

Exploring Your Community's Strengths and Hopes

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY LISTENING PROJECTS



DEVELOPED AS PART OF
INSPIRED TO SERVE: YOUTH-LED INTERFAITH ACTION



This guide was developed by the INSPIRED TO SERVE project team. Lead writer is Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, with input from April Kunze, Noah Sliverman, Megan Hughes, Kay Hong, and Deena Bartley. Special thanks to the INSPIRED TO SERVE cities (Chicago, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and St. Paul) for pilot testing this resource.

For more information on Inspired to Serve: Youth-Led Interfaith Action, visit www.inspiredtoserve.org

Exploring Your Community's Strengths and Hopes: A Step-by-Step Guide for Youth-Led Community Listening Projects

Copyright © 2009 by Search Institute and Interfaith Youth Core



Search Institute
615 First Avenue Northeast, Suite 125
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612-376-8955
www.search-institute.org



Interfaith Youth Core
910 W. Van Buren St., 4th Fl.
Chicago, IL 60607
312-573-8825
www.ifyc.org



This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service under Learn and Serve America Grant No. 06KCHMN001. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Corporation or the Learn and Serve America Program.

Contents

OVERVIEW 5

INTRODUCTION 6

Benefits of Listening Projects • Purpose of This Guide • Listening Project Overview • Unique Features • Why Strengths, Not Needs • The “Key Informant” Approach • Beginning the Conversation

1. GETTING ORGANIZED 12

Identify a Project Coordinator • Form a Youth–Adult Planning Team • Establish Scope and Goals • Review and Refine “Listening Tools” • Identify Key Informants • Establish Your Tasks and Timelines • Plan for Documentation • Invite People to Be Interviewed • Plan for Preparation, Reflection, and Analysis • Prepare Adult Leaders and Allies • Engage Parents/Guardians as Allies • Broadly Communicate the Plans • Ready to Listen and Learn!

Worksheets: Scope and Purpose Worksheet
 Checklist for Assessing Scope and Goals
 Listening Project Planning Assignments
 People to Interview

2. PREPARATION 27

Before the Event • Materials to Gather • Registration and Welcome • Opening: Listening to Each Other • Listening Project Introduction • Introduction to Your Community • Why Focus on Strengths? • Interview Expectations and Skills • Practicing • Assignments • Sending Forth

Worksheets: Sample Listening Project Schedules
 Discovering Needs, Fixing Problems
 Discovering Strengths, Sharing Dreams

3. ACTION 39

Adapting the Guide • Details Checklist • Introductions • The Basics • Perceptions of Strengths • Hopes for the Future • Opportunities for Partnerships • Summary • Conclusion • Review and Clarify Notes

4. REFLECTION

47

Options to consider • Before the Session • Materials to Gather • Welcome and Paperwork
• Reconnecting • Process and Expectations • Debriefing the Interview Process • What?
Summarizing Notes • So What? Surfacing Interests • So What? Finding Common Ground • Now
What? Surfacing Priorities • Now What? Next Steps • Thanks and Affirmations • Now What?
Commitments

Worksheets: Major Themes in Your Interview
 Identifying Opportunities
 More Formal Data Analysis and Reporting

5. RECOGNITION

60

Reinforcing Young People’s Learning, Growth, and Commitment • Building Awareness and
Commitment among Families and Faith-Based Organizations • Engaging with Community
Leaders and Members for Partnerships • Positioning Interfaith Action and Faith-Based
Organizations in the Public • Assessing the Project for Future Improvements

Worksheet: Assessing the Listening Project

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

64

Other Community Mapping Resources • Relevant Resources on Service-Learning, Asset
Building, and Youth Engagement • Relevant Resources on Interfaith Engagement

Overview

Here is a summary of the major activities and steps in a youth-led community listening project. It builds on the basic phases of effective service-learning projects: Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Recognition. The numbers below match the chapter numbers in the complete guide.

The community listening project involves interfaith teams of youth and adults interviewing community leaders (key informants) about their sense of the community's strengths, the opportunities for partnership, and their hopes for the future. It is designed to provide a foundation for building relationships in the community and for planning future service-learning projects.

1. Getting Organized

Approximately six weeks before your listening day, begin organizing your project as follows:

- ▶ Identify a project coordinator and form a youth-adult planning team to establish scope, goals, and timeline; review listening tools; plan documentation; and identify key informants to interview.
- ▶ Determine how you want to structure the listening project time. Timing options for everything from a one-day event to a five-session process are provided in Worksheet 5 on pages 42-43.
- ▶ Invite people to be interviewed, and inform other stakeholders about the project.

2. Preparation

The preparation phase is accomplished in a meeting format with all youth and adults who are participating in the listening project. The event introduces participants to the principles, goals, and tasks of the listening project. It sets expectations for the interviews and allows participants to practice interviewing before going into the community.

3. Action

The action phase provides a complete interview guide for interfaith, intergenerational teams to conduct key informant interviews in their community. Chapter 3 of the guide includes questions (and space for recording responses) for getting to know the key informant, exploring the strengths of the community, hopes for the future, and opportunities for partnership with the interfaith network.

4. Reflection

The reflection time involves a group process that brings the interviewers together to debrief the interviews, summarize the information, identify interests, find shared priorities, and identify next steps for future service-learning projects. Guidelines for more detailed interpretation are also provided in the guide.

5. Recognition

The recognition phase reinforces young people's growth and learning, broadens awareness in the community, and sets the stage for future community action. It involves presentations, media outreach, and networking to use the findings to strengthen community life. It occurs after the listening project.

Introduction

Effective service-learning requires that the action taken meet genuine needs in the community. As stated in National Youth Leadership Council's *Essential Elements of Service-Learning*: "[Effective service-learning] involves students in tasks that have clear goals, meeting genuine community needs identified by students and approved by the community, which is part of the students' learning process and integral to the program design."¹

Too often, however, service projects by youth groups are developed without dialogue in the broader community. The result can be that the service doesn't address the priorities of the community members. At best, young people's actions are largely inconsequential or irrelevant in the community, only offering a fun, feel-good experience for themselves. At worst, community residents feel exploited or "done to" for the benefit of those providing the service.

BENEFITS OF LISTENING PROJECTS

Taking the time to listen to the community is vital to the overall quality and impact of service-learning experiences. A structured listening project has a number of benefits:

- ▶ It helps ensure that the service-learning projects address community priorities and engage the broader community as partners, not just recipients. In doing so, it addresses one of the critical steps in effective service-learning: Investigating community priorities and needs.²
- ▶ It introduces young people to basic research skills and techniques.
- ▶ Young people have an opportunity to dialogue across faiths, thus increasing mutual understanding and commitment to the shared values of service, community engagement, and listening.
- ▶ Youth and adults become more invested in their projects when they understand the issues at stake, know people who would benefit, and have confidence that their efforts will meet genuine community needs.
- ▶ Young people become more committed to their communities as they learn about community needs and build relationships with others in the community.
- ▶ Agencies and sponsoring organizations (networks, congregations, etc.) benefit from being seen as true resources and collaborators in building community and meeting community needs.

¹ Toole, P. (Ed.) (1999). *Essential elements of service-learning*. St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council.

² See the standards for quality practice in service-learning that were developed by National Youth Leadership Council and RMC Research in 2008: www.nylc.org/standards. Also see: Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2009). *Service-learning in community-based organizations: A practical guide to starting and sustaining high-quality programs*. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

- ▶ It helps to position diverse faith communities as resources and allies within the community, countering negative stereotypes.
- ▶ People who develop the practices of listening and learning will become more effective citizens, leaders, and change agents in their communities and the world.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

There are many ways to listen to a community hopes, needs, priorities, and resources. Some involve surveys, extensive interviews, mapping technologies, and complex processes. Those detailed processes are vital for community-wide visioning and strategic planning for major public or philanthropic investments.

While recognizing the value and need for these detailed processes (some of which are described in the Additional Tools and Resources section), this guide is more modest in its approach. This guide seeks to:

- ▶ Introduce interfaith networks to a simple, yet structured, process for learning about community needs and resources as a foundation for service-learning.
- ▶ Provide a process and event that will help position young people and faith communities as partners and resources for building community.
- ▶ Stimulate reflection and dialogue that shifts the focus from a needs-based charity approach toward collaborative community building.
- ▶ Set the stage for interfaith networks that want to “go deeper” with assessment and community mapping.

LISTENING PROJECT OVERVIEW

This guide provides a step-by-step process and tools to help interfaith networks engage youth or intergenerational teams in a basic listening project (using a “key informant” interview approach).³ It includes the following elements:

- ▶ **Organizing**—How to involve young people and congregations to clarify the scope and purpose of the listening process, customize the tools to fit the community, identify people in the community to serve as “key informants,” and make plans to document and communicate what’s learned.
- ▶ **Preparation**—How to prepare youth and adult teams to conduct the listening project by increasing their awareness of the importance of focusing on strengths, reviewing the goals of the project, and building teamwork and listening skills.
- ▶ **Action**—How to conduct pre-arranged 30- to 45-minute interviews with key informants, including scripts, interview questions, and note-taking tools.

³ Roehlkepartain, E. C., Bright, T., & Margolis-Rupp, B. (2000). *An asset builder’s guide to service-learning*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

- ▶ **Reflection**—How to distill information from multiple interviews by multiple teams into themes, priorities, and potential projects. This includes reflection on shared values across faith traditions and skills learned.
- ▶ **Recognition**—How to publicize and celebrate the project, increasing public understanding of the community’s strengths and priorities while positioning young people and the interfaith network as partners in the community.

This guide provides a framework or template for this process, not a rigid structure that must be precisely followed. Each community and interfaith network is different, and the listening process needs to reflect local realities.

For example, an interfaith network just getting started may focus on generating broad interest in interfaith service-learning and a one-time, focused project. Their initial listening process may appropriately be quite compact (just a day) in order to generate broad participation. As a core group emerges, members might later repeat a listening process at deeper level.

In contrast, another interfaith network may be at the point of engaging a small group of committed young people in ongoing service-learning—the kind of sustained involvement that has a lasting impact on the young people and their communities. Their listening process may be a multi-phased in order to help them examine underlying causes of social issues.

It is important that each of the major steps be addressed in some way in the listening process in order to maximize impact. Thus, adaptations should be done to help fit the process with local readiness and realities, not to shortcut the basic principles and processes.

Throughout the guide are boxes like this one. They summarize underlying principles and practices of effective service-learning. As you adapt the process, reflect on how your work is true to these principles.

UNIQUE FEATURES

Since a number of guides for gathering community data are available, why create another one? We’ve developed this guide with several features that are specific to INSPIRED TO SERVE: YOUTH-LED INTERFAITH ACTION. These include:

- ▶ **Integrated themes**—This guide intentionally weaves together the core themes and best practices of the INSPIRED TO SERVE project. In doing so, it provides the opportunity to learn about each of these accents through experience and reflection.⁴ The four integrated themes are:
 - *Effective service-learning*—Applying the principles and practices of effective service-learning, including youth-led planning, meeting real community needs, and active reflection.⁵

⁴ This guide presumes that users have a basic understanding of service-learning, interfaith action, and Developmental Assets. If that’s not the case, consult www.inspiredtoserve.org to gain a basic familiarity of these foundational approaches.

⁵ For more information on the principles and practices of effective service-learning, see Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2009). *Service-learning in community-based organizations: A practical guide to starting and sustaining high-quality programs*. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

- *Interfaith engagement*—Building cooperation, dialogue, and joint action across diverse faith communities around shared commitments to service and community building, thus creating a stronger sense of mutual trust, respect, and understanding.
 - *Asset building*—Integrating a commitment to holistic youth development, building on the principles and practices of Search Institute’s framework of Developmental Assets.
 - *Citywide movement*—Partnering with others in the community to foster citywide movements of interfaith service-learning.
- ▶ **Community building**—The listening process lays a foundation for broad community engagement and community building. It also helps to create a sense of “community” among the youth and adults from diverse faiths who participate in planning, action, and reflection.
 - ▶ **Time constraints**—Interfaith networks rely on volunteer involvement, thus facing significant time limitations for both adult and youth leaders. This listening process can be completed within one day as a self-contained interfaith project, if needed, so options for length and levels of commitment are suggested.
 - ▶ **Scalable**—Some networks may want to explore strengths and needs throughout a whole city; others may want to focus on a block or a particular development. Some involve a large number of youth and adults; others have just a handful. This guide is adaptable.
 - ▶ **Adaptable**—This guide is adaptable for delving into underlying issues and resources for a particular social need or population, such as homelessness, people in prisons.

