



OEO QUICK-START GUIDE

How Do We Reduce Opportunity Gaps by Empowering Students, Families, and Communities through Listening and Co-Design?

Introduction

The shift to student-centered learning is revolutionizing our education system. Success depends on understanding that schooling entails more than the formal institutions of our schools and also includes the broader family and community environments where students live and grow. Listening to student voice is an important aspect in this shift but it also needs to be accompanied by listening to families and their communities. A key component of successful listening processes is ensuring that all participants—from educators to students themselves—feel that they are in control of the process: that is, their voices are heard. Then the insights from listening can lead to concrete action through a process of co-design, or harnessing our collective creativity. This quick-start guide will support schools, community groups, and others to build on effective listening tools to then improve students' experiences, schools, and the K-12 system.

The OEO Listening Session Model

At the heart of the Office of the Education Ombuds' (OEO) work is listening. From its casework to outreach, policy involvement to coaching of professionals, OEO staff focuses on listening as a fundamental tool of educational equity work. As part of this focus, OEO has developed a listening session model to elevate the voices of students, families, and their broader communities in our schools. Listening sessions are:

- An intentional collaboration among OEO, families, communities (e.g., education advocates, nonprofits, family support groups), and schools and districts to learn more about or to address a collective concern that has arisen (e.g., language access, services for students with disabilities, bullying);
- Intended to be opportunities for educators and other school leaders to hear directly about family and student experiences;
- Run by a facilitator from OEO – with note-taking provided by the facilitator and other OEO support;
- Built from an introduction to the process and agreed-upon rules and guidelines for the session;
- Responsive to the language access needs of families and others in attendance. For example, if the group is large and varied in the languages spoken, then OEO will create smaller groups where access can be facilitated better through in-person language support or interpreter headsets;

- Inclusive of family-friendly supports such as breaks, refreshments, and child-care (when available) in partnership with community organizations or the school district.

The sessions themselves are guided by open-ended questions developed in collaboration with stakeholders to meet the vision for each session. For some of OEO’s sessions, the two primary questions are:

1. How do you feel the district has/ hasn’t been able to meet your student(s)’ educational needs and set them up for success?
2. What has worked well, or could be improved, in the relationship between you and the school and district as you work in partnership to support your student(s)’ education?

The guiding questions frame a way for educators to hear directly from families about how the school system is working for them and their students, as well as how greater school-family collaboration could be fostered. Here are some additional key components of listening sessions:

- They are opportunities to reflect on systems issues and systems change;
- They revolve around families sharing only their own stories and limiting their examples to how they and their students have been affected;
- They honor confidentiality and privacy by asking each participant to avoid sharing personal information beyond the listening session.

Participants are discouraged from taking notes during the listening session to better enable a space of full and open sharing. Note-takers from OEO and partner organizations work to capture general themes of the conversation and their notes do not include specific examples or identify individual students or families. OEO synthesizes these notes and themes to later share with the district and participating families, students, and community leaders. Within a month of the initial session, OEO holds a follow-up session with participants. In that session, the school or district has an opportunity to share what they heard from participants and how they are working to address those issues moving forward.

OEO’s Future Work

OEO’s listening sessions model has provided a firm base for its collaborations with community-based organizations, schools, students, and families. Moving forward, OEO hopes to leverage additional techniques as part of its listening process to grow from student, family, community, and educator voice. We share these tools and structures here as additional resources for community groups, schools, and families to pursue in their own work or in collaboration with us:

Tool/Approach	When to use	Requirements
Appreciative Inquiry (groups of 3-100)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a community • Network building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A facilitator • Flip chart or whiteboard and markers

'As Seen On TV' (groups of 3-30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A way for families and schools to present their ideas in a safe and focused environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A facilitator • Flip chart or whiteboard and markers • A cut out 'TV' that the presenter stands behind when presenting their ideas
Chat Show (groups of 3-30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chance to weave ideas between different students and families and distill key issues • A way to draw out stories from students and families without them having to do a lot of preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Facilitator • 3 - 5 guests for "each show" • Room (ideally with theatre-style seating) • Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
Fishbowl (groups of 3-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An alternative to traditional conversations where each group or individual presents its perspective • Fosters dynamic participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A facilitator • Chairs • Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
Kibun (groups of 3-15)	Allows a space for a linked, dynamic conversation amongst peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A talking stick • One chair for every participant
World Café (groups of 3-50)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing experiences, stories or project results • Problem-solving • Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main facilitator • A host at each table • 3 - 5 tables and sufficient chairs for all participants • One flipchart and sufficient markers at each table
"Yes OR No" Game (groups of 3-100)	A way to introduce participants to the idea of sharing their ideas in a public space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A facilitator • Whiteboard or flipchart and markers • Rectangular cards, in two colors (3x5 or 4 x 8 inch)

More about these tools and techniques, as well as planning documents for OEO listening sessions, can be found in the complete report on our website at <https://live-oeo-wa.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/FullGuideforListeningandCoDesign.2018.07.02.pdf>.

