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# Community Listening in Practice

An introduction to engaging with your community





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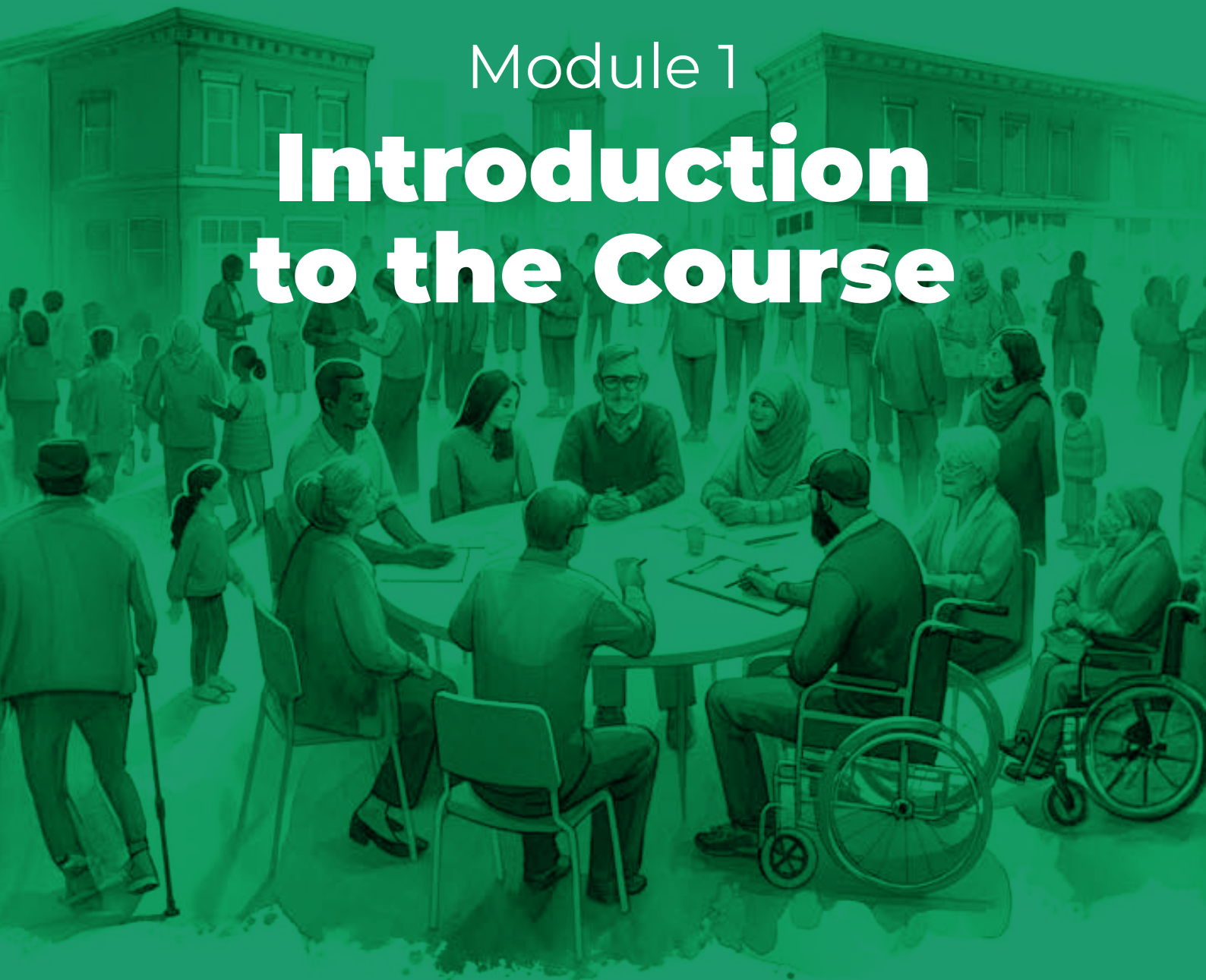
Resource Bank: Refer to [this link](#) to access the tools shared in the course.





Module 1

# Introduction to the Course



## Module 1

# Introduction to the Course

## What is this course about?

This course provides an entry point into the methodology of community engagement, focusing on the important aspects of connecting with people and understanding their needs and perspectives. We use three terms throughout this course: community engagement, community listening, and deep listening and they are defined as follows:

Community engagement is defined as a process emphasizing the involvement of diverse stakeholders in shared decision-making and co-designing projects and activities. Through the process, it values and respects the perspectives of the community, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of solutions for common issues.

To carry out effective engagement, an important skill to adopt is deep listening or community listening. It involves listening to the community through different channels, to actively understand the meaning behind words, and delving into the thoughts, concerns, and hopes of community members. When put into practice within the overall community engagement process, it helps foster a strong connection with the community. Community listening and deep listening are used interchangeably in this course and the definition of both these terms remains common.

To further understand the significance of community listening, please watch the following illustrative [video](#):





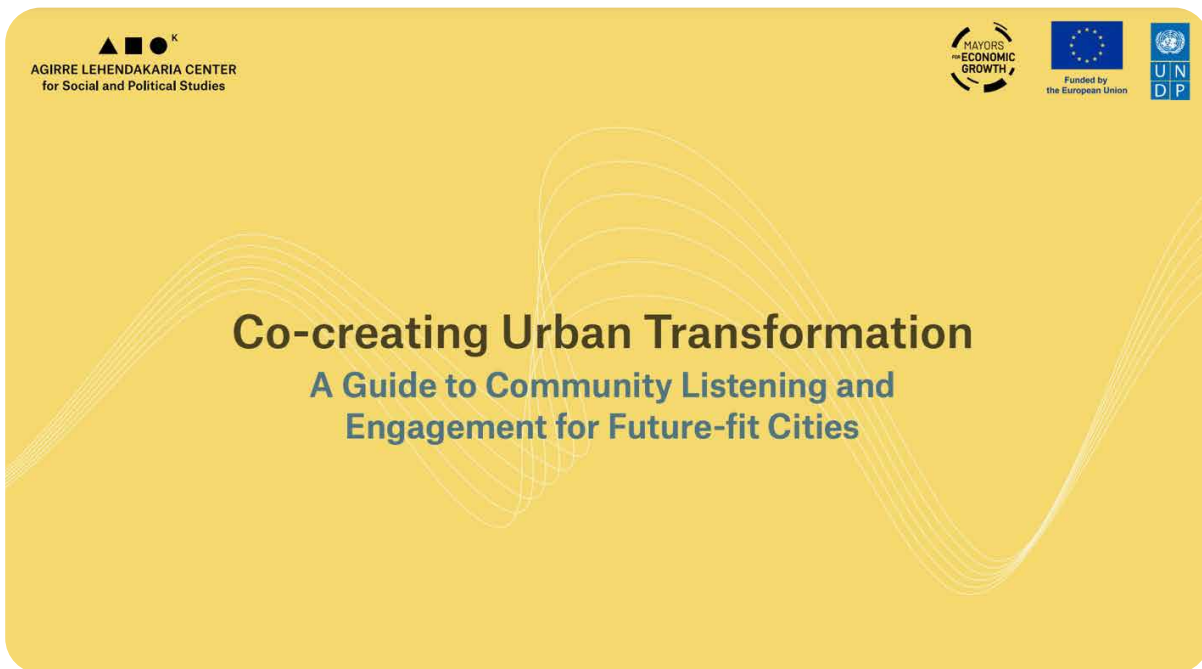
## How is this course designed?

The course consists of real-world examples, practical insights, and useful tools to explore the layers of community engagement and its potential for positive change. The introductory content provides key concepts, emphasizing the essential skills of deep listening and conducting insightful interviews with members of your local community.

Additionally, this course serves as a continuation, building on the tools and practices introduced in our [community engagement and co-creation guide](#) co-created by UNDP and the Agirre Lehendakaria Centre, under the EU-funded Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) programme. It ensures that you not only grasp the concepts that are explained thoroughly in the guide, but also put them into practice, solidifying your ability to engage with and listen to communities effectively.

Community engagement and co-creation [guide](#)





**Source:** Guide to Community Listening

## Why this course?

In a world dealing with global challenges and increasing distrust in public institutions and services, community engagement emerges as a vital strategy to address these issues. This course serves as a comprehensive guide, demonstrating how to implement these practices to build trust and foster meaningful connections. These efforts ultimately lead to more effective governance, responsive policies, and enhanced public services. Moving beyond theoretical concepts, the course encourages proactive involvement, empowering you to become a catalyst for transformation within your community.

## Who is this course for and what will you get out of it?

While this course is primarily designed for local authorities and public administrators, it can also be used by local changemakers like community organizers, CSOs and NGOs. It aims to help you discover the richness and diversity of community engagement practices and integrate them into all project designs and implementations.

By the end of this course, you will not only understand the theoretical basics of community listening but also acquire practical skills for real-life application of the method. Consider this course as a launching pad, providing you with an introduction to the expansive field of community engagement and encouraging you to engage with your communities in meaningful and productive ways.



Module 2

# Importance of Community Engagement



## Module 2

# Importance of Community Engagement

## Why do we need Community Engagement?

Local authorities have much to gain from engaging with communities and stakeholders and improving citizen participation in governance. This module summarizes a few arguments on why this underutilized tool of community engagement is both necessary and useful for local authorities to learn and implement.

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*"The ability to timely and relevantly study social opinion with the help of social listening is the key to a successful grant application and further implementation of the social action project."*

**Nizhyn Community, Ukraine**

M4EG Response and Renewal Programme

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*"[This process showcases] The importance of understanding the needs and opinions of the people affected by your work and the need to involve people in the decision-making process. A variety of perspectives provides a wealth of information and helps to better understand complex problems."*

**Velikyolukivska OTG, Ukraine**

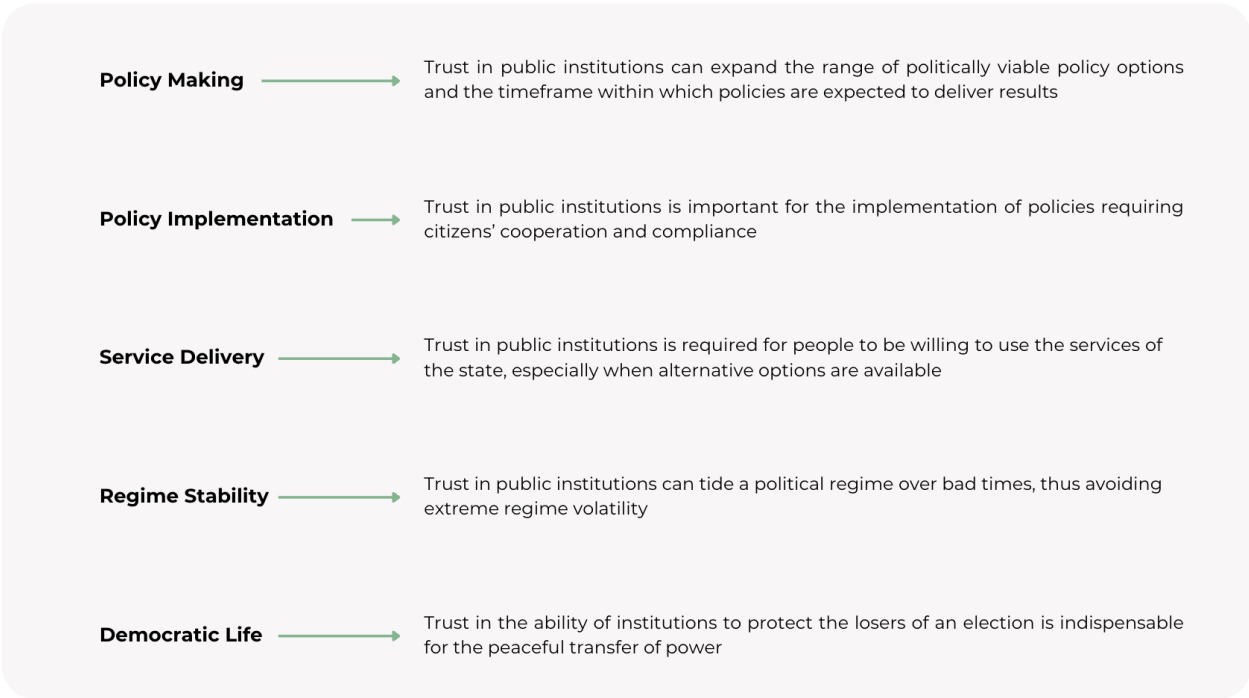
M4EG Response and Renewal Programme

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# Community Engagement helps tackle the trust deficit in public institutions

Trust is integral to the functioning of any society. Trust in each other, in our public institutions, and in our leaders are all essential ingredients for social and economic progress. It enables people to cooperate and show solidarity with one another. It empowers public bodies to plan and implement policies and deliver services that are widely accepted by various community members. Greater public trust has been found to enhance compliance with regulations, improve tax collections, and foster respect for property rights.

