Girls’ Voices, Girls’ Priorities:  
Participatory, Innovative Tools for Capturing Girls’ Realities  
and Understanding Changes in their Lives

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Acknowledgments

EMpower gratefully acknowledges Andrea Lynch, consultant and former EMpower Program Officer, for doing the scan of tools and pulling together this useful, annotated resource. Thank you, Andrea!

This kit was born out of and inspired by EMpower’s work with grantee partners striving to improve the lives of adolescent girls and young women in emerging market countries. We saw that many groups were interested to improve how they were documenting changes they saw in girls’ lives but were challenged to find simple, feasible ways to do so. We knew of a few tools that might be of use, but knew there must be others, and decided it would be valuable—for us also!—to have a “best of” list of low-tech tools to provide our partners, and others, to try. Thanks to the Nike and Novo Foundations for supporting this endeavor through their support to EMpower’s participation in the Grassroots Girls Initiative.

This kit would not have been possible without the following people, who contributed valuable insights, tools, experiences, suggestions, resources, and contacts:

- Catlin Fullwood, independent consultant
- Andrea Cornwall (Pathways of Women’s Empowerment Research Programme Consortium)
- Kim Sabo Flores (Thrive Foundation)
- Ernestine Heldring (Scenarios USA)
- Amy Kwan (The Population Council)
- Virginia Lacayo (independent evaluation consultant)
- Alexandra Lamb Guevara (RedTraSex)
- Carla Lopez (Central American Women’s Fund)
- Shreya Malena-Sannon (Sadie Nash Leadership Project)
- Benita Miller (Brooklyn Young Mothers’ Collective)
- Soledad Muñiz (InsightShare)
- Gabriela Pinheiro, Juliana Tibau, Vinicius Ribeiro, and Viviane Santos (Luta Pela Paz)
- Joanne Smith (Girls for Gender Equity)
- Caitlin Stanton (Global Fund for Women)
- Lisa VeneKlasen and Alia Kahn (Just Associates)
- Sarah Zeller-Berkman and Maria Torre (Public Science Project, CUNY Graduate Center)

Within EMpower, Cynthia Steele provided direction and reviewed/drafted, Carmen Morcos gave guidance and reviewed drafts, and Virginia Dooley provided reality-checks on uptake by potential users.

Below are credits for developers of specific tools, which are core to this toolkit:

The Girl-Driven Program Index, the Intentional Story-Telling Mechanism, and the Voice, Action, Comportment, and Opportunity Checklist were developed in 2000 by Elizabeth Debold, Catlin Fullwood, and Dana Davis, at the Girls’ Best Friend Foundation (no longer operational), and funded by the Ms. Foundation for Women. The GDPI was designed to assess organizations’ philosophy and practice of involving girls in leadership and decision-making, and to highlight any gaps between staff perceptions and girls’ perceptions about the role girls play in the program. The ISM sought to understand how girls develop a sense

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1 EMpower is an international funder that supports local organizations working on youth development in 14 emerging market countries around the globe. www.empowerweb.org

2 The Grassroots Girls Initiative (GGI) comprises six funders (American Jewish World Service, Firelight, Global Fund for Children, Global Fund for Women, and Mama Cash) seeking to support and strengthen grassroots work with adolescent girls around the world.
of efficacy and agency and how they apply this to everyday challenges, as a means to gain insight into how girls' involvement in social change work affected them and their communities. And the VACO was based on indications of leadership identified by adults working with girls, and girls themselves. They came out of a process called the Young Women's Action Team (YWAT), an action-research group of 12 adolescent girls from 6 community-based organizations that serve girls and young women in the urban United States. The descriptions of all three tools included in this report rely heavily on the implementation guides developed as part of the YWAT process. For more on the process, read the full report at www.cpn.org/topics/families/pdfs/New_Girls_Movement.pdf.

The Girl Path was developed by EMpower staff to help local organizations around the world identify, classify, and address obstacles girls face in their efforts to participate in community-based programs (it was initially focused on sports programs). It was inspired by research conducted by the Brazilian organization Instituto Sou da Paz that explored why girls were absent from public spaces in low-income communities of São Paulo, Brazil, and by an activity developed by Evelyn Flores, a trainer from Fundación Puntos de Encuentro in Nicaragua, designed to help mixed groups of adolescents reflect on how girls’ responsibilities at home affected their ability to participate fully in youth programs.

Section One: Why Bother?

All around the world, organizations working with girls know that they are shaping girls’ pathways and possibilities in both visible and invisible ways. Guided by a belief in girls’ capacity for contribution, a commitment to giving girls equal access to opportunities, and a desire to equip girls to depend on themselves, these organizations are reaching girls at a pivotal moment of their lives—as they pass from childhood to adulthood, negotiate old relationships and form new ones, build skills, care for others, and make future plans. Participating in an organization’s programs may be one activity among many in girls’ busy lives but, as most girl-serving organizations know, the opportunity to learn a new skill, build friendships and solidarity with other girls, become empowered, or become an agent of community change, can all have a profound impact on girls’ lives and futures.

Yet it is challenging to find tools or develop processes that adequately capture and convey the complexity of girls’ realities, as well as the impact that a program is having on their lives—especially tools that girls can participate in developing and applying. Traditional methods of research and evaluation can leave organizations feeling that the information they have gathered does not tell the real story of how girls are changing and growing through participation in a program.

This toolkit is designed to help meet that challenge. It draws on the work of different organizations, activists, and researchers with a history of working in partnership with girls to transform their horizons and create change in their communities and countries.

The toolkit shares innovative, participatory tools and strategies designed to:

• capture changes in girls’ lives
• understand the complexity of girls’ realities in the communities where you work
• assess and increase girls’ participation in your organization
• improve the quality of your girl-serving programs
• spark action and reflection
• showcase the value of your work with girls
all the while, engaging and empowering girls as partners in the process.

The toolkit draws on a range of methods and non-traditional approaches to research and evaluation that can yield insights, experiences, and information that other approaches might miss. It is based on a philosophy of research and evaluation that puts learning first and foremost, and a belief in girls’ right to play a leadership role in the learning process.

It is also based on the belief that participatory processes yield deeper, more lasting benefits than processes that are led by a few individuals only—particularly when working with youth. Organizations that have tried such approaches testify to how transformative it can be to learn and evaluate in partnership with girls: yielding new insights, strengthening relationships, and uncovering hidden talents. In the words of Joanne Smith, founder and executive director of Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), a group that works to empower and organize adolescent girls and young women in New York City:

*The participatory action research process transformed the way our organization approaches issues affecting young people and our community. It ingrained in our organization a commitment to being inclusive of the people most affected by the problems we address, since they're the experts of their own experience. It also helped to shape the academic trajectory of former members, who reported taking advanced research courses in college because of their research experience at GGE.*

As this quote demonstrates, participatory processes are about more than summarizing your activities, or determining girls’ satisfaction with your program. They allow you to amplify girls’ voices, build their leadership, bring your programs into closer alignment with your organization’s mission, and discover and address issues or challenges you may have overlooked in the past. Beyond yielding valuable information, they also have the power to transform youth-adult relationships in a positive way. And finally, playing a leadership role in organizational learning enables young people to build and strengthen many of the same skills, capacities, and relationships that youth-focused organizations seek to develop in their day-to-day programs.

Participatory learning processes can help you and the girls you work with solve problems, test assumptions, share successes, spark changes, and move closer to your mission, by:

- Increasing girls’ participation and leadership in your programs and in your organization
- Understanding and showcasing the changes your program bring about in girls’ lives—both intended and unintended (for example, you might discover that a community organizing program for girls also improves their academic performance or communication with parents)
- Learning more about a persistent problem or challenge (for example, why girls drop out of school, why it’s difficult for your program to recruit or retain girls, why fewer girls than boys take advantage of leadership opportunities your program offers)
- Supporting and gaining insight into girl-led processes of community change (for example, girls challenging sexual harassment in their schools or organizing to address child marriage)
- Gathering information that can be used to educate parents, teachers, donors, and government actors about the realities of girls’ lives and the need to deepen investments in them (for example, persuading parents of the benefits of educating their daughters, convincing local officials of the importance of investing in sexuality education, or demonstrating to donors that your program is expanding girls’ life opportunities)
- Gaining insight into the challenges girls face in the communities where you work (for example, street harassment, a heavy burden of domestic responsibilities, conflicts with other girls)

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3 Including participatory action research, feminist research, popular education etc.
• Learning from girls if your program is achieving what it aims to achieve (for example, does your program increase girls’ self-confidence and assertiveness? How exactly does it develop girls’ leadership?)

