

# Focus on Youth and Families

A Guide for Conducting Focus Groups with Youth and Families Impacted by the Juvenile Justice System



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# PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS: A GUIDE FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

## **Introduction**

Justice for Families (J4F) is a national organization created and directed by families and young people who have been impacted by the juvenile justice system. J4F staff and volunteers work to address systemic barriers in the juvenile justice system that impede meaningful engagement of young people and their families at both the individual case level and in broader system reform efforts.

In 2012, J4F released “Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice.” Based on over 1,000 surveys with parents and family members of system-involved youth and 24 focus groups nationwide, the report presented a body of data that had never been captured or examined before. It aimed to correct misperceptions about system-involved youth and their families; demonstrated the need for families’ active participation in redesigning juvenile justice systems; and exposed glaring flaws in the system that burden, alienate and exclude families from every juncture in the system.

In the three years since the release, J4F has successfully used the release of the report to help shape public opinion about families and change policy and practice to reflect the critical need for genuine family voice at all decision-making points in juvenile justice. Our experience demonstrates that partnering with families will lead to better outcomes for youth and more meaningful and sustainable system reforms. Families are a youth’s primary emotional, social, cultural and spiritual resource. Therefore, we cannot maximize youth success or achieve our public safety goals without meaningfully engaging their families.

## **Partnership**

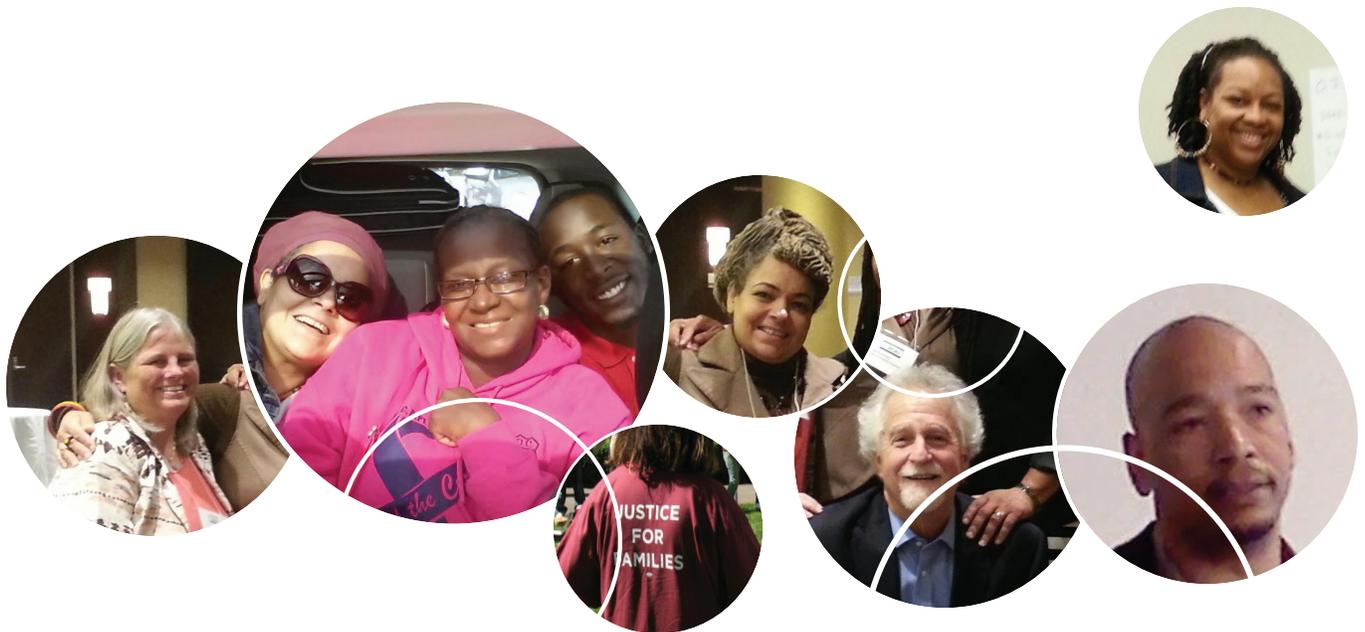
To develop sustainable solutions to the issues identified in our research, J4F partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Families, young people, foundation staff and system stakeholders from JDAI sites are now working together to develop tools and strategies that will help systems embrace and operationalize the core concepts of meaningful family and youth engagement.

This guide is designed to first, help juvenile justice agencies identify community organizations that they can partner with to conduct youth and family focus groups aimed at informing the system assessment process, and second, provide guidance to the partner organizations around the planning and facilitation of the focus groups.

Family engagement is a relatively new strategy in the field of juvenile justice reform, and with any new body of work, it will take time and trial and error to become embedded in the system's culture, policy and practice. We hope that this guide will prove helpful to agencies and their community partners as they work to partner with families and young people. At Justice for Families, we are also learning and would welcome feedback from those that use the guide. Our goal is to build the best possible tools to help juvenile justice agencies build partnerships with youth and families that create long-term reforms. Please consider sharing your thoughts and ideas to ensure that our tools meet the needs of the field.

Sincerely,

Grace Bauer-Lubow



# THE FUNDAMENTALS OF FAMILY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## Family Engagement Defined

Family advocacy experts define family engagement as “a meaningful partnership with families and youth at every level of the agency and system.” It’s important to note that meaningful engagement happens when families are truly valued, and when they are appreciated as experts and critical stakeholders in the shaping of positive outcomes. This is not limited to families as experts on their own children and the benefits to engaging them at the individual case-level; it also includes drawing on the experiences and expertise of families throughout all the stages of system reform.

## Core Concepts

**Family engagement is a mindset:** Family engagement begins with a fundamental belief that all families care for their children, have strengths that can be built upon, and can be engaged and empowered. Family engagement is not about one single policy or practice or program, rather it lives in the culture of an organization and its evidence is seen in how families are treated and partnered with at a systemic level.

**Define family broadly:** Narrow, traditional definitions of who “family” is will seriously undermine the ability of systems to achieve the best possible results for the youth they serve. Partnering with families cannot be limited to just parents and legal guardians. Instead, the definition of family should remain broad. This can include siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. An inclusive definition of family also embraces those connected by biology, marriage, adoption, and can even include people that have such significant shared histories and experiences that they are considered to be family. It is not the role of the system to define who a family is. Families and especially youth should be given the opportunity to define this for themselves.

**Culture and context must be valued:** Every youth that comes to the attention of the juvenile justice system brings along with them a complex web of experiences and stories. Many of these stories sit within a rich familial and communal culture. System stakeholders will achieve better outcomes if their first instinct and motivation is to learn and understand. If done correctly and authentically, this approach can help to mitigate both implicit and explicit bias, which sometimes comes in the forms of judgment and making assumptions.

**Self-examination and patience are key:** True collaboration and partnership requires mutual trust and respect. Developing trust and

respect among families that may come from different social, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds and cultures requires a deep level of openness for self-examination and exploration. We must be open to accepting that we naturally judge others that are different from us, but that a genuine interest in finding common ground is at the heart of building trusting and respectful relationships. Effective family engagement efforts are mindful of existing power dynamics and are intentional about sharing power and authority. Remember that true partnerships take time to build, and will require patience and perseverance.



## TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT COMMUNITY PARTNERS

During Phase One of the JDAI/Deep End reform effort, sites will work with the Casey Foundation to conduct a system assessment. Given the value of including the perspectives and experiences of youth and families directly impacted by the juvenile justice system, the system assessment will be informed by the voices of those with lived experiences in the system. In order to achieve this goal, Deep End sites will partner with local community-based organizations to plan, convene, and facilitate a series of focus groups.

