

Youth Focus Group Facilitation Protocol



Overview: The Youth Focus Groups are important preparation for the youth count. In the focus groups, participants identify the locations where unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability spend time. This information will help shape the plan and specific routes for the Street Count. It is important to have diverse representation in the focus groups, which is reflective of the subpopulations of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Participants will also provide recommendations about how to conduct outreach to youth who may not be found at the identified locations.

Objectives: At the conclusion of the Youth Focus Groups, participants will have:

- ✓ Identified the locations and times where youth may be found during the Street Count
- ✓ Developed a list of agencies to contact to survey youth for the Organizational Count
- ✓ Made recommendations about strategies to conduct outreach to youth to come to predetermined Come and Be Counted Locations to be surveyed during the youth count
- ✓ Provided recommendations for the survey incentives

Focus Group Participants: Youth should have personal experiences with homelessness or housing instability and be knowledgeable about where their peers and other youth spend time. Youth should be reflective of the diversity of subpopulations of youth within the community. Focus groups should be limited to 8-10 youth.

Staffing Requirements: 2-3 facilitators; a separate note taker is strongly encouraged.

Meeting Length: The focus group lasts 90 minutes.

Recommended Meeting Materials:

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| ✓ Name tags | ✓ Flip charts |
| ✓ Pens | ✓ Food and drinks |
| ✓ Hot Spotting Worksheets | ✓ Compensation logs |
| ✓ Projector and screen or blank wall space | ✓ Guide sign up list |

Tip: The paper and pens can be especially helpful if the conversation gets moving quickly so participants can write down ideas as they think of them.

It is also helpful to have a list of all of the major cities and towns in the community to ensure that all of the key areas are covered during the mapping exercise.

Tip: Map out the locations of youth service providers, homeless service providers, and other community based organizations prior to the focus group to have as references should participants have a hard time thinking of locations.

Room Preparation:

- Arrange room in small circle/horseshoe or combine tables.
- Place pens and Hot Spotting Worksheets on the tables.
- Set up the projector, flip charts, food/snacks and refreshments
- Place markers and nametags near the entrance.
 - **Tip:** Let youth know they should write the name they would like to be called during the focus group.

Introductory Remarks (10 minutes)

Welcome. My name is _____ and I am from [AGENCY]. Thank you for coming here today to talk with us. You may have noticed that we have food out—please feel free to take some now, or anytime later.

Not enough is known about the experiences of youth who lack a stable place to live. To learn more about how many young people are having this experience in our community, we will be doing a youth count. On [DATE], we will count and survey young people who don't have a regular place to sleep at night in a number of ways.

When we say “young people” or “youth”, we mean anyone between the ages of 13 and 25 years old who may not have a regular place to stay. We want to know about young people who might be couch-surfing, living with another family, living in cars, staying in hotels/motels, or those who might live on the street.

When we do the youth count, we will be asking youth to complete a short survey. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete and asks some basic questions about the person's age, housing situation, race, gender identity and sexual orientation, education, employment and other experiences. We will not be asking anyone for their names and we will keep the information youth share confidential. Anyone completing the survey will be offered a [INCENTIVE] for their participation.

The first step in doing the youth count is planning where and when we should go to conduct the count. We will use this information to help us do the youth count, and we will not share it with anyone else. Together, we will be making a map of all the places youth spend time, so that on [DATE], youth like you (and maybe some of you will want to work with us) can go out to all the places you tell us about and count the youth they find. Specifically, we want to know:

- *Where should we look for youth?*
- *What types of youth are we are likely to find in those places?*
- *When are youth normally at those places?*
- *Who can help us connect with those youth?*

When we finish talking today, everyone will get [COMPENSATION]. You will also have the chance to sign up to help us do the youth count on [DATE].

Introductions: *Does anyone have any questions? Let's go around and have everyone introduce themselves—tell us the name you'd like us to call you, and your favorite place to hang out.*

Guidelines / Ground Rules: *We want to go over some ground rules to make sure everyone feels comfortable talking. Is there anything we should add to the list to ensure that this is a safe space?*

- Try not to talk at the same time as someone else; we will make sure everyone gets a chance to speak
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Encourage other participants to share their knowledge with the group
- Ask questions if you are unsure about anything
- No side conversations
- No use of cell phones
- Be respectful
- Don't tell people outside the group what you learn today

What we will do with the information you share with us today: *The information you share with us today will help us figure out where we will count youth on [DATE]. We will only share the information about places we should look for young people and the times of day we should look in those places with the teams who are conducting the youth count. However, we will not tell anyone who said what or share this information with the authorities.*

Google Map Exercise (55 minutes)

Tip: If you are conducting more than one focus group, the groups are likely to identify some of the same hot spot locations. Should that occur, reflect back that the site was also identified in another focus group, review with them what the earlier group shared and ask for confirmation that the information is accurate and whether they have any additional information to share. This can help reduce time spent reviewing the same information and allow subsequent groups to identify additional, potentially obscure, hot spot locations.

