

INSTRUMENT 2
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

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NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP PILOTS FOR
DISCONNECTED YOUTH (P3)

Participant Focus Group Protocol

Good afternoon [MORNING]. My name is _____ and I am from Mathematica Policy Research [AND INTRODUCE OTHER VISITOR AS NECESSARY]. I am part of an independent research team that is studying [PROGRAM NAME] for the United States Department of Labor. The Department is interested in learning about your experiences participating in the program.

To help us better understand how [PROGRAM NAME] is working, we would like to ask you some questions about how you came to participate in it and your experiences. This discussion will be kept private. We will not share any information you provide with staff from [PROGRAM NAME]. In addition, our reports will never identify you by name. Instead, we will combine information from this discussion with information from discussion groups in other programs. Participants' comments will be reported as, "One person felt that. . ." or "About half of the participants did not agree with..."

I hope you will feel free to talk with us about your experiences. I ask that none of you share what you hear with others outside the group. It will also help me if you speak clearly and if you will speak one at a time. The discussion should last about one hour.

I'd like to record the discussion so we don't have to take detailed notes and can listen carefully to what you are saying. The recording is just to help me remember what you say. No one outside of the research team will have access to the tape. Are there any objections?

Let's get started. [HIT THE RECORD BUTTON].

I have hit the record button. Any objections to recording this discussion?

A. BACKGROUND (10 minutes)

1. Let's begin by going around the room and having each person introduce himself or herself by first name and tell us your age (or grade for school program).

For school-based program:

2. Can you tell me a little about what it is like to go to school here?

Probe: What are some of the good things about this school?

What are some of the bad things?

For out-of-school program:

3. How long have you been out of school? What have you been up to since you left school?

Probes: Have you been working?

If [PROGRAM NAME] wasn't available, what do you think you would be doing now?

4. Has it been hard to stay in school/find work? Can you describe for me some of the challenges you've faced in staying in school/finding work?

Probes: Do you find it hard to stay in school when your friends are out of school and working?

Have you found that employers are not willing to hire young people? Please describe your experiences.

Are there enough jobs in your community for young workers like yourselves?

What other kinds of issues have made it hard for you to stay in school/work—skills, transportation, child care?

B. OUTREACH AND INTAKE (8 minutes)

1. How did you hear about [THE PROGRAM]? When?

Probes: Were you already involved with [MAIN AGENCY/PROVIDER NAME]?

Did someone at another organization tell you about the program?

Did you hear by word-of-mouth? From a friend or family member? A school counselor or teacher?

Did you see a flyer or advertisement?

2. Why did you want to participate in [THE PROGRAM]? How did you think it could help you?

Sample probes (tailor depending on program focus):

Did you hope you'd get help/support to finish school?

Did you want to get some help to get back to school to get a diploma?

Did you want to gain some skills to help you get a job or a better job?

Did you want to get some work experience?

Did you want some help getting a job or a better job?

3. Can you describe your experiences when you were first getting into this program? Did you have to complete an application or have an interview? What was that like? How long did the process take? Was it easy or difficult? Why?

C. ORIENTATION, ASSESSMENT, ETC. (5 minutes)

1. What happened when you first began at the program? What kinds of things did you have to do before starting the program's activities?
2. Did you need to take any 'tests' or assessments to determine your skills and interests?
3. Did you talk to a counselor about your goals? Did you create a plan to achieve your goals?
4. How helpful were these initial services?

D. PROGRAM SERVICES (20 minutes)

I am interested in hearing about the types of activities you've been engaged in as part of [PROGRAM NAME].

1. First, when did you start participating in [PROGRAM NAME]? How long have you been participating?
2. Please describe for me the types of activities that you have been participating in as part of [PROGRAM NAME].

Probe: [IF NOT RESPONSIVE, THEN ASK SPECIFICALLY ABOUT SERVICES THAT YOU KNOW ARE OFFERED BY THE PROGRAM]

Are these activities usually just you working with one teacher/staff person, or are you with a group of other students/program participants?

How much time do you spend in the different activities in a day? In a week?

3. I am interested in hearing about the different teachers/staff of [PROGRAM NAME] that have been working with you. How many teachers/staff do you see/work with regularly as part of the program?

Probes: What are the activities that the different teachers/staff are leading or working with you on?

Do you have one main same staff person/teacher/counselor you work with?

4. Has it been hard to commit to the program and to spend the kind of time in the program that staff want you to? Why?
5. What kind of supports, if any, have you received to help you keep up your participation? These supports might include money or bus cards to help you get to and from activities or help with child care during program activities. How helpful were they?
6. Are there other types of supports that could have helped you? Please describe.
7. What have you liked most about participating in [PROGRAM NAME]? Why?
8. What have you liked least? Why?
9. Have you participated in programs like [PROGRAM NAME] before? If so, what about [PROGRAM NAME] is different from the other programs you've participated in? Are these differences good or bad? Explain.

E. USEFULNESS OF THE PROGRAM (8 minutes)

1. What about [THE PROGRAM] has been the most useful? Why?
Probe: How has it helped you? What did you get out of it?
2. What has been the least useful? Why?
3. Do you think the program so far has helped you get out of it what you had hoped for? Why or why not?
4. What will you do when [THE PROGRAM] ends?
5. What do you hope to be doing in five years? What do you think it will take to make that happen? Has [THE PROGRAM] helped you on that path?
6. Is there anything that you would recommend that [THE PROGRAM] do differently? If so, what should they do differently? Are there any services that you could have used or would have liked to have received but did not? If so, what are they?
7. Any other closing thoughts about [THE PROGRAM] that you'd like to share?

Thank you so much for participating in this discussion. This has been really useful. Your views are very important to help us understand how the program is going.