

# Creative Ways to Solicit Youth Input

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*A Hands-On Guide for Youth Practitioners*





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## Why Creative Ways?

*To understand how our programs are doing, improve the quality of those programs and report to funders and other stakeholders, we collect information from a variety of sources: staff, parents, and the youth themselves.*

We often ask youth for input or feedback through surveys. Other common methods to get information on how our programs are doing include observations (such as teacher observations in a classroom) or assessments (such as standardized tests).

These methods are useful, but they do have drawbacks:

### Surveys

- Students are over-surveyed.
- They may mark what they think you want to hear.
- There is no chance to vary from the pre-set questions.

### Observations

- The program may need a trained assessor.
- These don't provide feedback directly from youth.

### Assessments and Tests

- Assessments and tests tell us good information about some things, but limited information about a wide range of other important information.
- The ability to do well on a test is not necessarily the goal of your program or the only goal.

*This manual provides ideas for other, creative ways to get input from youth.*

**Part One** outlines a process you can use to plan your evaluation questions: what do you want to know, why you want to know it, and who is going to be able to provide that data to you (youth themselves, their parents, or someone else). Next, we present some key ideas to consider when implementing your evaluation, analyzing the results and reporting them.

**Part Two** lists detailed instructions for several activities you can use with youth to solicit their feedback. Each activity includes a list of materials you will need, the best age groups and group size for the activity, how long it will take, and any special setting or equipment you will need.

The manual concludes with a listing of additional resources for youth-focused and -led evaluation, for additional activities similar to the ones included here, and for analyzing and reporting your results.

## Planning

*Before you conduct any evaluation, think about what you want to know and how you'll use it.*

As you develop your **plan**, it may be a good idea to review:

- Reporting or funder requirements.
- Goals & objectives stated in grants that fund your program.
- Goals & objectives developed through strategic planning.
- Logic models describing your program.
- Informal goals & objectives held by your program staff, even if not stated elsewhere.

Most programs have at least one or two of these. Gather whatever you have for a **conversation** with your program or evaluation planning team.

Use the following questions to guide your conversation:

1. *What are the 2-3 things we really want to know more about?*
2. *Who else wants to know and how will they use the data? Will this be used to report to funders? For internal monitoring? Or as part of a process for program improvement?*
3. *What do they want to know about? Program quality? Why people come to the program or what they get out of it? What they wanted more or less of in the program? Whether they have mastered certain skills or learned certain content?*
4. *Finally, who is the right person to ask? Youth through self-report? Parents or staff reporting on youth? Or do you want to get this information through an assessment or test?*

Once you know what you want to know, plan your approach:

1. *Are verbal, visual or kinesthetic methods most appropriate for our youth?*
2. *Which activities from this guide would best get the information we want?*
3. *Who should be involved in the analysis of the data?*
4. *How will we use the results? Who should be involved in the analysis of the data? In action planning?*
5. *What are the next steps? What needs to happen this week to get started? This month?*

These planning questions are formatted on the next page as a handout you can print to use during your discussion.

## Soliciting Young People's Input Planning Guide

*In order to plan how you will solicit your youth's input on your specific area of interest, start by answering the questions below. The answers should guide your process.*

### Establishing a focus: What do we want to know and why?

*What are the two or three things that we really want to know more about?*

*Who else wants to know and how will they use the data? Will this be used to report to funders? For internal monitoring? Or as part of a process for program improvement?*

*What do they want to know about? Program quality? Why people come to the program or what they get out of it? What they wanted more or less of in the program? Whether they have mastered certain skills or learned certain content?*

### Methods and Activities

*Who is the right person to ask? Youth through self-report? Parents or staff reporting on youth? Or do you want to get this information through an assessment or test?*

*Continued on next page*

*Assuming we will ask youth, what method(s) is most appropriate for our youth?*

*What activity or activities would best get the information we want?*

### **Using Results**

*Who should be involved in the analysis of the data?*

*In action planning?*

### **Next steps**

*What needs to happen this week to get started? This month?*

## Implementation and Analysis

*Before you implement the activities, map out the time you will need. Pick the dates for the activity and backwards plan your implementation steps.*

Take about two weeks to **develop and implement** your activity. Remember to plan for unusual circumstances that will extend the time you need, such as the vacations of key staff.

Conduct a test run before implementing. This could be with a small group of staff or another group of youth. Notice what works well. Notice what doesn't work well and make changes to improve it.

Many tools can help you with **analysis**. Use either Microsoft Excel or the spreadsheet that is part of Google Docs to enter your quantitative (numeric or close-ended questions) information and do some basic analysis.

If you are collecting qualitative information (answers to open-ended questions), create categories ahead of time to code young people's responses. This will allow you to objectively determine how often certain concepts or themes appear.

When analyzing your information, look for patterns. Who is saying what and what might be affecting their input? Do any particular responses or themes stand out above the rest? Are any expected responses noticeably absent or low? If using a pre-test and a post-test, are they noticeably different from each other?

