

## Designing and Implementing Transformative Participatory Evaluation with Youth Nonprofit Leaders

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### Background

The RCC Sexual Violence Resource Center, a nonprofit full-service provider in Madison, Wisconsin, has been a Dane County institution for 50 years. The RCC hosts an innovative youth-led prevention program called GameChangers, which blends social justice education, community-facing projects, and coalition building and brings together passionate and diverse high school students as activists and advocates for social change. Alongside adult mentors, these youth leaders learn, strategize, and execute student-led violence prevention initiatives.

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### Problem

In the 10 years since GameChangers was founded, there had been no formal or systematic evaluation process to assess impact on youth members. Because GameChangers is grant funded, evidence of impact is critical to justify why the program should continue and why it's needed in the community. This gap presented an opportunity to not only gather this essential data but to gather it in collaboration with GameChangers youth leaders and alumni.

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### Solution

A collaborative team compiled of GameChangers staff, members, and Hjelm (then a PhD student) designed a transformative participatory evaluation that would highlight young people's experiences in the program and foster evaluation capacity at the organization level. Hjelm coordinated logistics and planning alongside RCC leadership and GameChangers members. And members were positioned as experts and co-evaluators throughout the evaluation planning, data collection, analysis, and dissemination stages. The transformative participatory design was in alignment with the RCC's values and would celebrate members' perspectives, meaning-making, and existing talents. Youth evaluators would: identify relevant indicators, write interview and survey questions, contribute data on their experiences, conduct thematic analysis and interpret their own data, summarize the findings into deliverables for different audiences, and build evaluation competencies alongside their peers.

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### Outcome

The GameChangers Evaluation Project provided the RCC with rich insights into how members experience the program's integrated design, peer community and mentorship, the knowledge and skills they gain through GameChangers activities, and members' takeaways. Evaluation deliverables included a comprehensive formal report, conference presentation, recorded webinar, and academic articles with youth evaluators as co-authors. The evaluation team provided recommendations to the RCC to enhance program effectiveness and developed a sustainable evaluation strategy to assess impact with and for youth activists in the future.