An extensive body of literature demonstrates that trust in public institutions is essential for the processes of investment, innovation, and trade that underpin economic stability and growth. However, trust in public institutions extends beyond the economic realm. It is fundamentally linked to state legitimacy and is crucial for the functioning of various governance processes, as outlined below:



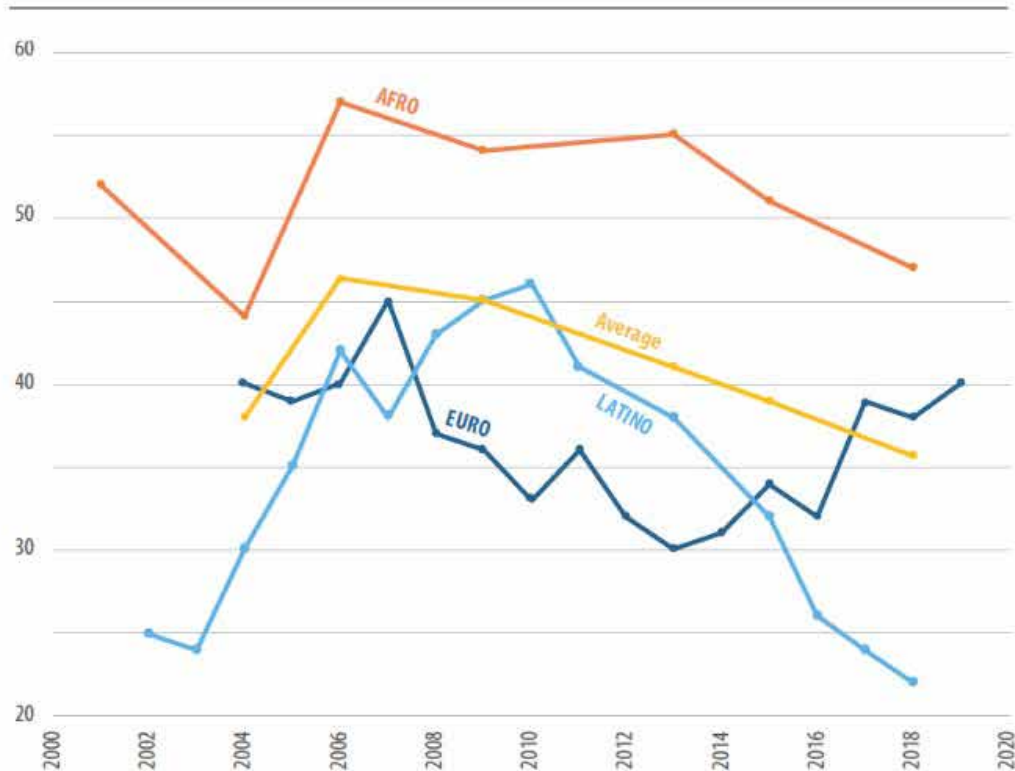
**Source:** Trust in public institutions, [UNDP, 2021](#)

In the face of multiple crises - climate change, social inequalities, polarization\*, development challenges, geo-political unrest, war and the residual effects the COVID-19 pandemic - the UN Secretary-General recently warned of a “trust deficit” that threatens to undermine progress towards the SDGs. While levels of trust in institutions vary significantly across many countries, opinion surveys suggest that there has been a decline in trust in public institutions in recent decades.

\*Polarization is the act of separating or making people separate into two groups with completely opposite opinions  
Source: UN/DESA Policy Brief #108: [Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security](#)

Figure 1

## Percentage of the population across three regions with confidence or trust in their national Government or Parliament



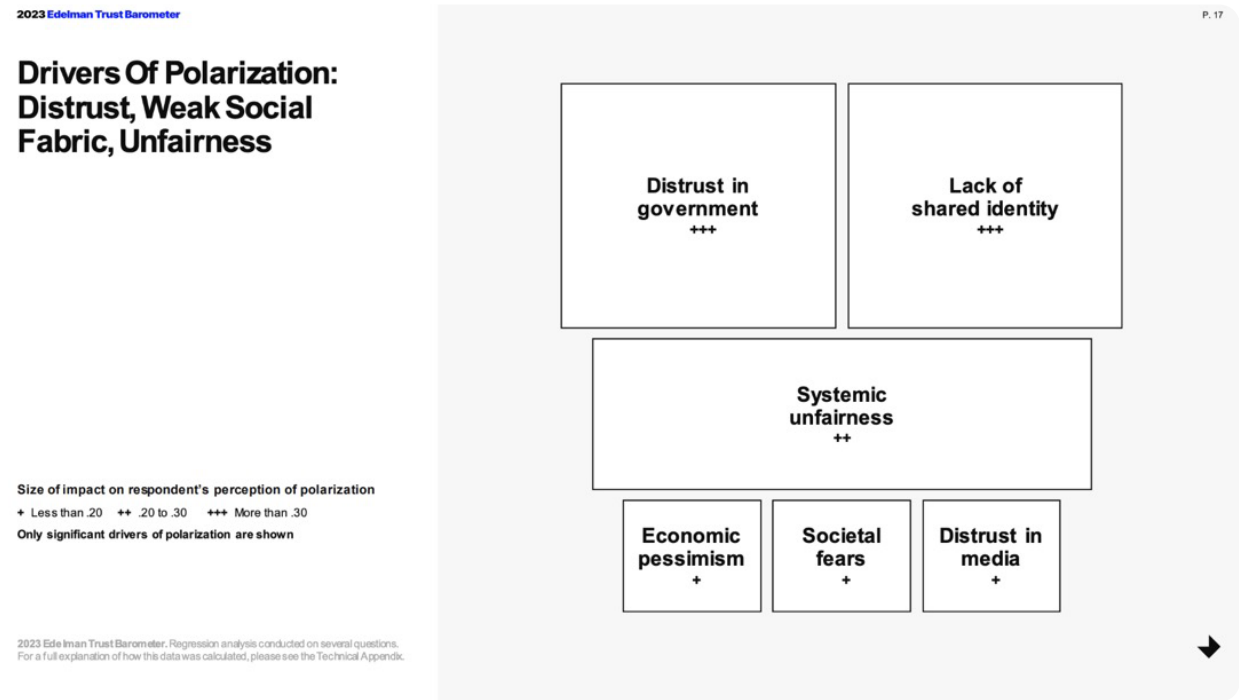
**Note:** Author's calculations (unweighted averages) based on data from Eurobarometer, Afrobarometer and Latinobarometro. Eurobarometer figures taken since 2004 EU expansion onwards to maximize countries included, while avoiding composition effects. Two values per year but only one selected here (earliest survey in year taken). Afrobarometer data consists of only 6 waves, with waves covering 2/3 years of field work and responses relate to "trust in parliament" (as there is no "trust in government" question on the survey). Reports as latest year in range. For Afrobarometer and Latinobarometro, graph combines "a lot" and "somewhat" into single positive value and "none" and "not much" into a single negative response. Graph excludes "don't know/no response" and calculations only include country averages with continuous data, to avoid composition effects.

**Source:** UN/DESA Policy Brief #108: Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security

Uncertainty, inequality, and insecurity go hand in hand with polarization and lack of trust. Political polarization and mistrust shrink our capacity for social dialogue and stifle collective action. Globally, less than 30% of people think most people can be trusted, its lowest recorded value. (HDR, 2022)



Source: UN/DESA Policy Brief #108



Source: Drivers of Polarization - [Edelman Trust Barometer Report, 2023](#)

The discontent we are seeing today reflects impatience with the status quo, but also a strong desire to contribute to positive change. Overcoming these crises and challenges requires approaches driven by unity, solidarity and compassion which require governance models and structures that work for the common good. The key to reinvigorated and reimagined governance lies in the truly meaningful participation of people and civil society in the decisions that affect their lives.

Read more about trust in public institutions:

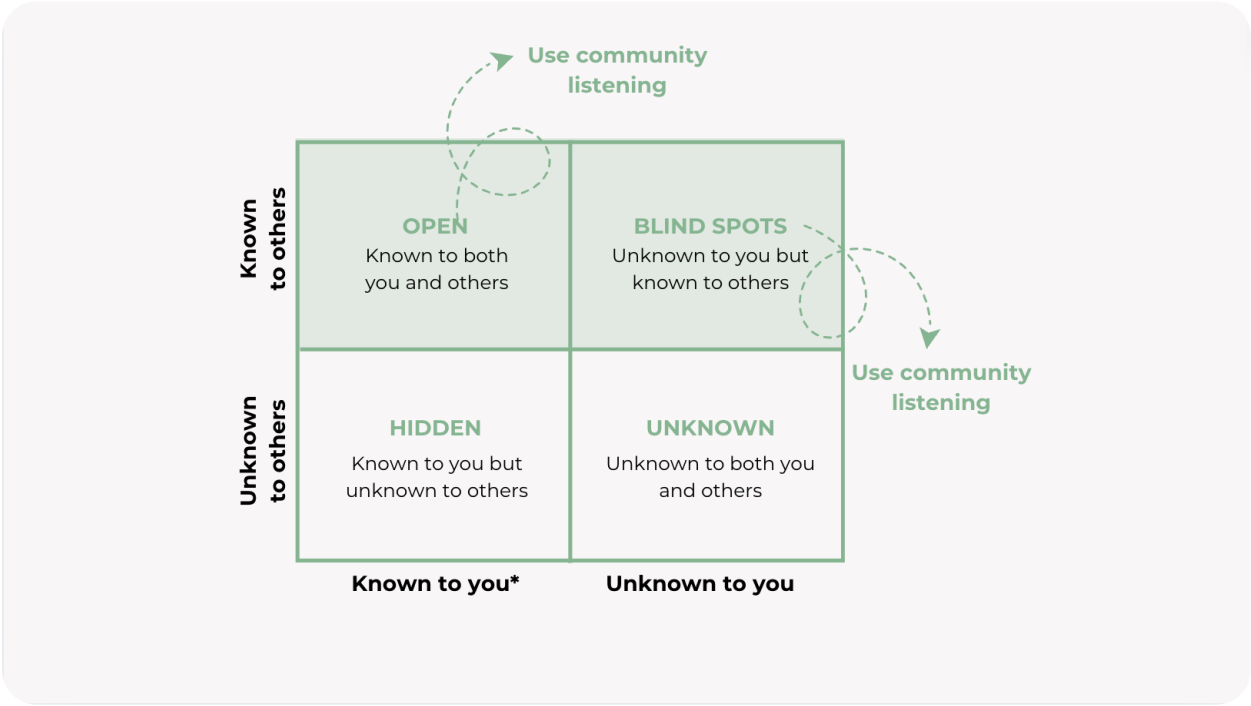
[UN/DESA Policy Brief #108: Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security](#)



## Community Engagement helps to fill in the gaps in our knowledge

Cities and municipalities are complex networks of individuals who assume various roles in society. Each person may be a citizen, a parent, a worker, and more. However, not everyone is engaged in all aspects of city life. This means that as individuals and citizens, we have knowledge in certain areas, but we also have gaps in our understanding. Furthermore, there are things we know we don't know, and there are things we are unaware that we don't know.

The Johari Window, created by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955, is a framework designed to better understand the relationship between self and others. It helps expand our thinking in this context:

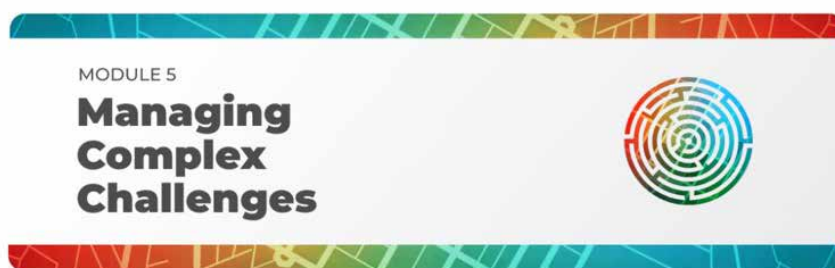


**Source:** UN/DESA Policy Brief #108

Our knowledge and interests in specific areas make us well-informed about their requirements, challenges, and opportunities. However, as we venture into unfamiliar territory, our knowledge diminishes. Additionally, the positions and roles we play in society provide us with a limited perspective on the topics we are familiar with. For instance, if I have been educated in a private school system, I understand the education system through my own experiences. However, I have less insight into what it means to navigate life in the same city from the perspective of someone educated in a public school system. Similarly, you might think you know what your community needs, but their perspectives might be vastly different.

It is crucial for us to remain humble and open to learning new information from others, even if we believe we are knowledgeable. Our specific knowledge and interests inform us about certain areas, but exploring unfamiliar territory exposes our limitations. Our societal roles and positions help us see only certain aspects of the topics we know. For example, private school education offers one view of the education system, but it does not encompass the experiences of those in public schools. Understanding this, we must be receptive to diverse perspectives to truly grasp the needs of our community. This openness is essential for learning and growth.

