Focus Group Guide

INTRODUCTION:

In addition to surveys and interviews, members of four of the five respondent types (all except parents/guardians) will be asked to participate in focus groups at the end of the school year. These are designed to create opportunities for idea sharing, provide a sense of the challenges and successes that resonate across respondents, and identify the site-specific and replicable elements of the first implementation year. All focus groups should be scheduled for the end of the school year.

RESPONDENTS: We propose to ask four of the five respondent types to participate in focus groups. The suggested grouping is:

(1) One focus group that includes all grantees. In order to ensure that grantees are comfortable sharing their experiences, the focus group should take place without the presence of the Program Officer or other CNCS staff members. Grantees will be able to discuss lessons learned from different programming approaches. This group can be conducted via conference call or webinar.

(2) Several focus groups (number TBD) should consist of school leaders, teachers, and counselors within one school. These focus groups will provide a perspective of program operations across staff roles as well as across schools.

(3) Several focus groups (number TBD) should consist of AmeriCorps members from different schools working for the same grantee organization. We expect that these discussions will allow an understanding of common challenges and successes. These groups can be conducted via conference call or webinar.

NOTES: The focus group is meant to be an open discussion around the key topics we have identified. The probes listed are meant to facilitate the conversation on several broad topics.

---

1. **[2] What are the factors that facilitate progress for school turnaround in this school?**
   [1,3] What are the factors that facilitate progress for school turnaround in the schools you work with?
   Probes:

   - How do following factors affect school turnaround efforts at your school(s)?
     o Relationships among grantees/school staff/AmeriCorps members
     o Support or mandate from district/state or other policy actions
     o Principal/coordinator or administration
     o Communication networks

   - In what ways do parents or the community support school turnaround in your school(s)? How does parent/community support contribute to the school's improvement goals?

   - How would you characterize teacher/counselor interest and student interest in the program, and how does it affect progress in school turnaround at your school(s)?

- What are the training/development activities for AmeriCorps members, and how does it affect progress in school turnaround at your school(s)?

- [1,2] To the best of your knowledge, how well do financial resources support school turnaround efforts in this school? Would you say they are sufficient or insufficient, and why?

2. **What barriers or challenges did you face in implementing school turnaround in your school(s)?**

   Probes: How did the following issues prove to be a barrier or challenge in implementing school turnaround efforts? How were they resolved?

   - Relationships among grantees/school staff/AmeriCorps members
   - Lack of support from district/state
   - Mandate from district/state or regulations
   - Lack of support from principal
   - Lack of support from parents or community
   - Lack of teacher/counselor interest
   - Lack of student interest
   - Lack of training for AmeriCorps members
   - Insufficient financial support
   - Insufficient time with students
   - School environment or climate
   - School resources

3. **What were the major strengths of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in supporting school turnaround at your school(s) this year?**

4. **This year, what were the most effective ways that School Turnaround AmeriCorps members supplemented the turnaround resources already in place at the school? Least effective ways?**

5. **In what ways could School Turnaround AmeriCorps members have been better trained/prepared to serve?**

6. **In what ways could schools have been better prepared to work with School Turnaround AmeriCorps members?**

7. **What are your recommendations for improvements to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program in supporting school turnaround? What lessons have been learned about implementing the program at (name of site/school) that might be helpful to other sites/school?**