Include

Equitable Inclusion Guide

Education Elements

INTRODUCTION

Why This? and Why Now?

WHY THIS?

At Education Elements, we define Education Equity as the recognition that the barriers that marginalized students face are due to deliberate actions and biases, and therefore require us to dedicate a greater amount of resources to remove them. In order to recognize what resources are needed to remove the barriers, we must deliberately seek out the voices of the community and people that the barriers are designed to exclude.

Education Elements works to dismantle systemic educational inequities using a three-part methodology:

CONNECT, INCLUDE, CREATE

In part one of our methodology guide, our team discussed the importance of how designers must take time to connect deeply to the challenge, prior to focusing on inclusion and creation efforts. By deeply connecting with the landscape of the systemic challenge, designers are now able to identify the marginalized stakeholder voices that are deeply impacted, often silenced, and frequently kept at bay. Having a deep understanding of the problem and landscape requires answering the following questions:

Find a detailed approach in our Equitable Engagement Connect Guide **here**.

1

Who is most impacted by the challenge?

2

How is the challenge presenting itself?

3

Why does this matter?

This guide focuses on the second component of that methodology:

Include

We present strategies a district/designer can use to explicitly include the voices of our stakeholders to reimagine solutions, with an emphasis on the voices most marginalized and least represented. We know that when districts examine and redesign inequitable systems, it is crucial to connect with their community, especially parts of their community that often are left out of the conversation.

WHY NOW?

We recognize that while many organizations aim to create inclusive opportunities for their stakeholders, often the outcomes of such inclusive initiatives may not meet the desired end-state. While this guide may not fully address all the reasons why inclusion efforts fail to achieve the desired outcomes, it serves to provide implementation strategies and best practices for teams and organizations to start making improvements in their overall inclusion efforts.

NAVIGATING THIS DOCUMENT

More specifically, this guide will prepare you and your team to mitigate barriers to bringing voices into the conversation, craft plans to create opportunities for authentic engagement, and incorporate inclusive practices to facilitate dialogue. This document is structured to answer questions like:

How might leaders and teams proactively design their inclusion process?

How might leaders spot and prevent detours to inclusivity?

What are barriers that may hinder the inclusion of diverse voices in the engagement process?

What are different engagement strategies to consider when creating inclusive spaces for identified marginalized voices?

AN INTRODUCTION

Phases of the Inclusion Process

In this guide, we will share potential barriers to inclusion in your stakeholder engagement process as well as a variety of data-backed engagement strategies.

Leaders designing inclusion efforts must recognize that equity-driven inclusion efforts will require rejection of broader inclusion strategies and intentionally create a focus on parameters that have shown to uniquely benefit specific marginalized groups most impacted by the challenge.

While efforts around stakeholder engagement during the Connect phase may gravitate towards broader strategies aimed at creating conditions to foster a diverse and inclusive climate, leading to integration of perspectives and deepening of relationships across lines of differences (Nishii, 2013), that is not the purpose of inclusion for equitable redesign.

As we discuss inclusive strategies for stakeholder engagement moving forward, we will often refer to this idea of “the room.” This proverbial room represents the space of decision making and engagement that happens within communities. In an effort to move beyond advocacy for a “seat at the table,” we will be thinking about not only “the table” and the identities of the guests seated there, but also the room in which the table sits as well as the experiences had by guests before they enter the room, while in the room, and after they depart.

Inclusive engagement has implications that reach beyond the diversity of decision-making committees or panels. It is also about the circumstances and contexts surrounding your engagement strategy and the barriers or detours that prevent diverse voices from ever entering the room, feeling isolated once in the room, or having negative experiences once they leave the room.

Based on this notion of “the room,” this guide is composed of four parts:

PRIOR TO ENTERING THE ROOM:
How might we proactively mitigate barriers that may silence marginalized voices prior to them even entering the (engagement) room?

ONCE IN THE ROOM:
How might we ensure that once the marginalized groups are in the room the conditions and climate create the psychological safety needed for voices to be heard? How might we spot the detours of equitable inclusion practices once everyone is in the room?

TYPE OF ROOM:
How might we select the correct engagement strategies and environment to meet the desired outcomes of the inclusion efforts?

DESIGNING THE ROOM:
How might we design, administer, and review data from an inclusive experience to inform next steps?

SECTION 1

Prior to Entering the Room

Barriers Preventing Inclusive Voices

Barriers that may hinder diverse voices from being *INCLUDED* and entering the room for dialogue:

BARRIER	KEY QUESTIONS	GUIDANCE
1 *Fragility of an Invitation*	Do you only invite underrepresented groups to the table for major decisions once? If they are unavailable or unresponsive the first time, is that the only time they will be able to contribute?	• Inclusive decision-making looks like multiple opportunities to engage, add perspective, and support the work. • Rejection of an invitation by underrepresented voices does not equate to not being impactful, not caring about the challenge, or not wanting to be heard. It can be a sign of distrust, frustration, and lack of psychological safety to engage. Keep inviting their voices to be heard and offer variety in how their voices can be heard.
2 *Intent*	Do you truly intend to cede or share power with those invited to the table? Do you plan to step back and make room for diverse voices to shape the direction in which you are going?	• Inclusive decision-making is not just about the presence of diverse voices, but also about allowing these diverse voices to inform, influence, and shape the future – sharing authority and decision-making power. • Marginalized voices are less likely to engage if they view the intent as an effort to affirm a pre-designed solution, perception of the dominant point of view, or simply a checkbox attempt for diversity.
3 *Duration of Efforts*	Are you planning to just make one finite attempt to address inequity in your community? Do you look at inequity as something that can be remedied through a single approach, like one-off training?	• Consistency communicates commitment. A consistent effort or plan to address inequity in your community lets those on the margin know that you are committed to truly shifting systems and culture. • If engagement and inclusion is a single pitstop in the process of addressing inequity, those most impacted by the system will view it as performative inclusion. • Tokenism does not simply apply to the presence of token individuals but also "acts," such as doing an training once for implicit bias with no clear follow ups. • Inclusive decision-making is not just about including multiple voices; it is also about inclusive strategies for how you incorporate diverse voices.
4 *Non-inclusive Strategies*	Do you place an undue burden on those on the margins to generate all your ideas and address all your equity challenges? Do you limit their influence and input to only address the areas you are most comfortable with? Or limit them to the areas that you deemed most appropriate for them to speak to?	• It should not be the goal of inclusion to place the need to generate ideas and solutions on those most impacted. Invite their voices to share their experience, their needs, their perspectives, and, if desired, their solution(s). Do not make providing solutions and ideas a necessity in having their voices included. • Do not attempt to restrict what experiences and needs they may speak to. Recognize that inequity is a complex web as a result of compounding generational and situational forms of oppression. True inclusion creates safety for comprehensive reflection and sharing. Inequity does not fit in a box, and the lived experience of those marginalized cannot be expressed in a perfect box.