WHY STRENGTHS, NOT NEEDS?

Most service-learning processes include a “needs assessment,” leading groups to discern community needs or problems and then determine what can be done to address these. This guide focuses more on the strengths and resources of the community. This emphasis grows out of a growing body of research and practice that finds resource mapping (often called “asset mapping”⁶) to be a more powerful tool for community building. It can lead to more creative solutions than problem-focused strategies.⁷

John L. McKnight and his colleagues at Northwestern University (who developed the asset mapping approach) contend that needs assessments take power and capacity away from the community by pointing toward service-oriented, external solutions. Furthermore, needs assessments create “mental maps” that define communities and organizations primarily in terms of their problems and challenges that lead to solutions involving professionally and institutionally driven programs, perpetuating a cycle of dependency.⁸

⁶ “Asset mapping” in a community context grows out of the work of the organization Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), which focuses on building capacity within “community assets.” Many people become confused by the terminology, since Search Institute talks about asset building in terms of Developmental Assets, which are basic building blocks of development that young people need in their lives to avoid high-risk behaviors and thrive. Though both terms are appropriate and compatible, we choose in this guide to avoid confusion by reserving “assets” for Developmental Assets.

⁷ Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2008). *Beyond needs assessments: Identifying a community’s resources and hopes*. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

⁸ Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside: A path toward finding a community’s assets*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

A resource-mapping approach, in contrast, seeks to identify and tap strengths and capacities that exist in every individual, association, and institution so that those gifts can be unleashed and connected in building community. For example, instead of only studying crime patterns in a community, it identifies and catalogs after-school programs, faith-based organizations, neighborhood centers, informal associations, parks, and other potential resources for healthy development and community building.

Not only is the process of resource mapping different from a needs assessment, but also the resulting information is also dramatically different. A needs assessment, for example, might chart patterns of crime, unemployment, pollution, and economic blight within a neighborhood, all of which are truly present. A resource map of the same neighborhood might identify individual gifts and interests, as well as the capacities of local organizations and associations, all of which are also truly present. The difference, contend McKnight and Kretzmann, is that the latter map “is the map a neighborhood must rely on if it is to find the power to regenerate itself. Communities have never been built on their deficiencies. Building community has always depended upon mobilizing the capacities and assets of a people and a place.”⁹

THE “KEY INFORMANT” APPROACH

This guide uses a “key informant” approach to listening as a foundation for service-learning. Key informants are the people who are interviewed within the parameters the team establishes for the listening project. One way to explain this approach:

If you have had lunch with a local public official, minister [imam, rabbi, or other religious leader], or school principal to discuss community needs, you have informally used the key informant technique. *Put simply, it is obtaining information from a community resident who is in a position to know the community as a whole, or the particular portion you are interested in.* That community resident can be a professional person who works with the group you want more information about, or a member of the target audience. Key informants can be young or old, or from a variety of socio-economic levels or ethnic groups.¹⁰

Key informant interviews are, by nature, a less rigorous research method. However, they have important advantages as a foundation for interfaith youth service-learning:

- ▶ They provide information directly from the people affected;
- ▶ They emphasize relationship building, which is core to asset building and to interfaith work;
- ▶ They are inexpensive and fairly easy to conduct;
- ▶ They are particularly valuable as a starting point in getting a sense of the “lay of the land” in a particular geographic or issue area;
- ▶ They are flexible for a wide range of situations; and
- ▶ They can fully engage teams of youth and adults without a lot of research experience in the complete process.

⁹ McKnight, J. L., & Kretzmann, J. P. (1990, rev. 1996). *Mapping community capacity*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University (p. 17). www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/papers/mcc.pdf

¹⁰ University of Illinois Extension—Program Planning and Assessment (n.d.). *Needs Assessment Techniques: Using Key Informant Interviews*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois. Accessed on October 6, 2006. <http://ppa.aces.uiuc.edu/KeyInform.htm>

However, they are not perfect. They will not generate quantitative data (statistics) about the community. They can result in biased data if informants are not carefully selected or if interviewees let their preconceived ideas color their interviews and interpretation. Thus, they are appropriate as a first step in a community listening process, but more sophisticated techniques are necessary when the stakes are higher in terms of public visibility and investment.¹¹

BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

Listening to a community as a foundation for service-learning is not a one-time event. Rather, it's an attitude and skill that continue across time. The same can be said for both asset building and interfaith engagement. Each practical action—including this listening project—is just one piece of a long-term focus on strengthening interfaith connections, young people's Developmental Assets, and community vitality. Each works together, reinforcing and enriching the others.

¹¹ Kumar, K. (1996). Conducting key informant interviews. *TIPS: Performance Monitoring and Evaluation*. Washington, DC: USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation. Accessed October 6, 2006, from http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNABS541.pdf

1. Getting Organized

The quality of your listening project will reflect how it is organized. Taking time to address the questions in this section will lead to better information from the listening process. It also will introduce your efforts to the community, presenting young people as being thoughtful and intentional.

This chapter outlines the decisions to be made and the steps to be taken in organizing a key informant interview process. *Begin these steps six to eight weeks before conducting the interviews.*

IDENTIFY A PROJECT COORDINATOR

A well-organized project coordinator is essential to the process. Responsibilities for the coordinator include:

- ▶ Coordinate all the steps, details, budget, and timelines in the project;
- ▶ Plan and facilitate team meetings;
- ▶ Serve as the communication hub; and
- ▶ Communicate with the interfaith network and community.

FORM A YOUTH–ADULT PLANNING TEAM¹²

Young people should be active partners and leaders in planning and leading the listening project. Their early involvement will help ensure that young people become invested in and excited about the project. As is always the case in interfaith work, seek to engage young people from a range of religious organizations and traditions.

The youth-adult planning team addresses critical components of effective service-learning by engaging young people as leaders throughout the process. It may seem more efficient to just have an adult leader do the planning. But doing so will significantly undermine the impact. If forming a planning team as described here is not feasible, be sure to find other ways to authentically engage young people as leaders throughout the process.

In addition, invite one or more community leaders to join the process. (These people may be in formal or informal roles, and they may also be part of congregations in the network.) Their perspective and knowledge can be invaluable in ensuring that you design the listening project with community realities in

¹² For more suggestions on organizing a planning team, see the information on forming a steering committee in Interfaith Youth Core's *Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer's Toolkit*, available at www.ifyc.org/ndiys_resources.php

mind. Their involvement can also bring important credibility to the process, opening doors for the interviews.

Specific tasks of the planning team include:

- ▶ Work together to establish the purpose and scope of the listening project.
- ▶ Develop a work plan and timelines for the project;
- ▶ Identify and invite people to be interviewed as “key informants;”
- ▶ Build enthusiasm and support for the survey and planning process throughout the network, participating congregations, and the broader community;
- ▶ Take on tasks—or ensure that they are appropriately delegated—throughout the listening project; and
- ▶ Participate in the listening project and the interpretations of findings.

The planning team should guide the rest of the tasks in this guide.

ESTABLISH SCOPE AND GOALS

Listening to the community will have much greater impact if you first get clear on the goals for the listening project.

As with any service-learning project, there is the potential to have an impact in at least four broad areas: Service goals, interfaith engagement goals, asset-building goals, and learning goals. Each reinforces the other. By setting these goals in advance, the team can plan the listening process that will specifically address these goals. Use the “Scope and Purpose Worksheet” (at the end of this chapter) to document team decisions.

Service Goals

There are dozens of worthwhile service projects for interfaith groups in any given community. A listening project could be very broad and seek to identify every opportunity. However, such an approach would be overwhelming—certainly not the place to start. So before the planning team jumps into the details, take time to put some parameters on the listening project so that the process will be manageable and the ultimate service project will be reasonable in scope. Some questions to help focus the listening project include:

- ▶ **What will be the geographic scope?** Do you want to do broad mapping in the community (more labor intensive) before focusing on a specific area to serve? Or, through previous work, are you aware of a specific neighborhood, block, or location where the network chooses to focus its initial efforts?
- ▶ **Is there a specific social issue (or set of issues) that your network wishes to examine?** Many interfaith networks already have priority service areas based on previous planning. Some cities have strategic plans that give focus. Others, such as New Orleans, are coping with major disasters that provide a focus for the whole community. Perhaps the interfaith network has a strong working relationship with a community partner that provides an issue focus. Or there may be a critical learning goal (below) that guides the focus.

Focusing your initial listening project does not commit you to that focus forever. Over time, as you build a comprehensive service-learning program, you'll likely engage in a series of listening processes that provide many opportunities. Not only will different types of experiences attract different people to service-learning, it will also offer variety and reinforce the importance of serving others in all areas.

Effective service-learning introduces participants to a *process*, a way of learning about and taking action on a wide variety of issues and concerns. As their comfort level grows and other opportunities arise, so will their willingness to explore new sites, issues, and activities.

Interfaith Engagement Goals

A key goal of interfaith youth work is to help young people constructively and positively navigate a religiously diverse world. For this work to be effective, young people from different religious backgrounds need to come together to listen to and to serve their community together. They also need to be given the opportunity to share stories from their own faith teachings and life experience. This type of interfaith reflection allows young people to learn from each other about diverse faith and moral traditions while simultaneously strengthening the connection they feel to their own tradition.

Through setting safe-space and well-facilitated interfaith reflections, the community listening event can provide an opportunity to realize key goals for effective interfaith engagement. In particular, the Community Listening Project is a great opportunity to reflect on the shared value of LISTENING as it is articulated across the diverse faith and moral traditions.

When planning, think of ways to help young people:

- ▶ Strengthen their awareness of and connection to their own faith tradition;
- ▶ Share stories of how their tradition articulates the value of listening and other values they have in common with people of different faiths;
- ▶ Encourage greater inter-religious harmony by coming together in meaningful, appreciative, and personal conversations both in and outside of facilitated reflection times;
- ▶ Promote an understanding of one another as partners in making the world a better place.

On a communal level, think about ways to use the Community Listening Project as a vehicle that moves your interfaith network and its composite faith communities from:

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| • Isolation/stereotypes | toward | Connection/understanding |
| • Mutual suspicion | toward | Trust/support |
| • Independent work | toward | Collaborative work |
| • Being unknown and invisible in the community | toward | Being known and visible |
| • Allowing religion to have a negative reputation | toward | Building a positive reputation of faith's role in the community |

Asset-Building Goals

INSPIRED TO SERVE has a specific focus on building Developmental Assets in the community and among the young people who are engaged in service-learning. How can your network be intentional about asset building through the listening process?

Engagement in service is, by itself, an asset (#8), and virtually any quality service-learning experience builds some Developmental Assets, even when it's not intentional. An intentional focus on the assets can help to identify other developmental goals, thus strengthening the experience. Consider these questions when shaping goals:

- ▶ How might you facilitate increased **support** for youth through building intergenerational relationships and caring community?
- ▶ In addition to preparing for service, how will the project **empower** youth by increasing the sense that the community values them (asset #7)?
- ▶ What **expectations** do you have about how young people will follow through on their commitments to the network?
- ▶ What kinds of **social competencies**, such as planning and decision making (asset #32), and cultural competence (asset #34) will you explicitly nurture?

Being intentional about identifying asset-building goals for the listening project ensures that the project not only meets community needs, but also contributes to the base of assets among the young people involved. It also becomes an opportunity to continue learning about the Developmental Assets and how they can be a resource for youth development in participating organizations.

