

## Community Organising Expansion Programme

### **Tips on running a Safe, Ethical and Legal listening campaign**

A listening campaign is a means of identifying themes and issues that are concerning a community and highlighting areas for action or change. It is also an effective way to find people who are motivated to gather and analyse the listening results and lead action. It is a method that can help organisers to find the people who will voluntarily engage in public life and join a powerful network to effect change. A listening campaign is the bedrock of an organising strategy and if done well it is a powerful tool.

**However, it is important to organise a safe, ethical and legal campaign which embodies the values and principles of community organising and the Community Organising Code of Conduct.**

During a listening campaign you may be knocking on doors, standing on street corners, going into all kinds of community venues and into people's homes. This involves being aware of potential dangers and managing them.

You will be striking up one-to-one conversations and paying close attention to what people say, as well as trying to get them to commit to further engagement. You need to be systematic about how you record the conversations and how you hold and store the records.

You will have conversations with a wide range of individuals, some of whom are vulnerable. A conversation may uncover sensitive issues, such as health or employment status and difficult life experience. It may also be politically sensitive. A listening team must have a high level of personal integrity to ensure that people are treated with respect and sensitivity and that they do not misuse the listening campaign.

The key principles to be adhered to in a listening campaign are:

- voluntary participation
- safeguarding people
- informed consent
- confidentiality
- anonymity
- data protection
- safety
- accountability

## **Foundations of a Good Listening Campaign**

1. The community organising team is appropriately trained and supported to stay safe, safeguard others, build trust and to be accountable
2. The purpose of the listening campaign is explained to those who participate
3. The limits of confidentiality are understood and agreed by those taking part
4. Information is recorded and stored with due regard to the level of confidentiality agreed with respondents
5. Participants can be involved in deciding how information they supply is used and consent is clearly gained for storing and using personal contact details
6. Appropriate support is offered to individuals who divulge and to those who are told about serious matters that are affecting them and/or their community
7. To uphold the negotiating power and confidence of the community the full findings of a listening campaign are acknowledged, understood and accepted as being the intellectual property of those who contribute or input to it
8. Members of the organising team must not give information away or share it without agreement
9. The community organising team holds the data on behalf of the community - it does not belong to any institution or funder
10. Reports of findings are produced collaboratively and in a format that will promote positive action and encourage solutions
11. The community organising team analyse, collate and use their listening data to inform action, mobilise people and transform power relations.

## **Door-knocking and Safety for your Team**

A listening campaign usually involves a substantial amount of time spent in door-knocking. This can be risky, and it is essential to put in place risk management procedures for your listening team, for example emergency contact arrangements, and notification of location of work.

It is best to avoid lone door-knocking at first and if you or members of your listening team are door-knocking alone you should undertake Health and Safety Risk assessments. Employer Liability and Public Liability Insurance is available if needed and can cover volunteers as well as paid staff, provided volunteers register with the organisation holding the insurance.

## Safeguarding Other People

It is vital that as a community organising team you have knowledge, procedures and policies for **safeguarding children** and **vulnerable adults**. The listening team should ideally be given introductory awareness training in safeguarding and should know:

- What safeguarding means
- How to recognise potential abuse or neglect
- How to report and who to report to any concerns they have – **Nominated Safeguarding Person** (this may be another agency but they need to know who it is)
- How to avoid putting themselves in a risky situation with children or vulnerable adults

### Disclosure Advice

In the event of being told of serious concerns - in particular if these relate to children or vulnerable people:

Ask if the person wants support. Tell them that you will need to talk to someone else in the team. Use key statements and questions such as:

*“What you tell me is confidential, and you need not be identified in any reports, but if you tell me of any serious concern I will have to talk to someone else on our team.”*

*“I will have to report this. Do you want me to support you to share this with someone who can help you change the situation you are in“? (children re disclosed abuse)*

*“Would you be happy for me to share this with someone who can help you change the situation?”*

*“Would you like any support or help in taking this matter further?”*

*“Can I come back to you about your concern?”*

Have information available on contact points for appropriate agencies/helplines.

