



MISSION CRITICAL

The Role of
Community Colleges
in Meeting Students'
Basic Needs



2022
NATIONAL
REPORT

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a discussion guide that can be used to facilitate conversations with students about their experiences with food and housing insecurity.

To access the full CCCSE Focus Group Toolkit, visit <https://cccse.org/resources/focus-groups>. Featured on this page is the Focus Group Manual, which provides comprehensive guidance around planning and conducting focus groups with students, faculty, and staff. This manual contains several appendix resources, such as templates for invitation emails and consent forms as well as sample intake survey questions and basic focus group opening questions. In addition, the Toolkit includes a variety of discussion guides (including this one) devoted to a diverse array of topics important to community college student engagement and success.

STUDENT DISCUSSION GUIDE

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. Let's talk about why you decided to attend this college.
 - a. Did anyone urge you to go to college? Parents? Friends? High school teachers or counselors?
 - b. How much was cost a factor in choosing this college?
 - c. Thinking about your future, what are your personal and professional goals?
 - d. Have you been going to college continuously since you started or have you stopped out at times? If you've stopped out, why? What brought you back to college?

FOOD

2. Please describe your access to food. How are you finding the food you need every day? Where do you go? Do you have a food pantry (either on campus or in the local community)?
3. In the last 30 days, have you been in a situation where the food you bought didn't last, and you didn't have money to buy more? If so, please talk about when that happened.
4. In the last 30 days, have you been in a situation where you did not have enough money for food, so you had to
 - a. cut the size of your meal or save a portion of the meal, so you could eat again at another time;
 - b. skip a meal;
 - c. or eat less than you wanted to, and you still felt hungry?

5. In the last 30 days, have you been hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food? If so, how often did this happen?
6. How do you distinguish between skipping meals and eating less?
7. What does a balanced meal mean to you? Do you have access to and/or money to buy food to eat a balanced meal as you described?
8. Who does the grocery shopping in your current living situation? [If it is someone else who does the grocery shopping] How often does this person go grocery shopping? [If it is the student who does the grocery shopping] When do you typically go grocery shopping?
9. In the last 30 days, has there been a time when you skipped a meal because you didn't have time go grocery shopping? If so, describe when this has occurred.
10. In the last 30 days, has there been a time when you skipped a meal because you didn't have time to eat? If so, describe when this has occurred.
11. Do you have any children living with you? If so, do you feel that you are able to provide sufficient meals for them? Please explain.
12. In the last 30 days, has your college helped you to get food when you could not afford to purchase it (food pantry, swipe/free meal program, SNAP enrollment, etc.)?

HOUSING

13. What is your current housing situation?
14. Tell me the story of your housing for the last 12 months.
 - a. Have you stayed in temporary housing (such as a shelter, hotel, or motel) because you had no other place to stay? If so, describe that experience.
 - b. Have you slept in an outdoor location or a space not meant for human habitation (such as a car or vehicle) because you had no other place to live? If so, describe that experience.
 - c. Have you temporarily stayed with a relative or friend or couch surfed because you had no other place to stay? If so, describe that experience.
15. In the last 12 months, have you been unable to pay your rent or mortgage in full? If so, describe when this has happened.
16. Has your college assisted you with paying rent/mortgage for your current residence? If so, describe how your college helped you.

17. In the last 12 months, has your college helped you obtain affordable housing? If so, describe how your college helped you.
18. Have you ever been unable to pay your utility bill(s) in full? If so, what did you do?
 - a. How do you define utilities?
19. Has your college ever helped you pay your utility bill(s)?
20. What access do you have to technology, such as Wi-Fi, cellular network, etc.?
21. Do you own a portable technology device (including phone, tablet, and/or laptop)? [If the participant previously responded that they are unhoused, ask how they charge the device.]
22. Describe any accessibility issues you have faced related to the internet when you need it for your coursework.
23. If someone had a similar living situation as you, what advice would you give them?

SUPPORT

24. What strategies are you using right now (to help with your food or housing needs)?
 - a. When you think about using a food pantry on campus, what feelings come to mind?
 - b. Who on campus, if anyone, have you spoken to about your challenges with food and/or housing? Who have you directly asked for help?
 - c. At this college, are there particular programs or organizations that have helped you be more successful in college (financial assistance, academic advising, food and housing security services)? If so, what have your experiences with these programs/organizations been?
 - d. What does “emergency financial aid” mean to you? Has your college communicated about this aid and how to access it? If so, what has your college shared?
25. Have you sought financial or housing services at your college and not received them? If so, what kind? What obstacles have you run into trying to seek this support?
26. At this time, what causes you the most worry or stress about college? How do you relieve your stress?
27. Is there a specific person or group of people you turn to when you need support with food, housing, etc.? If so, tell me about that person, group, or organization. How did you connect with that person, group, or organization?
28. If you have children or other dependents, describe any difficulties you have experienced related to completing homework and other assignments due to a lack of adequate care for your children or other dependents.

COLLEGE ADVICE

29. What advice would you give the college about one or two things the college could do to help students in your situation succeed?
30. What is the single most important factor that keeps you coming back to this college?
31. How confident are you that you will stay at this college and complete your academic goals? 1 being not very confident, 5 being extremely confident. Explain your answer.