

**famille**<sup>®</sup>  
community driven communications



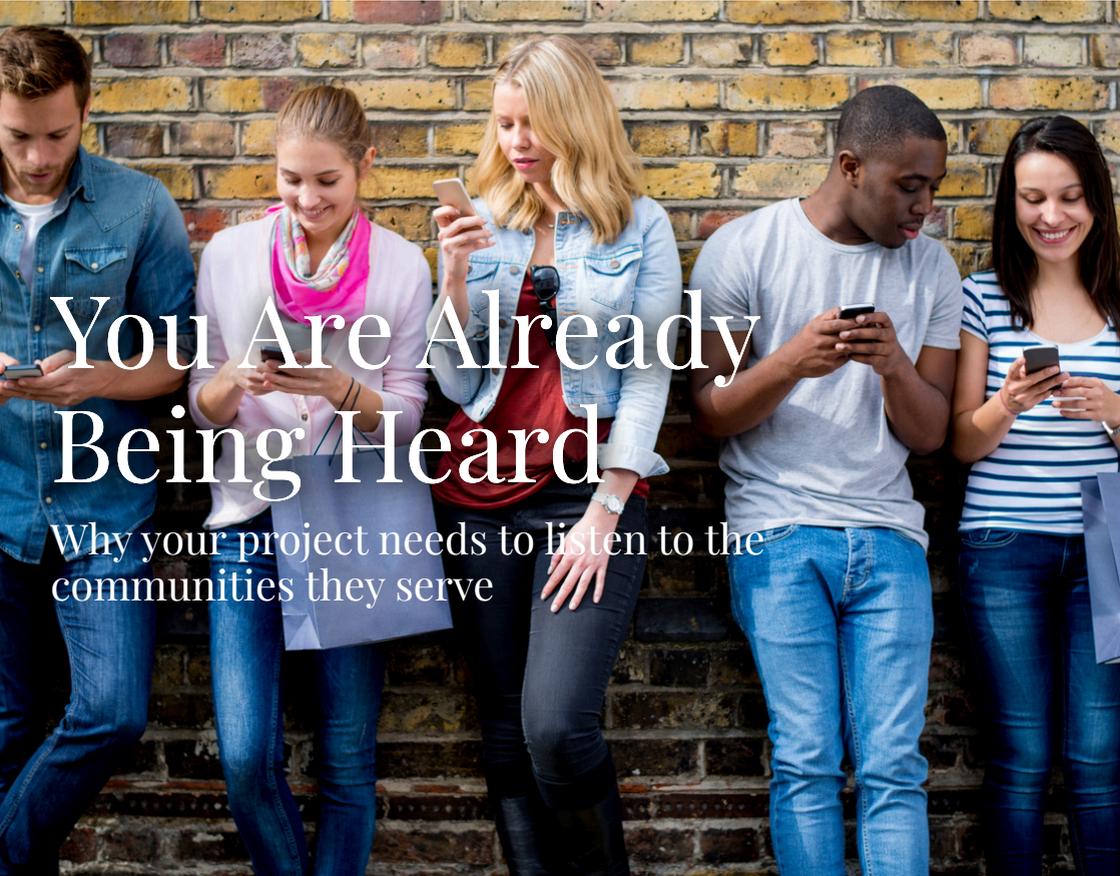
WITH  
PURPOSE  
NETWORK  
MEMBER



rebuilding  
nature



International  
Tree Foundation  
Founded 1922

A group of five diverse young adults (three women and two men) are standing on stone steps in front of a brick wall. They are all looking down at their smartphones. The man on the far left is wearing a denim jacket. The woman next to him is wearing a pink scarf and a light pink jacket. The woman in the center is wearing a denim jacket over a red top. The man on the far right is wearing a white t-shirt. The woman on the far right is wearing a blue and white striped shirt.

# You Are Already Being Heard

Why your project needs to listen to the  
communities they serve



# This little book is not about engagement

**M**ost organisations start in the wrong place.

They start with engagement plans, communications strategies, consultation timelines, or announcements. Organisations sometimes assume the problem is ‘how’ to speak about a project, change or development.

But listening to a community before and during a project is where you define success.

**Community Listening** begins by finding out what people think and feel. It begins with the idea that public response is not feedback: it’s context.

Just as markets, regulation, and supply chains shape what is possible, so do communities. When concerns aren’t heard, they don’t disappear, they deepen.

And it doesn’t stop at project launch, it continues through the project and beyond. It’s about listening now, and listening later.

Thoughts and feelings  
are shaping projects...



# You just have to listen where they're happening

- At kitchen tables
- In online forums
- In WhatsApp groups
- In local memory
- Through comparison  
with what came before

By the time an organisation speaks publicly, people are often already interpreting what is happening, sometimes accurately, sometimes not.

**Community Listening** starts from the simple idea that people are already forming, and acting, on their opinions, whether you participate or not.

# Why engagement is the wrong starting point

Engagement assumes readiness from the people you're about to talk to.

