

Phase Two

Plan and Hold Focus Groups



Phase Two is the primary information-gathering phase for the youth count. During the focus groups, you will learn from youth, and the providers who work with them, about the hot spots where youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability spend time. The focus groups also generate lists of provider and community locations for the Organizational Count and Come and Be Counted Locations. The Leadership and Stakeholder Teams will use the focus group information to finalize a day-of count strategy for reaching youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

Phase Two is the second phase of the Voices of Youth Count Toolkit. We encourage you to review the entire [Toolkit](#), where you can find more information about conducting a Youth Count using the VoYC approach.

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Step One: Convene the Focus Group Planning Meeting

Focus Group Planning Meeting Tools



- [Focus Group Planning Meeting Invitation](#)
- [Focus Group Planning Worksheet](#) (Phase One, Step Two)
- [Focus Group Planning Meeting Annotated Agenda](#)

The goal of the Focus Group Planning Meeting is to review and finalize the plan for the focus groups. We found it helpful to have the Leadership Team develop draft recommendations in advance of the Focus Group Planning Meeting. Please review Phase One, Step Two, Convene the Initial Leadership Team Meeting, for more information about preparing for the Focus Group Planning Meeting.

The Focus Group Planning Meeting objectives can be accomplished in 90-minutes. For some VoYC Youth Counts, we scheduled longer meetings to allow more time to develop youth recruitment plans. While the Focus Group Planning Meeting can be held via conference call, we found the meetings were more productive when held in person.

Rather than canvassing every area of a community, the VoYC Youth Counts use a targeted approach, focusing on the hot spots where young people are known to spend time.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Stakeholder Team will have:

- ✓ Reviewed the youth count logistics
- ✓ Discussed the role of youth in planning and conducting the youth count
- ✓ Finalized the focus group schedule
- ✓ Developed a recruitment plan
- ✓ Identified preferred locations for the focus groups and a plan to reserve space
- ✓ Developed a focus group facilitation plan

Guidance on conducting the meeting is included in the Focus Group Planning Meeting Annotated Agenda.

Step Two: Recruit Focus Group Participants

Focus Group Recruitment Tools



- [Focus Group Recruitment Language](#)
- [Youth Focus Group Recruitment Language](#)
- [Youth Focus Group Recruitment Flyer](#)
- [Focus Group Recruitment Plan Template](#)

Successful focus group recruitment is an important step to ensuring the diversity of your community's youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability are included in the youth count.

For the VoYC Youth Counts, we recruited youth primarily through providers. We gave providers language and flyers to use to aid in recruitment. Young people reaching out to their peers was often the most effective way to get service-averse youth engaged in the Youth Counts; this can take a lot of time, as it first requires young people to trust you and the purpose for the youth count. Youth were also recruited at provider programs and community events.

Consider using a range of recruitment strategies, including recruiting youth through existing youth advisory boards. If your community does not have one yet, planning and conducting the youth count can be a good foundation for creating one.

For the VoYC Youth Counts, we often created shared documents to track our recruitment goals and progress toward these goals. An example of a tracking tool, the Focus Group Recruitment Plan Template, is provided and can be shared with all contributors via a document sharing hub or email.

Step Three: Hold the Focus Groups

Focus Group Tools



- [Hot Spotting Worksheet](#)
- [Youth Focus Group Facilitation Protocol](#)
- [Provider Focus Group Facilitation Protocol](#)

The focus groups elicit information to develop a strategy for the Street Count including:

- Location of the hot spots
- The best time of day to count at each hot spot
- How many people are likely to be found at each hot spot
- Logistical information, such as agencies working in the area or safety concerns

The focus groups also generate lists of provider and community locations for the Organizational Count and Come and Be Counted locations. The focus groups typically last 90 minutes.

Guidance on running the focus groups is included in the Youth and Provider Focus Group Protocols. We discuss the decisions made for VoYC Youth Counts below.

For VoYC focus groups, we focused on maintaining the privacy of the focus group participants and the confidentiality of the information they shared. During the youth focus groups, we did not ask youth to sign in, allowing them to remain anonymous if they chose to. We only collected their names if they wanted to work as Guides during the Youth Count.

We only shared information about the hot spots with people helping to conduct the Youth Count, and we never revealed who told us about a specific hot spot. Youth had particular concerns about how the focus group information would be used because they did not want to reveal or share information that might create unsafe conditions for other youth or be used by authorities in ways perceived as adverse to the youth's interests.

For most of the VoYC youth focus groups, the youth attended the focus groups run by VoYC staff with no providers in the room. At times, though, we found it helpful to have providers attend:

- Some youth preferred having a provider they knew in the meeting, rather than just “outsiders”.
- Some youth were less experienced attending focus groups or meetings and extra staff helped ensure that all youth could fully participate in the focus groups.

While we preferred holding focus groups to learn about hot spots, we also held one-on-one conversations with youth or providers because of scheduling constraints, transportation difficulties, or individual preference, to make sure we could gather the expertise of all the people who knew the circumstances and locations of youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

We gathered information in one of two ways: using Google Maps or using printed Hot Spotting Worksheets. We used Google Maps in most of the focus groups, relying solely on the worksheets only when we did not have internet access. When we used Google Maps, we also provided printed Hot Spotting Worksheets so people could take notes and share written feedback if they were not comfortable sharing in the group discussion. Using Google Maps allowed us to generate maps in real time, which we later organized into team assignments for the street count.



Example Google Map with hot spots

Unfamiliar with using Google Maps? Google has created some [helpful instructions that will help use the maps to pinpoint hot spots and generate maps](#). 🍌

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