

Instrument 7: Evaluability Assessment Focus Group Guide for Youth Participants Activity 3: YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

Introduction

Thank you for talking with us today about the [NOMINATED PROGRAM]. We are researchers from [Westat, an independent research firm located in Rockville, MD / the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine University of Colorado]. We have been contracted by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to conduct an evaluation of programs serving youth in or transitioning out of foster care (called the Chafee Strengthening Outcomes for Transition to Adulthood [Chafee SOTA] Project).

As you know, [NOMINATED PROGRAM] was nominated as a potential promising program for youth transitioning from foster care. During the focus group today, we are interested in collecting information about the program and your experiences with it. Having experienced this program firsthand, your perspective is particularly important. We would like to hear your ideas on what works well for youth, why particular services and supports work or do not work, and what could be done to better meet the needs of youth in the program. At this time, we are not conducting an evaluation that will make conclusions about whether the program is working or not working – we are just gathering enough information to determine if the program is appropriate to participate in an evaluation of it, at a later date. Your input will help decision-makers improve services and supports to youth like yourselves across the country.

Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and it should take about an hour or so to complete. By being here today, you are giving your consent to participate and that you are here voluntarily. In addition, you understand that you will be paid \$50 for your time, which will be made available to you [via an emailed Visa gift card/\$50 cash].

We will be recording this session for analysis purposes; it also helps us with accurate note-taking. If you are not comfortable being recorded you can either stay quiet during the session or leave now. But focus group recordings will be stored in a secure location and will be destroyed after the end of the study; the only people who will have access to the recordings are members of the evaluation team. In addition, anything that is said during this group stays with the group. If it makes you feel more comfortable, you may use your initials or a pseudonym (a fake name) during the group instead of providing your name. We will keep your responses private. We expect that you will not share what others say today with those outside of the group. You also do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Before we get started, are there any questions for me?

Ok, then let's get started. I'm going to ask a series of questions about the program. Please feel free to be as clear as possible in your answers.

1. How did you hear about [NOMINATED PROGRAM]?
2. Was there an application process? What is the application process like? Why did you want to participate in this program?

3. What kind of assistance do you receive?
4. How long can you participate in this program? [When and why do most youth leave the program?]
5. In what areas of your life have you felt supported by this program?
6. Have program staff or developers ever asked for your thoughts about the program: for example, what you think works or doesn't work?
 - Have they ever asked you for input on how to improve the program? If there was a way for you to be involved in helping to shape this program, moving forward, would you be interested in doing that?
 - What about program evaluation [where activities are conducted to determine how well the program is working]? If you had a chance to be involved in an evaluation of the program – perhaps to help design the evaluation or collect data from other youth – would you be interested in doing that?
7. Are there needs you have that this program does not address?
8. What do you hope to get out of this program? What changes do you hope to make? Goals do you hope to achieve?
9. Is the program effectively reaching youth who could benefit from its services?

IF NO:

10. Can you tell me about these youth and what could be done to engage them better?
11. If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be and why? What suggestions do you have for improving your experience?
12. What do you think are the biggest challenges to understanding whether this program works?
13. Do you think youth would be interested in participating in an evaluation of the program? [An evaluation involves collecting and analyzing information about a program's activities, and what happens as a result of those activities. Evaluations are typically used to improve a program – to see what is working and what is not working or what might work better.]
14. Are there any program changes under way or being considered that are exciting to you and help to transitioning from foster care?

Are there any other things about this program you think we should know? If not, then this ends the focus group. Thank you so much for your time. Your gift card will be emailed to you at the address you provided when signing up for this focus group.