FROM THEIR LIPS TO YOUR EARS: USING FOCUS GROUPS TO INFORM CAMPUS SUPPORT PROGRAM DESIGN

MAY 7, 2014
TECHNICAL DETAILS

- Call-in number is (702) 489-0008 and access code is 737-021-686.
- To submit live questions, click on the “Questions” panel, type your question, and click “Send”
- Presentation materials and audio will be posted at www.cacollegepathways.org
PRESENTERS

- Debbie Raucher
- Jen Laird & Christina Stearns
- Rusty Johnson
AGENDA

1. Context for focus groups

2. What is a focus group, and Why are they helpful?

3. How to conduct a focus group
   - Planning
   - Conducting
   - Summarizing results

4. Overview of Resources on www.cacollegepathways.org/data-resources

5. Considerations for focus groups with foster youth
CONTEXT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

- CCP Milestone and Momentum metrics
- Accessing campus data
  - Getting to good data
  - Using data to inform program design
- Data often produces more questions than answers!
- Focus groups
WHAT IS A FOCUS GROUP?

“A group of people who possess certain characteristics and provide qualitative data in a focused discussion to help understand a topic of interest” (Kruger and Casey, 2009).

- Can be used to:
  - Explore the meaning of quantitative data
  - Examine complex problems from various perspectives
  - Create a stronger sense of engagement from stakeholders in problem-solving

- Small group: 6-12 participants
WHY CONDUCT FOCUS GROUPS?

EXPERT!
PREPARING FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUP

6 general steps.....
PREPARING FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUP

Step 1: Keeping in mind the overall goal of the focus group, identify specific lines of inquiry

- Line of Inquiry #1: Factors That Influence a Foster Youth’s Enrollment Experience
- Line of Inquiry #2: Factors That Influence a Foster Youth’s College Completion
- Line of Inquiry #3: How to Identify Foster Youth on Our Campus
- 1-2 Campus Specific Lines of Inquiry
PREPARING FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUP

Step 2: Develop focus group questions related to the lines of inquiry that spark a conversation

*This first set of questions is intended to help us better understand what factors influence a foster youth’s ability to successfully enroll in college.*

[Warm Up Questions]
1. Can you tell us about your path from high school to college? For example, how long after high school graduation did you enroll in college?

[Probe for:]
- If more than a year, why did you wait to enroll?
- If within 1 year, what helped you to enroll in college so soon after high school graduation?

[Targeted Questions]
2. Describe your transition from high school to college. Was it predominantly positive, difficult, confusing, etc.?
3. Reflecting on this experience, what made it that way?
4. What more can our campus, or high schools, do to make the transition to college very smooth for foster youth?
Step 3: Question Checklist

- Are my questions concise and direct?
- Are my questions focused on a narrowed topic/inquiry?
- Are my questions worded in a clear way that is unambiguous?
- Are my questions opened ended? That is, do my questions require more than a “yes” or a “no” to be answered?
Step 4: Identify appropriate location and time

**Location**

- Quite space, can accommodate audio recording the focus group
- Participants can see and hear each other (round table, circle of chairs)

**Time**

- At least an hour, 90 minutes ideal
- When most students don’t have classes
- Connected to another meeting?
PREPARING FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUP

Step 5: Recruit Participants
★ Do not rush this!
★ Can I leverage another meeting or gathering?
★ Is there an email group I can use? A good place to post flyer?
★ Face-to-face invitations
★ Highlight importance of their voice
★ Offer food!
★ Track RSPVs
PREPARING FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUP

Step 6: Choose Facilitators

★ Lead Facilitator

- Attentive, sensitive, empathetic, clear communicator
- Can multitask by listening to participants and formulating additional questions at the same time
- Can spend time becoming very familiar with the protocol and questions.

★ Assistant Facilitator

- Ability to quickly take notes and listen at the same time (usually on a laptop or notebook, with the interview protocol)
- Can manage the recorders
- Allow the moderator to do all the talking during the group
CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUPS

GET READY! GET SET!

GO!!
CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP

Make sure you are ready

- Remind participants 24 hours in advance
- Have consent forms drafted
- Facilitators should be very familiar with the focus group protocol
- Have recorders tested and charged
CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP

Establish an open, supportive environment

★ Warm greetings
★ Food!
★ Pass out consent form
★ Set norms, and appreciative tone
  ➢ Thank them for participating
  ➢ No right or wrong answers, all viewpoint valid
  ➢ Explain why recording, information will be kept anonymous
  ➢ They are helping to make change
CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP

**Lead facilitator guides the paces of the Focus Group**

- Estimate how much time to allot to each line of inquiry. With the help of an assistant facilitator, pace the group.
- Be on the lookout for ways to quantify responses to important questions.
- If a participant gives a response you don’t quite understand, ask them to provide an example or rephrase.
- Invite more reticent members to share their experiences.
- Don’t talk too much (< 20%)
Handling difficult group dynamics

- **Dominating Participant**: Thank them for sharing their view, and turn toward the rest of the group and ask them if they’ve had a similar experience or had something they wanted to contribute.