As you interpret (analyze) your data, be wary of letting your own expectations creep in. A good rule of thumb is: if someone else looked at the original data, would they be able to draw the same conclusions as you?

Once you have determined the patterns presented in the data, **report** results quickly. Your fellow staff, and the youth themselves and their parents, will appreciate knowing what came out of the evaluation activity.

Newer versions of Excel have pre-formatted charts to report quantitative information. For qualitative information, you can use Wordle ([wordle.net](http://wordle.net)) to create a visual display of common words.

Finally, remember to arrange your reporting format to match your purpose and your audience.




# Activities

Activities are divided into verbal (talking), visual (seeing) and kinesthetic (moving) activities.

Each activity in this manual includes information about the best age range for the activity, the best group size, the preparation and materials involved, the length of time the activity takes, and any specific setting or equipment the activity needs.

For each activity, we've also provided what kind of information the activity creates (What it's good for), a detailed description of how to conduct the activity, including suggested variations, and trainer tips and tricks you should review before facilitating the activity.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To get responses to close-ended questions.</li> <li>✓ To gather data over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b>	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set of jars each labeled with the response they represent.</li> <li>• Tokens, beads or other small item.</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b>	Many
<b>Age Levels</b>	This can work well for any age. For younger kids, you may need to read the question aloud, establish this as a routine part of your program, and/or have pictures to indicate the responses.
<b>Time</b>	This activity can take place over a period of time like weeks or months or it can take place in one session or afternoon.
<b>Setting</b>	Best if it's by the exit from the program space so kids participate on their way out the door.
<b>How to conduct the activity</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At the end of each day, give <del>participants</del> respond to a question, or vote for an idea, by dropping their token into the jar that matches their response.</li> </ol> <p>Note: this idea came from a grocery store that would give you a wooden token if you brought your own bags. On the way out, you could drop that token into one of three buckets, each labeled with a local charity. The grocery store would then donate \$5 to that charity for each token. The grocery store patrons were, essentially, "voting" for a donation for these charities.</p>

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**Things to watch for**

- This works particularly well when you only have one question going at a time.
- If the information you are gathering might be considered sensitive, such as certain demographic information, you may want to place the jars where they aren't visible from the main program space, but are still accessible. Or, you may not want to use this method at all.

**NOTE:** The Candy Survey is similar to the Token Survey activity. In Token Surveys, a token is tossed into one of many buckets to indicate the response and can usually work with only one key question. As written, the Token Surveys can gather information over time.

In the Candy Survey, there is one bucket, into which different colored responses are tossed, and can include a few (3-4) questions. As written, the candy survey happens and is tossed right away (so you can eat the candy).






**Example**

If you work at a homeless drop-in shelter and it is hard to gather reliable, anonymous demographic data, you may give everyone a token and have them place it in jars labeled "under 14 years old" "14 or 17 years old" and "18 years old and over" so you can gather simple age information keyed to a significant grant report.

Similarly, you can gather an answer to a specific "question of the week" from ~~drop-in~~ drop-in participants, such as at a recreation center.

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<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To help the group create a creative fun survey that can be eaten.</li> <li>✓ To design a fairly anonymous survey.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop, ideally with the young people themselves, a set of questions (a protocol) as well as response categories for each question. Note: Limit the number of questions on candy surveys to 5-6.</li> <li>• Code the response categories to match the colors of the candies or candy wrappers you will be using. Note: Use individually wrapped candies that can be safely eaten after handling. Example: The red candy could represent "very true" or "learned a lot"; the green candy could represent "somewhat true" or "learned some"; the yellow candy could represent "not at all true" or "learned nothing."</li> <li>• Place an empty bucket or jar next to or below each posted question.</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	<p>Many</p>
<b>Age Levels</b> 	<p>This can work well for any age. For younger kids, you may need to read the question aloud, establish this as a routine part of your program, and/or have pictures to indicate the responses.</p>
<b>Time</b> 	<p>10 minutes: 5 to vote and 5 to tally</p>
<b>Setting</b> 	<p>This can happen anywhere you can post a question and place some buckets.</p> <p>If responding to a presentation or a facilitator, you may want to set this up outside the presentation room so the facilitator isn't present for the survey about themselves.</p>

## How to conduct the activity



1. Have the group write each question in very large print on a sheet of standard 8½ by 11 paper.
2. The question can be posted outside a classroom, workshop room, or wherever the group meets. This allows the respondents to have some privacy when they are responding to the survey. This is particularly important if the survey is about the quality of the training or program or the facilitator's or program leader's approach.
3. Make bowls of individually colored candy available so that participants can easily select from the bowls.
4. Ask the participants to take the survey using their candy. They should answer each question by taking a piece of candy that matches the answer they've chosen and dropping it into the bucket. For example, if "very true" is color-coded red, and the respondent wants to choose that answer, the person should drop a red candy in that bucket.
5. Once everyone has had the chance to complete the survey, count up the different colored candies per question and record the results.

