

THE FLD HANDBOOK

Using Facilitative Listening Design
For Your Project



A guide to understanding and challenging
perceptions through the process of listening,
analysing, and sharing.

This guide was produced by Women Peace Makers, a Cambodian non-government organisation striving to prevent violence, transform conflict, and empower women, youth, and community to take leadership to address issues of gender and conflict in Cambodia.

We invite you to use this guide to begin your own projects and adapt the methodology to suit your needs in information gathering and working towards better mutual understanding.

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Using Facilitative Listening Design for your project A guide to understand and challenge perceptions

Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) has been developed over years of practice. It uses the power of listening to people as a central tool for understanding and building bridges. It can be used for information gathering, monitoring, and qualitative research. It can also be leveraged to challenge perceptions, evoke critical thinking, and help one group better understand “the other”.

The key to implementing FLD is to be fully aware that listening does not equate to agreeing. You can absolutely disagree with someone without shutting them down or preventing them from expressing what they think. Empathy is at the centre of this approach. Training everyone involved how to acknowledge everything they hear and remaining neutral, but supportive, is one of the biggest challenges in FLD. Achieving this, however, can produce the most positive results.

FLD Values

FLD is always adaptable. In fact, you must contemplate many factors about the people you're working with. Culture, gender, age, ideology – all are important considerations for how you will make FLD work well for your group. Some values, in any scenario, are key to remembering when beginning your design.

'Insider' ownership - Priority is always given to enabling full leadership of the communities wishing to explore issues or use the method for positive change. This is a human-to-human centred design in which 'insiders' plan, execute, analyse, and mobilise all findings and learnings. The role of external trainers or facilitators should be, at most, to assist in training trainers, researchers, or participants with the FLD approach to foster locally-driven initiatives. Fundamental to FLD is the belief that it is the people involved and affected by conflict, tension, or negative sentiment that have the power to positively transform relationships with others. They own and lead any FLD initiative.

Language is key in listening - It is vital to conduct any trainings and do full analysis in the languages being used by Listeners and Sharers. Interpretation and translation should be avoided, or used only in circumstances that do not contribute to the understanding of the data or information. Back and forth interpretation and translation will distort the core expression of the Sharers' voices. Translation of key outputs and products is certainly acceptable for wider mobilisation, but the work itself should be done in the languages of the respective community at all stages.

Bias is in everyone - It must be acknowledged and managed. Understanding bias is part of the process, but recognition of its existence should be upfront from the very beginning. Activities can be included in the coaching and training that help everyone spot their own biases. Observation during the processing of information from the field is crucial to seeking out biases and understanding them during analysis. Bias may hamper larger efforts to understand other perspectives but it will not ruin the overall goals of FLD as long as it is acknowledged and communicated in a transparent manner through the process and in any concluding outputs.

"Listening is a very deep practice.

You have to empty yourself.

You have to leave space in order to listen...

*especially to people we think are our enemies -
the ones we believe are making our situation worse."*

Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk and peace activist

Who's involved?



Designers

Your core team that consists of people who will conceptualise, plan, and implement the project. Designers are also likely play a key role in later analysis and communicating the results.



Listeners

Your group of information gathers who will work in the field to really implement FLD and carry out conversations. They will be trained to listen to others and learn how to record what they hear after their conversations.

Your Listeners are your key connection to the people you hope to learn more about and understand. Usually two Listeners will go out into the field and engage in conversations together.



