Research Workbook

482Forward Finding Answers and Creating Truth Committee (FACT)

With support from:

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Lesson 1: What is Participatory Action Research?

ACTIVITY

Picture a researcher in your head. Now draw or describe them. What do they look like? What kinds of things do they research? Where do they work? What happens to their research when it's done?

Now, picture a "Participatory Action Researcher" in your head. What do you think they look like? What kinds of things do they research? Where do they work? What happens to their research when it's done?

TAKEAWAY

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research process that involves collaboration between trained researcher(s), and the members within the community of focus. The goal of PAR is to give the community members the power to identify and select the issues that they feel are important. This process empowers the community to take control of solving their own problems, and in turn increases the possibility that the interventions put in place will be effective (Dold & Chapman, 2012).

Lesson 2: Why is Participatory Action Research important to organizing?

ACTIVITY

After decades of organizing to end segregation, leaders of the civil rights movement launched a legal strategy to challenge segregation in court. In what eventually came to be known as Brown v. Board, future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall presented the results of the now-famous "doll test". The "doll test" was an experiment by two psychologists who showed black children identical white and black dolls and asked them to identify, among other things, which was the nice doll, the bad doll, the good doll, and which was the doll they wanted to play with. The majority of children assigned the more favorable characteristics to the white dolls, although the results were stronger with children who attended segregated schools, supporting Marshall's argument that segregation was inherently damaging to black Americans.

Discuss with a partner:
- *What effect do you think the doll experiment had on the civil rights movement?*

- *Have you ever used or seen research in an organizing campaign? When, why, and to what effect?*

TAKEAWAY

We use Participatory Action Research at many points throughout the organizing process and for many different reasons, including:
- To identify the problems we want to fix
- To cut big problems into specific campaign demands
- To power-map our allies, opponents, and targets
- To create our campaign strategy
- To make arguments to our constituents and decision-makers
- To give credibility to our experiences

Lesson 3: Steps of the PAR Process

ACTIVITY

Put the following 9 steps into the correct order:

A. ____Develop strategies to answer the guiding research questions. What data is available? What do you need to create yourself?

B. ____Explore how your personal experiences, views, and identities shape your opinions about the topic.

C. ____Develop guiding research questions based on your experiences and the experiences of your constituents.

D. ____Determine what the team already knows about the topic.

E. ____Work with experts to analyze and check any data that you created yourself.

F. ____Pinpoint your personal strengths, limitations, biases, and "blind spots" to see who should be included in the research process.

G. ____Select topic related to a social/political problem the group cares about and wants to change.

H. ____Pinpoint the team's information gaps, points of confusion, etc.

I. ____Create task tracker and a timeline. Include roles to communicate with your constituents along the way.

Answer Key:
   A) 7.   B) 2.   C) 6.   D) 4.   E) 9.   F) 3.   G) 1.   H) 5.   I) 8.

Lesson 4: Exploring My Topic and My Identity*

PAR Step 1: The problem or topic I am researching is:

_____

_____

_____

PAR Step 2: Explore how your personal experiences, views, and identities shape your opinions about the topic.

The experiences of each person contribute to the way they identify, the views they hold and the opinions they develop. As you work through the exercises you will see that often times there are intersections, or connections, between the identity categories. For example, you and a friend may both identify as female, however one identifies as a Christian and the other as Muslim. So while both share their identity as a female, their life experiences may be very different based on the religion they identify with. Understanding the role that each of these and how they intersect is important for not only understanding yourself, but also understanding those who hold beliefs that are different from yours.
Instructions:

ACTIVITY
On the next page, put your name in the blank space above the words "who am I?''. At the end of each arrow, write different words or sentences to describe yourself, for example, your ethnicity, your gender, or your experience with education. You can write as many or as few as you like.

*See Appendix IV for alternative activities for this Lesson.

Who Am i?

