

Provider Focus Group Facilitation Protocol



Overview: The Provider 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 Provider 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

Focus Group Participants: Providers should be knowledgeable about youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability and should have knowledge which reflects the diversity of subpopulations of youth within the community. Recommended participants include staff from homeless outreach teams and other individuals knowledgeable about where young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability spend time.

Staffing Requirements: 1 facilitator for groups of 15 or fewer, and 2 facilitators for larger groups; a separate note taker is strongly encouraged.

Meeting Length: The focus group lasts 90 minutes.

Recommended Meeting Materials:

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| ✓ Name tags | ✓ Hot Spotting Worksheets |
| ✓ Sign-in sheet | ✓ Projector and screen or blank wall space |
| ✓ Pens | ✓ Flip charts |

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 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 services 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 and flip charts.
- Place sign in sheets, markers and nametags near the entrance.

Introductory Remarks (10 minutes)

Welcome. My name is _____ and I am from [AGENCY]. Thank you for coming here today to talk with us.

Today, we want you to brainstorm about how to best count youth who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability. There are a lot of different ways to define youth homelessness. We have chosen to use a broad definition—one that includes youth who are couch surfing, doubled up, living in cars, or involved in the sex trade, in addition to youth who are on the streets or in shelters. Youth can be pregnant or parenting themselves, but cannot be living with their parent. When we say “young people” or “youth”, we mean anyone between the ages of 13 and 25 years old.

We will make a map that shows where those youth are likely to be found. We also want to think about how to engage youth who are doubled up and couch surfing to ensure that they are also reflected in the youth count. As you may know, there is a focus group with youth happening as well. 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?*

Introductions: *Does anyone have any questions? Let’s go around and have everyone introduce themselves—tell us your name and what organization you are from.*

Guidelines / Ground Rules: *We want to go over some ground rules for the meeting:*

- Please hold side conversations for afterwards so that we can capture everything that is said.
- Discussion is encouraged. Please feel free to ask each other questions if you are unsure of what others mean, or if you need more information.
- 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 conducting the youth count.

Google Maps 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. This is particularly important with broader stakeholders who may not feel that they have as much to contribute. They likely have very important knowledge about subgroups of youth and should be engaged in the conversation.

We are going to make a map of the hot spots where youth who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability spend time. This could include places outside, like in the park, or indoors, like at coffee shops or libraries. As you think of hot spots, let us know, and we will add them to the map. We have paper and pens if you want to write anything down as we go through the mapping exercise.

We also want to think about ways to reach the youth who are unstably housed in the community. One way to do that is to have a location, or two, in the community where youth can go on the day of the youth count to be counted. As we talk through hot spot locations, please let us know if any of them make sense to be "Come and Be Counted" locations. We will talk more about these a little later in the conversation.

Call on participants 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.

As part of the youth count, we will be asking service providers to complete the surveys with youth who access their services on the day of the youth count. What agencies should we ask to do surveys? This could include agencies like drop-in centers or after-school programs, among others.

Ask people to identify agencies, and if there are any special considerations for each agency. For example, if there are concerns about confidentiality, agency staff will likely need to conduct the surveys, rather than a community volunteer.

Outreach Discussion (10 minutes)

As we mentioned during the mapping exercise, we know that not all young people are connected to service providers, but may be navigating their housing instability through the help of peers and community members. We want to make sure that those young people are reflected in our youth count, too. How should we engage these young people?

Allow a moment for people to respond. If no ideas are forthcoming, suggest: *One way is to get the word out to young people that they can come to designated places to complete a survey. Do you think that would work? If so, where should we invite youth to come? How should we get the word out to youth?*

Thank You and Next Steps (5 minutes)

We will be recruiting street savvy youth ages 18 and over to be Guides for the youth count, going out to the hot spots to count and survey their peers. We would really appreciate your help to recruit and support youth to participate. There will be a training for Guides on [DATE]. We will also be recruiting provider staff like many of you to be Team Leaders who will be paired with a team of Guides to conduct the count. There may be other opportunities to survey youth at locations including the Organizational Count and at Come and Be Counted Locations. If any of you already know you are available and interested to help with the youth count, please sign up and contact _____.