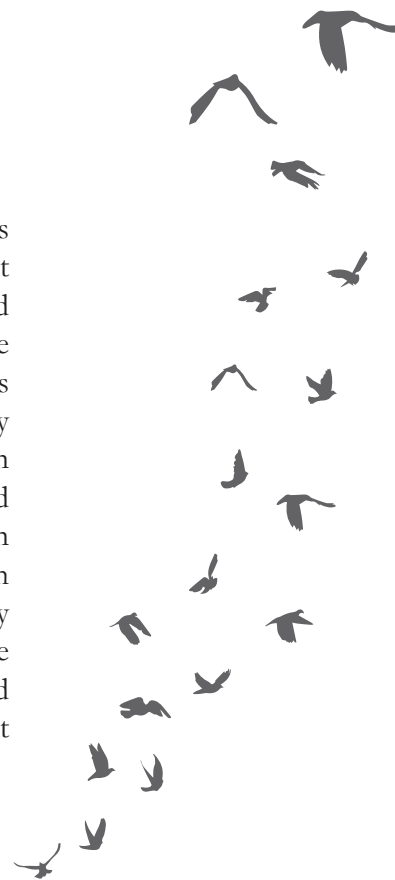
Sharers

Information providers that accept the invitation to talk about their views and share their opinions on an issue with your Listeners. They make up a wide group of people in your target communities from different demographics. Thought needs to be given to the scope of your Sharers, such as including sub-groups within main groups. Things like gender, disability, religion, language, income level, profession, age, etc. all need to be considered.



Analysts

Your information checkers and data verifiers that go through the recorded materials from the conversations. Designers may take on this role or may delegate it to others that can go through all the gathered information. Listeners can also perform this role with additional training as they have been through the process and have a good understanding of the content they will be reviewing.



“The basis of peace is understanding the pain of others.”

Katsuji Yoshida, 1945 Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor

Step 1 Decide what you need to explore and understand



Misunderstandings can lead to conflict. They can contribute to ongoing narratives and perceptions about the other that may or may not reflect the real situation. The first step is to try and understand how the other side feels. Even large-scale international conflicts that have decades of analysis and commentary hold deeply divided perspectives. The way any conflict is framed depends on how each and every person sees it.

FLD can be used in nearly any context where more information is needed to better understand the dynamics between two or more parties. It is particularly useful in situations where traditional research might not be realistic. For example, in areas where heavy conflict might be taking place, low-key initiatives that do not bring attention to the information seekers may be the only feasible approach. In politically complex environments where people may not feel free to voice their opinions or thoughts, FLD can be implemented without recording materials and in a way that is fully aware and sensitive to the potential dangers of information sharing. For difficult conversations on controversial topics or social taboos, FLD can be designed to provide a safe space where sharers might feel more comfortable to discuss their views and experiences.

First you must identify the issue you are seeking to understand. Are you involved personally in the conflict or have you observed it? Is there an issue that seems to be in the media a lot that portrays some sort of division between two or more groups? Is there a long history of animosity or mistrust between two parties that has really become protracted and seems irreversible? It can be helpful to develop a conflict analysis. There are many ways to do that and it can help you identify different actors and existing dynamics in any conflict or disagreement. Consider doing a literature review or a media analysis, something that will give you and your team a general understanding and a place to start in your journey to understand. If you come from one of the conflict parties or the groups involved, clarify how you fit in and begin to recognise the biases you hold. Lack of knowledge of the other side is normal and welcomed. The goal is to try to understand other perspectives and it is often much easier going into it without trying to define how other people feel.

Step 2 Find a likeminded group to work with



You may already be thinking and talking with others about your idea, or you may now be looking for people to work with on your FLD project. It is important to collaborate with likeminded people, meaning with those that share similar

objectives. This can be challenging, particularly if your goal is to try and understand “the other”. You should ideally have a team that is open to hearing something they may be fundamentally against. The FLD process will ultimately foster much conversation and dialogue on opinions and diverging points of view, including among the designers and planning team. The team must be constantly aware of different biases, including those of its own members.

Having a diverse design team will greatly contribute to your successful implementation of FLD. Networks are vital. Having people who can access different groups, including “the other” will make your work much easier. Having different people that can present well, do planning and logistics, communicate, etc. will also help to build your FLD dream team. Leveraging the skills of your team will be crucial as you work through the process.