_____
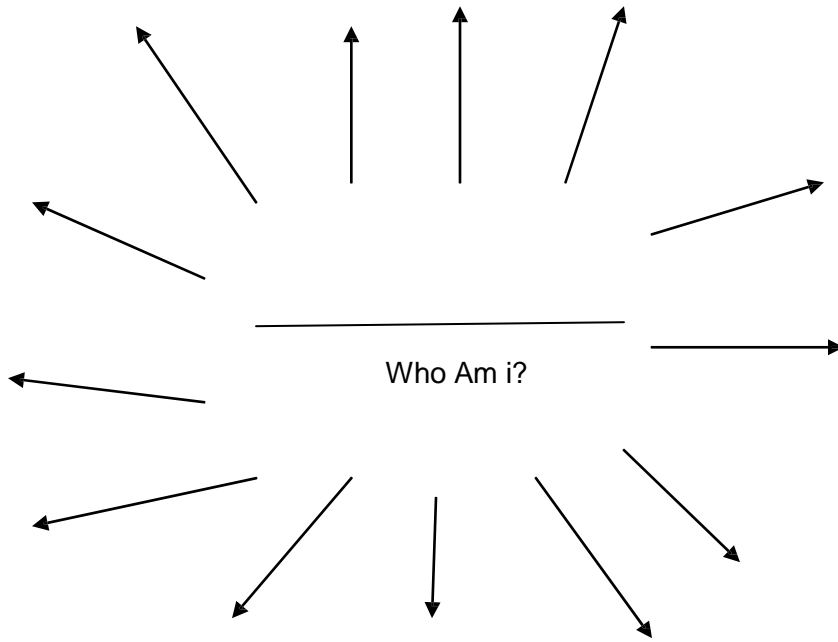
Group Discussion: If you're comfortable doing so, share what you put down. What categories have people used to describe themselves? How do you think these identities and experiences impact they way you each view the research topic?

_____

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Lesson 5: Strengths, Limitations, Biases and Blind Spots

PAR Step 3: Pinpoint your personal strengths, limitations, biases, and "blind spots" to see who should be included in the research process.

        PAR requires individuals to work within a group and/or community, and often times with individuals that may have different beliefs and skills than themselves. The benefit of this is that you may find that someone in your group has strengths in areas where you personally have weaknesses. Having an understanding of your strengths and weakness can assist when deciding the roles each person will fill throughout the PAR process.

        Biases can be categorized as a personal limitation and is especially important to identify and understand. This is because they can cause "blind-spots" or aspects of a topic or social problem that can be overlooked. A bias as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) is "to view something or someone with a negative view that is based upon personal opinion, and not supported by fact".

ACTIVITY

1. What do you consider to be some of your personal strengths? *(organized, empathetic, etc.)*

_____

2. Where could you improve? (*more patient, stop procrastinating, etc.)*

3. What biases or blind-spots do you have, how do they impact your view of the topic/social problem? (*Refer back to the identity activity in Lesson 4 as needed).*

_____

_____

4. Given your blind spots, who do you think you should include in assisting with your topic? (*supervisor, church group, people affected by the problem, community organizations, etc.)*

_____

_____

5. Who do you think would be challenging to work with on this topic and why? (*Community organization, a specific person, religious group, hard-to-find victims of the problem, etc)*

_____

_____

6. Based on the list you made for Question 5, brainstorm ways to engage them.

_____

_____

Group Discussion Prompts:
1. How do your strengths and limitations affect your ability to work in a group?
2. What did you learn about yourself after completing this activity?
3. How did an aspect of your identity from the previous section contribute to your biases?
4. How did identifying your limitations and biases help to understand both sides of the topic?
5. What individuals or groups do you now realize need to be part of the PAR process?

Lesson 6: What Do We Know?

PAR Step 4: Determine what your team already knows about the topic.

There are many ways we "know" things: we learn at school, from our experiences, from reading something in a book, newspaper or blog, or hearing from other people. Writing down and talking about what you know will give your team a knowledge base and determine which knowledge will be useful in your campaign.