While operating in complex environments with high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability community listening helps us uncover and discover our blind spots in the information, narratives, mindsets and behaviors that have an influence and impact on society (read more on complexity in the course [Foundations for Future Readiness: Module 5: Managing Complex Challenges](#)). Collaboration and creating a shared understanding with others can further enable us to design projects and services that address not just the needs of some individuals but the community's collective needs.



[Foundations for Future Readiness: Module 5: Managing Complex Challenges](#)



The past modules in this course have focused on highlighting concepts of change, introducing some key concepts that will shape the coming decades in profound ways.

The following modules will focus on approaches for **future readiness**; presenting a variety of practical methods that can help municipalities to thrive into the future.

In this module, we will explore complex challenges in further detail, unpacking what features of complex challenges make them so difficult to manage. This module will introduce a systems thinking perspective, from exploring how to identify the features of a system, to underscoring why thinking in systems can help to more effectively manage complex challenges.

Introduction page to the Module 5: Managing Complex Challenges

## Community Engagement helps harness the value of participation

Participation and the engagement of communities in public affairs is a fundamental human right and an underutilised tool for better policymaking. Engaging communities in co-creating and designing projects, planning urban spaces and making decisions that impact their lives has the potential to:



**Deepen our understanding of issues in the city and help identify better solutions**



**Inspire the direction of strategic development based on the realities of the community**



**Reduce social tensions and prevent violence by ensuring that concerns of the community are heard**



**Lead to a greater sense of ownership from the community, allowing effective implementation and utilization of resources**



**Reduce the investment risk and the risk of failure since the intervention or policy is co-developed by communities, for communities**

To strengthen our society and meet the urgency of our times, it is crucial for us to encourage participation in the community. This can help you nurture and draw on the existing knowledge, creativity and diversity that the community possesses.

## Common objections to community engagement and how to address them?

### **Community engagement takes too much time and resources**

The process of community engagement consumes time and requires the effort of municipalities to invest in human resources, which might pose difficulties. As with many processes, engagement takes time to set up in the beginning and becomes easier and quicker with time. When stakeholder relationships are built and maintained, connecting with them and continuing engagement becomes much easier. Engaging students and volunteers can also support this process and help build stronger relationships between the municipality and the community.

### **If I already know what the community needs, why should I ask the community?**

You might think you know what your community knows, but the perspectives might be vastly different. In the community engagement process, we sometimes hear things that verify our assumptions. However, municipalities who have engaged with stakeholders through community listening often hear new information they did not know. This is the reason why we need to learn the skills of deep listening and adopt a learner's mindset. We might think we know exactly what the community needs but this can be vastly different from how the community feels.

### **Why engage with communities when we can get the same responses in a survey?**

Surveys are excellent tools to get a pulse of the community when decisions need to be made. It provides a quantitative output which can substantiate those choices as well. It is, however, difficult to extract the depth, nuance and causes of those decisions without conversations with them. For example, a person might choose the top 3 challenges they face in a city, but their experience and the underlying causes of those challenges cannot be extracted from surveys. To uncover deep insights, surveys should be augmented with qualitative research, which can be supported by community listening. With a combination of both, community engagement will be more effective.

## Knowledge Check



**1. Which of the following approaches would help channel the strong desire among citizens to contribute to positive change in society, when trust is lacking?**

- a. Strict rules designed by local authorities
- b. Strong policies designed by local authorities
- c. Empowering citizens to participate in public decision-making

**2. What exactly are ‘blind spots’ that can be uncovered through community listening?**

- a. Things that are known to you but unknown to others
- b. Things that are unknown to you but known to others
- c. Things that are unknown to you and unknown to others

**3. Which of the following are the potential benefits of engaging with communities in designing projects and making decisions in the city?**

- a. Reduction of investment risk and failure
- b. Greater sense of ownership in the community
- c. Reduction in social tensions

Check your answers at the end of this course.

## Reflection exercise

Use the question below to reflect on your current context and discuss it with a team member.

**1. What is the nature of the relationship between citizens and the local authority in your city? Do citizens openly voice their concerns, or do they hesitate to approach public officials? Why?**

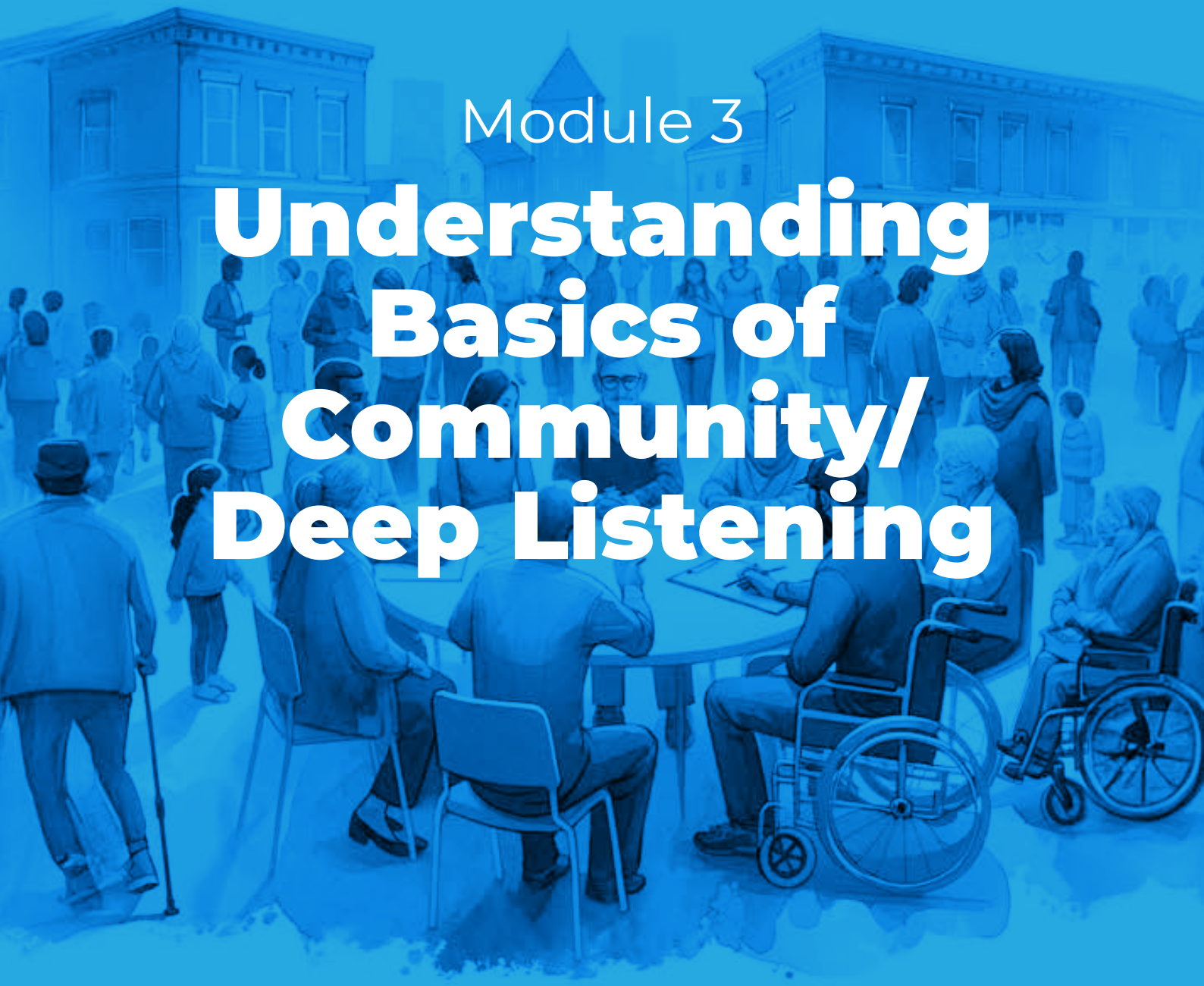
**2. Imagine that you wake up tomorrow and your city has a remarkably elevated level of trust among citizens and between citizens and public officials. What does the city look like and what changes as a result of this?**

**3. What actions can the local authority take to create more trust between citizens and public officials? What are some of the benefits and challenges of these actions?**



Module 3

# **Understanding Basics of Community/ Deep Listening**



## Module 3

# Importance of Community Engagement

## What is Community listening or Deep listening?

In this course's context, community engagement is defined **as a process emphasizing the involvement of diverse stakeholders in shared decision-making and co-designing projects and activities**. It values and respects the perspectives of the community, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of solutions for common issues. To carry out effective engagement, an important skill to adopt is deep listening or community listening. It aims to actively understand the meaning behind words, delving into community members' thoughts, concerns, and hopes. This dynamic process helps foster a connection through genuine conversation, interest and empathy.

During community listening you engage in a dialogue with deep curiosity and genuine interest in the speaker's point of view. Rooted in empathy, it recognises the speaker's feelings and experiences as important, respecting each person's unique story while being mindful of the listener's beliefs and biases that might influence the conversation.

This method goes beyond verbal communication - it also includes understanding non-verbal cues, picking up on subtleties, and uncovering underlying emotions to foster a genuine connection beyond surface-level interactions. Effective community listening enables a deeper understanding of the speaker's intentions and emotions, leading to improved problem understanding and solving.

### An example to illustrate the importance of community listening:

In Naftalan, Azerbaijan, the local authority wanted to build a marketplace. However, when they started talking to community members and stakeholders through the M4EG Urban Imaginaries Program, they found out nobody wanted another marketplace in the city. Through listening to the community, they discovered that what people really needed was a ceremonial hall for important community events. This changed the municipality's project plans completely, and they ended up building something that the community truly wanted and used, instead of just another marketplace that would've gone to waste. Thus, the practice of community listening really helped the local authority to align their work towards the priorities and needs of the community.

## Why is Community listening a vital skill for effective community engagement?

Community listening stands as a critical skill for effective community engagement for several important reasons:

- 1 Building trust and rapport:** Community listening serves as the cornerstone for trust-building. When community members feel heard and valued, it enhances their trust in the engagement process and the entities involved. Trust is fundamental for fostering open and constructive dialogue.
- 2 Understanding diverse perspectives:** Communities are diverse, encompassing varied backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. Community listening enables you to appreciate the complexity and richness of these perspectives, aiding in identifying common ground and addressing unique needs.
- 3 Identifying hidden issues:** Not all community concerns are immediately apparent. Community listening helps unveil latent or less-discussed issues that may be crucial to residents. By actively listening, engagement initiatives can effectively address these concerns because by asking an open-ended question, you allow your community to share what they believe is important, rather than immediately focusing on what you think is important.
- 4 Co-creating solutions:** Effective community engagement requires collaboration between stakeholders. Community listening promotes co-creation by involving community members in problem-solving and decision-making, ensuring solutions are grounded in the community's insights and preferences.
- 5 Adapting and evolving:** Communities are dynamic, and their needs evolve over time. Community listening, as an ongoing process, allows engagement efforts to adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring long-term relevance and effectiveness.
- 6 Enhancing accountability:** Active listening and responsiveness to community inputs demonstrates accountability, fostering transparency and a sense of shared ownership and responsibility. Community listening is also a two-way street, requiring you to share back with the community what you've learned and how you're applying that knowledge.

## Below you will find testimonials from members of various municipalities emphasizing how community listening proved to be beneficial to their work

### 1. Testimonial from Emma Baghdasaryan, Infrastructure & Urban Development and Marine Hovhannisyan, Leading specialist – Culture & Youth Affairs Department, Gyumri Municipality, Armenia

#### EXPERIENCE OF USING COMMUNITY LISTENING FOR BUILDING A PORTFOLIO OF OPTIONS IN GYUMRI, ARMENIA UNDER THE M4EG PROGRAMME



**EMMA BAGHDASARYAN**  
EXPERT - INFRASTRUCTURE &  
URBAN DEVELOPMENT  
GYUMRI MUNICIPALITY



**MARINE HOVHANNISYAN**  
LEADING SPECIALIST -  
CULTURE AND YOUTH AFFAIRS  
DEPARTMENT  
GYUMRI MUNICIPALITY

#### How was your experience in using listening with the communities of Gyumri?

The team conducted interviews with guides, workers of souvenir shops, hotels, restaurants, some locals, and others related to the tourism sphere. Each of them had a specific understanding of tourism in Gyumri and ideas on how to resolve specific problems. Some of the responses were particularly interesting - a tour guide had ideas on how to create functional zones in the city and an owner of a hotel was very worried about the preservation of the architectural monuments of Gyumri considering it as the main interest for tourists in the city.

#### How did community listening add value to the design direction of projects in Gyumri?

In the course of community engagement, problems were revealed, which we may not have been so deeply familiar with, but which our portfolio program was meant to solve. Our approach to community listening was more about learning something new, studying different approaches of people living in the same environment, because it gives an opportunity to make correct and constructive decisions.