These tips are meant to help sites identify and recruit community partners who have experience working with families and are trusted and respected within the community. It offers guidance on identifying and recruiting community partners with a particular focus on those who can assist with conducting family and youth focus groups.

### Identification of Community Partners

Collaboration and genuine partnerships with the community, including youth and families impacted by the system, are key to laying a strong foundation for the work ahead. Keep in mind that while you are looking for group(s) that can best assist with the family and youth focus groups, you are also looking for community partners willing to engage in other activities connected to your reform work. Therefore, it's crucial that community-based partners be included from the very beginning.

When preparing for successful focus groups, the right community partners can help:

- Increase the number of focus group participants;
- Create a safe space so that participants feel open to authentically sharing experiences, perspectives, and ideas;
- Offer information about resources and supports within the community;
- Deepen the system's understanding of community culture and history; and
- Provide experienced and trusted facilitators, with strong ties to the community.

Your site should first identify the geographic locations where the majority of children involved in the juvenile justice system reside. Once the high impact communities have been identified, sites can begin exploring potential partners located in those neighborhoods.



**Which of these characteristics apply to each of the organizations you are considering?**

<i>Name of the organization</i>	yes	no
It is located in an impacted community.		
The vision and mission reflect the needs of the community.		
Services focus on issues that are critical to families and youth in the community.		
Community members are on staff.		
Family members are on staff.		
Community members serve in leadership and decision-making roles.		
Family members serve in leadership and decision-making roles.		
Events and activities are open to the community.		
It is familiar with the juvenile justice system.		
It has some experience conducting and documenting focus groups or other similar forums.		
It has a clear understanding of the importance of including families in decision making and a track record of doing so.		
It operates with sensitivity to family dynamics and culture.		



A good place to start is identifying organizations that are working on juvenile or criminal justice reforms, racial and ethnic disparities, police and community relationships, and or other social justice issues. National groups that have local memberships, such as Justice for Families (J4F), the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY), National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN), and the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ), can be a resource when searching for potential local partners. Full contact information for these organizations, and others, is located in the back of this guide. ([see page 34](#))

There are a number of critical questions that must be answered when working to identify the right partners to assist with planning for and conducting focus groups with youth and families who have first-hand experience with the juvenile justice system. The above checklist can be used to help guide the selection process.

## Recruitment of Community Partners

If your site already has relationships with organizations that meet many of the criteria above, then recruitment should be easy. However, for those organizations that haven't yet been engaged, new relationships will need to be forged. Some strategies to initiate new connections include:

- Ask people within your agency who might already have some level of relationship with the organization to help make a connection;
- Find individuals within your current collaborative or other committees and workgroups that could help to make an introduction; or
- Ask the young people and families you work with to introduce you.

Whether or not new relationships need to be developed, there are a few things we suggest you consider as your recruitment efforts take shape:

- Schedule a visit with the community-based organization to meet with the leadership face-to-face;
- Be prepared to describe the scope of work and explain how your goals are aligned with the priorities of the community-based organization;
- Draft a proposal that outlines the goals, expectations, budget, and expected timelines for the focus group work and share it with potential partners; and
- Identify the person who will be the lead contact and internal coordinator for your partner organization(s).

## PLANNING & LOGISTICS

### Purpose

The focus groups are meant to help your site gather information about the juvenile justice system from the perspectives of youth and families that have experiences with it. For the purpose of the system assessment process, focus groups are structured discussions either with small groups of family members or with small groups of youth, where there is a guided dialogue about their personal experiences with the juvenile justice system.

Once the community partners have been identified, the planning for the focus groups can begin. Detailed and thoughtful planning of logistics, recruitment and execution is essential to successful outcomes. The sensitive nature of the topics discussed can be stressful to participants. Carefully planned focus groups are the critical first step in building longer-term relationships with the families and youth that participate.

### Confidentiality

Information shared during focus groups is sensitive and very personal. The utmost care to confidentiality is critical to the process. How information will be protected and how confidentiality and privacy will be guaranteed should be fully explained when contact with youth and families is first made. Any written invitations and recruitment materials should make reference to the value of confidentiality.

It is best to record the focus groups for accuracy. Facilitators should make clear at the opening of the focus group that participation is completely voluntary and that all identifying information will be omitted from the transcript and recordings will be destroyed once a transcript is completed. Consent forms should also explicitly assure confidentiality. For more information please see the “Consent Form” template included in this guide. ([see page 38](#))

Verbal reference to confidentiality should be made at the beginning of all focus groups. Questions from participants should be fully answered before starting the focus group. Everyone in the group should sign a consent form agreeing to keep everything they hear during the focus group confidential. Before proceeding with the focus group, facilitators should pause and check that everyone is comfortable with the process and is willing to participate. Anyone who is not should be courteously invited to leave and be graciously thanked for their time. Everyone who leaves at this point should still receive the promised stipend.



Insuring confidentiality is a matter of ethics as well as a legal requirement. Some sites might prefer to have separate forms for individual consent to participate, consent to be recorded, and each participant's promise to not disclose anything outside of the focus group.

**Preparing and conducting outreach to youth and families should be exciting! The right approach provides an awesome opportunity to tear down some of the barriers that have long existed between agencies and the families and youth they serve. Participants for the focus groups are youth and families who are currently involved or have had prior involvement in the juvenile justice system. The best way to reach them also happens to lend itself to the ultimate goal of family and youth partnership. Jurisdictions should think of outreach as a system-wide effort that includes all stakeholders.** Staff responsible for the project should brief all community partners on the goals and expectations for the focus groups.

### **Key strategies for recruiting families and youth to participate in focus groups**

Personal consideration and support can go a long way in showing youth and families that they are important to the process and that their input is valued. Recruiters should feel comfortable talking to youth and families about the focus groups and inviting them to join. In addition to the following tips, feel free to use the "Invitation" template provided in this guide. ([see page 36](#))

- Keep in mind people are more likely to join if they are invited personally by someone.
- When invitations are accepted, names and contact information should be added to a list or database. This information should be kept confidential and be protected from unauthorized disclosure.
- Recruiters should inquire about the best way (such as a home phone or cell phone call, a text message, email, or another method) to contact participants with reminders and other important information.
- Confidentiality procedures should be explained when extending the invitation.
- On top of explaining the purpose of the focus groups, participants should be told how the outcomes of the focus groups will be documented and shared.



- Recruiters should also make it clear that there will be no penalties or repercussions to families or youth who decline the invitation to participate in a focus group.
- Two reminders should be sent to each individual participant in advance of the scheduled focus group. The first should be delivered five to seven days prior and another should be made 24 hours before. Request that participants confirm attendance and double check to be sure all barriers to attendance have been alleviated.
- When someone who initially agreed to participate is no longer able to come, staff should ask if there is anything in particular the organization can do to make it possible for them attend.

## Participants

Including families and youth with a wide range of experiences will provide sites with a much richer body of data and information to work from. While every site may not be able to recruit representation for every group listed below, planners should use the following as a guide for recruitment efforts. Focus groups should aim to include people that can speak about their experiences through the following contexts:

- Youth on probation;
- Youth in out-of-home placement;
- Youth reflecting various demographics of the community including race, ethnicity, socio-economics, gender, age, sexual orientation and immigration status;
- Youth who have different offense histories;
- Youth who have been arrested and diverted; and
- Youth detained pending adjudication.