Finding out what you know can be as easy a creating a list. Using a whiteboard or paper, begin a list of information your research team already knows about your research topic. Next to what you know, write down *how* you know it. Did someone tell you? Was it on the news? Was it a subject in class last week? An example table is below:

TOPIC: DETROIT

What We Know	How We Know It
Detroit's name comes from the French	-I read it in a history book
Detroit is the greatest city in the world	-My mom told me
Detroit is across the river from Canada	-I read it on a map -When I went to the Detroit River I seen Canada
Detroit is the most dangerous city on the planet	-Someone shared a facebook post that said it
Detroit is a bad place to be	-I hate it here
Martin Luther King visited Detroit	-My grandfather told me a story about how he heard Dr. King speak in Detroit
Detroit has no streetlights	-My block has no streetlights and I live in Detroit
Detroit's population is 688, 701	-I googled "population of Detroit"

Although all of our knowledge is valuable, some information is more useful than others when we are conducting research, and some information can be used to create research questions that can help us verify what we already know.

Research Topic:

What We Know	How We Know It

Lesson 7: What Do We Need to Know?

PAR Step 5: Pinpoint the team's information gaps, information needs, points of confusion, etc.

After determining what your team knows it is time to determine the information you need to know in order to answer your research question. This information may later be gathered from other people, the library, the internet, or other sources; but first, you have to figure out what information you're lacking so you can pinpoint your search.

Take the information you gathered in Lesson 6 and compare your team's answers. There may be a lot of information you know because someone told you, and you want to see if it's true. There may be information about one neighborhood and you want to see if results are the same across the city. These are examples of gaps where you would expand current information.

Some gaps come from a lack of hard evidence, for example, something you know because someone told you so. Just because someone told you doesn't mean it's necessarily true, but it also doesn't mean that it's completely false. It just means your research team may have to look further to find out how close it is to the truth. An example from Lesson 6 could be the entry about Martin Luther King, Jr. coming to Detroit. Although your grandfather isn't known for lying, you decide to look further into his claim that he marched with Dr. King in Detroit. Your research brings you to a newspaper article from June of 1963, saying Dr. King gave a speech during the Detroit Walk to Freedom. The newspaper article is hard evidence that Dr. King visited Detroit and gives some backing to your grandfather's story.

PAR Step 6: Develop guiding research questions based on your experiences and the experiences of your constituents.

Your information gaps will be answered by your research questions. Some words of advice on building questions:
- Try to be as specific as possible. If your question is too broad, add sub-questions to try to guide your research.
- Are there common concerns within your research group worth trying to answer?
- Be flexible in your questions. After you answer one you may have three more. Some questions you may not be able to answer completely. Some questions you may decide not to answer.

Example:

Is Detroit the Greatest City in the World?

- How do people in Detroit like living there?
- How will we define "Great"?
  - o Does Detroit have the greatest food?
    - ▪ How many 5-star restaurants does Detroit have?
  - o Does Detroit have the best music?
    - ▪ How many Grammy winners are from Detroit?
  - o Are there any examples that define a "Great" city?
    - ▪ Are there lists already out? Are they current? Is Detroit on the list?
- What cities will we compare Detroit to?
  - o Two cities inside America, Two cities outside America

Your Questions:

_____

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Lesson 8: Developing Strategies to Answer Your Questions

PAR Step 7: Develop strategies to answer the guiding research questions. What data is available? What do you need to create yourself?

Now that you've got a running list of questions, your research team can brainstorm which strategies will work best to answer them, and assign questions to team members.

Method & Use	Pros	Cons
Interviews Allows room for follow-up questions and individual focus.	Get personal thoughts, hear emotions in voice, read body language, ask specific questions, you can explain your answers.	You can't do that many. Hard to quantify responses.
Surveys Good for: -Statistics: the percent of people who think x or y. -Comparisons: this group thinks x, and this group thinks y.	Can give it to a lot of people. Gives general idea of how different groups of people think about certain things.	Questions might be understood differently from the way you planned it. You can't ask follow-up questions or get explanations for answers.
Focus Groups Good for finding contrasts and similarities: What people say in interviews and surveys and what they say in a group, whether people agree or not	Get a lot of opinions and information at one time. People might feel more comfortable talking as a group. Gives people the chance to talk about and clarify any disagreements.	People might change their opinions and agree with others even if they don't really think that way. Some people are too shy to participate. Requires coordinating schedules.
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests Provides access to public records	Direct source.	The information that you are requesting might not exist.