#### How was your experience with community listening in conducting interviews?

We have conducted different types of research, in frames of different projects and used data analysis for the projects. The community listening was something different as you get the insights from the people involved in the sphere who deal with the issues and also communicate with the visitors of the city.

We were a bit worried, wondering if the interviewees would want to share their ideas but they were very motivated, open and willing to share. The interview process was also surprising, as in some cases it went not exactly "by the plan" but more naturally and spontaneously.

### 2. Testimonial from Ahad Kazimov

Head of International Relations, Investment and Projects Department, Khirdalan Municipality, Azerbaijan

#### EXPERIENCE OF USING COMMUNITY LISTENING FOR BUILDING A PORTFOLIO OF OPTIONS IN KHIRDALAN, AZERBAIJAN UNDER THE M4EG PROGRAMME



**AHAD KAZIMOV**  
HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS, INVESTMENT AND  
PROJECTS DEPARTMENT,  
KHIRDALAN MUNICIPALITY

#### How was your experience in using listening with the communities of Khirdalan?

The most interesting aspect lies in the fact that community listening provides an opportunity to gather crucial and precise information from key stakeholder groups. While we were aware of issues pertaining to transportation, waste management, and traffic congestion in the city, it was particularly enlightening to discover that young people expressed the need for a dedicated space where they can access personal and professional development resources.

#### How did community listening influence the design direction of projects in Khirdalan?

Young people underscored the importance of establishing a community resource centre that offers diverse activities for different community members. This centre could serve as a venue for events and activities involving local and international trainers, experts, and consultants, providing co-working space and a library stocked with contemporary literature focusing on professional and personal development. This concept has now become a pivotal element in our forthcoming initiatives in Khirdalan, and we aspire to bring it to fruition through collaboration with key stakeholders in our city.

#### What is the key value of this process in the work that the municipality does?

The community listening process fosters a sense of connection to our community, instilling confidence through firsthand information acquisition.

Furthermore, it offers diverse perspectives for implementing projects based on the interests, feelings, and expectations of the inhabitants of our rapidly growing city.

### 3. Testimonial from Revaz Barbakadze

Chairman of Rustavi Innovation Hub, Georgia

#### EXPERIENCE OF USING COMMUNITY LISTENING FOR A PROJECT IN RUSTAVI, GEORGIA UNDER THE M4EG URBAN IMAGINARIES PROGRAMME



**REVAZ BARBAKADZE**  
CHAIRMAN OF RUSTAVI  
INNOVATION HUB

#### What is the value of community listening from your experience of using it in your work?

It is important that the community listening methodology is actively used in the process of project concept preparation and co-creation. For this purpose, it is important to prepare adapted training materials and facilitators of the process so that they can organise and conduct community listening and draw correct conclusions from it. Community listening can be effectively used by both civil organisations and public structures during the planning of programs and projects of various scales.

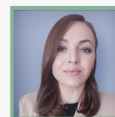
#### What is the biggest challenge in using community listening and how did you overcome it?

The main challenge associated with such process is involvement of community members in the process. In order to solve this challenge, it is important to better inform different groups of society about the current process, if the local context allows it, more collaborators with different media means and platforms. Due to the fact that our organisation had experience of cooperation with different groups, and intersectoral activity is one of our main tools, the team working on the project was able to establish contact using its own connections and involve a wide range of interested persons in the process.

### 4. Testimonial from Lilia Rata

Investment Attraction Specialist, City Hall, Calarasi, Moldova

#### EXPERIENCE OF USING COMMUNITY LISTENING FOR A PROJECT IN CĂLĂRAȘI, MOLDOVA UNDER THE M4EG URBAN IMAGINARIES PROGRAMME



**LILIA RATA**  
INVESTMENT ATTRACTION  
SPECIALIST CITY HALL OF  
CĂLĂRAȘI

#### How was your experience in using listening with the communities of Călărași?

We used community listening to discover the community's problem and how citizens see its solution - what they imagine the outcome of the project will look like and what life in the community will be like after its completion. It was the first time for us to do individual interviews, on different categories of the population, with various questions. These interviews brought more clarity to the problem and the way to solve it. The experience in Urban Imaginaries has made us understand that the city hall can see solutions and priorities different from the expectations of the citizens, and in every project that the city hall intends to implement, communication with citizens represents the sustainability of urban development.

#### What are some challenges with community listening and how did you overcome them?

The challenges I encountered in the process of listening are the modesty of some citizens to say what they really think, and using short expressions that do not provide a concrete answer. We tried to use several helping questions that would give us a broader answer to the topic of the problem. I tried the freer, friendly communication, without seeming like too serious an inquiry. As a result, people became more free to express themselves and increased their creativity in offering solutions. We learned from this project process that solutions can be diverse and unexpected if we take an interest in the opinions and visions of the community by stimulating expression.

#### What is the key value of this process in the work that the municipality does?

Listening to the community gave us the chance to concretise our actions on the project, have a clearer vision, and set our priorities for a solution based on needs. If at the beginning the problem posed by us was a broad one, like "household waste management", then after the listening process we understood that we have to focus on the collection platforms at the housing blocks, a narrow but achievable problem. This helped to set real goals and objectives with concrete solutions. The listening questions were adapted to a narrower problem, and from here the proposals and solutions offered by the citizens became more strategic, and sustainable.

## 5. Testimonial from Yulia Kuzmenko

Head of the Department of International Relations and Investment Activities of the Executive Committee of the Nizhyn City Council, Ukraine

### EXPERIENCE OF USING COMMUNITY LISTENING FOR RESPONSE & RENEWAL, UKRAINE UNDER THE M4EG PROGRAMME



**YULIYA KUZMENKO PhD.**  
HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND  
INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES OF THE  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
NIZHYN CITY COUNCIL (UKRAINE)

#### How was community listening used in your context? What was the result of this?

Community listening was conducted as a method of testing the hypothesis that was formulated at the stage of writing the grant application. Its essence was the assumption that IDPs experience difficulties in relation to integration into the community, which are primarily caused by problems with employment in Nizhyn.

The life stories of the participants collected during the community listening were impressive, poignant, and touching. It was them who convinced us of the correctness and necessity of our project.

#### How was your experience in using listening with the communities of Nizhyn?

Community listening was used for the first time for the implementation of a municipal project. The methodology is significantly different from all the previous methods that we used during grant writing. It was more reminiscent of a meeting between a psychologist and a patient because firstly it was necessary to convince the beneficiary to come to the meeting, then to create comfortable conditions for the participant of the community listening to open up and speak sincerely, and in the end to be able to calm and console, because we are dealing with persons who have suffered psychological trauma.

#### How did community listening add value to the design direction of projects in Nizhyn?

Community listening helped improve the project and adjust it, taking into account the requests of direct beneficiaries. In my opinion, this method makes it possible to humanize the project, to give it a more human orientation, because during community listening, the problems and requests of the project's beneficiaries are crystallized. In addition, community listening is now actively used by us during grant writing activities as a method of studying requests and needs in the community.

Community listening is an active, empathetic, and continuous endeavour—an indispensable bridge between community members and those seeking to engage with them. By integrating community listening into engagement strategies, municipalities can establish more inclusive, responsive, and impactful initiatives that authentically reflect the voice and needs of the community.

## What are some essential skills to be a good listener?

Listening is not merely the act of hearing; it is a dynamic skill that, when honed, can significantly enhance communication and understanding. To be a good listener, several essential skills come into play, each contributing to the ability to connect deeply with others. Here are four key skills that are fundamental to becoming an effective listener:



**BUILDING  
RELATIONSHIPS &  
NETWORKING**



**ACTIVE LISTENING  
& NON-VIOLENT  
COMMUNICATION**



**PUTTING YOURSELF  
IN OTHER  
PEOPLE'S SHOES**



**RECOGNISING  
PATTERNS & MAKING  
CONNECTIONS**

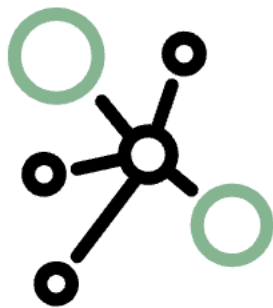


## PUTTING YOURSELF IN OTHER PEOPLE'S SHOES

**Practicing empathy:** Empathy is the ability to comprehend and share the feelings of another. To be a good listener, it's crucial to cultivate empathy—putting yourself in the speaker's position and trying to experience the situation from their perspective. This skill involves not only acknowledging emotions but also demonstrating a genuine concern for the speaker's well-being.

**Suspending judgment:** Effective listeners refrain from premature judgment. By temporarily setting aside personal opinions and biases, one can better understand the speaker's viewpoint. Suspending judgment allows for a more open-minded and unbiased reception of information, fostering a conducive environment for meaningful conversation.

**Example:** When speaking to someone who is dealing with a hardship, try to imagine what it would feel like to lead life being in that person's situation. You might feel the urge to suggest solutions and question their choices – suspending this immediate reaction and immersing yourself in the situation, without judging or reacting can help you put yourself in other people's shoes.



## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & NETWORKING

**Establishing trust:** Building trust is foundational to effective listening. Trust encourages open communication, making individuals more willing to share their thoughts and feelings. A good listener focuses on developing and maintaining trust through reliability, consistency, and a genuine interest in others.

**Networking skills:** Listening is a key component of successful networking. Beyond understanding individual perspectives, effective listeners use networking opportunities to build connections. This involves not only hearing what is said but also actively engaging in conversations, making meaningful connections, and fostering relationships at different stages of the project process.

**Example:** In a transactional relationship, trust and genuineness are lacking, making the relationship less reliable, easily damaged, and temporary. In an interview setting between a community member and a member of the LA, a transactional relationship between them would be one where the community member makes complaints, and the member of the LA passively registers it in a system. In contrast, a strong relationship is built on trust, genuineness and capacity to become stronger with time and grow to form new connections and networks. In this type of relationship, the community member is made to feel safe and empowered to speak to more detail and feels reassured that the LA member cares about the problem that is being faced by the person.

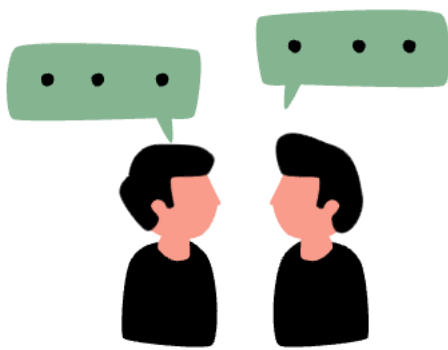


## RECOGNISING PATTERNS & MAKING CONNECTIONS

**Pattern recognition:** Skilled listeners recognize patterns in communication, identifying recurring themes, concerns, or emotions. This skill enables a deeper understanding of the underlying issues, developing insights and reflections and helps in responding more accurately and comprehensively.

**Making cognitive connections:** Effective listeners excel in making cognitive connections between different pieces of information. They can synthesize ideas, draw parallels, and integrate diverse perspectives. This ability enhances the listener's capacity to grasp the bigger picture and identify commonalities among seemingly disparate elements.

**Example:** As an interviewer, while listening to different people talking about problems they experience in the city, you might notice that certain responses are interconnected. A daily delay in reaching their workplace, the lack of convenient options to commute, the high proportion of the day spent travelling and the need to walk far to find public transport – all these responses form a pattern of inadequate mobility options in the city. The repetition and different dimensions mentioned by interviewees around mobility paint a clearer picture of the inadequacies of this service.



## ACTIVE LISTENING & NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

**Active listening:** Active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding (asking follow-up or clarifying questions, paraphrasing what someone said to verify if we are understanding them right)' and remembering what is being said. This requires not only hearing the words but also interpreting the speaker's tone, body language, and overall message. Active listening demonstrates genuine interest and commitment to understanding the speaker.

**Asking thoughtful questions:** Skilled listeners engage in conversations by asking thoughtful questions. For e.g.: How was that experience for you? How did it make you feel? What do you mean by that? Could you share with me an example of such a situation? These questions not only show interest but also encourage the speaker to delve deeper into their thoughts and feelings. Thoughtful questioning contributes to a more comprehensive and meaningful exchange of ideas.

**Example:** Becoming a good listener involves developing a combination of interpersonal skills that go beyond basic hearing. By cultivating empathy, building relationships, recognizing patterns, and actively engaging in conversations, individuals can enhance their listening skills and contribute to more meaningful and effective communication.

## Activity to reflect on your listening skills

**How good are you at putting yourself in other people's shoes?**



I'm not very good at it.

I'm okay at it but can get better.

I'm great at it!

**How good are you at building relationships & networking?**



I'm not very good at it.

I'm okay at it but can get better.

I'm great at it!

**How good are you at recognising patterns & making connections?**



I'm not very good at it.

I'm okay at it but can get better.

I'm great at it!

**How good are you at engaging in conversations & listening intently?**



I'm not very good at it.

I'm okay at it but can get better.

I'm great at it!

