



# Introduction to Participatory Research

Excerpted from:

## *Measuring What Matters: Neighborhood Research for Economic and Environmental Health and Justice in Richmond, North Richmond, and San Pablo*



PACIFIC  
INSTITUTE

654 13th Street, Oakland, CA 94612  
www.pacinst.org

In partnership with West County Toxics Coalition, Neighborhood House of North Richmond, Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization, Historic Triangle Neighborhood Council, Morada de Mujeres del Milenio, North Richmond Shoreline Open Space Alliance, and Richmond Progressive Alliance

With support from The California Wellness Foundation, The San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Y & H Soda Foundation, Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, California Environmental Protection Agency, Firedoll Foundation, Robert & Patricia Switzer Foundation, and The California Endowment

The full report is available at [http://www.pacinst.org/reports/measuring\\_what\\_matters/](http://www.pacinst.org/reports/measuring_what_matters/)



Creative Commons, 2009. Material can be adapted and reproduced for non-commercial purposes, as long as the author is credited. More info: <http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses>.



# PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The West County Indicators Project is rooted in principles of participatory research, in which impacted residents—rather than being the subjects of research—define and complete their own research projects to support community action. When impacted residents take charge of planning research, gathering and analyzing evidence, and sharing their findings, they are empowered to bring about considerable change in their everyday lives and collective circumstance.

A participatory research process can support many aspects of community organizing and advocacy campaigns, including:

- Identifying a common challenge (or building a shared vision)
- Investigating the root causes of that challenge
- Developing solutions to the challenge
- Building relationships with similarly affected individuals and allied organizations
- Delivering powerful, effective, and persuasive messages to convince others that a particular solution should be implemented

- Measuring whether the solution is in fact being implemented and whether it is effective

The benefits of participatory research are not limited to community organizing or advocacy campaigns. Service providers, educators, those who work with youth or in job training programs, counselors, and others who seek to improve community conditions by working with one individual at a time may find both the process and outcomes of a community-based research project useful. For example, such a project can help:

- Establish the need for particular services in a given community
- Identify strategies that are the most effective in bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, or action in individuals
- Build confidence and agency in those individuals participating in the research project

The following three chapters on city park conditions, streetlights, and youth programs are the result of participatory research by community-based organizations in the West County Indicators Project.



*Members of the park survey team document Richmond's city park conditions.*

## Diagram 1. COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Phases in Organizing	Examples of Useful Participatory Research Tools	Examples of West County Indicators Project Research
Identify a common problem Describe the problem Recognize patterns in experiences with a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Door-to-door survey to discover problems residents have in common</li> <li>• In-depth interviews to find out what people care about most</li> <li>• Survey of neighborhood conditions to document what is or is not working</li> </ul>	<b>Park Conditions Survey</b> NHNR youth documented conditions of city park facilities.
Develop solutions Develop strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey the quality and/or quantity of programs that address the problem</li> <li>• Investigate what policies or actions have been successful in other communities</li> </ul>	<b>Youth Programs Survey</b> CCISCO contacted every youth program provider and gathered info on how many youth they serve and how they involve youth in designing programs.
Build support Take action, implement strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present research findings to members, residents, decision makers, and media</li> <li>• Document or evaluate the actions as they are happening</li> </ul>	
Celebrate victory Evaluate outcomes and revise strategies Monitor implementation of solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather information on how funding for the solution is being used</li> <li>• Conduct “after” survey to document how issue has changed</li> </ul>	<b>Street Lights Survey</b> CCISCO members went door to door in the neighborhood where PG&E had upgraded streetlights to document resident perceptions of the impact on safety.