



A Resource Sheet Produced by  
Youth MOVE Massachusetts



## Let's Get Focused: Strategies to Develop and Run Your Own Focus Group

A focus group is a facilitator led group discussion consisting of 6-10 people. It's main purpose is to gain and generate insight about a particular subject that can be used to make change and hopefully generate further discussion

While using our lived experiences and voices to advocate for youth is powerful, sometimes we need something more for added support, and that's where a focus group can be really helpful. Focus groups can produce tangible facts supported by information taken from a group which can then be given to others to gain insight into a particular topic. The information can also be used for research, writing grants and putting together reports.

### Examples from Youth M.O.V.E Massachusetts:

Youth M.O.V.E Massachusetts youth and young adult focus groups are run by trained young adult peers. We have found that we get genuine and honest responses from our participants because we run our groups in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Youth and young adults are more likely to be open about their opinions when speaking directly to a peer rather than an adult or professional.

We have run many focus groups in the last few years and have used our findings to make change in our community, inform others about topics they may not have known much about and publish a report about youth leaders entitled "Pointing the Way to Leadership." Some of the other topics we've run focus groups on include bullying, confidentiality in healthcare, and young women in healthcare.

### Tips to get You Started!

Prepare questions to ask your group. Be conscious of time when writing them. You want enough questions to gather the information you need, but you also want to have enough time for your participants to get through all of the questions.

Recruit participants for your focus group. You'll need enough participants to get a discussion going, but you also want everyone to have enough time to answer all of your questions.

Have at least two trained, impartial facilitator lead the focus group, and one note taker- that way the facilitators can focus on leading the discussion while the note taker can focus on writing down all of the details.

Create a safe, friendly environment for your youth participants.

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### **Creating a friendly environment:**

Not only do youth want to be heard, they also want to feel safe while doing so. Creating a friendly, safe space for your focus group will make it that much easier for youth to be open and honest while answering your questions.

Here are some tips on creating a youth friendly environment:

- Provide snacks and water.
- Put fidgets (play dough, silly putty, koosh balls, etc.) on the participants chairs or on the table.
- Have at least one 10-15 minute break so youth can stretch their legs, go to the bathroom, etc.
- Express to the youth that if they need or want to talk afterward that they are more than welcome to do so.

### **Moderating:**

#### **Introductions**

Introduce yourself as the moderator and what your role is. Have the participants introduce themselves. Include a fun question or a short icebreaker!

#### **Confidentiality**

It's important to convey that everything that is said within the focus group is confidential- names and any other personal information will not be shared outside of the focus group!

#### **Setting Ground Rules**

Ground rules can help keep things in order and timely. Tell participants:

- How much time the focus group will take
- There will be a note taker present
- Everyone should be respectful of other's answers and agree to disagree
- Cellphone should be on silent or vibrate
- Ask if anyone has any questions or concerns

#### **Background**

Spend 2-5 minutes explaining the topic of your focus group, why you're asking questions and why their feedback is important.

#### **Questions and Discussions**

Ask your questions to the youth participants. If you want more information on specific questions, use follow up questions like "Can you tell me more about that?" "Could you elaborate a little on that?" "Does anyone want to add to that?"

Remember to be mindful of time. You want everyone to be able to give their feedback.

#### **Wrap up**

Ask if anyone has anything else they'd like to add before you wrap up. Thank them for their time and effort.

For those moderating, it may help to develop a Moderator's Guide to help you facilitate your focus group and stay on task.