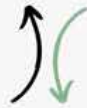
## What are some necessary mindsets for engaging in community listening?

Effective community listening goes beyond the physical act of hearing; it requires adopting specific mindsets that foster the skills learnt in the previous section, like empathy, openness, and a genuine desire to understand diverse perspectives. Here are key mindsets to embrace when engaging in community listening:



### WEAR A LEARNERS HAT

Imagine you just moved to the city and you are learning new things about the topic



### KNOW YOUR BIASES

Speak with people who hold opposite views to yours



### QUESTION THE OBVIOUS

Assumptions stop us from asking obvious questions but the answers might provide new information



### BE CURIOUS

Ask follow-up questions to deepen your understanding



### EMBRACE SILENCE

Resist the urge to react or reply, either verbally or nonverbally



### REFLECT WHAT YOU HEARD

Capture the stakeholders truth even if you have a different perspective



## WEAR A LEARNER'S HAT

**Imagine being new:** Approach community listening with the mindset of a newcomer in the city, eagerly learning new things about the topic. This mindset encourages humility and openness, acknowledging that there is always more to discover and understand. Embrace the opportunity to absorb information and insights with a fresh perspective, set aside what you might already know and just listen to the interviewee by enquiring as if you were a newcomer.

For example, try changing your daily routine to enable constant learning. Consider alternative ways to get to work, like walking or taking the bus instead of driving. For lunch, try a new spot and enjoy sitting on a bench while observing the people around you. Try to sign up for a city tour to experience your surroundings from a visitor's perspective. Such activities will help you develop a new and fresh perspective towards the same situation and practice listening more immersively.



## KNOW YOUR BIASES

**Acknowledge personal biases:** Recognize and confront your own biases\*. Understanding your biases allows you to approach community listening with self-awareness, ensuring that preconceived notions do not hinder your ability to genuinely hear and understand diverse perspectives. Actively seek out conversations with people who hold opposing views to challenge and broaden your own understanding.

Note\*: Biases can be defined as to feel or show inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something based on pre-existing knowledge and opinions on a topic.

## Exercise Activity

### SETTING ASIDE YOUR BIASES

#### Step 1: Make a list of your characteristics

1. Your gender
2. Your age
3. Your ethnic or national identification
4. Your religion or philosophy of life
5. Your political party or orientation
6. Your favourite psychological theory or approach – or at the very least how your beliefs about people are motivated.

#### Step 2: Add four additional phrases that describe you

Add four more words or phrases which are descriptive of you as an individual. It is likely that these 10 characteristics will be at the roots of your most obvious biases; that they will underlie the ethnocentric and egocentric tendencies we all have.

#### Step 3: Think about how your characteristics might bias your research

Now List ways in which your characteristics might bias you in your research interviewing. (E.g. if you are interviewing people without a job you might unconsciously feel they are to blame for their own situation. If you keep yourself fit, you may feel overweight people are lazy; if you hold right wing beliefs you may judge 'softer' motivational approaches as inadequate, etc.)

#### Step 4: In groups, discuss strategies / techniques / mindsets you have tried or adopted, to counteract biases

Share about the biases that can emerge from your characteristics. Additionally, also discuss how you would counteract these biases.

**Source:** How to do Bracketing – A process to help manage interview bias



## QUESTIONING THE OBVIOUS

**Challenge assumptions:** Mindfully question the obvious and challenge assumptions. Assumptions can limit our ability to ask crucial questions that might unveil new information. By adopting a mindset that encourages curiosity and questioning, you open the door to fresh insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the community's needs and concerns.



## BE CURIOUS

**Ask follow-up questions:** Cultivate a curious mindset that prompts you to ask follow-up questions. Delve deeper into the narratives and experiences shared by community members. By actively seeking additional information, you demonstrate a genuine interest in understanding the nuances of their perspectives, contributing to a more meaningful and productive dialogue.



## EMBRACE SILENCE

**Resist immediate reactions:** Embrace silence as a powerful tool in community listening. Resist the urge to react or reply hastily, either verbally or nonverbally. Allowing moments of silence creates space for individuals to express themselves fully, without feeling rushed. It fosters an environment where community members feel heard and valued.



## REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HEARD

**Capture stakeholders' truth:** Adopt a mindset of reflection, aiming to capture the stakeholders' truth even if it differs from your own perspective. This involves summarizing and restating what you've heard to ensure accuracy and understanding. Reflective listening builds trust and demonstrates a commitment to acknowledging the diverse voices within the community.

These mindsets form the foundation for effective community listening. By wearing a learner's hat, acknowledging biases, questioning assumptions, being curious, embracing silence, and reflecting on what you've heard, you create an environment conducive to authentic dialogue and understanding. These mindsets not only enhance your ability to connect with community members but also contribute to building trust and fostering a more inclusive and responsive engagement process.



Read more on [Deep Listening by the Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)

## When should you not use deep listening?

You should not rely on deep listening as the primary research method in the following situations:

- When decisions are already made and there is little to no room for change: If the final outcomes and project deliverables are predetermined with no flexibility of change, deep listening can lead to frustration and false expectations among the community.
- When getting a broad overview is a priority: For large-scale trends or statistical data, quantitative methods like surveys or big data analysis are more effective than deep listening, which in turn is more suited to gaining qualitative insights.
- When the research objective is to measure specific metrics: If the goal is to obtain measurable, numerical data (e.g., community's satisfaction scores, number of engagements), quantitative research methods should be prioritized.

### Knowledge Check



#### 1. Which of the following is not a mindset for being a good listener?

- Having a learner's attitude
- Being an expert on the topic of your project
- Having skills of reflection and synthesis
- Challenging pre-conceived assumptions

#### 2. Why is deep listening a vital skill for good community engagement?

- To build trust within the community
- To identify hidden problems and challenges
- To increase accountability
- All of the above

#### 3. Which listening skillset is your biggest strength?

- Putting yourself in other people's shoes (empathy)
- Building relationships and networking
- Recognizing patterns and making connections
- Engaging in conversations and listening intently

Check your answers at the end of this course.



Module 4

# **Putting Community Listening into Practice**



Module 2

# Putting Community Listening into Practice

This module breaks down different listening methods and provides tools for anyone ready to begin their journey to better engage with communities. In the Mayors for Economic Growth M4EG Initiative, municipalities from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have actively involved their communities in developing projects and portfolios of interventions. Insights from local citizens have significantly influenced the direction and design of these activities (see Module 3 for testimonials).

Despite different contexts, local authorities observed a common theme: the best way to improve listening skills is through practice – the 'learning by doing' process. Each stakeholder engagement is a learning opportunity that helps us reflect and improve. Initial conversations might be uncomfortable and challenging, but they become easier and more effective with each experience. Like riding a bicycle or driving a car, listening can become second nature and integral to your work over time.

The world is now changing at a pace faster than we can keep up with and faster than we can change ourselves. This requires us as individuals and groups to become faster learners and community listening is one way to keep your finger on the pulse of change and learn how the next change impacts your local context. It enables us to design initiatives based on this pulse and adapt when needed. There can never be a perfect time or a perfect solution, but testing based on these signals of change and pulse from the community can support your journey in understanding and addressing community problems effectively through new and innovative interventions.

This module is divided into 4 parts:

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
STAKEHOLDER MAPPING	ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS	PREPARATION FOR ENGAGEMENT	INTERVIEWS & QUICK CHATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is a stakeholder</li> <li>How do we map stakeholders</li> <li>How to use the stakeholder mapping tool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to engage with stakeholders</li> <li>Different methods of engaging with stakeholders</li> <li>How to avoid research biases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to frame good research questions</li> <li>How to create a questionnaire</li> <li>Creating a plan for conducting interviews and quick chats</li> <li>Setting up the research space</li> <li>Ethics and data privacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to conduct interviews and quick chats</li> <li>How to elicit responses</li> <li>Understanding the basics of note-taking</li> <li>Reflecting on the notes/ recordings</li> <li>Making sense of the information</li> <li>Exercise (in trios)</li> </ul>

## Step 1: Stakeholder mapping

In this section we will focus on:

- Who is a stakeholder?
- How do we map stakeholders?
- How to use the stakeholder mapping tool?



### Who is a 'stakeholder'?

Stakeholders are individuals, groups or organizations who are involved in or impacted by your project. They can range from the internal stakeholders in your organization to the end users of your project and the broader community that might be experiencing indirect consequences of your interventions. A stakeholder (individual/group/organization) has an interest in the outcome of the project and in shaping or influencing it.

The first step in engaging with stakeholders is to identify and map them. This can be done by individuals leading the project or by a group of stakeholders closely involved in it. In the process of stakeholder mapping, we want to answer the following:

1. Who has an influence on the shape and outcome of the project?
2. Who is influenced by the process or outcome of the project?
3. Who is related to the causes of the problem we are trying to address?

## How do we map stakeholders?

In order to get a thorough understanding of who our stakeholders are, we use a stakeholder map - a tool designed to help identify various actors and initiatives in the ecosystem surrounding our project. It is a visual representation of all the different stakeholders involved or influenced by the project. The tool has some key benefits in helping us:

- Visualize the stakeholders and make connections between them
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of current relationships with people, organizations, projects, and initiatives
- Understand interests, influence, and power
- Shape the project and make decisions
- Gather knowledge about the resources that are present and absent
- Make sense of the general ecosystem of the region

This tool helps initiate the engagement process by providing a clear picture of actors you can speak with based on your relationship, their influence, and their interest in the thematic area of your project.

### STAKEHOLDER MAPPING TOOL

This tool is designed to help you map different kinds of stakeholders that you think have an impact or are impacted by your projects. The various categories in which you can map these actors include the following:

**Individual stakeholders** or people who are linked to the theme.

**Municipality initiatives** that have been doing work in a similar or related area.

**External initiatives** that go beyond things happening within the municipality but are still linked to your intervention area.

**Businesses and private companies** that link with your theme.

**NGOs and CSOs** that have been contributing to the same topic and needs.

**Institutions and academic partners** that can help you dive deeper into the thematic area of your project.

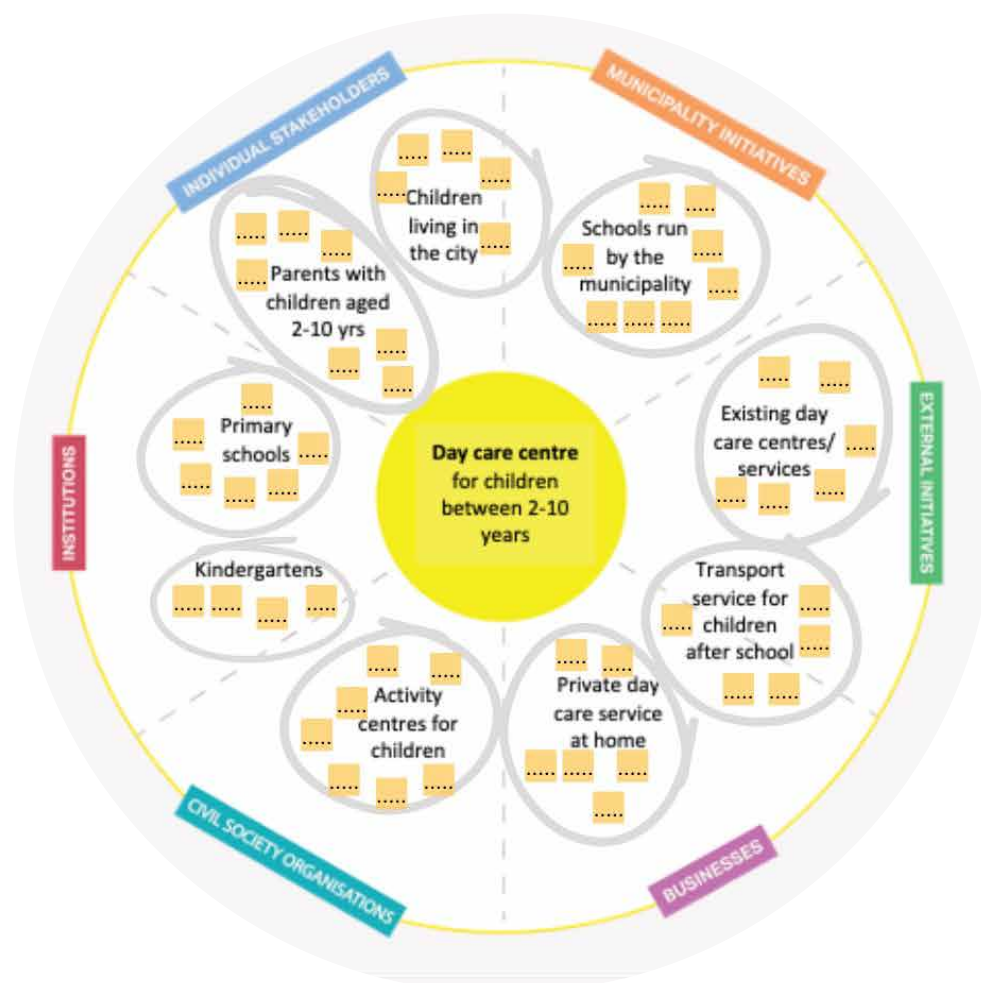


\*Inspired by the stakeholder mapping tool developed by ALC

## How to use the stakeholder mapping tool?

- Put the project in the centre.
- Think of the different types of actors in this space, using the 6 categories provided as a guide.
- Start naming the institutions, individuals, municipal initiatives, external initiatives, CSOs and businesses involved in this space. Try to cluster them by type to see which group is more numerous than others.
  - Those involved can be suppliers, operators or beneficiaries. They could also play the role of supporters or prohibitors of the service.
- When possible, mark relationships between different stakeholders. You can use thick lines to mark strong connections and thin/dotted lines to indicate limited contact between stakeholders.

