

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

In-school, struggling

March 7, 2005

9:30 am-12:30 pm

The PIC Office, 2 Oliver Street, 7th Floor

MATERIALS

Tape
Stipend
Markers (flip & white board)
Flip Chart
Pens
Food
Participant Information Questionnaire
Protocol
Disbursement form
Tent cards

PREP

Post on newsprint/board

INTRODUCTIONS (FLIP 1)

1. What's your name?
2. What high school do you attend?
3. What grade are you in?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (FLIPCHART)

1. What do you like about high school?
2. What do you dislike about high school?
3. Is there help for people who have trouble with school or other problems?
4. Are you part of a program that gives you extra support with school, career goals or staying focused?
5. Do you know students who have dropped out?
6. When you think about your future, what do you see yourself doing?

7. What kinds of services would help you achieve your goals?
8. What can we do help more students stay in school and succeed in school?

PROTOCOL FOR RUNNING THE GROUP

Before the group starts

- Blank tent card at each seat
- Markers

As people arrive and sit down, ask them to write their first name on both sides of the tent card.

OPENING

Thanks for joining us this morning. My name is (facilitator's name), I work with (organization affiliation) and one of the things I do is run focus groups with young adults to figure out what they need to get better connected with education, training and work opportunities that lead them to success.

(Youth program representative(s) name(s)), the person/people who referred you to this group is/are going to sit here for a few more minutes while we lay out why we're meeting today and to answer any questions you might have that I might not know the answer to. Then I'm going to ask them to leave because some of what you end up talking about might involve telling us about might be confidential and that'll be easier to do if they're not sitting right here.

The other people in the room are (recorder's name) from (organization affiliation)—s/he's going to take notes and write a report about what you all have to say...but it won't include any of your names. More about confidentiality in a minute—and (Name of observer's present), who is a part of this project, is observing.

That said, I'm going to be acting as the “facilitator” of this focus group.

Any questions so far?

OK. First I want to talk really briefly about why we're doing this group.

We are trying to figure out how to help youth stay in school and succeed and how to better help young people who have left school to get reconnected to education programs and be successful in their lives. Our goal is to make recommendations to schools, to local leaders and programs about how to help youth make a successful transition to careers and satisfying adult lives. We are interested in all youth, but have a particular interest in youth who may struggle with school, getting a job, or other things.

We are trying to learn what young adults have to say about all of this. Some of the things we want to hear about are:

- What makes it possible for students to succeed in school and transition to a successful career?
- Why do some struggle with school or leave school?
- What helps students who are struggling stay in school?
- What helps people who drop out come back to school?
- Why don't more people who have dropped out or who need work come to programs to get help?
- What would it take to get young people needing education, training or work to connect with programs?

We can't answer these questions ourselves. Yes, we can count how many of you get diplomas and jobs and what kinds of programs there are for youth, but that doesn't tell us how to make things better. We can only find that out by learning what your experience has been and we can't know your experience unless you tell us. Only your experience can tell us what to tell the decision makers—schools, government and local leaders—about how to make schools and youth programs better.

So this group is our opportunity to ask you...and listen. So that's what we're going to do over the next hour or so.

Any questions now?

OK. Then I have just two rules I want to tell you about and then I'm going to ask (**youth program representative(s) name(s)**) to leave and we'll all very briefly say who we are and then we'll talk a bit.

First rule is that whatever we say here is **confidential**. Here's what I mean by that. After this group, if you want to talk to anyone about some of the ideas that might have come up here...or even some of the feelings that people had.... you can do that. **But you can't say who said what or who was in the group.**

Why?

Because we need you to be completely honest about what we talk about. We want to do everything we can to help youth like yourselves be successful in school, at work, in life. One of the ways we think we can do that is by learning about your experiences—good and bad--with school, work, programs, and about what you need to succeed. Some of this information can feel personal and you would not want it repeated about you outside of this room.