This toolkit was written primarily for organizations working exclusively with girls, but it can be easily adapted for use by a range of people:

• **By girls themselves:** To spark internal reflection or external change; plan, communicate, or evaluate their own work; or learn more about the lives of other girls in their communities.

• **By people working in coed organizations who want to strengthen their work with girls:** To learn more about how the circumstances of girls’ and boys’ lives or the experiences they have in your organization’s programs might differ, to observe how girls and boys interact with each other, or to increase girls’ participation and leadership in your coed programs.

• **By youth-serving organizations:** to learn more about the young people (young men as well as young women) you work with and the communities they come from, to learn more about young people’s experiences in your programs, or to increase young people’s participation and leadership in your organization.

We know that local organizations often operate in challenging environments with limited staff and few resources. We know that few organizations have the staff, time, or the research capacities to engage in involved processes of inquiry or evaluation. Therefore, this toolkit was designed to be practical and not a comprehensive guide to research, monitoring, or evaluation.

This toolkit is designed to spark a *single* pilot process of girl-led learning. It is our hope that by testing ONE tool or approach developed to address a challenge or answer a question similar to the ones you may be facing, you will be inspired to try or adapt others, OR develop your own tools and approaches, inspired by and in partnership with the girls in your program.

Here’s how it works:

• **Section Two** contains a list of questions intended to clarify what you want to learn or capture and why, and how you intend to go about it. We encourage you to shape a pilot learning process in partnership with the girls in your program—from the beginning.

• **Section Three** offers a menu of innovative, participatory tools, giving you a taste of how each tool might be applied, and providing you with links to their implementation guides. Pick a tool that seems like a good fit with your organizational capacity and with the question you’ve chosen to explore, try it out, then reflect on the experience. If the process teaches you anything new about the girls in your program, and if you’re curious to explore the questions or issues it has raised in more depth, move on to Section Four.

• **Section Four** suggests next steps, as well as links to further resources that can help you deepen your knowledge of the issues that might have come up in the learning process.
Section Two: Where to Begin?

A Note on Terms

We have made an effort to avoid using overly technical terms so that the toolkit is as accessible as possible. The tools and methods described in the sections that follow generally fall under the category of ‘participatory action research,’ (PAR) a term that is used in many of the resources referenced in this toolkit. PAR generally refers to inclusive strategies for gathering information that involve the people directly affected by an issue in learning about or addressing that issue, and then linking that learning with taking action.

The tools shared in Section Three all support learning in partnership with girls. We prefer the term ‘learning’ over ‘research,’ as it is less technical and more approachable for community-based organizations and for girls.

• We use ‘learning’ as an umbrella term that includes, but is not limited to, monitoring and evaluation.
• The term ‘monitoring’ refers to processes that check actions against goals, or that answer the question “Are we doing what we said we would do?”
• The term ‘evaluation’ refers to processes that seek to capture changes that occurred as the result of a program, or to understand how a program might have contributed to creating a particular kind of change.
• The word ‘inquiry’ is used to describe a learning or evaluation process that seeks to answer a particular question or set of questions.

This section is designed to help you think through the purpose and the process of girl-led learning, to clarify what you hope to learn so that your approach will yield useful information. Because learning and evaluation can involve multiple motives and objectives (including hidden ones), this section is also designed to help you ensure that everyone involved in the learning process starts on the same page.

Processes of inquiry are intended to reveal things you might not already know, and participatory processes often yield unexpected results. The goal of this section is to:

• help you place the learning process in a wider organizational context
• anticipate and plan for stages of the process that may sneak up on you (such as organizing and analyzing the information you collect)
• think from the beginning about how you might use the information or learning that the process will generate in creative, strategic ways.

Because many of the tools shared in this kit are intended to be applied in partnership with girls, NOW is the best time to invite girls in your program to join the process. If you answer these questions on your own, then you will be the one shaping the process, and the girls will only be the ones implementing it. They may still gain valuable knowledge and experiences through their participation, but they will not have the same level of ownership over the process or the results. Inviting girls to co-define your questions and priorities will also reinforce and advance your mission of empowering girls.

We realize that inviting girls to participate—particularly in a process of evaluation—requires sensitivity to the power dynamics that inevitably exist between youth and adults, or between older and younger girls. Extra effort must be made to make girls feel comfortable and to support and empower them to share their opinions freely, even if those opinions differ from those of older girls or adults present. Setting ground rules for
discussions and making sure they are observed, or inviting a facilitator with an awareness of these dynamics to guide your conversation, may help create that space. You can also try using a discussion methodology that ensures universal participation—such as going around the room so that each individual has the opportunity to answer a question, rather than just inviting people to volunteer their opinions or stay silent.

### Setting ground rules

Ground rules may seem self-evident, but setting and agreeing to them collectively at the start of a process can have a very positive effect on the discussion that follows. If you are facilitating the discussion, you may wish to begin by suggesting some ground rules, but it is also important to ask for additional suggestions from participants, as a means to build ownership over the process. Here are some suggested ground rules:

- There are no stupid questions
- Step up (do speak up) and step back (let others talk also)
- Respond to the comment, not the person
- No texting during the discussion
- Listen actively and build on other people’s comments
- Sometimes: maintain confidentiality of what is said in the room (what is said there stays there)

When working with mixed groups of girls and adults, it may be useful to use the “Venn diagram” approach to setting ground rules. To use this approach, draw two partially overlapping circles—one for girls, and one for adults—and have participants brainstorm three categories of ground rules: rules that apply to everyone, rules that it’s important for adults in particular to keep in mind, and rules that it’s important for girls in particular to keep in mind. Setting ground rules in this way is not intended to create an unequal democracy, but rather to recognize the differences between girls and adults and the ways they may communicate, including how those differences might shape their participation in a collective discussion.

### Questions to Ask Yourselves, and Girls

Seven essential questions follow. At the end of this section are links to resources and guidelines that may be helpful in answering these questions.

1. **What do you want to measure or learn more about, and why?**

   Asking this question will allow you to brainstorm topics your organization wants to learn more about, areas where you feel your program can be strengthened, questions you have about girls’ experiences in your program or in their communities, or changes you’ve had a hard time capturing in the past. Asking this question will also allow you to identify any gaps between staff and girls’ learning priorities. In answering the ‘why’ part of this question, you may want to apply a technique known as the “Five Whys”. In this technique, you repeat the question of ‘why’ after each statement, then answer the question again, eventually leading you to the root cause of the concern.

2. **What is the specific question you want to answer?**

   Identifying what you want to learn more about and framing a specific learning question are two different things, though the distinction between them is often overlooked. A clear learning question can shape a process to help uncover concrete information and useful trends, rather than vague conclusions. Developing a learning question involves two steps: 1) From your brainstorm of learning topics, choose one priority topic or area for your inquiry. 2) Then, develop a clear question that you think will yield useful information about that topic. The more specific your question is, the more useful the data it will yield. You can always address other topics in future inquiries.

   Here are some examples of focused learning questions:

   - Why are girls in our community dropping out of secondary school?
• How do girls’ relationships with family members influence their self-esteem?
• What are the safe places in our community where girls can gather?
• Has our program changed girls’ view of what’s possible in their lives?
• Do girls feel as though their opinions are sought and their voices are heard in our program?

3. **Who should be included in which stages of the process?**
   It is important to be clear about who will participate in the various stages of the learning process. Think through who will
   • shape the learning question
   • choose the tool or methodology you will use to collect information
   • organize the information you collect, make sense of the information, and share it with others
   • participate in the research as ‘subjects’
   It is also important to decide
   • How many people you will have to collect information from to make the results of the inquiry meaningful
   • How many participants is too many participants—in other words, how much information can you realistically organize and analyze?
   • If you will need any external support (from students, trainers, consultants, or interns) to design and complete your inquiry?

4. **At what point or points in time will you need to collect information?**
   Some questions only need to be asked once, such as in processes that aim to: understand a specific challenge, learn more about the experiences of a particular group of people, or gather information that will help launch a new program.

