

SAMPLE YOUTH FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus groups are a great way to collect narrative data on your program. This sample protocol is adapted from a protocol developed by MEM Consultants. It focuses generically on students' experiences in a school-based enrichment program and is designed for use with young people.

BACKGROUND

- Facilitator is introduced and states:
 - The purpose of this conversation is to learn about your experiences in this program.
 - We'll hope you'll help us better understand what matters to you, so we can make your experience the best it can be.
 - Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer any question or leave at any time.
 - We'll take notes and report the topics or themes of our discussion, but your names will not be connected to your comments. Your feedback is confidential, except that the facilitator and others in the focus group will hear what you are saying.

WARM UP —

(Ask everyone to answer, round-robin style – it's important that everyone speak early or some might hide out and never speak, and you want to ask a first question that everyone can easily answer.)

- How did you first learn about this program?

Objective Questions -

- When did you first take a class in this program?
- Please tell me what your most recent class was, and why you signed up for that class?

Reflective Questions

- When you describe our program to your friends, what do you say?
- What are the best things about our classes?
 - What (else) do you like about our classes?
 - What else do you appreciate about this program?
- Is there anything about the classes that you don't like?
 - What do you want changed about these classes?

Interpretive Questions

- What did you learn in your most recent class?
 - What do you know that you didn't know before?
 - What new skills do you have?
- In what other ways has this program changed you or impacted you, besides teaching you things?
 - In what ways did you develop personally as a result of being involved with this program?

Generally speaking, the focus group questions are intended to flow with the following structure

1. *Objective* – factual questions
2. *Reflective* – emotional responses
3. *Interpretive* – making meaning of individual experience
4. *Decisional* – creating collective meaning or agreement, point towards future action

Follow-Up Prompts

- Say more
- Tell me more about that.
- Is there anything else you would like to say about that?
- Can you elaborate on that?
- Give me an example.
- What makes you think that?
- How so?
- I need an idea of what you mean by...
- Explain what you mean by that.
- Does anyone feel differently?
- Are there other points of view?

- Has this program changed the way you are in your everyday life?

(pictures ready – we can talk about what to gather)

- I am going spread out a bunch of pictures on the table. Please select one picture that reminds you of what this program means to you, or the impact it has had on you.
- Each of you should share your picture and why you picked it.

(list ready)

Now I am going to share a list of different ways that youth programs or classes like this one sometimes impact people your age. I am going to hand you the list – look it over, then let’s have a conversation about it.

- First, do you have any questions about the words on the list?
 - *If a student asks what a word means, I wouldn’t define it. Ask if any other student wants to explain what they think it means. Resist defining them, and let the group come up with a collective definition.*
- When you read this list, what jumped out at you?
- Are there any words or phrases on this list that remind you of your experiences in this program?
 - What is something on this list that this program does a good job of supporting?
- Is there anything on this list that you do not think belongs on a list of this program’s benefits or impacts?

<i>Handout</i>
- Artistic Expression
- Personal or Self-Awareness
- Media Literacy
- Communication and Social Skills
- Community Awareness
- Global Awareness
- Workplace Readiness
- Preparation for College
- Youth Opinion Valued
- Positive Identity/Confidence

Decisional Questions

- OK, it’s time to sum up what we’ve talked about today. I’d like you to think about you and your life one or two years from now. How will you be different because of the time you spent here?
 - I am going to list your answers on this flip chart paper.
- Is there anything important left off this list?

Closing

- Is there anything I should have asked you today but didn’t?
- Is there anything else you’d like to share?