As soon as possible, contact the Nominated Safeguarding Member of your team.

### ID and DBS (Police) Checks

There is no law which says that you must have ID or a police check before you embark on a listening campaign. After all you are just going to talk to friends, neighbours and members of your community. The best way to build trust is through openness, integrity, good behaviour and word of mouth recommendations.

However, given the low levels of trust in some communities (and fears about people knocking on doors and preying on vulnerable old people, for example,) it may be worth creating some ID for your listening team. This can include a photo ID and some endorsement by a trusted local organisation if there is one (church or mosque, community centre, school etc).

Police checks are only required if you are going to be involved in specific 'regulated' activity with young people or vulnerable adults. Knocking doors and holding conversations does not fall into this category.

If you want to specifically outreach to young people and build relationships with them it is sensible to find out who in your listening team already has a police check and is cleared to work with young people and let them lead this aspect of the campaign. It provides reassurance and safeguards the members of the listening team as well as the young people. Remember to avoid holding any one-to-one conversations with young people in private.

## **Safeguarding Information**

It is vital that as a community organising team you have knowledge, procedures and policies for **safeguarding data**. The listening team should ideally be given introductory awareness training in data protection and should be made fully aware of the organisation's Data Protection Policies and Procedures or be fully conversant with their responsibilities and legal obligations as individuals under Data Protection legislation.

Information collected in a listening campaign is precious. It is the key to the organising network's power base and should be recorded well and safeguarded.

During a listening campaign you will be collecting and recording two types of information:

1. People's opinions and feelings about their lives and the local neighbourhood or wider society
2. Contact information for the people you speak to so that you can contact them again, along with your assessment as to what motivates them and whether they are potential leaders etc.

Personal contact details should be recorded on a separate sheet from the general record of the conversation – the information, opinions and feelings expressed about the area. The person should not be able to be identified from the information, opinions and feelings expressed – this data should ensure anonymity.

On a contact or leader record you can also note their skills, talents, assets and motivations but be very careful about making your own judgements which cannot be substantiated. People have the right to request to see the information you hold on them.

We are all responsible for safeguarding people's personal data whether stored on paper or electronically, just as we would want our own data safeguarded. Always ensure your listening team have access to lockable storage for notes and contact details recorded whilst listening.

It is good practice for all members of the listening team to sign a form agreeing to keep sensitive personal data safely and secure it as soon as possible after collecting it. They should understand the importance of storing it securely and not allowing anyone else to look at it, even other members of the family.

Storing personal data electronically requires strong security e.g. password protection, encryption, so is best avoided unless you have access to a compliant, cloud-based storage system. Personal data should not be transferred by email or stored on removable data sticks.

## Getting Started

Start with “warm contacts” - try listening to friends, family, colleagues, and then meet up with others in the team to evaluate and learn from the experience.

Work in pairs in the same street/area, agree a time to meet up again, note if a colleague is invited into a house - check they come out safely! Be alert and apply common sense - make sure someone knows where you are and when you expect to be back.

Introduce yourself and the listening activity; explain to them who you are and what you are doing. Explain the open approach and clarify the boundaries of confidentiality; offer your contact information via a card or flyer; explain who you represent.

Remember this is a conversation not a survey! Build a relationship. Be yourself. Connect.

Listen and reflect back the information and stories given to you; check the person is happy with what you have heard and summarised. Try to identify their motivation, their passion or anger.

Check whether you can contact them again. Explain how you will use their contact information if they provide it. Remember, if you can't contact someone you can't move them to action!

Make notes after the conversation to help you remember the important points. Be systematic about recording the facts, opinions and feelings of the conversation.

Set a target for the number of people you want to reach in the session and don't stop until you have got there.

At the end of a listening session meet with your team and reflect on how things went. What did you learn? What went well? What could have been done better? Were there any concerns or issues that need following up straight away?

Store your conversations and your contacts separately & securely. Keep going!

*Community Organisers demonstrate honesty and integrity and uphold public confidence and trust.*

*(COLtd Code of Conduct)*