   However, if you are trying to understand a change that has occurred in time, you will need to collect information more than once: at the beginning of a process (called a ‘baseline’) and at the end of the process. You also may wish to collect information at the midpoint or at several points in a process, depending on what you are aiming to measure and why. When measuring changes in girls’ attitudes, it is sometimes more useful for them to compare themselves at the end of the program to how they remember feeling at the beginning of it.
5. What is the best tool/approach to use in order to answer your question?

FALSE NEGATIVES WHEN MEASURING ATTITUDES
Traditional approaches to evaluation suggest that doing a ‘pre-’ and a ‘post-’ survey—that is, asking young women a set of questions before a program starts, then asking them the same questions after it’s done—is the best way to measure changes the program has sparked. However, the experiences of several of the organizations and individuals we spoke to while preparing this toolkit indicated that in certain kinds of empowerment programs, it may be more effective to apply a post-test alone—in other words, rather than asking young women the same questions before and after a program, simply asking young women who had completed a program to compare themselves to how they were before the program started. As Amy Kwan, a researcher for the Population Council, points out, “Doing a pre- and a post- survey is better for questions that test changes in knowledge. But maybe not questions that test changes in attitude.” The experience of the Sadie Nash Leadership Project (SNLP), an empowerment and leadership development program for young women in New York City, highlights this challenge. As Shreya Malena-Sannon, SNLP’s program director, explains:

A lot of what we’re doing is challenging what young women think they know already. We could do a pre-survey and ask them if they feel confident, and they could say ‘Yes.’ But then, at the end of the program, they’re like, ‘Whoa, I don’t know what I was thinking.’ Learning about power, identity, and privilege—it blows people’s minds; it challenges their assumptions and expectations. And if you do a pre- and a post-, that ‘a-ha moment’ can look weird; it can get lost, and you wind up with what looks like a bad result. So we only do a post-test now: we ask them to compare themselves now to how they were before. It’s tricky, but it’s the best compromise to feel like we’re measuring accurately.

Since mismatches between questions and tools are common, it is important to make sure the tool or approach you select will provide the kind of information you need to help answer your question. The summaries of the tools in Section Three (particularly the parts that share possible uses, discuss each tool’s advantages, and offer advice on how to use each tool) should help you choose well.

6. How will you organize and learn from the information you collect, and who will do this?
Organizing and making sense of the information you collect are essential—and often overlooked—stages in the learning process. Many of the tools in this kit have the potential to yield vast amounts of information. Remember that all of the information you and the girls you work with collect must be compiled, organized, and analyzed—a reality that should shape your decisions about how much collecting you do. It is important early on to come up with a simple shared system for compiling and navigating that information, so that things don’t become chaotic and confused later. Once the information is compiled and organized, the process is not over: reflecting on all that you have gathered, in light of the learning that’s already emerged from the process, is where the real magic happens. Analysis allows you to spot trends and patterns, identify lessons learned, and draw conclusions that can be applied to your programs or shared with others.

7. How will you communicate the results of this process and who will you communicate them to?
Gathering information is an opportunity for action and communication as well as for learning. First and foremost, it is essential to communicate the results of your learning process with the girls who participated in it. Beyond strengthening your programs and coming up with solutions to issues you have identified, research can also convince others of the value of your work, or the importance of investing in girls. Think creatively and strategically about how and where you want to share your results (and possibly, your learning process). How can this help you achieve your organizational goals and improve the lives of the girls you work with?
Many of the questions above can be challenging to answer. You may want to draw on the following resources, all of which offer clear, practical, and helpful guidance for embarking on a learning or evaluation process in partnership with girls:

- The *Training Young Women to be Researchers* curriculum is a resource for organizations seeking to embark on research, evaluation, or learning in partnership with girls, provides practical strategies for addressing many of the questions above. Available here: [YWATManual](#)


Section Three: Go For It!

This section contains brief descriptions of seven creative, participatory tools and methodologies that can be used to capture changes in girls’ lives; learn more about girls’ realities, communities, and experiences in your program; address challenges; and design and evaluate programs—all in partnership with girls themselves. An eighth description shares suggestions for how you or the girls you work with might develop your own tool, based on exercises or activities you already use.

Each brief description includes:

- An overview of the tool (including links to more detailed descriptions of how to apply it)
- Possible uses for an existing program (if you want to apply the tool in partnership with a group of girls you’re already working with in an active program)
- Possible uses for a new program (if you want to apply the tool to developing a new program or launching a new project within an existing program, in partnership with girls you haven’t worked with yet, or girls you want to starting working with in new ways)
- What the tool requires (any special materials or conditions, or any participation requirements)
- How girls can participate (some tools lend themselves to a higher level of girl participation than others, but all can be adapted in ways that allow girls to take significant ownership of the process)
- Advantages of using the tool (observations on this tool’s particular strengths or capacities, insight into what you might get out of it)
- Advice for using the tool (suggested adaptations, possible challenges)
- Suggested post-tool reflection questions (these questions will help you analyze the results of the tool, apply any learnings the tool has uncovered, and determine if you want to embark on a more ambitious process)

All of these tools are adaptable to multiple contexts and can be used in many different ways (guided by your answers to the questions in Section Two), but some are better at capturing certain types of information than others, some lend themselves to particular learning styles, and some require more time and equipment than others. If a particular tool catches your interest, you can follow the link to the detailed description, which will explain how to use it. Although the tools can all be used in different ways, some are more participatory than others, and some are specifically designed with evaluation—rather than more open-ended learning—in mind. The summaries below will help you identify those differences, to help you select an appropriate tool for your process.

- The first three (the Girl-Driven Program Index, the Girl Path, and Girl-led Community Mapping) are particularly good for building your staff’s capacity to work with girls, understanding the realities of girls’ lives, laying the groundwork for a process of girl-led learning, or setting up a new program.
- The next two (Photojournaling/Photostories and Girl-led Participatory Video) are more visual methods that allow for a high level of participation from girls, which can be particularly useful for girls who struggle to
express themselves in writing. They also both offer creative methods for documenting and sharing an important process or a hidden phenomenon with a wider audience.

- The last two (The Intentional Story-Telling Mechanism and the Voice, Action, Comportment, Opportunity Checklist) are designed with evaluation in mind, offering creative ways to capture how programs can contribute to girls’ leadership development, attitudes, and behaviors, and to explore girls’ ability to put what they’re learning in a program into practice in their own lives. Although both tools offer opportunities for girls to self-assess, they are less participatory than some of the others.

Finally, the tools below are not rigid recipes that need to be followed to the letter. Feel free to adapt, change, or expand on them as much as you like: although the directions and suggestions that follow can help guide you through a process that can seem intimidating in the abstract, they are intended to inspire you, not restrict you. There is no ‘right’ way to learn, and the most effective tools will always be the ones you develop yourselves!
I: The Girl-Driven Program Index
Available here: [GDPI]

Overview of the tool
The Girl-Driven Program Index (GDPI) is intended to help you learn more about girls’ experiences in your program, and in particular to assess the degree of participation, leadership, and decision-making they have in the program or in your organization. The GDPI consists of two checklists:

• The first (the Program Director Assessment) is designed to help people who work with girls explore your program’s philosophy and practice of participation, guided by a series of ‘yes/no’ questions about the program’s structure, content, assumptions, origins, values, and environment.

• The second (the Girls and Young Women Index) gathers comparable information from girls, with a focus on their roles and responsibilities in the program, how comfortable they feel, and their relationships and communication with staff and/or trainers.

The GDPI usually involves three stages: first, several staff members and several girls complete the checklist individually and confidentially. Next, the results are compiled and analyzed, with staff and girl responses compared to identify any gaps, contradictions, differences of opinion, or areas of agreement. Finally, staff and girls come together to discuss and reflect on the results, identifying any changes or adjustments that are needed.

