

# Tribal College

## Student Focus Group Discussion Guide



# Tribal College Student: **SAMPLE** Focus Group Discussion Guide

*What follows is a sample focus group discussion guide that can be used to collect information from tribal college students.*

*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 Tribal College Students Focus Group Discussion:**

- 1. To understand what Native American students expect from higher education.*
- 2. To understand the importance of various college services in helping Native American students reach their academic goals.*
- 3. To understand the impact of Native American culture on the student experience.*
- 4. To understand how Native American students perceive the college's effectiveness in meeting their needs.*

## **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 "student services staff voices" 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 introduction, including: a) name, b) major, c) enrollment status, and d) other colleges you've attended.
2. What is your educational goal? Degree? Certificate? Transfer? Upgrade skills for a promotion? Learn new skills to prepare for career change? Other?
3. If earning a degree or certificate is not your goal, why not?

### ***Outcome 1: To understand what Native American students expect from higher education.***

1. When did you decide to go to college? While in high school? After high school?
  - Did you work for a while before deciding to return to school?
2. Why did you decide to go to this college?
  - Was it important to you to go to a tribal college? Why?
  - Has anyone in your family attended this college? If so, who was it?
  - What about friends? Did they or do they attend this college?
3. Before you came to this college, what did you expect college to be like?
  - Where did those expectations come from? High school counselors and teachers? Employer? Friends? Family? Information you read? Other?
  - How did your actual experience differ from your expectation?
4. Think back to the first time you came to this campus. You're sitting in the parking lot or getting off the bus, or walking to the college and you are preparing to walk into the building to register for your classes. What's going through your mind? What are you worried about? What are you excited about?
  - What did you think you would learn about Native American experiences, culture, and people?

### ***Outcome 2: To understand the importance of various college services in helping Native American students reach their academic goals.***

#### Admissions

1. Think about the first time you walked into a college building to get information, apply for admissions, register for classes (in person or online), or for any other reason. How would you summarize what the process of getting started at this college was like for you? (Rate it on a scale in which 1 is really easy and 5 is really difficult.)
  - What made it easy? What made it difficult?
  - Describe your best experience as you went through the steps needed to start college. Describe your worst experience.
  - What did you see?
  - Whom did you see?
  - Were you greeted? By whom?

- How did you feel?
  - Did anyone ask you about your tribal affiliation?
2. How did you learn what steps to take to apply for admission, enroll, register, and sign up for classes? Online? On campus? From college staff? What offices or programs? From friends?
  3. During the process of registering for classes, did you ever consider walking out the door and not attending this college? If so, why? What made you stay?
  4. As you think back to your early experiences at this college, is there anything you wish you had known before you came to campus to enroll and register?

### Advising and Planning

1. When you first started at the college, did someone (advisor or individual you initially met with) ask you about your academic goals—such as the benefit of having a goal, how long it would take for you to reach your goal?
  - Did someone discuss job or career opportunities based on your goal and career interests?
2. Before you signed up for classes at this college, did anyone talk to you about your commitments and life outside of school such as the number of hours you spend in a week working, caring for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse), etc.?
  - If so, did that conversation involve planning how you would balance those commitments with your college work?
    - Did it affect your thinking about how many classes you would take?
    - Has someone talked with you about commitments and life outside of school every semester that you've signed up for classes?
    - Did a staff member at this college ever recommend that you take more or fewer courses than you originally planned to take?
    - For part-time students, did a staff member ever suggest that you try to go full-time?
3. Did anyone talk with you about making a plan that lays out specifically what classes you would have to take each semester to reach your goals? Did they talk to about how you would track your progress on this plan?

### Finances and Financial Aid

1. Do you work? If so, what do you do? How many hours do you work each week?
2. Did you meet with a financial advisor when you first arrived on campus? Why or why not? Were you required to do so?
3. Did you fill out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form prior to first registering for courses at this college?
  - If so, when?
  - How did you find out about the form?
  - Did someone encourage you to fill out the form? Did someone help you fill out the form?

