

# Henry Clay High School

*In what ways can the Henry Clay community as a whole create a unified atmosphere in which students feel a sense of belonging and school pride?*

Student Focus Groups  
Spring, 2002

## **Facilitators' Guide**

Prepared by Roberts & Kay, Inc.  
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## About Co-Facilitation

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When you facilitate a focus group, you will work with a co-facilitator. At all times as you run the group, one of you will be the *lead* facilitator and one of you will be the *backup* facilitator. You should change roles one or more times during the session so that each facilitator is the lead and each is the backup about half the time. Optional ways to do this:

- Divide the introduction in half, and divide the Interview Questions in half. You can either do the division by switching back and forth frequently, or by dividing in large chunks.
- One person does all the introduction, and the other person does all the questions.
- Other divisions that suit you.

Once you reach the part of the focus group when you begin asking the Interview Questions, the person who is in the role of the backup facilitator should always be looking for opportunities to ask *spontaneous follow-up questions*.

## About Three Types of Questions

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After the introduction work is done, you and your co-facilitator will ask three types of questions:

1. **Interview Questions:** These are the main, numbered questions that are printed in **bold** type. The Work Group developed them specifically for this research. Ask each question exactly as it is written at least twice before doing any other thing to encourage responses. There are 10 Interview Questions for this study. They begin on page 12.
2. **Planned follow-up questions, or “probes”:** These are the written questions that make an Interview Question more specific and pointed toward the things you need to discover because of the research question. Planned follow-up questions are written below Interview Question 1. In most cases, facilitators should ask planned follow-up questions as written, if two things are true: (a) there is ample time, and (b) participants have not already answered the question the follow-up is asking.
3. **Spontaneous follow-up questions:** These are the questions that the facilitators – especially the backup facilitator – ask after listening to the first responses to each question. Spontaneous follow-up questions encourage one person to say more, or encourage more people to say something, in response to a particular question. Beginning on page 11, each odd-numbered page in this Guidebook shows words or phrases you can use to create and use spontaneous follow-ups. You may find you will use 25 – 50 spontaneous follow-up questions in a well-facilitated focus group. The more spontaneous follow-up questions you use, and the better you use them, the *richer* and *deeper* and *more valid* your focus group findings will be.

## About Time Tracking

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Starting on page 8, next to each question you will notice a space for the *elapsed time* and the *actual time*.

**Before you run each focus group**, you will need to fill in the actual clock time, like 9:30 AM, for your focus group session, with the first entry on page 2 being your focus group starting time. *Use a pencil*. Then you fill in the rest of the actual time blanks by adding time to your starting time.

The *elapsed time* space indicates how many minutes should have already passed in your focus group session, if you are following the time estimates for each question.

The actual time indicates the time on a clock. For example, beside Question 1, the elapsed time says “0:15.” If your session started at 9:30, then your actual time here will be 9:45. You fill in all the blanks for *actual time* in advance. This is how you know that if your session started at 9:30, you should be starting Question Two by 9:55.

## What matters most in focus group facilitation?

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- *Warmth* and *fun*: It's not a test, so help people relax
- *Neutrality*: Every answer is Interesting!
- *Balance*: Work on hearing a lot from everybody.
- *Purposefulness*: You have important work to do together — and people trust you to know what they should do.

## An essential repertoire of facilitator behaviors

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- ✓ **Pause:** seven seconds
  
- ✓ **Invitation to express a different point of view:**
  - "Does anyone see it differently?"
  
- ✓ **Request more information:**
  - "Tell me more about that."
  - "I don't understand."
  - "Could you please say more?"
  - "Will you give me an example so I can understand better?"
  
- ✓ **For dominant talkers:**
  - Withdraw eye contact
  - Shift attention, "Thanks, Chris. Now I would like to hear how the rest of you feel about..."
  
- ✓ **For shy people:**
  - Try for *appropriate* eye contact
  - Ask that everyone (or a whole section of the table) respond to a question
  - (Less often, only when it seems appropriate) Call on the person by name for a response
  
- ✓ **For rambling types:**
  - Withdraw eye contact after the talk gets boring
  - Turn slightly away from the speaker
  - Do not take notes or reinforce the talk in any way
  - At a pause, say, "Thank you, Terry. Now I want to get some other people to jump in here on this question." Repeat the question, if necessary, to pull the focus back.
  - (Rarely) Interrupt. "Excuse me, Evelyn. I'm sorry to have to interrupt you, but I see other people would also like to answer this question and I want to make sure they have time." Then repeat the question.