You can download a complete guide to implement the GDPI (including sample checklists to be completed by staff and girls) here: [GDPI]

Possible uses for an existing program
• To learn more about girls’ experience in your program and the challenges they face
• To monitor, assess, or test assumptions about girls’ leadership in your program or organization by highlighting any gaps between staff perceptions and girls’ experiences
• To assess your organization’s readiness for embarking on a more participatory process of programming, evaluation, or research
• In programs that already have some leadership from girls (for example, programs where girls who complete a leadership training are then responsible for recruiting new or younger girls into the program), girls may wish to adapt this tool so that they can apply it to each other to assess dynamics of participation among them
• You can apply the GDPI periodically (to track progress against goals on girls’ participation and leadership in your programs), or use it once as a diagnostic tool
• The GDPI was designed for use with girls, but it can also be used with boys or mixed groups of girls and boys, or to measure the level of leadership and decision-making among any category of program participants
• The GDPI can also be adapted to help you assess gender dynamics in a coed program. If you adapt the checklists so that they can be applied to girls and boys separately, you can compare the results to identify...
how girls and boys might experience your program differently, and to assess if they have equal access to opportunities for participation and leadership.

Possible uses for a new program
- For the development of a new program, you can adapt the Program Director Assessment into a planning checklist and use it to identify areas you would like your program to address, or to make concrete decisions about the ways girls should be able to participate in your program.
- You can adapt sections of the Girls and Young Women Index (particularly the first section) into a tool to assess the level of participation girls might seek or expect in your program.

What the tool requires
The tool's requirements depend on how you intend to use it, but if you are using it to assess an existing program, you'll need the following:
- At least 3 girls, ideally with different levels of involvement in your program
- Program director, program staff, volunteers, or other staff and leadership (ideally more than one staff member, but try to avoid having more staff than girls complete the checklist)
- A checklist for staff and a checklist for girls—you can use or adapt those in the guide, or come up with checklists that better reflect your context and program focus
- A quiet place for girls to complete the checklist confidentially

How girls can participate
At a minimum, girls participate by filling out the Girls and Young Women Index. It's a good idea to include them in analyzing and reflecting on the results as well—or, at a bare minimum, to share the results with them. If analyzing and discussing results together, keep generational power dynamics in mind, and make sure that girls are comfortable discussing differing perceptions of the same issues with program staff. This can require sensitivity on the part of staff—it is important to avoid defensive reactions to girls' feedback and to focus on what their experiences can teach you about any gaps that exist between your intentions and the reality of your program.

Advantages of using this tool
- Requires few materials and relatively little time
- Checklists can be easily adapted to different program and cultural contexts

Advice for using this tool
- The implementation guide suggests that the staff checklist be completed by your ‘program director,’ but it can be completed by anyone whose job it is to work with girls. If you aim to assess girls’ participation in defining your organization’s priorities and working strategies, you may want to have someone involved with the leadership or management of your organization complete the checklist. If your program offers different levels of participation to girls, you may want to have a range of girls complete the Girls and Young Women Index.
- Since you want girls to be able to respond to the questions freely and critically, it is important to ensure that their individual responses are kept confidential, and to make sure they know from the beginning that their names will not be included with their answers.
- The written checklist requires relatively strong reading skills. In a low-literacy context, someone can read the questions out loud to girls (program staff should not be the ones doing this). Another option is to use the Storyboarding technique (described below).
- Because the questions on the Program Director Checklist and the Girls and Young Women Index are not identical, care must be taken when comparing the results.
Because the checklists are mainly made up of ‘yes/no’ questions, the results of this tool are easy to analyze quantitatively, and to portray trends. If you develop your own checklists, be sure and include ‘yes/no’ questions if you want to be able to have quantifiable conclusions.

Differing perceptions are to be expected. Disagreement holds the possibility of sparking conflict, but it is important to approach and present the GDPI as a learning tool, and to treat areas of difference as opportunities to strengthen communication rather than evidence of a program’s weakness or anyone’s lack of appreciation for it.

Suggested post-tool reflection questions

- Did the tool teach you anything new about girls’ experience in your program or staff perceptions of it?
- Did the tool reveal any assumptions that might need to be explored further?
- Did anything about the results surprise the staff or the girls? Why?
- Examine the areas where there were differences between girls and program staff’s perceptions. What do you, and they, make of those gaps? How might they be addressed?
- Examine the areas of strong agreement between girls and program staff. Why do you think agreement was so strong in those areas?
- Are there any areas where girls would like to be more or less involved in your program or organization? How could you put this into motion—what concrete steps will you take?

Alternative Approach: The Storyboarding Technique

The GDPI is similar to a tool called ‘Storyboarding,’ developed by youth participatory evaluation expert Kim Sabo Flores. A visual alternative to the GDPI, it can be facilitated as follows:

1. On flip charts, youth participants in a program draw a storyboard (cartoon) with three panels:
   - Panel one: young people before the program
   - Panel two: young people in the program
   - Panel three: young people after they leave the program

2. In a separate area, program staff draw a storyboard with the same three panels (young people before the program, in the program, and after they leave the program).

3. Youth present their storyboard to program staff and vice versa. Together, everyone discusses the points of similarity and difference in the two storyboards, reflecting on the implications of these differences, and deciding what action—if any—should be taken as a result. If you are concerned about tensions between staff and youth that might emerge during this discussion, you may wish to have program staff compare their storyboard with the youth storyboard in a staff-only conversation before involving young people in the discussion. This is advisable in situations where you suspect that staff might feel that it’s not important for staff and youth to have the same perceptions of a program—in such cases, it may be useful to facilitate a discussion among staff first, then bring youth into the conversation.

4. Storyboarding can also be used among staff working in different areas of the organization to increase communication and consistency—for example, if you have a larger organization, you may want to have the people who work with youth, the director, the people who write proposals and reports, and the people who are responsible for external communications each develop their own storyboards, then compare them to identify gaps and contradictions.
II: The Girl Path

Overview of the tool
The purpose of The Girl Path is to identify obstacles that prevent girls from fully participating in youth programs, and then to brainstorm ways that programs can remove, reduce, or otherwise address those barriers.

The Girl Path involves brainstorming obstacles girls face in their efforts to participate in a program, divided into four categories:

- **In her head:** What self-doubts, fears, or perceptions of herself that come from others keep her from participating or even trying to? What are the voices inside her head saying?
- **At home:** What does she need to do before she can walk out the door to participate? Whose permission does she need? What responsibilities must she take care of?
- **On the way:** How does she get there, who and what can she meet on her way (is she safe?), how does her community react to her participation?
- **In the program:** Is she comfortable? Do the hours and location enable her to attend? Is it designed with her in mind—is she getting something valuable from her time/effort?

In four small groups, one for each category above, participants (usually program staff, girls, or a combination) brainstorm and write up the main obstacles and then post these. As a group, they discuss any additional obstacles, reflect on the trends they observe, and then brainstorm solutions that the program can address. For example, the program structure could be modified to schedule trainings during daylight hours, or equip educators/trainers/coaches to address bullying and teasing. Or, the content could be modified so that it includes activities that build solidarity between girls and boys, or better equips girls to develop persuasive arguments for negotiating with resistant parents, then allows them to practice applying these arguments through role plays.

Possible uses for an existing program
- To deepen program quality by learning more about girls’ lives and girls’ experience in your program
- To determine why girls’ participation in your program is lower than desired, or to understand why girls might be dropping out of your program
- To assess the “girl-friendliness” of a coed program (either by applying it to girls alone, or by adapting it to be applied to girls and boys to identify any gender-specific barriers girls face)
- To evaluate how well a program meets the needs of certain girls (for example, pregnant or parenting girls, younger girls, married girls, girls with disabilities, or out-of-school girls)
- To capture changes in girls’ and women’s lives over generations (for example, by asking girls to brainstorm the obstacles to participation they face, the obstacles their mothers or grandmothers might have faced, and the obstacles they think their younger sisters will face)

Possible uses for a new program
- To anticipate obstacles to participation that girls in your community are likely to face, so that you can structure the program to address those obstacles
- To create a baseline for measuring any increases in the girl-friendliness of your program over time, or to track how your program might increase girls’ capacity for participation

The Girl Path was developed by EMpower staff to help local organizations from around the world working on girls and sports identify, classify, and address obstacles girls face in their efforts to participate in community-based sports programs, but it is easily adaptable for use in many other contexts.
What the tool requires
- Flip chart paper, tape, cards, markers, post-its or cards of different colors
- A large floor or wall space where cards can be arranged or affixed in four columns

How girls can participate
The Girl Path allows for varying degrees of participation from girls. Girls can be invited to complete it as part of a needs assessment for a new program (to anticipate and address obstacles to their participation before a program begins), or they can complete it at the beginning, middle, and end of the program to track a program’s girl-friendliness over time. This process can also be used as a monitoring tool: invite girls to complete the exercise early on as a means to identify obstacles, then ask them to do it again later to see if resulting modifications to the program reduced or removed those obstacles.