Step 3 Begin planning and developing tools



Once you have a team, it is time to bring your FLD project to life. You’ll need to have a meeting together to further refine the issue and what you’ll be working to achieve. Will you focus on information gathering? Is developing more empathy and understanding with a specific group the main

goal? Do you plan on using FLD as part of an action-research methodology? Sometimes it is impossible to know what you will eventually do with the results when you are still unclear about dynamics and differing perspectives. Having some clear objectives defined, however, will help to lead you through the process.

Once you and your team have worked out what you hope to better understand and how you will do it, it is useful to begin tailoring the tools you’ll use to seek information. In general, you’ll need to develop consent checks, conversation logs, daily journals, and draft conversation inquiries.

A consent check



Consent is central to any ethical research activity. Sharers that decide to participate and engage in conversations with Listeners need to be fully informed of the purpose of the project, the methods to collect information, their participation, and any possible risks involved. You will need to decide whether a written or oral consent check is most appropriate. Written is always preferable as it clearly demonstrates that the Sharer has freely given informed consent. However, in reality it is sometimes unrealistic to use written consent checks. In sensitive situations, Sharers may not feel comfortable to be seen with paper around or do not wish to provide their signature. Illiterate people or those without the ability

to understand written documents may feel intimidated by trying to get them to read or sign a consent check. In such cases, alternatives should be sought. A formulated consent introduction to the project, for example, can be drafted and shared orally with the Sharer before beginning. Asking the Sharer if he or she agrees to all the conditions of consent can then be recorded by the Listener on the conversation log, for example. Whether you choose written or oral, make sure that your consent check is developed early on and ensures that Sharers are well informed and clearly can provide valid consent.

Conversation log

One of the most important tools is the conversation log that your Listeners will use to record what they heard after the conversation. Each Listener will fill out a separate conversation log, so two need to be produced. The conversation log needs to capture important information like the demographic profile of the Sharer, the main issues that came out during the conversation, any useful or memorable quotes, and any other reflections or important observations that can help to understand the information. Conversation logs can be drafted as printed documents that Listeners later fill in, or they may be digital documents, such as fillable PDFs, that they can do on

their computers or phones. The one you choose will depend on the capacity of your Listeners and the amount of data you are hoping to capture. A group that will be in rural areas with no electricity or with Listeners who don't have computers, for example, will likely want to prepare printed conversation logs. A group with highly proficient IT users and access to computers that will be doing a large-scale sample with many Sharers might prefer using digital conversation logs that can later have data copied and pasted into a database for analysis.

Daily journals

The first layer of analysis actually starts with the Listeners. A daily journal is used at the end of any day when more than one conversation was carried out. Like the conversation log, the daily journal can be a digital or a printed document depending on the context. It should allow the pair of Listeners to highlight any topics or themes that came up across the different conversations. It should also provide a space for them to share any disagreement they might have, like when one person heard something different than the other. It's quite common that things are heard differently in a conversation since we all hear things based on our own understanding.

Conversation inquiries

Although conversations should be relatively free and unstructured, they are helped along with a conversation inquiry comprised of some questions or topics. The questions assist Listeners to sometimes steer the conversations and provide a path for Sharers to reflect and discuss their thoughts on a particular topic. Questions should be discussed in depth with the Listeners to ensure cultural appropriateness and suitability with the proposed Sharers. The questions may or may not be used, depending on how the conversation goes. They are useful, however, for situations that require some more guidance for smoother and genuine conversations.

Finally, remember to begin considering training materials for once you have all the Listeners together. You will need to explain the project plan in detail, train them in the methodology, involve them in exercises to improve listening skills and bias recognition, and set up all the logistics together for fieldwork.

Step 4 Recruit your Listeners



Finding the right people to carry out your FLD project can be challenging, especially if you're trying to engage a group that you are not well acquainted with. This is particularly true

when you're trying to reach out to "the other" or to another side of a conflict that you might be connected to.