Variation: You can use different colored or shaped stickers or different kinds of whole fruit (that won't become squashed in a bucket) as your response options.

## Things to watch for



- This is mostly an anonymous survey, especially if a lot of kids are doing it all at once and no one is paying attention to the others or kids can hide the color in their hand and drop it in without anyone really seeing it.
- Ask the participants to refrain from eating the candy until after they have taken the survey. Also, make sure they do not eat candy from the buckets that are holding the survey responses.

Notes: The Candy Surveys is similar to the Token Survey activity. This one has one bucket, into which different colored responses are tossed, and can include a few (5-6) questions. As written, the candy survey happens and is tallied right away (so you can eat the candy).

In the Token Surveys, a token is tossed into one of many buckets to indicate the response and can usually work with only one key question. As written, the Token Surveys can gather information over time.

## Example



If you have a series of presentations to a group, you can have them rate each presentation. Using the example above where the colors indicate "learned a lot", "learned some" and "learned nothing"; you could ask how much you learned about the topic or about each of 3-4 specific, clear sub-topics covered in each presentation.







You could then ask a few additional questions to evaluate the presentation itself (red = very true, green = somewhat true, and yellow = not true at all), such as:

- Did the facilitator have fun presenting?
- Was this topic interesting to me?
- Will I use this information in my life/our project/school work (whatever context seems appropriate)?

## Source

Kim Sabo Flores. (2008). *Youth Participatory Evaluation: Strategies for Engaging Young People* (pp. 127). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To get responses to close-ended questions.</li> <li>✓ To gather data over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set of jars each labeled with the response they represent.</li> <li>• Tokens, beads or other small item.</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	<p>Many</p>
<b>Age Levels</b> 	<p>This can work well for any age. For younger kids, you may need to read the question aloud, establish this as a routine part of your program, and/or have pictures to indicate the responses.</p>
<b>Time</b> 	<p>This activity can take place over a period of time such as weeks or months or it can take place in one session or afternoon.</p>
<b>Setting</b> 	<p>Best if it's by the exit from the program space so kids can participate on their way out the door.</p>
<b>How to conduct the activity</b> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At the end of each day, give each child a token and have them respond to a question, or vote for an idea, by dropping their token into the jar that matches their response.</li> </ol> <p>Note: This idea came from a grocery store that would give you a wooden token if you brought your own bags. On the way out, you could drop that token into one of three buckets, each labeled with a local charity. The grocery store would then donate 5¢ to that charity for each token. The grocery store patrons were, essentially, "voting" for a donation for these charities.</p>

## Things to watch for



- This works particularly well when you only have one question going at a time.
- If the information you are gathering might be considered sensitive, such as certain demographic information, you may want to place the jars where they aren't visible from the main program space, but are still accessible. Or, you may not want to use this method at all.

**Note:** The Candy Survey is similar to the Token Survey activity. In the Token Surveys, a token is tossed into one of many buckets to indicate the response and can usually work with only one key question. As written, the Token Surveys can gather information over time.

In the Candy Survey, there is one bucket, into which different colored responses are tossed, and can include a few (5-6) questions. As written, the candy survey happens and is tallied right away (so you can eat the candy).






## Example



If you work at a homeless drop in shelter and it is hard to gather reliable, anonymous demographic data, you may give everyone a token and have them place it in jars labeled "under 16 years old," "16 or 17 years old," and "18 years old and over" so you can gather simple age information keyed to a significant grant report.

Similarly, you can gather an answer to a specific "question of the week" from all of your drop in participants, such as at a recreation center.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To get responses from youth when they need to categorize or choose from among several options or kinds of options.</li> <li>✓ Can be used as a post-test or a matched pre- and post-test.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare a set of cards with images in advance</li> <li>• Determine the sorting categories in advance</li> </ul> <p>Additional Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital camera (optional)</li> <li>• Paper and glue (optional)</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	<p>Many</p>
<b>Age Levels</b> 	<p>Works well for younger and middle school aged youth</p>
<b>Time</b> 	<p>5-15 minutes depending on discussion afterward</p>
<b>Setting</b> 	<p>Anywhere (windy outdoors not recommended)</p>

## How to conduct the activity



1. Have sets of prepared cards for everyone in the activity. Ask them to sort the cards into 2-3 categories (or rank them).
2. Ask students to share with the group why they sorted the way they did or have them write a short answer about how they might do differently in the future.
3. Use a digital camera to record each student's sort to use for later analysis and reporting. Or, have them glue down their sorts onto paper to save for later.

Variation: You can make this a more active experience by having categories around the room and having the youth sort the cards into those categories by getting up and moving around.

## Things to watch for



- Watch for leading images or categories.
- If using Frequently, Sometimes and Never as sorting or ranking categories, include a description of what you mean (e.g. Frequently is four or more times a week; see example below).

## Example



Ask them to sort pictures of foods they eat "A lot" or "A little". Or, they can sort foods into "Healthy" or "Unhealthy foods".






