



Listening Projects with Marisa Castuera Hayase Follow Up Q & A

Is all of your listening tour work one-on-one or do you work in group settings?

Both. The focus group setting can be limiting, especially for people who feel shy in groups and where they are sharing personal information. I have found group formats to be productive when people have a shared affiliation. In the discussion, they start to feed off each other's stories and realize they have a community they didn't know they had before.

This process seems very resource intensive. How do you make the case for the investment?

Many grant making agencies are interested in supporting community group with an interest in engaging community in planning processes. Some grant budgets will even have a line item for community planning or stakeholder participation. Your job is to explain why the listening tour is the best approach because you want to reach new, powerful voices or quiet thinkers, like *kupuna* and children.

Where do you have your interviews – in a home or at a public place?

I ask interviewees where they would like to meet and give them the power to decide.

When you have asked a question and the interviewee in turn asks you a question, how do you steer the conversation back?

I will often briefly respond or acknowledge what was asked, but quickly move the conversation back, asking them to continue telling me their story or to give me more detail into some aspect of what they've shared.

Do you consciously check your personal assumptions about the topic before you go in to an interview? What happens when your neutrality starts to shift mid-interview?

I like to have my interview guide, which is different from a script, reviewed by several people to make sure the guide is open ended enough. I am also comfortable moving away from the guide in the interview, depending on what I am hearing. It's important to have a commitment to the person's direction more than your own.

What is the difference between a “listening tour” and a “public forum”?

A forum is a group meeting where typically there is a set agenda, a moderator or facilitator, and a flip chart. The purpose is often to obtain reaction or input on a plan or proposal. The listening tour is done very early in a process to generate possibilities. What is learned from the listening sessions helps lay the groundwork for something to come, before anything is set in stone. Both types of engagement are useful; they tend to take place at different points in the process.



When you work with your client, who has probably invested in your work, and the people you are interviewing, who are you beholden to?

The client may not want to hear the results of a listening tour because they may hear something contrary to what they wanted to hear. Personally, I am beholden to the people I interview. I ask for their trust and give them my word that I will keep their identity confidential. In the case where someone being interviewed has misinformation, rather than contradict them in the interview, which could shut the conversation down, I accept that what they say is their truth. If necessary and appropriate, I find a way to offer different information at a later time.

What do you do when you hear misinformation or something you disagree with?

It's not always easy to hear what's being said. I try to listen and acknowledge it nonverbally or verbally, then continue with the person's story being shared. As a neutral interviewer, someone with little or no investment in the subject, it's easier to hear difficult things than it would be, say, for someone who works closely on a project. Sometimes, by the end of the session, the person will feel more positive after having had a chance to vent.

In the one-on-one listening tour format, are you subject to Institutional Review Board (IRB)? And if so, does it scare people from participating?

It depends on the client. For example, when working in a university setting, it's a requirement. And yes, it might inhibit some from participating. In recruiting interviewees, I focus on the intent of the listening tour – to hear a diversity of stories, while also acknowledging the IRB as a formality, they are likely familiar with.

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