## Barriers to Participation

There can be a wide array of barriers families face when working through the crisis of having a child involved in the juvenile justice system. There are also a number of barriers when families attempt to engage with advocates or system leaders in reform efforts. Research revealed the following top five barriers:

- Financial obligations;
- Lack of trust;

- Lack of knowledge about how to find or get help;
- Prior bad experience with the system; and
- Lack of transportation.

It is wise to consult with family leaders in the community to ascertain the kinds of barriers families in your jurisdiction face and then ask them for suggestions on how to ameliorate or eliminate them.

Impacted community refers to the communities that are the most affected by the juvenile justice system.

## Location

Ideally, the focus groups should be held in places that are easily accessible to the participants, and located in the communities that are the most affected by the juvenile justice system. These areas are referred to as **impacted communities**. Here are some things to consider when selecting a location:

- Is the location accessible by public transportation and is there ample, convenient, and free parking for those with private transportation?
- Is it inviting and comfortable, as well as quiet and private?
- When a site has many youth in several different areas of the city, it will be best to host groups in each area rather than have folks come to parts of the city they aren't familiar with or may not feel comfortable in. This will also help identify any variances in experiences from different segments of the community.
- Focus groups should not be held in the courts or any agency buildings and offices.
- For focus groups held at residential facilities or other out of home placements, the groups should never interfere with youth activities or family visitation. Also, additional precautions should be taken to protect the confidentiality of participating youth and insure that they experience no repercussions as a result of speaking honestly about their experience and feelings.

## Group Size

For many of the participants, the focus groups may be the first time they have been given the opportunity to share their experiences. Creating a safe space and ensuring that everyone is heard helps to foster connections among participants and also lays the groundwork for future relationships between the organization, families, youth, and the impacted community.

- Family and youth focus groups should be held separately. Family members and youth have different perspectives and sometimes they can be in conflict. Youth and family members will feel more comfortable and be open to speaking honestly about their experiences when in focus groups consisting only of their peers.
- The ideal number of participants in each focus group is 8-12. Up to 14 participants could be invited in order to insure an adequate turnout, in case some are unable to attend at the last minute.

It is wise to consult with family and youth representatives or leaders in the community about the specific times that are best for holding your focus groups.

### Focus Group Duration

Work and school schedules and normal day-to-day responsibilities and activities can make it difficult for families and youth to participate in the focus groups. Here are a few tips on planning the agenda and some considerations to keep in mind in order to help overcome these barriers.

- Starting and ending on time demonstrates that you honor their time and that they are valued.
- The intimate nature of the discussions can leave families and young people feeling traumatized and raw. Some participants may hang around after the focus group in hopes of speaking to someone privately about a particular concern. Designate at least one person from your organization to fill this role.
- Each group's discussion should last between 2 and 2 ½ hours.
- If you expect a focus group will exceed 2 hours, a break should be built in.

### Best Days and Times

It is very important to let people know as far in advance as possible.

They may need to make childcare or eldercare arrangements, take time off work, arrange for transportation, have medical issues or other barriers to work through and it's best to give them as much notice as possible. To accommodate family and youth schedules, hold focus groups at different times.

- Hold some focus groups on a weekday late in the afternoon or early evening when most people are done working.
- Hold other focus groups on a Saturday in the late morning or early afternoon.

Remember to be sensitive to dietary restrictions and cultural practices when selecting what to serve.

Cash compensation may jeopardize public assistance funds or services that some families receive. For solutions to this and other issues regarding compensation, please see “Pathways to Partnership: Frequently Asked Questions on Compensation for Family, Youth, and Consumer Involvement” in the Resource section of this guide. (See Page 44)

It is wise to consult with family and youth representatives or leaders in the community about the specific times that are best for holding your focus groups.

## Refreshments/Meals

Providing meals and light refreshments shows the participants that you are a gracious host and appreciate their participation. When the focus groups are held during meal times the meal should be served before the focus group begins. If the focus groups are not held during a mealtime, offer snacks and drinks. Beverages and a light snack can also be offered when there is a short break in the focus group. The invitation should mention if a meal or refreshments will be provided.

## Stipends

Financial issues are one of the top five reasons families find it difficult to engage in working to improve policies, programs, and services that their children need. We recommend paying each participant a stipend of \$25-\$40.

- Gift cards can serve as a great alternative to checks or cash.
- When stipends are paid by check, keep in mind that families may lose a significant portion of the stipend to check cashing fees. In some neighborhoods families may not be able to cash a check at all.
- As an alternative to covering child care costs, organizations should consider providing on-site childcare.
- To offset transportation costs, you should provide bus passes, mileage reimbursements and pay parking fees.

## Room Set Up

This may be the first chance families and youth have the opportunity to join with others who have had similar experiences. The room should be set up to promote connectivity and relationship building among participants.

- Chairs should be set up in a circle.
- Consider setting up chairs around a table so that participants have a place to take notes.

During the planning stages, it would be wise to form a small work group that includes system stakeholders along with some impacted family members and youth, in an effort to develop focus group questions that directly meet the interests and needs of your community.

## Staffing

There should be a coordinator that is the lead contact for all planning and logistical matters. The lead contact should also be the one to field calls and questions from any participant seeking assistance. The coordinator should also be present for the focus groups in case any issues need to be resolved.

The focus group facilitator(s) should have strong ties to the impacted community, a clear understanding of family dynamics, and ideally some personal experience with the juvenile justice system. In addition to the facilitator, it is recommended that you have two staff charged with recording the discussion. One could record the conversation on flip charts, while the other uses a laptop to take notes, along with operating the tape recorder and changing the tape as necessary. The coordinator, depending on their interest and skillset could also fill the role of either facilitator or recorder.

Unlike peer support groups where participants can expect to get support and suggestions about how to deal with the experiences they are having, focus groups are a means of gathering data about specific topics or issues. However, when an individual talks about their stressful, traumatic, or negative experiences in a focus group, others in the group may spontaneously offer support and advice. When this happens, focus group facilitators need to lead the discussion back to the focus group questions. It could be extremely helpful to have some additional peer support on hand to assist, in the event that a participant becomes upset.

## Facilitation and Materials

The right facilitators can significantly impact the amount and usefulness of the information gathered from focus groups. Facilitators that have personal experience with the juvenile justice system are more likely to have the nuanced interpersonal skills, knowledge, and common language needed to encourage participants to articulate their experiences and feelings. Skillful, well-trained facilitators know the appropriate follow up questions to ask and can quickly identify themes that emerge during the focus group discussion.

A more comprehensive facilitator's manual is included in this guide. (see page 19)

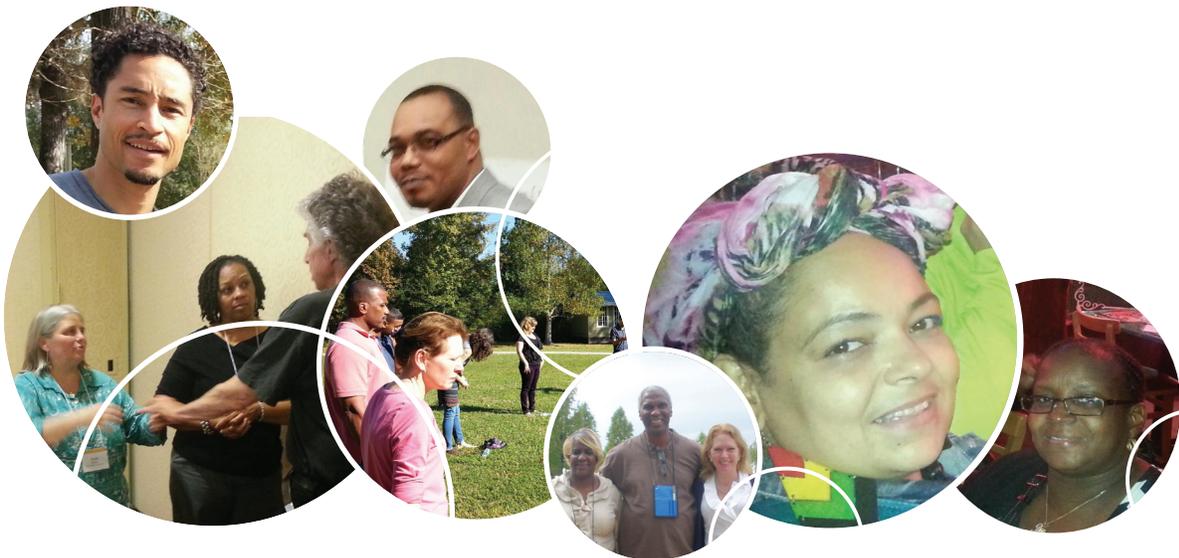
Other resources and materials you will need to provide for each focus group include:

