
SAMPLE YOUTH FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL-VISIONING

This sample protocol is adapted from a protocol developed by MEM Consultants. It focuses on students' experiences in school and the community. It is designed to be used in program design and planning both in and out of school. It is generic, but can be adapted to a particular setting, or set of issues.

BACKGROUND

Facilitator is introduced and states:

- The purpose of this conversation is to learn about your experiences at school and the ways that experience could be better.
- 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.)

- What grade are you in?
- How long have you attended this school?

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

MAIN QUESTIONS

Objective Questions:

- Are you involved in any school activities like sports or music or student government? If so, how did you get involved?
- How about programs or activities outside of school, at a community center, YMCA, church, or somewhere else? How did you get involved in that activity?

Reflective Questions:

- When you talk about school with your friends, what do you say?
- What are the best things about school?
 - What (else) do you like about your classes?
 - What else do you appreciate about this school?
- Is there anything about school that you don't like?
 - What do you want changed about school?
- How about the activities you are involved in outside of school? What are your thoughts about those experiences?

(If applicable, the facilitator can repeat the questions in this section, substituting other activities for school.)

- What are some things that are different about the classes or programs you enjoy, and the ones you don't?

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?

Interpretive Questions:

- If you could imagine the perfect school, what qualities or features would it have?
 - How would it be similar to this school?
 - How would it be different?
- Other than classes, what are some things you would like to be able to do at school, or after school?
 - What would need to happen in order for you to be able to do these things?

(Optional activity. Prior to the focus group, collect a set of pictures that represent different emotional states in different ways – people, landscapes, art, etc. – and have them ready.)

- I am going spread out a bunch of pictures on the table. Please select one picture that represents what you would like your school to be.
 - Each of you should share your picture and why you picked it.
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Decisional Questions:

- OK, it's time to sum up what we've talked about today. I'd like you to think about the most important changes you would like to see at this school.
 - 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?