

# Engagement Practices

## LISTENING WALKS

---



### Description

Listening walks allow groups to develop an understanding of an issue from all the participant perspectives and practice active listening. They support collaborative learning by ensuring that all participants understand the perspectives of the others.

### Participants

Each listening walk involves a pair of people. Many pairs can work concurrently.

### Process

#### Steps:

1. Show the group the starting and ending point of the walk. The total walk is 20 minutes, with each speaker using 10 minutes. It is useful to have them walk for 10 minutes in one direction while the first person speaks. When the pair switches roles, they can turn around and walk back for 10 minutes.
2. Pose an issue to discuss. *For example, ask the speaker to state the pros and cons of developing a new road in the city center.*
3. Participants pair off and decide who will be the first speaker.
4. The listener will time the conversation, unless there is a landmark (approximately a 10-minute walk away) that is the turning point.
5. Speaker 1 talks about the issue, using the 10 minutes to think aloud and refine perspectives on the issue.
6. The listener does not speak or answer the speaker, but listens to understand what the speaker thinks about the issue and any nuances that arise during the talk.
7. The listener alerts the speaker after 10 minutes and the pair switches roles.
8. The pair walks back toward the ending point, arriving when Speaker 2 has used 10 minutes.

## Benefits

- Allows the speaker to refine his or her perspective without interruption.
- Allows the listener to focus on the information without trying to formulate a response.
- Allows the listener to follow the thought process of the speaker for a clearer understanding of what the speaker thinks about the issue.
- The act of walking side by side allows for a more collaborative conversation.

## Considerations

- Must have an engaged group that is willing to think and talk about an issue as they refine their own thoughts.
- It pushes people out of the comfort of dialogue.
- It takes time and a facility that allows for walking.

## Debrief

This debrief will allow the facilitator to synthesize the input from all the participants. Capture responses on flip charts. Ask the group some questions to determine where they currently stand on the issue.

1. What did you learn about the issue?
2. What are the pros?
3. What are the cons?
4. Did the speaker say something you initially disagreed with?
5. Did you eventually understand why the speaker said it?
6. Did the second round of speakers modify their initial responses while listening to the first set of speakers?
7. How did the perspectives change based on what was said?
8. Now that we have an understanding of the perspectives, how can we now address the issue?

## Materials Needed

- Space to walk
- Flip chart, chart pads, or whiteboard and markers to capture the debrief

## References

- Active Listening: Hear What People are Really Saying at [mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm](http://mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm).
- 10 Steps to Effective Listening at [forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/#4f917fbc3891](http://forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/#4f917fbc3891).