Have a Google map of the community pulled up and projected on a screen or wall.

Tip: A bed sheet or a white wall can be used in lieu of a projection screen.

Throughout the conversation, make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share, checking in with each participant to make sure they have an opportunity to contribute. This is particularly important for youth who may not have experienced street homelessness and may not feel they have as much to contribute. Youth should also be told that they can make notes of locations on the Hot Spotting Worksheets if they would rather provide input that way, instead of speaking in the group.

Refer back to their answers about where they indicated they like to hang out—ask them to think about those places and whether other youth spend time there. Remind them we want to learn about ALL subgroups of young people between ages 13-25 who do not always have somewhere to sleep at night.

We are going to make a map of the hot spots where young people hang out. This could be places outside, like in the park, or indoors, at coffee shops or libraries. As you think of hot spots, let us know, and we will add them to the map. Hearing other people mention locations may remind you of other locations. We have paper and pens if you want to write anything down as we go through the mapping exercise.

Ask the participants to let you know as they think of places so they can be put on the map. Call on them or ask them to volunteer. For each place identified, ask the following questions:

- *Where is the hot spot located?*
- *What kinds of young people can be found there?*
- *At what time(s) of day are they likely to be found there? Early morning, afternoon, evening or overnight?*
- *About how many youth are likely to be found there? 2-3; 15; or 50?*
- *Are there any service providers or community members who have a connection with those youth?*
- *Are there other places where those youth can be found at other times of day? Where and when?*
- *Where do these youth sleep at night? On the streets, in cars, staying with friends, etc.?*

Check that everyone has had a chance to share their ideas. Ask if there are any locations missing. Use the list of main centers in the community to make sure no locations are missing. Depending on who the participants are, some focus groups may only have knowledge about certain areas of the community.

Ask if there are any groups of youth missing. Ask if there is someone else who would know where the missing groups of youth can be found.

Organizational Count (10 minutes)

In addition to the Street Count, there will be an Organizational Count, in which local providers will be asked to do surveys with any of the young people they serve during the youth count. Providers can include traditional homeless service providers, as well as other organizations who provide services to young people who are homeless or unstably housed (e.g., afterschool programs, services for LGBTQ youth). Some of these locations may have been identified during the mapping exercise. Make sure to note these and any additional locations on the map, or a separate sheet of paper. This information will get added to the map to ensure that the street teams know they are being counted separately.

We have mentioned a couple of provider locations in the mapping exercise, but are there any other providers we should be asking to do surveys on the day of the youth count? Are there other agencies you know of where youth go for services?

Outreach and Incentives Discussion (10 minutes)

We want to make sure that youth know about the youth count, but we do not want them to be scared that they will get in trouble or be reported to the authorities. Do you think we should put up flyers somewhere, or stick to word of mouth? Are there any places we should not post flyers? Should someone post to Facebook?

We are thinking about picking a location where youth can come on the day of the youth count if they want to be counted—somewhere that you and other young people can tell youth to go if they would like to participate. It could be someplace like a park, or a library, or a service provider. Youth who go there would be surveyed, just like the youth in the hot spots. Where do you think we should do that? What time of day?

As mentioned, we are going to offer youth a [INCENTIVE] to complete a survey during the count. Where should we buy the gift cards? Is there a certain store or restaurant that you think would be best?

Thank You and Next Steps (5 minutes)

Guides are very important members of the youth count team. Working in teams, Guides visit the locations we just talked about to count and survey other youth. If you want to be a Guide during the youth count on [DATE], we'll be passing around a sign-up sheet. You must be 18 years old or older to work as a Guide. We will provide training. Just like today, you will get paid for working with us.

We want to make sure everyone receives their [COMPENSATION]. All you need to do is sign the paper I am bringing around which says you were paid. You can sign the name you feel most comfortable using.

Does anyone have any questions before we leave? I am going to give each of you my card. If you have any questions or think of anything else you want us to be aware of, please feel free to contact me.