

Community and Congregational Listening

coaching and best practices and from CMG Online sessions

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Community Listening

- Be on the lookout for potential partners. Interviews not only provide info on community needs and assets, they offer a chance to discover others who may be open to collaboration.
- Use the “snowball” method to build on your initial listening list—ask each person you interview who else you should talk with.
- Explore ways to piggy-back on existing groups / networks / events in the community—like a mom’s support group, a pastors’ network, a nonprofit resource council or a town parade.
- Consider planning a special event, like a block party, holiday event, donuts & coffee, or “Stone soup” community celebration, as a setting for community listening. Build good will as you get info!
- Go to where the people are! Where do folks hang out—coffee shop, bingo hall, diner? How about inviting input via social media sites, like a moms’ online group or neighborhood Facebook page?
- When people get ideas for a community ministry during the community listening phase, write them down to save for later. It’s not time yet to narrow down a plan, but keep the ideas on tap.
- Debriefing after a community listening activity is important ... but find the strategy that works for you. For example, if people don’t want to stick around to meet in person, try sending the debriefing questions by group text, email or other social media.
- Talk with people and organizations outside “the usual suspects.” Cast a wide net. Who else might have a perspective that is not usually heard? You might get some surprising but valuable input!
- If you feel overwhelmed by the needs and opportunities ... affirm yourselves, because that means you have been truly listening! Trust that you will discern your congregation’s unique contribution. Mutual ministry also means that you will be connected with others who are doing *their* part.
- If your listening leads to you to a timely, specific ministry opportunity (like building a wheelchair ramp or providing back-to-school supplies) and the congregation is on board, why wait?

Congregational Listening

- Look for ways to work smarter not harder! For example, build congregational listening around existing groups (like Sunday school, Bible study or fellowship), and already planned activities.
- Draw a networking map of what connections the congregation has with the community—what groups, nonprofits, businesses, schools, etc. the congregation has ties to. Seeing all the ways the congregation is networked can be helpful, especially in a smaller town.
- When one listening strategy doesn’t work, try another! Some congregations do better with written surveys, others with more face-to-face approaches, others with social media. What fits your style?
- Look for representation from diverse groups in the congregation. Try to get input from both newer and more long-term members. Both have important perspectives on the congregation.
- Tune in to the rhythms of congregational life. Some seasons on the church calendar don’t work as well for extra activities, so don’t feel bad about the lulls. Just try to plan ahead.