



“Talking about Food” Engagement Guide

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Background

Sharing lessons from **Lac La Biche**

From July to December 2023, the **Prairie Food System Vision Network** (PFSVN) facilitated a community-led process in Lac La Biche, Alberta to explore opportunities to address local food needs.

The process was hosted by a local organization that served as a champion and convenor of the process. A project coordinator along with two workshop facilitators supported the process.

The intention was to engage community members to identify specific and achievable projects that could make a difference on food security and could be stepping stones to further community-led initiatives.

Honouring the People and the Land

Lac La Biche County is uniquely situated on the lands of three different Treaties between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as well as Region One of the Métis Nation of Alberta. The County directly neighbours three First Nations (Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Heart Lake First Nation and Whitefish Lake First Nation) and two Alberta Métis Settlements (Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement and Kikino Métis Settlement).

The dialogue process engaged an Indigenous Elder to ensure that the conversations were convened in a good way that respected different ways of knowing.

Our core assumption:

Food is more than sustenance. Food meets social and cultural needs as well as physical ones.

Purpose of this Guide

The following guide is intended to:

1. To share lessons learned from a grassroots dialogue and visioning process around food security and food sovereignty.
2. To provide some basic tools to help facilitate community conversations on food security.
3. To provide some recommendations for others interested in facilitating similar processes in their own communities.

Community development principles

Guiding Principles

Listening drives action

- True mobilization can only occur around issues that are genuinely relevant to communities.
- Listening is key. The issues that rally a community may be hard to recognize from afar and need to be identified by communities themselves.
- Listening is also crucial for building the trust and reciprocal relationships required for sustainable community change.

Learn by doing

- You never know what works in a community until you try something. We often don't know what we don't know. Small, calculated actions provide rapid feedback and help reveal relationships and community values, interests, and dynamics.
- Learning from what works and from what doesn't work is the key to effective innovation.

Guiding Principles

Action is the oxygen of community development

- Action is the oxygen of community development
- Effective community development requires thoughtful execution but planning at the expense of action can kill initiative.
- Anything that “drags on too long becomes a drag.” – *Saul Alinsky*

Like attracts like & success attracts success

- Investing in something encourages and invites others to do likewise. Unrestricted funds are necessary to kick-start innovation and to unlock resources in the community. Often a relatively small injection of resources can spark imagination and create momentum.
- The greatest assets in our communities are our people. People are drawn to initiatives that are hopeful and optimistic — where there is a sense of mutual support and creative possibilities.

Process Steps

The process in Lac La Biche included the following progressive steps.

1. Meeting with key stakeholders in the community to find **champions** for the work.
2. Undertaking **site visits** to get a feel for local realities and to build relationships.
3. Creating a **stakeholder map** to show key food relationships in the community.
4. Undertaking **interviews** and **snap surveys** to identify food needs, interests, and opportunities of people in the community.
5. Hosting an initial gathering of community members to share food challenges and potential food solutions. This gathering included:
 - **Empathy-mapping** to identify the hopes and struggles of those most impacted by food issues.
 - Some **brainstorming** to identify promising ideas.
6. Hosting a full-day **solution workshop** to prioritize and further develop these ideas.

Start with **Site Visits**

Go where people are.

Meet them where
they are at.

When initiating a community process, it is helpful to get on the ground experience before hosting dialogue sessions.

Experiencing the sights, sounds, and smells in a community by *hanging out* situates conversations.

Meeting with members of the community *where they gather* (live, work, and play) can establish relationships and credibility.

These site visits can provide vital information to identify issues, dynamics, and factors that could impact the dialogue process.

Site visits can also help with stakeholder mapping.

A note on the value of local **hosts & convenors**

Local hosts and convenors are critical for organizing and hosting dialogue sessions.

They have on-the-ground knowledge that is essential to designing events that are relevant and appropriate to their community.

