

**American  
Heart  
Association®**

**life** is why™

# **Design Research Toolkit**

**THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION**



PREPARED BY **verynice.**

# Project Background

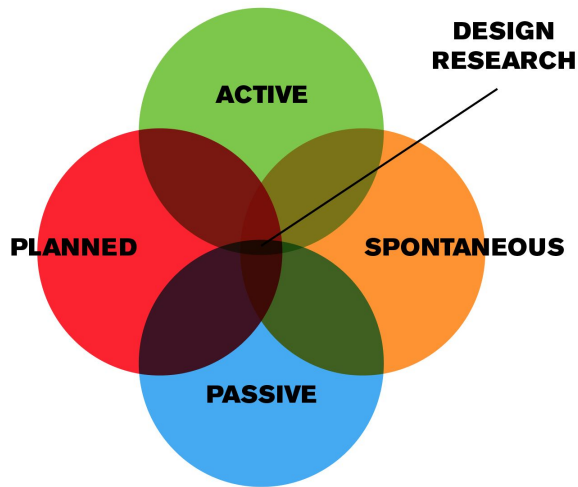
The American Heart Association (AHA) has almost a hundred years of experience uncovering the barriers to better health and sharing best practices for achieving healthier lifestyles across the country. Still, as a national organization, representing all needs from all communities can be challenging. Some communities, especially those that are rural, go unheard or are inadequately addressed by solutions that don't match their circumstances. With AHA looking to transition towards a more equitable approach to health, the organization is seeking new methods to better understand these underserved communities.

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1. Introduction/Methodology Overview
2. Breakdown of the Methodology
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  - f. REFLECT
  - g. LEARN

# Introducing Design Research as a Model

Design Research is a field of study dedicated to understanding people's needs to better inform an organization's products and services. Rather than start with solutions, design research is all about gaining a human-centered perspective first. This requires combining a variety of research methods that span a spectrum of types of research and researcher roles.

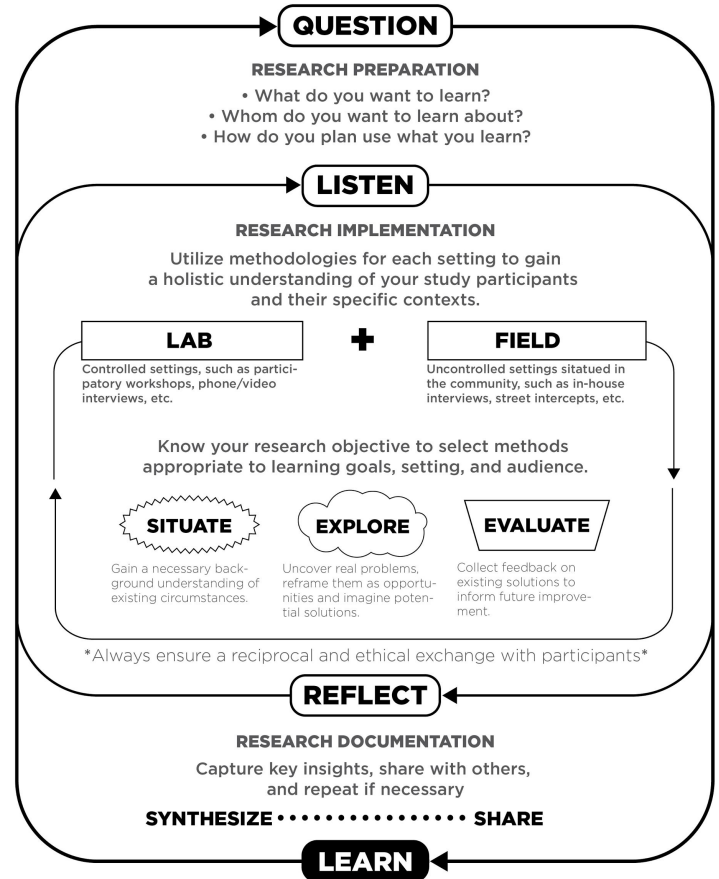


**PLANNED** research is far more scripted and controlled than **SPONTANEOUS** research, which is freeform and unstructured. With either type of research, the researcher can play a more **ACTIVE** role as a facilitator or a more **PASSIVE** role as an observer. Both research types and roles can be equally effective at gaining insights, but are more or less appropriate in certain situations or for particular objectives of research. Combined, these types and roles create a holistic model for community-based design research initiatives.

