



## The ABC's of a Ministry Listening Tour

Done well, a Ministry Listening Tour can help you understand how those to whom you are ministering perceive your ministry. It can point out areas needing improvement. It can help identify areas where your students and their parents or your community need additional ministry services. Below, you will find the basics of conducting a successful ministry listening tour.

### General Principles of Conducting a Listening Tour

1. Your interviews should include as many people as possible in the categories you choose below. In general, the more people you can interview, the more accurate your conclusions will be. Remember, there may also be one person who has recognized or analyzed the situation in ways others have missed. Failing to interview this person could leave you without critical insights.
2. If you are interviewing several sub-groups of people and combining the results, make sure you have a representative/equal number of people in each group interviewed.
3. Do not interview only the people you like or who love your ministry. If you can't interview everyone, put all of the possible names in a hat and draw the number you can interview randomly. This will increase the likelihood you get a variety of helpful responses.

### Before You Interview Anyone

1. Gather the information you already know.
  - a. Statistics
  - b. Current Ministry efforts
  - c. Community resources available to families in your area
2. Decide whom you will interview.
  - a. Main segment(s)
    - i. Church Members

- ii. Community Members
  - b. Sub-Groups
    - i. Parents
    - ii. Ministry Volunteers
    - iii. Children
    - iv. Teens
    - v. Church Leaders
    - vi. Community Leaders
3. Decide the time frame in which you would like all interviews to be conducted.
4. Decide how many people you would like to interview in each category of people chosen.
5. Determine which format(s) of interviews you would like to use.
  - a. One-on-one interviews
  - b. Small focus groups
  - c. Written survey followed by personal or small group interviews
6. Determine what questions you would like answered during interviews. (See attached samples for ideas.)
7. Decide who will conduct the interviews and how the information shared will be recorded.
8. Determine what follow-up participants will receive after their interviews.
  - a. Thank you note
  - b. Summary of total responses
  - c. Information about steps being made to change or develop your ministry as a result of the information gathered.

## **During the Interview Process**

1. Make telling the truth (as they see it) feel safe for those you are interviewing.
2. Treat those being interviewed with love and respect – even if you are hurt or upset by what they say.
3. Avoid making defensive comments in reaction to what is shared.
4. If you disagree with something that is said, ask follow-up questions to determine what specific things made them believe the statement they made is true.
5. Show appreciation to everyone who shares his or her time with you.
6. Let participants know what will be done with the information you gather.

## **After Interviews Are Completed**

1. Examine all of the information gathered for patterns, clusters, red flags (problems mentioned by only one or two people, but which may still be valid) and other helpful information.
2. Place each bit of useful information in either the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities or Threats portion of your strategic plan.
3. Adapt goals and action plans as needed.
4. Follow-up with each participant.

## **Sample Questions to Ask Parents Who Attend Your Congregation**

1. How many children do you have and what are their ages?
2. What is the average number of times your children attend the following during a typical four week period of time:
  - a. Sunday morning worship service
  - b. Sunday morning Bible class
  - c. Other week night Bible classes
  - d. Ministry events for your children's age groups that occur outside of regular class times
3. What do you believe our ministry is doing well?
4. In what areas do you believe our ministry needs improvement? (Note: Those interviewed should be encouraged to give at least one thing they believe needs improvement. If necessary, remind them your ministry really wants to know what needs to improve.)
5. What else could we add that might help strengthen the faith foundations of your children?
6. What can we do to support you in your Christian parenting?
7. What are the three most concerning problems your children are experiencing outside of Church?
8. How well would you say our curriculum helps your children grow in the following areas:
  - a. Bible knowledge
  - b. Knowing how to apply the Bible to their lives
  - c. Christian life skills

- d. Gift identification, development and use
  - e. Servant leadership skills
9. How would you describe your children's relationships with:
- a. Their peers at Church
  - b. Our volunteers
  - c. Our leaders/staff
  - d. Other adults in our congregation
10. If you could change only one thing about our ministry, what would it be?
11. Is there anything else we should know?

## **Sample Questions to the Community to Determine Whether or Not Your Congregation Should Begin a Ministry for Children With Special Needs**

1. Do you currently attend church somewhere regularly?
2. What experiences have you had with Church and your child with special needs?
3. What is the age of your child with special needs?
4. What special needs does your child have when attending:
  - a. Bible classes
  - b. Worship services
  - c. Other children's ministry events
5. Does your child require a dedicated aide to help him or her participate in activities?
6. What concerns are you struggling to address in regard to your child with special needs?
7. How could our Church best help children with special needs?
8. How could our Church best help the families of children with special needs?
9. If we begin a ministry serving children with special needs and their families:
  - a. What should it include?
  - b. What should it avoid?
10. What is the best way for us to find and communicate with families who have a child with special needs?
11. What is one thing you wish more people knew about your child with special needs?
12. What else do we need to know?