EMPATHY INTERVIEW OVERVIEW
CITYBRIDGE INCUBATOR TOOLKIT

Estimated Time: 2-3 hrs to prepare, plan, and conduct interviews, and analyze what you learn.

Empathy interviews are a foundational step for human-centered design. The core idea is that in order to design new approaches to challenges in schools, we have to center the experience of students, families, and educators—and build or remake relationships with them. What you learn in empathy interviews will help you define insights that help guide the next steps of your design work. Quality matters more than quantity. Use this guide to prepare for and conduct empathy interviews, and dig into the examples to see how teams of equity designers have generated insights from their work.

Goals for empathy interviews:
1. Expand your team's data and knowledge about student and stakeholder needs.
2. Design *for* and *with* the most marginalized.
3. Make the invisible visible and cede power. Develop authentic relationships with stakeholders.

STEPS

1. PLAN THE INTERVIEW(S)

Use this companion tool— 📄 Toolkit - Plan and analyze interviews - TEMPLATE —to plan your interviews, beginning with a clear statement of the challenge you're working on. From there, use the prompts in the template to plan who to talk with, what questions to ask, and who is the right person on your team to conduct the interviews. Don't forget the logistics of when you will meet, if the interview will be virtual or in-person, and how you will explain to stakeholders what you will do with the valuable information they share.

2. CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

Equity pause. Before the interview, take time to reflect on your identity and situation. Ask:
- What power and privilege will I bring to this conversation?
- What biases do I risk bringing to the conversation? How will I mitigate those?
- What about my own situation may create distance or closeness to the person I'll be talking to?

Plan for plenty of time to cover the questions you want to ask, with a buffer for follow-ups. This could be 30-45 minutes for older students, or shorter for younger students. Record the interview if you can—always ask for permission. Use the recording function on video conferencing software, or the voice memo app on your phone, or try out the StoryCorps app, which allows you to synch your questions with the recording. If you just take notes, try to write down **exact phrases**, not just summaries.

EMPATHY INTERVIEW TIPS

Do…	**Don't…**
- Take an equity pause and self-reflect before the interview. - Ask "why?" to probe for understanding: "Why do you say that?"... "Why did you do that?" - Encourage stories: "Tell me about a time (or the last time) when…" - Ask follow-up questions. - Allow for think time. Silence is ok. - Record the interview or write down exact quotes. - Approach interviews as a way to build relationships. - Consider who is the best person to conduct the interview.	- Forget to record your interviews or write down exact quotes. - Wait too long to schedule and conduct interviews. - Offer answers to your questions. Instead, ask them neutrally: "What do you think about doing class on the computer?" is open-ended. "Doing classes online is hard, right?" is not. - Just interview stakeholders who are easy to get in touch with. - Ask binary or yes/no questions. - Ask long or complicated questions. - Write down the "gist" of what you hear. - Treat the interview as just a way to get information.

3. ANALYZE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Analyze what you learn from the interview using the organizer in the
📄 Toolkit - Plan and analyze interviews - TEMPLATE tool. We suggest a simple T-chart:

Insight from empathy interviews (add as many rows as needed)	Quote from stakeholder that supports this insight

It's fine to record insights and then back those up with quotes, or group quotes together and then summarize them with an insight. The goal is to ensure that any insights your team generates are rooted in what you actually heard from stakeholders.

Equity pause. Who is analyzing these interviews? Who is interpreting the data? Share and discuss with another team member. Did you identify the same top ideas?

EXAMPLES + ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
- [Example of the interview planning tool](#) is based on the work of Andre Zarate
- See a transcript of an [example empathy interview](#)

SOURCES
- This guide is based on the ["Conduct Empathy Interviews"](#) tool from Transcend Education.
- Stanford d.school: ["Method: Interview for Empathy"](#)
- 228 Accelerator: [Design Principle Provocations](#)
- Panorama Education: [Distance Learning surveys](#)