Ask students to categorize the activities they did in the program into "Like" and "Don't Like".

Ask students to sort activities they do at home into "Frequently, Sometimes and Never".

## Source

Gray, D., Brown, S., & Macanuso, J. (2010, July). *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Getting qualitative data.</li> <li>✓ Getting youth to think about their experiences in preparation for quantitative data collection.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create your questions that will guide the skits.</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	<p>Many</p>
<b>Age Levels</b> 	<p>Depending on your group, this could work with 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> graders and older.</p>
<b>Time</b> 	<p>40 minutes + 5 minutes for each small group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 minutes to introduce activity and for groups to develop skits simultaneously.</li> <li>• 5 minutes for each group to perform and to de-brief.</li> <li>• 10 minutes to close.</li> </ul>
<b>Setting</b> 	<p>A large room with space for small groups to have some space between them and space for the performances.</p>



## How to conduct the activity



1. Divide the group into small groups of around four.
2. Give each group a question (same or different for each group) and ask them to talk and plan how they will respond to it (or give the group a concept and have them plan how to illustrate it). They can write their brainstorm on chart paper or have one of them take notes. Give them 10 minutes to do so. Then, ask them to put together a skit, write a song or a poem illustrating their response. Give them another 15-20 minutes to do this.
3. Call each group one by one to present their Show. After each one, ask the members of the audience to report on what they saw or heard (de-brief). Ask the performers to tell a bit about what they were trying to convey. Record these responses on chart paper.
4. At the end, review the accumulated comments and highlight recurring themes. You could then have individuals reflect on one of the themes and how the program has helped them grow in that area.

*Individual Variation:* Instead of small groups, have individuals journal a response and then turn that "free write" into a poem, song, poster or drawing of their response.

## Things to watch for



- This may be most appropriate for an older group (high school) and for kids who've known each other a while and work together well.
- This will be challenging for shy or quiet kids. Walk around and check on groups and make sure there is a comfortable role for each person.

## Example








Divide students into groups of 4 or 5. Ask them to write and act out a skit that illustrates: Being a good neighbor.

After each group performs, ask the whole group to write up on the board "qualities of a good neighbor" that the skit demonstrated. Once all the groups have had a chance to perform their skits, look at the list and ask for common themes.

*Additional Activity:* You can also then ask students to pick a theme and write about how the program has helped them be a "better neighbor" either in their family, their own neighborhood, or the program itself.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To measure the number of youth with certain attitudes or values.</li> <li>✓ To elicit information about why youth believe what they do.</li> <li>✓ Can be used as a post-test or a matched pre- and post-test.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a set of values statements in advance: 5-6 may be enough, although you might be able to do 10-12 with older youth (high school).</li> <li>• Create a grid to record the number of people at each location for each statement.</li> <li>• Create labels for the four corners.</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	<p>Many</p>
<b>Age Levels</b> 	<p>Appropriate for older youth; this can work with a well-established group of younger (elementary) youth. See also the variation for younger participants below.</p>
<b>Time</b> 	<p>5-15 minutes depending on discussion afterward</p>
<b>Setting</b> 	<p>Anywhere</p>

## How to conduct the activity



1. Set up four corners of the room with labels: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, and Disagree.
2. Read the first prepared statement of values or attitudes. Ask each youth to stand in the corner that reflects whether they Strongly Agree, Agree, etc. with the statement. Record the number of kids in each position.
3. Repeat with each subsequent statement.

Variation: You can ask a few of the kids in each corner to explain why they are standing where they are. Some youth may choose to move to a different corner based on others' responses! Record this as well.

Variation: For younger audiences, you can simplify to Agree and Disagree. You might want to have an adult at each point to say out loud what it represents, especially if students can't yet read.

## Things to watch for



- You want to make sure with ground rules and the way you follow up with youth that they feel safe disagreeing with any of the statements. For example, you may want another adult they know well to facilitate this for your group.

## Example








At the end of a 6 week enrichment program within a comprehensive after school program, you can read students statements such as:

- I had fun at this enrichment.
- I learned something new in this enrichment.
- I have used something I learned here in school.
- I have used something I learned here outside of school.

Record where kids stood and responses to any follow up questions. When all the questions have been asked, ask the group if there is anything else they want to add.



