

Tips for Facilitating Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Remotely

Brandon Louie and Nancy Erbsstein

This resource came about to support YPAR praxis during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are various contexts in which working remotely for all or part of a YPAR project might be useful (e.g. youth mobilization/collaboration across large distances, other youth mobility limitations, etc.). No matter your team's reasons for working remotely, the broad frameworks and values of YPAR and positive youth development still apply and our intention here is to highlight practices that can translate these into a virtual environment.

While adaptations can be made to fit a variety of circumstances, the following practices assume participants and facilitators have at least some access to resources and tools that allow for synchronous connectivity (e.g. landline/cell phone or internet-connected computer/laptop/smart phone, reliable cell/internet service, a relatively quiet location with limited distractions, etc.). We encourage you to become familiar with whatever tools you want to use and seek out additional resources that support remote facilitation, teaching and engagement (such as the [University of California, Davis' Keep Teaching website](#)). Please note that tools referenced in this document are mentioned for example purposes only, and this mention neither reflects an exhaustive set of options nor constitutes an endorsement.

Below are our tips for remote YPAR facilitation, organized according to key project stages and aligned with the 9 Stepping Stone guides from our online YPAR toolkit: [Community Futures, Community Lore](#).

- **Youth Recruitment (*Stepping Stone 1*)**
 - Work closely with the young people with whom you already have relationships to connect with their peers.
 - Youth know youth and are skilled at recruiting their peers. They also are often adept at communicating with each other and sharing information via remote platforms like social media sites and mobile apps.
 - If you're starting a new project or looking to recruit beyond the social networks of pre-existing youth contacts, work with schools and/or other youth-serving community organizations, agencies and networks to reach out to their youth populations and help identify potential youth participants (remember, schools will not connect you with young people who are out of school, who might be important stakeholders in your project).
 - They may have additional channels for advertising your project to youth such as online newsletters, virtual classroom discussion boards, social media or phone trees.

- **Team Building (*Stepping Stone 2*)**
 - Conduct a quick online or phone survey with your group to identify the tools (e.g. WiFi access, smart phone, data plan, computer/printer, snail mail, etc.) that everyone brings to remote collaboration.

- To build relationships with and among your youth participants in a virtual environment and practice speaking up online, start small and work your way up a bit more gradually than you would in an in-person setting.
 - For example, if you're new to the young people and they're new to each other, consider beginning by conducting individual 1-1's with each youth participant. Then do small group meetings with a few youth. Facilitate steadily larger groups meetings until you work your way up to bringing the whole group together for the first time.
 - If you're new to the young people you're working with, consider whether it's appropriate to establish opportunities and communication channels for engaging with their parents/caregivers to ensure they are aware of and connected to the project taking place in their homes or places of residence. Note it's important to recognize that some young people might not be staying with caregivers and/or it might not be safe for them to share the specific project with them.
 - Have participants share a photo and short biography to introduce themselves to their teammates, and get those to everyone.
 - You may want to modify your traditional group agreements to collectively create a safe virtual environment. For example, new considerations for online video conferencing platforms may include the muting of microphones, use of video cameras, sharing screens, and recording of meetings. If data are going to be held online, be sure everyone understands the limits of confidentiality and anonymity in an online environment in order to make safe choices about sharing/storage of information.
 - Adult allies also need to be prepared to put themselves out there and be open and vulnerable online to model and support this behavior among their youth participants.
 - Check-ins, icebreakers and energizers are always important tools for building team dynamics and making gatherings fun! Search online for icebreakers designed specifically for virtual meetings and adapt in-person activities to fit a remote environment.
 - Utilize breakout rooms as much as possible via online video conferencing platforms to facilitate pair/share activities and small group discussions. These breakout rooms allow large groups to break off into smaller, pre-determined online "rooms" and then reconvene.
 - Conduct further asset mapping activities with the group to capture the skills and resources everyone brings to the collective effort.
 - Encourage team members to use the communication tool of their choice to stay connected with each other outside of scheduled meetings. Also consider using free apps that can support project management and communication (e.g. Slack, the Google Suite, etc....)
- **Collaborative Work for Identifying Issues, Developing Research Tools, Analyzing Data & Creating Final Products (*Stepping Stones 3, 4, 5, 7 & 8*)**

