

Conducting a Listening Tour

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Table of Contents

Overview.....	2
Recruiting Participants.....	2
Listening Tour Interview Questions	3
Introduction	3
Landscape of Department.....	3
Change to Departments.....	4
Core Principle Card Sort.....	4
Prior Committee Experience	4
Questions for established DAT members	5
Questions ABOUT established DATs.....	5
Interpreting Listening Tour Responses.....	6
Responses regarding prior committee experiences.....	6
Responses regarding facilitation.....	6
Responses regarding ideas about change	6
Responses regarding the landscape of the department	7
Responses regarding the Core Principles	7



Overview

This tool contains a set of questions that can guide semi-structured “Listening Tour” interviews. The goal of a Listening Tour is to gather perspectives from a diverse group of department or DAT members, in order to inform facilitation work and the DAT’s focus. The interviews aim to provide information about the landscape of the department and its approaches to change, the experiences of department members on committees and the DAT, and the orientation of the department with respect to the DAT Project’s Six Core Principles. Although we offer suggested questions for a Listening Tour, questions can be added or removed in order to customize the information obtained from these interviews.

Listening tours can be conducted by DAT researchers or DAT facilitators, at any stage of a DAT’s work. If the interview responses will be used in research, they should be conducted by a researcher within the context of a project with an IRB protocol, and interviewees must give consent. Interviews are usually audio recorded, then transcribed for analysis. If audio recording is not possible, a second interviewer may be needed to take notes.

Recruiting Participants

Participants can be recruited in two ways. The first method of recruitment is by directly contacting potential participants. This method is useful if you are interested in getting the perspectives of specific department members, or to ensure you are obtaining a diverse set of perspectives. A sample email that can be used for contacting participants is located below.

Hi [NAME],

I’m contacting you to see if you’d be interested and available to be interviewed by a member of our team about education in the Department of _____. This information will help the facilitators of the Departmental Action Team that is forming in _____ to understand the context of your department. The interview would last about an hour, could take place wherever is convenient for you, and would be audio recorded. If you are interested, could you please let me know a few dates you might be available in the next couple weeks?

A second method of recruitment is possible if you ask departmental members to complete a survey, such as the DELTA. At the end of the survey, you can ask participants if they would be willing to be interviewed about their responses and their experiences in the department.



Listening Tour Interview Questions

You may modify the following suggested questions to create a set that best fits your goals for a Listening Tour. For an hour-long interview, it is generally best to prepare 5-15 interview questions, as you will likely ask follow-up or clarifying questions during the interview. Thus, pick the questions that will best support your understanding as you move forward with a DAT.

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduce yourself and your role in the project.
2. Check that it is OK to audiotape the interview. Explain what will happen to the tape and transcript.
3. What is your position in the department? How long have you been here? What classes do you teach?
4. What is your understanding of the DAT process in which your department is engaging?
 - a. What do you see as its strengths? What do you see as its drawbacks?
 - b. What do you think will be the points of resistance?

LANDSCAPE OF DEPARTMENT

1. What do you see as the goals of the department's undergraduate program? What do you hope for students to get out of the program?
 - a. Which of these are most important to you?
 - b. How does the department know whether it is achieving these goals?
2. Why do you think some students succeed in your department while others do not?
 - a. What does "success" mean to you in this context?
 - b. Can all students be successful in this way?
3. Do you feel like your department is an inclusive environment, or not really?
 - a. Who is included or excluded in your department?
4. What is the culture around teaching in the department?
 - a. Is teaching a common topic of conversation in formal settings? Is it commonly talked about in informal settings?
5. What is the role of evidence (e.g., research, data) in departmental decision-making, especially around education?
 - a. What is the role of education research and/or education professionals?



CHANGE TO DEPARTMENTS

1. What is your understanding of how departments change?
2. Have there been any recent initiatives to change or improve aspects of the department?
 - a. What was successful / unsuccessful about them?
 - b. What do you think contributed to their success, or lack of success?
 - c. If a participant has a difficult time answering 2b, you can ask the following questions: In what ways did the department support change or inhibit change? Were there particular people in the department who were necessary for change to happen, or who inhibited change? In what ways was change sustained?
3. What are your hopes and aspirations for the department?
4. What leads to changes being sustained in your department?

CORE PRINCIPLE CARD SORT

The interviewer will need to print the six Core Principles (see DAT Digital Resource: DAT Six Principles) and affix them to index cards in advance. Put all six cards with one Core Principle per card in front of the interviewee on the table. Allow them to respond to them in any order.

1. Here are the six principles that have guided the DAT Project. What are your thoughts about these principles? Are there any that are confusing? Are there any that are interesting or important to you? Are there any that you disagree with?
2. Are there any that the department embodies currently?
3. Are there any that seem important to you, but the department currently does not embody?

