



**LISTENING
TO YOUR
PEOPLE**



Listening to Your People: A Guide



**Begin: Listen to the
whole church**

Page 3

**Invite: Gather people
into the conversation**

Page 4



**Host: Create a warm
environment**

Page 5

**Ask: What am I
listening for?**

Page 7



**Leadership starts with
listening.**

Scott Cormode, professor of
leadership at Fuller Theological
Seminary and teaching.

**Conclude: Synthesize
your listening**

Page 8

Begin: Listen to the whole church

Before you begin actually listening, you need to develop a curated list of the people you're hoping to hear from. This group should include both people who will offer encouraging sentiments and also people who will challenge the vision or may not be on board right away.

The point in listening is not to collect statements affirming your assumed beliefs.

Instead, the goal is to develop a collective narrative that is composed of the whole community that you serve.

Write down the names of ten people in your congregation or church community who you would like to hear from.

Once you've written them down, begin to categorize these people in the following ways:

- Male/Female
- Ethnicity/Race
- Ableness
- Age
- Social class

Once you've finished, study your list.

Where are these leaders similar in the categories above? How are they different? Begin to replace some of the leaders on your list with new names so that you can expand who you're listening to.

Again, the point is to help round out the perspective so that you're actually getting a clear picture of where people are. (This encompasses physical location, as well as where people are emotionally and spiritually.)

Learning these things will help you better tailor your ministry for the community.

Invite: Gather people into the conversation

A Helpful framework can begin in the following way:

For Next Generation Engagement purposes, our hope—and we anticipate your hope—is to get a better sense of how all generations feel engaged in each congregation. Begin by stating this as the purpose for your conversation.

1.

Create a safe space for honest communication.

It is important for you as the facilitator to create a safe space for honest dialogue. This means more listening from you as you ask questions and less talking or directing the conversation. It can also be helpful to state some common ground rules.

We often say:

- no experience is unloveable
- titles are left at the door
- we're committed to eliminating side bar conversations (in person or through technology).

You can invite the group or the individual to add ground rules as needed.

2.

Avoid buzzword phrases.

Phrases like, “but don’t you think?” or “when I was your age...” suggest that you’re not actually listening.

Typically, what follows these statements are thoughts and/or opinions that reflect your own experience. Your experience is valid, but it is not the purpose of this listening exercise.

Instead, you’re working as a scientist to uncover the true feelings and experiences of the person before you so that you might discover what is currently happening in your congregation.

Note

Next Generation Engagement is committed to coming alongside congregations in raising up young leaders. As you are preparing for listening, also consider how you might gain a broader perspective of the young leaders in your community. This may require a separate time of listening solely to these young people who are committed to serving your congregation well.

Host: Create a warm environment

Your listening sessions can be one-on-one, or you can gather in a small or large group. Select a group size that will be comfortable for all participants, and ensure that there is time and space for everyone to share.

We recommend including no more than 12 people in any group session. Research shows that a person's willingness to be vulnerable decreases dramatically when a group is larger than 12..

For in-person gatherings:

Setting the environment for in-person gatherings can be essential for honest conversations.



For one-on-one conversations with young leaders, coffee shops might feel more hospitable. Sometimes even going for a walk can be easier.

If you're meeting with a larger group, consider meeting in a home with comfortable furniture. While it is not necessary, available food and drinks can provide the space for internal processors to take a minute to pause and reflect upon questions that have been asked. The point is to create a space that feels safe and inviting for authentic reflection.

Host: Create a warm environment

For Virtual Gatherings

It's important to remember that every generation has a different perspective of technology. In technology, vulnerability is less likely to decrease for younger generations. In the age of digital listening sessions, we would recommend leveraging the features of your digital platform.

1.

If there is a chat, ask participants to respond that way. Invite everyone to stay muted until they are prepared to speak.

2.

You can share videos and powerpoints easily through this platform as well. While we don't recommend a robust presentation for your listening sessions, a helpful reminder of why you're meeting or what question you're hoping to have answered can be very helpful..



Ask: What am I listening for?

Scott Cormode, leadership professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, says it best: **“You are listening to the longing and losses of your people.”**

As you sit together, the point is not to ask targeted questions that reveal only the things you’re hoping to hear. Instead, you’re listening for the things people are grieving. You’re listening to see what they’re hoping for. These are the primary emotions that people are bringing to the situation at hand but also before God and in living in community with one another.

We’ve developed some key questions that may help you to steward your conversations.

These are suggestions and not mandatory for your listening session. Tailor the questions to your church community and situation.

Make the most out of these listening sessions, carefully asking the right questions to get at the answers you need.

In your life right now, what has been good for you?

What are you celebrating?

What has given you hope?

What are you grieving right now?

What makes you sad?

What is something that you’ve learned about God recently?

What is something that you’ve learned about the church?

Do you feel included in the church and/or community?

If yes, how so? If no, why not?

What is one thing you need right now?

Conclude: Synthesize your listening

It's likely that you'll hear nothing ground-breaking or earth-shattering during your listening. The point is not to find the most innovative church ministry work.

Instead, after listening to people in your church and community, you will be in a better position to truly help the people you serve better love God and love one another.

Once you've conducted your listening, you'll want to look for key themes or common stories that you heard.

What things were surprising to you?

What stood out to you?

Where did you see similarities?

Finally, what might you need to do to really help the people in your faith community better live and love like Jesus?

LISTENING TO YOUR PEOPLE



Connect with us!

**To unpack your listening further,
consider consulting with the Next
Generation Engagement team.**

**Find out about coaching or
learning processes, or simply ask
a question, with an email to
nextgen@rca.org.**

NEXT GENERATION ENGAGEMENT