



Overview

Justice for Families (J4F) developed the guide, [“Focus on Youth and Families: A Guide for Conducting Focus Groups with Youth and Families Impacted by the Juvenile Justice System”](#), to assist in planning and executing family and youth focus groups. The guide was informed by youth and families that have been involved in the juvenile justice system and have experience in facilitating focus groups of their peers. The three goals of the guide are to:

1. Provide a roadmap for jurisdictions to use in conducting effective and informative focus groups with youth and families;
2. Ensure that focus groups are driven by people and organizations rooted in the communities most impacted by the juvenile justice system; and
3. Encourage jurisdictions to approach the focus groups as a means to gather systemic information and build partnerships with youth and families who can inform juvenile justice decision-making and systemic reform efforts on an ongoing basis.

The unique perspective of youth and their families are often under-utilized in juvenile justice reform efforts. As your deep end work unfolds, you will find the insights and knowledge of youth and families to be an invaluable resource, both at the individual case level and at the system/community level. The information collected during your focus groups will provide critical data that will inform your system assessment and the subsequent recommendations. This tip sheet seeks to provide clarification on anticipated questions as you refer to the Guide to plan and execute the focus groups.

Anticipated Questions

Does the community-based partner organization have to meet every characteristic listed in the chart on Page 9 of the Guide?

No, the organization that facilitates the focus groups does not need to meet every characteristic in the chart. The purpose of the chart is to provide key elements of the ideal partner, and should be used to measure current community-based partners and to determine if relationships with new organizations should be forged. While an organization may not meet all of the listed characteristics, it is critical to identify one where families and youth are at the center of their work and that have demonstrated a capacity to engage with impacted communities in meaningful ways.

What is the role of the Deep End Site Coordinator in this effort?

The role of the JDAI/Deep End Site Coordinator will vary by site but includes the following activities:

- Assist with the development of the budget and scope of work;
- Collaborate with the Deep End Team Leader and other key stakeholders to tailor the set of focus group questions;
- Serve as the primary system contact for the partner organization(s) or provide support to the staff person assigned to fill this;
- Participate in the discussions of the focus groups' findings and recommendations and;
- Develop strategies for sustaining long term relations with the selected community-based organization(s).

When "coordinator" is referenced in the Guide, who is this referring to?

The "coordinator" is meant to signal the individual from the partner organization(s) that will play the lead role in managing the focus group work and the primary contact person for the system partners. It does not refer to the JDAI/Deep End Coordinator.

Can agency and/or system staff be present in the room when focus groups are being conducted?

We recommend that agency and system personnel are not present during the focus groups. It has been our experience that having them in the room can prohibit or limit the information families and youth are comfortable sharing.

Should sites aim to have more than one focus group for each youth and families?

For the purpose of your system assessment, we recommend that sites conduct at least two focus groups, one with family members and one with youth. As you move forward in deep end reform work, sites should continue to facilitate focus groups based on the different geographic locations that referrals into the system are coming from to understand the culture, resources, assets, and any barriers that may be unique to various communities. Given this particular guidance, there is no mandatory minimum.

How do you protect confidentiality in the face of mandatory reporting?

As always, mandated reporters are required by law to make an immediate report when they suspect or know of abusive or neglectful situations. Participants should be made aware of the legal requirements of mandated reporting at the start of the session during the *Welcome and Introductions* of the facilitator's script found in the Guide on page 21. Any information that is shared that does not fall under reporting requirements, must remain confidential.

Are focus group facilitators required to tape record the focus groups?

No, this is not a requirement, though it is recommended as it makes it easier to capture accurate and detailed information. If you use recordings, they should be transcribed as quickly as possible, without identifying information, after which the tapes should be destroyed. As mentioned in the Guide, some participants may be uncomfortable with the use of a tape recorder. If there are concerns that the use of a tape recorder could inhibit the conversation, please use your best judgement.