PRIOR COMMITTEE EXPERIENCE

1. Can you describe faculty groups or committees that you have been a part of? What were those like?
 - a. What was/were the purposes of the committee(s)?
 - b. Would you consider it/them successful? Why or why not?
 - c. Were the committees facilitated? Did that impact your experience?
2. How would you characterize a “successful committee”?



QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED DAT MEMBERS

1. Tell me about your experience so far as a member of the DAT.
 - a. How did you personally end up joining it?
2. What value, if any, do you think you will gain by participating on the DAT?
3. What impact might the DAT have in the future?
 - a. How would you know if the DAT is making an impact?
4. In what ways do you think a DAT will be similar or different to other committees that you've been on?
5. Are there areas that you hope the DAT will focus on?

QUESTIONS ABOUT ESTABLISHED DATS

1. Describe what the DAT is currently working on. How did the DAT decide to do those things?
2. Are your experiences in the DAT matching your expectations, or are they different from your expectations?
 - a. What did you think the DAT would be like before it started? Explain.
3. What has facilitation been like on the DAT?
4. Describe your interactions with other DAT members. What is the "feel" of the group?
 - a. What aspects of working together are working well and not so well?
 - b. Do people's participation seem equitable, or are there power imbalances?
 - c. Do you think that differences in participants' roles and responsibilities within the department have impacted the DAT? If so, how?
5. What personal and departmental aspirations do you have for the DAT?



Interpreting Listening Tour Responses

After the interview, send the participant a thank you email. Transcribe the audio recording, or add to the notes to make them interpretable. The following information can be used to guide interpretation of the responses. Once you understand the themes from your Listening Tour, it can be helpful to summarize the ideas and articulate them to the DAT, along with any clarifications about the DAT model that may help them shape their culture and work efficiently with each other and with you.

RESPONSES REGARDING PRIOR COMMITTEE EXPERIENCES

Learning how other teams in the department operate can reveal expectations department members may have about how the DAT will function. Departmental teams and committees may operate with a culture similar to the entire department. The Listening Tour responses can help you identify the differences between other departmental groups and the DAT, and articulate this to new DAT members to help adjust their expectations about participating in the DAT. If you learn that departmental committees typically have one person driving the work, you may want to have a conversation with the DAT about dispersed leadership and the role of the facilitator. You may find out that committees in that department always have student membership (or the opposite), and probing how department members view student membership can indicate how a student's voice may be received in the DAT meetings. Overall, learning about how groups of people in the department typically operate should inform your relationship and facilitation moves with the DAT.

RESPONSES REGARDING FACILITATION

Listening Tour interviews are an opportunity to receive feedback on your facilitation. Feedback can be used to identify what is working for DAT members, what is not working for DAT members, and possible sources of confusion. In some cases, DAT members may feel that certain activities are not productive for them simply because they are not aware of the intention behind your facilitation moves. Use feedback to modify your facilitation moves accordingly. What works for one DAT may not work for another, so you can use the feedback from the Listening Tour to provide customized support for a DAT.

RESPONSES REGARDING IDEAS ABOUT CHANGE

Change can occur in a variety of ways, and understanding what has worked and what has not in a department from the perspective of its members can inform the change efforts of the DAT. Department members may recall reactions to other change efforts in the department or university, and may have suggestions on how the change efforts could have been modified to be better received and/or sustained.



RESPONSES REGARDING THE LANDSCAPE OF THE DEPARTMENT

Some Listening Tour questions focus on departmental perspectives and culture around undergraduate education. This can reveal the level of support a department shows for undergraduate education, and ways that support is manifested. It can also indicate whether a department is prepared for the work the DAT might take on. For example, if the only people who are invested in improving undergraduate education in the department are on the DAT, it may be difficult to recruit allies for the DAT's change efforts. In other cases, you may find that people in the department are very supportive of undergraduate education but simply don't have the resources to invest in improvements. Themes from these individuals could point to an area of focus for a DAT that the department might broadly support. If you are conducting Listening Tour interviews after a DAT has already begun its project, you can use targeted questions in this area to probe how receptive the department will be towards the DAT's work and help the DAT members think through how they might engage the department in their change work.

RESPONSES REGARDING THE CORE PRINCIPLES

Interviewee thoughts about the Core Principles shared during the Listening Tour can influence how and when you bring up these principles in meetings. Talking about the Core Principles both in the interview and in DAT meetings is a useful reflective practice. Certain DATs may feel more comfortable with one or two of the principles. The Listening Tour will allow you to identify which principles DAT members are familiar with and which may require more conversation. This also serves as a way to collect baseline data about DAT members' perspectives about the six principles. Revisiting the Core Principles in an exit interview, near the end of the DAT's time with external facilitation, can provide you with information to show growth in DAT members' understanding and application of the Core Principles.