<p><b>What it's good for</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Getting descriptive (qualitative) information from participants.</li> <li>✓ Uncovering unexpected information.</li> <li>✓ Finding differences within an otherwise similar group.</li> <li>✓ Exploring the range of opinions or reactions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Preparation and Materials</b></p> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare in advance the focus group questions (protocol), including prompts to encourage participants to expand or clarify their answer. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with concrete and specific questions. Use the language of the participants in the program ("ambassadors" instead of "peer leaders" for example).</li> <li>• Then, move into more general and abstract questions as you proceed.</li> <li>• Use prompts or examples to encourage additional information. For example, if you are asking about their exposure to new experiences, you might list the field trips the program has been on or a few of the guest speakers that have visited the program.</li> <li>• Be careful to not ask leading questions. For example, "Think about some of the field trips we've taken, like that great day we went to the zoo and the baboon spit at us and you all said it was the best field trip ever, or when we went to the park."</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Outline of the question "path": <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Opening question: Gets everyone talking; asking for factual information, is easy to answer.</li> <li>b. Introductory question: Introduces the topic and gets people thinking.</li> <li>c. Transition Question(s): Moves the group toward the Key Questions.</li> <li>d. Key Questions: 2-5 questions, the heart of the focus group, where most of the time is spent, allow for plenty of conversation on these questions.</li> <li>e. Ending Question(s): Allows for last thoughts and feedback on the process.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

	<p>See also: "Crafting Interview Questions" starting on page 25 for more tips on how to create good questions.</p> <p>Prepare a <b>facilitator (who asks questions)</b> and a <b>notetaker (who writes everything down)</b>: Make sure they are familiar with the questions and the themes you might be expecting. One of these roles may be you, or it may be two other people who you feel are better suited to the task.</p> <p><b>Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pen, paper or computer and a notetaker for writing/typing responses.</li> <li>• Tape recorder for recording responses (serves as a back up to the notetaker).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Group Size</b></p> 	<p>A good focus group will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5-8 participants.</li> <li>• Youth who are somewhat alike.</li> <li>• Youth you have access to (in other words, not "people who don't come to our program").</li> <li>• Youth who are unlikely to defer to others in the group (in other words, you probably don't want to mix teenage girls and boys, or 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders).</li> </ul> <p>For example: Invite 5<sup>th</sup> graders who regularly attended your after school program this past year or teenage boys who come to the rec center but don't participate in the leadership program.</p>
<p><b>Age Levels</b></p> 	<p>You can do this with 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> graders and older.</p> <p>A focus group differs from a group interview in the hope youth will build on each other's responses. So, you want youth who can listen to others in the room and build ideas from what has been said by others. Generally, this will work better if youth have had practice with group process skills or with facilitated discussions in the program already.</p>
<p><b>Time</b></p> 	<p>1 – 1 ½ hours, depending on the age and attention span</p>
<p><b>Setting</b></p> 	<p>A quiet place with seating so participants can see and hear each other</p>

## How to conduct the activity



### Instructions for the facilitator:

1. Gather your group into a comfortable setting with some privacy so participants feel they can speak their opinions freely.
2. Introduce yourself and the notetaker, even if everyone knows you already, and explain your roles: the facilitator will ask the questions and the notetaker will record everything that is said.
3. Explain any guidelines related to confidentiality and anonymity. Make sure you have any permission slips you need from everyone in the group.
4. Then, move into the focus group itself:
  - Ask the young people your prepared questions.
  - Encourage them to build off and expand on each other's responses. The purpose of a focus group is to generate cross-talk and new ideas among participants.
5. When you are done, thank the participants and hand out any small incentive you've planned.

Instructions for the Notetaker: Make sure the tape-recorder is working ahead of time. During the focus group, write down everything that is said to the best of your ability. Plan not to rely on the tape-recording.

## Things to watch for



- Invite a few more participants than you will actually need. Not everyone you've asked will agree or show up.
- If you have the budget, try to do 3 or even 4 focus groups with the same kinds of people until you stop hearing something new.
- Watch out for opening a focus group to people who will defer to others in the group, such as 3<sup>rd</sup> graders with 5<sup>th</sup> graders, newcomers to your program and established leaders or mixed gender groups.
- About 10 questions, with prompts, is about the right number of questions.
- For the shy or young kids, be prepared with additional general, opening questions and/or activities such as drawing or a game to give them time to warm up.
- For more information, we recommend reading *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, the source for this activity. It provides a detailed, easy to follow, and yes, practical, guide to this way of soliciting input.

## Example



For a program with a goal around increasing student's exposure to cultural resources in their community, the questions could start off as more concrete and specific such as: "Where did you take field trips this summer?" or "What was your favorite field trip this semester?"






They can then expand into additional questions like, "What do you remember most about it?" or "What did you like about the field trip?"

You can then encourage the participants to respond to and build off each other with questions such as: "Of the things your friends have said here today, which do you agree with and why?" or "Do any of you feel differently?"