# DESIGN RESEARCH PROCESS + APPROACH

The following approach was developed by verynice for the American Heart Association, and is comprised of a diverse array of tools, methods, and strategies for design research. While the process is nonlinear in nature, it follows an iterative pattern in which the researcher must QUESTION, LISTEN, and REFLECT in order to LEARN.

The following pages break down each step in the process as well as an array of tools to accompany the process. The approach is designed to be flexible enough to adapt to accommodate any phase of a project.



*The above diagram provides a visual overview of the Design Research model designed for use in rural communities.*

**QUESTION**

# QUESTION

Every great study starts with great questions. This phase of the methodology gets any team off to the right start with 3 crucial questions.



Prior to commencing a Design Research project, **research preparation** will help AHA focus its efforts, select appropriate methodologies to apply, and gain useful results. The following questions and tips should be used to guide any new study<sup>1</sup>.

## What do you want to learn?

Select 5-7 research questions for your study (e.g. “What barriers affect health in rural towns?”).

*Note that these are the internal questions you wish to answer and not the ones you’ll be asking research participants.*

## Whom do you plan to learn about?

Consider primary characteristics that best describe your target participants.

*Think also about the types of behaviors you wish to understand.*

## How do you plan to use what you learn?

Create goals for any study that explain how insights may guide decisions.

*Imagine how the results might impact your organization’s practices.*

**See the next page for a Research Preparation + Questions Template.**

1. These questions have been adopted from Tomer Sharon’s book, *Our Research: Attaining Stakeholder Buy-In for User Experience Research Projects*, 2012

## Research Questions Template

What do you want to learn?

Whom do you plan to learn about?

How do you plan to use what you learn?

**LISTEN**



# LISTEN

The best way to learn about others is by listening to them. The trick is being able to hear what you need to learn for the purpose of the study.



**Research implementation** is where teams begin uncovering answers to their questions. Here it is necessary to understand the **objective** and determine which **setting** for research best fits the study's purpose, the participants' needs and the team's resources.

## Objective

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### TO SITUATE

Gain necessary understanding of existing circumstances

### TO EXPLORE

Explore issues of interest, uncover problems, and imagine solutions

### TO EVALUATE

Evaluate existing solutions + collect feedback from potential stakeholders

## Setting

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### LAB

Controlled settings, such as participatory workshops, phone/video interviews, etc.

### FIELD

Uncontrolled settings situated in the community, such as in-house interviews and street intercepts

[See the next pages for a methodologies for each Research Objective and Setting.](#)

**SITUATE**

# Situate

Getting started in a new community will certainly require the team to situate themselves in their new context. Below offers a couple of options for both Lab and Field settings.



## LAB

- A. **Interviews:** Recruit interview participants to provide insights through a structured, 30 minute phone or video interview. Create and follow an interview guide of no more than 10 questions, most of which are open ended. Lead interviews with questions about the day-to-day experience as opposed to being overly direct and confrontational.
- B. **Surveys:** Create and send a 10 question follow up survey to identified community members. Ensure that the survey can be easily completed within 5 to 10 minutes.

## FIELD

- A. **Field Study (contextual inquiry):** Send a 2-3 member team to conduct in-house interviews (~1 hour) with preselected individuals from the community. Ask individuals to walk through their food prep, cooking, and/or shopping routine. Document responses to pre-planned questions and take pictures of key behaviors, artifacts, or any other moments of interest.
- B. **Field Experience:** Visit the community to get a sense for the literal landscape. Eat at a local restaurant, take note of the businesses, etc.

See the next page for Interview Techniques.

## Interviewing Techniques

The following are some techniques to consider when conducting interviews.

### What does the nonverbal language of the participant tell you?

To listen is not just to take note of what is heard, but also what is seen. Consider the following:

1. Take note of the participant's body language. What does this tell you?
2. What is the participant's environment telling you?
3. What might the participant be thinking/feeling in this moment?