Learning Goals

An emphasis on learning differentiates service-learning from other forms of service and volunteering. The listening project is an intrinsic opportunity to learn about the community. Your group may have other specific learning goals that tie to school curriculum or educational strategies within a faith community. In general, the listening process can link to learning goals such as:

- ▶ How to develop and implement a project work plan;
- ▶ Interviewing and research skills, which can be transferable to many areas of life, including job seeking;
- ▶ Group process and facilitation skills;
- ▶ Learning about the dynamics and issues in community life;
- ▶ Examining career options in the community; and
- ▶ Knowledge of other cultures and/or religious traditions.

Establishing one or two goals for learning up front makes it possible to be more intentional about the learning side of service-learning. It also provides an opportunity for mentoring between youth and adults who have specific skills or experience to pass on to young people.

Shape Goals in Light of Capacities and Readiness

As you develop the goals, keep in mind the specific capacities, experience levels, and other dynamics within your network as well as in the broader community. Otherwise, you risk creating a process that is unrealistic or that doesn't fit the community you seek to serve. Factors to consider include:

- ▶ **Commitment and experience levels**—Be realistic about the level of commitment and experience among group members. Through the ongoing action–reflection cycle of service-learning, both commitment and experience will grow over time—particularly if initial experiences are positive.
- ▶ **Time and schedule realities**—When will people be available? How much time will they be able to give? The listening process can be adapted to a one-day process or one of extended depth and scope.
- ▶ **Developmental stage**—If the network leadership group is primarily younger youth, plan different, age-appropriate goals and processes than those for a group that is primarily older youth.
- ▶ **Community openness and trust**—Some communities will be open to and welcoming of interfaith groups launching a learning project. Others may be suspicious due to past experience or stereotypes. In some cases, neighborhoods are suspicious of anyone coming to “study” them and then “do things to them.” Having community leaders on the team will help sort through these kinds of trust issues. If the group is new, focus initial efforts on places that are likely to be receptive. An established group may see healing such divisions as part of its purpose and mission, and invest accordingly in a long-term listening and serving project.

Use Worksheet 2 (“Checklist for Assessing Scope and Goals”) to evaluate and adjust the listening project scope to address these kinds of issues.

REVIEW AND REFINE “LISTENING TOOLS”

Chapter 3 of this guide (Action) includes several “generic” listening tools that capture the general scope and purpose of the INSPIRED TO SERVE project. Take time as a planning group to review the tools and processes to be sure that they are appropriate and will meet your goals.

IDENTIFY “KEY INFORMANTS”

With goals in mind, interview tools refined, and geographic and issue parameters in place, the group is ready to identify potential key informants and invite them to participate. (In research terms, you're ready to frame your sample.) The process of identifying the sample for key informant interviews is vital to the quality of information that will be received. As a planning team, come to consensus on the following questions:

- **How many interviews do you intend to conduct?** Most key informant interview processes involve between 15 and 30 key informants. Fewer than 15 can lead to skewed information and lack a broad enough representation of voices from across the community. More than 30 can generate more information that the team is able to analyze and use.
- **What groups of people or organizations need to be represented?** Are there agencies within your focus area that have a reputation for knowing what's going on or that are addressing the issues you seek to examine? Are there faith-based or public institutions that are particularly knowledgeable? What are the informal networks or “natural leaders” in the community? Are there particular

populations within the focus area who need to be included? It's best to identify a wide range of stakeholders in community life as the foundation for your sample. Their buy-in and inclusion early in the process will shape whether and how they embrace the interfaith network as a partner in community building. Brainstorm this kind of list, then set priorities based on the number of interviews the team can do.

- **Is there a range of opinions that need to be represented?** Every issue has more than one side to it. What is the range of voices that needs to be heard in order to avoid unduly biasing the findings? Listening for divergent interests and perspectives gives a fuller and more accurate understanding of community life and the opportunities for service-learning efforts.
- **Who are the specific people who should be interviewed?** Seek people with high levels of knowledge about the area or issue of your focus. If team members know people within the targeted organizations or networks, ask them to recommend the best people to interview. If there are places you simply don't have contacts, ask some of the first people interviewed for their recommendations of other people to talk to.

The art comes in balancing the variety of perspectives, the quality of information, and the range of people and organizations—without committing the team to more interviews than is feasible. Taking time up front to identify a strong and diverse sample sets the stage for a much more effective process. Worksheet 4 (“People to Interview”) can help organize the selection process, then track the interviews.

ESTABLISH TASKS AND TIMELINE

Work out the specific details of the project, using Worksheet 3 (“Listening Project Planning Assignments”) to track decisions and assignments.

Who?

Who will conduct the interviews? Are all the interviewers part of the planning team, or will other people be invited to participate?

Plan on teams of two to four people to conduct each interview. (We do not recommend sending anyone to conduct interviews alone. It's helpful to have multiple perspectives, and teams increase the safety and comfort level participants.)

Will youth and adult teams conduct the interviews together? Or will teams of young people conduct the interviews?

Give each interviewer a unique role to play during the interview (for example, ask questions, take notes, and take pictures or to videotape the interview).

Consider having each team conduct more than one interview, so that young people hear both similarities and differences across interviews. This will, however, take more time.

When?

The guide is designed so that your network could conduct the whole process in one day, if the planning steps are completed in advance. In this condensed approach, orient and train interview teams in the morning before they conduct prearranged interviews. In late afternoon, come back together for initial synthesis and reflection, knowing that additional analysis and reflection will be needed later.

A significant limitation of a one-day process is that the window during which you can conduct interviews is quite small—only two to three hours. So it's difficult to be flexible with busy interviewees and still include them in the process. If this becomes a major obstacle, consider doing the bulk of the interviews on one day, then plan to follow up with other interviews so that their input can also inform the planning of service-learning projects.

Spread out the process to increase its effectiveness and spend more time with each element. In this model, there may be a series of events across one to two months to complete the process. It is important to maintain young people's involvement throughout the process. It is difficult to say exactly how much time is needed for an extended process. It depends on how many young people are involved, how many interviews are conducted, and how much analysis will be done. A possible extended schedule:

- ▶ Two sessions to prepare youth and adults to conduct the interviews. One could provide an overview of the process, including assigning specific interviews to teams; the second could be a “dry run” time when each person has a chance to practice interviewing with someone in the group.
- ▶ Two or three weeks during which teams conduct the interviews.
- ▶ One or two half-day sessions to analyze and interpret the findings.
- ▶ One or two sessions to compile the results and determine how to share them with others.

Each of these steps is described in this guide. Review each one in light of your network's needs and capacities before settling on a specific schedule.

Where?

An interview can be conducted over the phone, in a cafe or barbershop, or at an interfaith gathering. Whenever possible, conduct interviews face-to-face where the key informant lives or works. Not only will this help the person interviewed be more comfortable, it also allows the interviewers to learn through the physical space and environment. For safety purposes, interviews conducted by young people should be conducted in public spaces.

If interviews will occur some distance from your central location, arrange safe transportation for the interviewers.

PLAN FOR DOCUMENTATION

Determine how to document what the informants say during the interviews. At a minimum, someone on each interview team should plan to take detailed notes. Consider making audio or videotapes or still photographs of interviews to use in reflection on the process and future planning and communication (web sites, presentations, newsletters, etc.). Keep in mind the sensitivity of the issues being explored and the level of trust in the community.

Parental Consent

Due to the nature of the content and purpose of the interviews, it is not necessary for parents to give written permission (active consent) for the interviews with young people under age 18 in most states. (Please confirm with a local researcher.) However, in addition to contacting young people who you seek to interview, it is also important to inform their parents in writing that they are being asked (passive consent). If the parents do not want their child to be interviewed, it is essential to follow their wishes.

INVITE PEOPLE TO BE INTERVIEWED

Invite key informants to be interviewed about two to three weeks ahead of the desired interview date. Send a written invitation/request (via mail, fax, or email) followed by a phone call to explain more, answer questions, and set the time and place. Provide the following information:

- ▶ Purpose of the interviews and why he or she is being asked for an interview;
- ▶ Who is conducting the project and the interview;
- ▶ The kinds of questions that will be asked;
- ▶ How much time will be needed;
- ▶ How the interview will be documented (particularly if you are planning to videotape or audio record the interview);
- ▶ What you will do with the information; and
- ▶ A specific request for an interview time and place.

Follow the initial invitation with a phone call—preferably by one of the interviewers—to reiterate the request. If the person is willing to be interviewed, set a time and place for the interview.

When inviting people to be interviewed, think of goals beyond gathering information. Begin building a relationship between the informants and the interfaith network. Position the diverse faith community as a valuable resource and partner in strengthening the community. It's important to take care to be courteous, hospitable, flexible, caring, and generous in the invitations and the follow up.

PLAN FOR PREPARATION, REFLECTION, AND ANALYSIS

The actual interviews are only a small part of the project. It's likely the work before and after the interviews will take twice as long as the interviews themselves!

Plan how you will prepare the interviewers, considering how this preparation might address the learning, interfaith, and asset-building goals of the project.

Plan for the reflection and analysis following the interviews. This may include securing a facility and refreshments. The chapters that follow provide details on these elements, but anticipate them early in the planning process.

PREPARING ADULT SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

Participating adults should be part of in the same planning and orientation sessions as the young people—not just to prepare them, but also to build the relationships and shared experiences with the young people. Consider having teams of youth and adults conduct the key informant interviews together. In addition, adults likely will have other roles, such as providing transportation, assisting with logistics, and partnering with young people in designing the project and interpreting the findings. Adult participants may include youth workers, parents, and other volunteers from participating congregations, as well as other individuals who are part of the interfaith network.

An additional area of preparation for adults is to equip them to be *allies with youth*, not *leaders of youth*. A key element of this training is to address the ways many adults undervalue youth, take over responsibility from youth, or overprotect youth from failure. Talk with adults about their roles as asset builders for the young people who are participating. Discuss questions related to several of the categories of Developmental Assets, such as:

- ▶ How will we each work to create supportive, caring relationships with the young people?
- ▶ How will we ensure that all the young people feel valued and feel like they are contributing?
- ▶ What is our role in setting and enforcing boundaries?
- ▶ How will we help young people develop their own skills, values, and commitments?
- ▶ How will we model positive values with the young people?
- ▶ What skills do we have that we can help to nurture in young people?

If your interfaith network will be working in a setting that has not previously engaged young people, talk with program leaders about appropriate ways to interact with and support young people. Staff may have preconceptions about young people that interfere with young people's ability to contribute.

Finally, the adults who are working with your project need to have a clear understanding of the basic ground rules for interfaith dialogue and action. These include:

- ▶ Respect the uniqueness of each religious tradition and its practices and beliefs. No proselytizing is appropriate.
- ▶ Recognize the power that lies in exploring and acting upon the values that different faith traditions hold in common.
- ▶ Affirm the differences in beliefs and practices among and within faith traditions. The goal is not to try to find or create beliefs and practices that are shared across many traditions.

Determine the level of awareness about these issues within the participating groups. If the groups have not had much experience with interfaith dialogue, increase the time spent on building these competencies before the listening event, using the Interfaith Youth Core's Safe Space Toolkit, which is in *Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer's Toolkit*.¹³

ENGAGE PARENTS/GUARDIANS AS ALLIES

Parents or guardians can be important allies in your network's interfaith dialogue, service-learning, and community listening efforts. Or they can be obstacles if they are suspicious or have many unanswered questions. Parents need to know what's going to happen, how it might affect their children, what's hoped to be learned, and how they can be supportive and involved. They also need to understand the ground rules for interfaith engagement and dialogue (above).

¹³ Available for downloading at www.ifyc.org/events/DIYS.

If the listening project is launching your interfaith service-learning efforts, host a forum for parents and guardians (or ask each congregation to host one) about the overall project. In addition to the logistical details of the listening project (such as getting parental permission to participate, when needed), share the overall service, learning, interfaith, and asset-building goals so that parents and guardians can reinforce these goals. Encourage questions, taking time to ensure that any concerns about an interfaith project have been fully addressed.