## Source

Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research (4th ed)*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Getting detailed feedback from particular participants.</li> <li>✓ Being able to expand or explore participant's thoughts.</li> <li>✓ Carefully and respectfully done, it can be a way to get information from kids who are doing really well and kids who are struggling in the program.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pen and paper (or computer) for recording responses.</li> <li>• Tape recorder for recording responses.</li> <li>• Prepare the interview questions, including prompts ahead of time.</li> </ul> <p><i>Note:</i> A dozen open-ended questions are too many. Especially for younger or more restless kids, try to keep it to 4 or 5 questions.</p> <p>See also: "Crafting Interview Questions" on page 25 for more tips on how to create good questions.</p>
<b>Group Size</b> 	1 or 2-5 participants
<b>Age Levels</b> 	This can be done with youth of any age. However, you will be able to ask more questions of older children and youth (4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> grade and older).
<b>Time</b> 	30-45 minutes, depending on how many interview questions you have
<b>Setting</b> 	A quiet place with some sound privacy

## How to conduct the activity



1. Thank the young person for meeting with you and explain why you are conducting the interview. If the youth's responses are confidential, explain this. If not, notify her/him.
2. Provide a large format copy of the questions to the youth.
3. As you ask the young person your prepared questions, encourage them to expand on what they say, especially if they give brief or ambiguous answers.
4. Use active listening techniques, including summarizing what you understand the person is saying, to assure you understand their point.
5. If you are doing this in a group, encourage everyone to respond to each question.
6. Try to take verbatim notes of what you asked and what the youth said.

## Things to watch for



- If you are interviewing a few people from your program, make sure you schedule more than you will actually need. Not everyone you've asked will agree or show up.
- One-on-one is good for younger children. Older children may also be able to handle a group interview.
- Plan for questions to take longer than you think, and limit yourself to the number of questions that might fit into the time your youth will remain engaged.

## Example



The questions should be about what they've learned or what they've experienced, but grounded in specific, concrete examples or details, such as: "One of the activities this semester was a trip to the science museum. What do you remember about that day?"

Or, "We talked a lot about reading in our program this summer. One word we talked about was *infer*. Can you tell me what *infer* means? Can you give me examples of times we inferred things in our readings?"



## Crafting Interview & Focus Group Questions

### Be specific

It can be hard to understand what your interviewer wants to know about, especially when they ask very broad, general questions. This can be particularly tough for young kids, who are very concrete thinkers.

Use your knowledge of your program and your understanding of what you want to learn from the interview to craft more specific questions.

Instead of: “What did you learn in this program?”

Try: “Can you tell me three things you learned about being a leader in this program?”

Instead of: “Did you like anything here?”

Try: “If you were telling another kid about this program, what would you tell them are the best things about this program?”

### Give examples

This can be tough, because you don't want to coach kids' answers, but do want to be sure that they are thinking about the right activity or experience when they think of a response.

One way to give interviewees examples without implying that you want a specific answer is to do some context setting for your questions. Before asking kids to talk about their experiences in leadership development, remind them of a few of the different things that they did as part of your program's leadership development curriculum.

Be as factual as you can when setting context. Describe the activity as, “The field trip that we took with Ms. Jamila to see the youth clown troupe” rather than, “That totally awesome field trip that blew your mind and convinced you to sign up for Barnum and Bailey as soon as you turn 18.”






## Have backups




Sometimes, people just don't want to talk to you. It's OK! Having a few backups on hand can make an interview go better:

Additional questions – Don't feel shy about changing the subject if you need to. Talk about sports, what the kid is reading, what gossip is going around school... just get them talking, then turn the conversation back to the topics you are interested in.


Additional modalities – If time permits, prepare a collage activity, a sort, or another version of your interview. If it doesn't, ask the kid to draw you a picture or tell you a story.






<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To encourage youth to reflect on something they have done.</li> <li>✓ As a post-test.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a video clip, usually of the youth themselves, ahead of time. NOTE: This can take a lot of time so be sure to plan well in advance.</li> <li>• Prepare questions (based on your program model, objectives, goals or evaluation questions).</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	<p>As many kids as can see the video screen you are using</p>
<b>Age Levels</b> 	<p>Depending on your group, this will work with 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> graders and older</p>
<b>Time</b> 	<p>30-45 minutes</p>
<b>Setting</b> 	<p>Room where a video can be played</p>

<p><b>How to conduct the activity</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Show a video clip, usually of the participants themselves. You may want to replay it once if the voices are hard to hear or there is a lot to observe.</li> <li>2. Ask the young people your prepared questions.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Things to watch for</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important that youth agree to be videotaped, and agree to share that tape with others.</li> <li>• Youth may want the chance to preview a clip of themselves before sharing it with peers, especially if they are doing something alone.</li> <li>• Staff members should ask youth to report on both what they saw in the video, and what they think about it.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Example</b></p> 	<p>Teaching character values is one of the goals of your program. Show your participants a video of them working together on a project. Remind them of the program's character values such as cooperation, helping each other, giving everyone a chance to speak, etc. Ask them to point out examples of when these values were being acted out in the video.</p> <p>Teaching sports and fitness concepts is one of the goals of your program. Have your participants watch a video of themselves playing a sport together, or of a recent professional sporting event. Ask them to point out each time they see certain skills or experiences demonstrated such as teamwork, passing, dribbling, etc.</p>
<p><b>Source</b></p>	<p>Belinsky, M. (2009, August 1). Forty Interesting Ways to Use Your Pocket Video Camera in the Classroom [presentation]. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.slideshare.net/rmbelinsky/forty-interesting-ways-to-use-your-pocket-video-camera-in-the-classroom">http://www.slideshare.net/rmbelinsky/forty-interesting-ways-to-use-your-pocket-video-camera-in-the-classroom</a>.</p>



