

Guided Pathways

Pathways Team Focus Group Discussion Guide



Guided Pathways Team Members: **SAMPLE** Focus Group Discussion Guide

What follows is a sample focus group discussion guide that can be used to collect information from pathways team members about their experiences developing guided pathways at your college.

For supporting focus group materials such as recruitment tips, invitation e-mail templates, consent forms, profile sheets, and a comprehensive planning guide that outlines focus group staff roles and order of operations, visit <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>.

Outcomes for the Pathways Team Members Focus Group Discussion:

1. *To understand how the four major “essential practices” of the guided pathways model have been integrated at the college.*

The Focus Group Session

A. Preparation

As participants enter, the coordinator should

- a. Ask participants to sign in
- b. Ask participants to sign consent form (if applicable)
- c. Ask participants to fill out profile sheet/response sheet
- d. Provide stipends (if applicable)

B. Overview of Focus Group Discussion

As focus discussion begins, the facilitator should

- a. Introduce focus group staff
- b. Explain purpose of focus group
- c. Confirm that participants have signed the consent forms (if applicable) and reiterate that participants can stop participating at any point
- d. Describe facilitator’s role:
 - To ask questions and keep the group on track
 - Explain that discussion will move fairly quickly, even though people might have more to say about a particular topic

- e. Describe participants' role:
 - To share experiences and opinions, both positive and negative
 - Explain that there are no right or wrong answers
 - Explain that everyone should participate in discussion

- f. Explain logistics of discussion:
 - 90 minutes maximum
 - Arrangements for water and restroom break
 - Cell phones turned off

- g. Explain ground rules:
 - One person speaks at a time; no side conversations
 - No one person dominates; everyone will have a chance to be heard
 - There are no right or wrong answers; the discussion is about participants' experiences.

- h. Introduce notetaker and if applicable, audio/video operators. Explain purpose of audiotaping/video recording/notetaking:
 - For the purposes of highlighting “ the pathways team member voice” at this college
 - Explain that no names will be used in reporting
 - Give thanks from the college

- i. Take questions from participants

C. Focus Group Discussion

Facilitator Tips:

- a. Remind participants of the value of differing points of view:
 - Does anyone see it differently?
 - Are there any other points of view?

- b. Probes (questions to elicit more detailed responses):
 - Would you explain further? Tell me more about that.
 - Can you give me an example of what you mean?
 - Would you say more?
 - Is there anything else?
 - Please describe what you mean.
 - Does someone have a similar/different experience?

[Provided below is a bank of example outcomes and questions which can be used to form your discussion guide.]

Background of, and general information about, participants:

1. Participant introductions, including: a) name, b) how long you've worked at the college, c) area of responsibility.

Outcome 1: To understand how the four major "essential practices" of the guided pathways model have been integrated at the college.

Leadership for Change

1. How did this college build leadership throughout your organization to implement guided pathways?
 - Who was involved?
 - What steps did you take?
2. What are the most compelling elements in making the case for pathways reform at this college?
3. How do you see the work of preparing for and implementing guided pathways integrating with other student success initiatives you have in place?
 - Is guided pathways a separate initiative?
 - Does it bring other initiatives together? Explain your answer.
4. What have been important steps in creating an institutional culture at this college to support this magnitude of transformational change?
5. How have you allocated and reallocated human and fiscal resources so that guided pathways can be implemented and sustained?
6. What is this college explicitly doing to ensure equity in outcomes for all students as it implements guided pathways at scale?
7. What have been the greatest challenges in leadership as part of this work?
8. What are one or two examples of effective strategies your college has used to promote faculty and staff engagement in pathways design and implementation?
9. To create the time and space we know is needed to support guided pathways implementation, are there other initiatives or programs the college has discontinued? What has the college stopped doing?
10. What strategies have you used for ongoing communication and dissemination of key messages related to pathways design and implementation at scale?

11. What types of professional development are needed to support faculty and staff as the day-to-day roles evolve and shift?
12. What steps have you and are you currently taking to build and strengthen partnerships with K-12, universities, and area employers—so that student pathways connect across educational sectors and to jobs/careers?
13. What steps have you taken to build and enhance the technology infrastructure needed to support the guided pathways work?
14. Have you asked your board for specific policy support or initiated any policy changes within the institution to support the guided pathways work?
 - If yes, what types of policies did you need to promote and support the work?

Clarify the Paths

1. How did you set up your teams for the critical process of mapping programs to create clear and coherent pathways for students?
2. When you created your program maps, what were some surprises that you encountered?
3. What was the process for determining the progress milestones in the maps?
4. How have you worked with university partners to ensure that students can transfer with junior standing in their chosen major?
5. How have you used this college's program maps to work with high schools?
6. How has this college used program maps to work with regional employers on alignment with jobs and careers?
7. How did this college determine what type of math to include in each program of study?
8. In what key ways has this college integrated redesigned developmental education (academic skill building in English and math) into your pathways?

Help Students Get on a Path

1. What were the most important changes needed as part of the college intake process for a guided pathways model?
2. How does this college connect new students to programs of study? Does this process differ for students who need support to build academic skills?

3. What has this college done to assess students and determine what supports they may need if they are not ready for college-level work? *[For example: Multiple measures, non-cognitive assessments, etc.]*
4. What requirements (if any) have been established for students in their first semester? First year? What are the desired outcomes? *[For example: Declare major, complete full-program plan, complete college-level math and English, etc.]*
5. How is this college encouraging and supporting career exploration?
6. To ensure students are passing the gateway courses, what integrated supports has this college put in place?
7. What were the greatest challenges you witnessed in the work to redesign intake processes in the guided pathways implementation process?
8. How should institutions meaningfully engage student services practitioners in the change process?
9. In what ways do student services practitioners' roles need to change in order to carry out the work of guided pathways?
 - What professional development support is needed in student services for professionals to adopt and carry out their new roles?
10. How has the experience of a student entering at your college in this academic year changed most significantly from that of a student who entered three years ago?

Keep Students on the Path

1. Has the advising structure changed as part of the pathways work at this college? If yes, in what ways?
2. If a student needs help, what supports does this college have in place to identify these needs?
 - Once the need is identified, how do students get the support they need?
 - Are academic supports embedded within courses in the college's pathways?
3. If students falls off their path at this college, what structures or processes are in place to get them back on path successfully?
 - How do you know when they are back on path?
4. Do students have a tool they can use to track their own progress on their path?
 - How do they find out about this tracking method?
 - When do they find out about it?
 - Is this college tracking how frequently this tool is being used?

Ensure students are learning

1. To what extent have faculty members integrated active and applied learning experiences into pathways at this college? *[For example: Apprenticeships, group projects, field work, clinical placements, service learning, etc.]*
2. How has assessment of learning changed under the guided pathways model at this college?
3. How is this college engaging faculty to participate in learning outcome assessments that are pathways-focused and authentic?
4. Does this college have ways to help students document and monitor their learning? *[For example: Electronic portfolios, etc.]*
5. How has this college integrated feedback from employers to improve outcomes for graduates?
6. How is this college equipping faculty—providing professional development—to ensure they can provide engaging learning strategies that include project based, collaborative, and applied learning experiences?
7. Are faculty working together any differently to support improvement in teaching practices within pathways?
 - If yes, in what ways?
8. How is this college bringing part-time faculty into this work so they build the needed skills to improve student learning?

Summary and Close

1. In what ways is this college working differently? Please provide examples of changes in culture, policy, structure, or practice.
2. For colleges that are new to pathways reform, what advice would you give?

Facilitator asks participants if they have any final questions or comments. Facilitator thanks them for their participation once more.