So that's why we have confidentiality. The only way we think people can be as honest as we need them to be is to ask that you not mention names if you choose to talk about anything that happened here.

I also mentioned that (recorder's name) is going to write a report about what we discuss. She doesn't mention names either. She talks about the ideas that the group talked about.

That's the first rule –it's important, so I wanted to take the time to explain it.

The next rule is: **one person speaks at a time**.

And if more than one person is speaking at a time, it's my job to remind everyone of that rule. And I will.

So that's it for telling you about why we're doing the group and the rules. Any questions?

OK. Now I'm going to ask (youth program representative(s) name(s)) to leave.

Thanks for getting us started.

PROCESS/AGENDA

First we're going to do what we call '**Introductions**.' We'll go around the room and ask you to say your name and something about the program you are in (I know they're on your tent cards but it helps those of us taking notes and running the group for you to say them out loud too).

General Discussion: Then we have about 8 "Discussion Questions" that ask about what you think about school, what is helpful or not for you and for students you know. These questions are on another piece of flipchart that I'll guide you through, so don't worry about them right now.

Are there any questions before we get started?

OK. Then let's get started.

INTRODUCTIONS

[**Remind** that this is just a **brief** Introduction.]

Let's each introduce ourselves. Please say your name, what grade you are in and what your favorite class is.

This is just a brief go around.

[Go around the group and have each person say their name and answer the introductory questions.]

Now we'll start the discussion questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In answering these questions, we're not going to go around the room. If you want to answer, just raise your hand. But we will go through each question separately because it's easier for the note taker. And again, please, let's just have one person speak at a time. Anyone want to answer question #1.

For in-school youth (struggling):

1. What do you like about high school?
 - Other students/friends
 - Teachers or other school staff
 - Physical environment (size, level of activity, safety)
 - Course offerings/curriculum
 - Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs)
 - Connections to other resources (jobs, counseling, tutoring)

2. What do you dislike about high school?
 - Other students/friends
 - Teachers or other school staff
 - Physical environment (size, level of activity, safety)
 - Course offerings/curriculum
 - Lack of extracurricular activities (sports, clubs)
 - Lack of connections to other resources (jobs, counseling, tutoring)

3. Do you know if there is help for people who have trouble with school or other problems?
 - What kind (specifically) do you know about?
 - Is the help the right kind of help?

4. Are you part of a program that gives you extra support with school, career goals or staying focused?
 - What type of program?
 - What made you decide to join that program?

5. Do you know students who have dropped out?
 - Why did they leave?

6. When you think about your future, what do you see yourself doing?
 - Do you have a career goal?

- What led you to think about that?
- Have you worked before? What kind? Has this helped you think about your future?
- What do family members or relatives do for a living?
- Are you influenced by or interested in jobs that they have?
- Do you know what will you need to do to get there?
- What help or support do you have at this time?

What kinds of services would help

7. What kinds of services would help you achieve your goals?

- Education:
 - Tutoring/academic support
 - GED
 - Better connections to college
 - Other
- Work-Readiness Training
- Employment
- Job Skills Training
- Help with personal development (personal problem-solving, leadership)
- Help staying focused
- Other

8. What can we do help more students stay in school and succeed in school?

CLOSE

I need you to fill out a brief form. You don't have to put your name on it. We want to get a sense of the age, ethnicity, gender and neighborhood representation of the group. You'll see at the end that there is space if you want to write something down that you didn't get to say in the group [Pass out forms and pens if necessary].

Then the last thing I'd like to do is pay you for your time. We value your time and everyone is receiving \$20. As you receive your envelope, please print your name and then sign your name on this list. Signing your name tells our accountants that you received your \$20.

[Pass out envelopes and have youth sign roster/disbursement form verifying receipt of payment as they get their envelopes.]

[Thank the group for their participation, their time and for their contribution. Acknowledge the usefulness of the information and caliber of discussion.]