



Focus Group Format

A focus group is a structured discussion format for small groups. Focus groups can help you gain in-depth insight into students' opinions. You can use the information below to plan and run focus groups. What you learn in these discussions can help with intentional activity and program design.

Elements and Guidelines

Element	Guidelines
Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops the questions to be asked, greets participants, keeps the discussion on track, and asks clarifying questions. • Establishes a good rapport and builds trust with the students so that they feel comfortable being open and honest. • Gives everyone an equal opportunity to share their views and doesn't let one or two students dominate the discussion.
Notetaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens and takes accurate notes.
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Randomly select student participants from a grade level or from the entire program so that you'll hear a variety of perspectives. • Limit the number of students to no more than eight to 10 per focus group.
Location or Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a separate area with a door you can close, if possible. • Can be a quiet corner of a room.
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 to 30 minutes, in general, depending on the age group and the purpose.

Meeting Structure and Sample Script

Section	Purpose	Sample Facilitator Script
Welcome and Introductions	Greet participants and help them understand the goals of the focus group.	Hello, my name is Pauline. I'm here with my colleague Chris. You already know us since we're part of the afterschool program staff. Today we'd like to hear from you! We want to know how you feel about the program and what changes you'd like to see. Knowing what you're interested in and what you'd like to see will help us make program decisions.
Guidelines	Explain the basics of what will occur and why.	Before we get started, here are the guidelines we'll use to make this focus group work for everyone: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one person will speak at a time. • There are no "wrong" answers to any of the questions. We want to hear your thoughts. • We value confidentiality. Our notes will record only what was said, not who said it.



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Section	Purpose	Sample Facilitator Script
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We want to hear from everyone! We may ask specific people questions. It's OK to say "pass" if you don't want to answer. If you have your cell phone with you, please turn it off or place it on silent. <p>Are there any other guidelines you'd like to add? Do you have any questions?</p>
Notetaking Disclosure	Explain why notes will be taken during the focus group discussion.	Chris will be taking notes during our discussion, just to make sure we capture all your feedback.
Parking Lot	Tell what will happen to great information that isn't directly related to a question, or relevant to the topic.	We have "parking lot" where you can put any ideas or thoughts that aren't related to our question but might be important. You can use the Post-it notes to add things to the parking lot. Chris or I may also post notes there.
Introductory Exercise	Help students feel at ease.	Ask an icebreaker question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you like to do for fun? What's your favorite color?
Focus Group Questions	Focus attention and discussion on key issues. <i>Questions may pertain to the program in general or to a specific area, like a new schedule or initiative.</i>	<p>Examples of general questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you like most about our program? What do you like least about the program? What would you change about the program? What are some activities you'd love to do at the program? <p>Have sticky notes available for students to write their answers. Then have them share with their table groups and come to consensus. Once done with that, have them post on wall or share out with the larger group.</p>
Conclusion	Thank participants and tell them the results will be shared later.	Thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas with us today. We'll be sharing the information with other staff. Our staff will use this information to make decisions.