- **Rambling Participant**: Take a look at the clock/your watch, and when they seem to break for a breath, jump in, thank them for sharing their perspective and ask others if they would like to contribute.
Handling difficult group dynamics

- **Quiet Participant**: Directly ask for them to share their experience if they are comfortable, smile at them, and thank them for sharing when they finish.

- **Circling Participant**: Facilitator can take sparse notes, and when this participant brings it up again, the facilitator can look at their notes, read them to the participant, and ask if there was anything else they should add.

- **Self-Appointed Voice**: Thank them for sharing their views, and ask to hear from some other people.
CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP

Closing the Focus Group

- Invite final thoughts
- Thank them for their time and expertise
- Reiterate that information they provided will be used to improve supports for foster youth
SUMMARIZING RESULTS

Approaches

- Many different approaches for summarizing and analyzing focus group data, with varying levels of research rigor

- CA College Pathways less concerned with research rigor and most concerned with the process being helpful to your campus.

- Hope to support learning across the networks and beyond the network
  - Will incorporate some qualitative data from student focus groups in an annual report that RTI will provide to networks in the winter.
  - Focus Group Report Template provided
SUMMARIZING RESULTS

Tips for Summarizing

Flesh out the notes taken by the assistant facilitator

Both facilitators read the notes, then come together to discuss and identify themes, prepare the Focus Group Report
OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES

Available on www.cacollegepathways.org/data-resources

Tips Tools for CCP Campus Focus Groups

Appendix A: Draft Focus Group Protocol
Appendix B: Sample Focus Group Flyer
Appendix C: Lines of Inquiry for Student Focus Group
Appendix D: Campus Focus Group Reporting Template
Appendix E: Sample Email Invitation and Sample Consent Form
Appendix A: Draft Protocol

Starting the Focus Group [sample language]

Thank you for agreeing to be part of the focus group. [Facilitator(s) introduce themselves]

We appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts and experiences with us so that we have a better understanding of how to effectively support foster youth on our campus. Our discussion should take about [duration of time].

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. In fact, it is highly likely that many of you have had different experiences on campus and therefore your perspectives on how best to support foster youth may vary. We expect that people will have different views, and it’s important that we learn about all of the views that are represented here. We want to make sure that everyone has a chance to talk, so we ask that only one person speak at a time so that we can be sure to hear everyone’s views. The focus group will be recorded, and we will take notes so that we can be as accurate as possible with the information that everyone provides to us. However, when sharing this information with other professionals, we will not use your name, or any identifiable information. We will only use the recording to flesh out our notes and make sure we understand what you are telling us.

The information that you share today will be used to improve the supports to foster youth on our campus, and to share with other campuses and other advocates of foster youth. Our goal is to ensure that you feel comfortable to speak freely about your experiences and so we ask that everyone be respectful of what everyone else has to say. If you accidentally share something that you do not want to be shared beyond today, just let us know and we will be happy to remove the information from our notes.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start?

Warm Up

This will give you a little information about the participants, and also get them talking:

Please go around, introduce yourselves, and mention how long you’ve been on this campus, and if you transferred from another college.

Focus Group Questions

[See Appendix C for the three “lines of inquiry” recommended for each campus, and for tips on developing approximately two additional campus specific “lines of inquiry.” Once you have finalised your questions, you can insert them here.]

Closing

To close, let’s go around once and hear from everyone on a “final thoughts” question: If there was one (or two) things that the college could be doing differently or better to help more foster students achieve their goals, what would it be?

Thank you very much for your time. We learned so much from this conversation and we will use this information to improve the supports for foster youth on this campus and other campuses across the state.
Appendix C: Lines of Inquiry for Student Focus Groups

Below are three lines of inquiry that RTI recommends be used in the campus focus groups. The proposed questions are for youth, but many of them could be adapted for other stakeholders as well. These questions are informed by data drawn from the CalPass ERM System in February 2014 for select campuses. In addition to these suggested three lines of inquiry, each campus may have particular challenges or opportunities, suggested in your data or from other sources that you want to pursue in your student focus group. We suggest preparing up to two campus-specific lines of inquiry in addition to the three suggested below for all campuses. The John Burton Foundation technical assistance advisors can provide assistance with identifying the most salient questions for your campus.

The interview questions are shown in grey text boxes. We suggest you move the interview questions, including the campus-specific questions you develop, into Appendix A, which also has introductory, warm-up and closing language you can use for the focus group.

Line of Inquiry #1: Factors That Influence a Foster Youth’s Enrollment Experience
(Note: There may be transfer students in the focus groups, particularly at the CSUs and UCs. Hearing about the path of these students, even though they did not start at your college, may be valuable nevertheless).