Fill out the chart below as a group, deciding which data collection method(s) you will use to answer each of your guiding questions. See the Appendices for detailed explanations and examples of each data collection method listed in the chart on the previous page.

Guiding Question	Data Collection Method(s)	Why

Lesson 9: Create Goals and a Timeline, and Track Progress

PAR Step 8: Create task tracker and a timeline. Include roles to communicate with your constituents along the way.

As you go through your research it's important to track your team's progress and goals throughout. Set a timeline to complete certain tasks, like conducting a focus group or compiling the results in a survey. Below is an example of a project task list tracker taken from a Microsoft Excel Template. You can create your own timeline or task list, or use a template from the internet. Vertex42.com and other websites have examples that are easy to download and use.

TASK	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE	% COMPLETE	DONE	NOTES
Task	Name	Date	0%		
Task	Name	Date	50%		

Included in your timeline should be times when you "check-in" with each other as well as your constituents-the people you're researching for.

Your research team should set up regular meeting times, either in person or over the phone/via Skype to share information and get a status on goals that were set in the timeline.

Checking in with your constituents will not be as regular as your group meetings, but every now and then you should check-in to give an update on your research and what evidence you've found out.

TASK	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE	% COMPLETE	DONE	NOTES

Appendix I
Literature Review

A Literature Review is a summary of all the information your research team has read on your subject. The review can cover several kinds of documents:
-already published research papers
-news articles
-books
-magazines and journals

Your literature review does not have to be a formal document. Depending on who you plan to share it with it could be a series of notes or a PowerPoint presentation. No matter how you create it, always make sure to keep track of your references. Additionally, if you plan to create a formal paper, there are certain ways to properly cite your sources. A handy guide to citation can be found at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/. The below example credits the authors of the original works within the paragraph itself.

Example:
We chose our current study because of its relevance in relation to the recent water shutoffs in the metropolitan Detroit area. In 2014, water was shut off in more than 17,000 households due to unpaid bills as a part of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's debt collection during Detroit's municipal bankruptcy (Wahowiak, 2014). Detroit lacks several energy assistance programs initiated by other municipalities used to mitigate shutoffs. These shutoffs seem to have become commonplace in the city, as community members and organizations such as the People's Water Board have actively protested and petitioned city government regarding the shutoffs. A recent Detroit News article highlighted the disproportion in residents and businesses being targeted for the shutoffs, stating "about 1 in 13 of the city's 175,000 residential accounts has been disconnected, compared to 1 in 68 of the city's 25,000 non-residential accounts" (Kurth, 2016). We aimed to explore whether or not the shutoffs were due to residents being unable to afford their water bills.

The following tips were adapted from Camille M. Wilson, Ph.D. – University of Michigan, camillew@umich.edu

Be clear about your interview goals before starting the interview. Stay focused on your learning goals and information needs. Also remember that stories may emerge that you cannot anticipate. These stories (or alternative explanations that interviewees provide) may prove very important to your inquiry.

Developing an interview guide, also known as an "interview protocol"

Use your research questions as a guide for developing your interview questions. Write 3-5 interview questions that address each research question.

- Start with more general warm-up questions and then move to more specific questions.
    - o <u>Examples of general questions</u>: How long has your daughter attended Detroit schools? In general, how would you describe your daughter's experience in Detroit schools?
    - o <u>Examples of specific questions</u>: How long has your child participated in special education services? What is the nature of your child's disability, if you don't mind discussing that topic?
- Questions should be clear and inviting, not hard-to-follow or off-putting. Avoid using terminology the interviewee may not understand.
- Open-ended to elicit detailed responses (instead of yes or no replies). Some close-ended questions are fine, and it is natural to ask them when you are seeking clarification, want to confirm facts, or want to confirm your own interpretation. Still, keep most of your questions open-ended.
    - o <u>Example of open-ended questions</u>: Can you tell me about a time when you advocated for your child at school or with educators? Can you walk me through the process of participating in an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting?
    - o <u>Example of close-ended questions</u>: Do you ever advocate for your child in school? Do you ever go to IEP meetings?

