual interviews	Participants, program staff, employers
	Program records, logs, and reports	Internal database/MIS (management info system) Documentation provided by participants and employers

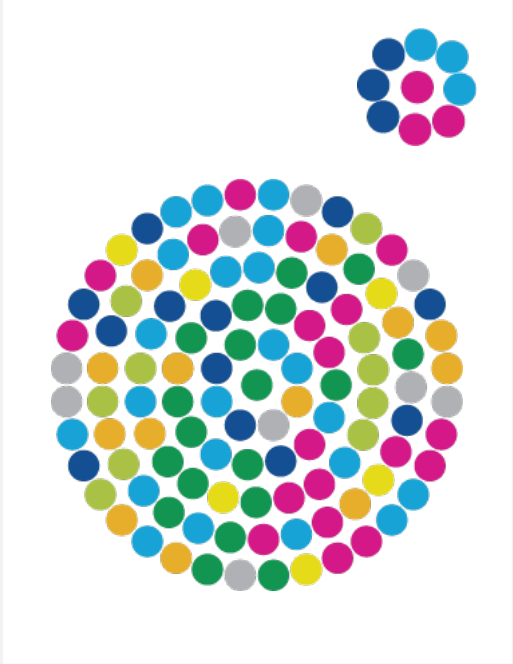
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Step 2: Designing your assessment (continued)

3. Determine **who** you will engage (this can happen simultaneously with the previous step).

Key considerations:

- **Which participants** are appropriate to **adequately answer** each assessment question?
  - Consider **representation**
  - Consider enrollment, participation, and completion status
- How will you reach **less vocal participants** (not just the most vocal)?
- How will you hear from those who find it **more challenging to participate or who encounter barriers**? (e.g. different schedules and availability)
- Are there **underrepresented groups** to engage?



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Step 3: Collecting and analyzing data

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Step 3: Collecting and analyzing data

1. Conduct **outreach and recruitment** for qualitative feedback activities
2. Conduct **qualitative feedback activities**







Tip: Trust is critical—build it by:

- Approaching participant engagement with **care and thought**:
  - Consider sensitive topics, power dynamics, accommodations
- Putting **informed consent** protocols in place
  - Be **clear and transparent** about how participant feedback will be used
  - Clearly explain terms and processes: confidentiality, privacy, data use
- Providing **fair and equitable compensation** to participants

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Step 3: Collecting and analyzing data (continued)

3. Gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data
4. Synthesize findings



Tips:

- **Disaggregate quantitative data** (break data into subcategories) to see if outcomes are unevenly distributed between groups
- Invite **multiple perspectives**, including the participant perspective, into the data analysis process (to avoid bias)
- **Avoid common risks**, such as:
  - Cherry-picking info/data to support your own agenda or beliefs (confirmation bias!)
  - Generalizing based on a few experiences – be aware of whose voices are being prioritized and whose voices may be/are missing

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Step 4: Reporting, sharing, and making improvements

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Step 4: Reporting, sharing, and making improvements

1. Determine how to **share findings with stakeholders/participants**

Tips:

- Determine how you will **elevate the participate voice in your findings**
- Identify your stakeholders and their characteristics
- Identify your communication goals
- Determine:
  - How to present the information
  - Which **reporting/communication method(s)** would be most appropriate





- Written report
- Memo
- Roundtable discussion(s)
- Workgroup session(s)
- Gallery walk of data/findings
- Town hall meeting
- PowerPoint slides
- Social media
- Infographics
- Videos/photos

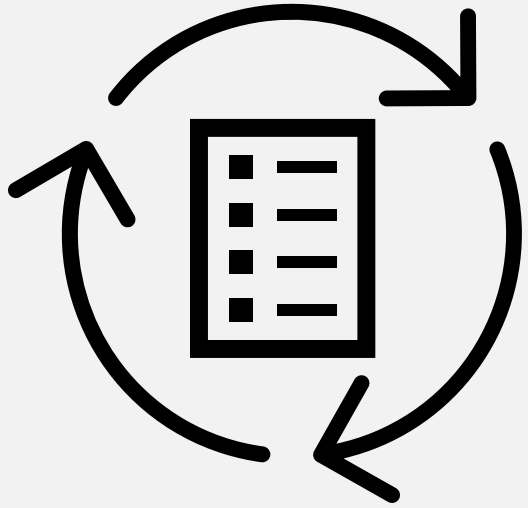
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Step 4: Reporting, sharing, and making improvements (continued)

2. Commit to **taking action on the findings** (i.e., making participant-centered improvements)

Tips:

- Think about **utilization** from the beginning
- Have a process for discussing the findings and turning them into action
- Create a timeline, set goals, and have ways to track progress



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How to get started

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Building participant engagement into day-to-day work

- Make participant engagement an **agency priority**
  - Include in your **strategic plan/goals** and **allocate resources** for participant voice activities
- **Operationalize** by making participant voices part of daily activities
  - Include participant voices in **key initiatives, decisions, and practices**
  - Make participant voices a **required component** of assessments and continuous improvement work
  - Create **participant advisory boards** for key initiatives/changes
  - Provide participant voice **professional development and training** to staff







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Tips and suggestions

- **Be intentional** about taking a participant-centered lens (this shouldn't be an afterthought)
- **Start small**: what small action(s) can you take based on what you're already doing?
- **Incorporate short questions and conversations** with participants into orientations, intake, 1:1 meetings, classes
  - "What did you learn today? What would you still like to learn/do?"
  - "I want to learn from you about how our program is working for you and your suggestions for making it better. I'll check in about this with you or you can bring it up with me as you think of things and with your permission, I'll take some notes to share with my team."
- **Dedicate time at team meetings** to compare notes, identify themes in participant feedback/insights, and make adjustments
- **Share results or changes** that you made with participants, staff, and stakeholders







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Reflection:

What can you do, or what have you done, to incorporate participant voices into your assessment or improvement work?

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Q&A

Connect with us!

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Evaluation

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NCAP Thank you!

Contact us anytime!

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