## Beautiful, spontaneous follow up questions

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- Q. What's one difference between an adequate focus group and a really good one?
- A. Facilitators who ask good spontaneous follow-up questions.
- Q. How?
- A. You start with precise Interview Questions, which you ask exactly as written. [They are printed in **bold type**.]
- Q. Then what?
- A. As people start to answer, be curious, and try to learn all that you can.
- Q. How?
- A. Ask extra questions that make sense, things like: "Tell me more." "Could you say more about that?" "How does that happen, exactly?" Etc. (And stay away from "why" questions if you can.)

## **Your Guide for the Focus Group**

*(Elapsed time)* 0:05 *[Five minute allowance for lateness]*

*(Actual time)* \_\_\_\_\_ Welcome, introductions, preliminaries, ground rules

Thank people for coming. Suggest they help themselves to snacks.

Mention the focus of discussion: Ways to create a unified atmosphere at Henry Clay, increase school pride, and students' sense of belonging

Underscore the main point: You are taking part in this group in order to help improve our school. We are listening, we are going to tape record your statements, and people are interested in hearing from you.

Check verbally on comfort: temperature, refreshments, any needed materials.

Introduce yourselves and your titles ("*We'll be your facilitators*" or "*We'll be asking you questions.*"). Don't give personal details that could sway people's opinions.

Say you're going to turn on the tape recorder now.

Remind people they agreed to be audio taped when they signed their permission slips.

Explain that an adult sponsor is outside the room and can hear the conversation on headphones. Explain that s/he is listening primarily to support you, the facilitators, and to provide total safety for the conversation.

Tell how confidentiality is protected: no names or identities are ever used in the reports from the sessions. First names used during the session are taken out of written transcripts and never used in analysis or reporting.

Ask group members after the session to separate other people's names and views when they talk about the session. [Stop here and get a nod or other form of agreement from group members.]

Do introductions, using first names only. After going around once just for names, go around again with a question about something fun and interesting. [“*What is your favorite food?*” or “*What is your dream job when you grow up?*” or something else] Ask people to write their names on the table cards provided.

Explain that this is one of eight student groups that will lead to a report to be produced in April. All the groups will work on the same questions. The questions came from a Work Team made up of students, teachers, administrators, and a community person.

State the ending time for the session: \_\_\_\_\_

Emphasize that all comments and opinions are right and valued. You will not be asking questions that have wrong answers.

Emphasize that the purpose of the session is to see how many opinions there are about each topic. The purpose is not to make decisions or persuade each other. Explain that members of the group were picked intentionally to be different from each other.

Strongly encourage people to state their personal opinions, no matter what opinions others in the group may hold.

Explain that as facilitators, you will be the guides, and you will recognize people to speak. As much as possible, encourage people to speak one at a time, but assure them that if they get lively, you will help sort it all out and get it recorded for analysis.

Let people know that you may occasionally rush some section of the discussion they find interesting, and may even have to interrupt some people to move on to new topics or new speakers. On the other hand, they may notice you pulling more information from more people than they think is necessary. Remind them that you will be the one to worry about all this, and

you will make your decisions based on what the Work Team has decided to ask all the groups.

Ask people to speak for themselves alone, not for others or for the "average person."

Check for agreement. (*"Those are our ground rules. Can you agree to live them during this session?"*)

Ask if there are any questions.

Now go to page 12 for the Interview Questions.

## **Hints for Spontaneous Follow Up Questions: *Curiosity in Action***

Note: Spontaneous follow up questions are the key to detail and depth. They help you get the good stuff that's below the first, "surface" answers.

*Here are good first words for spontaneous follow up questions:*

Please say more about that.

Can you give me more details?

Anybody else?

What is it about ...

Tell me more about ...

What is your experience with ...

Describe ...

Imagine ...

What caused you to ...

What features of X do you particularly like/dislike ...

How...When....Where....How often do you...

