



Focus Group Planning Checklist

Preparation

- The purpose of the focus group is clear.
 - Two people have agreed to lead each session: one asking questions, one taking notes.
 - Focus group questions have been prepared (How, What, Why, Explain, Tell me more about...).
 - An introduction has been prepared for the participants. The message includes the purpose of the session, the difference between confidential and anonymous, and how data will be analyzed and acted upon.
 - Randomized groups of students have been chosen.
 - If required by the district, permission forms have been obtained.
 - A time has been established for the leaders to analyze results after the focus group.
 - Students will be excited to participate—share your enthusiasm and appreciation!
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Remember Best Practices

- Check your biases. Make sure leaders are not trying to find insights into their own interests; instead, let the established questions guide the focus group.
 - Talk less, listen more.
 - Never force anyone to answer a question and always provide the opportunity for students to send a written response at a later time.
 - Keep the over-talkers in check.
 - Ask follow-up questions and request anonymous examples.
 - Do not volunteer examples students may have forgotten to share (e.g. “Don’t you recall when the principal did this or that...”).
 - Pay attention to what students do not say or have no responses to.
 - Enjoy the experience. The first few rounds of focus groups are a learning experience and not a scientific study!
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Close the Loop!

- Read the focus group notes and look for themes. Suggestion: Use a highlighter to mark each emerging theme with a different color.
- Be cautious that themes from louder voices do not overshadow other themes.
- The feedback loop must be closed! In a timely manner, share and discuss learnings with students and staff.
- Use the findings to inform action plans. Remember to involve students.
- Handwritten thank you notes are rare and appreciated. Send a thank you to students!

For Consideration:

Think ahead to your next focus group and its purpose. Ensure that a variety of adults have opportunities to co-lead focus groups, matching experienced leaders with new leaders. Most teachers and administrators find this process extremely insightful and rewarding. At the high school level, teachers often partner with a student to lead focus groups.