

# Community Listening Sessions: Implementation Guide

Sometimes, people don't come to court because they lack trust in the criminal justice system. Building community trust is a complex process, but Community Listening Sessions, based on a model used in [Minnesota](#), may help. Use this guide to plan and host a listening session.

- 1 Establish a team of stakeholders.** Identify and include all impacted stakeholders, such as clerks of court, judges, prosecutors, defenders, and community members.
- 2 Connect with a community partner.** Consider approaching a community organization to partner with you on the event. A partner can help spread the word and increase participation by marginalized community members.
- 3 Decide on the format.** Do you want a “town hall” style forum where anyone can speak? Or do you want to only invite pre-selected speakers, like leaders with community groups, and have small group conversations? Something in between? How long do you want the session to be?
- 4 Decide on the topic.** Decide if you want to give people an open forum to speak on any court system issue or if you want to focus on a specific issue—like barriers to court appearance. Your community partner can help you determine the best topics.
- 5 Choose a location.** Some people might be hesitant to come the courthouse, so consider holding your listening sessions in a community space, like a community center.
- 6 Consider barriers to participation.** To make sure your event is welcoming to all, consider and address any barriers to participation. Is the location accessible by public transit? Is it wheelchair accessible? Do you need a translator? Your community partner can help you identify barriers.
- 7 Decide on a date and spread the word.** Leverage your community partner to help promote the event.
- 8 Prepare your presenters.** Depending on the format, court actors might serve on a panel or engage in small group conversations. You might need one or more trained facilitators. Make sure all participating stakeholders and facilitators are prepared, including knowing how to address tough questions.

## EXAMPLE

You can find sample facilitator guides, feedback forms, and promotional materials from a listening session in Minnesota [here](#).

- 9 Hold your listening session.** Keep introductions and discussion from court actors to a minimum—the goal is to listen to community members.
- 10 Debrief and plan for next time.** Community members might raise issues that your team has never considered. Make time to debrief and assess policies or practices based on community feedback. You might decide to host multiple listening sessions to continue building community trust.