SECTION 2

Once In the Room

Detours From Hearing Marginalized Voices

Based on Joan Olsson's work around detour-spotting, our team believes it is also important to spot the detours of equitable inclusion. In order to truly lead for inclusion of underrepresented voices, one must become aware of one's individual habits, attitudes, and behaviors, which divert from inclusive practices. As designers and leaders, your current behaviors are simply a reflection of your current internalized identity.

In order to address systemic inequities of exclusion, you must begin to recognize the invisible and subconscious behaviors that are preventing you from believing new things about yourself and what inclusion looks like.

You must build new identity-based habits in order to truly address inequities in inclusion. Those habits can be built by your attempting to actively recognize the barriers of inclusion when marginalized voices are in the room.

Once the voices are in the room and at the table, it is important that the experience is truly inclusive.

That means ensuring the decision-making process and communication does not leave little-to-no room for nuanced and inclusive approaches. Detours to inclusive approaches include:

DETOUR #1:

Rejecting Both/And

Do you have people in the room focusing and limiting their thinking of things and experiences in terms of an either/or mentality or rejecting the notion of both/and? These voices may be asking and answering questions to prove how there is only room for a singular experience or solution. When people are rejecting the notion of both/and, the changes conversations on determining whose truth to accept and validate. This may also manifest itself in the form of binary thinking or shape how solutions are generated. People may uphold the following:

- There can only be one truth and it is my truth – “I have not experienced this, so I don’t think it is the case here.”
- Only acknowledging one particular method as valid – “Do we have a policy/standard protocol for this?“
- Refusing to challenge historical context – “This is what we’ve always done.”

DETOUR #2:

Statements Upholding the Myth of Meritocracy

Do you have someone who is often invited into the room, has a seat at the table, and represents an underrepresented group - but you treat them like they are the exception? They are uniquely different from their race, group, or demographic based on assumptions you have made about said group? Do you undermine their contributions through comments about their exceptionalism relative to their community? These kinds of behaviors can foster resentment, insecurity, exclusivity, and a host of other sentiments that prevent underrespresented voices from feeling empowered.

- “We are hoping we can lean on you to provide perspective around these challenges.” (the only person(s) in the room that may represent a specific underrepresented community being impacted the most)
- “We trust you – you are not like others (insert identity/marginalized group here).”

DETOUR #3:

A Few Dominating Voices

Do you have someone who is consistently the loudest voice in the room? They may be the first to speak and last to listen. They often hold such strong opinions that it leaves little room for dissenting voices. How can you shift the dynamic to make room for multiple voices to be amplified?

DETOUR #4:

Speaking on Behalf

This refers to speakers in the room that may be repeating ideas and suggestions made by others as if they are their own ideas. They may even explain the nature of racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression instead of ceding the floor to allow others to speak for themselves. If you are inviting underrepresented voices into the room, do they have to compete with others for room to speak or contribute? To spot this detour, you may hear comments starting with, “I’ve heard from _____ they feel….”

As you're discussing challenges in the community or culture, do you focus solely on your intent as a leader or the intent of the person who may have caused harm? Do you not acknowledge the impact of that harm? If you solely look at intent or use intent as a way to minimize impact, you are creating another barrier to including diverse voices and acknowledging their experiences.

DETOUR #5:

Speaking to Achknowledge Intent

- "But you know that is not what they meant."
- "We know that (insert person) really cares about the kids."
- "They are a good person and would never intentionally do anything to hurt (insert community)."

DETOUR #6:

Inclusion Feedback Fatigue

You'll also want to be on the lookout for inclusion feedback fatigue. If you're constantly calling on the same people to help make your culture, leadership, and policies more equitable and inclusive, there is a possibility that they may be exhausted or burned out by the demand placed on them.

- The same participants are there for every inclusive opportunity for dialogue
- "We should ask (insert parent) since they are always willing to come to school."
- "We should ask (insert person)." (the only person of the particular community that would engage in dialogue)

SECTION 3

Types of Rooms

Strategies of Engagement

This section explores 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 to use it' column to understand how to consider which approach will be most effective.

TYPE OF ROOM	WHAT IT IS	WHY AND WHEN TO USE IT
Focus Groups	A facilitated discussion among a small group selected based on cohort similarities, with specific questions designed to elicit a narrative response.	• 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 into experiences and needs. • Use focus groups when you want to dive deep into community experiences, uncover trends shared among stakeholder groups, and elicit narratives.
Town Halls	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.	• 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. • Use town halls to create a space to engage more broadly with stakeholders and create an open opportunity for feedback.
In-Depth Interview	A 1:1 session in which an interviewer asks open-ended questions to dive into personal experiences and needs.	• This is often helpful for underrepresented voices to feel comfortable speaking honestly. • The personalized nature provides even deeper personal anecdotes while allowing interviewers to uncover trends across several interviews. • Scheduling is flexible and allows you to reach more stakeholders. • Use IDIs to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings among your stakeholders or when you are dealing with a sensitive topic unsuitable for public discussion.
Empathy Interview	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.	• 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.

TYPE OF ROOM	WHAT IT IS	WHY AND WHEN TO USE IT
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.	• 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. • Use shadowing to get a personal perspective into someone’s experience, particularly with communities that you may not have typically engaged with.
Community Walks	Using a set of questions or prompts for things to look out for, go into various community settings to see firsthand stakeholder experiences and put yourself in their shoes.	• 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. • Use community walks to get insight into the common experiences of stakeholders and their everyday lives.
Targeted Survey	A form sent to specific stakeholders to respond to specific questions, usually in a digital or paper format.	• This is often a more comfortable avenue for people to share feedback. • There is a lower barrier to engagement which 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.
Bulletin Board	Collaborative online space for stakeholders to log in, share feedback, and respond to updated questions.	• This is convenient for stakeholders to log in when/where they can. • It is a safe space for quiet voices to share feedback and narrative responses. • You can create boards for different groups or communities to get targeted feedback. • Use bulletin boards to uncover trends in feedback and community needs in a format with a low barrier for participation.