### What is the participant saying, and what are they *actually* saying?

In addition, it is the researcher's job to work with the participant in order to inspire them to share the deepest insights. Consider the following:

1. Empower your participant to be vulnerable by being vulnerable yourself. Share a personal story, be casual and friendly, show genuine interest.
2. Remember that it is often difficult for a participant to clearly express themselves. For complex questions/responses, consider using the 5 Why method. For every answer the participant gives, ask "why" 5 times in order to dig deeper into the root cause of their response.

### How are you documenting what you are hearing/seeing?

The method of documentation plays a significant role in the comfort level of your participant. Consider the following:

1. While convenient, large video cameras are often intimidating, even for the most outgoing participant.
2. 360 video cameras are now affordable, and are typically less intimidating, allowing for total documentation of both environments and conversations.
3. Still cameras are a great tool for capturing an environment, and portraits, but are awkward to use while interviewing. If you opt for this documentation method, consider bringing a designated photographer.
4. Notebooks are the least invasive method.

**EXPLORE**

# Explore, Part 01

If AHA is seeking to better understand any issue through the eyes of community members, this option excels at reframing the problem by prompting solutions created by the community itself.



## LAB

### Participatory Idea Generation Workshop

In this interactive workshop (2 hours), facilitators lead participants through the following activities to learn from the solutions that participants create themselves.

SEE APPENDIX FOR LOGISTICS  
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Drawing Exercises
- Journey Mapping
- Empathy Mapping
- Story Boarding



The following pages include a complete set of facilitator notes as well as a set of printable worksheets.

## Facilitation & Logistics Considerations

When you arrive, arrange the room how you see fit, but be sure to allow space for each participant to be able to work through the worksheets on their own. Bring plenty of water, nametags, pens, and scrap paper for your participants. Also, keep in mind that some participants may bring their children with them. Bring toys for the children to allow the parents to focus.

Aside from materials, you will need one lead facilitator who introduces each activity as well as a co-facilitator who monitors the room in order to provide answers to clarifying questions. In addition, it is recommended to bring a documentarian who is responsible for logging key information from the report-outs as well as to assist the lead facilitator in keeping the workshop running on time. The lead, co-lead, and documentarian must speak the native language of the participants.

### Sample Workshop Agenda

As the workshop is intended to take place over the course of 2 hours, the following is a recommended agenda, assuming a 10:00 am start time. Instructions and facilitation notes for each of the following agenda items will be described in the pages and worksheets that follow.

10:00-10:15	Introductions
10:15-10:25	Worksheet 01: Draw Something
10:25-10:35	Select participants "Show and Tell" from Worksheet 01
10:35-11:00	Worksheets 02-03: Chart Your Journey
11:00-11:15	Group Mapping Exercise inspired by Worksheet 02-03
11:15-11:20	Worksheet 04: Empathy Map
11:20-11:40	Worksheet 05: Storyboard
11:40-11:55	Select participants share results of Worksheet 05
11:55-12:00	Final discussion and close

## Facilitation & Logistics Considerations, cont.

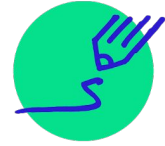
### Worksheet 01: Draw Something

The first activity invites participants to draw their favorite food OR the contents of their refrigerator. Food is a universal topic that brings joy to many, and allows the room to open up quickly. While this exercise is the most straightforward, many participants will lack creative confidence, and will be afraid to draw. To help ease the participants into the idea of drawing, the lead facilitator will create a drawing of their own in a very rudimentary manner in order to build confidence amongst those in the audience. It is important to leave a few minutes in this activity to allow participants to quickly share with the group. In doing so, Worksheet 01 is also able to serve as an icebreaker activity.





## Draw Something



### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Think about one of the following:
  - a. Your favorite food or
  - b. What's inside your refrigerator/pantry
2. Draw it from memory in the box below.

A large empty rectangular box with a blue border, intended for drawing.

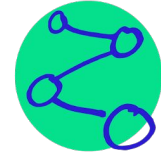
## Facilitation & Logistics Considerations, cont.

### Worksheet 02-03: Chart Your Journey

Each participant will take time to individually fill out worksheets 02 and 03 in order to log information regarding their process of acquiring food as well as to indicate the party responsible for the task, and the relative ease/complexity of the task. Because this section is the longest and most intellectually demanding, the co-facilitator must pay special attention to the audience, and be ready to intervene quickly in order to provide clarification to one or all of the prompts.



# Chart Your Journey



## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Think about each of the following activities.
2. Answer the questions for each activity in the space provided.

HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN? WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN? WHAT ARE THE STEPS YOU TAKE?

WHO IS INVOLVED OR RESPONSIBLE?

HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE DOING THIS?

## 1. Going to Get Food

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Fill in one circle

1 2 3 4 5

## 2 Selecting What to Buy

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Fill in one circle

1 2 3 4 5

## 3. Purchasing Food

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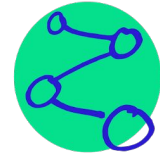
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Fill in one circle

1 2 3 4 5

# Chart Your Journey



**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Think about each of the following activities.
2. Answer the questions for each activity in the space provided.

HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN? WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN? WHAT ARE THE STEPS YOU TAKE?

WHO IS INVOLVED OR RESPONSIBLE?

HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE DOING THIS?

## 4. Storing Food

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Fill in one circle

## 5. Preparing Meals

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Fill in one circle

## 6. Eating Meals

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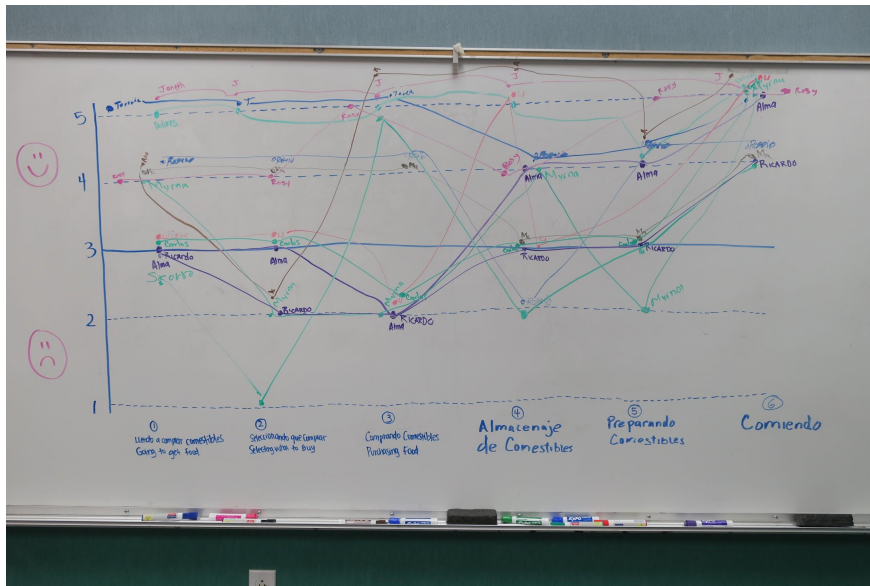
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Fill in one circle

## Facilitation & Logistics Considerations, cont.

Once all participants are done populating their worksheets, the lead facilitator will solicit a volunteer to come to the front of the room. Together with the volunteer, the lead facilitator will plot the participant's answers on the pre-drawn journey map. Once completing the sample, all participants will be invited to the front of the room in order to plot their responses. Once all responses are plotted, the lead facilitator will provide improvised commentary on the results.

*Journey Maps consist of an x-axis that represents the linear timeline of the participant's experience as well as a y-axis that plots the relative ease/complexity of the task(s). By having a large scale Journey Map at the front of the room, participants can see how their pain points relate to those of their peers, and the facilitator can easily begin to see patterns in behavior.*



## Facilitation & Logistics Considerations, cont.

### Worksheet 04: Empathy Map

Next, participants are asked to select the point of their journey they dislike the most, and complete an empathy map inspired by that low point. The purpose of an empathy map is to allow the participants to reflect on the pain point by describing in detail their feelings, as well as what they were hearing and seeing the last time they experienced said pain point. *For the sake of time, participants do not need to share the results of Worksheet 04 with the group.*