Below is an example of what a stakeholder map would look like as you think of different actors and cluster them by type:



## Exercise – stakeholder mapping

Follow the instructions below for the exercise on stakeholder mapping.

### TRY IT OUT

- Choose a project: a community library or a medical clinic [choose one and write it in the central yellow circle]
- Think of the different types of actors in this space, using the 6 categories provided as a guide
- Write down the name of the various institutions, individuals (or categories of individuals), municipality initiatives, external initiatives, CSOs and businesses involved in this space
- Those involved can be suppliers of the service, operators or beneficiaries. They could also play the role of supporters or prohibitors of the service.



If you are looking for alternative effective tools to map stakeholders, try and explore the following ones:

**Mapping Initiatives and Stakeholders**  
by Agirre Lehendakaria Center



**Online Whiteboard Stakeholder Mapping Template** by Miro



## Step 2: Engaging with stakeholders

In this section we will focus on:

- How to engage with stakeholders?
- Different methods of engaging with stakeholders.
- How to avoid research biases?

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
STAKEHOLDER MAPPING	ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS	PREPARATION FOR ENGAGEMENT	INTERVIEWS & QUICK CHATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is a stakeholder</li> <li>• How do we map stakeholders</li> <li>• How to use the stakeholder mapping tool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to engage with stakeholders</li> <li>• Different methods of engaging with stakeholders</li> <li>• How to avoid research biases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to frame good research questions</li> <li>• How to create a questionnaire</li> <li>• Creating a plan for conducting interviews and quick chats</li> <li>• Setting up the research space</li> <li>• Ethics and data privacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to conduct interviews and quick chats</li> <li>• How to elicit responses</li> <li>• Understanding the basics of note-taking</li> <li>• Reflecting on the notes/recordings</li> <li>• Making sense of the information</li> <li>• Exercise (in trios)</li> </ul>

## How to engage with stakeholders?

The depth of engagement with stakeholders can vary depending on the nature of the information required and the role of the stakeholder in the project. As the depth of engagement increases, the amount of time you spend with the listening process also increases.



An example of stakeholder engagement in co-creation and collaboration - the fourth level of engagement.

**Source:** UNDP Europe and Central Asia



## Different methods to engage with stakeholders

In our pursuit of community listening, it's essential to understand that listening takes on different forms, each serving specific purposes in community engagement and stakeholder research. These methods and formats are instrumental in gathering insights, building rapport, and addressing community needs effectively. Let's explore a diverse range of listening methods and formats.

### Before delving into the specific methods, it's crucial to distinguish between primary and secondary research.

Primary Research involves gathering data directly from original sources. It is tailored to specific research objectives and can take the form of in-depth interviews, surveys, focus groups, and observational research. Community listening is a form of primary research since it involves speaking or engaging directly with stakeholders to gather data.

Secondary Research involves the analysis of existing data and sources, such as academic papers, reports, and articles and even netography. It provides valuable context but may not address specific research questions.

### Community listening can be carried out through following primary research methods:

- **Observational Research:** Observing people in their natural environment provides insights into behavior and interactions. It can also be used to observe how the environment is influencing certain behaviors and how people adapt to it and interact with it. It can be especially useful for understanding non-verbal communication, routines, and community dynamics. Observational research offers a holistic view of community life.

**Example:** Observe the different groups of people who visit a neighbourhood park and what activities they engage in. This provides more insights into the patterns of change and utilization of the space.



**Source:**

Psychology with Miss Smith  
– Observation

- **Immersive Research:** This involves immersing yourself in the stakeholder's context and deriving deep insights on what they experience. These experiences can be valuable in uncovering new information about a place or uncovering elements of friction or differences that influence behaviors.

Example: If you drive your car in the city, try commuting using the public transport system for a week and experience how it influences the quality of your day. This might help uncover new information and identify some of the challenges and frictions in the system.



**Source:**  
Min An/Pexels

- **In-Depth Interviews:** These one-on-one conversations that are 45-60 minutes long allow for deep exploration of interviewee's experiences, thoughts, and feelings. They are highly flexible and provide rich qualitative data. In-depth interviews are ideal for uncovering nuanced insights and personal narratives.

Example: Speak to a member of a community about their daily routine, their needs, challenges, aspirations and how they imagine the future of the city from their point of view. This might help us understand the narrative and perceptions of the individual and the stakeholder group in that community.



**Source:**  
Alex Green/Jotform

- **Quick Chats:** These are 15-30 minute conversations with stakeholders or community members that are informal in nature. Quick chats help uncover initial insights or gather quick feedback on a project. They are valuable for preliminary data collection and building initial connections.

Example: Speak to a member of a community about how a new intervention or project in their community has influenced their daily life. This might help uncover some insights about both positive influences and unintended, negative consequences of the project.



**Source:**

Burro Millennial/Pexels

- **Focus Groups:** These involve small groups of participants discussing specific topics. They encourage interaction and can reveal shared perspectives, disagreements, and new ideas. Focus groups are excellent for exploring collective viewpoints and generating discussions.

Example: Engage with a group of students in a discussion about their career aspirations, their mentors or idols and what they would want to change or improve in their environment. This might help uncover some insights from their perspective, their collective needs and challenges.

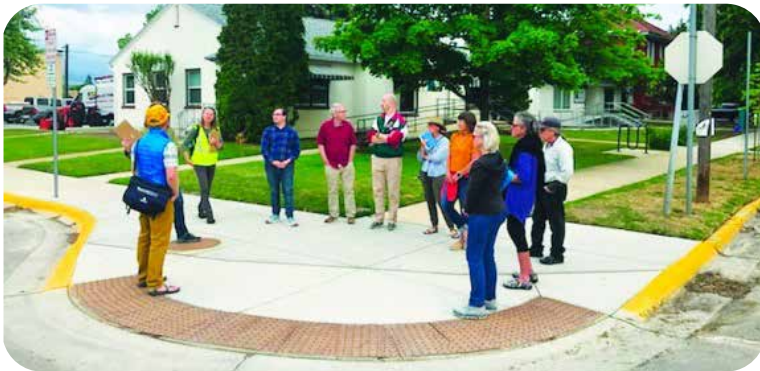


**Source:**

Kindel Media/Pexels

- **Participatory audit:** This is a mechanism for citizens' active participation in public oversight. It directly involves citizens and civil society groups (CSOs) in the audit process. (World Bank Institute & ACIJ, 2015). It is important to note that CSOs are partners and part of the community, and not competitors for funds or watchdogs. Involvement and collaboration with CSOs in development work, including these methods like participatory audits, makes it possible to have a complementary relationship to ensure that municipality and community goals are on track.

Example: A citizen audit of a neighborhood to document and note the infrastructure problems they face while using it on a day-to-day basis such as broken footpaths, potholes and dangerous road junctions. When the audit is conducted by a variety of citizens, including children and senior citizens, it provides a broader picture of the existing needs and challenges.



**Source:**

Bitterroot Star. A group of citizens, policymakers and transportation professionals gather to discuss State Street. Photo by Nathan Boddy

- **Self-reporting:** This involves setting up a social media or community page on municipality's services here citizens can quickly address any issues they are facing. This could be done through discussion boards, submission of forms or AI chatbots. Additionally, this data can also be found through websites that ask for public reviews and opinions.

Example: Tripadvisor or Google reviews can be a source to understand challenges faced by tourists or citizens in particular locations or with particular services. Similarly, the **municipality can also set up a chatbot** for inputs, feedback or complaints on social media for citizens.

While these methods cover a wide spectrum of community engagement, newer techniques such as online surveys, social media listening, and participatory action research are also gaining prominence in the ever-evolving landscape of community engagement and primary research. The choice of method should align with your research goals and the unique dynamics of the community or stakeholders you are engaging with.

**If you are looking for additional effective tools to engage with stakeholders, especially the community, try and explore the following ones:**



**Peer Observing Peers**  
by IDEO's Design Kit to help you engage the community in the listening process



**Extremes and Mainstreams** by IDEO's Design Kit to help you include community members that might give you varied yet important information and feedback

### How to avoid research biases?

When you limit your research to a single method or limit it to only quantitative or qualitative research, it poses a drawback in constraining your understanding of the context and you run the risk of misinterpretation. When you diversify the channels of listening and a combination of quantitative and qualitative research are interpreted together, you can draw rich insights that will lead to more targeted action.

It is important to remember that research often runs the risk of biases including:

- Design bias (example: designing a questionnaire that is biased to ask only about positive outcomes and not negative outcomes)
- Selection bias (example: circulating a survey only online thereby limiting the participants only to those that have access to a device and an internet connection)
- Gender bias (example: interviewing more people belonging to one gender that is not a representation of your city or community)
- Social class bias (example: interviewing more people belonging to one social class that is not a representation of the city or society)
- Analysis bias (example: interpreting the results in order to confirm own beliefs or assumptions)

Although these biases are carried out unconsciously, they tend to mislead the results and can divert the project in the wrong direction. It is thus important that research is carried out by a team (not just 1-2 individuals) to be able to collectively design the listening approach and questions and collectively interpret the results, to reduce the risks of bias.

## Step 3: Preparation for engagement

In this section we will focus on:

- How to frame a good research question?
- How to create a questionnaire?
- Creating a plan for conducting interviews and quick chats.
- Setting up the research space.
- Ethics and data privacy.



### How to frame good research questions?

Many of the primary research methods we have discussed such as surveys, in-depth interviews, quick chats and focus groups involve asking questions to stakeholders. In these situations, framing questions becomes an important part of the preparation.

The way we frame our questions and the context in which we ask them can greatly influence the quality of responses from stakeholders. Consider how the framing of the following questions might affect the responses of a stakeholder, especially if it is your first meeting:

1. how are you?
2. are you fine?
3. you're fine, aren't you?

While the first question provides room for you to express yourself in any way you would like, the second question closes your window of responses and limits you to 'yes' or 'no' responses but still allows a little room for choice. The third question on the other hand, makes an assumption and asks for your confirmation. All three questions seek to learn about the well-being of the recipient, but the framing strongly influences how comfortable the recipient feels about responding.

The first question is an open-ended one since it is open enough for the recipient to answer from a variety of feelings: 'fine', 'terrible', 'alright' and many more.

The second and third questions are both closed-ended questions as they close off certain options and limit responses to 'yes' or 'no'.

Both types of questions are important while engaging with stakeholders, but they need to be used for specific purposes.

### CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

Closed-ended questions are questions that can only be answered by selecting from a limited number of options, usually multiple-choice questions or with a single-word answer, 'yes' or 'no', or a rating scale (e.g. from strongly agree to strongly disagree). These questions are typically used to confirm the facts and information mentioned and to conclude.

### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions are questions that cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no', and instead require the respondent to elaborate on their points. Open-ended questions help you see things from the respondent's perspective as you hear their own narrative. They encourage people to reflect and reveal what is important to them and to freely expand on what is comfortable for them, rather than justifying their thoughts.

We use closed-ended and open-ended questions here to compare how they are different and how they elicit different responses. This is exemplified below:

- **Closed-ended question:** "Do you think the children behave this way because they are sleepy?"  
- Maybe
- **Open-ended question:** "What do you think causes children to behave this way?"  
- I have noticed that the children get hungry very quickly in the morning and it could be causing this behavior.
- **Closed-ended question:** "Do you think this product is good or bad?"  
- It's good.
- **Open-ended question:** "Can you describe how you found this product after using it?"  
- I think it's good, but it would be much better if it had a feature that allows me to...."

## How to frame open-ended questions?

When framing open-ended questions, we want to ask the respondents to describe how they experienced a situation and what emotions were triggered. We frame questions around:

- **ATTITUDES** when we want to uncover opinions and arguments:  
"What do you think ...?"
- **FEELINGS** when we want to uncover relationships and internal conflicts:  
"How do you feel .... "
- **MEMORY** when you want to uncover practices, behaviors and manners:  
"Tell me about ...."