SECTION 4

Designing the Room

By Identifying Your Inclusive Approaches

Now that you have a sense of the many ways in which you can engage stakeholders, we are going to help you understand how to make it happen. This section explores how to design your approach, tips for administering, and how to collect and analyze feedback so that you are leveraging your community insights to truly understand needs. While we will not go into depth with each of these approaches (each approach could stand alone as an extended guide!), we aim to provide you with enough information to get started in the right direction.

DESIGNING A

Focus Group

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

Focus groups require thoughtful planning to organize and execute successfully. Prior to designing your focus group, you will have already identified the insight you are seeking and the stakeholders you are aiming to engage. Use this information to design your focus group guide, which is the set of questions you will be asking across groups.

Questions should be open-ended in format, meaning they will elicit a narrative response rather than a short answer. This is a key factor in designing focus group questions: they should encourage participants to share experiences and insights openly. It is also disruptive to the conversation flow and group engagement to include short answer questions, however, you should give participants the space to introduce themselves at the outset with a short-response question. Your primary open-ended questions should be no more than 8 to 10 depending on the length of your session. However, you will also want to include potential probes. These are follow up questions that you may want to ask if there is a specific topic you want to dive deeper into. You will also want to close with an exit question, which is a way to check to see both what is most important to participants and if there is anything they feel was missed in the discussion.

Include talking points at the beginning and end of your guide to help frame the discussion.

The beginning should remind participants of why they are there, the value of their feedback, and how the feedback will be used. Your guide should also include a section at the beginning to set the norms and expectations. For example, participants should know whether they will be anonymous (this often helps people share more openly), they should be encouraged to share speaking time with other participants, and they should be asked to keep the responses of other participants private. Determine what the norms are that will be consistent across all participants. And lastly, at the end of your guide, you should include a closing statement which includes a thank you, a reminder of how the information will be used, and any next steps.

Remember that you want to create a space that encourages all participants to share their experiences openly and honestly without fear of judgement.

FORMATTING GROUPS

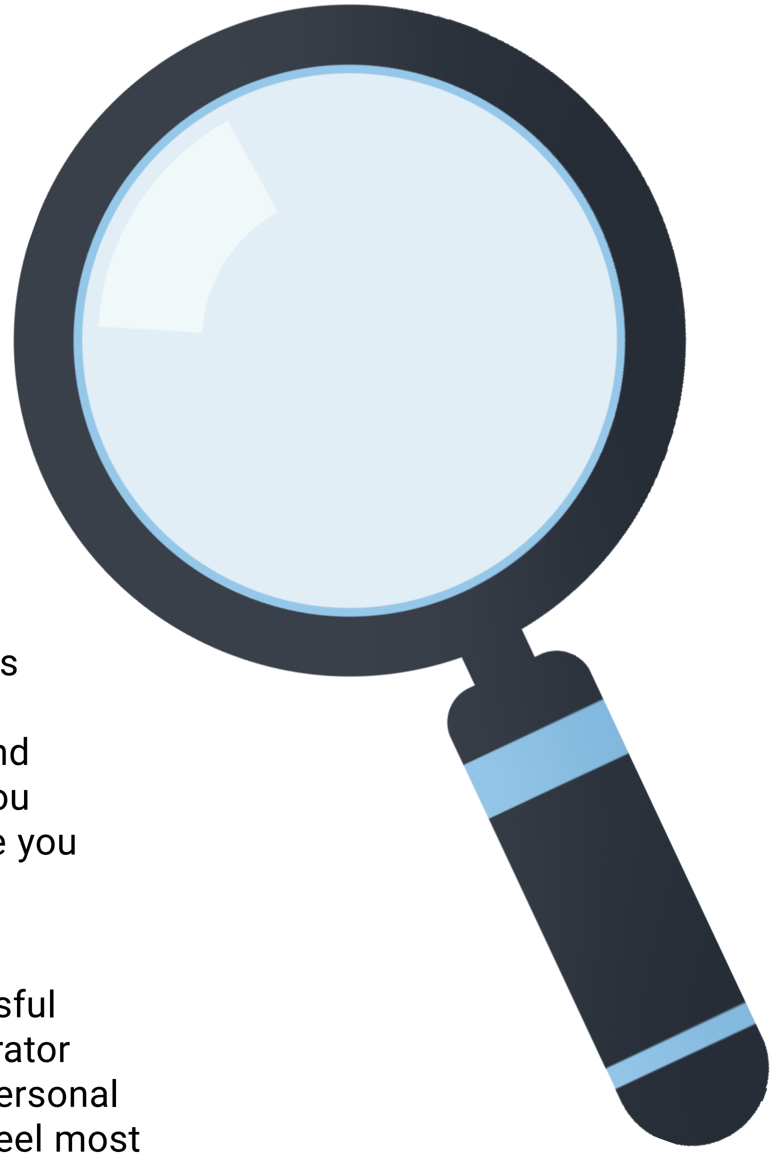
It is often helpful to design groups around a shared experience or identity. Groups can range in size from 5 to 10, but 6 to 8 is usually the sweet spot to allow all people space to share. The length may range from 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of questions.

WHAT QUESTIONS

Your focus group questions will tie back to your primary question but there are some guidelines to keep in mind to help you design effective questions.

- Use clear and unambiguous phrasing
- Ask one question at a time. For example, a question like 'What is your commute to school like and what do you do when you arrive?' should be avoided.
- If you are covering difficult topics, begin with more approachable questions.
- Be mindful of your phrasing to encourage better depth of responses (e.g. 'do you' or 'have you' suggest a one-word response).
- Participants should only be asked about their personal experiences and observations, not the community at large or assumptions of experiences others are having.
- While questions should be open-ended, it should also be clear what information you are requesting. For example, if you ask 'What are your biggest frustrations with this school?' there is very little guidance and you may struggle to uncover trends. Instead, think about the specific areas you want to focus on. Are you curious about transportation challenges? At-home learning experience? Parent-administrator interactions? Sense of belonging? What is the heart of the challenge you are trying to understand?