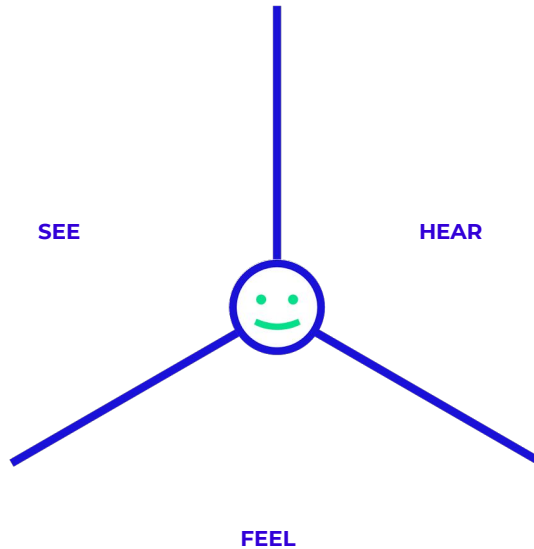


## Empathy Map



### INSTRUCTIONS:

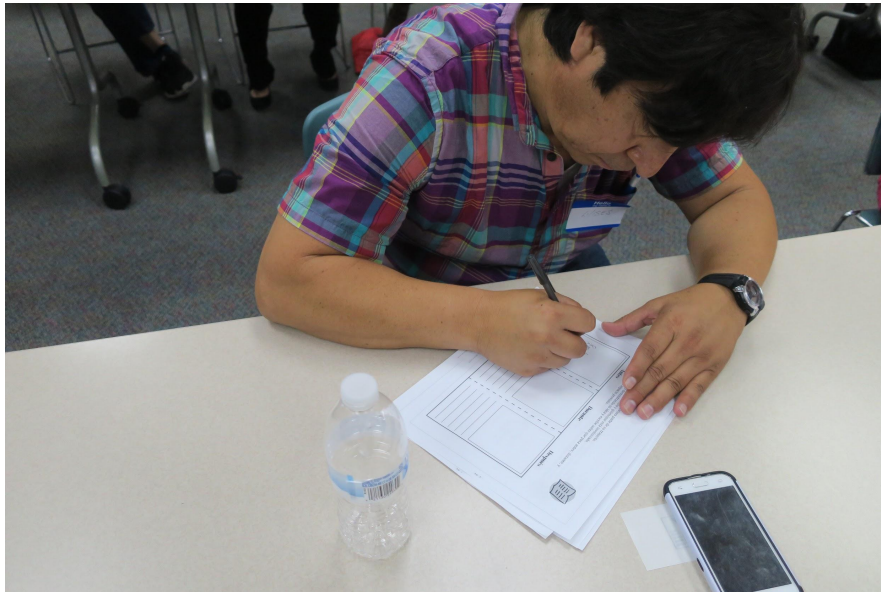
1. Select the part of your journey that you dislike/want to change the most.
2. Think about the last time it happened.
3. Write down what you saw, heard, and how you felt.



## Facilitation & Logistics Considerations, cont.

### Worksheet 05: Storyboard

The final exercise, inspired by all previous activities, asks participants to invent a new solution (potentially materials, programs, or initiatives that the AHA could initiate) that can reduce the negative aspect(s) of their journey. To begin, the lead facilitator must demonstrate by producing a storyboard of their own in real-time in order to help bring clarity to the exercise. As participants work on their storyboards, the co-facilitator will be available for clarification and creative encouragement. At the end of the exercise, a selection of the participants will share their solution with the group in order to close out the day. *Prior to ending the meeting, the lead facilitator will ask the participants to remove their name tags, and stick them on the worksheets before turning them in.*





# Tell a Story



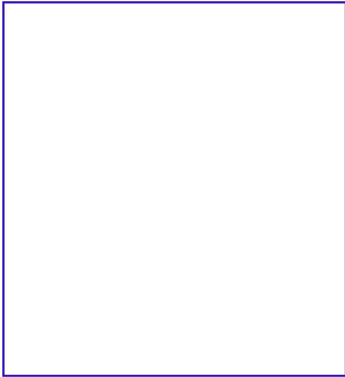
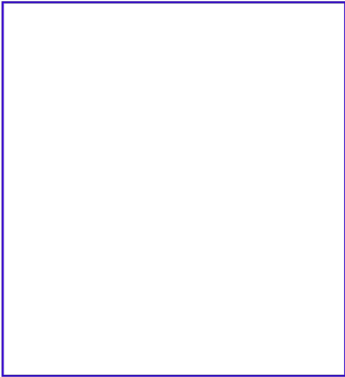
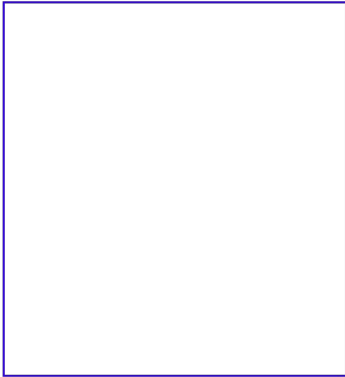
**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Think about a way to improve a part of your journey.
2. Consider what the solution is and who/what is involved.
3. Draw a picture showing your idea and write about what happens before your idea is used, the experience during, and after your solution is put into action.

