



How Best to Engage Your --- **COMMUNITY**

When schools and districts examine pathways for school improvement, it is crucial for leaders to connect with their community, especially parts of their community that often are left out of the conversation. In fact, we must deliberately seek out the voices of the community and people may be most impacted, marginalized, and disadvantaged by the current school systems, structures, and strategies.

There are several ways in which you can engage stakeholders depending on your purpose and goals. Keep in mind that there is a time and place for each approach; it is important to first define your goal then design the approach that best suits your goal. Use the pointers under the 'Why' and 'When' columns for guidance on how to determine which approaches will be most effective for you.



SURVEYS

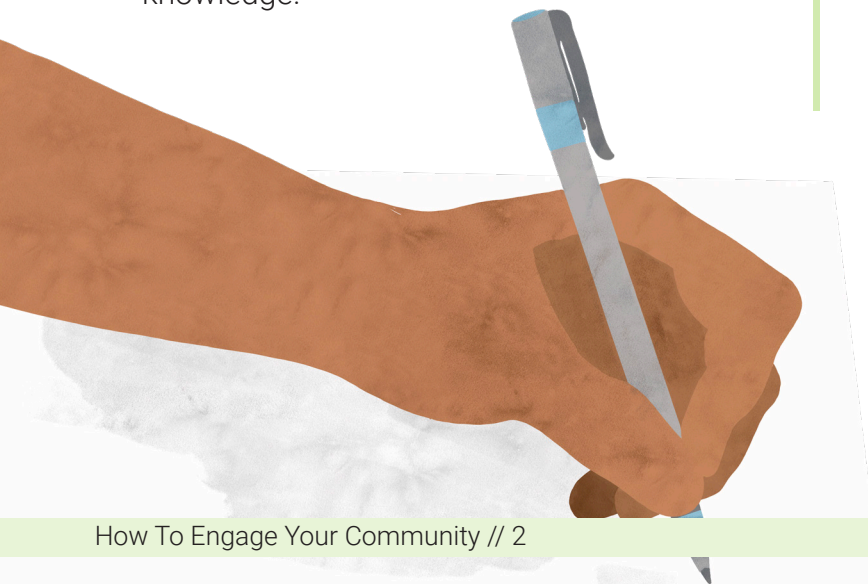
A series of questions sent to stakeholders to respond to specific questions.

Why Use It

- A lower barrier to engagement enables higher participation.
- Use surveys to identify high-level trends (that may be explored more deeply through other engagement means) and solicit a high volume of feedback on specific questions with categorized answers.
- This can be a comfortable avenue for students and families to share feedback and knowledge.

When To Use It

- Use a survey aligned to the school improvement guidance (including climate and instruction and family engagement) as a baseline.
- Repeat during the year and then use the same survey consistently over several years.



FOCUS GROUPS

A facilitated discussion among a small group selected based on cohort similarities, with specific questions designed to elicit a narrative response.



Why Use It

- This is a great opportunity to target questions based
- on stakeholder demographics and learn more about specific populations.
- The open-ended question format enables a depth of understanding of experiences and needs.

When To Use It

- Use focus groups when you want to dive deep into community experiences, uncover trends shared among
- stakeholder groups, and elicit narratives.
- Lead after surveys to gather more
- information on trends that emerged in survey data

TOWNHALLS

Also known as a forum, this is an open space where all community members are invited to share thoughts and feedback on topics of interest to them. It may also be used to discuss specific pending plans.



Why Use It

- The size can be flexible depending on your goals; it may be a chance to bring
- together a large group of stakeholders at once.
- There are multiple format options available including Q&A, specific question protocol/ feedback on a topic of interest, or an open mic inviting all feedback.

When To Use It

- Use town halls to create a space to engage more broadly with stakeholders and create an open opportunity for feedback.
- Use, ideally, when you can set expectations about the format- whether you'll be listening or in conversation with - so that you build trust.
- Keep in mind that non-English speakers, or communities and people who feel more vulnerable or less comfortable with public speaking may be disinclined to share their story and experiences.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

A 1:1 session in which an interviewer asks open-ended questions to dive into personal experiences and needs



Why Use It

- These are often helpful for underrepresented voices to feel comfortable speaking honestly.
- The personalized nature of these interviews provides even deeper personal anecdotes while allowing interviewers to uncover trends across several interviews.
- Scheduling is flexible and allows you to reach more stakeholders.

When To Use It

- Use in-depth interviews to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes,
- and feelings among your stakeholders or when you are dealing with a sensitive topic unsuitable for public discussion.
- Use before launching or designing a survey to provide perspectives and questions you may not have considered.

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

While very similar to in-depth interviews, a nuanced difference is that empathy interviews often focus on “user experience” to facilitate the design of specific experiences. topics of interest to them. It may also be used to discuss specific pending plans.



Why Use It

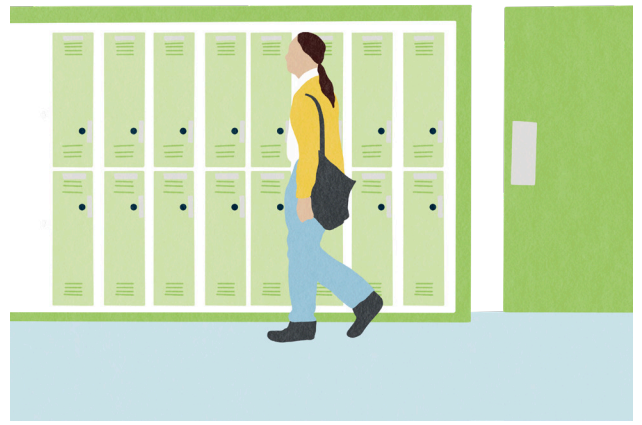
- Empathy interviews allow you to have an open discussion with a stakeholder to get feedback on ideas or solutions. This is a common approach in Design Thinking.
- Use empathy interviews when you want to target your feedback around specific experiences

When To Use It

- To get feedback on specific experiences and/or get feedback on ideas or solutions.
- These are terrific if you are interested in focusing on solutions to specific challenging
- – e.g. Improving arrival time, improving the engagement of specific subgroups, etc.

SHADOWING A STUDENT OR FAMILY

In this approach, you will spend a period of time with your stakeholders to gain an understanding of what their day-to-day life is like.



Why Use It

- Another way to think of this is “walking a mile in their shoes” to truly understand someone’s needs.
- Oftentimes there are challenges in a student or family’s day-to-day life that you can impact but they may be so commonplace that only an outside observer would notice.

When To Use It

- Use shadowing to get a personal perspective into someone’s
- experience, particularly with communities
- that you may not have typically engaged with.
- These can provide deep empathy for leaders and teachers who may be working on designing solutions for others.

COMMUNITY WALKS

An experience that allows you to observe various community settings (e.g., playground, neighborhood, other heavily trafficked areas)



Why Use It

- This is similar to shadowing except you are taking a broader look into a community
- It can be used in a variety of settings (e.g. neighborhood walks, classroom visits, lunchtime discussions).
- You can engage with stakeholders where they are rather than requiring them to show up to a specific place at a specific time to engage with you.

When To Use It

- Use community walks to get insight into the common experiences of stakeholders and their everyday lives.
- Use it as a way to provide context as you build your engagement plan, or following your surveys or interviews as a way to better understand context - that becomes more evident through observing interactions among people, space, and the environment.