

LOGISTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR INDUSTRY FOCUS GROUPS

1. Only allow industry people at the table to discuss the focus group questions. Educators should be invited to attend as observers only. However, it's a good idea to have them introduce themselves at the beginning of the focus group.
2. Allow 5-10 minutes at the end of the focus group for the educators to ask any questions they may want to add to the session. During introductions, let the group know that this will occur.
3. The most successful time for focus groups in my experience has been 7:30 AM to 9:30 AM with a continental breakfast, and the focus group actually starting at 7:45 AM. This allows 15 minutes for gathering food and finding seats, and for late-comers to arrive.
4. Recruiting needs to begin at least 30 days prior to the date of the focus group, with emails and phone calls, and maybe a letter if that works for your businesses.
5. When you're doing the recruiting, it's good to use an introductory letter/email/phone call, an initial confirmation with the date, time and location, and a final confirmation email.
6. The final confirmation email should contain the date, time, location, map/driving directions and parking information. The agenda and the Technical Knowledge and Skills Survey should be attached or enclosed. Ask the participants to complete the survey prior to arriving at the focus group.
7. A good note-taker needs to be identified to take notes. He/she can take the notes directly into a laptop, or take notes by hand and transcribe them later into a computer. It's not a good idea to have the facilitator lead the group and take the notes. Multiple note-takers can work, if one person is designated with primary responsibility for integrating all the notes. The industry folks can get to talking pretty fast, so 2 sets of notes is a pretty good idea.
8. The facilitator needs to make sure the note-takers can hear. Industry folks need to be asked to speak loudly enough for the whole room to hear. Sometimes they forget about the observers, and just talk loudly enough for one another.
9. The best room set-up is either a board-room style, or a U-Shape.
10. It's important to end on time. The wrap-up should occur a few minutes before 9:30. If all the topics have not been covered, ask the group if it's OK to email or call them to get additional input. It's actually a good idea to do this even if the agenda has been completed, in case questions arise.

11. The facilitator really needs to be good at driving the group to keep moving. If you think this will be a problem, you can choose to run the focus group from 7:30 to 10:00.

12. Supplies for the focus group:

Sign-In Sheet.

Pre-printed name tags or name tents.

Information packet on the college (optional good PR opportunity).

Extra copies of the Technical Knowledge and Skills Survey (for those who forget to bring theirs along).

Flip charts (not white board, because multiple charting may be required at the discretion of the facilitator).

Flip chart pens.