

## **Focus Group/Interview Guide – Youth Participants**

Youth Leadership, Responsibility, Youth choice and Autonomy  
in youth after-school and summer programs

*Developed by Health Resources in Action  
for Boston After- School & Beyond*

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the focus group is to:

- Gather participants' thoughts of the program so far, especially about youth leadership, responsibility, youth choice and autonomy.
- Identify barriers to their involvement in the program in regards to leadership and choice.
- Solicit suggestions from program participants about engaging youth and about the quality of the relationship between youth workers and youth.

### **ORGANIZATION**

Each group will last approximately 45- 60 minutes (elementary age) or 75- 90 minutes (middle school and high school age) and be comprised of 8-12 young people enrolled in the organization's program.

**Note:** *This is a guide not a script. Questions will be adapted to meet the developmental level of the youth participants.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

- Thank you for coming today. My name is Laurie Jo Wallace and this is my colleague,                     , who will take notes, and we are from Health Resources in Action, a non-profit organization in Boston where we provide training and support for youth and youth and youth workers.
- We are here to learn more about this program [insert name of program], and what you think about it.
- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions we'll be asking today. Please just be as honest as you can. Any information you can provide will be helpful.
- As you can see,                      is here taking notes during the group. Everything you say here is confidential. No names will be connected to anything you say. We are conducting several of these groups. When we write our report, we'll be pulling out key themes and mentioning

that “some people said this” or “other people said that.” We will not identify any individual or program with any specific comment.

- We only have a brief time together and I want to make sure I get through all my questions on time, so let’s begin.

### **WARM UP**

Please introduce yourself. Tell us your first name and something you like to do when you are not in school. *Note: May use another “icebreaker question,” depending on group, and there may also be another icebreaker to warm up the group, especially the younger ones.*

### **CORE QUESTIONS**

1. Tell us about **this program**. What do you do when you come here? (Probe: *In the school year? In the summer?*)
  - a. If you were talking to a friend who was thinking of joining the program, would you recommend the program to him/her? Why/why not?
  - b. What would you tell him/her about the program?
2. What do you think about the program staff? (Probe: *How do they treat you? How comfortable you feel around them?*)
  - a. If you needed to talk to an adult about a serious matter, would you go to program staff member or another adult in your program?
    - i. What type of serious matters would you talk to adults about?
    - ii. Do you feel like the adults/staff listen to you and your ideas?
3. **YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY** (*definition: youth planned and youth-led group activities and practices*):
  - a. Do you get to help plan activities for the program?
    - i. If so, what activities? (Probe: *Do you plan games, crafts, icebreakers, workshops, groups, events like “open mic night,” field trips, or new participant/student orientation?*)
    - ii. Depending on the activity you plan, what do you actually do? (Probe: *Did you lead the outreach, the facilitation, the logistics?*)
    - iii. Does the staff help you? (Probe: *How do they help you? What are ways that they can help you more?*)
    - iv. What activities would you like to plan in your program (Probe: *Type of activities? What support do you need to plan these activities?*)
  - b. Do you get to lead any activities?
    - i. If so, what activities? (Probe: *Do you lead games, icebreakers, workshops, groups, events like “open mic night,” field trips, or new participant/student orientation?*)

- ii. Depending on the activity you lead, what do you actually do? (Probe: *For example, if you lead workshops, which parts: the planning, the outreach, the facilitation?*)
  - iii. Does the staff help you? (Probe: *How do they help you? What are ways that they can help you more?*)
  - iv. Are there activities you would like to lead? (Probe: *Type of activities? What support do you need to plan these activities? How would they fit into the program?*)
- c. Do you get to help make decisions or rules for the program?
- i. If so, what decisions or rules? (Probe: *Do you set “agreements or ground rules”; do you give input to the “vision and mission” of your organization; are you involved in setting program rules or consequences if the rules are broken; are you involved in planning budgets or any part of hiring staff?*)
  - ii. What rules or decisions would you like to be involved in (*see probe above*)?
  - iii. How might you or other youth in your program participate in decision-making? (Probe: *As a “peer leader” or “junior staff”; in a youth advisory group; in meetings with the staff?*)
- d. Do you get to do things to help people in the neighborhood/community (**can insert name**) where your program is located?
- i. If so, how do you help your neighborhood/community? (Probe: *For example, initiate and participate in community clean up; solicit donations for a neighborhood bake sale; participate in a community mapping project?*)
  - ii. Are there community projects or events you would like to be involved in (*see probe above*)?
- e. Do you give any feedback or get to evaluate the program, or parts of the program?
- i. If so, how do you give feedback? (Probe: *feedback form, focus group, one on one?*)
  - ii. How could your program better get youth feedback? (Probe: *conversations with peer leaders, youth leadership group/committee, focus group in middle of program session, check-ins at end of each day or week*)
  - iii. How is your feedback used? Are there ways your feedback can be better used? (Probe: *Do you see any impact on programming?*)

4. **YOUTH CHOICE/AUTONOMY** (*definition: individual choice and self-determination*):

- a. Do you get to choose how you spend any of your time in the program?
  - i. What are examples of times when you get to choose how you spend your time?
  - ii. How much time during a typical program do you get to choose how you spend your time?
  - iii. What kinds of activities do you do? (In what parts of the program can staff give you more freedom to make choices that interest you? (Probe: *When during the*

*program day? What parts of the program? What activities would you do if you could choose?)*

- iv. How can staff better involve you in picking activities that include your ideas? (Probe: *How can they support you to give input? When should they ask for input or feedback? Should it be a select group of youth, or the whole group? What methods – surveys, voting, individual conversations?*)
  
- b. Do you get to choose which other youth you spend your time with here?
  - i. How often do you get to choose? (Probe: *do you get to choose teams for games? your study partners?*)
  - ii. How can staff give you more freedom to choose which youth you spend your time with here? (Probe: *When during the program day? How could this impact the program – both positively and negatively?*)
  
- c. **For older youth:** If you were a staff person or director of the program, how could you allow more youth leadership and choice, and still meet the needs of all the youth and ensure that program goals are met?

## CLOSING

- 5. Is there anything else you would like to mention before we close?

Thanks!!!