I. Goals/Outcomes

1. To create the opportunity for relevant stakeholders to share their ideas, concerns, and advice about an ongoing change process.
2. To provide the change leader or top leadership with honest feedback and information about a change process.

II. Background/Context

During any complex change process, the change leader needs to create opportunities for feedback from relevant stakeholders. You don’t want to get toward the end of a change process and discover difficult problems that were known about but were never surfaced and discussed. The change leader needs to be proactive and create identified and predictable times to gather people affected by the change together and hear their ideas and concerns. This will take courage. The good news is that by creating these learning opportunities you will be smarter because you will have access to information few change leaders have.

In low trust institutions, obtaining honest information and feedback is almost impossible. It is also difficult to do when the leader is powerful, charismatic, or intimidating. Sometimes, even when a leader is cared for and respected, people will be reluctant to bring up sensitive issues. The challenge for the change leader is: How do I create the opportunity for honest information and feedback from people on my campus?

This design enables the change leader to receive strategic and important information from people as long as the leader is willing to listen to what is being said. The most crucial element of this design is the leader’s maturity. We have had clients who told us they were ready to hear the truth but didn’t have the emotional maturity to listen to difficult information. You want to avoid this situation.

The “fishbowl” design has been around for a long time. We have adapted it to create an interesting and engaging way to share stakeholder concerns and advice. This design could be used for a single issue (such as: campus morale, institutional communication, faculty concerns) or a systemic issue.

This design works well with an outside or neutral facilitator who has very good skills and is trusted by the leader. Lastly, it is important to have the right people in the room. When you create a
meeting to obtain feedback about the ongoing change process, make sure you have those affected by
the change in the room, and not the same old gang that is always brought together.

III. Logistics

Materials: Moveable chairs, paper, and pens
Space needs: Large, comfortable room
Time frame: Approximately two hours
Number of participants: 20–50

IV. Implementation

We will use a group of 30 stakeholders as a model for this design.

The facilitator reviews the purpose of the meeting with everyone (e.g., "We are here to create the
opportunity for honest feedback about how the change process is going.").

The facilitator then creates mixed groups by having participants count-off from one to five. This
gives you five randomly mixed groups of six participants.

Have participants organize into five groups around the room.

After people have settled into their groups, the facilitator then asks participants the focus
question for the meeting: "What are the things the leadership of this campus (or change process)
needs to know about the current change process?" Here's some examples:

A. Positive things are happening.
B. Some things that are creating problems for people.
C. Anticipated problems that will be coming down the road.

Any information that helps the leader make better decisions about the change process is helpful.

Give each small group about 20–25 minutes to discuss the focus questions. Their main goals are
to have an open and honest dialogue and create some key messages that would be helpful to the
leadership. They should try to keep this to four or five key messages. Before the small groups start
their discussion, let them know that they need to choose a spokesperson for the group. This person
will represent each group's ideas and share the key messages with the leaders.

After 20–25 minutes of small group discussion, the facilitator should let participants know it
is time to hear from the spokespersons. Have the spokespersons come into the middle of the room with the facilitator (F) and leader (L). Then, the room should look like this:

The group discussion then begins. The facilitator lets each person convey the key messages from their group. This could be done in a structured way (e.g., What is going well? What's not going well? What advice do you have? What problems do you see down the road?). Or, it could be done in a more flexible fashion, depending upon the skill level of the facilitator. This discussion should take no longer than 30 minutes.

The leader's job is to listen to what is being said. He or she can ask some questions for clarification, but should not get engaged in the content. Remember the goal is to listen.

The spokespersons in the middle of the room should speak loud enough for everyone to be able to hear clearly. You want all the participants to hear what the other groups discussed and believe that their ideas are being communicated effectively and honestly.

After the spokespersons have shared their key messages with the leader (for 30 minutes), they should return to their original groups. Give the small groups about 15 minutes to check in with each other and make sure their key messages were communicated.

During this time they can also create new messages. Often, we have found that participants who are listening to the first round discussion have better insights, discoveries, or more
quality ideas that need to be shared. This second discussion round creates the opportunity to source these new ideas.

After the 15 minute check-in discussion, the spokespersons come back to the middle of the room, again, to have the final round of discussions with the facilitator and leader.

You follow the same process where the facilitator makes sure that all the spokespersons have a chance to share their new ideas and key messages. Keep this second round to about 20 minutes or it will drag on and people will suffer from information overload.

The final step to this design is for the leader to reflect back to all the participants what they heard people say. Keep it short and simple, but provide enough information to convey honestly to all participants that the leader has heard their thinking.

Some examples of a leader’s concluding remarks:

"I have heard that we are relying too much on outside consultants for this project and that I should use more of our own people. I may need your help in identifying these people on our campus."

"One of the strongest messages I heard is that I need to be more inclusive when making the most important decisions regarding this change process. I am committed to doing this. I will be meeting with several groups (e.g., faculty senate, administrative council) over the next few weeks to hear their ideas about our change process."

"I am much more aware now about the high level of frustration people have with our campus master plan. Many people feel we are building too many new things and could be spending our money more wisely. I will have to think about this more carefully and discuss this matter with you at a later time. (If you say you will get back in touch with people, make sure you do it!)

"I must say I was disappointed to hear that my presence isn’t felt as much as it needs to be on campus. I travel a great deal building alliances, developing donor relationships, and doing a fair amount of public speaking. I want to be seen and felt more on campus and I will work on this over the next year."

Finally, the leader thanks all the participants for their time and ideas. If the leader has made any commitments (e.g., a follow-up meeting), make sure he or she reviews this with the group and lets people know who will be contacting them about commitments.
## Schedule

1. Facilitator welcomes participants and explains the purposes of the meeting  
   10 minutes

2. Facilitator creates mixed groups by using a counting-off method  
   5 minutes

3. Small groups discuss issues and create strategic questions for the leader  
   20-25 minutes

4. Spokespersons meet with the leader and facilitator for first discussion  
   20-30 minutes

5. Small groups check in with each other to ensure key questions and themes 
   are being discussed  
   15 minutes

6. Spokespersons have a second round discussion with the leader and facilitator  
   20 minutes

7. Leader reflects back to all participants what they have heard from the 
   previous discussions  
   10 minutes

8. Leader or facilitator thanks participants for their help  
   5 minutes

*Total time: Approximately 2 hours*