



Thinking Differently About Input Gathering

While Conversations in the Spirit are the primary model for listening in Partners in the Gospel, the unique language, geography, and resource realities in each family may necessitate additional approaches to ensure all voices can be heard during consultation. What follows are some ideas about alternative input gathering that can help expand community engagement with the Partners in the Gospel process.

1. Virtual conversations

If geography is your primary challenge, hold virtual Conversations in the Spirit. Follow the same best practices found in the [Partners Listening Session Overview](#) while adapting the structure for Zoom or Teams. Consider having live notetakers *and* post-meeting surveys to collect input.

Main considerations:

- These work well for geographically dispersed families but lose the benefit of in-person connection.
- Make the most of Zoom and Teams by using features like breakout rooms, polls, and document sharing to approximate the in-person experience.
- Make sure to build prayer into these – prayer can easily be lost during digital gatherings.

What you'll need:

- A Zoom or Teams account.
- One or more discussion facilitators and notetakers (based on meeting size).

2. Tabling During Parish Social Events

While Mass is the best time to catch your parishioners each week, coffee and donuts – or other social events – are often the *second-best time*. Set up a Partners in the Gospel table at one of these events staffed by one of your PFLT or PFAC members. Parishioners can ask questions, learn more, and provide responses to adapted versions of the One Parish Plan questions.

Main considerations:

- The goal for tabling is to be available but unobtrusive. Make yourself present where people are gathering, but do not take over the space or event.
- This is a great opportunity for parishioners to meet the PFAC and learn about future listening events.

What you'll need:

- Table staffers knowledgeable about the Partners in the Gospel process.
- Partners in the Gospel materials (like those in the [Communications Toolkit](#)).
- A feedback box with question prompts for anonymous feedback.

3. Survey series

Surveys can easily lose the prayerful engagement of in-person listening and become a single point of reflection rather than being part of something larger. To make survey gathering part of an ongoing conversation, consider breaking your questions out over a series of weeks and utilizing bulletins, parish websites, and social media to introduce the questions and gather input.

Main considerations:

- Do not simply pose questions with no background information – introduce them with context, an announcement, or a reflection to start with.
- Survey participants can easily feel overlooked in listening reports. Make sure to intentionally reflect those voices in your listening syntheses.
- Be intentional with timing – if you have two questions, consider dedicating a month to the effort, spending two weeks on one and two on the other.

What you'll need:

- Written or digital versions of the survey questions (note: template forms for input questions are available in ParishStaq to be launched by parish families).
- A team to collect and synthesize the written and/or digital submissions.

4. Phone trees

Make use of your database and parish staff or key leaders for a phone tree, directly connecting with households to gather input. Each caller will be responsible for gathering and submitting input from a set of households.

Main considerations:

- In an era of spam calls, parishioners may avoid unknown numbers. Announce the effort in the bulletin and newsletters so parishioners know it is coming.
- Some people may not want to (or be able to) give feedback live. Pair this method with an online option to follow up with them via an emailed link.
- Give volunteers a script to use and some basic training to take the guesswork out of how to start these conversations.

What you'll need:

- A list of households to call, broken out for individual callers.
- A script for volunteers to use.
- Tools for volunteers to submit input (e.g. spreadsheet, ParishStaq, worksheets)

5. Go where they are

Many ministries and groups already have regular scheduled meetings. Instead of asking them to attend another event, go to them. Work with the group or ministry leader to see if they can dedicate a portion of their scheduled time for a group session to provide feedback or input. Parishes have reported that this is one of the most effective ways to capture groups of people who may not attend in-person events otherwise.

Main considerations:

- Ideally 2-3 members of the PFAC or PFLT could host the session. This way 2 can help facilitate, while the third takes notes.
- Start by showing the updated Partners in the Gospel video and use the other materials in the [Communications Toolkit](#).

What you'll need:

- One or more discussion facilitators and notetakers (based on meeting size).

Final notes

These are just a few alternative ways to gather input, but there are countless others. Feedback postcards, comment boards, messages to parent groups – we encourage you to be creative in thinking about how and from whom you gather input! Aim to provide diverse, accessible opportunities for parishioners to partake in this shared discernment, always recognizing that in our sharing and listening we are ultimately looking for the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Whatever you do, do it well, and do it with the ultimate goal in mind of fostering communities that reflect Jesus Christ.