**Before**

**During**

**After**

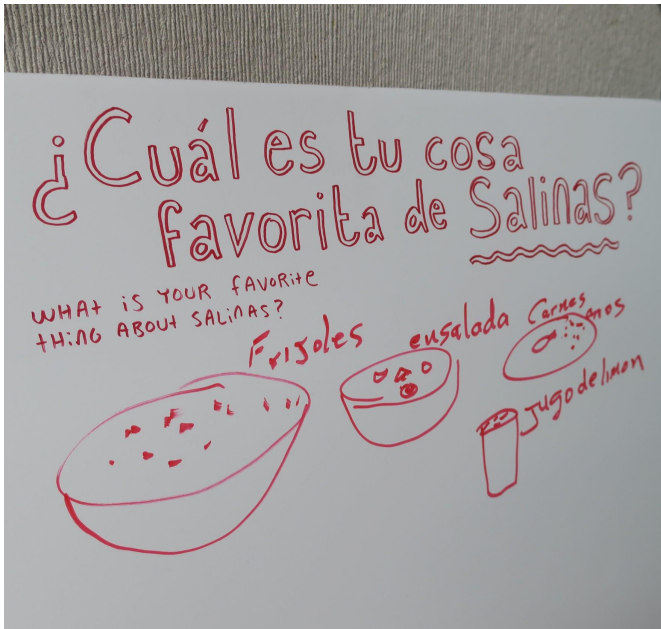
		
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# Explore, Part 02

It is important to balance the setting of a controlled workshop environment with a range of design-driven research approaches in more spontaneous environments in order to capture insights from the community that are as honest and holistic as possible.



## FIELD



### Exploratory Guerrilla Research

Before or after the workshop, teams can conduct quick, dirty, AND effective exploratory research within the community. This is a much more SPONTANEOUS way to learn about what is important to community members, and to gain additional insight on their day-to-day lives.

The following page includes a diverse range of guerrilla research tactics.

## Exploratory Guerrilla Research

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Leverage the results and inspiration of the anchoring workshop to conduct at least one of the following methodologies.

**Coffee Shop Intervention** (ACTIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Stand in line at a local coffee house, and offer to buy the person in front of you or behind you a cup of coffee in exchange for participating in a survey/study. This catches people off guard and allows for more authenticity than someone who is more prepared.

**Reenactment** (ACTIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Put yourself in the shoes of a local. Attempt to find a place to eat healthy, exercise, and more (specific actions dependent on goals in specific communities). Take a journal of your experience. Was it hard? Was it easy?

**Day in the Life** (ACTIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Sit down on a bench with a sheet of paper, and a series of colorful markers. Invite participants to choose any color they like, and draw a day in their life. As they draw, or after they draw, ask them to explain the drawing to you.

**Listening Booth** (ACTIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Set up a table in an open setting with a sign that invites people to come and talk. The sign should include a prompt that is very specific and slightly whimsical/comedic in order to attract participation. For example: "Talk to me about your favorite food." "Talk to me about fun things." "Talk to me about your day."

**Insight Wall** (PASSIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Install a chalkboard wall or poster board with a prompt at the top (for example: "What I Love About My Community Is \_\_\_\_\_", "Today I Ate \_\_\_\_\_ for Breakfast", etc.). Have writing instruments available, and pre-populate the wall with a number of generic responses to inspire participation.

**Insight Floor** (PASSIVE/SPONTANEOUS): While the Insight Wall is a successful methodology for reaching both adults and children, for studies focused on the health and wellbeing of kids, create a similar installation on the floor.

**Eavesdropping** (PASSIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Sit in a public space, and listen. What are people talking about? What are people doing? What are they laughing at? What is the space like? Do this in multiple spaces.