## Exercise Activity

### REFRAME THESE CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Did you become a lawyer because you like debating?	→	.....
Is it hard to manage a class of children?	→	.....
Are you happy you chose that college?	→	.....
Do you want things to change or stay the same?	→	.....
How much effort did it take for you to get this far in your career?	→	.....

Additional examples:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- Why do you say that?
- What were your feelings when that happened?
- Can you give me an example?
- What kind of .... was it?
- That's interesting, could you explain that?

## How to create a questionnaire?

The creation of a questionnaire is a collaborative exercise between the members of the community listening team. You should first decide on key categories, based on the unknowns that you would like to explore or learn more about. For example, the needs of the stakeholders, challenges faced by the stakeholders, and experiences of the stakeholders around certain topics like air quality, mobility, accessibility, etc. Once these categories are decided, open-ended questions are framed in preparation for interviews or quick chats.

**If you are looking for additional effective tools to ask better questions, try and explore the following ones:**

**The Five Whys** by IDEO's Design Kit to help you deep dive into the interviewee's narrative



**Mapping or Drawing Out an Experience** by IDEO's Design Kit to help you understand the community's engagement/journey around your area of interest.



**Guide for Conducting Quick Chats** by Agirre Lehendakaria Center (ALC)



Through the course of the project, the number of stakeholders you will connect with can grow considerably and there is a need to create a database of the stakeholders that you interact with for two reasons:

- The stakeholder management tool helps keep track of relationships and is a resource for future projects in the city and can help accelerate the community engagement process for subsequent projects in the city.

	Name of team member: Number of interviews per week: Stakeholder groups to be interviewed:	Name of team member: Number of interviews per week: Stakeholder groups to be interviewed:	Name of team member: Number of interviews per week: Stakeholder groups to be interviewed:
<b>Week 1</b>	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)
<b>Week 2</b>	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)
<b>Week 3</b>	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)
<b>Week 4</b>	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	Stakeholders interviewed: 1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

[illegible]

Access the tool [here](#)



## Setting up the research space

To ensure the interviews are well-organized and stakeholders feel comfortable, it's crucial to prepare and arrange several key elements in advance. See below some tips which can help you prepare the research space.

### SETTING UP THE SPACE



#### START WITH YOUR SCRIPT

- Introduce yourself and why you are speaking with them
- Provide information about the study and how the information will be used



#### COLLECT CONSENT

- Provide plenty of time for the participant to read the consent form and ask questions
- The participant might choose to withdraw - do not conduct the interview and do not attempt to compel them



#### ARRANGE TO INTERVIEW YOUR RESPONDENT IN A QUIET, SEMI-PRIVATE PLACE

- Make sure to select spots that are not crowded and distracting
- Choose quiet spaces with minimal distraction in advance



#### BE PREPARED WITH TIME

- Clear your schedule and make sure to block more time than you will probably need
- Turn your mobile to silent mode and ensure you don't create distractions



#### USE A RECORDING DEVICE AND ONLY TAKE BRIEF NOTES

- This is done to maintain eye contact with your interviewee
- This also helps with focussing on deep listening and asking better questions
- If recording is not possible, work as a pair (where one person is only responsible for taking notes while the other person focusses on conducting the interview)

## Ethics and data privacy

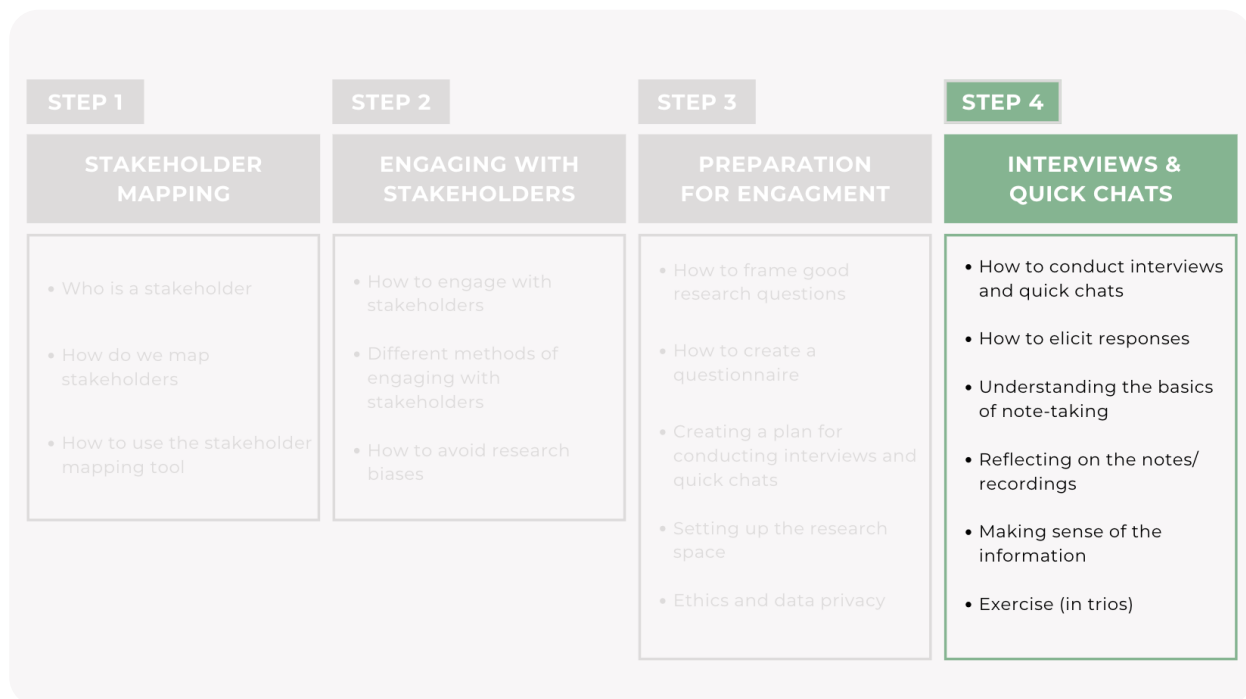
Obtaining consent to conduct an interview with a stakeholder is a crucial step in ensuring their comfort and willingness to provide honest and open responses. When collecting consent, clearly explain how the collected information will be used. Ensure that this information is not shared or misused beyond what the stakeholder has permitted.

If a participant feels uncomfortable providing their name and contact information for inclusion in the stakeholder database or during the interview, do not force them. Always offer the option to respond anonymously. Similarly, obtain explicit consent for recording the interview or taking notes of their answers.

## Step 4: Interviews and quick chats

In this section we will focus on:

- How to conduct interviews and quick chats?
- How to elicit responses?
- Understanding the basics of note-taking.
- Reflecting on the notes/ recordings.
- Making sense of the information.
- Exercise (in trios).



### How to conduct interviews and quick chats?

Conducting interviews is a skill that is learned through practice. An expert interviewer is someone who has done it many times and the only way to learn how to interview better is to reflect on your experience after every interview and improve on the next interview. There are a few overarching steps and tips to keep in mind while conducting interviews as we start putting this into practice:

- ASK the interviewee an open-ended question to explain their perspective
- LISTEN, without interruption, putting aside judgements, counterarguments and solutions
- ASK questions to uncover core issues with open-ended questions
- ASK to define some of the key terms the interviewee is using (What do you mean by ....?), even if you assume you understand what they mean
- SUMMARIZE the core of what you have heard and check if you have understood correctly (including the emotions)
- ASK whether they agree with your summary. If not, ask them to explain more
- REPEAT with this process till the speaker gives a resounding "Yes."

## How to elicit responses?

Eliciting skills build on the mindsets you need to be unbiased and open. These skills increase the validity of research by keeping it focused on the experience of the respondent. It is best practice to listen carefully and build questions based on what the respondent says. Some of these can be:

- **NOTICING CHANGES:** Sometimes respondents might exhibit a change of tone or body language that might be a cue for probing
- **ECHOING:** Using the same words as the speaker in your questions
- **PARAPHRASING FOR EMPATHY:** Relaying what you heard and letting the speaker know you understand and can relate to their emotions.
- **PROBING ON DETAILS:** Asking speakers to elaborate on certain details, emotions or gestures that they express.
- **CHECKING THE PARAPHRASE:** Summarizing the emotion or emphasis with how you interpret it and checking if that is accurate



An example of how eliciting responses can look like.

## Understanding the basics of note-taking

While taking notes, it's important to consider 3 things:

- **CONTENT:** Important direct quotes coming from the respondent. This includes only the facts and not our analysis of the words.
- **CONTEXT:** Observed behaviors and body language that sheds more light on what the words mean to the respondent. Observed non-verbal cues that reveal the respondents attitude.
- **MEANING:** Understanding the relevance of the responses with respect to the respondent's reality and environment. Taking note of moments in the interview that surprised you or challenged/reaffirmed your assumptions.

A simple note-taking template (see below) can help us collect the key content, context and meanings as we listen during interviews and quick chats. This will help document and collect all the information.

Week 1	Interview/Quick chat 1: Name: Stakeholder type:	Interview/Quick chat 2: Name: Stakeholder type:	Interview/Quick chat 3: Name: Stakeholder type:	Interview/Quick chat 4: Name: Stakeholder type:	Interview/Quick chat 5: Name: Stakeholder type:
Question 1					
Question 2					
Question 3					
Question 4					
Question 5					
Question 6					
Question 7					

Note-taking template

Reflecting on the notes/ recordings

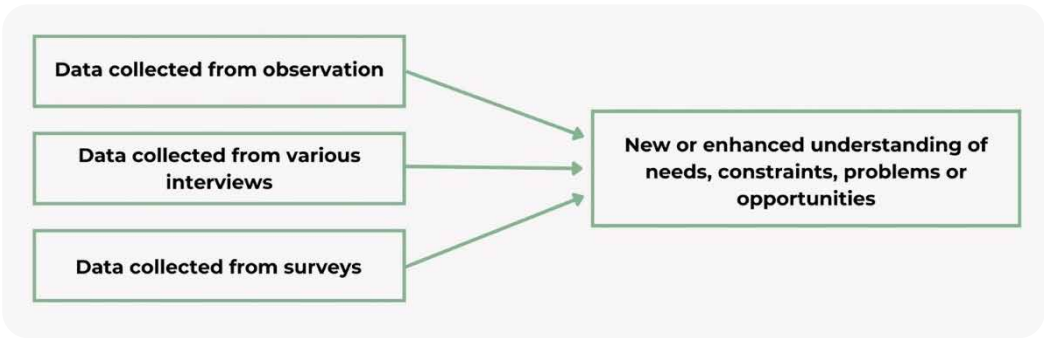
After an interview or a series of interviews, the interviewer (and note-taker, if involved) needs to reflect on each of the interviews in order to summarise dominant narratives, new information, observations and additional questions arising after the interview. Listening to the recording or reading the notes can help this process and support you in collecting this key information to make sense of it as a team.

Interview #: __	Dominant Narratives	New information/ Information that challenged our assumptions	Observations/ Quotes or insights shared by the stakeholder	Things we did not hear/ Questions we still have
Question 1				
Question 2				
Question 3				
Question 4				
Question 5				
Question 6				
Question 7				

Template to reflect and summarize the interview

How to make sense of information gathered

The goal of analyzing the gathered information is to develop a collective understanding of the existing challenges and opportunities. When the needs and constraints are identified and established, the problems become better defined. This process also helps uncover and share new initiatives within the ecosystem, such as a new non-profit or a small business providing a community service, which might have been previously unknown to team members. Additionally, reflecting on and sharing the diverse perspectives of the interviewed stakeholders can uncover insights or new opportunities for the municipality.