- Translation services, if needed.
- Audio recording device. Check that it is working properly and it can pick up voices from all parts of the room. Be sure there is a backup microphone and sufficient recording media for the entire session. Have extra batteries on hand.
- Easels, flip chart paper, and markers for note takers. Families in other settings have reported that seeing their responses in writing helps them to feel heard.
- Laptop for note-taking.
- Note pads or index cards and pens for participants to take notes with.

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**You can learn more about the barriers families face, along with a number of family-driven solutions to these barriers by downloading the Justice for Families report, “Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice” from [www.justice4families.org](http://www.justice4families.org)**

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# FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

## INTRODUCTION

This guide is a tool for the team that will be organizing, conducting, and facilitating the focus groups. It includes: a statement of purpose and goals for conducting these focus groups, including a description of what a focus group is (and is not); a check list of the materials facilitators will need; a detailed, suggested script for facilitators to use when conducting the focus groups; and two sets of sample questions—one to use with youth and one to use with family members.

## PURPOSE AND GOALS

These focus groups are being held in order to give voice to the youth and families impacted by the juvenile justice system. Their insights and experiences will be critical to the system assessment process. In addition, the focus groups will be used to assess whether youth and family needs are being met, and whether services are being provided. Finally, there is the expectation that these groups will provide an opportunity for youth and families to share their ideas about how to make the system better. *[It may be helpful to have a visual hanging up in the room that reflects the purpose and goals.]*

### **What is (and is not) a Focus Group**

For the purpose of a system assessment, focus groups are small groups of family members or youth assembled to participate in a guided discussion about their personal experiences with the juvenile justice system. Unlike peer support groups where participants can expect to get support and hear suggestions about how to deal with the experiences they are having, focus groups are a means of gathering data about specific topics or issues. However, when an individual talks about their stressful, traumatic, or negative experiences in a focus group others in the group are likely to spontaneously offer support and advice. When this happens, focus group facilitators need to lead the discussion back to the focus group questions. It could be extremely helpful to have some additional peer support on hand to assist, in the event that a participant becomes upset.

## FACILITATOR'S CHECK LIST

- Agendas for participants
- Food and beverages
- Note pad and pens for participants
- Forms
  - Informed Consent form
  - Confidentiality form
- Audio Recording Device
- Easels, flip chart, markers, and blue painter's tape
- Stipends
- Hand-outs with additional information about your organization and/or the reform efforts underway

## FACILITATOR'S SCRIPT

### Welcome and Introductions

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this focus group. My name is *[insert lead facilitator's name]* and I will facilitate the discussion. *[Insert any other staff name(s)]* is/are also here to assist in making sure that everyone feels heard and that everyone's perspectives are captured accurately. Before we get started, I'd like to review a few details.

The *[insert agency name here]* is currently undergoing a process to assess and examine their juvenile justice system. They are interested in making policy and practice reforms in order to more effectively serve youth and families in their homes and communities, with the ultimate goal of reducing the number of youth committed or placed outside of the home. A critical part of this process is hearing directly from youth and families who are impacted by the juvenile justice system.

So, in the next 2 hours, you will have an opportunity to discuss a series of topics related to your experiences in the juvenile justice system. The information from this discussion will be used to compile a general list of the points you make, as well as any recommendations you may have for how the system can be changed.

I want to emphasize that we will **not** include anyone's name or any other identifiable information in any of the documents or materials that come from this, or any other, focus group. We will hold your specific responses in confidence and ask that each of you do the same for one another.

The discussion we have may generate emotions of a sensitive nature. If you are uncomfortable with a question, or simply don't have a response, it is perfectly fine to pass. We don't expect everyone to answer every question, but we are interested in all of your perspectives so we hope everyone will contribute something during the course of the discussion. Due to the time constraints we have, I may need to move us along on occasion in order to help make sure everyone is heard and that all topics are discussed.

IMPORTANT! Ask if anyone is uncomfortable with the conversation being recorded, and would prefer not to sign either the informed consent or the confidentiality forms. If anyone does not want to sign either form, thank them for coming and give them permission to leave. Be sure they get the stipend for coming.

## Informed Consent

Everything you say in this room will be kept strictly confidential. With your permission we will be taping the discussion. Be assured that the tapes will be reviewed only to insure information is accurate and precise. The recording will be transcribed without the use of your names, and then destroyed. The transcription of this group's dialogue will only be viewed by those inside this organization, namely only those tasked with compiling all of the information gathered.

We deeply appreciate and value your confidence and trust in us. It is also important that we reassure each other of our promise to keep what is said here, confidential. I am distributing forms for permission to tape this session. We will read these over together and I am happy to answer any questions you may have. After each of you signs the forms, we can begin.

- a. Distribute the informed consent and confidentiality forms.
- b. Read them out loud, and give people time to think about them and ask questions before they sign.
- c. Collect all signed forms.

## Logistics

*[Explain where the rest rooms are, offer additional refreshments (if they are readily available), and explain when and how people will be paid for their participation.]*

Thank you. Any further questions?

## Conversation Guidelines

It is important that together we create a set of guidelines for this conversation so that everyone gets a chance to be heard with respect and feels safe speaking in this group. For example:

- **One microphone:** Only one person speaks at a time so that everyone can be heard.
- **Technology:** Everyone agrees to turn their phones and devices to silent or vibrate mode.

As participants offer items to the list of guidelines, ask if they are agreeable to everyone. If so, write them on a flip chart and keep them visible throughout the focus group. Allow just a couple of minutes for this task. The list should be short (3-6 items at most).

There is one more ground rule I need you to respect in order for us to achieve the purpose of this focus group. It may not be easy but we all must resist the natural urge to offer help, guidance, or suggestions for resolving an individual's problem or challenge. We recognize that this kind of peer-to-peer support is necessary and very important. *[If you have a family member or youth that has been impacted by the juvenile justice system, in the room with you, now would be a good time to re-introduce them and explain their role.]* Therefore, we have some people *[re-introduce them here]* available who are prepared to discuss specific issues or needs with you after the focus group has concluded. You are also welcome to stay afterwards to talk with each other or to mutually agree to exchange contact information. And finally, if anyone becomes too overwhelmed with emotions brought on by the discussion, please feel free to excuse yourself for a few minutes. *[Again, mention the names of any peer supporter resources that are available and ready to listen and help as best they can.]*



## Warm-Up

Please share your first name, where you are from, provide a brief and general description of your family, and tell us how you have been or are involved with the juvenile justice system.

