Participatory Learning Needs Analysis

Facilitation Guide

A participatory needs analysis is a way for you to get input from a wide range of stakeholders by using an online tool that allows for many people to answer the same questions at the same time. In this document you will get a step-by-step guide on how to set up and facilitate this process.

WHAT, WHY, WHEN

The basics of participatory needs analysis

What is a participatory needs analysis?

A participatory needs analysis is a process where you give space to your stakeholders to tell you their needs about your project. It is based on a workshop approach and designed to engage your participants and enhance your project.

Why do it?

- To ensure that you have listened to all your stakeholders – not just the loudest ones
- To uncover hidden (but important) needs that you might have missed
- To provide space for your stakeholders to explore their own needs and reflect on them
- To get engagement from your stakeholders early in the process and to manage their expectations
- To save time by getting a lot of input in a short time and avoiding time-intensive individual meetings or long group discussions

When to do it?

- Before starting a big project (for example a training development project or a training consultancy)
- When the purpose of your project is to provide a missing learning opportunity, to close a gap etc, and you want to make sure you are offering what is truly needed
- When you have a set of stakeholders who you want to connect with

HOW

The step-by-step guide for setting up a participatory needs analysis

1. Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise

List all the people who have an interest in your project. Read up more on stakeholder mapping here or consider listing people according to these categories:

- Will be affected by your project

- Will make decisions in your project
- Will support you in your project
- Will potentially block you in your project

You will want to make sure that you have groups with no more than 10-15 people. If you have more stakeholders organize then into separate meetings.

2. Brainstorm on questions

What is it that your really would like to hear from your stakeholders? List a couple of questions where their input is needed and prioritize them in order of importance – you might not have enough time for all.

Examples of good questions:

- What performance gaps do you normally see in people in these positions? What is it that they would need to know/be able to do, but can`t?
- What is your overall objective for this training?
- What new behaviour would you like to see?
- What's in it for the learner? How will they benefit from taking the course?
- If the learner will remember one thing after taking the course, what should that be?
- For more detailed list of questions, please click here.

You also want to make sure that you are getting specific examples, so instead of "we need a training on soft skills" you get "we need to train personnel on working in multicultural teams". As a facilitator be ready to ask follow-up questions to dig deeper! You might need to revise your questions as you go through the process, so be flexible and check in to see if you are getting the data that you are looking for.

3. Set up a participatory online tool

This tool will help you ensure that all your meeting participants can answer the same question at the same time. We suggest going with Padlet as it is very easy to use and has a lot of great functionalities. But there are many other tools out there so browse and choose the one that best fits your need.

Typical difficulties, mistakes:

- Too many or too complicated online tools: You don`t want to overwhelm your participants with a lot of new tech. As a rule of thumb, it is better to only use one tool through the process
- Tool is not tested: to avoid the embarrassment of realizing something is not working while presenting to 70 people test your tool extensively. Ask colleagues to do the tasks to see if everything is working as it should!

4. Write a run-down for your participatory meetings

Take your list of questions and schedule them into the meeting time. Use your participatory online tool to have people answer your questions. Remember that less is more – you do not want to overwhelm your stakeholders with a 4-hour meeting or rush them through a 1-hour meeting with too many questions. Consider these best practices:

- Use an icebreaker: it is a great way to ensure that your meeting start on the right note and that you will have an active audience. For example, ask people to put in a GIF describing how they are feeling at the moment, or ask participants to describe the weather at their current location in the chat.
- Never talk for more than 7 minutes: you will lose people`s attention. If you are planning to do a presentation, consider using polls to keep people active. However, we suggest avoiding doing presentations during these meetings since they are designed to get input from your participants and not to give them information.
- Assign a person who is responsible for all the tech (for example: the polls, the screensharing, the questions in the chat). It is very difficult to facilitate and do tech support at the same time.
- Use our tracker and make sure that you are clear on what you are hoping to get out of each meeting and design the event for that purpose.

5. Do a dry run

This is absolutely essential! Together with your tech support person go through the entire meeting as if it was for real. Make sure that this includes giving instruction to people on how to use the online participatory tool. This will help you see what potential challenges you might face during the meeting and will also give you a better estimate for timing – and will make you a smoother facilitator. If you would like to further hone your facilitator`s skill, check out this playlist!

6. Enjoy your participatory needs analysis meetings.

Remember to have fun:)!

7. Analyze the input that you have gathered

The last step is to analyze your data and to structure it to guide your project. Remember to check your confirmation bias and to try and remain as objective as possible when looking at the inputs.

One way of communicating preliminary results to your participants is a wordcloud. Please see an example bellow from the participatory learning needs analysis process of the Induction to IFRC Operations training:

What you will need

People: at least a facilitator and a tech person (for screensharing and putting links into the chat)
Time: A good rule of thumb is that you need at least 3x as much time to prepare than the meeting itself. So a 1,5 hour meeting needs 4,5 hour of prep time at the very least. If you're looking at having a week of events, start planning 3-4 weeks in advance.
Tracker: Organizing your event will get messy unless you keep things nice and neat. We have an excellent tracker that will help you keep all the info at one place: your list of stakeholders, your rundowns, and your schedule.

Want to know more, have some feedback or looking to get more support on this? Contact the Disaster Response Training Team at surge.learning@ifrc.org!

This guidance is one of the learning tools along many that the Disaster Response Training Team offers. The mission of the team is to harmonize surge learning efforts in the IFRC network in order to equip Rapid Response personnel to respond effectively.
The team is based in the IFRC Global Services Centre in Budapest.