The profile of the Listeners you hope to recruit will depend on your FLD objectives. Is this strictly an information gathering initiative? Do you hope to bring Listeners together from different groups and foster reflection and possible transformation in the group? Is it likely that the potential Sharers you plan to eventually engage with will only talk with certain people? Diversity is likely to be an important aspect. Gender, language ability, ethnicity, professional background, age, and other factors might be critical in forming a team that can be relatable to Sharers and reach out to the most demographically widely diverse target groups. All these issues need to be taken into account when considering who will be listening. FLD should be implementable with any group of Listeners, whether they are highly trained data collectors with strong research backgrounds or whether they are farmers who might have easy access to neighbouring crop growers, for example.

If you need to expand your potential network of Listeners, consider reaching out to other organisations or associations. Explain to them what you are doing and what kind of people you are looking for. Consider partnering with others if it could help you connect with Listeners. Once you begin talking with potential Listeners, make sure they match the profile you are seeking. You can hold interviews or simply connect with them to assess their suitability. In particular, gauge their commitment. FLD will require time and effort and it's essential they understand and show enthusiasm to engage in the process during the set time frame.

Step 5 Hold a Training and Coaching Lab

Once you have your team of Listeners, you need to arrange a date for them and the design team to meet for a comprehensive Training and Coaching Lab. Whether you decide to design this as a workshop, on online course, or through an experiential learning process, you should make your best effort to bring all Listeners together to meet, exchange, learn, and get to know each other. The relationship between the Listeners and with the design team will likely determine the overall quality of the intervention, both in terms of group transformation and information gathering.

The Training and Coaching Lab programme should be facilitated by the designers and has the main objective of sharing information with your Listeners and setting up the next steps for fieldwork and listening activities. The following are important components to include in your schedule:



1. Project introduction – A full description and presentation should convey the larger picture of what you are doing. Listeners need to understand the purpose of the FLD initiative and how their role fits into the design.

2. FLD methodology – A detailed lecture in how FLD works will enable Listeners to begin to understand the information

gathering process and any transformative elements that could occur with the group from the start.

3. Communication skills – A general session on active listening should provide the skills necessary to listen and appropriately probe others using empathy. Attention should be given to discussing how to listen to difficult issues or topics that the Listener might fundamentally disagree with. Acknowledging what others say does not mean accepting it or agreeing. Different types of follow up or probing questions such as open/closed and yes/no along with tactics for paraphrasing and reframing should also be taught.

4. Listening and biases – A practical session and activity should be given to really explain and show how we interject our own biases into how we hear others. A listening exercise or game can be designed to get this message across by demonstrating misunderstanding or different perceptions.

5. Conversation inquiry – The conversation inquiry draft with guiding questions should be presented and discussed with the Listeners. They should have a chance to comment and provide feedback. Your Listeners will usually have more context and understanding of the people they will be engaging in conversations with, and can consequently localise your conversation questions. You should come up with a final conversation inquiry together as a group, noting that there may be different versions depending on the groups that might be reaching out to different communities and cultures.

6. Conversation tools – a detailed session should be held to show all the tools that Listeners will need in the field. Consent should be discussed and a decision made on the appropriateness of written versus oral. Recording tools including conversation logs and daily journals should be

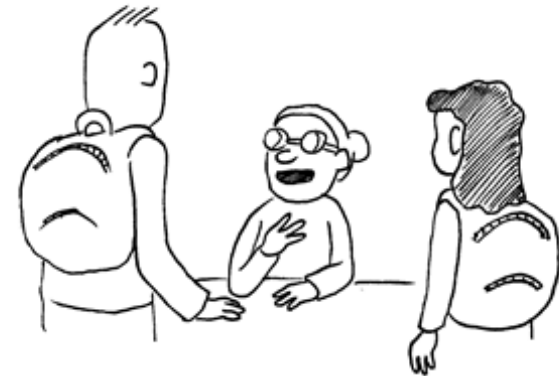
shared and explained thoroughly. Conversation rules should also be conveyed. Are Listeners allowed to bring in a notepad to record quotes or will it be paper-free? Should they take photos of the communities? Will one Listener do more talking and the other listening or will they participate equally?

