

Active Learning Panel Explainer

What is an Active Listening Panel?

Active Listening Panels (ALPs) are a new engagement tool underpinned by practical and applied engagement methodologies. They unlock the power of listening for project teams using a simple framework and tools that can be replicated.

Why would I use an Active Listening Panel?

Listening is recognised as a powerful way of building rapport with stakeholders but only if you do it in a way that ensures the speaker feels heard and valued. The [Centre for Creative Leadership](#) explains that: “Active listening requires you to listen attentively to a speaker, understand what they’re saying, respond and reflect on what’s being said, and retain the information for later.” This approach demonstrates that the thoughts, ideas and concerns of stakeholders are being considered and understood by the Project Team.

ALPs therefore provide a framework within which the project team can include stakeholder views at the heart of strategic planning and decision-making, whilst also building strong relationships with those key influential stakeholders.

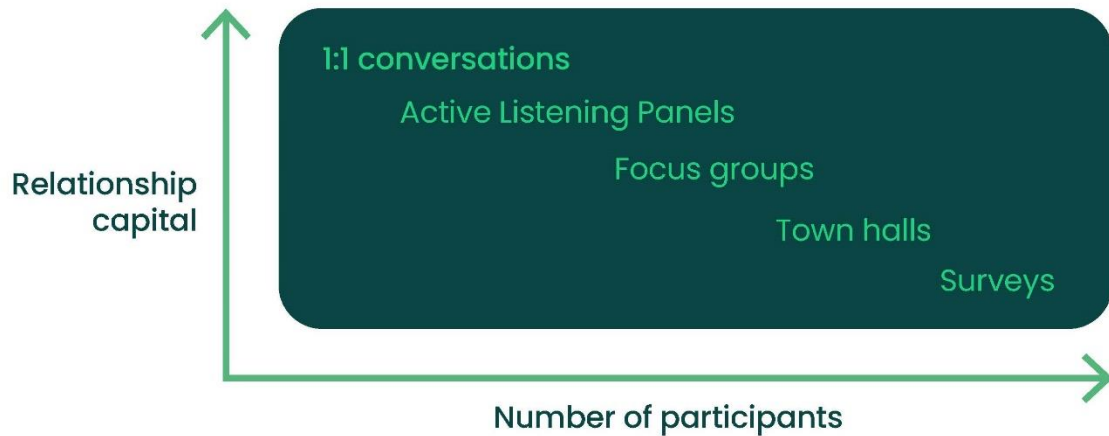
ALPs provide a tried and tested framework within which the project team can identify, approach and engage with stakeholders through a tool that facilitates active listening.

When would I use an Active Listening Panel?

The range of tools available for project professionals to engage with stakeholders are varied and each is more or less appropriate depending on the desired outcomes. An Active Listening Panel fits within this set of tools and primarily provides a method for building rapport or relationship capital. [Jennifer Wines writes for Forbes Business Development Council that](#) “...relationship capital is an intangible asset that is built up over time, between two people when understanding and trust are present and growing”.

ALPs should be considered within your stakeholder engagement approach and deployed dependent upon the desired outcome from your engagement activities. A newly launched project, particularly one with risks associated with stakeholders, may want to consider using ALPs early within the project as part of risk mitigation and management plans.

An Active Listening Panel provides the opportunity to grow relationship capital with more than one stakeholder at a time. Whilst still being delivered in small groups (four to seven participants) they are intimate enough that the facilitators can ensure all voices are heard but they are a method by which rapport can be built with multiple stakeholders simultaneously.



The diagram above shows the positions of various engagement tools in the matrix intersecting engaging with small to large numbers of people and the opportunity to build relationship capital to ensure that people feel valued and heard.

Who should run an Active Listening Panel?

Where other methods that seek to gain stakeholder views can be contracted out to third parties, ALPs are most effective if delivered by members of the project team. Where possible the project manager or sponsor should be involved. It's important that those who have a role within the project for engagement with influential stakeholders are also involved in facilitating as the primary purpose is to build relationship capital. There are two roles within the panels, one is facilitator and one is note taker. Both roles have the potential for building rapport and growing relationship capital with participants.

How do Active Listening Panels work?

The primary purpose of ALPs are to build relationship capital, the secondary purpose is to provide immediate dynamic stakeholder feedback and intelligence into the project team.

Simple steps and templates help facilitators to deliver these outcomes (*available within this ALP Toolkit).

1. Use the **Scoping document*** template to consider the details behind your Active Listening Panel; why you'd like to run a panel or panels and what you're trying to achieve through them. Use this template in conjunction with any other stakeholder engagement tools that the project team are using such as a stakeholder matrix.
2. Work up a **Timeline*** template for development and delivery and integrate it with your project timeline or Gantt chart.
3. Use the **Attendance pipeline*** template document to manage invitations and ensure that you're giving consistent messages about what's expected

from participants. Also use template invitation messages that provide participants with confidentiality, privacy and data policy information.

4. Update the **Facilitation guide and question set*** template with your own questions and relevant organisational policy information.
5. Run your Active Listening Panel(s).
6. After the panel(s) have taken place remember to send 'thank you' messages to those who attended in a timely fashion and follow up with those who didn't attend.
7. Complete the **Internal intelligence briefing*** template. Share and discuss with your project team to consider what you could take on board from the intelligence gained.
8. Use the panels as a starting point for future engagement and rapport building with the participants by demonstrating that the project has taken feedback on board, and managing expectations about items that weren't possible for inclusion. Above all ensure that participants feel heard and valued for their views in future engagement with them.

Conclusion

ALPs are a useful engagement tool that should be conducted in line with project and organisational values. They are a tool with which projects can demonstrate active listening to their stakeholders and further deepen relationships with them.