Advantages of using this tool
- Easily adaptable for a range of contexts and uses
- Effective at breaking down the assumption that girls are not participating in a program simply because they are not interested or they don’t feel like it
- Gives insight into girls’ lives at home and in their communities
- Offers a practical, applied way to identify and address multiple, overlapping obstacles, such as girls’ possible feelings of unworthiness or belief that they don’t deserve to participate in a program because they are girls

Advice for using this tool
- One comment that often surfaces during The Girl Path is that many obstacles show up in more than one category: for example, a girl’s parents might resist her participation in the program because there are boys in the program (at home), a girl might worry about how she will be viewed by the community if she is seen socializing with boys (on the way/in her head), and then boys might indeed create stress for her in the program itself (in the program). The facilitator can emphasize that it’s important to recognize the multiple dimensions and expressions of these challenges in order to be able to address them fully.
- Another issue that often surfaces is safety: girls are often kept at home based on fears that bad things will happen to them if they venture outside. It’s important to recognize that those fears are both based on reality (bad things can and do happen to girls who venture outside—or who stay inside, for that matter!—and programs must be mindful of exposing girls to danger), and also used to curtail girls’ participation in public life and access to basic rights and services. It is important for the facilitator to draw out a discussion of this contradiction, in order to prevent the group from adopting an overly protective attitude toward girls. The Girl Path can also be combined with safety mapping and other girl-led community mapping exercises (see “Girl-Led Community Mapping” below) to explore these questions further.
- The Girl Path often surfaces complex challenges. It is important to recognize that not all of these challenges can be addressed at once, and instead, to use the tool to prioritize, take things one step at a time, and highlight positive aspects of how the program may already be responding to girls’ needs.
- One nice way of closing the session is to have each participant write down on a card one thing that they resolve to do to make the program more accessible to or comfortable for girls. Participants can keep cards to themselves, read them aloud, or share them with a partner.

Suggested post-tool reflection questions
- Did The Girl Path teach you anything new about the girls in your program or your community?
- Did any obstacles appear in more than one category? What do you make of that?
• Do you think the challenges revealed in The Girl Path can be addressed by changing or adding to your program’s structure or content?
• Which of the brainstormed solutions will require additional funds, which are the most urgent, which can be addressed soonest and which will have to wait?
III: Girl-led Community Mapping

Overview of the tool
Community mapping is a popular strategy in participatory research, and many community mapping tools and exercises are available online and through organizations that practice participatory development. Girl-led community mapping is community mapping designed and conducted by girls themselves—based on their own knowledge of their communities, or drawing on information they gather from others.

There are many different ways to do community mapping. Girl-led community mapping allows you to gather useful information about a community but also to equip girls with basic research skills.

We encourage you to invite girls to come up with their own mapping priorities, materials, and methods.

Possible uses for an existing program
- To better understand the dynamics of a community where you work or where the girls live
- To build girls’ research capacities and lay the groundwork for girl-led community service or action, based on the trends or priorities uncovered during the mapping process
- To gain insight into the complexity and diversity of girls’ lives outside your program, and to check any assumptions you might have
- To identify places or contexts where girls feel they can safely share what they learn in your program, as well as places or contexts where they don’t feel safe doing that
- To strengthen community support for your program by giving girls the opportunity to build community relationships, answer questions about the program, and gather and share information that might be useful for other community members
- To strengthen community support for your program by demonstrating concrete evidence of why it is needed

Possible uses for a new program
- To learn more about a community where you hope to work with girls
- To identify safe and unsafe spaces in girls’ communities, or spaces where girls, women, or young people congregate. This knowledge can inform where girls hold their meetings, or help you decide where to hold an event or training. It can also serve as the basis for advocacy to address issues like street harassment, or launch campaigns about girls’ right to public space.
- To establish relationships or identify allies in a new community where you hope to work with girls by gathering and sharing information that might be useful for other community members, or by gathering and sharing information that demonstrates why the program is needed
- To help girls gather vital information about a community or area where they are planning to launch their own program or activities

The Population Council’s Girl-Centered Program Design has guidelines and worksheets for girl-led community mapping (particularly on the issue of safety) on pages 28-29 of Section 1 and pages 45-49 of Section 2. You can download them at http://www.popcouncil.org/survey/container.asp?AskSurvey=n (also available in Spanish and French). See other resources on girl-led community mapping here: community_mapping_exercise
What the tool requires

• If mapping involves going out into the community to record observations or collect information from others, mappers will need worksheets, surveys, interview guides, notepads, cameras, or recording devices—depending on the kind of information they aim to collect.

• If mapping will draw on the girls’ knowledge alone, you will need worksheets and/or flipcharts and markers for gathering, organizing, and processing what they share.

How girls can participate

Ideally, girls participate in every stage of the process: from choosing which aspects of their community they would like to map, to gathering the information they need, to developing the maps based on that information.

Advantages of using this tool

• Draws on girls’ own knowledge and expertise.

• Can help raise girls’ self-esteem and status in communities, especially if others see them as researchers or authorities on community knowledge, or are impressed with their ability to gather and present information.

• Reveals communities’ diversity and complexity, which often dispels myths and assumptions about them.

• Raises community awareness about girls’ realities, builds support for girl-focused programs.

• Generates useful information for other community members.

Advice for using this tool

• If girls will be conducting observations, they should observe the same places at different times of day, in order to get a more complete picture.

• Particularly in small communities, it is a good idea to inform community members or leaders that girls will be conducting research—or to equip girls to explain the purpose of their research themselves. Girls may also wish to present the maps or other findings to people who participated in the research, to community leaders, or to the community at large—particularly if the mapping was undertaken as part of an advocacy strategy.

• Make sure girls take breaks to record their observations after interviews, interactions, or walks through a community, so that they can capture as many details as possible.

• Community mapping can easily be combined with videography, photojournaling, or traditional qualitative research methods (such as surveys or interviews), depending on the kind of map girls aim to develop.

• Community-based research can expose girls to unsafe places or people. To address this, girls should be encouraged to follow their instincts, and to avoid areas or situations where they feel they are putting themselves at great risk. It is a good idea to have girls work in pairs. You may also wish to have an adult accompany girls in the early stages of their research, until they build the confidence to continue on their own—but it is important for adult mentors to stay at the margins so that girls can have their own interactions with community members.

Suggested post-tool reflection questions

• Did the mapping process or the maps themselves teach you anything new about girls’ lives or communities?

• How did the process of conducting community-based research change girls’ perceptions of their community? Of themselves?

• Would the maps be useful tools for community advocacy, led by or in partnership with girls?
IV: Photojournals/Photostories

Overview of the tool
Photojournals or photostories use photography to record moments and then combine them to tell stories. They can be stories of change taking place in your program, in girls’ lives, in girls’ communities or other spheres of action. These tools use both images and text, providing details and context that may not be clear from the images alone.

To put together a photojournal or photostory, girls first choose an issue they want to track or observe—for example, girls speaking up in public or claiming public spaces, girls organizing and conducting community dialogues or workshops, the dynamics between girls and boys in a program, the experiences of pregnant or parenting girls in school, or the daily realities of girls from migrant families. Next, over a period of time, girls take photos of relevant people, moments, or events, while making a note of:

- Basic information about the person or subject photographed (date, names and ages of people in the photograph, relationship to girls or to the program, etc.)
- The circumstances under which the photo was taken (date, time, location, etc.)
- Their account of what is taking place, and why the moment or subject is significant

Possible uses for an existing program
- To document an event, project, or process, or to tell a story of change
- To capture and contextualize important events or moments in girls’ lives or the life of a program
- To day-to-day interactions of participants—in their communities, in their families, in their own organizing spaces, or in your program
- To share the process and results of girl-led research; educate communities, parents, teachers, and local leaders about issues and experiences in girls’ lives; or shed light on a hidden or overlooked phenomenon
- To build support for a girl-led project or a girl-serving program among parents, peers, or community members

Possible uses for a new program
- Photojournaling is best used with an existing program

What the tool requires
- One or more cameras, or mobile phones with the capacity to take photos
- Photograph log sheets

InsightShare, an international organization focused on participatory video, has put together a number of photostories documenting their participatory video research projects. (http://insightshare.org/resources/photostory/all).

