

# Promoting Reentry Success through Continuity of Educational Opportunities

## Focus Group Facilitation Guide:

### Participants

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Participants (maximum of 8 per focus group): Formerly incarcerated PRSCEO participants

Time: 1 hour

Introduction (10 minutes): As participants arrive, the facilitator will hand them the informed consent forms and ask each person to complete a form and return it to her. If necessary, she will read the form to the participants and/or answer any questions participants have about the form. When everyone is present and the consent forms are completed, the facilitator will say:

*Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this group interview. My name is [facilitator name] and I will be leading the discussion today. My job is to evaluate the Department of Education's PRSCEO project, which you may know as [local project name]. The purpose of this project is to help participants continue their education when they return to the community after release from [prison/jail], and I am trying to learn more about how the project is working.*

*We really appreciate you being here today and sharing your experiences with this project. We think it's important to get your perspectives, and what you tell us today will help us improve our work in the future. We also want to remind you that your participation in this focus group is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions I will be asking. There really aren't any right or wrong answers to my questions so please feel free to share your point of view even if it's different from others in the group.*

*I'll be recording our discussion because I don't want to miss any of your comments, but the only people who will hear the recording are myself and the person who transcribes the recording. The information I learn from you and other project participants will be written up in an evaluation report for the Department of Education, but the report will not identify any individual person by name or be published. I want you to feel comfortable talking about your experiences and ask that you respect each other's confidentiality outside this room.*

*Does anyone have a question about today's interview or the evaluation in general? If not, I'm going to go ahead and turn the recorder on and get started. For the first question I'd like to go around the room and hear what each of you has to say, but after that feel free to jump in at any time. I just ask that you speak one at a time to help with the recording.*

Questions for Discussion (45 minutes):

- 1) Let's start by having each person introduce themselves. Please say your first name and tell me a little about your educational and career goals. For example, are you working on your GED or taking a vocational class and how does that class relate to your employment goals?
- 2) How did you find out about the [local project name] program?
  - Did you have to apply to participate? Did you complete an application form?
  - Did anyone suggest to you that this program would be a good idea? If so, who?
  - When did you start in the program? Was it before you were released from [correctional facility]?
- 3) If you were in the program while still at [correctional facility], how did you learn about continuing your education after your release?
  - Did someone from [community education provider] come to the facility to tell you about the programs they offer and how to enroll?
  - Did you meet with a counselor or case manager to prepare for your release? Did you put together a release plan? What kind of information was in that plan?
  - What materials were you given in preparation for release? For example, were you given your assessment scores or a transcript of the classes you have taken? How about financial aid forms?
  - How easy was it to enroll in classes once you were released? What factors made it easy (or hard) to do so?
- 4) When you first met with your counselor or instructor here at [community education provider], what did you talk about?
  - Did you take any assessment tests? Did your instructor talk to you about what your test scores mean?
  - Did you create/update a plan for your education? If so, did you do that before or after your release from [correctional facility]?
  - What sorts of things are in your education plan? If you already had an education plan, what changes did you make to it?

- 5) Tell me about your classes. What classes are you enrolled in?
- How often do you go to class?
  - What materials do you use in class? Was there any cost for those materials? Can you take those materials with you to study outside of class?
  - Do you have access to computers in your classes? What do you use them for?
  - Do you work together with other students in or out of class?
  - Have your classes talked about life skills like managing your money or getting along with other people?
- 6) What have you learned about careers or about how to get a job?
- Have your classes focused on any particular jobs or careers? Which ones?
  - What are your employment goals for the future? Do you know what training or certification you will need for the job you want?
  - Are you currently employed? If so, do you use the skills you learned in your classes at your job? Is the job connected to your career goals? Does your employer support your efforts to continue your education?
- 7) Are there any barriers or problems that make it hard for you to succeed in your classes?
- Is there anything you have been able to do to overcome those barriers?
  - Has anyone else been especially helpful in overcoming those barriers? If so, who?
  - Do you ever have to miss classes? For what reasons? Is it possible to make up classes you have missed?
- 8) What are your plans for continuing your education after you complete the classes you're taking now?
- Have you talked with your instructor or a counselor about your plans?
  - What advice have you heard about continuing your education? Who gave you that advice?
- 9) What other programs or services have you participated in since your release from [correctional facility]?
- How did you find out about those programs or services?
  - Are there other services that might be helpful but that you haven't been able to access? Why not?