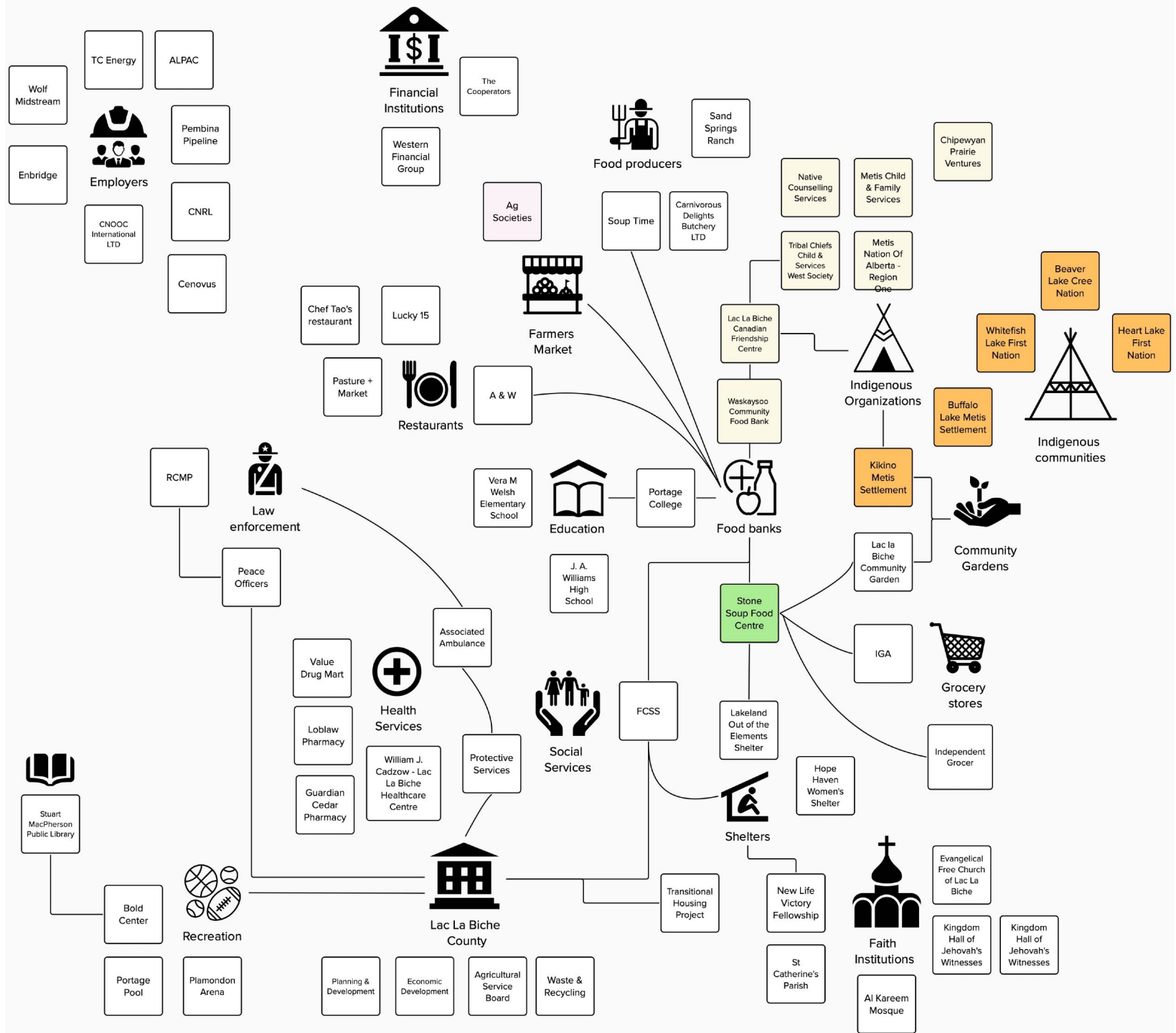
They know who to invite and often have access to local venues for hosting the workshops. They also have the connections and credibility to draw people to the sessions.