Session 4 of the Training Young Women to be Researchers curriculum [YWAT] explains how to train girls in photojournaling. The training is somewhat dated (it assumes girls will be working with cameras that use film), but can be easily updated for contemporary photography tools, which make photojournaling a more accessible and inexpensive method.
• Software that allows you to combine text and images into photojournals, or just photos, markers, tape, and flipchart paper
• Consent from people being photographed

How girls can participate
Ideally, girls participate in every stage of the process: from choosing the question they want to focus on or the process they want to document, to taking the photos, to developing the resulting photojournal or photostory.

Advantages of using this tool
• Effective at documenting both the process and the results of a project or event
• Good for visual learners and lower literacy groups
• Captures key moments that might otherwise be lost
• Tells stories from girls’ perspective, gives them the power to decide which moments are important and describe them in their own words
• Builds girls’ capacities for documentation and analysis

Advice for using this tool
• Choose a topic that can be addressed with images and text
• Make sure the issue goes beyond simple documentation, to offer input for learning, advocacy, or communications
• When taking and sharing photographs, it is important to obtain consent from the people who are being photographed. You can use this opportunity to discuss the concept of consent with girls. Developing a written consent form is also a good opportunity for girls to come up with a clear and simple description of the research process and goals, and to clarify how it might be used internally or shared externally (you can find sample text at the end of this description).
• Photographing an event or moment can change the dynamics of that moment, and people who know they are being photographed may behave differently as a result. It is important to encourage girls to use their judgment in these situations, and always to ask permission before taking photographs.

Suggested post-tool reflection questions
• How did the use of images change the way you told the story?
• Did the practice of taking and sharing photos teach you or the girls you work with anything new or unexpected about the process or events they were documenting?
• Did taking photos with a question in mind result in better, more useful, or interesting photos?

The New Girls’ Movement: New Assessment Tools for Youth Programs (http://www.cpn.org/tools/manuals/families/pdfs/new_girls_movement_assesstools.pdf) explains how photojournaling was used in a wider research process developed and implemented in partnership with girls.
**Sample consent form text**

I, ____________________________ (print name) give [ORGANIZATION] permission to use my image as part of [EXPLAIN PROJECT OR FINAL PRODUCT].

I understand that all materials will remain the property of [ORGANIZATION], and I am not entitled to any compensation or payment for their use.

I consent to having my real name used in the final product: ___YES ___ NO

Date: __________________________
Signature: __________________________
Contact information: __________________________

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**Alternative approach: individual journaling or photojournaling**

Photojournaling also can be used more like traditional journal writing— that is, as a tool for individual girls to capture important moments or record significant events in their lives. To use photojournaling in this way, each girl must have access to a camera (or a journal, in the case of traditional journal writing). Girls may wish to take photos or write journal entries over a period of time based on a particular theme or question, or use their cameras or journals to document their personal experience of growth or development in your program. When the process is over, girls will be left with a record of their experiences, which can help them appreciate how they have changed, grown, or learned over time.

One advantage of individual journaling or photojournaling is that it allows girls to reflect on their own lives and observe themselves in private, and to explore thoughts, feelings, and events that may be difficult to share with others. For this reason, the confidentiality of girls’ journals and photojournals should be respected. However, you can invite girls to put together short autobiographies based on their journal entries or their photos (with the texts or photos they feel comfortable sharing), or invite a group of girls to compile selected photos or journal entries into a publication that commemorates the process or program they participated in together.
V: Girl-led Participatory Video

Overview of the tool
Girl-led participatory video puts girls behind (and often in front of) the camera. It empowers them to capture and share their peers’ and their own realities, use video to spark community change, or document their own work or the work of your organization. In girl-led participatory video, the process is as important as the product: beyond enabling girls to create powerful and persuasive stories, it gives them an opportunity to:

• learn new media and communication skills that are both empowering and useful
• build collaborative relationships with other girls
• develop more confidence in their abilities
• spark or contribute to processes of community change

There are many ways to use participatory video. If you plan to undertake an ambitious participatory video project, you may require some hands-on training and support (unless you or the girls you work with already have experience in this area). But if you want to test this method on a smaller scale, all you need is an inexpensive video camera and a group of willing girls.

Online resources and organizations that specialize in participatory video can also help you deepen and extend the process. For example, the international organization InsightShare trains organizations and communities around the world to use participatory video as a tool for organizing, advocacy, evaluation, and social change.

InsightShare’s website (http://insightshare.org/) has many free training resources, manuals, case studies, and examples of video projects. A good starting place is this short video on its approach to participatory video: http://www.insightshare.org/watch/video/what-is-pv. To learn more, download the free toolkit on a Rights-based Approach to Participatory Video at http://insightshare.org/resources/right-based-approach-to-pv-toolkit.

You can access the toolkits (and watch the videos girls made) at http://www.projectinggirlpower.org/.

Possible uses for an existing program
• To document the process and/or the results of a project or event led by girls or involving girls’ participation
• To empower girls by building their technical capacities and amplifying their voices and perspectives
• To evaluate the impact of a program on girls’ lives by gathering and compiling their testimonies
• To document a personal history, or the history of girls’ families or communities, including changes in attitudes and practices over time
• To learn more about community perceptions and attitudes about a particular issue, to educate people about an issue, or to advocate for change
Possible uses for a new program

• To identify and explore a problem that girls want to address as part of a new program or project

What the tool requires

• A video camera or cameras
• A video log
• Consent from people being recorded
• Video editing software or equipment
• A place to review and share videos made by girls

How girls can participate

Ideally, girls participate in every stage of the process: identifying the issue they aim to address, taking the videos, editing them, and sharing them with key audiences.

Advantages of using this tool

• Video is a fun and engaging way to gather and share information
• Giving girls control over the process allows them to decide what to document and how
• Increases girls’ comfort with technology and communication tools
• The approach offers multiple opportunities for participation (filming, presenting, editing, facilitating discussions at a screening)

Advice for using this tool

• Although cell phones with video recording capacity, Flip cameras, and free online editing software all make participatory video more accessible than in the past, this approach requires more equipment, training, and time than many other tools. If you want to try it out, make sure your staff and the girls have access to the technology and support they need to succeed.
• It is important to keep footage organized, and not to go overboard when taking a video: encourage girls not to collect more data than they can handle reviewing.
• Taking a video of an event or moment can change the dynamics of that moment, and people who know they are being recorded may behave differently as a result. It is important to encourage girls to use their judgment in these situations.
• When taking videos, it is important to obtain consent from the people who are being recorded. You can use this as an opportunity to discuss the concept of consent with girls. Developing a written consent form is also a good opportunity for girls to come up with a clear and simple description of the research process and goals, and to clarify how it might be used internally or shared externally (for sample text, see “Photojournals/Photostories” above).
• Screening videos is an excellent strategy for sparking community dialogue. Recording a group of girls or other community members watching a video and discussing it afterwards—especially if the resulting recording can then be shared with those who attended the screening and discussion—also provides good insight into group dynamics.
• Video can be fun, but it can also be intimidating. The more exposure girls have to the equipment, and the more they are allowed to play with it and make mistakes, the more relaxed they will become. Make sure girls practice experiencing and

For a good example of how participatory video can be combined with storytelling and life histories, see 3G: Three Generations of Women at http://www.3gwomen.org/, an international, intergenerational storytelling initiative developed by Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium.

www.empowerweb.org
experimenting with video on themselves and each other before they begin filming people and events outside the program. There is no substitute for hands-on learning!

- This approach can be easily combined with other research or evaluation methods, such as the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology, or storytelling/oral history methodologies.

**Suggested post-tool reflection questions**

- Did the process or the results of the participatory video project teach you anything new about the girls in your program?
- Did girls build new skills or develop new capacities during the participatory video process?
- How can the results of the process be used to spark change or strengthen your program?