7. Planning – some sessions need to be included for planning the fieldwork. A discussion and agreement on diversity and demographic needs will help to get the listening pairs to decide their targets to aim for a balanced representation among Sharers. How many men and women do you hope to reach? Who will try to talk with a small minority group known to be living in one of the areas? Should teams try to find people of all ages? A logistics and budget session will be needed to prepare the details and probably give some advance funds so Listeners can cover their expenses. Consideration should be given for transportation, accommodation, meals, hospitality to invite Sharers for a refreshment, etc.

8. A trial conversation – a test drive of FLD in action should happen around the training site if possible. Listening pairs should go outside and attempt to locate a Sharer and have a conversation. Later recording and reflection using the conversation log and the daily journal should follow so that they fully understand how the process works. A regrouping to discuss the experience and process will also uncover any potential issues and reassure Listeners before they head out to the field.

Once you've come to the end your FLD Training and Coaching Lab, make sure to set a timeframe for the fieldwork and decide together on a date to come back together for the Information Processing and Transformative Space Lab. Normally this should be no longer than a month later in order to retain memories of the conversations.

Step 6 Send Listeners out to the field



Listening pairs should go to their designated communities or areas as soon as possible following the Coaching and Training Lab. Depending on how much time they will be able to spend having conversations, it's usual for listening pairs to try and engage in three to five conversations a day. The first day or two can be less productive as most teams need to get familiar with the community and sometimes find it challenging to locate any potential Sharers. Once they do find someone to talk with, however, they often begin to connect with others quite quickly and often through contacts of their initial conversations.

The design team should provide as much support as possible to the Listeners once they begin the fieldwork. An emergency contact number should be provided for any potential situations. If the fieldwork is all happening in close proximity, a few meetings to bring everyone together and see how they are progressing can really benefit the process. Phone calls, emails, or text messages to each listening pair to check-in can be very useful in making sure things are going smoothly. Be ready for change if needed as the fieldwork must be flexible. For example, if local authorities become suspicious or try to prevent Listeners from connecting with people in their

communities, you may have to find a new place for them to have their conversations. If a neighbourhood turns out to be particularly dangerous, the design team needs to ensure the safety of the Listeners on a case-by-case basis.

Step 7 Bring everyone back for an Information Processing and Transformative Space Lab

After all the listening pairs have finished their fieldwork, you need to organise a gathering that we call an Information Processing and Transformative Space Lab, or simply the “Info-Space Lab” for short. The purpose for the Info-Space Lab is two-fold. First, it is a structured way to get all the information learnt from the conversations from the minds of the Listeners to the group. It is also a space for Listeners to reflect deeper not only on the issue at hand, but also on any changes they may have personally experienced.



The information processing sessions should focus on extracting the opinions and views shared directly from the Sharers that the Listeners had conversations with. Effort must be constantly made to discourage Listeners from interjecting their own interpretations and instead speak directly from what they heard. They can work in their pairs at first to write down main themes they heard on poster paper. This can later

be presented to the whole group, pair by pair. Afterwards, the design team should try and summarise all themes into a condensed list. Pairs then vote on the frequency that they heard the different themes, eventually creating a list of most heard themes in order. Other activities can be planned to get different aspects of the information or to learn more about the people they spoke with.

The transformative element of the lab should provide a space for honest discussion and reflection. Focus groups can be incorporated to share personal thoughts. If it is easier for different groups to reflect in their own language or social group, multiple simultaneous focus groups may be more appropriate. One-on-one interviews can also provide further insight and provide profiles and individual stories to record and share. Full group activities can also further foster team building and transformation if two conflicting groups are present. Outdoor activities, camping, group artwork, and sports are all possibilities in bringing people together to think and talk about their experience working in the field and as a group with each other.

