



# Ari Kopycinski, M.A.

## Associate Consultant, The Improve Group

Ari is inspired by the power of collective action and collaboration to stimulate change and address social issues. Ari brings expertise in applying human rights and social justice frameworks to qualitative research. Her background working directly with impacted communities on participatory research serves IG's vision to ensure mission-driven organizations effectively develop a more resilient, equitable, and thriving world. Outside of work, Ari enjoys traveling, crocheting, and petting local neighborhood cats.

### Expertise

#### **Participant-driven data collection and analysis**

Ari collaborates with interest-holders to co-design and implement data collection tools. Ari has a strong skillset in designing outreach for data collection, bringing a focus on how a potential data collection participant will experience our outreach. She has worked with participant advisers to strengthen our data collection tools, such as seeking feedback after interviews to improve the protocol and sharing draft tools with advisers for their feedback. Ari has sought feedback on protocols to make iterative improvements to data collection, as well as working with advisers to inform what to ask about and how in interview protocols. Using these tools and drawing on her academic and professional background, Ari analyzes data, synthesizes results, and makes informed recommendations based on client needs.

#### **Facilitation**

When designing and conducting facilitation, Ari prioritizes creating an environment in which participants feel comfortable sharing and collaborating. Whether virtually or in person, Ari builds rapport with participants to ensure facilitated gatherings feel conversational and engaging in order to promote participation. Ari has facilitated focus groups and community listening sessions across a variety of topics, from how people report potential child maltreatment to what type of needs exist among low-income pet owners.

#### **Gender justice issues**

Ari has a deep passion and developing expertise in issues related to gender justice. For instance, during her time working with Kansas-based Trust Women, Ari dialogued with community members on their attitudes about abortion, other women's health issues, and restrictive local and statewide abortion legislation. In her graduate studies, Ari collaborated with the Advocates for Human Rights to conduct research on local and international legal practices and social movements around domestic violence and sexual assault. At The Improve Group, Ari supported evaluation of Minnesota's Safe Harbor program for youth experiencing or at risk of sexual exploitation.

#### **Organizational development**

Ari is a champion for equity-focused approaches within The Improve Group. One area in which she has demonstrated leadership is developing a Tribal engagement guide. Following a project that offered many lessons, Ari supported internal reflection on practices that could foster respectful and appropriate engagement with Tribes. She supported a review of our typical project activities, facilitated discussions among Improve Group staff, and drafted and continues to promote the use of Tribal engagement best practices. In another example of Ari's work to ensure The Improve Group is an equitable organization, she served on an internal Compensation Task Force to review our compensation structure and ensure it is equitable and competitive.

## Professional Experience

**The Improve Group** | St. Paul, MN | Associate Consultant | 2024-present | Works collaboratively with project teams to gather and make meaning of information, navigate complexity, and ensure clients' investments of time and money lead to meaningful, sustained impact. Project experience includes:

Conducting an environmental scan of provider practices related to substance-exposed newborns, to inform Minnesota Department of Health strategies for improving care for Neonatal Abstinence and Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndromes.

Supporting Minnesota's Youth in Transition Database surveys with young people aging out of foster care, as well as a related evaluation of federally funded supports to this population. Ari had a lead role in designing and co-facilitating an all-day retreat with affected youth.

Supporting analysis of data from a statewide assessment to inform the Minnesota Department of Education's design of a Kindergarten Fall Assessment.

Contributing to a needs assessment of unhoused and low-income pet owners for the Animal Humane Society, including conducting qualitative interviews, qualitative analysis, and supporting facilitation for community listening sessions.

Serving as a team member for the Minnesota Homeownership Center and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity's Advancing Black Homeownership program. Ari developed evaluation design, conducted data collection through interviews with homeowners who participated in the program, and analyzed and reported findings.

Serving as a core team member for the evaluation of Minnesota Department of Health's Safe Harbor program, which supports organizations who work with youth who have experienced sexual exploitation or trafficking. Ari conducted interviews with youth who were supported by grantee organizations.

Supporting data collection and analysis for research and engagement on child maltreatment reporting systems for the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Ari interviewed child welfare staff in other states and administered surveys to mandated and voluntary reporters to understand the successes and challenges of the current child maltreatment reporting system in Minnesota.

**Research in Action** | Minneapolis, MN | Junior Research Associate & Project Manager | 2022-2024 | Managed multiple mixed-methods participatory action research projects co-designed with institutional stakeholders and community advisory councils to advance concrete policy and practice solutions.

**Future Services Institute, Humphrey School of Public Affairs** | Minneapolis, MN | Research Assistant | 2021-2022 | Led and contributed to multiple research projects on systems change, human services, tribal-state relations, and native North American language revitalization and sustainability.

**The Advocates for Human Rights** | Minneapolis, MN | Women's Human Rights Intern | 2021 | Conducted qualitative research on gender-based legal practices and analyzed data related to domestic violence and sexual assault judicial proceedings.

**The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society** | Wichita, KS | Outreach Account Lead | 2018-2020 | Recruited and trained fundraising directors on the implementation of fundraising programs across K-12 school districts.

**Kansas Appleseed Center for Law & Justice** | Wichita, KS | Lead Canvasser | 2018 | Oversaw canvassing team that surveyed 1,000+ participants on local food insecurity issues, food assistance programs, and statewide legislation regarding food deserts.

**Trust Women Foundation** | Wichita, KS | Lead Canvasser & Advocacy Assistant | 2017-2018 | Supervised canvassing team that surveyed 38,000+ participants on statewide reproductive health legislation and fundraising.

## Education

University of Minnesota, Humphrey School of Public Affairs | Master of Arts in Human Rights, International Development concentration

Wichita State University | Bachelor of Arts in Sociology (major), Political Science (minor), Gender Studies (minor), and Global Studies (certificate)

## Training

Technology of Participation® Facilitation Methods | Institute of Cultural Affairs in the U.S.A.

## Professional Affiliations

American Evaluation Association