But hosting and convening takes time and resources, so it is important to recognize the potential burden this places on individuals and organizations that are often stretched thin to begin with.

Providing additional funds to offset these costs is often appreciated and necessary to sustain efforts over time.

Mapping the relationships

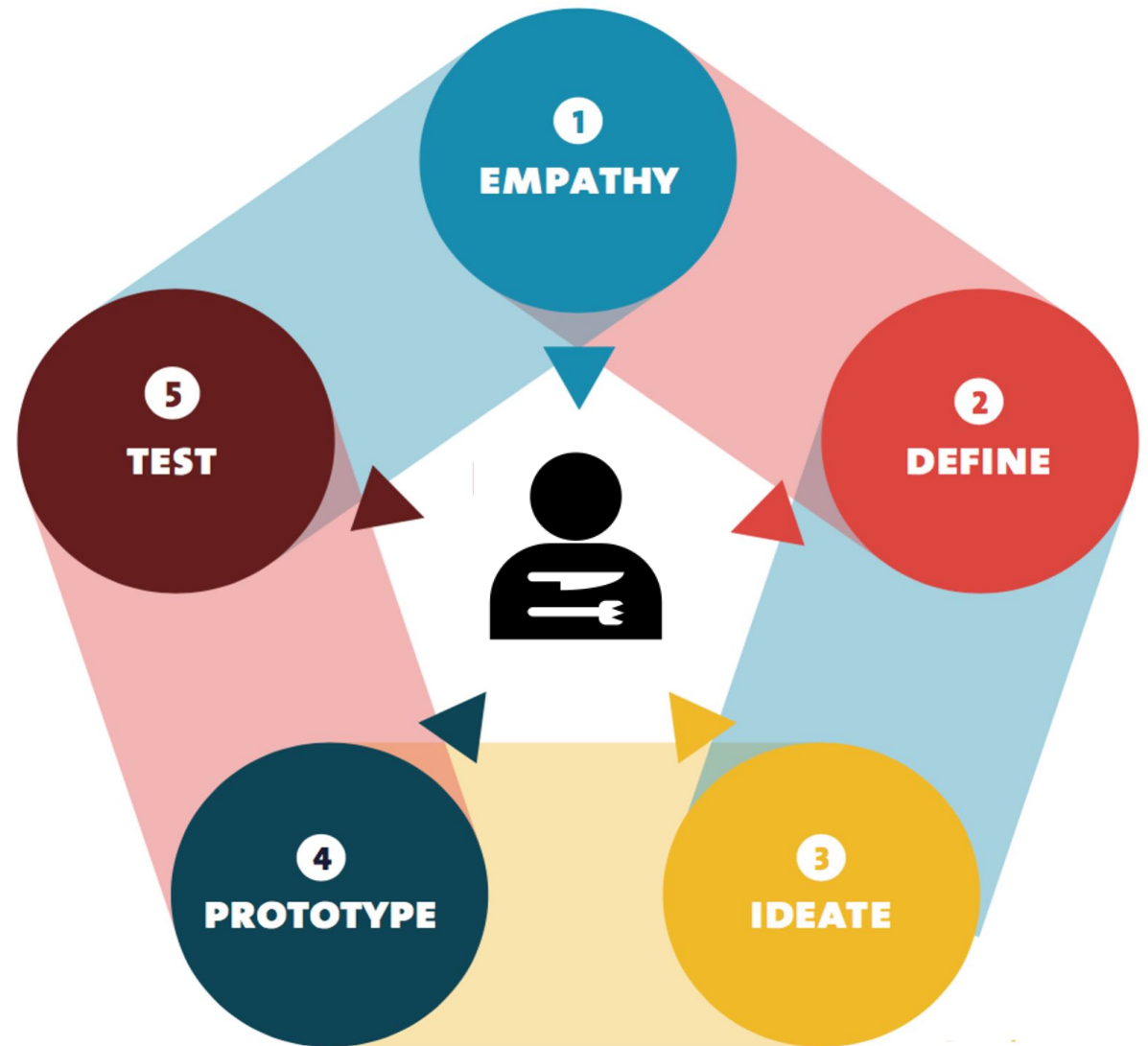
Visualizing relationships can identify potential allies. Look beyond the usual suspects.