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**Tip: Write a sample introduction on a flipchart so that participants have an example to follow. If the facilitator has direct experience with the system, it would also be helpful for the facilitator to go first and model for others.**

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This is an example of just how much information would be helpful for each participant to share.

*My name is Trish. I live in Chinatown. I have 3 children, ages 7, 12, and 15. My oldest son has been on probation for 6 months and has been detained two times. In addition to my son, my nephew was committed to the state and spent 18 months in a residential school for boys.*

## Explaining the Process

I will ask a question and give you a minute or two to collect your thoughts. You can keep track of your ideas by making notes on the paper provided, if you wish. Then we will go around the room “round robin style” so each one of you can give us one of your responses. If someone has already mentioned your point, tell us so that we can underscore it. Then you can give us another one of your ideas. We will keep going until it’s time to move on, or until all ideas are exhausted. *[Insert name of recorder(s)]* will write your items on a flip chart. If necessary, I might rephrase something for clarity and check with you to be sure what is written accurately reflects your point. *[Note to facilitators: There is a list of probes under each question. These should be used to get richer and more in depth responses. You can ask a participant for clarification or for an example if a particular response is vague or too complicated.]*

During the planning stages, it would be wise to form a small work group that includes system stakeholders along with some impacted family members and youth, in an effort to develop focus group questions that directly meet the interests and needs of your community.

---

**Asking the Questions: Proceed to ask the questions taking a planned break if the focus group is scheduled for more than 2 ½ hours. There are two lists of sample questions appended to this guide. One set of questions is for YOUTH and the other is for FAMILIES. However, every community is different and the questions you ask should address topics and issues important to the families, youth, organizations and agencies in your area.**

**When choosing the questions, be conscious of the time allotted for the focus group. For example: Assume each participant will take one minute to answer a question. Also assume it takes three minutes for the facilitator to ask the question and allow participants time to think before the “round robin” begins and another two minutes for any clarification needed by the note takers. Expect to use 15 minutes for the opening activities and five minutes for wrapping up at the end. If your focus group is scheduled for two hours and you have ten participants and your facilitator keeps things moving quickly you should be able to cover six topics. If your group is larger you will need to cut down the**



number of questions, and/or the number of responses, in order to give everyone an opportunity to contribute.

Sometimes you do not get through all the questions with the first focus group. If this happens you can start with the unanswered questions when you hold the next focus group then go to the questions the first group covered.

---

### Concluding the Focus Group

Our time is about up. You have generously shared your experiences and insights with us and I assure you they will be captured and shared in a spirit that respects your collective wisdom. We hope you will continue to contribute your ideas as *[insert name of your organization]* and *[insert name of the juvenile justice agency]* continue to work to improve the juvenile justice system. Thank you all for coming and please remember your promise to keep what you heard here confidential and not share it with anyone outside this room. Before you leave be sure to collect your stipend from *[insert the name of the person who is distributing the stipends.]*<sup>1</sup> Thanks again.

---

1. You might find that it's easier to distribute the stipends at the start, as people arrive. There's no rule for when they should be distributed, so please do what works best for your community.

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

### SAMPLE Questions

Each topic below starts with a general question (do not read out loud the topic theme, i.e. “Collaboration”), followed by “probe questions.” Ask the general question first, and then as the dialogue moves along, be sure to ask the probing questions in order to get to the heart of the topic. Often times, you will find that the young people will answer questions that are on your list before you get a chance to ask them.

### COURT PROCEDURES

**Question: “As your case moved through the juvenile justice system, did you understand what was going on?”**

Probes:

- a. How did people in the system make you feel?
- b. How were you included in decision-making?
- c. Did you feel heard?
- d. What was most helpful?
- e. What was least helpful?
- f. What ideas do you have for helping to make the court process better?

**Question: “What do you think the purpose of the juvenile justice system is?”**

Probes:

- a. Is it to help youth be successful?
- b. Is it to help the community be safer?
- c. Is it to punish youth?
- d. Does the current system do a good job at delivering on its purpose?
- e. What should the purpose be?

### COLLABORATION:

**Question: “Are you ever asked what you think about the current juvenile justice system?”**

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

Probes:

- a. Are you ever invited to meetings with probation, the courts, providers or others to work on making the juvenile justice system better?
- b. Does anyone ever ask you about your experiences or opinions?
- c. Do you think your opinion makes any difference in terms of making the juvenile justice system better?
- d. What ideas do you have for making it better?

### ACHIEVING RACIAL & ETHNIC EQUITY:

**Question: “Are there issues about how people from different races and ethnic backgrounds are treated?”**

Probes:

- a. Do you think that there are problems with different races or ethnic groups being treated differently in the juvenile justice system?
- b. Have you ever been treated differently? How?
- c. Do you think the people who work in the juvenile justice system are sensitive to different races and cultures?

### YOUTH WELL-BEING & COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES, SUPPORTS & OPPORTUNITIES:

**Question: “Do people in the juvenile justice system know what you need? Are you being connected to resources to help with things like employment and education?”**

Probes:

- a. Do the people you work with know what your goals and interests are?
- b. Are you connected to employment resources and opportunities while you are in the juvenile justice system? How about when you leave the system?
- c. Are you connected to education resources and opportunities while you are in the juvenile justice system? How about when you leave the system?
- d. Are you connected to recreational activities while you are in the juvenile justice system? How about when you leave the system?

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

- e. Do you get mental health services if you need them while you are in the juvenile justice system? How about when you leave the system?
- f. Are you connected to other services while you are in the juvenile justice system? How about when you leave the system?

**Question: “Are there good programs and services offered in the juvenile justice system? Are there services you need that aren’t available or you can’t get to?”**

Probes:

- a. Do you think your attorney does a good job of representing you?
- b. What programs and services do you like the best? Why?
- c. What’s missing? Where are there gaps?
- d. Are programs and services located where you and your family can get to them easily? Or is there public transportation? Is public transportation easy or hard to use in your area and why?
- e. Are programs and services available on days and times that work with your schedule?
- f. Are you ever asked to evaluate the programs and services you and your family participate in?

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND OUT OF HOME PLACEMENT:

**Question: “What happens when young people are placed outside of their homes? Are you involved in those decisions? Do you know what the purpose is?”**

Probes:

- a. Are you told about the different choices you have when you come into the juvenile justice system?
- b. Are you asked about being placed outside of your home?
- c. What is the purpose of going to a residential treatment facility, or treatment foster care or a group home? What kinds of services and programs do you get there?
- d. What is the purpose of going to a juvenile correctional facility? What kinds of services and programs do you get?
- e. Do you or other young people have concerns about safety in residential treatment or juvenile corrections facilities?

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

- f. Are you and your family involved in developing plans of care in residential treatment or juvenile corrections facilities?
- g. What happens when you leave one of these facilities? What kind of supervision and services do you get?
- h. How is your family involved when you leave the residential treatment or juvenile corrections facility?

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PROBATION:

**Question: “What about probation? How does it work? Do you get what you need?”**

Probes:

- a. What do you think is the purpose of probation?
- b. What do you think the job of the probation officer should be? What should he or she be doing for you and your family?
- c. Can you describe what it is like to meet with probation officers?
- d. Does the probation officer ask you what services and supports you and your family need?
- e. Do you know how probation officers decide to file a violation of probation?
- f. What kind of positive changes in your life have happened through the help of probation?
- g. Were there any positive changes in your life that you wanted to make, but probation was not able to help you get there? If so, why do you think they were not able to help with this?
- h. If you were in charge, what would you change about the way probation works?
- i. Is there something that would help you get off probation and stay out of trouble that isn't available to you now?