ADMINISTERING



Logistics

When scheduling focus groups, be mindful of the availability of your participants. It may be helpful to offer sessions at multiple times to increase engagement opportunities. Invite participants to sign up at least a week in advance. Send a confirmation email once group participants are finalized and a reminder email within 48 hours of the session. You will want to hold multiple sessions with the same stakeholder groups so that you are able to uncover trends across groups. Holding multiple sessions is also a great way to test out your guide. You may find after an initial session that there are edits you can make to increase engagement or ensure you are gathering useful information.

Moderating

A skillful moderator is essential to a successful focus group. We recommend that the moderator is not an administrator or someone with a personal stake in the feedback. Participants tend to feel most comfortable when a third party is the moderator and will provide unfiltered feedback. In addition, we recommend that you also have a third party notetaker who is not the moderator. Having a notetaker will allow the moderator to stay engaged in the discussion while the notetaker can capture important information, especially nonverbal cues. You may also choose to record and/or transcribe the session. If you do so, it is important to get informed consent from participants.

Some tips for moderation include:

- Listen actively and follow up on interesting topics with probing questions. You do not necessarily need to go in the order of your guide if the conversation flows naturally toward other questions but you should keep topics consistent across groups.
- Keep participants on topic by finding spots to interject when they have strayed.
- Invite all voices to the table. Actively intervene if someone is not sharing the table and invite specific people into the conversation who are quiet.

- Remain unbiased. Although you may want to react and empathize, this can lead to biased responses whereas participants are seeking positive reinforcement or reactions. Instead, acknowledge that their feedback is very helpful.
- If possible, the moderator should be able to relate to the demographics of the group.
- A focus group is not a Q&A; make it clear that you are there to hear their feedback, not to respond nor make suggestions. You may invite them to follow up after the session if there are questions you can answer.

DIVING INTO DATA

Collectong Data

The notes and/or transcripts that you collect during a focus group is your qualitative data. It is important that information is collected using best practices. When notetaking, keep in mind that you should not attempt to interpret participant statements. You may find that you are unable to capture verbatim phrasing and may need to summarize information; do so objectively. It is also helpful to capture who has said what as that can help with your analysis. For example, you may want to identify trends specific to parents of children and a certain grade. Denoting the speaker allows you to complete this analysis. If possible it is a best practice to have your focus groups transcribed to ensure you have accurately understood participant experiences. As noted previously, there may be important nonverbal cues. You may note gestures of agreement or reactions to certain ideas. This data should not be missed and helps inform trends.

Analyzing the Data

Analyzing qualitative data can be a tedious process, but it is important to do this accurately. Even experienced moderators often miss important information, notice things that personally piqued their interest but may not have been a trend, or misunderstand an experience that was shared. For this reason, among others, we suggest coding your data. There are many approaches to coding qualitative data and software available to help you do so. We will briefly describe one process. Keep in mind that it takes time and experience to learn to code qualitative data effectively.

In the approach we will describe, you will use a spreadsheet with a column for coding (or categorizing), a column for participant ID (again, anonymous if possible), and a column for responses. You will enter each comment into a different line.

> ***One of the biggest mistakes we see in focus group analysis is when moderators or notetakers assume that they were able to determine trends simply from hearing what the participants said.***

It is often helpful to do a full read of the transcript at this point to familiarize yourself with the content. Next, you will use the coding column to categorize the response. Your goal is to identify common 'buckets' or themes that you are finding. At this point, you are not interpreting the information; rather you are categorizing information. For example, a focus group about parent experiences dropping students off at school might have buckets such as 'traffic flow,' 'timing,' or 'signage.' You may have to go through your sheet more than once to complete categorization. It is common to adjust your codes after your initial round. You may also choose to have another person review for any key categories you may have missed.

Once all comments have been assigned a code, you can sort your excel sheet to group by code. You can then add a sub-category that adds a layer of analysis. Using the example above, sub-categories for 'traffic flow' might be things such as 'frustrations with cutting' or 'efficient process.' You can again sort your sheet so that information is not grouped by both code and sub-category. At this point, the hard work is done; you've identified your trends or themes. At this point, your data can be translated into whatever format you want to use for the presentation. If you are creating a writeup, you may write a short summary of the finding for each sub-category and include exemplifying quotes. Using the aforementioned example, you might write something like: 'Parents were predominantly concerned about the backups caused by parents who disregard the traffic flow and cut in line' followed by quotes that highlight this concern. Note that this process can be leveraged to analyze trends to specific groups. For example, you may group parents of students in a certain grade into an excel tab to conduct a targeted analysis.

DESIGNING A

Town Hall

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

Town Halls are typically large gatherings of community members with administrators and staff. As mentioned above, there are multiple format options when designing a town hall. You may have multiple segments of your town hall to leverage various strategies.

- Often longer than other types of engagement, e.g. 2 hours
- Set ground rules to ensure a productive discussion
- Districts often have ongoing town hall engagement opportunities

WHAT FORMAT

Open Mic

This is a common approach for town halls where community members are able to share their thoughts on any topic of interest to them. You may have a designated ‘open comment’ period combined with another format. Typically in this approach, the moderators are not responding to specific questions and are rather taking note of comments that are shared.

Q&A

During a Q&A, attendees are invited to ask questions of the administrators and staff and request specific insight or follow up.

Feedback

This is an opportunity to solicit feedback on specific topics from the community. You may have an idea that has been put before the public that you’d like to hear thoughts on. In this case, it is helpful for the community to be aware of the proposal in advance so that they can prepare feedback to share.

ADMINISTERING

Logistics

Town halls are usually open to a larger group. However, you may choose parameters for attendance such as requiring registration and setting a cap at a certain number or creating town halls for specific stakeholder groups. As with any engagement format, it is helpful to share the time and place well in advance, find a time convenient for stakeholders, and consider accessibility when choosing a place. While town halls are typically held at a consistent time, often repeated on a regular basis, it can be helpful to offer alternate times periodically. There may be parents who work a night shift, who have a long commute, or other logistical challenges that may be remedied with alternate times.