<p><b>What it's good for</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Getting information on what kids have learned about their community or what resources they have been exposed to.</li> <li>✓ It can also serve well as a needs assessment at the beginning of the program to check what youth already know about.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Preparation and Materials</b></p> 	<p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare questions in advance that ask participants to fill in specific details on their map. For example, you could ask: "Draw the Youth Center in the middle of the map. Now, draw the streets around the youth center. Now, draw our neighbors: what's next door, around the corner, across the street?"</li> </ul> <p>These questions should relate back to your goals and objectives (formal or informal) as prompted in the Planning Guide.</p> <p><b>Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big chart paper</li> <li>• A large, detailed map of the area of interest or print enlarged sections of a map area and file the pages together</li> <li>• Markers, pens</li> <li>• Stickers, sticky notes</li> <li>• Yarn or string, tape</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Depending on the variation you are using, some of these materials may not be needed.</p>
<p><b>Group Size</b></p> 	<p>Small (around 3-7)</p>
<p><b>Age Levels</b></p> 	<p>This can be done with children and youth of any age</p>

<p><b>Time</b></p> 	<p>30-45 minutes, depending on how detailed they are or you want them to be</p>
<p><b>Setting</b></p> 	<p>A large table or space on the floor where all participants have access to the paper or pre-printed map and the additional materials.</p>
<p><b>How to conduct the activity</b></p> 	<p>Form a circle around your paper or pre-printed map.</p> <p><b>Variation One: Draw Your Own</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Draw the Map: Ask the participants to draw all the places around the area of interest: the school/program center, the city, their neighborhood. Ask them to fill in details as guided by your prepared questions.</li> </ol> <p>You should end up with a picture of the neighborhood, the small town, the activities of the program, or similar.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Mark the Map: As guided by the prepared questions, have them mark different locations with stickers, markers/crayons or sticky notes as directed by your questions. The different colors or types of markers could mark different kinds of places, or whether the participants go to those places Daily, Weekly, Rarely or Never or whether they go with Family, Peers, or Alone.</li> </ol> <p><b>Variation Two: Start with a Printed Map</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Orient the Participants and Mark the Map: With a printed map, once you have oriented the participants to the map, you can dive right into marking the map in different ways (see Step 2 above for ideas). You may want to demonstrate the process by adding the first mark, such as the location of the program, which can also serve to orient the participants.</li> <li>2. Map Routes and Connections: You can mark routes and connections on a hand drawn map, but with a pre-printed map drawn to scale, these routes and connections can take on added meaning as reflections of participants' actual experience. Again, with questions prepared in advance, ask them to use string to connect places on the map that relate. For example, have them string yarn between their homes and the Youth Center. Or, have them mark their biking/walking route to school, each with a different colored marker.</li> </ol> <p><b>Variation Three: Individuals</b></p> <p>Either of these can also be done in pairs or individually depending on your group size and temperament. Individual maps will show more detail relevant to the individual, rather than the details relevant to the group as a whole.</p>

## Things to watch for



### Tips for Variation One: Draw your own

- Encourage youth to expand the map as needed and be prepared to add paper to one or more sides if the map expands a lot in a particular direction.
- It is unlikely that youth will need to draw anything to scale, so encourage them not to worry about it.

### Tips for Variation Two: Start with a Pre-Printed Map

- To print a map large enough for this activity you may need to print your map as a "Poster" which may be found in some printers' setting.
- You may still want to have blank paper they can add around the edges of the pre-printed map for additional routes or locations.

## Example







Have youth draw a map of all the activities they've done through the program, including field trips (remember: distances do not have to be drawn to scale). After they've spent several minutes building out the details, have them each mark with a green dot their favorite activity or location and with a yellow dot their second favorite. Analyze for the popularity of different components of your program.

Have youth review a map of their neighborhood. Have them mark with stickers all the places they can get vegetables or the ingredients for a dish you've prepared with them. Have them mark with other stickers all the places they can go for physical activity in their neighborhood or for a specific kind of activity you've taught them. Then, have them connect their homes to these locations with string along the walking, biking, or driving routes. Measure the distances for later analysis.