**Diary Study** (PASSIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Recruit identified 'extreme-users' to keep a diary for two to three weeks. Participants will be asked to document their personal experiences as they relate to AHA's topic of interest. Entries will be captured in a private online blog for later review by an AHA team.

**EVALUATE**

# Evaluate

This objective is useful to if AHA already has guidelines, programs, or offerings to present to community members.



While **Explore** allows teams to imagine solutions collaboratively with a group of participants with little-to-no preconceived notions, **Evaluate** is most useful for capturing feedback on concepts that have already been developed either internally at AHA, or at a previous Participatory Idea Generation workshop.

## LAB

## FIELD

### Participant Feedback Workshop

The facilitators will lead participants through these activities and collect feedback on the selected materials for evaluation.

SEE APPENDIX FOR LOGISTICS  
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Empathy Map
- Dot Voting
- Directive Feedback

### Evaluative Guerrilla Research

*SPONTANEOUS* tactics can also be used for evaluating existing AHA materials, programs, or ideas. These often require a more *ACTIVE* role, at least in setting them up. However there are some *PASSIVE* examples as well. The list below includes both.

- Street Intercepts
- Live Prototyping
- Urban Interventions
- Visual Voting Mechanisms

See the next page for Definitions & Instructions

## Participant Feedback Workshop

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Keep in mind that Participant Feedback Workshop's focus is to EVALUATE. As a result, the session will require more context and information at the beginning of the meeting (in comparison to the EXPLORE segment).
2. To collect feedback on an existing idea in a controlled setting, leverage up to 2 of the following methodologies over the course of a 2 hour workshop.

**Empathy Map:** A documentation tool for facilitators and participants to record what stakeholders "see", "hear", and "feel" so that they can interpret and empathize with the end user. In the context of a Participant Feedback Workshop, the facilitator will use the empathy map worksheet in order to understand the participant's response to the program from multiple perspectives.

**Dot Voting:** A simple, democratic facilitation method to build consensus and gain buy-in amongst a diverse group of participants. To conduct a dot voting exercise, the facilitator will need stickers in a range of colors. Participants are typically given 3-5 stickers in order to vote on a series of ideas. If the participant feels strongly about a single idea, they may opt to use all of their stickers on one concept. At the end of a dot voting exercise, the facilitator will moderate a discussion with the group about the results.

**Directive Feedback:** A process for structuring and capturing stakeholder feedback on existing solutions or ideas to guide further developments and improvements. The specific questions for a directive feedback session will differ depending on the scope of the program or initiative, but may include prompts such as:

- "What I like most about \_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_."
- "If I could change one thing about \_\_\_\_, it would be to \_\_\_\_."
- "I would/would not use \_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_."
- "Have you thought of \_\_\_\_?"

Prompts like these provide the audience with a set of statements to provide critical feedback in a less awkward and intimidating manner.

## Evaluative Guerrilla Research

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Leverage the results and inspiration of the evaluative workshop to conduct at least one of the following methodologies\*

*\*Alternatively, conduct the GUERRILLA RESEARCH first, and leverage the results and inspiration of your work in order to inform the PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK WORKSHOP.*

**Street Intercepts** (ACTIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Walk around the center of the town, and strike conversation with as many people as possible. Maintain a consistent interview guide in order to get multiple perspectives on similar prompts. Interview guide TBD based on the community and material to be evaluated.

**Urban Interventions** (PASSIVE/SPONTANEOUS): The act of placing unique/out-of-context artifacts or verbiage in the public space in order to inspire people to stop and think/interact. Keep notes of key observations and interactions.

**Live Prototyping** (ACTIVE/SPONTANEOUS): Bring a rough prototype (e.g. sketch, storyboard, cardboard model, etc.) to the street. Share the prototype with passersby and share extra materials with them so that they can build upon your idea.

**Visual Voting Mechanism** (PASSIVE/SPONTANEOUS): This methodology allows for the capturing of data in a public and visual manner. For example, have a bin full of red balls, and two clear buckets. On the floor, you'd have a prompt, and on each bucket, you would have one of two potential responses to the prompt. Community members contribute by moving the ball to the appropriate bin. This can also be accomplished with buildings that have multiple doorways - using the doorway as the prompt for answering a question or stating a belief.