BROADLY COMMUNICATE THE PLANS

Communicate about the listening project in the community, with families, with participating congregations, and the media. Let them know what's happening and why. Describe the service, interfaith, asset-building, and learning goals. Among other things, this communication provides increasing visibility for young people and the interfaith network in order to increase ongoing support. Highlight unique features of the project, such as:

- ▶ Youth from multiple faith traditions listening and learning together;
- ▶ Intergenerational teams engaging in the process together; and
- ▶ A focus on strengths and assets.

Many participating congregations will appreciate having a prepared announcement that they can include in their newsletters or bulletins. Also encourage participating youth to make announcements in their own faith community about why they are excited to participate.

READY TO LISTEN AND LEARN!

The kind of planning outlined in this chapter pulls together the elements you need for an effective listening process in which young people will be introduced to the basic processes of service-learning. As you begin the interviews in your community, you cannot fully anticipate the results. In some cases, you may encounter resistance and have limited success. In others, you may become overwhelmed with people wanting to be interviewed. In every case—with careful attention to reflecting in the process—young people can learn important insights about their community, the process of community building, and their peers and mentors throughout the interfaith network.

WORKSHEET 1

Scope and Purpose Worksheet

Use this worksheet to document the goals and parameters of your network's listening project.

SERVICE GOALS

Geographic scope:

Issue focus:

INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT GOALS

ASSET-BUILDING GOALS

LEARNING GOALS

WORKSHEET 2

Checklist for Assessing Scope and Goals

Use this checklist to evaluate the service, interfaith, asset-building, and learning goals the network has identified for the listening project. Is the project framed in a way that it is likely to be successful in reaching the goals? If you're unsure of some of the answers, take time in your leadership group to explore them. Then adjust your goals and scope as needed.

	☺	☹	?
A. How well does the listening project fit with your young people's . . . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interests and passions? • Developmental stage and ability level? • Life experiences and other differences? 	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____
B. How well does the listening project fit with the community's . . . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing resources and programs? • Experience and capacity in community assessments? • Level of trust and openness to interfaith engagement? 	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____
C. How well does the project build upon your network's . . . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission or purpose? • Experience in the community? • Current projects and programs? 	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____
D. How well does the project address your goals for . . . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service? • Interfaith engagement? • Asset building? • Learning? 	 ____ ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____ ____
E. Is the project appropriate for your group's . . . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size? • Level of skill and experience? • Time availability and commitment? 	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____	 ____ ____ ____
F. Other:			

WORKSHEET 3

Listening Project Planning Assignments

	Assigned to	Due	Done
Who? Interviewers			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite/confirm youth and/or adults to conduct interviews.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine number of interviewers available: _____			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decide how to organize interviewers into teams			
When?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine the schedule for completing the process			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm that the dates selected do not conflict with major community events, school events, religious holidays, etc.			
Documentation			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine what you hope to do with the documentation.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather supplies needed for note taking.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will you also videotape, audio record, or take still photographs? If so, gather the needed supplies/equipment.			

Invite People to Be Key Informants			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the list of people to be invited to be interviewed 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write invitation letter/email. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up with phone calls. Confirm time, date, and place. 			
Plan for Preparation, Reflection, and Analysis			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine when and where you will work with the group to complete these phases of the process. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure a location for group activities. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange for refreshments, meals, or other needs that teams will have as they do these activities. 			
Communication			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine what you want to say to the community, the participating faith-based organizations, and the media. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with participating families. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send materials to participating faith-based organizations. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth do announcements, etc., in their own congregations. 			

WORKSHEET 4

Adapt the headings of columns to fit the key factors you identified for your interview sample.

People to Interview

	Person, Organization/ Network	Phone/ Email	Expertise	Religious Tradition	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age Group	Interview Time, Date, and Place
1.								
2.								
3.								
4.								
5.								
6.								
7.								
8.								
9.								
10.								

2. Preparation

Preparation is the first phase of the four-part service-learning process:

- ▶ Preparation
- ▶ Action
- ▶ Reflection
- ▶ Recognition¹⁴

This chapter highlights the major issues to be addressed in preparing teams of youth and adults for the community listening project. Although the preparation process can be done many ways, this guide outlines a series of group activities to prepare youth and adults to conduct the key informant interviews. A range of times is suggested for each activity. These activities can be carried out across multiple sessions, depending on the network's needs and capacity to bring people together multiple times.

Worksheet 5 outlines several possible schedules for preparation meetings.

BEFORE THE LISTENING EVENT

- ▶ Determine the schedule.
- ▶ Copy all handouts and worksheets for participants.
- ▶ Assign members of the planning team to take various roles in the activities that introduce the listening project to participants.
- ▶ Select an opening “listening” icebreaker activity.
- ▶ Determine whether to invite a local leader to give a presentation about the community. If so, issue and confirm the invitation.
- ▶ Assign people to interview teams, based on the number of interviews you have arranged in advance. Where possible, put youth and adults together. Also work to have religious diversity on the teams.
- ▶ Ask two people from the same organization or faith community to participate in the “Why Focus on Strengths?” exercise. Try to find people who are self-confident and are knowledgeable about their organization. Avoid choosing pick an organization that is in the midst of major internal conflict, as it could skew the conversation.

¹⁴ Since this guide was originally created for piloting, the field of service-learning has expanded the process to six steps: Investigate; prepare; act; reflect; demonstrate and celebrate; and sustain. Each of these elements is embedded in the older framework. The community listening project is a strategy for fulfilling the first step: Investigate.

MATERIALS TO GATHER

- ▶ Nametags and markers
- ▶ Copies of registration forms for all participants
- ▶ Appropriate refreshments
- ▶ Pens/pencils and writing paper for all participants
- ▶ Newsprint, easel, non-toxic markers, and masking tape
- ▶ Forms, information, and equipment for conducting interviews:
- ▶ Contact information for each key informant
- ▶ Clear directions and map for finding each key informant
- ▶ A copy of the complete interview guide for each person
- ▶ A camera, video camera, and/or audio recorder (if needed)
- ▶ Contact information for someone to call if there is a problem during the interview

REGISTRATION AND WELCOME

As youth and adults arrive . . .

- ▶ Ask them to register for the listening project. [NOTE: Registration forms will be provided that gather required information for documentation.]
- ▶ Give each person a nametag.
- ▶ Provide light refreshments and do other things that create a welcoming environment.

When it is time to start, have a member of the planning team welcome everyone to the event. Provide a brief overview of the agenda and time together.

OPENING: LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

10 – 30 MINUTES

Take time for people to introduce themselves and their faith communities. (If your group is larger than 10–15, do introductions in small groups.) Invite participants to about a time in their lives when someone really listened (or didn't listen) to them and what about that experience was memorable.

Lead an opening icebreaker activity around the theme of listening. Find an activity that fits the group's trust level, size, and dynamics. Be sure that it's an activity that includes everyone, both youth and adults. Some possibilities include the following:

- ▶ The “Deep Listening” activity in the Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer’s Toolkit.¹⁵
- ▶ An icebreaker or mixer from Get Things Going! 50 Asset-Building Activities for Workshops, Presentations, and Meetings (Search Institute).

Review the key principles for interfaith dialogue and action, including the following:

- ▶ Respect the uniqueness of each religious tradition and its practices and beliefs. No proselytizing is appropriate within an interfaith context.
- ▶ Recognize the power that lies in exploring and acting upon the values that different faith traditions hold in common.
- ▶ Affirm the differences in beliefs and practices among and within faith traditions. The goal is not to try to find or create beliefs and practices that are shared across many traditions.

If the group has more experience, you may choose to read the Covenant of Commitment for interfaith dialogue from the *Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer’s Toolkit*.

LISTENING PROJECT INTRODUCTION

3 – 5 MINUTES

Provide an overview of the purpose and goals of the listening project, based on the planning team’s work. Be sure to highlight the following:

- ▶ Members of the planning team and the local sponsoring organizations.
- ▶ The learning, service, interfaith, and asset-building goals the planning team developed.
- ▶ The benefits of a listening project as a foundation for service-learning.
- ▶ An overview of the activities and schedule for the listening project.

Conclude the overview by introducing the “key informant” interview model, why it was selected, how the interviewees have been selected, and what you hope to gain from the interviews. (See Chapter 1 for information.)

INTRODUCTION TO YOUR COMMUNITY

15 – 45 MINUTES

Participants who have not been active on the planning team need an introduction to the focus community for the listening project. Outline the scope (geographic and/or issue) for the listening project, summarized in Worksheet 1. If there is a specific geographic focus, show a map that gives the boundaries and puts it in context.

If data are available, provide a basic profile of the focus area—number of residents, socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic composition, and/or other relevant information. Answer questions that participants have about issues of safety, language barriers, and other cross-cultural issues. Encourage everyone in the group with knowledge of the community to share their thoughts.

¹⁵ Available for downloading at www.ifyc.org/events/DIYS.

In some cases, you may decide to invite a local or organizational leader to introduce the community with a brief presentation. If so, be sure that the introduction does not answer all the questions that are being asked through the interviews. You may also wish to limit the question-and-answer time, and invite the presenter to be part of the “dry run” exercise later in this session.

Some questions that come up may be difficult to answer or they may be the same kinds of questions that will be explored in the key informant interviews. In these cases, suggest that the question will be easier to discuss after you’ve talked with people in the community.

WHY FOCUS ON STRENGTHS?

20 – 30 MINUTES

Form two subgroups. If possible, send each to a different space to work. Introduce groups to the person they will be “interviewing” for this exercise. Give one group Worksheet 6 and the other group Worksheet 7. Do not discuss the differences in the worksheets. Give groups time to complete their interviews and develop their proposed action plans.

Reconvene the large group, and ask the group with Worksheet 6 (who focused on needs) to report on their recommended action plan. Jot the key points of their plans on newsprint. Then ask the group with Worksheet 7 (who focused on strengths) to report on their recommendations. Jot the key points of their plans on newsprint.

Discuss:

- ▶ What’s similar and different about the two lists?
- ▶ What was the “tone” of the conversations in the group working with Worksheet 6 and the group working with Worksheet 7?

Ask the two people who were interviewed to tell about their experiences of being interviewed: Did they feel defensive? Were they proud of their organization? Were they overwhelmed? Were they energized?

Explain what was happening in the activity. Both groups were looking at the same organization, but through different lenses. In some cases, they likely reached similar conclusions or recommended strategies. However, there was likely a difference in tone, energy level, and sense of hope.

Say something like: *Those differences illustrate one of the key themes of this listening project: A focus on the community’s strengths, not its problems. Unlike traditional “needs assessments,” this community listening project focuses on strengths, not problems. This approach is counterintuitive to some people. Common questions include: How can you figure out what needs to be done if you don’t know what the problems are? How can you know what needs to meet if you don’t have people tell you all about their needs?*

However, a growing number of people in community development are finding that gathering baseline data based on strengths, hopes, and dreams can be just as useful for planning as traditional needs assessment.

Outline some of the advantages of assessing strengths:

- ▶ Since it focuses on the capacities that are present in the community, not what is absent, a strength-based assessment tends to be more empowering and energizing in the community.

- ▶ It assumes that local residents are in the best position to know the true strengths and capacities of the community, making community members the “experts” (not clients) in the community.
- ▶ Identifying strengths tends to surface informal strengths and resources that may never be noticed by outsiders, but are central to the lives of community residents. In the process, it brings to light previously unrecognized interests, talents, skills, and capacities for strengthening community life.
- ▶ It opens the door to a “partnership” with the resources within the community, not just a “service to” the community. Both the young people engaged in service-learning and the community have resources to be tapped in order to enrich community life and tackle the challenges that are present in the community.

It is important to note, too, that people’s worries or concerns about a community are often expressed and captured when they talk about their hopes for the community. However, the hopes or visions for the future tend to invite people into dialogue and planning in a way that is energizing and positive; a focus on just problem and needs tends to move people toward blaming and believing that the problems are too big to tackle, thus disempowering people from taking substantial action to address the challenges.