Moderating

As with any engagement with a number of stakeholders present, setting ground rules will be helpful to support a welcoming space for all attendees. Sample ground rules might include limiting comments to a certain length of time, staying on topic, or respecting the opinions of all who share their voice. Because of the large number of people attending town halls, it is helpful to have a moderator present who is skilled at keeping the conversation productive and on topic.

In-Person vs. Virtual

With a virtual town hall, you will want to communicate the platform and login process in advance. Because people are not in the same physical space, you will want to add some logistical considerations. While community members may line up at a mic for an in-person meeting, you will likely want to have community members sign up in advance and call on specific people to speak at designated times. You will also want to set additional ground rules for a virtual setting, such as staying muted until it is your turn to speak.

The nature of a town hall is typically not research based, however, you can still leverage qualitative research approaches to understand trends.

DIVING INTO DATA

Collecting Data

Data for a town hall can come in the form of notes or transcripts from public comments. For this reason, you will want to have a diligent notetaker present who is able to accurately capture the feedback that is shared.

Analyzing the Data

You can follow the approach noted in the focus group section above. Another tactic that you may try given the lower volume of data to analyze in a town hall compared to multiple focus groups is affinity grouping. In this approach, you will write comments on a sticky note and group comments together based on similar ideas until you have identified groupings of similar trends. This approach is often best done as a group so that you can brainstorm groupings. This will give you a visual representation of common concerns or ideas and is a more interactive way to approach understanding insights.

DESIGNING AN

In-Depth Interview

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

An in-depth interview is an approach that allows you to have individual conversations with stakeholders to understand their personal experiences and insights. This is often helpful for sensitive topics or for stakeholders who have typically not felt comfortable engaging in a group setting.

Many of the design strategies are similar to focus groups. Coming into the design of the guide, you will have identified the stakeholders you need to interview and the information you are hoping to gather. Your questions should be open-ended with possible probing questions listed. Similar to a focus group guide, you will want to have opening talking points to state the purpose and process as well as closing talking points. You may have more questions for an IDI guide, up to about 15 for an hour-long session.

WHAT QUESTIONS

- Because this is 1:1, you can take time to build rapport and help the interviewee feel more comfortable at the outset.
- Follow the same questioning tips for focus groups such as clear phrasing, one question at a time, and personal experiences.
- Use the guide as such; to guide your questions. You will want to listen actively to ask follow up questions of your interviewee.

ADMINISTERING

Logistics

Because you are conducting interviews on a personal basis, you may find that you have more flexibility in scheduling. However, you will still want to begin by offering multiple times to interviewees to help them find a convenient time. With IDIs you are often able to reach data saturation at 10 to 15 interviews due to the depth afforded. Data saturation refers to the point in which you are identifying the same themes consistently enough to pull it out as a trend. Interviews can be conducted in-person, over the phone, or in a video call.

Moderating

We recommend that you follow all applicable tips for moderation as described in the section on focus groups. The biggest factor in successful moderation is to be an active listener while remaining impartial to interviewee responses. You will want to be prepared to follow up with probing questions to dig deeper into certain responses and ready to shift question sequences depending on the flow of the conversation.

In-Person vs. Virtual

An IDI is most commonly administered in a virtual environment. You may choose to give interviewees a choice to participate over the phone or through a video call depending on what feels most comfortable for them. Successful interviews are commonly conducted in either format. If you choose to offer in-person interviews, keep in mind common considerations such as accessibility and ease of locating the interview location.

DIVING INTO DATA

Collectong Data

IDIs are commonly recorded and transcribed so that you do not need to focus on diligent notetaking while engaging in the interview. However, it is often more manageable to serve as both the interviewer and notetaker for IDIs as compared to focus groups since you are speaking with just one person. If you are the note taker, be sure to capture information objectively.

Analying Data

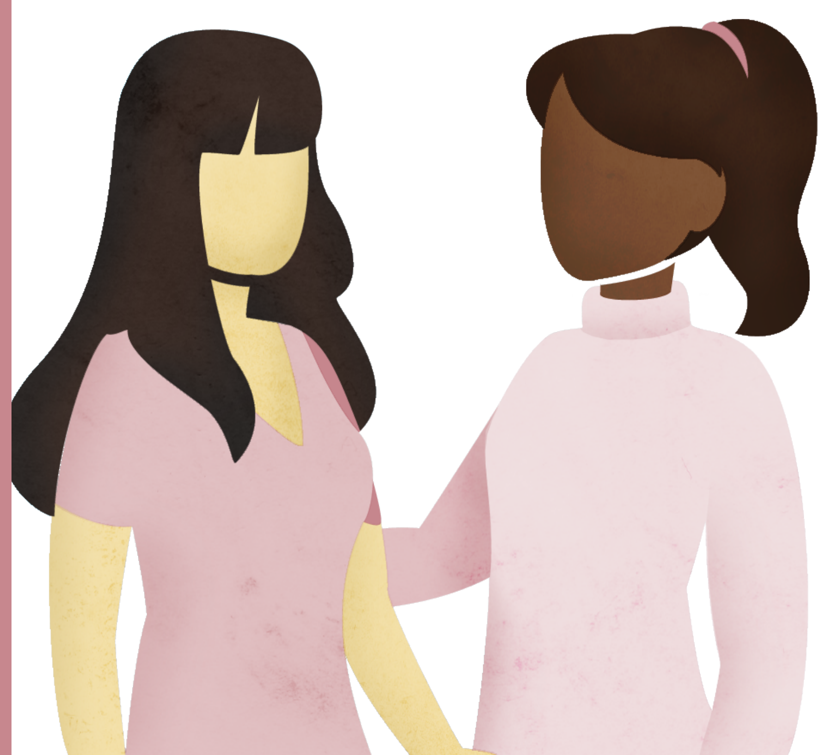
IDI analysis can be time-consuming because you are analyzing transcripts or notes for 10 to 15 hours of conversation. However, the rich data and depth of insight can make it worth all the effort! You will want to analyze using the same approach described in the focus group section or a similar qualitative coding technique.

A NOTE ON

Empathy Interviews

Empathy interviews will follow an approach very similar to IDIs with a few key distinctions. First, you may choose to get feedback on a specific experience or idea. In this setting, you would share with your interviewee the focus of the feedback, giving them time to process. You would then ask specific questions about their experience.