4. On a scale of one to five with one being the easiest and five being the most difficult, how would you rate the ease or difficulty of going through the financial aid process?
5. If you did not fill out the FAFSA, why didn't you?
  - How do you pay for college? Your own income or savings? Money from parents or other family members? Loans? Scholarships? Other?
6. Think about the money you're bringing in—from your job, from scholarships, grants, loans, other sources—and think about your current expenses, both school expenses and living expenses. List your current expenses for school and current expenses outside of school (things like mortgage or rent, child care, food, clothing, etc.).
  - Are you bringing in what you need for living expenses? For school expenses?
  - What else do you need money for right now?
7. Do you and the people living with you bring in enough money to buy groceries for everyone that lives in your house each month?
  - If not, what do you do?
  - Do you worry about running out of food? Not having money to buy food? If yes, do you let someone know at the college? If no, why not?
8. How far do you live from this college? What types of transportation do you use to get to the college? Do you drive yourself? Get a ride from someone else? Take public transportation? Walk?
  - Do you ever think about dropping out from this college because of transportation issues, if any?
9. Is there anyone you talk with inside or outside the college about managing money or who helps you when you are faced with financial difficulties and decisions? Describe who that person is and how he or she helps you.

### Academic Experiences

1. What kind of expectations do you think teachers have of you at this college?
  - Did these expectations motivate you? As an individual? As a Native American? Do these expectations of you seem any different from expectations for other groups of students?
  - How do your teachers' expectations match your own personal expectations?
2. Think about any class experiences—has there been a time you have come to class without completing readings or assignments? Skipped class? Submitted an assignment late or not at all? If so, why?
3. During your first couple of classes at this college, did your instructors have any activities to help you and other students get to know each other? Please share an example.
4. Do you know your instructors' names? Do they know yours? How easy or difficult is it for you to talk with your instructors?

- When you do talk with an instructor, what leads to that conversation? Do they come to you? Do you go to them?
5. Think about any class experiences you've had so far that have not been so good. What about that experience didn't work for you?
    - What could have improved that experience for you?
  6. Do you know how well you're doing in your classes so far? If so, how do you know? Did your instructor give you that information or did you go to your instructor to find out?
    - If you don't know how well you are doing so far, are you concerned about it? Do you plan to talk to your instructor?
    - What is different about the instructors that you talk to and those that you don't?
  7. What are the characteristics of an instructor that you would say is the best type of instructor for you?
  8. Overall, do you feel prepared academically to succeed at this college? What reasons make you believe you are or are not academically prepared to succeed at this college?

#### Support Services

1. Has anyone given you information about services available to help you with your coursework if you need that help? Tutoring? Study groups? Other?
  - If so, who gave you this information? Have you used any of these services yet? Why or why not?
  - If you need additional help, how likely is it that you will use one or more of these services? Why or why not?
2. Does your college have a computer lab that is available to you? If so, is this type of support important to you?
  - What's your main reason for using the computer lab? Access the Internet? Write papers? Other?
  - Or, do you have a computer and Internet access at home that you prefer to use? If you don't have a computer and Internet access at home, then how does that impact your academic progress?

#### ***Outcome 3: To understand the impact of Native American culture on the student experience.***

1. In what ways, if any, do you think your race, ethnicity, or cultural background is important in influencing/defining your experiences in school?
2. What Native American cultural practices have you experienced at this college—such as learning/speaking a Native American language, developing a Native American identity and values, storytelling, connecting with the elders, etc.
  - What types of Native American cultural practices would you like to experience at the college? Why are these important to you?

3. Overall, how do you feel the college nurtures your experiences regarding the mind, body, and spirit—such as integrating ceremonies and traditions into college activities and classroom instruction?
  - Do you feel like these experiences have strengthened your connection to your tribal community, if you are Native American? Can you please give me an example?
4. How has attending this college impacted the way you understand, interact, and communicate with your tribal community, if you are Native American? What about communicating with people from other cultures?
5. What do you believe are the one or two most important things the college could do to improve the experience for Native Americans?

***Outcome 4: To understand how Native American students perceive the college's effectiveness in meeting their needs.***

1. In your opinion, what are this college's strengths?
  - What is this college doing well that is helping you feel comfortable and able to stay on track?
2. What aspects of college cause you the most worry, frustration, or stress? Have you done anything to deal with that? If so, what? What has been the result?
3. Is college different from what you expected it to be? If so, in what ways?

***Summary & Close***

1. What's the single most important factor that is keeping you moving toward success at this college?
2. Have you ever considered not continuing on with your education here at this college? If so, what was the reason? What would cause you leave?
3. How confident are you that you can stay and complete your academic goals? One being not very, five being extremely confident. Explain your answer.
4. If you were giving advice to a friend or sibling who was planning to attend this college about what the student could do to be successful here, what advice would you give?

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