Some people within your group will likely be able to speak to the differences in approaches from their own experiences. However, try not to turn this time into an abstract, philosophical debate. If people have misgivings, as them to suspend judgment through this listening process, knowing that you will have opportunities to debrief later.

INTERVIEW EXPECTATIONS AND SKILLS

30 – 45 MINUTES

Explain that participants in service-learning take action, then reflect on that action in order to learn and grow. This activity uses this approach to teach or refresh people on interviewing skills, rather than simply giving a list of skills. This session relies first on previous experiences in interviewing (or interviews you’ve seen). Then participants will have a chance to try it out and reflect on those experiences. Next, participants will conduct interviews in the community, then reflect on that process afterwards.

Ask people to brainstorm some of the life applications that may use these interviewing skills, including school, congregational life, work, and citizenship. List key words on newsprint.

Form the predetermined interview teams. If teams have three or four people in them, have teams each work alone. If you have arranged for pairs to conduct interviews, group two interview teams together for this exercise.

If needed, give people time to introduce themselves. Then ask each person to tell the others about a time when he or she has seen or experienced a really effective interview.

Lead groups through the following steps, giving time for everyone in each group to complete each step before moving to the next. (These three questions are at the heart of the reflection process, which will be reinforced throughout the listening project.)

- ▶ **What?** What was the interview? What happened? Who was involved? What was said?
- ▶ **So what?** What was it about the interview that you found to be so powerful or of high quality? What was it that you remember about it?

- ▶ **Now what?** What do these interviews tell us about how we might be effective in interviewing key leaders in the community? What do we want to be sure to do or not do?

Ask each group to draft on newsprint its Five Top Tips for Great Interviews. Then have all groups share what they learned with the whole group.

Conclude by saying something like the following: *It's always important to learn new skills and stretch. But it's also important to remember that the bottom line in conducting effective interviews is to be yourself. If you show genuine interest in what the interviewee has to say, it will show. There's no need to try to impress or be someone you're not. Focus on openly listening to the person, her or his story, and her or his hopes. Your authentic interest and openness will be much more important to building a relationship than any specific technique you use.*

PRACTICING

40 – 60 MINUTES

Give each interview team the interview guide developed by the planning team, based on the information in Chapter 3. Walk through the basic flow of the interview, then answer any questions about it. Give teams time to negotiate roles. Who will do interviews? Who will take notes? Will they alternate roles or will they stick with one role each across multiple interviews (if relevant)? Encourage teams not to default to having adults do the interviews because they have more experience; a key goal is to build the skills and experience of young people, supported by adults.

Have teams conduct a “dry run” of the interviews. This can be done in different ways, depending on your time, goals, and planning:

- ▶ Teams can pair up and interview each other, focusing the conversation on their own faith community. In this way, they learn more about each other and the diverse faith communities in the city.
- ▶ Invite a few community leaders (or faith community leaders) to participate in the session and be “guinea pigs” for the interview process. You may then choose to include these interviews as part of the overall listening project, even though the teams will be less skilled in conducting the interviews.

When each team has had a chance to conduct an interview, repeat the reflection questions that were introduced earlier, building on and expanding the learning from the last time.

- ▶ **What?** What happened during the interview? Who was involved? What was said? What did it feel like to do the interview—or be interviewed?
- ▶ **So what?** What went really well about the interview? What didn't go well? How did you see the tips that were brainstormed earlier being useful or not useful? What might you add to that list?
- ▶ **Now what?** What can you do next time in the community to make it go better? What do you want to be sure to keep doing?

Have a discussion across the whole group about what they've learned, what they've enjoyed, and any remaining questions they have. Encourage people to answer each other's questions, rather than answering them as the facilitator.

ASSIGNMENTS

10 – 20 MINUTES

Assign each team to its key informant. Depending on the dynamics and norms in your network and your community (and available time), you can let interview teams select who they want to interview, randomly assign people (names in a hat), or intentionally assign teams to specific individuals based on building bridges across the community or other factors. Remember that you may want to push interviewers a bit outside their comfort zone (where learning is more likely), but that they may shut down if they are pushed into a place that seems unsafe or risky to them. Use your knowledge of the group, the temperaments of individuals in the group, and the community to make informed judgments. It's most important that they all have a positive experience, knowing that there will be opportunities in the future to build on that success for inviting people to more challenging or "risky" tasks.

When teams all know about their interviews, walk through logistics and timing so that everyone is clear about their assignments. Be sure that each team has the supplies needed (interview guide, note paper, pencil/pen, and, if needed, audio or video recorder and camera). Depending on the experience level of your group and their familiarity with the community where you're doing the listening project, you may also want to address the following kinds of issues:

- ▶ What safety concerns are there in the area where the interviews will be held? How should they be addressed?
- ▶ What basic etiquette may be assumed? (Particularly address diverse religious customs and practices that may be relevant if the teams are doing interviews in religious settings other than their own.¹⁶)
- ▶ How do people prefer to be addressed (Mr., Mrs., first names, etc.)?
- ▶ If you're working with another agency, what specific rules or regulations might affect the interviews?
- ▶ What cultural differences in terms of dress, language, gestures, and other customs do interviewers need to understand?
- ▶ What do teams do if the interviewee isn't available or if he or she wants them to interview someone else?

Finally, take a few minutes to describe what the planning team has determined to do with the results from the interviews. The interviewees will want to know how their insights will be used and, if possible, where they can learn more about the overall results of the listening project.

SENDING FORTH

5 MINUTES

Offer one or more quotes about the power and importance of listening, or find an inspiring quote, song, or image to share that will be appropriate in an interfaith group. Here are some possible quotes:

- ▶ "One must talk little and listen much." (An African proverb)
- ▶ "Listen a hundred times; ponder a thousand times; speak once." (A Turkish proverb)

¹⁶ A guide for navigating religious sensitivities is available in Interfaith Youth Core's *Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer's Toolkit*. In addition to general guidelines, it provides basic information on the holidays, practices, beliefs, and dietary restrictions of eight major religious traditions within the United States. Available for downloading at www.ifyc.org/ndiys_resources.php.

- ▶ “Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.” (The Dalai Lama)
- ▶ “Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. Every head is a world.” (A Cuban proverb)

Remind the participants that listening, in itself, can be a powerful and important act. It's not always easy. But it is a gift to those who tell their story and let you into their world. Encourage them to go out, listen with care, and discover new insights into the community.

As teams leave to conduct interviews, be sure they have:

- ▶ Contact information for the interviewee, including clear directions on how to find her or him.
- ▶ The interview guide, including forms and note-taking sheets.
- ▶ A camera, video camera, and/or audio recorder (if you are documenting the process in one or more of these ways).
- ▶ Contact information of someone to call (from your planning team) if there is a problem or miscommunication.

WORKSHEET 5

Sample Listening Project Schedules

Here are two options for schedules. The first combines the Preparation, Action, and Reflection components into a single day. The second spreads them out across five sessions. (All assume the Recognition phase is completed separately.) You may choose to adapt these or other timeframes to fit the realities in your community and interfaith network.

ONE-DAY LISTENING PROJECT

8:30 a.m.	Registration and Refreshments
9:00 a.m.	Opening: Listening to Each Other
9:10 a.m.	Listening Project Introduction
9:15 a.m.	Introduction to Your Community
9:30 a.m.	Why Focus on Strengths?
9:50 a.m.	Expectations and Skills
10:20 a.m.	BREAK
10:30 a.m.	Practicing
11:10 a.m.	Assignments
11:20 a.m.	Sending Forth
11:30 a.m.	LUNCH
12:30 p.m.	Interviews in the community (more time will be needed if each team is conducting multiple interviews)
2:00 p.m.	Reconnecting
2:10 p.m.	Process and Expectations
2:15 p.m.	Debriefing the Interview Process
2:30 p.m.	What? Summarizing Notes
3:00 p.m.	BREAK
3:10 p.m.	So What? Surfacing Interests
3:40 p.m.	So What? Finding Common Ground
3:45 p.m.	Now What? Surfacing Priorities
4:00 p.m.	Now What? Next Steps
4:05 p.m.	Thanks and Affirmations
4:20 p.m.	Now What? Commitments
4:30 p.m.	Adjourn

FIVE-PART LISTENING PROJECT

(Icebreaker, community-building, and closing activities should be added to each session. Each session is roughly two hours long.)

Part 1 (Preparation)

Opening: Listening to Each Other	30 minutes
Listening Project Introduction	5 minutes
Introduction to Your Community	45 minutes
Why Focus on Strengths?	30 minutes

Part 2 (Preparation)

Expectations and Skills	45 minutes
Practicing	60 minutes
Assignments	20 minutes
Sending Forth	5 minutes

Part 3 (Action)

Conduct key informant interviews	60 minutes
<i>(Increase time if each team conducts more than one interview)</i>	

Part 4 (Reflection, Part 1)

Reconnecting	15 minutes
Process and Expectations	15 minutes
Debriefing the Interview Process	20 minutes
What? Summarizing Notes	60 minutes

Part 5 (Reflection, Part 2)

So What? Surfacing Interests	60 minutes
So What? Finding Common Ground	10 minutes
Now What? Surfacing Priorities	30 minutes
Now What? Next Steps	15 minutes
Thanks and Affirmations	25 minutes
Now What? Commitments	10 minutes

WORKSHEET 6

Discovering Needs, Fixing Problems

As a group, ask your interviewee the following questions:

Describe your organization. What needs is it trying to meet? What problems is it trying to solve?

What are the biggest challenges or problems facing your organization at this time?

What will it take to fix those problems?

What could we do to help you?

As a group, take time to identify one or two actions you could do to help address the needs or problems that have been identified.

WORKSHEET 7

Discovering Strengths, Sharing Dreams

As a group, ask your interviewee the following questions:

Describe your organization. What is its vision? What does it seek to accomplish?

What are the strengths of your organization? Where are you making a difference?

If you could have three wishes for the future of your organization's work, what would they be?

How might we partner with you to fulfill your dreams for the future?

As a group, take time to identify one or two actions you could do to help move toward the vision of this organization.

3. Action

The action phase of the listening project involves teams of youth and adults from the interfaith network interviewing key informants in the community. This chapter provides a “generic” protocol for key informant interviews. *As part of the planning (Chapter 1), customize the guide to the specifics of your community and interfaith network. Provide copies of the complete customized protocol to each person.*

ADAPTING THE GUIDE

This guide is based on the assumption that teams of two people will visit with the key informants in their own setting (neighborhood, workplace, etc.). If interviews are conducted elsewhere, the questions may need to be adjusted.

The guide does not address specific issues that may have already been selected as the focusing issue for the interfaith network (such as affordable housing, children of prisoners, or neighborhood safety). Integrate these topics by either modifying existing questions or by adding these specific topics as prompts.

Keep in mind that key informant interviews are more free flowing and less structured than some other types of data collection. One or two questions (and some follow-up prompts) for each topic are all that’s needed. The key is to listen to responses, then ask follow up questions that clarify thoughts and move them to a deeper level.

As you conduct the interview, listen for recurring themes and new perspectives. Take notes to highlight important points. Pace the interview so that all the key questions are covered during the available time.

DETAILS CHECKLIST

Before meeting the interviewee, be sure to have:

- ▶ Complete contact information for the interviewee and clarity on where you’re meeting and how to get there.
- ▶ Clarity on who will be the interviewer and who will be the documenter.
- ▶ The interview guide, including forms and note-taking sheets.
- ▶ A camera, video camera, and/or audio recorder (if you are documenting the process in one or more of these ways).
- ▶ Contact information of someone to call (from your planning team) if there is a problem or miscommunication.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Be sure to take good notes even if you are recording the interview. The notes will be key to your initial summary and interpretation. And they provide an essential backup if the technology fails for some reason (e.g., too much background noise, low batteries).

- ▶ Copies of the INSPIRED TO SERVE fact sheet or other materials about your interfaith efforts, if you want to share those with the interviewee.
- ▶ Write the name of the interviewee on the top of each page of notes so in case pages get separated from each other.