For example, an empathy interview with a student about a specific edtech platform might have questions about their user experience, ease of access, understanding of the materials, and enjoyment in using the tool. At Education Elements, we commonly use this approach to understand student experiences with personalized learning in classrooms or teacher feedback implementing the approach.



SHADOWING A

Student or Family

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

Shadowing a student or family is a great way to see the world through their eyes and empathize with their needs. You may be able to discover the experiences of students or families that you otherwise were unaware of. It is a good practice to begin with a pre-conference and end with a post-conference. During the pre-conference, you may take time to build rapport to get to know who you are shadowing. During the post-conference, you may ask questions about the things you observed.

You will want to decide in advance the best approach for your observation depending on your objectives. Your options are to observe without asking questions and noting any questions you have for the post-conference or to find non-disruptive moments to ask follow up questions.

WHAT QUESTIONS

Example of questions to help you think about the student experience might include:

- Who are the primary staff that this student interacts with? What is their relationship with them?
- Who else do they most frequently interact with?
- What seems to be the highlights and lowlights of their day?
- What frustrations have you observed?

During the post-conference, you can use this time to ask both clarifying questions and debrief questions. You may have noted specific things you want to follow up on, such as questions about interactions or your perceptions of their experience. In the debrief, you can also ask questions to better understand the overall experience, such as: How typical of a day was this for you? What do you do next in your day? What is something I didn't observe that you'd like to share with me?

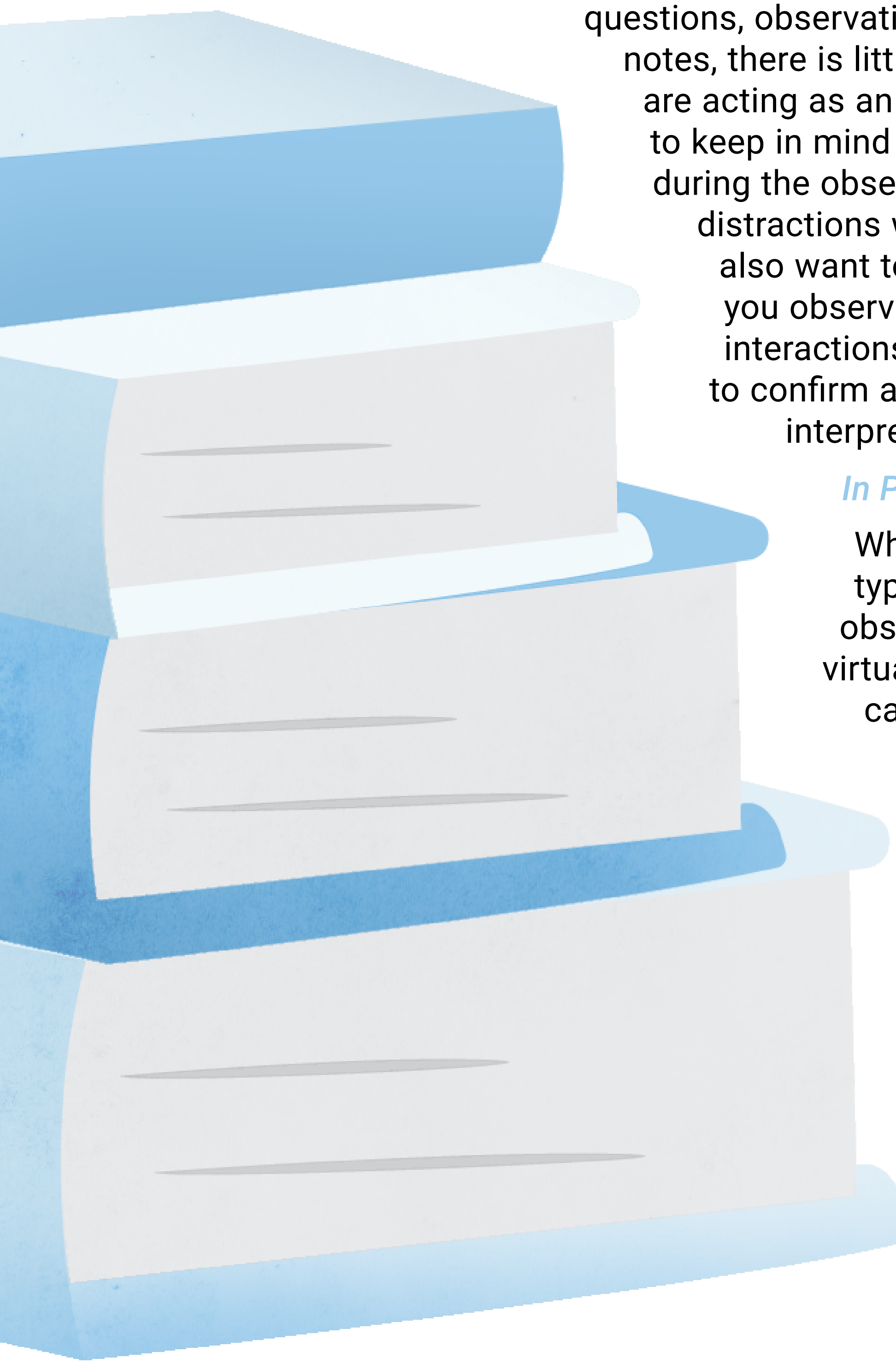
ADMINISTERING

Logistics

With this approach to insight, you are spending an extended amount of time with an individual or family. It is important to be mindful of their personal needs when arranging logistics. To identify a focus for shadowing you may ask a teacher for a recommendation or you may already have someone in mind. Communicate well in advance what you would like to observe, your objectives, how the information will be used, and answer any questions or concerns.

During the shadowing experience, you will want to have guiding questions to help you think about the things you are observing.

If you are observing a parent, you will want to speak with them for consent as well. Make it very clear that this is an entirely optional experience. Be flexible with the timing. They may have specific days or times that they would prefer you observe and it is important to be respectful of these preferences. However, if possible it is helpful to arrange to shadow around a similar time with a group of other administrators so that you can have a collective debrief to enhance your understanding of their experience.



Moderating

Aside from a field guide with your pre/post conference questions, observation guiding questions, and field notes, there is little moderation required as you are acting as an objective observer. One thing to keep in mind is that you want to be present during the observation and avoid outside distractions whenever possible. You will also want to observe and note things that you observe (e.g. statements, reactions, interactions) and use the post-conference to confirm any meaning you may have interpreted so as to remain unbiased.

