Principles of small scale research

Applied research on the small scale with limited resources works well through a model of partnership with the service provider. How that partnership is worked out in practice leaves room for negotiation and for applying different models of collaboration and participation in the research. However certain key principles can be elucidated as guidelines for the process under the headlines:

- Partnering
- Researcher's role
- Research for development
- Research for use
- Ethics
- Scale
- Resources
- Rights to the report
- Experiential learning
- Students

Partnering
The research is based on collaboration between equals - researchers and organisation members. The relationship is one of mutual benefit. The research is conducted by negotiation, with respect being given to organisational goals and ethos and to the needs of the researchers and the researched.

Researcher's role
The researcher's role is largely that of an independent consultant, but with the flexibility to become participant when the study requires this. The role involves collaboration with stakeholders to ensure that their interests and priorities are covered within the study.

Research for development
Because of its limited scale, small scale research is less concerned with impact according to quantitative / monetary standards, and more concerned with service improvement through recommendations for manageable change.

Research for use
The research is designed to be used by an organisation to change its practice. It is not primarily evaluation for theory and it is not research which exploits an organisation for data collection for academic publication without benefit to the organisation.

Ethics
The research should involve ethical decision-making through all its stages, with due adherence to professional codes and guidelines, and sensitivity to the resolving of dilemmas.

Scale

The research is small-scale and conducted usually in one or two locations, often with a small team of researchers providing feedback on the experience of a program, from the viewpoint of stakeholders. Feasibility studies in local neighbourhoods can also be conducted to help with service development. The research will be conducted over the course of a few months, usually by part time researchers.

Resources
Monetary resources from organisations are likely to be limited to expenses (where students or volunteers are involved) along with the provision in kind of office space, computer access, photocopying or printing facilities, where these are available. The researchers provide research expertise and communication input.

Rights to the report
The details of rights to the report need to be covered in the negotiation, but broadly the organisation would normally receive the report with the right to disseminate it in full or part (with acknowledgement of authorship). researchers and student supervisors should retain publication rights, which may include a proviso for informed consent from the organisation.

Experiential learning
The research should be a learning experience for all partners, with researchers acknowledging the expertise and wisdom of organisational members, and organisational members respecting the competency and knowledge of the evaluators. The research should be part of a reflective process, with researchers conducting their work with self-awareness and through regular contact with the people sponsoring the study.

Students
Where the research is being conducted by students, it will be assessed through clear criteria which have been made available at the start of the project. Students will have a right to regular supervision from their University and to support from the organisation. Students will be acting as representatives of the University in the community, and will conduct themselves appropriately. Students also have the right to a safe environment.

(Adapted from Hall I and Hall D [2004] *Evaluation and Social Research*, Palgrave Macmillan)