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4 You can download a complete guide to the Most Significant Change methodology at [http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm](http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm).
VI: The Intentional Story-Telling Mechanism

Overview of the tool
The Intentional Story-Telling Mechanism (ISM) uses a case-study approach to measure how girls apply problem-solving, organizing, and leadership skills they have learned in a program to real-life situations: in their households, schools, communities, and in relation to peers, partners, parents, and others. It presents girls with various scenarios, asks them to brainstorm possible responses (individually, in pairs, or in groups), then asks them (individually) to identify both the ‘ideal’ response and the ‘most realistic’ response to each scenario. The results can then be coded and analyzed based on learning priorities chosen beforehand (which allows for data to be statistically significant), or reviewed more informally to get a clearer picture of girls’ critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills.

The ISM was developed in 2000 by Elizabeth Debold, Catlin Fullwood, and Dana Davis. It came out of a process called the Young Women’s Action Team (YWAT), an action-research group of 12 adolescent girls from 6 community-based organizations that serve girls and young women in the urban United States. For more on how the tool was developed, read the full report at www.cpn.org/topics/families/pdfs/New_Girls_Movement.pdf.

Possible uses for an existing program
• To track changes in the same girls over the course of a program’s implementation (if it is applied at the beginning and end of the program and then the results are compared)
• To evaluate a program by comparing the responses of girls who have participated in a program with those of girls who have not participated in a program

Possible uses for a new program
• To gain insight into the issues you might want your program to address
• To establish a baseline against which to track changes in girls’ reactions to certain situations

What the tool requires
• 10 girls minimum (the ISM can be applied to as many girls as you like, but remember that the more information you collect, the more you will have to analyze)
• A space where girls can meet
• Flip chart paper and markers, or pens and paper for note takers
• 3-6 written scenarios that can be read aloud or distributed to girls—you can use the scenarios included in the implementation guide, or come up with original scenarios that better reflect your cultural context and the focus of your program

How girls can participate
This tool allows for flexible levels of participation from girls. For maximum participation, a small group of girls can determine what they want to learn about the program’s impact, develop the scenarios themselves, apply the tool to their peers, and analyze and share the results—all of which can be done in partnership with the program’s staff and/or trainers. The tool can also be developed and implemented by program staff alone, or by an external evaluator or researcher.
Advantages of using this tool

- Adaptable to diverse cultural and community contexts
- Can bring forward real dilemmas and situations girls and peers face, creating an opportunity for constructive, collective problem-solving
- Allows for creativity and can double as a learning tool for girls themselves
- Seeks to address the tendency to provide ‘right’ vs. ‘real’ answers by allowing girls to brainstorm all possible responses, and to identify both ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ response to a situation
- Effective at capturing girls’ sense of agency and efficacy, as well as their leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking, and organizing skills
- Allows for diverse levels of participation from girls
- Can be applied written or orally, collectively or individually, and requires few materials. The data it generates can be coded and analyzed relatively simply. To use the data to determine quantitative trends, you will need to conduct an additional statistical analysis (details explained in the implementation guide).

Advice for using this tool

- While designed for use with girls, the tool can also be used with boys, with mixed groups of girls and boys, or as a staff development tool with trainers, educators, or coaches.
- If you write your own scenarios, keep in mind that the ideal scenarios contain conflicts, and have multiple solutions. Collectively, the scenarios should touch on all of the categories of relationships that are important in girls’ lives: including family, peer, and community.
- Pay close attention to the data coding instructions included in the implementation guide, as they are easy to follow (even for organizations with limited research experience), and will ensure that you get the most out of the data this tool generates.
- The key to communicating the results of this tool effectively is to understand and analyze the connections among different kinds of skills your program builds (for example, critical thinking, decision-making, organizing, or conflict resolution), and to take the time to explain how the tool reflects subtle changes in girls’ thinking.
- If it is applied as a written assessment, the ISM may involve a lot of writing for girls. In a low-literacy context, you may want to substitute role plays for writing, as long as you have a way to capture the resulting role plays. You can also read the scenarios aloud, then assign one note taker (ideally a girl with stronger writing skills) for each group of girls during the brainstorming process.

Suggested post-tool reflection questions

- Did either the process of applying this tool or the results the tool generated teach you anything new about the girls in your program?
- Did the process of applying this tool or the results the tool generated teach you anything new about your program?
- Did the tool generate any surprising results—either positive or negative?
- Did the tool reveal any gaps in your program that you’d like to address going forward?
- If you were going to apply the tool again, would you do anything differently?
- What are you going to do differently with these learnings?
VII: Voice, Action, Comportment, and Opportunity Checklist (VACO)

Overview of the tool
The Voice, Action, Comportment, and Opportunity Checklist (VACO) is an observation tool intended to capture changes in girls’ confidence, assertiveness, and speaking power—key indicators of leadership development that will be familiar to most youth development professionals—over the course of their participation in a program. It tracks capacities in four areas: speaking on one’s own behalf (Voice), taking initiative in the interest of the group or to support others (Action), projecting confidence and self-respect (Comportment), and volunteering or asking for new experiences or responsibilities (Opportunity).

To apply the VACO, staff or volunteers periodically observe a complete program session or activity, filling out VACO checklists for individual girls by placing a check next to the behaviors or abilities they demonstrate. Girls also self-assess (using the same checklist) after each program session or activity during which they are observed, or can periodically self-assess to track their progress against personal goals. The data the VACO generates can then be discussed with girls during individual progress meetings and used to calculate VACO ‘scores’ for individual girl, which can then be tracked over time.

Possible uses in an existing program
• To capture how your program develops girls’ leadership, in partnership with girls themselves
• The VACO works best if it is used with girls who are new to a program, since the skills it tracks are relatively basic leadership skills. Girls who have been in a program for longer may require a tool that measures more advanced leadership skills—otherwise it might appear that their progress in the program has stopped or slowed.

Possible uses in a new program
• To establish a baseline against which to track changes in girls’ behavior over time
• To set and track specific leadership development goals for individual girls, in partnership with girls themselves

What the tool requires
• Several copies of the VACO checklist
• One or more staff members or volunteers who can observe the same girls over a period of time (the observations should be conducted by the same person every time)
• An activity or type of activity involving girls that will be repeated over time (for example, a citizenship class, peer education event, or girls’ club meeting), so that each observation can take place under similar circumstances
• The VACO can be used on its own to help girls reflect on their own development, to generate baseline data, and to track individual girls’ progress over time. The implementation guide also discusses how to analyze the VACO data to generate ‘statistically significant’ results (results that make a convincing case that changes in girls’ scores cannot be attributed to chance). This requires a basic knowledge of statistics.

How girls can participate
The VACO allows for varying degrees of participation from girls. Girls can fill out the checklist after every program session, or more infrequently (every few weeks or months). They can also use it to set and track their own personal development goals. In general, the more girls use the VACO, the more comfortable they become with it. Ideally, the VACO combines staff observations of girls with girls’ own self-assessments, supplemented by periodic meetings with individual girls to discuss progress. This creates an opportunity for reflection, goal-setting, and dialogue. Girls can also apply the VACO to each other, or to younger or less experienced girls they are mentoring in the program—in that scenario, girl mentors would observe the girls they are mentoring, who would also use the tool to self-assess.

Advantages of using this tool
• Breaks down a complex concept like ‘leadership’ into smaller, easily observable skills and behaviors, providing measurable goals and helping both girls and program staff article what it means to develop as a leader
• Can help motivate girls to get more comfortable taking action, increasing their participation, taking advantage of opportunities, and taking positive risks, since they are assessing themselves and being assessed based on those behaviors
• Allows for differing levels of participation from girls, sparks dialogue between girls and staff
• Allows program staff to gather and share evidence of girls’ increased leadership skills over the course of the program in a reliable and systematic way

Advice for using this tool
• The VACO works best in a program where girls participate over time in the same kinds of activities. If your program is not set up in this way, you may want to use a different tool.
• You can use the VACO checklist in the implementation guide, or adapt it to focus on abilities and behaviors your program seeks to build. Girls can also come up with their own checklists based on abilities and behaviors they want to track, either as individuals or as a group.
• Whether you use the checklist in the implementation guide or develop your own, make sure you use the same checklist every time, so that the results will be consistent.
• The implementation guide shares useful guidelines and questions that can be used to organize and make sense of the data the VACO generates. These guidelines and questions will allow you to develop individual and group scores (for single behaviors, or for groups of behaviors), and to analyze trends over time in a meaningful way. You will need more sophisticated statistical analysis software to generate ‘statistically significant’ results (see implementation guide and ‘What the tool requires’ above).
• Girls may initially feel some discomfort or self-consciousness if they know their behavior is being observed. But the more you use the VACO, the more comfortable girls will become. Involving girls in the process and encouraging them to take ownership of the tool as a means to self-assess can also help break down discomfort.