INTRODUCTIONS

Begin by introducing each person on the interview team. Invite the key informant to introduce herself or himself, too.

If it's appropriate, ask the interviewee to give a brief tour of the area. If you hope to photograph or videotape, be sure to ask the interviewee if that is appropriate. If you intend to audio record the interview, be sure to confirm that this is okay.

Introduce the project and the interview with the following information:

- ▶ What you are doing and why you are doing it.
- ▶ Basic information on interfaith action.
- ▶ Why the interviewee was selected.
- ▶ Who is involved in the project and your interfaith network.
- ▶ The scope or focus of your interview process.
- ▶ How the information will be used.
- ▶ Whether or not the person wants to be named when reporting results from the interview or would prefer to remain anonymous.

The rest of this chapter is the interview guide. It includes the major questions as well as potential follow-up prompts, which are in brackets [_____]. Try to make the conversation flow smoothly and only use the prompts that are relevant and helpful in enriching the interview.

THE BASICS

1. Tell me about yourself, your organization (if applicable), and how you are involved in this community/neighborhood.

- ▶ [What's your organization's mission? Your role in the organization?]
- ▶ [How long have you been here?]
- ▶ [What do you do in the community/neighborhood to meet people's needs or make it a better place to live?]
- ▶ [Who are your major allies and partners?]

2. What motivates you to make a difference in this neighborhood/ community?

PERCEPTIONS OF STRENGTHS

3. What are some of the things or some of the people who make this community strong, vibrant, or resilient?

- ▶ [Are there specific people that come to mind?]
- ▶ [What are the informal things that happen that make a difference?]
- ▶ [Where do you see faith communities making a positive difference?]
- ▶ [Where do you see young people making a positive difference?]

4. What do you think are some of the best things happening in this neighborhood/community these days?

- ▶ [Who is involved? How did it get started?]
- ▶ [Where do you see it having a big impact?]

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

5. If you had three hopes or wishes for this community/neighborhood in the next three to five years, what would they be? Why are they important to you and to the community?

- ▶ [What are things you wish for that members of the community could play a significant role in bringing to reality?]
- ▶ [Who are other people in this community who share your vision or dreams?]

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP

6. In what ways do you see yourself or your organization helping to make these dreams or hopes come true?

7. What other people or organizations might be interested? (Where possible, get contact information, including name, organization, phone, and e-mail.)

8. As you think about your hopes and vision for the future, what opportunities do you see for young people from diverse faith-based organizations to help bring those dreams closer to reality?

- ▶ [What resources (people, facilities, communication strategies, etc.) does your organization have that could potentially be tapped?]

SUMMARY

9. I have asked all the questions I have. Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude?

Before concluding the interview, scan your notes. Tell the interviewee some of the major themes you heard during the interview so that you're sure that you understood what was said—and the interviewee also has confidence. Give the interviewee an opportunity to highlight other things he or she would emphasize.

CONCLUSION

Describe how your interfaith network will use the information. Highlight the ongoing reflection that the young people and adults will do together based on all the findings. If possible, give a sense of the timeline for when key findings will be available and when the network may begin launching projects based on what you have learned.

If you intend to prepare a report or presentation on the overall listening project, ask the interviewee if he or she would like a copy of the report, an invitation to a presentation, or some other way of learning about the key findings.

If opportunities for collaboration or interest in what the network is doing emerged in the conversation, decide together the best way to continue staying in touch and continuing the conversation.

Once again, thank the interviewee for her or his time and insights.

REVIEW AND CLARIFY NOTES

Immediately following the interview, review the notes to ensure that they are clear and useable. If you made recordings, check them. Add comments or insights that occurred but weren't discussed. Highlight any issues or opportunities that the interview team noticed that have implications for future work with the interviewer or in the community.

4. Reflection

The reflection phase is critical to the success of the listening project—and to effective service-learning. It is when participants internalize and process their experiences. Furthermore, in the listening project, the reflection time is the opportunity to interpret the findings from the interviews, setting the stage for future projects and future community dialogues.

There are, of course, many ways to analyze and interpret data from interviews. Some are sophisticated and complex, requiring technical expertise. Others are done by a small group of people who do the analysis and interpretation on behalf of the whole group through systematic review, analysis, and interpretation. Each of these approaches has value, and each could be added to the process outlined here to deepen the learning.

This guide utilizes group process and dialogue to move toward group interpretation and consensus. It is more inductive than deductive. And while it may not have as much rigor as other processes, it has the distinct advantage of involving all the young people and adults (and, in ideal scenarios) community members in data interpretation and application. The result is higher buy-in and commitment to the final results and the projects that are identified for the future. In addition, the participants learn new skills as well as new information about their communities, each other, and themselves through the process.

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ It is ideal to at least begin this process immediately following the interviews when the experience and information are fresh. If interviews are spread out across several days, this may not be possible. In these cases, you will want to give more time for people to review their notes and remember the interview experience.
- ▶ Depending on the dynamics of your group and community, consider inviting some key informants or other community members to be part of the data interpretation and application. They may be interested in observing the group's reflections on the interviewing experience, then offering their perspective on the interpretation and application. If you take this approach, allow plenty of time for introductions and trust building so that the young people and adults who conducted the interviews do not feel intimidated or like they're "being watched" as they seek to interpret interview findings.
- ▶ Review the learning, service, interfaith, and asset-building goals that you established for the listening project. Be sure that they are all being appropriately addressed through the reflection time.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- ▶ Arrange for a way to make photocopies of all the notes from interviews.

- ▶ Make copies of all worksheets for the participants.

MATERIALS TO GATHER

- ▶ Nametags for all participants
- ▶ Appropriate refreshments
- ▶ Pens/pencils and writing paper for all participants
- ▶ Newsprint, easel, non-toxic markers, and masking tape
- ▶ Greeting card or paper to send thank-you notes to interviewees. If needed, also gather envelopes and postage stamps.
- ▶ A decorative bowl with water in it (one for every 10 – 12 participants).
- ▶ A small rock or pebble for each participant.

WELCOME AND PAPERWORK

As people return from conducting their interviews, welcome them. Consider providing refreshments and/or other ways to help them relax after the interviews (which may have been stressful for some people).

Have the note taker from each team check her or his notes to be sure they are legible and relatively clear. **Write the name of the interviewee on the top of each page, if that hasn't been done already.**

Make three photocopies of each set of notes and set the original aside for safekeeping and future use. (If your teams had more than 2 people, make enough copies for each person, plus one extra.) If your teams did audio or video recordings, collect those for future use.

RECONNECTING

10 – 15 MINUTES

Select a group-building activity that will bring people back together after the interviews while also strengthening their relationships. Here is one possibility that's a bit "lighter" to help reduce the intensity that is inevitable in an interviewing and planning process:

1. Form two groups. Ask one group to stand in a circle, facing out with an arm's length of space between each person.
2. Ask the other group to surround them with a circle so that each person in the outer circle is standing face-to-face with a person in the inner circle.
3. Have participants each give their names and both answer this question: "If you weren't at this meeting, what would you be doing?"
4. After a few moments, ask the inner circle to move one person to the left. Have participants give their names and respond to this question: "What's the one place in the world that you most wish you could visit? Why?"

5. Repeat the process, using the following questions (or other questions that are specific to your group or community):

- ▶ Who did you interview as part of the listening project? What does he or she do in the community/organization?
- ▶ What was one funny or unusual thing you heard or saw during the interview (or when you were going to or from the interview)? (Remember to be respectful while enjoying the moments!)
- ▶ What was one thing you learned about the other person on your interview team that you didn't know before you did the interview together?
- ▶ What was one thing you heard or saw that has really stuck with you about the community/organization since the interview?
- ▶ If you had been interviewed and asked about a hope you have for the future of your community, what might you have said?

PROCESS AND EXPECTATIONS

5 – 15 MINUTES

Remind participants that intentional reflection on experiences requires focus and discipline. When done in a group, it requires creating a safe and comfortable environment for dialogue and exploration. Furthermore, this kind of environment is also the foundation for effective interfaith dialogue.

If you haven't done so in a previous session, set ground rules as a group for reflection. If you already have ground rules in place, review and refresh them, particularly if there are people in the room who were not part of creating them. Some ground rules to consider¹⁷:

- ▶ Treat each group member with respect. Everyone has something unique to offer and deserves to be heard.
- ▶ Treat the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees with respect and appreciation for the time they gave. Don't say anything about interviewees that you would not want them to hear.
- ▶ Respect the differences in how people process information and express their thoughts and feelings.
- ▶ Stay focused and engaged in the process. Coming and going will disrupt the flow, and you will not be able to participate as effectively.

Note that reflection is a process that will integrate learning as well as planning for the future. It will follow the flow of the three questions¹⁸ that were introduced in the preparation time:

- ▶ *What?*, which looks back on the concrete experience, giving participants an opportunity to internalize the experience and their feelings about it (reflective observation);
- ▶ *So what?*, which focuses on meaning and interpretation Interpreting the experience (abstract conceptualization), which includes opportunities to examine their experience in light of social trends,

¹⁷ Ground rules for interfaith dialogue are also foundational to the reflection time. To review them, see the *Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer's Toolkit*. Available for downloading at http://www.ifyc.org/ndiys_resources.php.

¹⁸ Kate McPherson, K. (1989). *Learning through service*. Mt. Vernon, WA: Project Service Leadership.

underlying causes of social conditions, or other information that is relevant to your learning, interfaith, and development goals; and

- ▶ *Now what?*, which returns the focus to experience and explores the possibilities for change (active experimentation). In this case, it includes a major focus on identifying potential future interfaith service-learning projects.

Review what will happen during the remainder of this reflection session. Emphasize that this kind of interpretive work is challenging and requires focus. However, it also sets the stage for powerful new projects and partnerships.

DEBRIEFING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

15 – 20 MINUTES

Take some time to debrief the interview process—both to see how it went, but also to cement some of the skills and learning. Form small groups (4 to 6 people in each). If possible, mix up interview teams as well as young people from different faith communities so that they have a chance to get to know others. In each group, have people discuss the following questions:

- ▶ **What?** Tell each other about your interview experience. What did you see, hear, or feel during the interview?
- ▶ **So what?** What did you learn about yourself (your gifts, interests, skills) as you did the interviews? What did the process teach you about your community?

Post on the wall the newsprints from the preparation session on which the teams identified tips for effective interviews. Briefly remind participants of some of the things they said. Then have them discuss in their groups:

- ▶ **Now what?** If you were doing interviews again, what other tips or suggestions would you add to make them more effective?

Ask groups to each report one or two tips from their discussion that they think would be helpful to other groups as well.

WHAT? SUMMARIZING NOTES

30 – 60 MINUTES

Ask participants to get back into their interview teams. (If community members who did not conduct interviews are present, ask them to join an interview team—but not the one that interviewed them, if they were interviewed.) Give each team member a copy of the notes from their interviews and a copy of the “Major Themes in Your Interview” sheet (Worksheet 8).

Ask people to read through the notes silently, marking key words or important points that the interview made. Working individually without talking, have them jot down only two or three points in that they thought were most critical or insightful in each section of the worksheet.¹⁹

After about 10 minutes, have the teams work together to create a shared list of major points from the interviews. Have people go around the circle, with each person sharing her or his notes to each question.

¹⁹ Giving individual, silent time for each person to reflect and interpret the interview key to the young people internalizing their thoughts. If they jump straight to discussion, then the quieter, more reflective voices and insights can be overpowered by the first voices to speak.

After each question, then have the team work together to agree to the major points that grow out of everyone's perspectives. Encourage them to include not only those things that everyone noticed, but also unique, surprising insights that only one person may have discerned. After each section in Worksheet 8, ask them to document their 2 or 3 most compelling points on newsprint.

When all the teams are ready, have each report out on its major findings, beginning by telling a little about the person they interviewed. Keep all the sheets of newsprint posted around the room.