Human Centred Design

When exploring food security, it is helpful to use a human-centred approach that starts from a place of empathy.

We seek to listen people and understand their experiences before we jump to solutions.



Snap Surveys

Here are some basic questions that can be used in pre-session surveys and interviews to gather information on how people are meeting their food needs and the barriers they may be experiencing in accessing appropriate food.

- **Where** are you getting your food from? (Please list the places you get your food from or the sources of your food)
- What **things do you do** to ensure you have enough food for the week? (For example, Getting / Preparing / Storing / Sharing food)
- What is making it **difficult** for you to get food?
- What would make it **better**? (What could you (or the community) do make it easier for you to get food?)

Putting ourselves in the shoes of others is important to avoid creating solutions that don't connect to needs or desires of real people



**human
experience**

design

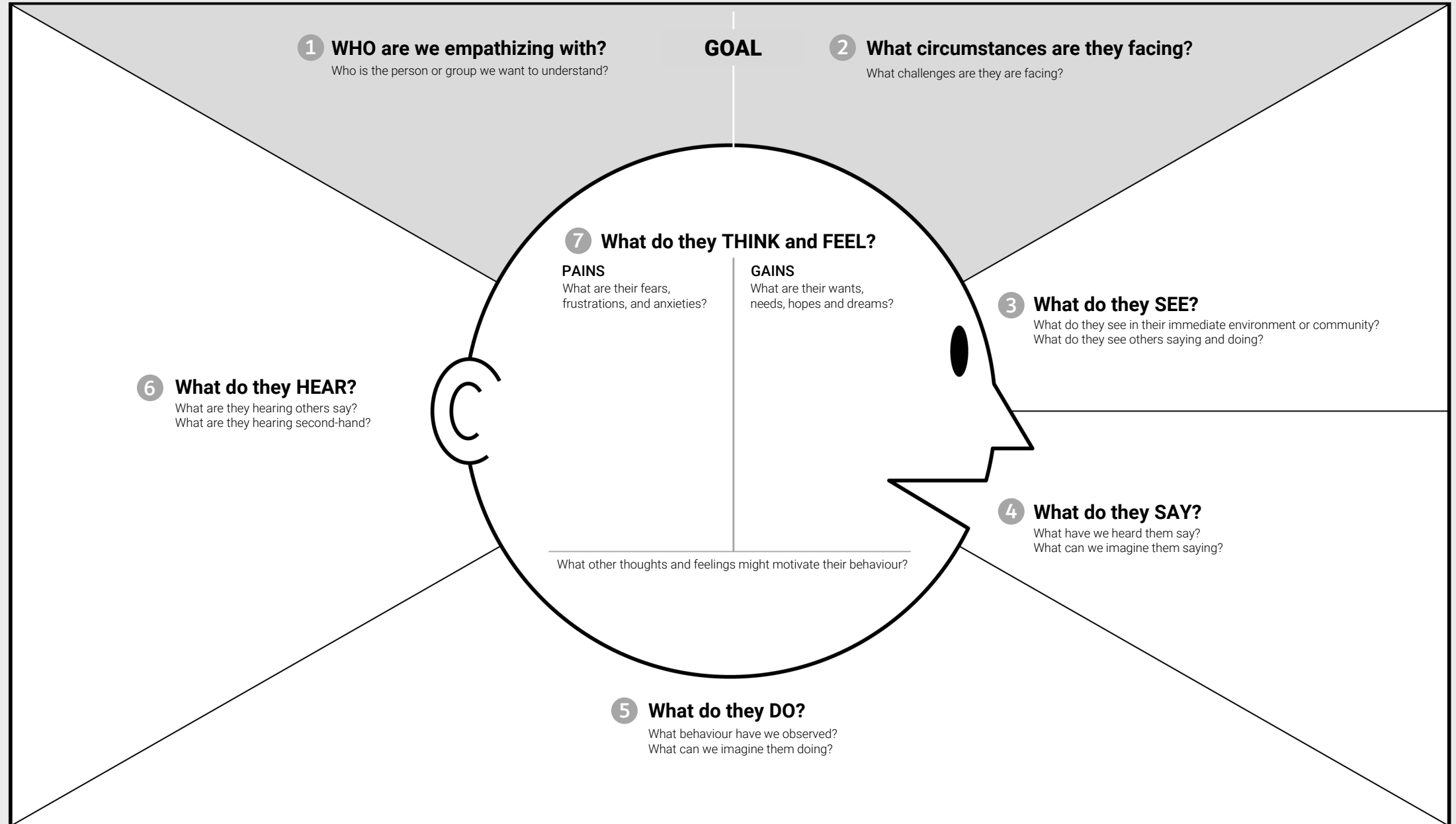
Using personas

A persona is a fictional representation of a real person. Creating personas helps us understand the needs, experiences, behaviours, and goals of different people. They help us relate to groups of people as individuals and give context to the specific challenges they're experiencing.



Jane, a senior living on a fixed income

Empathy Map Canvas



Empathy Map Canvas



Designing solutions to food security requires us to think about the journey our food takes from our gardens, fields, and forests to our kitchen tables

The Food Journey

1

Producing & harvesting food



2

Accessing, distributing & sharing food



3

Preparing, preserving & storing food



In Lac La Biche, we brainstormed solutions in three main stages of the food journey

Sample brainstorming questions

How might we create opportunities for people to **produce & harvest** their own food?

- How can we assist people in growing their own food or raising small livestock?
- Opportunities for hunting, gathering, and fishing?

How might we improve the **access to and the distribution of food**?