It assumes:

- people understand what is being proposed
- opinions are fully formed
- positions are stable
- trust is neutral

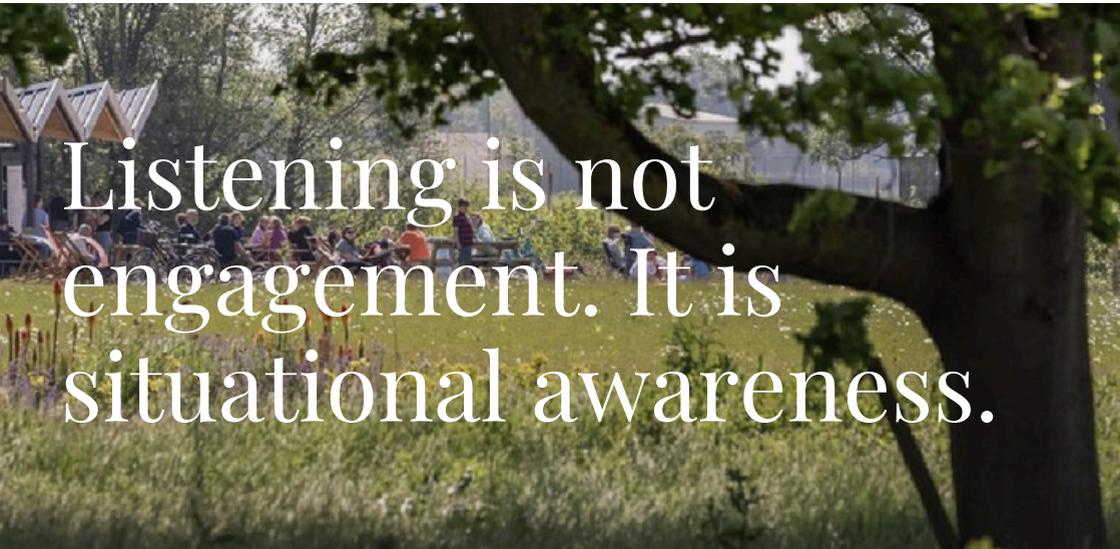
**This is rarely true.**

More often:

- people are unsure
- narratives are half-formed
- concerns are implicit rather than explicit
- silence hides uncertainty, not acceptance

Engagement without understanding can:

- surface issues too early
- amplify misunderstanding
- create opposition where there was none
- force organisations into defensive positions

A photograph of a group of people sitting on a grassy field under a large tree. In the background, there is a building with a gabled roof. The scene is outdoors and appears to be a community gathering or a meeting.

Listening is not  
engagement. It is  
situational awareness.

“Some of the most serious issues emerge not from protest, but from unnoticed narrative drift; when a project slowly comes to be associated with something it was never intended to represent.

By the time that drift becomes visible, it is often difficult to reverse.”

## **Listening is ongoing, not a one-off**

Listening isn't something you do once and move on from.

Projects change as they move from idea to reality. Details emerge, trade-offs become visible, and what felt abstract starts to affect people's daily lives. As that happens, understanding and trust shift too. Listening at the start helps you decide what to do.

Listening throughout helps you understand how it's landing. Ongoing listening gives organisations the awareness to adjust, hold steady, or leave things alone, based on evidence, not guesswork.

## **Loud does not mean important. Quiet does not mean safe**

A common mistake organisations make is mistaking volume for significance. Loud opposition is visible, but it is not always representative. Silence can feel reassuring, but it is often ambiguous.

By listening early and often you pay attention to:

- where conversations are happening
- who is influencing them
- how narratives are travelling
- what is being assumed rather than stated

# Why early listening reduces risk on both sides

Organisations often fear two things at once:

- acting too early and inflaming concern
- acting too late and losing trust

**This creates paralysis.**

**Listening reduces both risks by improving judgement.**

It helps organisations understand:

- what genuinely needs addressing
- what can be left alone
- where action would help
- where action would make things worse

**Good listening doesn't lead to more activity.**

**It leads to less, but better-timed, action.**

## **Understanding is not agreement**

Listening does not mean endorsing every view, nor does understanding require agreement. In fact, credibility often depends on restraint.

Communities are not homogeneous. They contain contradiction, tension, and competing values. The role of listening is not to manufacture consensus. It is to understand the landscape well enough to act responsibly within it. That responsibility includes knowing when not to speak.

## **Social licence is not granted once**

Organisations often treat public trust as something that can be “secured” and moved on from. In reality, social licence is ongoing. It is shaped by:

- consistency of behaviour
- how concerns are handled
- whether people feel surprised
- whether organisations appear to listen, even when they disagree

Community Listening helps organisations see where licence is strong, where it is fragile, and where it is being quietly eroded.



# Listen Before Deciding

# This little book is not about engagement

The most important role of **Community Listening** is not to improve messaging. It is to improve decisions.

Decisions made without social context:

- narrow future options
- increase reputational exposure
- shift risk downstream
- force reactive engagement

Decisions made with context:

- hold legitimacy longer
- withstand scrutiny
- reduce escalation
- allow proportionate response

This is not about being popular. It is about being prepared.



# Talk to us about Community Listening

If you'd like support, famille has developed a Community Listening service that helps you deliver what's included in this book.

famille uses tools and insight to understand what people are already saying in public spaces about a place, project or issue. We look beyond the loudest voices to the quieter conversations that shape what people actually care about.

We offer a free demonstration and initial consultation free to any organisation.

Email [team@famille.uk](mailto:team@famille.uk) to organise

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Discover what's possible