Facilitating a good interview

- <u>The protocol is a guide not a script.</u> It's ok to diverge some, or else it will feel unnatural.

- Explain the objectives of your inquiry to the interviewee before you begin asking questions.

- Make the interviewee feel comfortable. Let them know they don't have to answer any

question if they prefer. Avoid showing any disapproval.

- Make the interview process as conversational as possible. It is ok to offer very brief comments along the way, but keep your focus on them.

- Jot notes throughout your interview. Keep track of key points or terms said along the way that you want to follow up on and ask more about when the time seems right.

- Ask probing questions follow-up when the time seems right.

- Avoid asking leading/biased questions or offering your personal responses that convey too much approval or any disapproval
  - Example of leading/biased question: Did you find Principal Rivers to be problematic when your son attended Main Street middle school?
  - Example of offering too much approval: Oh, I know exactly what you mean. That's just crazy – that happened to my brother too
  - Example of offering disapproval: (Serious face with raised brows and pressed lips. Or stating "Hmm, umph, or exhaling in a way that may convey frustration or disagreement.)

- Spend the last few minutes of the interview reviewing what you learned from the interviewee to make sure you have an accurate interpretation. Ask questions to fill in any missing information. If possible and/or needed, verify some of the most important quotes you have if you weren't able to audio record.

- Leave a few minutes at the end of every interview to ask: "Is there anything else you would like to ask?"

- Write and/or audio record your reflective comments immediately after the interview.

  REMEMBER, unlike community organizing strategies, interviewing isn't a persuasive tactic.   To the contrary, you want to stay as objective as possible during the interview process and show that you respect and appreciate everything the person is sharing with you. It's not good to show too much agreement or any disagreement. **The key purpose is to get the interviewee's point of view and the story of their key experiences.**

Appendix III
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request SAMPLE

Ms. Michelle Zdrodowski
Director of Communications
Detroit Public Schools
3011 W. Grand Blvd
Detroit MI 48202

Dear Ms. Zdrodowski:

I am a member of 482Forward, a network of parents, pastors and community organizations working to improve public education in Detroit. We are conducting research on student mobility and attrition between Detroit Public Schools and Detroit charter schools.

I am writing to ask you to provide, as soon as possible, the following data on student attrition from charter schools within the city of Detroit over the past three (3) years:

1. The *number* of students in each Detroit public charter school—by school--who left those charter schools and enrolled in Detroit public schools during the regular school year;
2. The dates of each student's departure from the charter;
3. The percentage of these students who are identified as Special Education (with an IEP)
4. The percentage of these students who are identified as English Language Learners;

We do not wish in any way to infringe on student privacy, so please redact or withhold names or other information which would in any way infringe on those rights. We will happily accept the information in electronic form via an excel spreadsheet if it relieves you of any additional cost or burden. If there are any fees for searching or copying these records, please inform me if the cost will exceed $10.00

This information is requested under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act s15.231 et seq. the Public Records Act. The Michigan Freedom of Information Act requires a response to this request within 5 days. If access to the record I am requesting will take longer than this amount of time. Please contact me Dawn Wilson-Clark at 313-551-1239 or msdawn313@gmail.com with information when I might expect the information.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Appendix IV
Alternative Activity for Lesson 4: Privilege Walk

Instructions:
Have participants line up in a straight line across the middle of the room with plenty of space to move forward and backward. You may use tape to create a line on the floor for everyone to start with. Then read the following to participants:

> "I will read statements aloud. Please move if a statement applies to you. If you do not feel comfortable acknowledging a statement that applies to you, simply do not move when it is read."

Begin reading statements aloud in a clear voice, pausing slightly after each one to allow time for everyone to move. When you have finished the statements, ask participants to take note of where they are in the room in relation to others. When finished have everyone gather into a circle for debriefing and discussion, this exercise can cause a variety of emotional responses making time for debriefing very important.

Activity Questions:

1. If you are right-handed, take one step forward.

2. If English is your first language, take one step forward.

3. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.

4. If you can find Band-Aids at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.

5. If you rely, or have relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.

6. If you have attended previous schools with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward

7. If you often feel unsafe walking alone at night, take one step back.

8. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.

9. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.

10. If you often feel that your parents are too busy to spend time with you, take one step back.

11. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.

12. If your family has ever left your homeland or entered another country not of your own free will, take one step back.
13. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
14. If your family owns a computer, take one step forward.

15. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
16. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one step back.
17. If you feel respected for your academic performance, take one step forward.

18. If you have a physically visible disability, take one step back.

19. If you have an invisible illness or disability, take one step back.

20. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
21. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.
22. If you have ever been profiled by someone else using stereotypes, take one step back.
23. If you feel good about how your identities are portrayed by the media, take one step forward.
24. If you were ever accepted for something you applied to because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
25. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial or gender group, take one step forward.
26. If you have always assumed you'll go to college, take one step forward.

27. If you have more than fifty books in your household, take one step forward.

28. If your parents have told you that you can be anything you want to be, take one step forward.

Debrief Discussion:
1. What did it feel like to end where you did?
2. Did you have an emotional response when you moved either direction away from the people next to you?
3. What did you learn about privilege and yourself?
4. How has your privilege impacted your view, beliefs and identity?
5. What question points to an identity that you wish others knew about and how it is impacted by the topic or social problem you described in section 1?

Alternative Activity for Lesson 4: Identity Shield

Each person will need a piece of paper and something to write with. Have all participants draw the outline of a shield with 6 sections, or print the blank template below, Template C.1. In each section, number them 1 through 6. Each participant will draw a picture corresponding to the statement given. Once everyone has finished drawing, split into pairs and small groups to share your shields, then come back together as a group and discuss.

1. In section 1, draw your family
2. In section 2, draw a time you were aware of your gender
3. In section 3, draw a moment when you discovered what religion meant to you
4. In section 4, draw a time you remember this topic/social problem impacting your life.
5. In section 5, draw a time you disagreed with someone about this topic
6. In section 6, draw something in your life that makes you feel safe.

Discussion Prompts:
1. Did this activity give you a better understanding of your partner as a person?
2. What areas of identity did you see and discuss based on your drawings?
3. How did the topic/social problem impact you compared to your partner?
4. How honest was your shield? Did you hold back to avoid discussing uncomfortable topics?
5. Based on what you drew from section 5 of your shield, what parts of the other person's identity could explain your differing views?
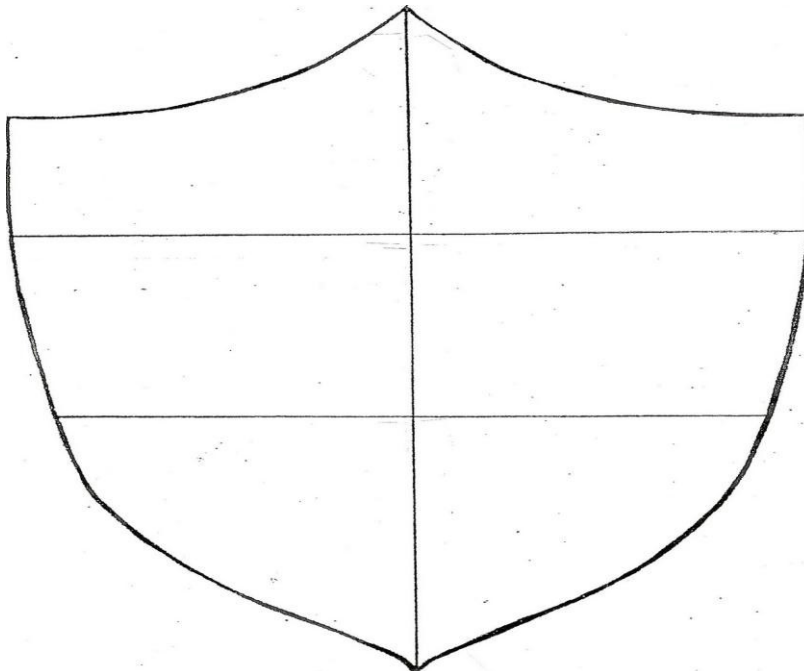
Template C.1
Identity Shield Template

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