

LE Lab Session 1: Introduction to Legal Empowerment and Lab

Goal: introduce Lab's overall objectives, get participants excited about the Lab, begin the process of collaboration and exchange between participants, and introduce a conceptual understanding of legal empowerment methodology and field.

Draft Agenda

9-10am Full Group Session

9:00-9:05 Slideshow of names of people/pictures/where they live

9:05-9:08 Welcome by Bernstein Institute team

9:08-9:25 Spectrum Icebreaker 3 questions

9:25-9:30 Overview of Lab Objectives and Schedule

9:30-9:40 Introduction to Legal Empowerment (fundamentals, methods, critical approaches)

9:40-10:00 Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative Case Study by Jhody Polk

5 minute stretch break

10:05-10:55 Breakout Groups

10:05-10:20 Introduction Facilitation Exercise

*Share link to jamboard in chat and mention that we'll have a collaborate board to use to document insights/reflections among the group

*Ask participants to introduce themselves, their org/work, and why are they interested in the Lab

10:20-10:35 Reflection on Legal Empowerment presentation and LE Lab objectives

**Questions to guide your facilitation

- A core objective of the Lab is democratize research and learning by redistributing legal empowerment and participatory research concepts, methods, and skills across a network of grassroots justice practitioners and academics. This is no easy

task and there are often competing interests and divergent backgrounds that make collaboration between researchers and activists challenging.

- What are some ways that you've addressed these divisions in your work?
 - **Are there principles we should bring to the Lab to create a space of vibrant and healthy collaboration?**
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- What elements of the legal empowerment cycle (know, use, shape, transform) resonates with your work?
 - Jhody discussed how in the Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative, legal empowerment is a pathway to disrupting the cycle of incarceration (e.g. decarcerate the mind by creating ways to know, use, shape, and transform laws) -
 - How does this cycle of disruption and expansion apply to your work and in particular?
 - How may engaging in participatory action research and learning contribute to knowledge and agency building of the grassroots communities that you work with?

10:35-10:55 Learning questions that participants are bringing to the Lab

*Start the discussion by noting that we imagine that participants will iterate their learning questions over the course of the Lab. As they engage in new methods/tools/concepts our hope is that they apply those insights to their learning question and eventual creation of an action-research plan.

*In some cases some people will not have a learning question because they are experienced researchers and participating in the Lab from a mentorship perspective OR they are still sorting it out and the Lab will serve as a space to create a question that matters to their work and community.

- Ask participants to share their learning questions or issues they hope to workshop through the Lab. Encourage other participants to ask questions/provide suggestions.
- For experienced PAR researchers, ask them to share an example of a learning question that involved a PAR approach (probe on methods, ethics, theory)

*Before finishing up the breakout sessions remind participants to update their individual “learning question template” with thoughts/reflections based on today’s discussion.

10:55-11:00 Regroup and discuss next steps

LE Learning Lab Background

Lab Objectives

Democratize research and learning on legal empowerment through grassroots engagement

Build a community of practitioners and researchers invested in legal empowerment and participatory research

Open up democratic forms of inquiry to explore what works, what matters, and what’s needed to achieve justice from the grassroots

Support the co-design and co-execution of participatory research on legal empowerment and spur scholarship that is more responsive to the needs of grassroots communities

Problem

Despite the empowering nature of participatory research, a literature review found that—ironically—“participatory evaluation methods are rarely used in studies of legal empowerment interventions,”¹ with only two percent of the studies found to be participatory in nature.

Too often scholar-practitioner collaborations—where they do exist—are implemented in a top down manner, with research questions and processes driven by the scholar’s priorities and interests. Such projects often use highly technical methods that can seem irrelevant or even extractive to communities. Further, research that is not anchored in a community’s own sense of justice will often miss what matters most.

Learning Objectives for the Sessions

¹ Vivek Maru & Laura Goodwin, *What We Know about Legal Empowerment? Mapping the Evidence*, Hague J. Rule Law, 9:182 (2017), available at <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs40803-016-0047-5.pdf>.

- Bring participatory action research methods/tools/approaches into research and learning about legal empowerment (theory, methods, and ethics)
- Redistribute key legal empowerment and participatory research concepts, methods, and skills across a network of grassroots justice practitioners and academics

- Create accessible training sessions rooted in the concrete needs and demands of practitioners eager to learn with grassroots communities. Each training session will be co-designed and co-facilitated by a team of grassroots activists and researchers, and will comprise the following:
 - Introduction to Legal Empowerment
 - Introduction to Participatory Action Research
 - Community-Led Research Design
 - Participatory Data Collection
 - Participatory Data Analysis
 - Approaches to Measuring Empowerment
 - Accountability and Ethics
 - Two Case Studies on Legal Empowerment and Participatory Research
- Participants gain knowledge and skills to incorporate participatory methods and legal empowerment into the creation of their action-research plans and overall organizing and program work. Support and guidance on the research plan will to be provided by Lab participants and organizers.
- Create a vibrant space for collaboration and exchange between practitioners and academics committed to participatory legal empowerment research and program learning by forging common vocabularies, concepts, and tools