- Where are potential new sources of food that could be distributed to those in need?
- How can we improve collaboration between the various organizations in Lac La Biche that support people with food needs?
- How might we remove barriers to getting food to those in need?

How might we create opportunities to support **food storage and preservation**?

- Opportunities for canning, pickling, preserving, drying, freezing?

**Facilitating change involves
celebrating local strengths
and assets**

Name one thing...

What are your **hopes** for your community as it relates to well-being and food?

What are you most **passionate** about or **interested** in as it relates to food?

What **skills, resources, talents, knowledge** or **experiences** can you contribute to making your community better?

Who else do you know who could help address food needs in your community? (**connections, relationships**)

Developing Prototypes & Promising Solutions

Prototyping Canvas

1. **INNOVATION / SOLUTION:** Our promising idea is to...



2. **TARGET AUDIENCE:** We are aiming to benefit the following **people** or **community members** ...



3. **RATIONALE:** We think this is a promising idea because it addresses the following **needs** and creates the following **benefits** for our target audience...

NEEDS: We are aiming to address the following **issues** for our target audience ...



BENEFITS: We are aiming to facilitate the following **positive impacts** for our target audience ...



MAIN INGREDIENTS

4. **KEY ACTIVITIES:** To make this idea come alive we need to do the following ...



5. **COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH:** We'll connect with our target audience in the following ways ...



6. **KEY PARTNERS:** The following relationships and partnerships will unlock potential here ...



7. **RESOURCES:** We need the following resources to create and sustain this initiative ...








8. **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** To be successful we need to pay attention to the following things ...



Testing your ideas

Testing Sheet

A useful tool for providing constructive feedback on prototypes

Prototype		
Likes 	Concerns 	Questions 
Keep 	Modify 	Discard 