Wrap-up (5 minutes): Facilitator will briefly summarize key points from the conversation and say:

*The purpose of today's conversation was to learn about your experiences with [local project name]. We really appreciate the chance to get your input and want to make sure that we have covered all the important points. Is there anything we've missed or that you would like to add?*

Participants (maximum of 8 per focus group): PRSCEO participants incarcerated in a participating correctional facility

Time: 1 hour

Introduction (10 minutes): As participants arrive, the facilitator will hand them the informed consent forms and ask each person to complete a form and return it to her. If necessary, she will read the form to the participants and/or answer any questions participants have about the form. When everyone is present and the consent forms are completed, the facilitator will say:

*Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this group interview. My name is [facilitator name] and I will be leading the discussion today. My job is to evaluate the Department of Education's PRSCEO project, which you may know as [local project name]. The purpose of this project is to help participants continue their education when they return to the community after release from [prison/jail], and I am trying to learn more about how the project is working.*

*We really appreciate you being here today and sharing your experiences with this project. We think it's important to get your perspectives, and what you tell us today will help us improve our work in the future. We also want to remind you that your participation in this focus group is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions I will be asking. There really aren't any right or wrong answers to my questions so please feel free to share your point of view even if it's different from others in the group.*

*I'll be recording our discussion because I don't want to miss any of your comments, but the only people who will hear the recording are myself and the person who transcribes the recording. The information I learn from you and other project participants will be written up in an evaluation report for the Department of Education, but the report will not identify any individual person by name. I want you to feel comfortable talking about your experiences and ask that you respect each other's confidentiality outside this room.*

*Does anyone have a question about today's interview or the evaluation in general? If not, I'm going to go ahead and turn the recorder on and get started. For the first question I'd like to go around the room and hear what each of you has to say, but after that feel free to jump in at any time. I just ask that you speak one at a time to help with the recording.*

Questions for Discussion (45 minutes):

- 1) Let's start by having each person introduce themselves. Please say your first name and tell me a little about your educational and career goals. For example, are you working on your GED or taking a vocational class and how does that class relate to your employment goals once you are released?
- 2) How did you find out about the [local project name] program?
  - Did you have to apply to participate? Did you complete an application form?
  - Did anyone suggest to you that this program would be a good idea? If so, who?
  - How long ago did you start in the program?
- 3) When you first met with your counselor or instructor for this program, what all did you talk about?
  - Did you take any assessment tests? Did your instructor talk to you about what your test scores mean?
  - Did you create a plan for your education? What sorts of things are in the plan?
- 4) Tell me about your classes. What classes are you enrolled in?
  - How often do you go to class?
  - What materials do you use in class? Can you take those materials with you to study outside of class?
  - Do you have access to computers in your classes? What do you use them for?
  - Do you work together with other students in or out of class?
  - Have your classes talked about life skills like managing your money or getting along with other people?
- 5) What have you learned about careers or about how to get a job once you are released?

- Have your classes focused on any particular jobs or careers? Which ones?
  - Have you been able to use any of the skills you have learned in your classes at a job while you were here at [correctional facility]? What did you have to do to get that job?
  - What are your employment goals once you are released? Do you know what training or certification you will need for the job you want?
- 6) Are there any barriers or problems that make it hard for you to succeed in your classes?
- Is there anything you have been able to do to overcome those barriers?
  - Has anyone else been especially helpful in overcoming those barriers? If so, who?
  - Do you ever have to miss classes? For what reasons? Is it possible to make up classes you have missed?
- 7) What are your plans for continuing your education after you are released from [correctional facility]?
- Have you met with a counselor or case manager to prepare for your release? Have you put together a release plan? What kind of information is in that plan?
  - Have you already enrolled in any classes that you will attend once you are released? If not, do you know where you will need to go to enroll in classes once you are released?
  - How did you learn about these classes? Did someone from [community education provider] come here to the facility to talk about the classes available?
- 8) What kinds of assistance or support do you think you may need after your release?
- Do you know of any organizations that can help you connect with these services? Did any of those organizations come here to the facility to tell you about their services?
  - Have you received any referrals for jobs or other services after you are released? Who provided those referrals?

Wrap-up (5 minutes): Facilitator will briefly summarize key points from the conversation and say:

*The purpose of today's conversation was to learn about your experiences with [local project name]. We really appreciate the chance to get your input and want to make sure that we have covered all the important points. Is there anything we've missed or that you would like to add?*