

**Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Racial Disparities in Higher Education Project
Black Students in Higher Education: Facilitators and Barriers to Completion
Postsecondary Staff Virtual Focus Group Protocol**

OMB Control Number: 3170-0036

Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX

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Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., facilitator).
- Briefly discuss the focus group's purpose: *The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has hired a company, ICF, to conduct a study into facilitators and barriers to college completion for Black students. This includes postsecondary institution initiatives or strategies that have successfully supported Black student persistence and completion, and issues related to non-completion faced by Black students. We are collecting data through interviews and focus groups with hundreds of former students and postsecondary institution staff across the U.S. Today, we will have a focus group in which we ask you all to share your experiences and perceptions on this topic. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers—only your own opinion. The goal is to hear many different viewpoints. I also want to know if you agree or disagree with what others are saying and why. Please, only one person speak at a time. This focus group discussion will take approximately 60 minutes.*
- Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: *Before we get started, I want to remind you about a few things related to confidentiality: (1) Your participation in this focus group discussion is voluntary; (2) you can decline to answer any questions or stop participating in the discussion at any time without any consequences; (3) the information you share today will be kept in confidence by the ICF team to the extent permitted by law; (4) the ICF team has signed confidentiality agreements that we will protect the information that you share with us; (5) the ICF team will store focus group data in secure areas; and (6) please respect each other's confidentiality by not sharing any information outside of this focus group.*
- Ask if they have any questions before you begin. Read consent form and obtain verbal consent.
- Ask permission to record the focus group: *In order to capture the discussion, I would like to record the session. Only ICF team members will have access to the recording. Transcripts of audio recordings will be provided to CFPB at the conclusion of the study; however, these transcripts will be deidentified prior to being shared. In other words, all names of persons, schools/colleges, organizations, locations, job titles, or any other identifying details of what you*

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*share will be anonymized prior to sharing the transcript with CFPB. If at least one person chooses not to have the focus group recorded, we will not record the session but will take notes. We will not include your name(s) in these notes. Any information that can be used to identify an individual will be removed prior to sharing any findings. **START RECORDER NOW!***

Section 1. Icebreaker/intro questions

1. Thank you all for joining us today! To get us started, I want to go around the room and have each of you introduce yourselves. Tell us: your current institution, your position at that institution, and how long you have been in that position.
2. Let's talk for a moment about your role at the institution in working with Black students. Would you please describe your connection to the Black student community on your campus?

Section 2. Facilitators to postsecondary completion

Our study is interested in understanding various facilitators and barriers to Black college completion. The next set of questions focuses on facilitators to college completion for Black students.

3. **Success stories:** I'm sure each of you could share dozens of stories of Black students who excelled on your campuses—who thrived while at your institution and completed their program of study. I'd like you to take a minute and think through those stories and see if you can identify any common traits, attitudes, resources, program participation – things like that – of these students. What do you see as any commonalities of Black students thriving on your campus?
4. **Facilitators:** Now, let's be more specific about the facilitators supporting Black student persistence and completion. If needed: You can think about people, programs, or other supports like social supports or college policies.

Probe for:

- a. Social supports (e.g., sorority/fraternities, clubs, churches, campus activities)
 - b. Individuals (e.g., friends, family members, mentors/tutors, coaches, faculty or staff, church/community leaders)
 - c. Institutional programs/policies (e.g., financial support, flexible/asynchronous coursework, support services, easy remediation)
 - d. Personal factors (e.g., career goals, well-paying job, few outside commitments, friends already at that institution)
 - e. External factors (e.g., societal expectations, groups/clubs, proximity to campus)
5. **Institutional Facilitators for Belonging.** What are some initiatives, programs, groups, or activities on your campus that you see trying to foster a sense of belonging among Black students? Are any of these particularly successful? Why?
 - a. *If not clear and seems relevant, probe for:*

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- i. Racial/ethnic make-up of the campus or smaller groups
 - ii. Available relevant student organizations, athletics, Greek life, etc.
 - iii. Supportive faculty
 - iv. Culture/climate of the campus (e.g., largely commuter school, large Greek life, party scene, rural/urban institution, etc.)
- b. Maybe think about the overall feel of the campus or institution, are there smaller groups that are able to support a sense of connection based on factors that students consider important to their identity (e.g., gender, sexuality, religion, political views), without negative implications?

6. **Community Facilitators for Belonging:** What community resources (outside of the institution) do students use (or have access to) in college that may contribute to feelings of belonging and/or success?

If not clear and seems relevant, probe for:

- a. Church community groups (e.g., AME, Baptist, Methodist, Islamic Temples)
- b. Family in the area (this may be extended family, “my people”)
- c. Geographical location (e.g., safety, proximity to social life scene, surrounding schools, rural/urban institution)

7. **Institutional supports.** What institutional supports, policies, or individuals are in place at your institution that successfully help students persist and complete their program of study? Are any of these specifically designed for Black students? Any specific supports based on gender experiences? What about other underrepresented student populations?

Probe for:

- a. Policies (e.g., financial support, flexible coursework/remediation, re-enrollment policies, etc.)
- b. Individuals (e.g., coaches, tutors, mentors, supportive faculty)
- c. Programs (e.g., wraparound supports, summer bridge, first-time college student programs, extra support for low-income students, remediation programs)
 - i. If not discussed, probe for characteristics of programs (e.g., whole student body versus targeted demographics; funding source; timeframe of program; staffing)

Section 3: Needs/barriers to postsecondary completion

8. **Overall:** Now let’s turn to barriers to postsecondary completion faced by Black students. Based on your professional experiences, what are the major barriers to completion that Black students face?

[Use Q9-Q12 to follow up on responses to Q8]

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9. **Personal barriers.** In your work with students, what are the primary **personal** factors that seem to challenge their ability to successfully complete their programs of study?

Probe for:

- a. Family history of postsecondary education
 - b. Demands of work/family/childcare
 - c. Housing or transportation challenges
 - d. Financial cost of institution
 - e. Personal support systems
 - f. Academic preparation
 - g. Time management
 - h. Self-motivation
10. **Institutional barriers.** Thinking about your specific institution, are there any **structural** barriers like policies or programs that seem to be a particular hurdle for program completion?

Probe for:

- a. Cost of courses or limited scholarships/aid
 - b. Requirement to live on/off campus
 - c. Required developmental coursework
 - d. Lack of credit for prior learning
 - e. Complex or limited scheduling system
 - f. Limited like-minded peer group and/or networks
11. **Community/external factors:** Are there any other circumstances or factors in your local community that may make it particularly difficult for Black students to stay enrolled? How, if at all, is this different from other students of color?

Probe for:

- a. Pandemic, safety concerns, local job market/economy, regional racial tensions, others?
12. **Unique/Pronounced Barriers for Black Students:** As we discussed at the beginning, our study is particularly interested in exploring the unique or persistent barriers faced by Black students. Thinking just about your institution, what are the specific or unique challenges faced by Black students? How, if at all, does this differ across Black students of different identities (e.g., gender identity, family income, religious or political affiliation, sexual orientation)?

Probe for:

- a. Sense of belonging on campus (e.g., student organizations, racial/ethnic make-up of student body)
- b. Historic or current patterns of discrimination on campus
- c. Beliefs about systemic racism among students/faculty/staff/community

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- d. Lack of scholarship opportunities (e.g., “legacy” scholarships)

Section 4. Life after non-completion

- 13. From your perspective, what are some major issues that former students face as a result of non-completion? What informs this perspective?

Section 5. Conclusion

- 14. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us barriers or success factors to program completion among Black students at your institution?

Thank you for joining us today!