**What else do you want to tell us? What else should we know?**

## FAMILY FOCUS GROUP

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Each topic below starts with a general question (do not read out loud the topic theme, i.e. “Collaboration”), followed by “probe questions.” Ask the general question first, and then as the dialogue moves along, be sure to ask the probing questions in order to get to the heart of the topic. Often times, you will find that the young people will answer questions that are on your list before you get a chance to ask them.

### SYSTEM AND COURT PROCEDURES

**Question: “As your child moved through the court process, what was that experience like for you?”**

Probes:

- a. Did you feel like you understood what was going on?
- b. How did people in the system make you feel? Respected? Valued? Part of the problem?
- c. Did people ask for your opinion?
- d. Did you feel heard?
- e. What was most helpful?
- f. What was least helpful?
- g. What ideas do you have for helping to make the court process better for new families?

**Question: “What do you think the purpose of the juvenile justice system is?”**

Probes:

- a. Is it to help youth be successful?
- b. Is it to help the community be safer?
- c. Is it to punish youth?
- d. Does the current system do a good job at delivering on its purpose?
- e. What should the purpose be?

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PROBATION:

**Question: “What about probation? How does it work? Do you and your child get what you need?”**

## FAMILY FOCUS GROUP

### Probes:

- a. What do you think is the purpose of probation?
- b. What do you think the job of the probation officer should be? What should he or she be doing for you and your family?
- c. Can you describe what it is like to meet with probation officers?
- d. Does the probation officer ask you what services and supports you and your child need?
- e. Do you know how probation officers decide to file a violation of probation?
- f. Do probation officers visit families in their homes or communities instead of just meeting in the office? Are probation officers available to meet with families evenings, weekends, and holidays?
- g. What kind of positive changes have happened for your child through the help of probation?
- h. Is there something that would help your child get off probation and stay out of trouble that isn't available now?
- i. If you were in charge, what would you change about the way probation works?

### ACHIEVING RACIAL & ETHNIC EQUITY:

**Question: “Are there issues about how people from different races and ethnic backgrounds are treated?”**

### Probes:

- a. Do you think that there are problems with different races or ethnic groups being treated the same in the juvenile justice system?
- b. Have you experienced being treated differently? How?
- c. Do you think the people who work in the juvenile justice system are sensitive to different cultures?

### YOUTH WELL-BEING & COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES, SUPPORTS & OPPORTUNITIES:

**Question: “Do people in the juvenile justice system know what you and your child need? Is your child being connected to resources to help with things like employment and education?”**

## FAMILY FOCUS GROUP

### Probes:

- a. Do the people you work with know what your child's goals and interests are?
- b. Is your child connected to employment resources and opportunities while he or she is in the juvenile justice system? How about when he or she leaves the system?
- c. Is your child connected to education resources and opportunities while he or she is in the juvenile justice system? How about when he or she leaves the system?
- d. Is your child connected to recreational activities while he or she is in the juvenile justice system? How about when he or she leaves the system?
- e. Does your child get mental health services if needed while he or she is in the juvenile justice system? How about when he or she leaves the system?
- f. Is your child connected to other services while he or she is in the juvenile justice system? How about when he or she leaves the system?

**Question: "Are there good programs and services for families in the juvenile justice system? Are there services you or your family need that aren't available or you can't get to?"**

### Probes:

- a. Are there services and programs for families?
- b. Which services and programs for families do you like the best? Why?
- c. What are the gaps—that is, what services are missing?
- d. Are programs and services located close to where you and your child can get to them easily? Or is there public transportation?
- e. Are programs and services available on days and times that work with your schedule?
- f. Are you ever asked to evaluate the programs and services you and your child participate in?
- g. **Do you think your child's attorney does a good job of representing your child?**

## FAMILY FOCUS GROUP

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND OUT OF HOME PLACEMENT:

**Question: “What happens when a child is placed outside of your home? Are you involved in those decisions?? Do you know what the purpose is?”**

Probes:

- a. Are families told about the different choices for their children when they come into the juvenile justice system?
- b. Are families consulted about their children being placed outside of the home?
- c. What is the purpose of youth going to residential facilities? What kinds of services and programs do they get?
- d. What is the purpose of youth going to juvenile correctional facilities? What kinds of services and programs do they get?
- e. Do you have concerns about safety in residential treatment or juvenile corrections facilities?
- f. Are youth and their families involved in developing plans of care in these facilities?
- g. What happens when the youth leaves one of these facilities? What kind of supervision and services does the youth receive?
- h. How are families involved when the youth leaves the facility?

### COLLABORATION:

**Question: “Have you ever been asked about your thoughts on the current juvenile justice system?”**

Probes:

- a. Have you ever been invited to meetings with probation, the courts, providers or others to work on making the system better?
- b. Has anyone ever asked you about your experiences or opinions?
- c. Do you think your opinion makes any difference in terms of making the juvenile justice system better?
- d. What ideas do you have for making the system better?

What else do you want to tell us? What else should we know?

NATIONAL  
JUVENILE  
JUSTICE  
ORGANIZATIONS  
WITH  
LOCAL  
AFFILIATIONS &  
MEMBERSHIPS

**The Community Justice Network for Youth @ The W.  
Haywood Burns Institute**

475 14th Street, Suite 800, Oakland, CA 94612

Email: [info@burnsinstitute.org](mailto:info@burnsinstitute.org)

Phone: 415.321.4100

Web: <http://www.communityjusticenetworkforyouth.org/about-us/cjny-members/>

**Campaign For Youth Justice**

1220 L Street, NW, Suite 605, Washington, DC 20005

Email: [info@cfyj.org](mailto:info@cfyj.org)

Phone: 202.558.3580

Web: <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/>

**National Juvenile Justice Network**

1319 F St. NW, Suite 402, Washington, DC 20004

Email: [info@nnjn.org](mailto:info@nnjn.org)

Phone: 202.467.0864

Web: <http://www.njjn.org/our-members/our-members>

**Justice For Families**

1913 Azalea Street, Sulphur, Louisiana 70663

Email: [info@justice4families.org](mailto:info@justice4families.org)

Phone: 443.418.5201

Web: <http://www.justice4families.org/about/our-partners/>

**Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

1319 F Street NW, Suite 402, Washington, DC 20004

Email: [info@juvjus.org](mailto:info@juvjus.org)

Phone: 202.467.0864

Web: <http://www.juvjustice.org/about-us/members>

**National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health**

15883-A Crabbs Branch Way, Rockville, Maryland 20855

Email: [ffcmh@ffcmh.org](mailto:ffcmh@ffcmh.org)

Phone: 240.403.1901

Web: <http://www.ffcmh.org>



# TEMPLATES & TOOLS



## DINNER, CHILD CARE, TRANSPORTATION & \$40.00 STIPEND PROVIDED!

### Family/Youth Focus Groups

**Location:**  
Your Community

**Date:**  
August 1, 2015

**Time:**  
5:00-7:00

We are inviting you to participate in an important activity that will help the Department of Juvenile Justice reduce reliance on out-of-home placements, eliminate racial and ethnic disparities, build safe communities and aid in the safe and healthy development of young people. *[insert your organization's name here]*, an organization serving your community, is working with *[insert agency name here]*, to conduct a series of focus groups with families and young people who are currently involved or have had prior involvement with the juvenile justice system. Our goal is to learn about the experiences of young people and their families in the system.

Childcare will be available on site and transportation assistance is available. Dinner or light refreshments will be provided. In appreciation for sharing your time and experience with us, each participant will receive a \$40.00 dollar gift card [or cash stipend].

