

Solution-Oriented Focus Groups

Owner

- Senior administrator or veteran process improvement coordinator

Stakeholders

- Senior executives
- Campus-wide staff

Time estimate

- 2-3 sessions, 1-2 hours each

Guidance

- Leaders should decide the scope of the focus groups, whether all campus staff, those in the finance and administration area, or in just a single department
- Emphasize that the purpose of these sessions is not to assign blame, but to target broken processes that hinder mission-critical work
- Among smaller groups, set a goal of creating a common list of top pain points

You know you're done when you have a list of 5-10 processes that generate widespread frustration.

Gut check for owner

- Have you used the focus group to source volunteers for process improvement teams that will fix the problems raised?
- Have you provided additional venues for staff to submit their frustrations and ideas anonymously?

Goal: List of Top Targets for Improvement

Focus groups allow senior administrators and process improvement coordinators to tap into the voices of staff and other customers with the goal of identifying which business processes are prime candidates for reengineering. Combined with other facilitated discussions, focus groups help institutions maintain open lines of communication with customers and staff. The questions below can help jumpstart conversations that provide useful context for frustrations around broken processes and pain points, as well as insights into possible solutions.

• What is a process that you find frustrating?

- How would you describe the current process?
- When, where, and why do problems arise?
- Which of the following problems describe this process?
 - Too costly
 - Too many people involved in the process
 - Too many errors
 - Too much time required
 - Too much work required
 - Insufficient documentation or information to complete the process
 - Insufficient training
 - Unclear policies
- Why does this process need to be improved now?
- How does this process affect the institution's mission and priorities?
- Who is impacted by this process?
- Who is the final customer? How would a customer describe their frustrations? Why are their expectations not being met?
- Who would benefit from an improved process?
- How would you measure success?

• If you could recommend a change or a solution, what would it be?

- What has your team or department done to address inefficiencies?
- How do other teams or departments solve these problems?

• Where is the same work...

- completed in different ways on campus?
- unnecessarily duplicated on campus?

• What is the greatest impediment to completing mission-critical tasks?

- Too much time spent on manual tasks
- Too much time spent on data entry or validation
- Too much time spent waiting for others to complete their work
- Too much time spent correcting the mistakes of others

• What resources would make you more effective and productive?

- Additional training
- Simpler processes
- Clearer delineation of responsibilities