

The First Conversation:

A Listening Guide for Building Local Partnerships

Listening Conversation Guide

Local credibility is borrowed, not built from scratch. A first meeting is a listening meeting. When you ask great questions and reflect back what you hear, you earn trust and discover needs you can actually solve.

MEETING OUTCOME

Leave with: (1) the top 1-3 needs in their words, (2) one measurable 30-90 day small win you can execute, and (3) a next step date on the calendar.

SUGGESTED FLOW (30-45 MINUTES)

0-3 min: warm intro • 3-20 min: open listening • 20-30 min: measurable clarity • 30-40 min: small win • 40-45 min: close + next step

Your posture: Curious. Humble. Helpful. Listen first - the pitch comes later (if ever).

PRINT TIP

If you're printing, bring pages 2-5 into the meeting (prep + questions + notes).



CHURCH
GROWTH
INCUBATOR

Meeting Setup: Prep + Scripts

Use this page before you go in (and again in the car right after).

Before you walk in

Bring	Decide	Research
• A notepad (yes, paper) • Your calendar • A one-sentence intro • A realistic volunteer range	• Who owns follow-up • Budget range you can mobilize • Your 90-day capacity (time, people)	• What they do + who they serve • Current initiatives • Their busiest season / pressure points

30-second opener (script)

"Thanks for making time. I'm with _____ Church. We want to serve our city in a way that actually helps. Today I'm not here to pitch - I'd love to listen. What needs are you seeing right now, and where would volunteers make the biggest difference?"

2-minute close (script)

"Let me make sure I'm hearing you right. The biggest needs are: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____. A measurable win would be _____ by _____. If we start small, would you be open to a next step where we propose a simple 90-day plan? Could we schedule that now?"

BEFORE YOU LEAVE, CONFIRM

- ☐ Summarize the need in their words
- ☐ Confirm numbers + timeline (measurable)
- ☐ Identify one 30-90 day small win candidate
- ☐ Agree on next step + date
- ☐ Ask: "Who else should be in the loop?"

Question Bank for the First Meeting

Pick the best questions for the room. Stay present. Take notes. Reflect back what you hear.

Open-ended (start here)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. What are the top 3 needs you're seeing right now in our community? | 6. What are you tired of outside groups doing that doesn't actually help? |
| 2. If we could help with one thing in the next 90 days, what would matter most? | 7. When volunteers show up, what makes it easy - or hard - to use them well? |
| 3. Where do you feel stuck or under-resourced? | 8. Which populations are most overlooked or hardest to reach right now? |
| 4. Who is already doing great work in this space (and why)? | 9. What season of the year is most critical or most stressful for you? |
| 5. What does success look like to you in 6 months? | 10. If we could become a reliable partner, what would you want us to be known for? |

Measurable clarity

1. Roughly how many people are affected (or could be served)?
2. What would a win look like in one sentence - with a number?
3. What timeline would make this helpful (30, 60, or 90 days)?
4. What resources already exist, and what's missing?
5. How will we know we actually helped? What should we measure?

Pain points

1. Where does momentum usually break down when groups try to help?
2. What's been frustrating about past partnerships or volunteer groups?
3. What hidden constraints should we know (policies, liability, comms)?
4. What do you wish more people understood about this problem?
5. What would make you hesitate to partner with us - and why?

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Don't open with your event idea. Open with their reality.
- Don't turn it into a pitch. You're building trust, not closing a deal.
- Don't ask for stage time, promo, or publicity in the first meeting.
- Don't overpromise (volunteers, money, timeline). Trust is fragile.
- Don't leave without a next step date on the calendar.

If you sense defensiveness: "I don't want to add work to your plate. If it's helpful, we'd love to start small and measurable. If it's not helpful, tell me - we'd rather learn than waste your time."

Meeting Notes

Partner name

Date

Organization / department

Location

Role / title

Your team present

Top needs (1-3)

Measurable needs (numbers + timeframe)

Need (plain language)	# impacted / target	Timeframe	Notes

Pain points / constraints (what makes this hard?)

Key quotes (capture exact wording)

Meeting Notes (continued)

Use this page to capture small-win ideas and lock in next steps before you leave.

90-day small win candidates

What we can realistically provide

Volunteers (how many?)	Budget (range)	Skills / assets

Next steps (leave with a date)

Next step	Owner	By when

Additional notes

Follow-Up Email Template

Send within 24 hours. Keep it short. Reflect what you heard. Propose one small next step.

Subject: Thank you + next steps

Hi _____,

Thank you for meeting with me today. I'm grateful for the work you're doing for _____. Here's what I heard you say:

- Priority need: _____
- Who it impacts: _____
- What a win looks like: _____

Based on that, here's a small first step we can take in the next 30-90 days:

- Proposed small win: _____
- Target date: _____
- What we'll provide: _____
- What we need from your side: _____

If that aligns, could we confirm a quick 15-minute check-in on _____?

Thanks again,

Phone: _____ | Email: _____

Fast recap formula (optional)

USE THIS IF YOU'RE STUCK

- 1) Here's what we heard: _____
- 2) Here's what we can do (small + measurable): _____
- 3) Here's the next step + date: _____

First 90-Day Small Win Plan

Keep it simple. Keep it measurable. Keep it owned.

Small win statement

FILL IN

In the next 90 days, we will _____ for
_____ so that _____ (measured by
_____).

DEADLINE

Target date: _____ | Location/site: _____

Scope guardrails

IN SCOPE (yes)	OUT OF SCOPE (no)

Owners

Role	Name	Contact
Church partnership owner		
Partner point person		
Volunteer / logistics lead		

Milestones (backwards from the target date)

Week of	Milestone	Owner	Status

Success metrics

Close the loop: schedule a 15-minute debrief with the partner within 7 days of completion.