For more information or to register, please contact *[insert name and contact information for focus group coordinator]*.

Your experience is vital and will help shape the future of juvenile justice in our community! Please join us!

ALL information provided will be kept strictly confidential and no identifying information will be used or disclosed without your permission.



[This Registration Form can be completed by the participant alone or with assistance from focus group staff. Please make sure the name, and all helpful contact information, for the focus group coordinator is shared with participants.]

**ALL information provided will be kept strictly confidential and no identifying information will be used or disclosed without your permission.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle one:    **Family**    **Youth**

**We will be sending reminders one week in advance, as well as 24 hours before the focus group. Please provide your contact information and then circle which mode of contact is the best way to reach you.**

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Call: \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you need transportation assistance? Please circle one: Yes No**

**If yes, please check what kind of assistance you need.**

Gas money

Taxi

Other: Please give details.

Parking fees

Wheel chair accessible vehicle

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bus or train fare

**Do you need childcare assistance? Please circle one: Yes No**

**If yes, please tell us the following for each child that needs childcare.**

Child's Name	Age	Gender	Any Special Needs



[Insert name of the organization holding the focus group], in collaboration with the Department of Juvenile Justice, is conducting focus groups with families and young people who are currently involved or have had prior involvement with the juvenile justice system. Our goal is to learn about the experiences of young people and their families had while in the system. The information gathered through the focus groups will be used to help the Department reduce reliance on out-of-home placements, eliminate racial and ethnic disparities, build safe communities and aid in the safe and healthy development of young people.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group today. Before we begin our discussion, there are some things we would like you to know. As I read these, please ask any questions you have about them.

Your participation in this focus group is totally voluntary.

There will be notes taken on flip chart paper for all of us to see. Please bring any inaccuracies to our attention immediately.

The focus group will be audio taped for accuracy. Personally identifiable information will not be in the transcripts. The tapes will be destroyed once the transcripts are typed.

Your name will not be used in any reports about this focus group, and no direct quotes or comments you make will be linked to you or your family in any way. The report will not contain any personally identifying information.

This focus group poses few, if any, risks to you. You will be asked about your personal experience, and this could be uncomfortable for some people.

While we hope you will fully participate, you may choose not to answer a question if you prefer.

You may choose to leave the group at any time, for whatever reason, and without any repercussions for you or your family.

Each participant in the focus group will receive \$40.00 for their attendance.

We will answer any questions you have about the focus group before the group discussion begins. Contact information is provided below for any questions you may have after your participation.

Participants in the focus groups agree to maintain confidentiality of all the information discussed.

You will be provided a copy of this consent form. [Please mail completed forms to participants if a copier isn't available on site.]

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact [insert appropriate name and contact information].

I understand the above and agree to participate in the focus group.

I agree to the audio recording of the discussion.

I promise not to share, discuss, or disclose any information, comments, or remarks made by other participants.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

August 15, 2015

Dear *[Participant Name]*,

*[Insert your organization's name here]*, and the *[insert agency name here]* appreciate your participation in the recent focus group. What you so generously shared about your family's experience with the juvenile justice system will help guide the Department's efforts to partner with the youth and families in our community.

In September, we will share what we learned from the focus groups held in our community and invite you and the community to join us in a discussion that will lead to recommendations and community-driven solutions. We hope you will stay connected and continue to provide your perspective and ideas as we work together to make sure our community has the tools and resources we need so all our children thrive.

We are honored by your participation and look forward to more opportunities to work with you. If you have any questions or ideas to share, please be in touch.

Sincerely,

*[Name]*

*[Contact Information]*



## SAMPLE SCOPE OF WORK FOR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

**PROJECT TITLE** Deep End System Assessment: Youth and Family Focus Groups

**PURPOSE** [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] will partner with [NAME OF THE AGENCY] to plan and execute a number of focus groups with youth and families impacted by the juvenile justice system. The goal is to create a space for open, honest, and non-judgmental dialogue among youth and families. The insights and experiences shared by youth and families involved in the system will: (1) help to inform the deep end system assessment, and (2) identify opportunities and ideas for reform.

The partnering organization(s) will be responsible for:

- Identifying location(s) for the focus group(s) that are located in impacted communities.
- Partnering with the agency to assist with the recruitment of youth and family members to participate in a series of focus groups.
- Scheduling the focus group(s) based on the schedules of youth and their families.
- Partnering with the agency to ensure diversity among focus group participants including:
  - Demographics—focus group participants reflect the demographics of the youth and families impacted by the juvenile justice system, for example, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, and geography, etc.
  - A range of experiences— focus group participants have experienced varying degrees of involvement with the juvenile justice system, for example, diversion, detention, probation, placement, parole, etc.
- Providing meals and/or refreshments for focus group participants.
- Paying each participant a stipend for participating in the focus group(s)<sup>2</sup>.

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2. Justice for Families recommends compensating each focus group participant between \$25 and \$40. Cash compensation may jeopardize public assistance funds or services that some families receive. In this case, gift cards may be given in lieu of cash compensation.

- Providing bus/train passes or mileage reimbursements to participants.
- Participating in webinar or other training for focus group leaders.
- Facilitating 120-150 minute (2-2.5 hours) focus group(s).
- Providing necessary resources and materials for focus groups (e.g. note-takers, translators, flipcharts, easels, markers, note pads and pens, etc.).
- Writing “thank you” notes to participants after the completion of each focus group.
- Tracking participation (e.g. number of focus groups, number of participants, demographics).
- Documenting focus group findings in a format/structure that eliminates any identifying information of individuals or groups.
- Compiling notes in a format/structure that makes it easy for system partners to understand and grasp key themes, highlights, ideas, and topics discussed.
- Sharing final deliverables by [enter date].
  - Final budget expenditures;
  - Scope of participation, including final numbers and any helpful aggregate demographic information; and
  - Final compilation of notes.



## SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP BUDGET FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANZATIONS

Please use the following budget template to calculate the cost of ONE focus group. For each focus group, staff will need to:

- Identify the time and location for the focus group
- Recruit focus group participants (create and distribute invites; track RSVPs; send out reminders)
- Coordinate logistics (food, supplies, etc.) for focus group
- Facilitate and document 120-150 minute (2-2.5 hours) focus group
- Provide translation (if necessary)
- Document the focus groups

Cost per Focus Group	\$0.00		
Number of Focus Groups			
Total	\$0.00		
PERSONNEL			
Salaried Staff			
	Annual Salary	% of Time	
[Title]			\$0.00
HOURLY STAFF			
	Hourly Rate	# of Hours	
[Title]			\$0.00
TAXES & FRINGE			
		Rate	
Salaried Staff			\$0.00
Hourly Staff			\$0.00
CONSULTANTS/CONTRACTORS			
	Hourly Rate	# of Hours	
[Title]			\$0.00
[Title]			\$0.00
[Title]			\$0.00
OTPS			
	Cost per unit	# of units	
	(meal, stipend, etc.)		
Meals and/or refreshments			\$0.00
Stipends for focus group participants	\$40.00		\$0.00
Bus/train passes or mileage reimbursements			\$0.00
Sticky pads and markers			\$0.00
Pads and pens for participants to take notes			\$0.00
Rent			\$0.00
Other (explain):			\$0.00
		TOTAL	\$0.00



## SAMPLE DELIVERABLE: TEMPLATE FOR COMPILED NOTES

In addition to reporting the total number of focus groups conducted, along with any helpful aggregate demographic information for the participants, it will be critical that the notes from the focus groups be captured in an organized way so that your system partners have a clear sense of the key points and takeaways.