After all the teams have reported, ask people to name any consistent themes they kept hearing come up across the different interviews. Note these on a separate sheet of newsprint. Also ask if there are any major themes that are noticeably absent from the reports. In particular, be sure that the group addresses the question of whether and how faith-based institutions are already engaged in and seen as resources by the broader community or neighborhood. Note those themes as well.

BREAK

10 MINUTES

SO WHAT? SURFACING INTERESTS

30 – 60 MINUTES

Use what is known as Nominal Group Process to help with surfacing project ideas and setting priorities for partnering and service based on all the key informant interviews. Form new small groups of five to eight participants—preferably mixing people with others they don't know as well. Give time for people to introduce themselves to each other, if needed. Ask someone in each group to be a facilitator and someone to be a scribe. Write the following statement on newsprint or project it so everyone can see it. Also provide a copy of Worksheet 9, which includes this line:

Based on what we learned from the key informant interviews, some ways I could get really excited about partnering to serve in the community as an interfaith network are:

Ask people individually to complete the sentence on the worksheet. When everyone has written her or his sentence, ask the facilitators to guide the group in dialogue around the ideas, as follows:

Have each person share one idea at a time, round robin, from her or his list. Do not have any discussion of the ideas, except for clarification. Have the recorder summarize each idea on newsprint. (Use the person's words when writing the idea; don't try to restate it.) Continue around the group—with each person giving one idea at a time—until all ideas have been shared.

Once all ideas are on the newsprint, dialogue around the following questions—not to make a choice right now, but to understand why people in the group identified each idea. Encourage them to share their passions about the ideas with the group. Avoid a heated debate, and ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard and is respected in the process. If needed, use the following prompting questions:

- ▶ What would excite you about doing this kind of a project?
- ▶ How would this opportunity help you live out your beliefs, values, and/or faith commitments?
- ▶ What skills, talents, gifts, and interests do you have that would help in this kind of project?
- ▶ What strengths or resources might the interfaith community bring to this issue?
- ▶ Who else in the community might be a partner in doing this project?

SO WHAT? FINDING COMMON GROUND

5 – 10 MINUTES

Bring the whole group together for a short time (not to report on their conversation yet). Note that all the ideas have merit and value, and many grow out of deeply held commitments and passions. Indeed, some people or faith communities may choose to pursue ideas on their own as their own sense of calling and commitment. At the same time, the group needs to move toward a shared understanding of opportunities for youth-led interfaith action.

Remind participants that interfaith action generally focuses on deeply-held, widely-shared beliefs—focusing on the things diverse faith communities are called to do together, not on what each faith community is uniquely called to do. The process of identifying the common ground out of the listening project is a helpful model for finding common ground for interfaith action in general.

To help guide the priority setting, brainstorm as a whole group some of the factors that would make for a particularly good interfaith project. List these on newsprint. If you get too many, ask people to select the top 3 to 5 criteria for prioritizing projects. Some factors might include:

- ▶ A shared commitment to the underlying issues across the faith traditions.
- ▶ Projects that fit the capacities, skills, and readiness of the groups.
- ▶ A good fit with the interfaith network’s learning, service, interfaith, and asset-building goals.
- ▶ An eagerness in the community to partner in a youth-led interfaith action project.

NOW WHAT? SURFACING PRIORITIES

15 – 30 MINUTES

Have people go back into their same groups and use the criteria to evaluate the ideas that have surfaced—not by whether they are good ideas per se, but whether they are the best ideas for youth-led interfaith action. Ask each group to identify *no more than three ideas* to share with the larger group. Write key points about each on newsprint.

Ask each group to share its top ideas with the whole group. Give an opportunity for clarifying questions, but do not get into a debate about the various options. If some ideas overlap, decide as a group whether it is appropriate and helpful to combine them.

Note that, over time, you may be able to do many of the projects. Furthermore, you will need to check them out with people in the community to see if, in fact, they resonate and are feasible, and whether there are opportunities for partnership.

However, to get preliminary sense of priorities, review the list of criteria again. Then give each person three self-adhesive “dot” labels. Have everyone mill around and vote for three ideas—only one from their own sheet!—that they believe would be excellent opportunities for youth-led interfaith action, based on the criteria.

When all the “votes” are placed, see what priorities may have surfaced. See how the group feels about these ideas. If there is a sense that they are not on the mark, indicate that the planning team will revisit and continue the dialogue. But, for now, it’s time to let them rest and get more information. Again, some of the top ideas may not be feasible and others may emerge as stronger over time.

If community members who were not on an interviewing team are part of the conversation, invite them to respond to the ideas from their own perspective, if they are comfortable doing so.

NOW WHAT? NEXT STEPS

5 – 15 MINUTES

Brainstorm how to move forward on three fronts. (If the group is large, you may simply identify an intergenerational, interfaith group of people who would be willing to form a working group to develop the plans.)

First, plan for designing future service-learning projects that were identified as high priorities, including the process of evaluating their feasibility. Guidelines and tools for designing a service-learning project can be found in *An Asset Builder's Guide to Service-Learning*.

Second, plan for sharing the results from the listening project. You may choose to compile the notes from the reflection session and share them with the interviewees and others. Or you could have an intergenerational team do more formal analysis and report/presentation preparation using Worksheet 10 as a guide. More discussion on how to report on the project findings is included in the discussion of recognition (Chapter 5).

THANKS AND AFFIRMATIONS

15 – 25 MINUTES

The final phase of service-learning is Recognition—celebrating the work that has been done and reinforcing the learning from the project. Chapter 5 suggests a number of concrete steps and strategies for recognition. It is also important and appropriate in the short term to thank the individuals who took time to be interviewed. It is also appropriate to affirm each other for the insights and efforts that each person brings to the listening project and the interfaith network.

Give each person a piece of paper or a greeting/note card. Ask them each to write a brief thank you letter on the paper/card to the person they interviewed. Encourage them to be specific about what they particularly appreciated about the conversation. Be sure the interviewees' names are on their letters, then collect them. Identify a volunteer who will address envelopes and send out the letters within the next week.

Then invite people to find two or three other participants who said or did something that inspired them in some way to serve others. Ask that they go offer that person a word of encouragement or thanks. Encourage people simply to say “thank you” when someone affirms them.

When everyone has finished their greetings, take time to thank the people who were instrumental in organizing the key informant interviews, including the listening project's planning team.

NOW WHAT? COMMITMENTS

5 – 10 MINUTES

You have identified next steps to continue with the interfaith service-learning projects and for sharing the findings from the interviews more broadly. In addition, the process of listening to community leaders also merits an individual response. Regardless of what the interfaith network is going to do, what will you personally do as a result of what you've experienced, seen, and heard?

Lead the group in a final personal commitment exercise, such as the following:

- ▶ Ask participants each to think of one action they intend to take personally in response to the key informant interviews and the group’s shared dialogue. Give a minute or two for silent reflection.
- ▶ Have people stand in a circle with everyone facing each other. If your group is large, form multiple groups with 10 to 12 people in each.
- ▶ Place a small bowl of water in the center of each group. Give each person a pebble to hold.
- ▶ Invite participants each to share their personal commitment with the group. As they do so, invite them to drop their stone in the water. (If some people prefer not to share their commitment publicly, ask them to drop their stone in the water silently.)
- ▶ When all the pebbles are in the water, ask people to reflect briefly on what they might have experienced or insights they may have had as they did this exercise. For example, even though each pebble is small, each made a ripple. Furthermore, when all the individual pebbles are together, they are very noticeable.
- ▶ Then ask participants each to reach into the water and pull out one pebble to take with them as a reminder of their time together and their commitment to serve others. Encourage people to be supportive and encouraging of each other as each person seeks to follow up on personal commitments made.
 - Remind people that the service-learning cycle is not yet complete. In addition to Preparation, Action, and Reflection, a critical piece is Recognition—the phase that focuses on celebrating what Thank participants for their work during this meeting.

WORKSHEET 8

Major Themes in Your Interview

Person Interviewed: _____

Members of Interviewing Team: _____

1. Major ways the interviewee and her/his organization are making a difference in the community/ neighborhood. What motivates her or him? (Primarily interview questions 1 & 2, but include ideas that came up in other parts of the interview as well.)

2. What major community strengths and positive energy and resources did you discover through the interview? (Primarily interview questions 3 and 4)

3. What major hopes or wishes did you learn about for the neighborhood/community? How broadly does that dream seem to be shared? (Primarily interview question 5)

4. What opportunities did you hear about for partnering with others to make a difference in the community? (Primarily interview questions 6, 7, and 8)

5. What else, if anything, stood out to you from the interview?

WORKSHEET 9

Identifying Opportunities

On your own, complete the following sentence. (If you prefer, you may draw or illustrate what comes to mind for you.)

Based on what we learned from the key informant interviews, a way I could get really excited about partnering to serve in the community as an interfaith network is . . .

WORKSHEET 10

More Formal Data Analysis and Reporting

During the reflection time, the participants reviewed the data and briefly identified patterns and themes. That approach is useful in terms of group process and engaging young people as stakeholders in designing future projects. However, you may also find it helpful to do a more formal analysis of the key informant interviews. This analysis can become the basis for reporting to and engaging in dialogue with other members of the neighborhood/community.

There are, of course, many different ways to analyze qualitative data (interviews, etc.). Some are sophisticated, complex, and academic, utilizing analytical computer software and trained researchers.²⁰ The approach outlined here is less formal, aimed primarily at creating a useful snapshot of the interviews for community dialogue and planning.

As with other aspects of service-learning, this analysis and sharing can be led by young people in partnership with adults. By engaging young people in these phases of the listening project, you add to their research, writing, and presentation skills—along with increasing ownership of the findings and understanding of the community.

Clarify Your Goals and Audiences for Reporting

Before investing in analyzing and reporting the results of your key informant interviews, articulate the specific goals and audiences you have for your findings. Here are some possibilities:

- If the analysis is just for the interfaith network and participating faith-based institutions to use in planning (and individual conversations with the interviewees and other potential community partners), you may not need to do much more than to review the notes from the reflection session to confirm that the major themes from the interviews were, in fact, captured.
- If you want to “go public” with the report by sponsoring community presentations and dialogues, you will want to be more systematic in ensuring that the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations are all thoughtfully developed and build directly from the interview findings.
- If you want to gain broader public dialogue and media attention, you will likely need to be more sophisticated in justifying your conclusions and more precise in articulating the key findings. In this case, it would likely be important to gain the formal endorsement from and support of the key informant interviewees as well as other community stakeholders before releasing a public version of the report.

²⁰ A website with much more information on data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting is the Instructional Assessment Resources kit from the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment, University of Texas at Austin: www.utexas.edu/academic/diia/assessment/iar/index.php. Portions of this material is based on this kit.

Notes and Transcriptions

Depending on your goals, you may wish to type up notes from the interviews. If you recorded the interviews, determine whether you want them to be transcribed. Otherwise, simply make sure that you have extra copies of each interview for notes, coding, etc., while preserving the original notes in case you need to refer back to them in the future.

Analyzing and Interpreting the Interviews

Coding is the process of labeling key ideas in each interview into themes so that they can be categorized as patterns emerge. Here are basic steps:

1. Label interviews: Label each interview with a code. (You may use the interviewee's last name.)

2. Build base of codes: Give several people the same one or two interviews. Ask them each to look for and highlight key ideas, words, or concepts. Then have them compare notes and come up with a shared set of basic codes that they will all use. (These codes will not be the only codes needed for all the interviews, but they provide a foundation.) Create a master copy of each interview with codes written on it. In addition, you will find it helpful to do one of the following:

a. Create an electronic spreadsheet that puts each block of text into a table with codes as follows:

INTERVIEW	CODE	TEXT
Smith	Safety	Wishes for a neighborhood where children can play in the park without fear.

b. Paste or copy each block of text onto a separate card. Write the interview name and the code on each card.

