

Research Meets Policy: Connecting with your audience

Content contributed by Paola Ardiles & Dr. Amy Lubik

Edited by Lupin Battersby, Alison Moore, and Jennifer Chutter, SFU Knowledge Mobilization Hub

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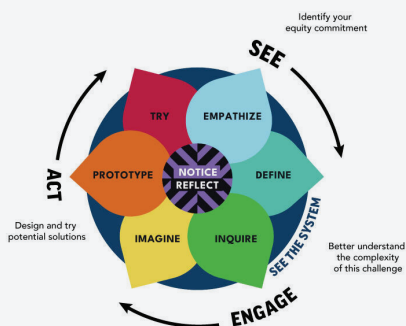
In this explainer, we build on some of the concepts described in our first explainer document by focusing on skills for connecting with stakeholders. The more you listen to your audience, the better your communication and contribution to policy will be. To do this, we must first consider how our own beliefs and experiences influence how we perceive or hear others.

Learning to listen begins with self-reflection

One approach to connecting with stakeholders is equity-centred design. Design thinking is an approach to addressing complex problems based on those who experience the problem. Equity-centred design prioritizes the voices and needs of equity deserving communities.

The [equity-centred design framework](#) includes the following iterative steps: notice, empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test, and reflect. Here we focus on the first two steps.

 Liberatory Design for Equity Process



April 2021



Anaissie, T., Cary, V., Clifford, D., Malarkey, T. & Wise, S. (2021).

Notice

Notice, in this context, means taking time to identify your intentions and biases, and recognize your privilege. Doing this helps you to be more open to listening and hearing the expertise, needs, and biases of your stakeholders. This openness facilitates engagement and relationship building with your stakeholders, which will in turn help you communicate your research effectively to your policy audience.



Before engaging stakeholders

Before engaging stakeholders, ask these questions of yourself (notice):

- **Identity:** Who am I? Who will (potentially) be impacted by my work?
- **Power:** How am I situated (relative to opportunity, institutional power)?
- **Context:** What is the situation, what are the equity challenges?
- **Partnership:** How can I build relationships that are liberating?
- **Intention:** ...so that what we create generates increased equity

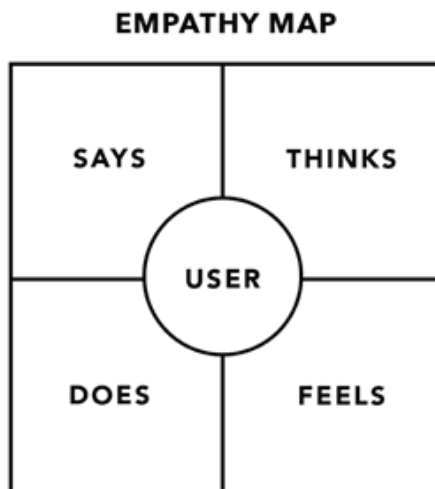
Empathize

Empathy is the ability to see a situation from someone else's perspective. One tool to intentionally understand and document another person's perspective is [empathy mapping](#). This is useful if you are preparing materials from your research to share with them.

Create an empathy map

Empathy mapping steps included:

- 1) Define scope and goals
- 2) Gather materials for mapping
- 3) Collect qualitative data: interviews, contextual inquiry, observations on what your user says, thinks, feels and does
- 4) Generate ideas for each quadrant from the data
- 5) Cluster like ideas into themes, review



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Practice active listening

When you are ready to engage and learn from your stakeholders and target audiences be sure to use active listening skills. That is, you put yourself aside and are fully present to listen and hear what your stakeholder is sharing. Top tips for keeping your listening active:

1. Pay attention, use eye contact & avoid crafting a rebuttal or opinion in your head
2. Show you're listening, use verbal (e.g. uh huh) and non-verbal (e.g. nod) cues
3. Ask questions & summarize for clarity and understanding
4. Be respectful in your questions and responses

Resources for connecting with your audience

Pindeo: [An Introduction to Liberatory Design](#)
Vora: [What Great Listeners Actually Do](#)
NNGroup: [How to Empathy Map](#)
Anaissie, T., Cary, V., Clifford, D., Malarkey, T. & Wise, S. (2021). Liberatory Design.
<http://www.liberatorydesign.com>.