Suggested post-tool reflection questions

If you have, or can access someone with, knowledge of statistics, you can download free statistical analysis software at http://vassarstats.net/. 

www.empowerweb.org
• Did the VACO teach you anything new about the girls in your program or their experience in the program?
• Did the VACO reveal any surprising trends?
• Are there any areas of the VACO where very few girls are exhibiting leadership? How much would you attribute to girls themselves, versus how your program is structured?
• Can the VACO be adapted to track any indicators you have already identified that you would like to track, or that you have already been asked to track by a funder?
**Bonus: Make Your Own Tool**

As someone who works with girls, you probably already use a range of activities and exercises that are effective in sparking dialogue, shifting thinking, and introducing new ideas or perspectives. Many of these activities and exercises can easily be converted into learning and evaluation tools if you simply introduce the element of time.

For example, many organizations working to address violent and/or abusive dynamics in adolescent relationships use a tool called the Power and Control Wheel. The Power and Control Wheel lays out various categories of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse and violence and the behaviors or strategies associated with them (for example, sending unwanted text messages, humiliating someone, isolating someone from friends or family, using drugs or alcohol to pressure someone into sex). The wheel is designed to raise awareness about the fact that these behaviors are part of a continuum of violence, and that they are all signs that a relationship may not be healthy.

The Power and Control Wheel can be used to teach young people to identify risk factors in their relationships. It can also be used as a learning or evaluation tool. For example:

- Have girls apply the wheel to their relationships at the start of the program and at the end of the program, as a means to measure if the program's impact on their relationships
- Show girls the wheel at the end of the program, and ask them to identify how many of the behaviors they would have considered controlling or abusive at the beginning of the program, versus now
- Invite girls to use the wheel to develop a community survey on violence and abuse in teen relationships, or their peers’ attitudes about what kind of behavior is acceptable in teen relationships

The Power and Control Wheel is only one example of an activity that can easily be transformed into a tool for learning or evaluation. If you approach all of the activities you use in your daily work with girls in this way, the possibilities are endless.

[Several samples of the Power and Control Wheel, or version of the information it contains, available at http://www.sprucerun.net/about-abuse/domestic-abuse/power-and-control-wheel/)](http://www.sprucerun.net/about-abuse/domestic-abuse/power-and-control-wheel/)
Section Four: What next?

If these tools have led you to new learning, or yielded valuable information, the first step is to share the results with all those who participated in the research process. The results would also provide a good basis for making changes to your programs:

- to develop a new program
- to help build community or family support for your program
- to advocate for changes in the communities where girls live or in the institutions designed to support them.

You may wish to share the process and results of the experience with existing or prospective funders, as a means to request additional resources or training that will allow you to deepen and extend this learning. You may be able to partner with local universities or training institutes to take this process to the next level.

Trying out one of the tools in this kit may have provided you with new information and insights, or possible strategies for addressing persistent challenges in your work. The experience may have raised new questions or opportunities, leaving you with a desire to go deeper or to learn more.

If you are interested in going beyond this first step in your learning process, you might find it useful to work with a professional researcher, evaluator, or trainer with experience in helping organizations develop and implement such projects. Such expertise and interest might also be found in local or international students, interns, and other young people who grasp the principles of participation and can appreciate the substance of your work. Or you may wish to invest in developing the capacities of a young woman participant in your programs, or a staff member or educator who demonstrates enthusiasm and aptitude for participatory tools and approaches.

In the meantime, the following resources can help deepen your thinking on some of the questions the process may have raised, and can support your ongoing reflection, in partnership with the girls in your program.

**Recommended resources on girl-led or youth-led research and organizing**

The *Training Young Women to be Researchers* Curriculum is a practical, accessible guide to building girls’ capacities to lead research processes. It includes exercises designed to orient girls to the research process, develop and choose research methods, and collect and analyze data. It also includes detailed session plans for training girls in videography, ethnographic observation, photojournaling, journaling, and conducting interviews. Available here: [YWAT]

- **Girl-Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen & Expand Adolescent Girls Programs** contains a practical and useful section on monitoring and evaluation, including sample surveys, interview questions, and worksheets aimed at capturing changes in girls’ self-esteem, social capital, skills, and assets. Available at [http://www.popcouncil.org/publications/books/2010_AdolGirlsToolkit.asp](http://www.popcouncil.org/publications/books/2010_AdolGirlsToolkit.asp) (also Spanish & French)

- **Youth Participatory Evaluation: Strategies for Engaging Young People** is intended to guide you through the development of a youth-led participatory evaluation process from start to finish, including strategies for managing youth-adult power dynamics, and tips for developing your own evaluation tools. Available for order at [http://www.amazon.com/Youth-Participatory-Evaluation-Strategies-Engaging/dp/0787983926/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1341521109&sr=8-1&keywords=kim+sabo-flores](http://www.amazon.com/Youth-Participatory-Evaluation-Strategies-Engaging/dp/0787983926/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1341521109&sr=8-1&keywords=kim+sabo-flores)
• *The New Girls’ Movement: New Assessment Tools for Youth Programs* compiles useful tips, methodologies, strategies, and experiences to begin a girl-led process of participatory research and evaluation. Although it focuses on research design, it includes valuable advice for data organization, analysis, and coding; working with more than one research method at once; and matching research methods with research questions. Available at: http://www.cpn.org/tools/manuals/families/pdfs/new_girls_movement_assesstools.pdf

• The Article 15 Toolkit compiles practical resources for youth-led groups (including research and evaluation skills development), based on global research on how young people organize and take action at the community level. Available at: http://article15.squarespace.com/participant-map/

• Occasional Paper 11 from the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) compiles data on the impact of youth organizing, and includes many good frameworks and specific questions for people developing youth-focused evaluations. Available at: www.fcyo.org/media/docs/2525_Paper_11_CompleteWeb.pdf (the complete occasional paper series is available at: http://www.fcyo.org/toolsandresources)

Resources on measuring women’s empowerment

• *Empowerment: A journey not a destination* offers insights into the nature of women’s and girls’ empowerment, and an exploration of the (sometimes unexpected) factors and processes by which changes happen in girls’ and women’s lives, based on research and action conducted in partnership with women’s organizations and academic institutions from around the world. Focused on women but easily applicable to girls as well. Available at: http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Empowerment_Report.html

• *Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment.* This article explores why traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation so often fall short of measuring changes in women’s lives. It explores three dimensions that inform women’s decision-making and shape their choices—resources, agency, and achievements—examining what each concept means and how they interact with each other in practice. Available at: http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4085&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=gsdrc&utm_source=newsfeed

Cutting-edge thinking on evaluation, gender, and social change

• *Capturing Changes in Women’s Lives: A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches* provides an excellent introduction to the challenges of measuring social change when women’s and girls’ rights and empowerment area at stake. The second part is a helpful overview of several contemporary approaches to monitoring and evaluation (including the most significant change methodology, the theory of change approach, logframes, and outcome mapping), including the pros and cons of using them to measure changes in women’s lives. Available at http://www.awid.org/About-AWID/AWID-News/Capturing-Change-in-Women-s-Realities

• *Strengthening Monitoring And Evaluation For Women’s Rights: Twelve Insights for Donors* offers useful guidance for donors on how to support monitoring and evaluation processes that support, rather than constrict, processes of social change and women’s and girls’ empowerment. Available at

- *Limitations of the Machine Metaphor for Social Change* applies lessons from complexity science to explain why traditional approaches to research and evaluation often fail to meaningfully capture and convey processes of social change. Includes recommendations for evaluation and program design. Available at: http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=374

- Barbara Klugman's research and recommendations on evaluating social justice and advocacy—particularly on women's rights—is available at: http://barbaraklugmanevaluatingadvocacy.blogspot.com/