## Source

Modified from a process outlined in: Harder + Co. (2011, November). Using Visual Data to Engage Stakeholders in a Community Assessment of a Placed-based Initiative [presentation]. Retrieved from <http://harderco.com/wp-content/uploads/Data-Visualization-AEA-2011.pdf>



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To see if young people have incorporated information they've been given in your program.</li> <li>✓ To better understand what young people value most about the program or an experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare comic strip blanks (4-8 frames will work) in advance.</li> <li>• Prepare sheets of clip art images including standard images of people and settings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include any special images that might be relevant to your group (without leading the participants – you don't want to only include fruit and vegetables if one of your questions is about healthy eating).</li> <li>○ Have multiple copies ready for each participant.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prepare your questions in advance, related to your objectives, goals, logic model or evaluation questions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pens/pencils</li> </ul> <p><b>Variation:</b> You can use an online create-your-own-comic site such as Comic Creator (<a href="http://www.readwritethink.org">www.readwritethink.org</a>) or (<a href="http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/">www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/</a>).</p>
<b>Group Size</b> 	Many
<b>Age Levels</b> 	Works well for 4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> grades and older. Youth have to be able to write their own dialogue.
<b>Time</b> 	30 minutes
<b>Setting</b> 	Anywhere



## How to conduct the activity



1. Ask the participants to reflect on your prepared question(s) for your evaluation.
2. Hand youth the prepared comic strip blanks or them to use a comic site such as Comic Creator.
3. Ask youth to draw a comic strip that illustrates the response to your question or theme.
4. Ask for volunteers (or, if a small group, for everyone) to present their comic or place it on display on the wall.

## Things to watch for



- Youth may need support in thinking through their key message before making their manga.
- Youth may try to "interpret" the images from a pre-set comic instead of making their own. (E.g. tailoring their script to the images provided rather than sharing their own thoughts).






## Example



Ask students to think about ways that young people can help out in their community. Have them make a manga that illustrates those ways. Look for evidence that youth include three of five ways that you've covered previously.

Ask youth to make a comic about the after school program to share with other kids. Look for common themes in how kids describe the best parts of the program.



<b>What it's good for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To collect information from very young children, youth who speak English as a second language, or youth with developmental differences.</li> <li>✓ As a post-test.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation and Materials</b> 	<p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare the guiding question(s) for the drawing or collage in advance. Link the question(s) to your objectives, goals, logic model or evaluation questions. For this activity, use a very limited number of questions (1 is best, 2-3 might also work, depending on your group and time).</li> <li>• Write the question on the board in front of the room or on a large flip chart page.</li> <li>• (Optional) Prepare sheets of clip art images that relate to your evaluation questions if you are doing a collage.</li> </ul> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheet(s) of paper for each participant</li> <li>• Pens, markers, crayons, paints (drawing)</li> <li>• Old magazines, scissors, glue (collage)</li> <li>• (Optional) Sheets of prepared clip art icons (collage)</li> </ul>
<b>Group Size</b> 	Many
<b>Age Levels</b> 	This can work well for any age
<b>Time</b> 	30-45 minutes
<b>Setting</b> 	Anywhere (windy outdoors not recommended)

## How to conduct the activity



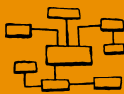
1. Ask students to draw a picture (or create a collage) about a particular aspect of your program per your prepared question(s). Write the question on the board or a large flipchart paper so everyone can see it.
2. Give the group plenty of time to draw or collage their response. You may want to remind them of the question(s) periodically and/or display it on the board so they stay on task.
3. After students have had a chance to draw or collage their response, ask students to present their drawings, display them on a bulletin board or simply turn them in to you. If they are presenting them, take notes during the presentation on what their drawing/collage is and why.

## Things to watch for



- You can offer both drawing and collage simultaneously.
- You may want to set up a pre-set list of things you are looking for so you can simply tally the number of pictures that show that.

## Example



Ask students to draw a picture (or create a collage) of all the people they are close to at your program, including both youth and other adults. For analysis, you can count up the number of kids and youth in each picture.

Ask students to draw one of their favorite moments in the program. Analyze evidence of peer relationships, relationships with adults, skill-building and/or youth engagement.

## Source

The Improve Group. (2008). "Using Pictorial Survey Methods in Program Evaluation." Presented at the American Evaluation Association Conference.

## Further Resources

We recommend the following additional resources if you want to explore these ideas further:

Belinsky, M. (2009, August 1). Forty Interesting Ways to Use Your Pocket Video Camera in the Classroom [presentation]. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/mbelinsky/forty-interesting-ways-to-use-your-pocket-video-camera-in-the-classroom>.

Gray, D., Brown, S., & Macanuso, J. (2010). *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.

Harder + Co. (2011, November). Using Visual Data to Engage Stakeholders in a Community Assessment of a Placed-based Initiative [presentation]. Retrieved from <http://harderco.com/wp-content/uploads/Data-Visualization-AEA-2011.pdf>

Kim Sabo Flores. (2008). *Youth Participatory Evaluation: Strategies for Engaging Young People* (pp. 127). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

The Improve Group. (2008). "Using Pictorial Survey Methods in Program Evaluation." Presented at the American Evaluation Association Conference.

University of Wisconsin Extension. Tip sheets on evaluation, including analysis and making sense of answers to open-ended questions (i.e. qualitative data). Available: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/resources/index.html>

## About Public Profit

We help public service organizations measure and manage what matters. Public Profit provides high quality evaluation services to groups that serve children and youth, including nonprofits, grant makers, and school districts.

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