Co-Design

Moving forward in its work, OEO would like to take its strengths in listening to families, students, communities, and educators to the next step by promoting co-design in its processes and

programs, as well as in its partnerships. Co-design is exactly what it sounds like—designing together. It is an important tool for addressing the various ideas surfaced through listening processes. Co-design harnesses our collective creativity and provides a range of methods for taking ideas and transforming them into action. The most effective co-design results are achieved when students, families, and their communities are actively involved in these processes with educators, policymakers, ombuds, district leaders or others playing strong facilitative roles.

Three approaches to co-design are: “Design For”; “Design By”; and “Design With”.

(1) Projects using the “**Design For**” approach usually take the form of councils and forums. A council might involve bringing together a group of students, their families, and community members who then work with a project or program leader. After the group develops ideas, concepts, and designs through the council, they share them with decision-makers.

(3) The “**Design With**” model brings students, their families, and community members together with educators and administrators (or ombuds, policymakers, or others) to come up with design ideas together. The ideas surfaced through this process can then be catalysts for getting buy-in from schools or other leaders to implement those ideas. In this approach, students, their families, and community members are not only heard and recognized but they are also actively involved in the creative design and build-out processes.

(2) The “**Design By**” model sees students, their families, and community members as active designers and planners who have ideas and perspectives that are different from those proposed by educators, ombuds, administrators, policymakers, or others in traditional planning and decision-making roles. “Design-by” gives these new designers the lead in guiding what the system, program, or policy looks like. One limitation of this approach though is that if educators or other leaders feel like their ideas have not been considered, then it will be difficult for them to implement the ideas that came from the process.

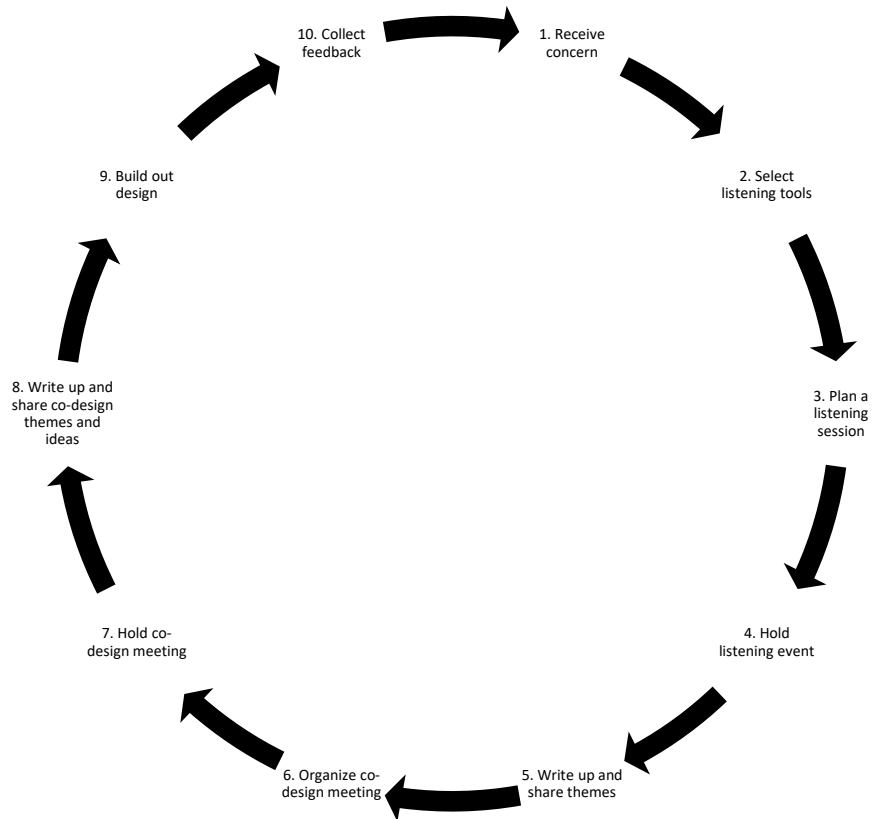
Combined, these three approaches present a range of ways in which students, families, and their communities can play vital roles in co-design processes. Which tool an organization chooses will depend on what the overall goal of the design process is, the availability and capacity of design-savvy facilitators, and the willingness of participants in the process. More about these tools can be found in the [full report on our website](#).

Facilitation (undertaken or coordinated by OEO or others trained by OEO) is an essential aspect of a successful co-design project. Facilitators provide the space and insights for people to engage with one another and offer ways for participants to be creative, share insights, and test out new ideas in supportive and inclusive environments for everyone.

Bringing it Together

Listening + Co-Design → An iterative, responsive cycle of continuous improvement

When we listen with the goal of improving what we do and how we do it, we are open to new possibilities and different perspectives that help us to better nurture student engagement, growth, and learning.



The 'From Listening to Co-Design' Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Reducing the opportunity gap by empowering students, their families, and their communities to share their voices and creative insights is an important and necessary goal. We can't, however, just create the spaces for these voices to be heard. We must also ensure that the insights gained through increased voice are put into practice. This cycle of continuous improvement demonstrates concrete ways in which student, family, and community voice can be a leverage point for effecting change in schools and in our State's education system.

OEO looks forward to learning from and with you, joining in collaborative improvement efforts, and supporting you in other ways in your work. Please reach out to us at any time for creative collaborations, facilitation, coaching, and other supports at oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov or through our website: <http://www.oeo.wa.gov>.