Below is a sample grid that you could adopt and modify as your organization works to analyze and compile the information from the varying groups.

**Along with the grid, it will be important to include powerful and poignant quotes from the participants that highlight their perspectives.**

Note: if your organization is charged with conducting both youth and family focus groups, we recommend creating two of these types of grids for each category. It is important that the voices of the youth and their experiences remain independent from the families' voices.

### XX County: A Summary of Findings from Focus Groups with Impacted Families

Topic Area	Key Themes	System Strengths	Concerns	Recommendations For Change
System and Court Procedures				
Family Engagement & Probation				
Racial & Ethnic Equity				
Community Based Services, Supports, and Opportunities				
Family Engagement and Out-of-Home Placement				
Collaboration				



## PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP

# Frequently Asked Questions on Compensation for Family, Youth, and Consumer Involvement

From the Partnering with Youth and Families Committee  
National Child Traumatic Stress Network

The NCTSN's Partnering with Youth and Families Committee is dedicated to building partnerships among youth, families, and professionals based on mutual respect and a common commitment to healing. By encouraging consumers to participate at all levels of program design, development, and implementation, service providers can ensure that youth and families are integral partners in the delivery and evaluation of services. The following questions and answers are designed to help Network centers address some of the compensation issues that arise when working with youth and family members.

### **Why should youth and family members be compensated for their involvement in Network activities?**

Financial and logistical issues can be significant barriers for many youth and families who wish to participate in an advisory or peer-to-peer capacity. Providing compensation can help to overcome these barriers, and also shows respect for the experience and contributions of the individuals involved.

### **Is it okay if a person wants to volunteer their services or their time?**

Of course! The important thing is that the person feels free to volunteer and is not pressured to do so. If a person truly wants to volunteer, the agency should keep track of the time spent as an in-kind contribution to the grant (if applicable).

### **Is it appropriate to involve individuals or families who are currently in treatment?**

Centers may want to establish a policy on this question, with input from family and youth. Some centers seek input from families still in treatment on non-treatment related topics (i.e., waiting room design, hours of service). The most important consideration is that the people in treatment always feel free to decline a request and feel no threat to their ongoing treatment.

### **What activities might be eligible for compensation?**

Some form of compensation or reimbursement is appropriate for any activity or level of participation that goes beyond the scope of regular meetings, including:

- Participation on phone calls, especially conference calls
- Preparation/review of materials

- Participation in focus groups
- Attendance at Network face-to-face meetings
- Participation on a panel with other Network members at a conference
- Providing consultation

### **How should compensation be structured?**

Individual organizations will have different policies about ways to compensate non-employees. It is important to talk with your organization's financial manager when deciding on compensation policies. Some possible options include:

- An hourly rate or flat retainer
- A contract for participation on a community advisory board
- Reimbursement for travel expenses (travel, room, board)
- Reimbursement for time spent on advisory boards, meetings, and preparation time

Keep in mind that cash compensation may have to be reported to the IRS as 1099 earned income, and could jeopardize a family's receipt of public funds or services. In these cases, alternative forms of compensation may be more appropriate, such as:

- Gift cards
- Child care
- Meals
- Tickets to movies or other local entertainment
- Access to computer training or other skill building activities
- Recognition events with food and special certificates for youth and family participants

Whatever form of compensation is chosen, your organization's compensation policies should be as consistent and clear as possible.

### **Should we make distinctions in pay rates between youth and adults?**

Yes, based on age and experience. Clearly define "youth" for your organization. Rates may also vary based on experience and actual work requested. Remember that youth may have valuable experiences and skills that adults do not have.

### **Should we pay more if someone takes on a leadership role?**

Yes. People who take on leadership roles take on more responsibility, and compensation should reflect that fact. For example, if a person spends time developing and preparing for a presentation, compensation should include the value of the advance preparation.

## **If a person misses work to attend a meeting, should we try to make up for the salary lost?**

No. Compensation should be set at a standard rate. Variations in salary make it impractical to assign a value to work missed.

## **If a person's employer will pay for the time spent on NCTSN activities, should that individual be paid in addition by the Network?**

No. If a person works for an organization that will pay for time spent on family involvement issues, extra compensation is not necessary.

## **Who should pay for family/youth involvement in Network collaborative groups?**

This depends on the work being done. If the work is for an individual center (e.g., participation on a community advisory board) then the center should compensate the youth or family member. If the work is for the Network (e.g., presenting at the All-Network Conference or participating in a collaborative group), then the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (NCCTS) and/or SAMHSA should cover expenses or provide compensation.

As there is a limited budget for providing compensation through the NCCTS, Network members are encouraged to contact the NCCTS as early as possible to discuss their needs and plans. In some cases, the NCCTS and Network centers might agree to share responsibility for compensation for participation in Network activities. At all times, Network centers should collaborate with the NCCTS and SAMHSA to ensure that youth and families are compensated fairly.

## **Are there any other sources of support for youth and family involvement?**

Numerous funding sources are available to support youth and family involvement, including Medicaid, federal mental health block grants to states, corporations, foundations, and local, state, and federal grants or cooperative agreements.<sup>1</sup> The resources listed in **Table 1** offer useful information on funding strategies and compensation rates for youth and family members.

## **How can I find out what other organizations in the Network are doing?**

Examples of cash amounts and other compensation practices provided to family/youth/consumers by other organizations may be obtained by contacting the NCTSN Partnering with Youth and Families Committee at [youthandfamilies@nctsn.org](mailto:youthandfamilies@nctsn.org).

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In 2008, the NCTSN released Pathways to Partnerships with Youth and Families to provide trauma-treating entities with a method for considering the role of youth and families in their organizations. Many sites have requested more technical assistance before beginning their efforts. This tip sheet was designed to provide additional information on compensation research and models. It is not meant to be an exhaustive guide, but rather a starting place for organizations seeking to develop compensation guidelines in their programming.

**Table 1. Additional Resources of Compensation for Family and Youth Involvement<sup>2-4</sup>**

Organization	Resource	URL
California Network of Mental Health Client (Sacramento, CA)/Recovery Innovations, (Phoenix, AZ)	<p><i>Minnesota peer support implementation: Consultant's report.</i></p> <p>Concise review of various state approaches to implementing Medicaid-reimbursed peer support services</p>	<p><a href="http://www.californiaclients.org/pdf/Sue%20Watson%20Presentation%20Attachment.pdf">http://www.californiaclients.org/pdf/Sue%20Watson%20Presentation%20Attachment.pdf</a></p>
Healthy & Ready to Work National Resource Center	<p><i>Family/youth leaders consultation rates.</i></p> <p>Examples of compensation rates for youth and family member participation</p>	<p><a href="http://www.hrtw.org/yac/consultation_rates.doc">http://www.hrtw.org/yac/consultation_rates.doc</a></p>
Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, University of South Florida (Tampa, FL)	<p><i>Effective financing strategies for systems of care: Examples from the field—A resource compendium for developing a comprehensive financing plan.</i></p> <p>Findings from a five-year study of finance strategies for building effective systems of care for children, adolescents, and families coping with serious emotional disturbances. Includes many examples of financing to support family and youth partnerships</p>	<p><a href="http://rtckids.fmhi.usf.edu/rtcpubs/hctrking/pubs/Study03-exp-frfield.pdf">http://rtckids.fmhi.usf.edu/rtcpubs/hctrking/pubs/Study03-exp-frfield.pdf</a></p>

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**Rosie Garibaldi, Co-Director, New Mexico Youth Alliance**

**Nel Andrews, Program Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation**

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