Empathy Interview Workbook

Opening Script

Hi, thank you for talking with me today. I'm part of a team working to learn from the experiences of those most impacted by the [policy]. Your voice will help us better understand what's working and what needs to change to ensure all stakeholders have positive experiences and outcomes. This conversation is voluntary and will be anonymized. Your responses will be used to gather community perspective in our redesign process. I'll be taking notes as we go — ready to start?

Introductory Question (5 min)

Tell me about a time when you felt motivated or proud of something you accomplished.

Core Questions (15 min)

Anchor Question	Follow Up	Notes
How do you feel about the policy?	*Tell me about your experiences with it.*	
What additions do you think would make the policy most supportive for students?	*If you could redesign it, what would it look like?*	
Do you think some people are more impacted by the policy than others?	*Who and why?*	

Likert Scale Reflection (5 min)

Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5:
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
The current approach is equitable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The current approach helps promote belonging and motivation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There are better ways to support positive outcomes than the current policy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Closing Question (5 min)

Is there anything else you'd like to share about how fairness, accountability, or support could be improved in relation to this challenge or policy? Anything we didn't ask that you think matters?

End of Interview

Thank you again for your time and insights. Your feedback is helping us build policies and practices that truly support those furthest from opportunity.

Empathy Interview Workbook: Appendix

Description
This workbook supports schools, districts, municipalities, and organizations in addressing equity challenges through structured empathy interviews. It can be used whether a policy already exists or is in development. Grounded in our *Community Co-Design for Equity Framework*, this tool centers the experiences of those most impacted and furthest from opportunity. In school-based settings, it complements Phases 2 and 3 of the *School Equity Audit Tool (SEAT)* process to inform equity-driven, culturally responsive redesign.

Purpose
This workbook helps teams better understand an equity challenge through the lens of those most impacted. It supports narrative-based insight, community co-design, and the transformation of policies and practices, whether through SEAT or other aligned frameworks.

Background
Empathy interviews emerged from human-centered design (Brown, 2009) and are now widely used to surface lived experience as a driver for systems change (IDEO, 2015). This tool is also grounded in Motivational Interviewing and Appreciative Inquiry. Motivational Interviewing emphasizes values-based, person-centered dialogue (Miller & Rollnick, 2013), while Appreciative Inquiry builds on existing strengths to inspire action (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Together, they foster relational, responsive, and equity-centered inquiry.

Glossary
- **Appreciative Inquiry**: An approach focused on discovering what works well in an organization or system and building forward from those strengths.
- **Community Co-Design**: A collaborative approach that centers those furthest from opportunity in the development of policies, practices, and systems. See our "Community Co-design for Equity in School Districts and Municipalities" for more information.
- **Empathy Interview**: A structured, human-centered conversation that elicits stories, emotions, and meaning from participants about their lived experiences in relation to a specific equity challenge.
- **Motivational Interviewing**: A strengths-based method of inquiry that helps participants surface their own motivations for growth, improvement, or change through active, empathetic listening.
- **Targeted Universalism**: A policy framework that sets universal goals while employing targeted strategies to meet the needs of those most impacted by inequity.

Next Steps: Coding Methodology
At LRFB, we recommend a clear, equitable process for turning interview insights into usable data:
1. **Protect Privacy:** Follow all consent and data use guidelines.
2. **Identify Themes:** Focus on codes like belonging, access, identity, and fairness.
3. **Use a Binary Matrix:** Mark each theme as present (1) or not (0) across interviews.
4. **Analyze Patterns:** Track frequency and overlap of key themes.
5. **Disaggregate:** Break down by race, gender, and other opportunity indicators.
6. **Synthesize:** Combine with surveys, co-design labs, and other listening data.