In Person vs. Virtual

While the default approach is typically in person, you can observe a student who learns in a virtual environment as well. In this case, you would confirm their schedule so you are aware of when they are in video calls. You can also put yourself in their shoes by working on the same subjects and tools that they are using for a given period. In virtual environments, this can actually be a great way to empathize with the student experience to understand challenges they may be experiencing or opportunities to improve weekly schedules.

DIVING INTO DATA

Collecting Data

Your means of collecting data will be your field notes. You should take notes during your shadowing so that observations are fresh in your mind. Many observers will bring a clipboard, pen, and notepaper or you may choose to take notes on a digital device. Your notes may be open-ended, or you may have specific questions about different parts of the day that you are answering.

Analyzing the Data

Your analysis will focus on reviewing the observations to observe key findings. If you were able to work with a group or conduct multiple observations, you can use a debriefing protocol to identify the shared experiences of your observed stakeholders. Your trends may include what you learned about the stakeholder group, positive experiences in their day, challenges to address, and ideas for improvement of their experience.

DESIGNING A

Community Walk

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

This approach is very similar to shadowing, however, you are instead observing various community settings while making your fieldnotes. This can be done in a number of settings such as observing schoolyard interactions, spending time in a neighborhood and exploring heavily trafficked areas, or attending community events (as invited).

WHAT QUESTIONS

You may engage community members you encounter in discussions to better understand their experiences or your observations. Questions should be specific to the environment you are in. Be mindful of requesting permission to ask someone a question and document their response. You will also want to communicate the purpose of your inquiry.

ADMINISTERING

Logistics

Try to choose a date and time that is relevant to your key question. For example, if you are curious about what families do after their children come home from school, then of course of school will be the best time to gain insight. You will also want to be respectful of community spaces and only go where you are invited. You may choose to have a community liaison to guide you or help arrange your visit.

In-Person vs. Virtual

If a virtual community walk is required, although not ideal, the best approach is to identify virtual community events that you can join and seek approval to attend from the organizer. Otherwise, this is best done in person whenever possible.

DIVING INTO DATA

Your approach to collecting and analyzing data will be similar to that of the shadowing experience whereas your field notes and debrief serve as your data.

DESIGNING A

Targeted Survey

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

Surveys are a helpful tool to gather data from a large number of respondents. However, an effective survey necessitates a thoughtful design. Beginning with your objective, you will want to identify the data points that will help you reach your goal. Your survey should also state the goal for respondents. Surveys are best utilized for closed-ended questions with specific choices (e.g. multiple choice or checkbox). You may have a few text response questions, but if you find that most of your questions are better suited for text response then you may consider shifting to an interview approach.

WHAT QUESTIONS

Keep in mind that surveys should be succinct and the time expectation should be communicated. Some helpful tips for questions include:

- Ask only questions that your target audience can answer. You may need multiple surveys for different audiences or you can use a survey tool with skip logic to ensure respondents only see relevant questions.
- Questions should not be leading or influence the response.
- Ask one question at a time to ensure you know exactly what your respondent is communicating (i.e. no double-barreled questions).
- Keep choices balances; any scale you choose should have equal and opposite choices on both sides of the neutral response.
- Test your survey before sending it out.

ADMINISTERING

Logistics

Surveys should be kept open for a reasonable amount of time to give people time to respond. When you send out the survey, communicate the deadline. Ensure that the survey is easily accessible in multiple formats. Include contact information for questions.

DIVING INTO DATA

Collecting Data

While you will be hands-off for the data collection process, you can proactively keep track of respondent demographics to ensure you are getting data representative of your district.

Analyzing the Data

Survey analysis can take many shapes depending on the questions that were asked. You may have numerical analysis, trends in rankings, short text to code, and scales to analyze among other data points. One of the helpful things about most modern survey tools is that they have built-in analytic tools and data dashboards that make the analysis easier.

DESIGNING A

Bulletin Board

DESIGNING THE APPROACH

Online bulletin boards come out of the market research world. In this approach, you have a central digital space where invited participants can respond to posted questions. There are many tools you can use, including tools specifically designed for this approach or adaptable tools like online documents or Padlet. Like other engagement strategies, it can be helpful to group participants by similar characteristics.

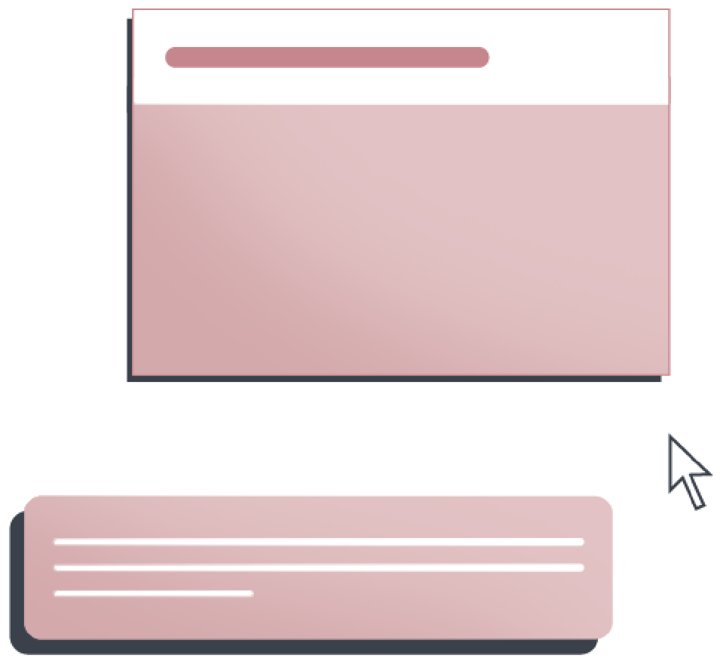
WHAT QUESTIONS

There is a lot of flexibility with the types of questions asked on a bulletin board, but typically you will want to strike a balance with open-ended and specific questions. Participants may get fatigued if they are expected to consistently share long narratives, so you may occasionally use short answer questions to keep them engaged.

