

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Introduction of Moderator, Note Taker, and Others:

When all of the students have arrived and completed their forms, the moderator shall introduce the session:

“Welcome and thank you for coming today. We’re from IMPAQ International/DIR and are part of an independent research team that is helping the United States Department of Labor evaluate what aspects of Job Corps promote success.

My name is () and this is (), etc... I will be leading today’s discussion. My role, for the most part, is to make sure that we get through our agenda, keep to the time frame and make sure that you all have a chance to share your experiences about the program. () will help me do these things, and will also be taking notes. In addition, we will be audio-taping the session, which will ensure that we record the discussion accurately. The discussion session today will last for about 1 hour.”

The moderator will now begin the focus group session.

2. Purpose of the Focus Group Session:

“To help us better understand effective Job Corps practices, we would like to ask you some questions about your experiences during your enrollment. Our goal for this session is to capture, in your own words, your overall assessment of your Job Corps experience.”

“We could not conduct this research without approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB Control No. 1205-0XXX) and the expiration date for the approval is XX/XX/XXXX. The time required to complete this session is estimated to average 1 hour.”

3. Privacy and Anonymity:

“We will not share or use your name, address, or any other identifying information in reports or other materials related to this study. We will not identify any of the students by name. All of the information we collect here today will be kept private. All data will be pooled with data from similar sessions with students in other Job Corps centers visited and published in aggregate form only.”

4. Participant Consent and Agreement:

“The informed consent and agreement to participate form will be our record that you have agreed to participate in the focus group and that you agreed to be tape-recorded. Do you have any additional questions about the focus group or about the consent and participation form? If you do have any further questions and have not signed and dated the consent form, please do so now.

We would like to collect the form and the questionnaire we asked you to complete when you arrived. Please pass the signed consent form and completed questionnaire forward.”

5. Session Instructions:

“Let me begin our discussion by reviewing a few ground rules about how we will conduct the session.

During this discussion, we would like you to focus on topics that are of particular interest to us. We are interested in what everyone has to say about our discussion topics. If someone throws out an idea that you want to expand on, or if you have a different point of view, please feel free to speak up. Occasionally, I may have to interrupt the discussion in order to bring us back to a particular topic to make sure that we cover everything on our agenda.

There are a couple of common-sense guidelines that we will follow during this session:

- 1. In this type of group setting, it is important for everyone to get involved and express their opinions openly. We want all of you to express your honest opinions about the discussion topics – we are interested in multiple points of view on the topics. There may be differences of opinion, there are no right or wrong answers, and we are not here to resolve any issues you may bring up.*
- 2. Please do not hold “side conversations” – don’t talk individually to other participants during the session. We want to be able to hear from everyone, and we want you to hear what everyone else has to say. Because we are also recording the session, it would really help us if you could speak up so that everyone can hear you.*

If there are no other questions, let’s begin the discussion.”

6. Participant Introduction:

“Now, let's start by going around the room and have each of you introduce yourself by first name.”

7. Focus Group Questions:

1. How well do ... [each of the following groups of center staff] ... *understand* and *serve* your needs. How do they understand and serve your needs? Do you think [each of the following groups] are well qualified? Why or why not?
 - a. Academic instructors?
 - b. Career technical training instructors?
 - c. Residential staff?
 - d. Counselors?
 - e. Food service?
 - f. Security?
 - g. Maintenance?
 - h. Health care personnel?
2. How well do these parts of center life serve your needs? How are they meeting your needs?
 - a. Non-class activities?
 - b. After-hours activities?
 - c. Off-center activities?
 - d. General center policies – governing what areas of center life?
(Probe for areas including scheduling, payroll, health care, discipline, personal travel, dorm life, or anything not covered above.)
3. How often do you see and interact with senior management staff on center?
(By “senior management” we mean the people who are in charge; not your instructors, residential advisors, and support staff like facility maintenance and food serving, but those persons’ directors, managers, and supervisors.)
4. Have you ever thought about leaving Job Corps before completing? Why? What made you decide to stay?
5. You’re still here in Job Corps, but if you have had classmates who have left without completing: why do you think they did that?
6. What could this Job Corps center do differently to help people complete their training?
7. What do you think about the quality of your academic classes?
 - a. Do you think your academic classes have helped you reach your academic goals?
 - b. Why or why not?
8. Do you think the quality of your academic classes is better or worse at Job Corps compared to your previous school?
 - a. What makes it better or worse?
 - b. Which is better at helping you reach your academic goals?

9. How much do you think your academic and career technical instructors communicate with each other? How does that help (or hurt) your learning in either or both areas?
10. Which CTT program are you in?
 - a. Is it an Advanced Training Program?
 - b. What do you find most positive about your CTT program? (probe: teachers, content, structure, quality)
 - c. What do you find most negative about your CTT program (probe: teachers, content, structure, quality)
 - d. If you could change anything about your CTT program, what would you change and why?
 - e. Has your CTT program helped you reach your career goals? Why or Why not?
11. How was your specific career technical training chosen?
12. Do the choices of career technical training programs offered at this center meet your training needs?
13. How well is student discipline handled at this Job Corps center? Are violations caught and addressed appropriately? How does that affect the atmosphere here?
14. How much interaction have you had with the surrounding community (everything outside the Job Corps center)? For what type(s) of purposes? Would you say the interaction has been mostly positive or negative? Why do you say that?
15. Who is the most important person to you on center? Why do you consider him or her the most important person to you?
Probe: Elicit a response about both a *staff person* and a *fellow student* (but record which was offered first by respondents).
16. What does Job Corps (this center) do well?
17. What could Job Corps (this center) do better?