3. Code all interviews: Once the team has a shared understanding of the codes and the level of detail for the analyses, divide up the interviews so that two people (if possible) code each one, then work together to come to a consensus on the codes for different statements. Add new codes that emerge to the original list. If one piece of information fits in multiple codes, use it twice. It's usually best to start with more codes without working at first about having too many.

4. Organize the codes: After you have coded all the interviews, review the codes again to combine any that seem redundant, eliminate any that are less useful, or group several into a larger category. (If you have created an electronic spreadsheet, it's helpful to sort the data by the code column so you can easily group the findings in this way. (Or simply make stacks of the

cards sorted by category. If a particular code has a disproportionate amount of information, see if there's a way to subdivide the category into subcodes. Try to limit final codes to between 30 and 50.

5. Themes: Once you have a set of codes (which represent repeating ideas), begin grouping them into major themes. These will provide the structure for your report. For each major theme, highlight each key idea, then use a quote or two that exemplify the idea. If some ideas came up with lots of people, highlight that level of response. If there are "minority" or dissenting opinions in some areas, show those as well. (If it's just one or two people, indicate that.) If possible, find some graphical ways to present the findings using charts, tables, diagrams, etc., which may be more accessible to audiences.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations: Determine how you will come to conclusions and recommendations. Rather than just having a planning team do this, it may be helpful to present the findings and themes to key stakeholders, then ask them to come to agreement on conclusions and recommendations. Or you may choose to have the planning team draft conclusions and recommendations, which you then first present in draft form to key stakeholders for response and refinement. The conclusions and recommendations should grow explicitly from the repeating ideas and themes.

7. Reporting: Decide how you will present the findings (which will vary by audience). Will you do it primarily through verbal presentations with handouts and slides? Will you do a written report? Or will you use drama, arts, video, or other formats to share the information? If you made videotapes of some interviews, that footage can be the foundation for such reporting as you find quotes and examples that illustrate the key themes.

8. Review and Refinement: Interpreting interview data is quite subjective, so it is essential to verify the conclusions with people involved. Do they believe that the findings accurately captured what they meant? The first people to see your report's findings, conclusions, and recommendations should be the stakeholders (people interviewed and community members) and the participating teams from congregations. Be open to adjusting the findings based on their feedback. If you have access to other studies or data about the community or neighborhood, review them, too, to see where there are similar or different conclusions.

5. Recognition

Recognition is the fourth phase in the service-learning cycle. It isn't just about giving oneself a pat on the back. It is a critical element in reinforcing what has been done, thus making it more likely that people will do it again. If done well, it also provides an opportunity to gain broader interest and engagement across the community. Finally, engaging young people in the recognition activities is vital for building their skills and enriching their base of Developmental Assets.

In the listening project, recognition plays a particularly important role, since the project is specifically designed to set the stage for youth-led interfaith action in the community. There are five key goals or targets of recognition for this project:

1. Reinforcing young people's learning, growth, and commitment;
2. Building awareness and commitment among families and faith-based organizations;
3. Positioning interfaith action and faith-based organizations in the public;
4. Engaging with community leaders and members for partnerships; and
5. Assessing the project for future improvements.

REINFORCING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING, GROWTH, AND COMMITMENT

Throughout the listening project, young people have received feedback and support. An important part of the process of internalizing their learning, growth, and commitments is to be intentional in reinforcing the good things that happened during the project—and being intentional about working through any problems or challenges that emerged. Your interfaith network's planning team should determine the best ways to reinforce the project in a number of different ways. They may be done centrally through the network. Or the reinforcement can happen primarily within the young people's own religious institutions.

Public and Private Acknowledgement

There are dozens of public and private ways to celebrate, acknowledge, and affirm people's involvement in the listening project and your interfaith network. Public celebrations give other stakeholders a window into the project in ways that help them feel a sense of pride and ownership in the effort. They also help to position young people as valuable resources in their community. Here are a few possibilities to choose from:

- ▶ Give young people certificates of recognition, including certificates sent to all the participating religious institutions.

- ▶ Send a thank-you letter to the head of each participating congregation or other faith-based organization. Encourage them to share it with the broader faith community.
- ▶ Write letters to the editor thanking the young people and their supporters.
- ▶ Encourage media coverage.
- ▶ Highlight the young people’s contribution during assemblies and gatherings of participating religious institutions and other organizations.
- ▶ Host private celebrations that give participants a chance to reconnect with each other, swap inside stories, and implant the positive experiences they had in the listening project.
- ▶ After the project is complete, have a picnic or party for everyone who participated.
- ▶ Create a project t-shirt for everyone and have people all sign each other’s shirts with affirming messages.

Individual Check-in and Reinforcement

Sometimes a personal conversation has much more power than an event or letter. Find a way for a youth director, clergy member, or volunteer to talk individually and informally (but intentionally) with young people about their experience. Ensure that the person having the conversation has a good relationship already with the young person. (Older young people and peers can also have these conversations, but intergenerational conversations can be particularly powerful.)

Encourage the person to ask about how they enjoyed (or didn’t enjoy) the experience, what they learned, questions they have, suggestions they have, disappointments they experienced, how they felt treated by adults and people of other religious backgrounds, and things they might want to do as a follow-up. Perhaps, for example, they like doing presentations. Or maybe the next time they hope to do the interviews, not the note taking. In addition, the leader should be explicit in affirming something he or she saw the young person doing during the listening project. That specific feedback can play a significant role in helping the young person internalize those skills, values, and commitments.

Follow-Up Learning and Activities

Issues, questions, or concerns likely surfaced through the interviews that young people are motivated to explore in more depth. Take advantage of opportunities to do educational events, workshops, or small groups that examine a particular issue and seek to get at root causes. They may have also experienced interfaith or intergenerational dynamics that were unfamiliar, opening up new opportunities for learning, dialogue, and growth. These kinds of educational and dialogue opportunities not only bring closure to issues that came up in the listening project, but they also set the stage for the service-learning projects that are planned for the future based on the listening project’s findings.

BUILDING AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT AMONG FAMILIES AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Key stakeholders in young people’s lives and the interfaith network deserve particular attention during the recognition phase. Think about ways to honor people not just for their help with logistics of the listening project, but as asset builders for the young people who were involved.

Some of these people may have had misgivings about some aspect of the project, or they may simply need their support for the project to be reinforced and deepened. Doing so not only builds awareness of what you're doing, but it helps with the process of recognizing young people as resources in and contributors to their families, congregations, and communities. Some ways to engage these stakeholders include the following:

- ▶ Write articles for newsletters or post photographs and other information on the organization's web site or bulletin board.
- ▶ Ask young people who took pictures or video to create a presentation about the listening project and what you learned. Offer the presentation to stakeholder organizations.
- ▶ Host a reception for families, people in religious institutions, and other stakeholders. Have posters and other visuals from the listening project displayed in the meeting space. Give a brief thank you and project overview.
- ▶ Invite creative young people to create an art display, skit, or other creative expression that captures the key themes from the listening project. Display or perform the creations for interested organizations and networks.
- ▶ Create a booklet of reflective readings, artwork, photography that includes journal excerpts and other writings about the listening project. The booklet can serve as a reminder of the experience for youth and help community members learn more about what their young people did.

ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS AND MEMBERS FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Engage young people from the interfaith network in dialogues with other community leaders and residents, using the report of findings and recommendations from the interviews and a springboard. Structure the conversations with a goal of deepening and refining the learning, not as a way to "sell" an idea to the community. Conduct the dialogues in ways that illustrate that the interfaith network is truly a respectful and respectable partner in the community. Highlight the unique role that young people have played throughout the process, thus reinforcing the sense that young people are key resources to their communities.

As these dialogues continue in formal and informal ways, begin identifying projects around which there might be a shared passion and commitment both within the interfaith network as well as the broader community. Over time, these can become formal opportunities for developing a new service-learning project that explicitly and intentionally builds on the priorities, hopes, and dreams of people in the community.

POSITIONING INTERFAITH ACTION AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE PUBLIC

There are many occasions and ways to spread the word about the listening project. The goal is not just to have some good publicity, but also to begin positioning interfaith action and faith-based organizations as positive resources for community life.

Public Presentations

As the conclusions of the report are affirmed and/or refined by people in the community, you may reach a point where there's interest in hosting presentations about what the interfaith network learned about the community. These presentations may be most effective when they are led not just by network organizers, but also by young people and community members.

But you don't have to wait for the findings. Arrange for young people to offer their reflections on the listening as part of a regularly scheduled event or meeting in the community. Or arrange for a special event to highlight the listening project and give young people the opportunity to tell their stories.

Media Engagement

The local print, broadcast, and cable media may be interested in the story of what you're doing with the listening project. Both the youth and the interfaith "angles" may play well for the media. It's likely that you have people in your network with expertise in engaging the media. In addition, see the media relations materials that are available in Interfaith Youth Core's *Days of Interfaith Youth Service: Organizer's Toolkit*.²¹

In addition, think about the young people in the network who may have a talent or interest in journalism. Ask them, for example, to write and distribute stories to the local paper and/or all the participating faith communities. They may also want to write a series of short articles for newsletters that highlight each of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

ASSESSING THE PROJECT FOR FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

As with any project, it is important to step back at the end to assess how it went and what could be done the next time to strengthen the project. With the planning team (and others, if you are able), reflect on the following questions:

- ▶ Look back at your goals for the project (completed Worksheet 1). In what ways did you meet or surpass those goals? In what ways did you fail to meet them?
- ▶ What three parts of the listening project would you do differently?
- ▶ What three parts of the listening project would you repeat the next time?
- ▶ What other things would you like to explore or learn about before doing another listening project?

²¹ Available for downloading at http://www.ifyc.org/ndiys_resources.php.

Additional Tools and Resources

OTHER COMMUNITY MAPPING RESOURCES

Below are several more comprehensive and rigorous approaches to community assessment. Some are strength-based, but others are not. None have an explicit faith community focus. Most are not specifically designed for youth to lead.

Beaulieu, L. J. (2002). *Mapping the assets of your community: A key component for building local capacity*. Mississippi State, MS: Southern Rural Development Center. Available at www.srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227.htm.

Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2006). *A positive revolution in change: Appreciative Inquiry*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Also visit the Appreciative Inquiry Commons: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

Hammond, S. (1996). *The thin book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing.

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and National 4-H Council (2001). *Building community: A tool kit for youth and adults in charting assets and creating change*. Takoma Park, MD: Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development.

Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside: A path toward finding a community's assets*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

McKnight, J. L., & Kretzmann, J. P. (1990, rev. 1996). *Mapping community capacity*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. Available at www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/papers/mcc.pdf.

Michigan State University. (1998–1999). Several forms of “community mapping”—2. *Best Practices Briefs*, 4. Available at outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/archive.asp.

Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2008). *Beyond needs assessments: Identifying a community's resources and hopes*. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

Rondeau, A. (2006). YMCA resource mapping and community action guide: *Assessing and strengthening communities through service-learning*. Chicago: YMCA of the USA.

RELEVANT RESOURCES ON SERVICE-LEARNING, ASSET BUILDING, AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Benson, P. L. (2006). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents (2nd Ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mosaic Youth Center Board of Directors with Griffin-Wiesner, J. (2001). *Step by step! A young person's guide to positive community change*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2009). *Service-learning in community-based organizations: A practical guide to starting and sustaining high-quality programs*. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2007). Service-learning with disadvantaged youth (fact sheet). Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

Roehlkepartain, E. C., & Scales, P. C. (2007). Developmental assets: A framework for enriching service-learning (fact sheet). Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org).

Roehlkepartain, E. C. (1999). *Building assets in congregations: A practical guide for helping youth grow up healthy*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Roehlkepartain, E. C., Bright, T., & Margolis-Rupp, B. (2000). *An asset builder's guide to service-learning*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

RELEVANT RESOURCES ON INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT

Betz, A., & Roehlkepartain, J. L. (2000). *Networking congregations for asset building: A tool kit*. Minneapolis: Search Institute. [Currently out of print.]

Patel, E., & Brodeur, P. (2006). *Building the interfaith youth movement: Beyond dialogue to action*. Lanham: Roman & Littlefield.