**REFLECT**



# REFLECT

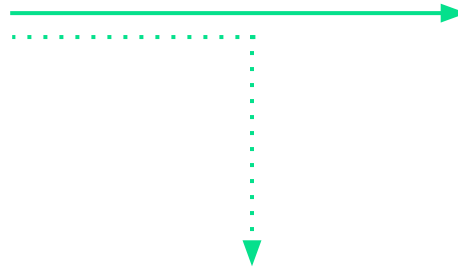
Making sense of what you've heard is a process in and of itself. Getting others to understand it is equally important.



**Research documentation** allows teams to make sense of what they've heard, determine if they've received sufficient answers to their questions, and share the results with their organization.

## Synthesize

Review research results and distill key insights as they relate to your study.



## Share

Present results to relevant team members to build buy-in and represent what matters most from what you found.

- *If there are still research questions left to be addressed go back to the LISTEN phase.*
- *If you have new questions, add them in the QUESTIONS phase.*

See the next page for a [Research Synthesis & Insight Sharing template](#)

## Research Synthesis + Sharing

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Use the template below, and work from left to right to document your research and make sense of it.
2. When sharing, consider the implications as the message, the interpretations as your understanding, and the observations as your evidence.

### OBSERVATIONS

### INTERPRETATIONS

### IMPLICATIONS

What did I hear/see?	What might it mean?	Why does this matter?
—	—	—
—	—	—
—	—	—
—	—	—
—	—	—

**LEARN**

# LEARN

Design Research at its core is applied research that takes an empathetic understanding of others to improve how programs and services are made.



**Research completion** is when the real work begins of putting newly gained understanding into action. Teams must always remember that the process is iterative.

## **Qualitative work is directive, not definitive**

Having in-depth conversations with community members is tremendously valuable for understanding their unique cares and concerns. However, this should not replace or be replaced by quantitative research methods.

## **Research is an ethical practice**

Always make sure to respect, compensate, and follow up with research participants as necessary.

## **Everything you learn can be helpful**

Many research projects result in additional insights. Make sure to document these somewhere. You never know when they might be helpful.

# APPENDIX

## Process Overview

The process, which can be modified based on need, consists of:

1. Connecting with a local partner who has familiarity and trust within the community.
2. Designing a recruitment approach to attract participants to the workshop and/or phone interviews. Workshops of 2 or 4 hours each should have 7-12 participants. Phone interviews of up to 10 people. We can also do a series of in home 1-2 hour visits as well.
3. Secure a location for the workshop, date and time. Recruit participants.
4. Conduct workshops and/or calls/visits.
5. Document observations.
6. Conduct one or more community listening experiences.
7. Arrange ongoing contact with participants if they choose.
8. Arrange to share results of the interviews with partner organizations.

Compensation for participants will be provided and compensation to partner organizations who assist in the recruitment/hosting process is also available.

## Planning Recommendations

Based on the initial pilot study we completed, below are some additional recommendations that stem from our learnings.

1. Select your general community demographic. For the rural listening pilots we were seeking participants from 18+ (no under 18 for privacy/permission issues). Beyond that we wanted a wide range of ages, mix of genders, mix of employment.
2. Identify community partners who can assist in recruitment. You will need a trusted intermediary to act on your behalf. Their role can be recruitment only, hosting or arranging a site, participation in the workshops and receiving final reports.
3. Know your participants language preference and respect that preference. If the audience is Spanish speaking and their preference is Spanish, conduct interviews and workshops in Spanish. If the audience is of mixed language preference, provide translation.
4. It is possible your participants will bring along children, which may increase your participation rates for certain demographics. Arrange with your community partner to provide childcare services (local teens, volunteers, etc.) who can keep the children busy and non-disruptive. Alternatively have coloring pages, quiet toys, etc.
5. Have names, contacts, phone numbers, emails, address of site and share with the entire team.
6. Have an accurate count of gift cards/remuneration method and bring at least 2 extras, just in case. Target/Wal-Mart if these are in the local area. Pre-paid debit cards and VISA/MC gift cards have upfront transaction fees and some require release of personal information by the user and are subject to transaction fees. These do not seem to be a good format. Ask your community partner for other recommendations, but avoid cash/checks.
7. Arrange appropriate snacks/water to be provided. Consider using local area vendors for this.
8. Prepare simple thank you notes for all participants. Place gift cards in thank you notes. Hand out at end of session.



PREPARED BY **verynice.**

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