Sensemaking process of the gathered information

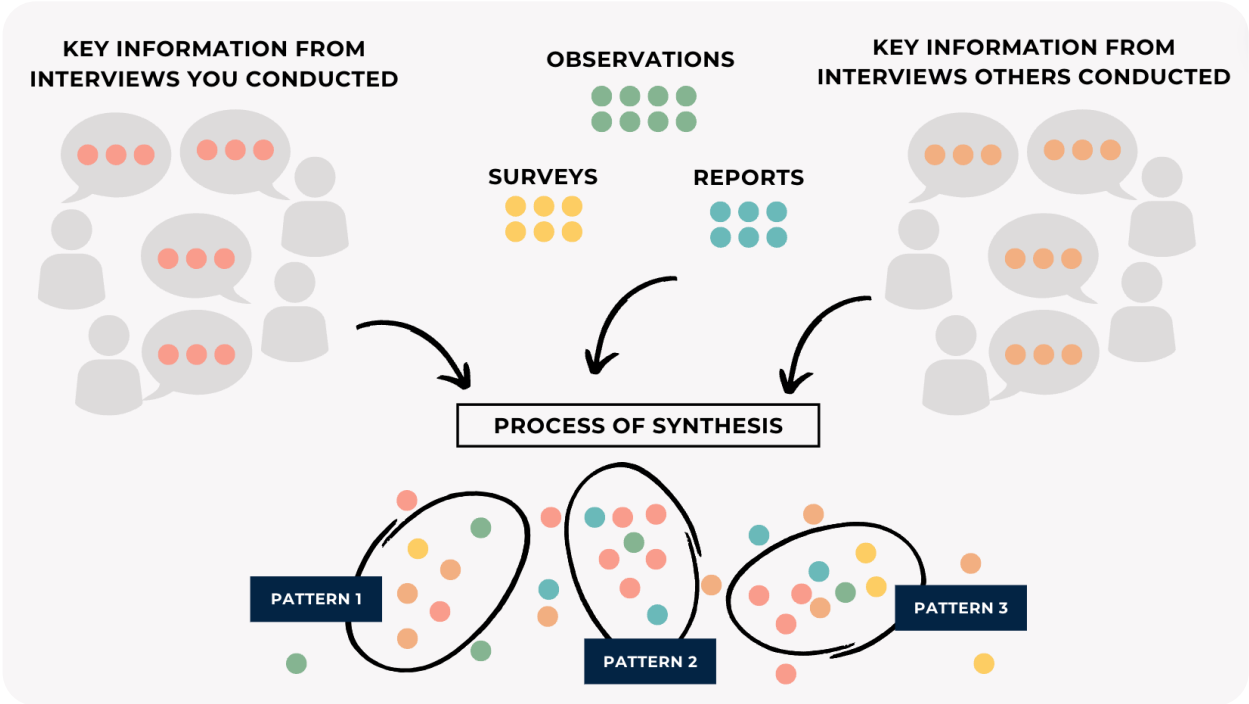
Making sense of the information is done collectively with the entire team engaged in the community listening process. This process requires a facilitator who will listen to each of the interviewers reflections and make notes. This process can be carried out in a workshop format with the use of flipcharts and post-its. Alternatively, this can also be done online through the use of digital workspaces or whiteboards such as **Miro** and **Mural** which can be very useful when all team members cannot be physically present for the workshop. This setting is created to ensure engagement, dynamism and transparency in the process.



A group of people engaging in an interactive planning session.

**Source:** Walls Io on Unsplash

Each member communicates their reflections from the interviews and what they heard from the stakeholders- dominant and repetitive responses to questions, new information that was previously unknown and challenged the team's assumptions, observations or insights and direct quotes from the stakeholders and things that were left unanswered and key points are shared by each of the interviewers. With more interview data, you will have more information to work with and you will see patterns beginning to emerge. These patterns will start building a clearer picture of the existing problems, challenges, and needs and can uncover opportunities or uncharted areas of exploration.



Process of synthesizing information obtained from interviews

This practice is conducted collectively by the team on a regular basis (e.g. weekly) to analyse the information and determine if additional or fewer questions are needed, or if existing questions need modification. It also creates a space for self-reflection and team reflection on the practice.

Question	Responses from interviews	Inference
<p>Imagine it's Monday morning and you are ready to leave for work</p> <p>When you're commuting from your home to the office, what are some key challenges you experience in the city?</p>	<div> <div>ENVIRONMENTAL</div> <div> <div>increasing temperatures</div> <div>lack of tree shade</div> <div>air pollution</div> <div>air pollution</div> <div>garbage thrown on streets</div> <div>air pollution and smoke</div> </div> <div>stray dogs</div> </div> <div> <div>TRAFFIC</div> <div> <div>bus delays</div> <div>noise pollution</div> <div>traffic jam</div> <div>traffic near schools in the morning</div> </div> <div>insufficient parking</div> </div> <div> <div>SAFE INFRASTRUCTURE</div> <div> <div>broken pavement</div> <div>insufficient light at night</div> <div>broken street lamps</div> <div>unsafe for pedestrians</div> <div>safety at night</div> </div> <div>narrow cycle path</div> </div>	<p>Working professionals commuting between their home and place of work in the central area of the city, say that key challenges are related to environment (mainly air pollution), traffic and the safety of the road infrastructure for pedestrians.</p>
<p>Key</p> <div> <div>Interviewee 1</div> <div>Interviewee 4</div> <div>Interviewee 2</div> <div>Interviewee 5</div> <div>Interviewee 3</div> <div>Interviewee 6</div> </div>		

Example of a synthesis board in Miro

The method of making sense and choice of tools depends on the project and its stage of completion. Other methods which can be used to make sense of the information gathered are the Iceberg model and the Journey map.

**If you are looking for alternate and effective tools to make sense of what you have heard, try and explore the following methods:**

**Downloading and clustering** what you hear



**Journey Maps** to identify and understand key moments for the community



Refer to this [link](#) to view additional ways of analysing insights gathered through community listening



## Exercise Activity (in trios)

For this exercise, you need at least two persons. The third one as a note-taker is optional. Please find further instructions for the exercise below.

### EXERCISE - MOCK QUICK-CHAT

#### INTERVIEWEE

You will play the role of Sarah

#### INTERVIEWER

You will play the role of Tania

#### NOTE-TAKER (OPTIONAL)

You will play the role of Harry

#### TIME

25 minutes [20' for the quick chat and 5' to reflect]

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- The activity requires a minimum of 2 persons and a maximum of 3 persons to participate
- Choose a character that you would like to play. Read the character brief based on the role you choose.
- After all participants have read their respective character briefs only, please step into the character you have chosen to play and begin playing your role.
- Use a timer set to 20 minutes as you begin the role-play
- Stop at the end of 20 minutes and then take 5 minutes to share reflections from the exercise
- Take notes on the worksheet while reflections are being shared

Please find the character briefs by following the links below.

Interviewee - [Sarah](#)

Interviewer - [Tania](#)

Note-taker - [Harry](#)

## Reflection Exercise

Reflect on the following questions after completing the exercise.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



**WHAT  
WENT  
WELL?**



**WHAT  
DIDN'T  
GO WELL?**



**WHAT DO YOU  
THINK YOU'RE  
GOOD AT?**



**WHAT DO  
YOU NEED TO  
WORK ON?**

## Knowledge Check



**1. Which of the following is a way to engage with stakeholders?**

- a. Informing
- b. Consulting
- c. Involving
- d. Collaborating

**2. Which of the following are primary research methods?**

- a. Quick chats
- b. Interviews
- c. Researching reports
- d. Focus groups

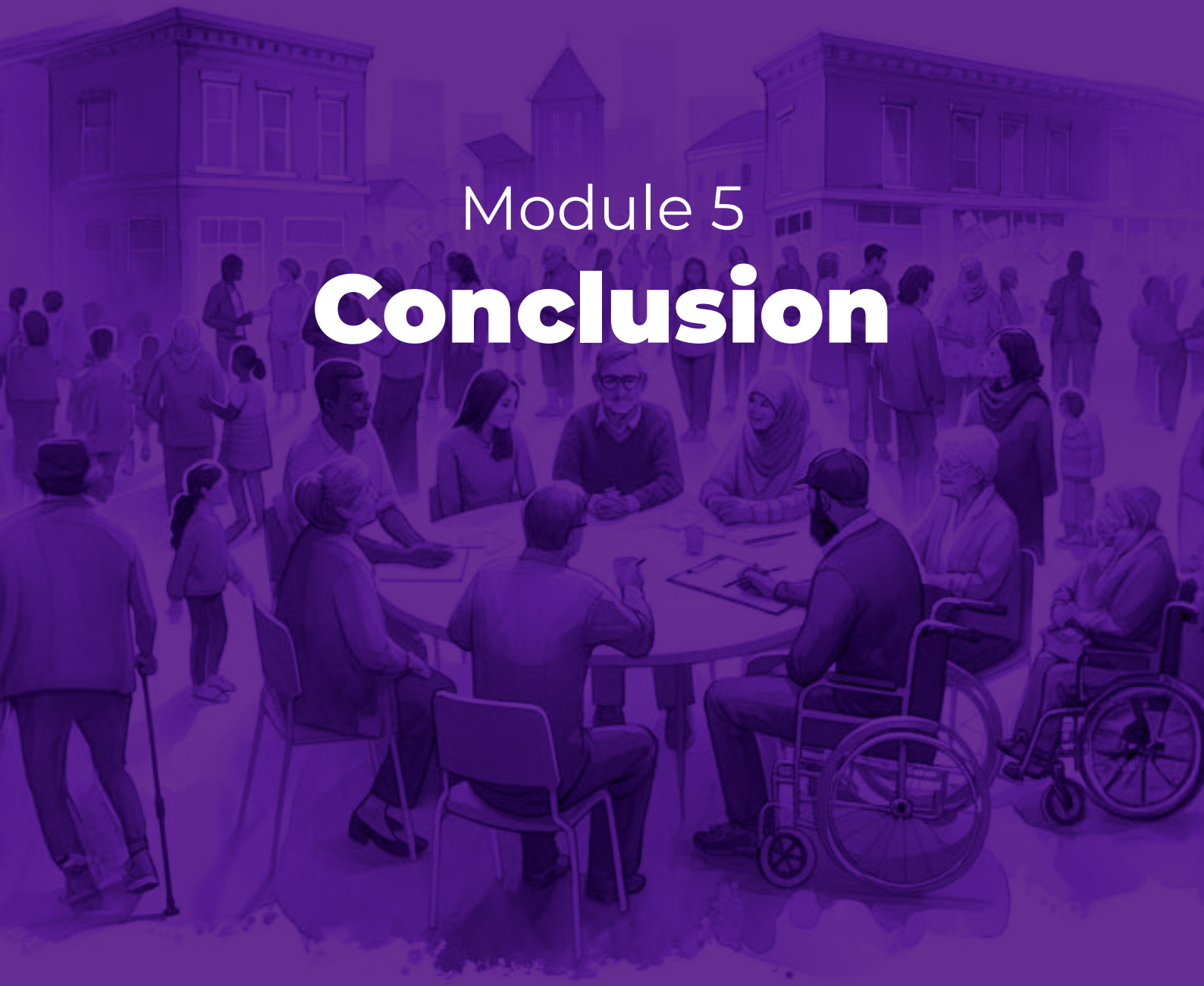
**3. Which of the following is an open-ended question?**

- a. Do you want things to change or stay the same?
- b. Do you feel this is a good thing?
- c. Tell me what an ideal city would look like to you?

Check your answers at the end of this course.



# Module 5 **Conclusion**

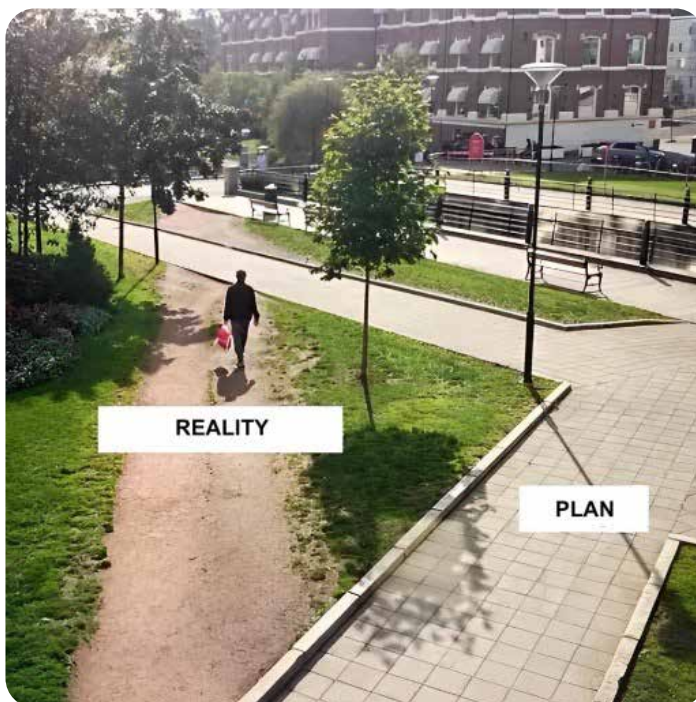


## Module 5

# Conclusion

This training was designed to provide you with essential theoretical and practical knowledge when it comes to understanding the basics of community listening. However, as mentioned in the course, listening is not a one-off exercise. Instead, it is a muscle that the municipality can build to check the pulse of the residents' needs and problems.

While all the tools here will be beneficial when you carry out the process live, it is important to note that often the reality is different from the planned scenarios showcased in the training. It is only when you put it into practice that you will be able to understand what works for you as a listener, what works for the communities you are engaging with and for the stakeholders you collaborate with. It is only by doing that you will be able to learn and adapt to make the process more suitable for your community, culture and geography. Additionally, we recommend that you also create a sustainable model for this practice by putting together some knowledge management methods within your institution that can help you see trends (consistent changes) in the community over time.



Plan vs Reality

If you need more support from us, please fill out [this form](#) and we will be in touch with you



## Check your answers

Module 2:

- Q1: c
- Q2: b
- Q3: a, b and c

Module 3:

- Q1: b
- Q2: d
- Q3: all options are correct

Module 4:

- Q1: all options are correct
- Q2: a, b and d
- Q3: c



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