This first set of questions is intended to help us better understand what factors influence a foster youth’s ability to successfully enroll in college.

[Warm Up Questions]
1. Can you tell us about your path from high school to college? For example, how long after high school graduation did you enroll in college?

[Probe for:]
- If more than a year, why did you wait to enroll?
- If within 1 year, what helped you to enroll in college so soon after high school graduation?

[Targeted Questions]
2. Describe your transition from high school to college. Was it predominantly positive, difficult, confusing, etc.?
3. Reflecting on this experience, what made it that way?
4. What more can our campus, or high schools, do to make the transition to college very smooth for foster youth?
Facilitator’s Guide During the Focus Group

Appendix C + Appendix A

Appendix A: Draft Protocol

Starting the Focus Group (sample language)

Thank you for agreeing to be part of the focus group. [Facilitator(s) introduce themselves]

We appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts and experiences with us so that we have a better understanding of how to effectively support foster youth on our campus. Our discussion should take about [duration of time].

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. In fact, it is highly likely that many of you have had different experiences on campus and therefore your perspectives on how best to support foster youth may vary. We expect that people will have different views, and it’s important that we learn about all of the views that are represented here. We want to make sure that everyone has a chance to talk, so we ask that only one person speak at a time so that we can be sure to hear everyone’s views. The focus group will be recorded, and we will take notes so that we can be as accurate as possible with the information that everyone provides to us. However, when sharing this information with other professionals we will not use your name, or any identifiable information. We will only use the recording to flush out our notes and make sure we understand what you are telling us.

The information that you share today will be used to improve the supports to foster youth on our campus, and to share with other campuses and other advocates of foster youth. Our goals is to ensure that you feel comfortable to speak freely about your experiences and so we ask that everyone be respectful of what everyone else has to say. If you accidentally share something that you do not want to be shared beyond today, just let us know and we will be happy to remove the information from our notes.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start?

Warm Up

This will give you little information about the participants, and also get them talking.

Please go around and introduce yourselves, and mention how long you’ve been on this campus, and if you transferred from another college.

Focus Group Questions

See Appendix A for the three “lines of inquiry” recommended for each campus, and for tips on developing approximately two additional campus specific “lines of inquiry.” Once you have finalized your questions, you can insert them here.

Closing

To close, let’s go around once and hear from everyone on a “final thoughts” question: if there was one (or two) things that the college could be doing differently or better to help more foster students achieve their goals, what would it be?

Thank you very much for your time. We learned so much from this conversation and we will use this information to improve the supports for foster youth on this campus and other campuses across the state.
Appendix D

Campus Focus Group Reporting Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Name:</th>
<th>Date of Focus Group:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Lead Facilitator, and Contact Information:</td>
<td>Name of Assistant Facilitator:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Focus Groups: (student, other stakeholder)</td>
<td>Number of Participants:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Description of Participants: (how many transfer students; how many freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors; race/ethnic breakdown, approximate ages, anything else you think is salient)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General impression of how it went: (e.g., most participants seemed quite engaged; was difficult eliciting input from participants; was interrupted by a fire drill)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Line of Inquiry #1: ____________________________

Questions asked:

Summary of discussion:

Illustrative quotes:
Appendix D- continued

Major Themes that Emerged

Considering the totality of the focus group, what main themes emerged? Often unexpected themes emerge, so be sure to include those.

Using the Focus Group Information

How can you use the information from the focus group to inform your planning and practice? Did it raise additional questions you want to investigate? How might you continue to engage students in your planning and practice?
questions about...
Recruitment & Preparation of Youth in Your Focus Group

- What’s in it for the youth?
  - Food/Refreshments
  - Stipend
  - Opportunity to improve services for foster youth on campus – spell it out!
- How will you manage youth concerns about stigmatizing themselves on campus?
  - Know support services
- What will you tell youth participating before they participate?
  - Who will be in attendance
  - Why exactly are they being asked to participate/what they can contribute
  - Information on strategic sharing
- Confidentiality & informed consent
questions about...
Facilitating, Conducting, & Closing Your Focus Group

✧ Is the facilitator knowledgeable about foster care/youth?
✧ Manage and know possible “triggers”

✧ How can you manage your group’s expectations?

✧ What’s the plan for the youth after?
  ✧ Methods for them to be involved and/or updated
  ✧ Youth/alumni groups/resources

questions about...
Finding Youth to Co/Present at Your Focus Group

Rusty Johnson, California Program Coordinator
www.fosterclub.com
rj@fosterclub.com (714) 619-8418
FOR MORE INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

Materials available on
www.cacollegepathways.org/data-resources

Contact Debbie Raucher at
debbie@johnburtonfoundation.org for additional information or assistance

To submit questions now, click on the “Questions” panel, type your question, and click “Send”