The conclusion of the Info-Space Lab should always be forward-looking. What is next? It's often quite useful to allow the Listeners to work together and come up with any ideas or plans to continue to work together if they wish. It can be effective to leave them alone to do this and then have them present back to the design team. Can the design team help to support their ideas? Will there be another opportunity to meet? Could they all work together to plan a project or to eventually collaborate on bringing the FLD project findings back to the communities they listened in? The possibilities are endless.

Step 8 Develop and carry out a data verification and analysis process



Following the Info-Space Lab, you will likely be left with large amounts of data in the form of conversation logs and daily journals. You will also have Info-Space Lab notes and poster paper with reflective work from the listening pairs. What you decide to do with this data is up to your initial FLD project objectives. If your goal was to better understand an issue or to collect information on different perspectives, the analysis will probably be more intensive. If you simply wanted to bring different groups together to foster relations or encourage the transformation of a conflict, you may decide that enough analysis was carried out during the Info-Space Lab.

If you are planning to share the findings of the conversations with others, it is important to develop some kind of information verification and analysis process. You need to compare what you heard from the Info-Space Lab with the data found in the recording tools. A very easy method might entail simply having a few people from the design team read over a random sample of the conversation logs and daily journals. A more rigorous process might include a team of analysts going through all data and coding it into categories based on the themes identified in the Info-Space Lab along with other

topics emerging from the recorded information. When going through the written materials, you will undoubtedly come across unclear data. If you still have access to the Listeners, you can reach out to the pairs in question and continue getting clarification and additional information. If not, you can make decisions based on your interpretation, or simply leave it out. In cases where interesting findings emerge, you can decide to continue to follow up or learn more by sending out an additional listening team to reach out to more Sharers. The process is adaptable and you can make it work for your purposes.

Step 9 Translate data and results into something for others



You may want to share your findings with others. Could the information you heard from the conversations provide others with a better understanding? Did the group of conflicting parties experience any transformation or form new friendships? Were you able to advance FLD and find a new way to implement it? All of these results could be useful for others to learn about.

After considering what information you wish to share, you need to think about who would benefit from receiving it.

This will determine what you will produce. To share findings and results from conversations, a book might be most appropriate. It might be more practical to produce a short report. Online publications like blog postings or social media updates might be enough to get the work out to your target audiences. In cases when you may wish to reach communities or grassroots organisation working in rural areas, traditional written products may not be effective. Creative ideas might include comic books, posters, or even forum theatre or drama productions. If you created some form of art during the Info-Space Lab or you took photographs of the process or during the fieldwork, you might consider finding a venue to host an exhibition. There are no limits to the ways you can creatively share your work with others.

Final tips for successful FLD

You are ready to go out and start designing! Remember a few things throughout the whole process.

- Don't forget that FLD is to help one group understand the other. You don't need to get overwhelmed by details or process. At the core, FLD is about people going out to have conversations with others, and sharing that information in a group.
- You can make FLD as technical and research-oriented or as flexible and transformation-focused as you like. Think about your goals and design around them. Find a system that works for everyone.
- Make sure to practise listening at every step. Listening is very difficult. Facilitative listening is the most difficult. You must have an understanding of empathy and a mindset that you are there to help someone by listening to them. It means

that listening is taken to the next level as an intervention in itself. This takes skill and practice.

- Build a network with the people you work with. Everyone who participates with you, from designers, to Listeners, and even Sharers themselves, are all potential peacebuilders. They will complete the FLD process with more understanding and maybe even new perceptions. Their journey will be part of yours.

Good luck and keep working towards learning about what others think!

We are always interested to know what kinds of projects people are doing with Facilitative Listening Design.

E-mail us with your ideas, updates, results, and questions.

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Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) is an innovative approach to understand others. Through better understanding of those who we might see as “the other”, we are armed with more information for bringing people together and even building stronger and more lasting peace.

This handbook serves to help anyone better understand other perspectives. It lays out in very simple terms an evolving methodology that can be used for action-research, peacebuilding, and transforming relationships at any level. Fundamental to its core is the strong belief that it is precisely those living with and affected by conflict that have the ability and the tools to overcome it.