ADMINISTERING

Logistics

Bulletin boards are typically used for a select group (chosen based on cohort characteristics that are important to your research question) for a designated period of time. A group size of 15 to 30 can allow for a diversity of opinions, dynamic discussion, and breadth of insight. Your questions should require no more than about 10 minutes of engagement at a time, usually over a period of about a week



Moderating

As a moderator, you are responsible for posting questions, notifying participants, and asking follow up questions when applicable. You should be actively involved in monitoring the board for the duration of the participation window.

DIVING INTO DATA

Collecting Data

The data collected will be in a text format in the online bulletin board. Typically you are not collecting data outside of that space when leveraging this approach.

Analyzing the Data

This is another approach that can leverage analysis similar to focus group data analysis. Once the participation window closes, you will want to go through a multi-step text coding approach to pull out overarching themes, sub-categories, and text to exemplify the themes.

Further Considerations

Communication

Ensuring that your outreach language and strategy are mindful of your community's needs and research goals is essential to the success of any engagement strategy. In particular, you will want to consider appropriate timing, how to communicate your purpose, the aright people to engage, and the right places to advertise. If you are finding that you have low participation, it may be due to one of these considerations not being met. If the problem persists, we encourage you to revisit our Connect Guide to understand why some groups may not be engaged and how you can encourage bringing their voices to the table.

Identifying Problems to Solve For

You may find that there are many problems that come to light and feel frustrated with deciding where to start. Your data analysis should help you see what concerns were most commonly shared, however that may not necessarily be the best place to start. Ideally in your research, you will include questions that ask stakeholders to prioritize the issue that is most important to them. This is one way to guide your decision. You may also see that there are some quick wins. This can be one way of demonstrating to stakeholders that their input was taken seriously and acted upon.

Identifying Potential Members of Your Co-design Team

In our next guide, we will talk about ways to co-design solutions. Throughout your stakeholder engagement process, you should be on the lookout for people who would be helpful additions to the co-design team. People who are engaged, constructive in their feedback, representative of the community, and solution-oriented are great to have on your co-design team.

Common Questions and Answers

Why are the groupings of focus groups so important?

In a group setting, you want to make sure that everyone feels comfortable sharing personal experiences. People are more likely to speak up if they feel they are with their peers, rather than in a group that might judge or react negatively to their experience.

How can you get useful data for 1:1 interviews?

While 1:1 interviews may seem like you are only getting a small amount of information from a small number of stakeholders, research shows that 10 to 15 interviews can actually help you gain valuable and representative insights (given that you have reached out to specific target groups and designed open-ended questions).

Don’t you always end up with just the loud voices and leave out the quiet ones?

This is a skill that comes with moderation preparation and experience. You want to set ground rules early on so that everyone knows how they are expected to engage. In those ground rules, you should also note that moderators may intervene to stay on track. Never invalidate someone’s feedback. Instead, acknowledge it, invite follow up communication, and move the conversation along.

I'm still not sure which approach is right?

The good news is that you don't have to choose one. However, you do have to choose a place to start. We most often see surveys as a first step to get a broad understanding of community needs and focus groups to dig deeper into trends. That's just one strategy. Most importantly, your objectives should guide your choice in engagement strategy. If you need to better understand the community in which your student lives, shadowing or community walks is the way to go. If you want to start by having space for people to air their questions, consider a town hall. Whatever your objective may be, there's an engagement strategy that will help you get there.

Do I really need to follow best practices? Can't I just 'talk to people' to understand their needs?

Of course, informally engaging your community is a great way to build relationships and get an intimate knowledge of their needs. However, when you are seeking to uncover trends to truly dig deep into community needs and potential solutions with an unbiased lens, you will want to be diligent in your approach to make sure you are making the best use of your community's time and taking the best possible approach to leveraging their insights. Here are just a few things that can go wrong if you stray from best practices:

- You make assumptions based on your perception and bias, which may not match reality.
- Your insights are based on a small group of connections or vocal stakeholders rather than representing the community at large.
- You design solutions that are ineffective or unhelpful.
- Stakeholders feel that their voice was misrepresented or excluded.

What happens if you skip best practices?

Below we share some common mistakes that can occur when you stray from best practices.

BEST PRACTICE	RESULT OF SKIPPING PRACTICE
Divide focus group participants into cohorts based on similar experiences or backgrounds.	• Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing their experience in a group that they cannot relate to. • Your data will be broad and difficult to act on without the ability to distill findings into specific group needs. • You may be asking questions that feel irrelevant or difficult to answer for some members of your group.

BEST PRACTICE	RESULT OF SKIPPING PRACTICE
Conduct a rigorous analysis rather than simply reading transcripts to generalize findings.	• Personal bias and interest may lead you to notice trends that feel more relevant to you and miss trends that are important to your stakeholders. • Strong statements and phrasing may stand out more regardless of the extent to which they are important to stakeholders. • Your analysis will misrepresent the voice of your community.
Use the interview guide to frame the conversation and cover key topics but do not strictly follow it.	• You may miss important data that is shared, particularly when you do not probe. • The flow of conversation will feel unnatural and disengaging. • Participants may feel that you are not truly listening to their feedback.
Design focus groups or interviews with open-ended questions and leverage specific closed questions for surveys.	• Open-ended survey questions take a lot of time to analyze and may be lengthy to complete, which may dissuade people from completing the survey. • Closed-ended interview questions cause you to miss the purpose of an interview, to collect rich data and narratives on participant experiences. It is also a wasteful use of time, as closed-ended questions can more easily be completed in a survey.
Schedule engagements at a time that is convenient for stakeholders rather than a time that is convenient for you.	• You may have a low turnout if you are not mindful of stakeholder availability, leading to a waste of time and resources as well as missing the voice of community members. • This may cause frustrations in your community if people feel that engagement opportunities were poorly planned and difficult to attend.
Set ground rules and expectations for engagement activities.	• People may not understand the expectations and use the time inappropriately, causing others to miss out on the chance to share their insight. • It will be more difficult to effectively keep the conversation focused. • It's important for people to understand why they are there and how the information will be leveraged.

This sounds like a lot of work, is it worth it?

The truth is that stakeholder engagement is indeed a lot of work. It takes time to learn the process, develop the protocols, reach out to stakeholders, administer, and analyze the information. However, it is truly the best way to understand the needs of your community and certainly worth the effort. And if you don't have the capacity to do this internally, Education Elements regularly works with district partners to support stakeholder engagement while helping them connect with their community.

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