- To modify activities and discussions for remote facilitation, utilize creative online substitutes whenever possible for standard in-person techniques.
 - For think, pair, share activities and small group discussions, utilize breakout rooms via online video conferencing platforms.
 - To support team decision-making processes, check for agreement and/or assess interest, use polling tools embedded in online meeting systems or online polling sites/apps in addition to chat and verbal communication options.
 - To capture notes and build out ideas as a team, use online whiteboards and annotation tools via online video conferencing platforms or cloud documents that can be viewed and edited by the whole team in real time.
 - Pens, pencils, markers and paper can still be used by each individual team member for activities. Participants can share what they work on via mail if necessary, their video feed or can scan or take pictures of their work and then upload files to a shared team cloud storage folder and/or a shared social media group.
- Use collaborative cloud storage tools to share and edit files together as a team (e.g. word processing documents, spreadsheets, presentation slides, etc.)
 - Some cloud platforms will allow you to collectively edit documents in real time so all your team members can work together at once.
- For instances when real-time interaction is not possible (e.g. scheduling conflicts, uneven access to technology among team members, etc.) you may want to explore asynchronous collaboration options to maintain project momentum.
 - Activity instructions and demonstrations can be provided through pre-recorded videos and/or text, allowing youth to perform set tasks independently within a designated window of time. Both the guidance for activities and the resulting work products can be shared through your group's preferred communication tool(s) (e.g. text message, mobile app, discussion board, social media platform, cloud storage platform, etc.)
- **Conducting Research (*Stepping Stone 6*)**
 - Although some in-person research methods may not be possible during this time, there are still a number of creative and effective research options available. Consider using one or more of the following methods:
 - Autoethnography within your group
 - Youth use self-reflection and autobiographical storytelling to analyze and explore their own lived experience and connect it to wider community issues and contexts.
 - Photovoice/Videovoice
 - Youth create photographs/videos/illustrations and accompanying narratives that reflect the concerns and assets of their community and identify issues, themes, and theories that emerge.

- Visual images can be captured within and around their homes, as well as in public spaces (following applicable social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders).
- Community mapping
 - Youth create their own map(s) with data to represent their spatial knowledge of their community.
 - Data can include information they have measured or counted as well as pictures, drawings, videos and/or audio clips they capture.
 - Map creation can involve techniques and skills ranging from individual hand-drawn maps to group-generated digital maps using geographic information systems (GIS) or web applications like Google My Maps.
- Analysis of publicly-available data online
 - Youth identify what data already exist about their community/school/organization and compare them to their own knowledge of conditions on the ground.
 - Look for data or data mapping sites that focus on your region or your team's topic(s) of interest, seeking out trustworthy data sources such as school districts, local government agencies, state agencies, etc.
- In-person interviews with people in youth participants' households
 - Youth conduct guided, one-on-one discussions using a set list of questions, utilizing people with whom they are currently social distancing as their sample (note the importance of confirming youth access to people they can comfortably interview).
- Phone/video conference interviews with people outside of youth participants' households
 - Youth use a set list of questions to conduct guided, one-on-one or two-on-one discussions remotely with people within their social networks (e.g. youth participants' friends and extended family members, and/or strangers that adult allies and other supporters have within their social networks)
- Focus groups with people outside of youth participants' households
 - Youth use a set list of questions to facilitate group interviews, linking people together remotely via online video conferencing platforms
- Online surveys
 - Youth solicit people to independently write down answers to questions on a form and submit them online.
 - Various online tools allow you to build surveys, collect and compile survey data, and run reports for data analysis and presentation.
- Observation
 - Youth watch and document qualities of settings and interactions between people based on a set list of guidelines (depending on what may be visible from youth participants' homes and/or following

social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders for observation conducted outside the home).

- **Presenting Findings & Sharing Final Products (*Stepping Stone 8*)**

- A variety of final products can be created in a digital format and shared widely over the internet, including a report, book, magazine, newspaper, comic book, presentation slides, video, photo gallery, artwork, recorded performance, live presentation, discussion forum, social media campaign, etc. Get creative!
- Look for opportunities to share digital copies of your final product(s) with decision makers and community members via social media accounts, digital newsletters, online community/school message boards, community/school listservs, local media outlets, phone trees, etc.
- Find creative ways to share your work in real life, making sure to follow social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders in your community.
 - Post fliers around your neighborhood or town with website links or QR codes to connect people to your project and your final product.
 - Display an art installation or project installation in a public space (note: permissions may be required).
- Find opportunities to present your work, findings and recommendations to decision makers in individual video conference meetings and/or present your findings to decision making bodies that are holding virtual meetings (e.g. school board, city council, county board of supervisors, etc.)

- **Taking Action (*Stepping Stone 9*)**

- Ideas for taking action through Education:
 - Organize an online teach-in
 - Facilitate an online class
 - Develop a social media campaign with photos, videos, data, etc.
 - Create and share a podcast
 - Film and share a documentary
- Ideas for taking action through Service:
 - Organize a donation drive
 - Create a mutual aid network
 - Facilitate an online workshop to build other's capacity or support them to complete a task
 - Volunteer in real life, following social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders in your community
- Ideas for taking action through Organizing & Policy Advocacy:
 - Present your work, findings and recommendations to decision makers in individual video conference meetings or calls and/or online meetings of decision making bodies (e.g. school board, city council, county board of supervisors, planning commission, etc.)
 - Develop a social media campaign with photos, videos, data, etc.
 - Create an online petition

- Engage in collective action in real life, following social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders in your community
- Ideas for taking action through Art/Cultural Activism:
 - Create an art installation in a public space, following social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders in your community
 - Share a photo gallery or video via social media and other online platforms and distribution channels
 - Organize a cultural celebration online
 - Record and share your performance of a song, dance, poem or educational play
 - Create and share a cookbook of traditional recipes
- Ideas for taking action through Design/Planning:
 - Create and share a mock-up of a design online or in a public space, following social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders in your community
 - Collaborate online with your local planning department and/or local or regional governing groups and participate in virtual meetings