

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR SCHOOL'S FOCUS GROUP PROCESS

1. Hand Select A Moderator

This is the most important choice you will make. When considering candidates, look first to those who have displayed leadership skills, but avoid selecting someone in a position of authority over other focus group members (i.e. principal, pastor, teacher.)

A good moderator is someone who can:

- Conduct productive meetings
- Keep discussions focused and moving with an eye on the clock
- Ensure that all participants are heard
- Effectively manage the potentially overpowering person or position

Places to look for your moderator:

- School Board
- Home and School Association
- Parishioner
- Parish Ministries/Committees (i.e. Small Christian Communities)
- Parents
- Parish Trustees
- Community leaders in the parish

Your moderator should use the agenda and questions supplied in this package to guide the focus group discussion.

Regional training sessions have been scheduled for moderators to provide them with some direction and background in conducting the school focus groups. The schedule of training sessions is as follows:

- Tues., January 10th** at St. Thomas Seminary, Bloomfield
 - Thurs., January 12th** at SS. Peter & Paul School, Waterbury
 - Wed., January 18th** at St. Stephen School, Hamden
- Times of all training sessions: **6:30 – 7:30 p.m.**
Snow Date: January 19th at St. Thomas Seminary

2. Hand Select A Recorder for Your Focus Group

This should be a detail oriented person who can take precise notes (via handwriting or with a laptop), work as a team with the moderator, and concentrate on, then synthesize the comments made. This person will not participate in the actual focus group discussion. A tape recorder should be considered only as a back-up to the Recorder.

3. Hand Select Your Focus Group Participants

When considering participants, limit your number to 8-12 per focus group and try to include people representative of different constituencies throughout the school community. (*See comment below.) Invite those who will appreciate the seriousness of the mission and who will honor it with a strong commitment of their own. Each participant should be personally invited via a letter from the Pastor/Principal (sample included), then receive a follow-up call of confirmation within one week. In short, each participant should be engaged personally.

People to consider as focus group participants:

***Ideally, your group should include representatives of all of these groups. Avoid over-representation of any one single constituency.**

Parents, Alumni, Past Parents, Grandparents, Parishioners (of home and feeder parishes), Parish Council/Parish Committees, Faculty (with at least three years of experience), Staff, School Board, Development Team, Home and School Association.

All focus group participants should receive copies of Mr. Hoyt's Position Paper, the Vision Statement, and the document published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (*Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*) prior to the focus group meetings so they can familiarize themselves with the discussion points to be addressed. (Work sheets on each topic have also been provided should the participant wish to make notes beforehand to bring along to the focus group.)

4. Determine Your Location

When choosing a location, consider comfort, ease of conversation where participants can view each other (circle or horseshoe), accessibility, ease of location, and parking. A home environment might be the best setting for your focus group, or your parish meeting hall might be preferable. What is most important is that people are comfortable and that the room facilitates the discussion.

5. Other Considerations

- ✓ Light refreshments should be provided.
- ✓ You may want to consider offering babysitting services.
- ✓ **The length of the focus group discussion should not exceed two hours. Since there are four core values to be discussed, we recommend having two focus groups; one to discuss two of the core values and one to discuss the remaining two. (Trying to discuss all four in one focus group is unrealistic and would not be productive.) Remember, each focus group should have 8-12 participants and meet for no more than two hours.**
- ✓ Miscellaneous supplies which may be necessary:
 - Flip Chart
 - Pads/Pencils
 - Markers
 - Masking Tape
 - Name Tags
 - Tape Recorder

6. Send Thank You Letters to All Focus Group Participants

At the conclusion of the focus group process, each participant should receive a thank you letter from the Pastor/Principal (sample enclosed).

7. What To Do With Your Focus Group Results

Each school is responsible for completing a response form (enclosed in this packet), identifying the belief statements and strategies/action steps supporting each of the four core values. The form, while included in your packet, will be e-mailed to each Principal, and also will be made available on the OCS website so you can download, complete, then e-mail it back to the Office of Catholic Schools at this address: aclubb@adh-ocs.org. These responses will be analyzed and synthesized with those of other schools to create the framework for the Educational Symposium 2007.