*Note: Try to avoid "Why" questions because they can put people on the defensive and make them not want to answer questions at all.*

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## The Interview Questions

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**Note: Ask the questions in bold type exactly as written, twice if necessary.**

(Elapsed time) 0:15

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 1. Here is a small challenge that you will do with one or two other people. [Stop and help divide the group into twos or threes.]

**Write a song, poem, or rap [or jingle] that describes Henry Clay High School.**

[If people get stuck, offer the additional prescribed follow-up questions below. If people are slow to respond to the main question, use the first follow-up below. If that is enough, stop there. But if the group still has people who are not feeling confident about the task, then ask the second question as well.]

Prescribed follow-up questions, for use only as needed:

What words or phrases would you want to include?

What song title best describes how you feel about Henry Clay High School?

(Elapsed time) 0:25

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2. For this next question here is a sheet of red paper and a sheet of green paper for each person. You need one of each.

Think of these papers like stoplight colors. Red means “No” and green means “Yes.”

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**On the red paper write down a few words or draw a cartoon, picture, or doodle that shows a couple of things you DON'T LIKE about Henry Clay.**

**On the green paper write down a few words or draw something that shows what you LIKE about Henry Clay.**

You don't need to put your name on these. We will be taking them up after you talk about them a little bit.

[Pause to give the participants time to do the task.]

Would someone share what you wrote or drew on your papers? You can pass, but we're really hoping to hear from you and let you hear from each other so this research can help bring about some good changes here. Who is willing to go first?

[Keep probing, gently, to encourage as many students as possible to describe verbally what they have done on paper.]

[Ask LOTS of spontaneous follow-ups to keep people talking.]

Thank you. **Would you please pass your papers to us? Remember, we don't need your names.**

(Elapsed time) 0:35

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 3: What things make you proud to say you are a Henry Clay student?**

(Elapsed time) 0:40

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 4: What things make you embarrassed to say you are a Henry Clay student?**

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Note: The person in the role of back-up facilitator should step outside right here and see if the adult has any suggestions.

(Elapsed time) 0:45

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_ Question 5: Here are four cards. On each card, please write the name of a group of people that has something to do with the way things are at Henry Clay. We're not looking for names of people; we're looking for types of people who make a difference in how we feel at school. For example, if we were talking about a basketball game, types of people involved might be players, fans, umpires, coaches, cheerleaders, and reporters. **What are the types of people who are involved in making things the way they are at Henry Clay every day? Put one type of person on each one of the cards.** It's okay if you think of more than four. We just need your first four ideas. Write large, and use a marker so other people will be able to read what you have written. You don't need to put your own name on the cards.

[Pause to give the participants time to do the task.]

Now put your cards on the table in front of you. You'll probably want to stand up for the next part. What we want you to do, as a group, is to look at all the cards together. Take out all the ones that are duplicates. Then put the remaining cards in order from most powerful group to least powerful group.

[You will probably need to repeat these instructions several times.]

[Pause to give the participants time to do the task. Avoid coaching, except to clarify the task.]

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Now tell us what made you put \_\_\_\_\_ first. What makes \_\_\_\_\_ most powerful?

What about the \_\_\_\_\_ group that you have put last. What makes them least powerful?

Let's say you get to be the boss of each one of these groups. What you want is for each group to do all it can to make Henry Clay High School a place where students are proud to go, and feel like they belong to a unified community. Starting with the most powerful, what would you tell each group to do?

[Ask lots of spontaneous follow-ups to hear from as many students as possible in as much detail as possible.]

*[Take up the cards, in priority order. The back-up facilitator should number them immediately, from #1 for most important group to #n for least. Stack the cards and put a rubber band around them.]*

(Elapsed time) 0:52

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_ Question 6: Now we want you to do something a little bit different. It's called a "Human Spectrum." To do this you'll need to stand up and get in a line facing us.

[Help people find the right place to be in the room so they can move around a little bit and find their place on the spectrum.]

**Now imagine that we have a line here that runs from one to ten. I'm going to make a statement. One means "I don't agree at all – in fact I completely, absolutely disagree with what you said." Ten means "I agree with that statement all the way. It says exactly what I think and feel."**

**So one is \_\_\_\_ (point to a location) and ten is \_\_\_\_\_ (point to the other end of the spectrum.) It's a scale of one to ten.**

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**Now here's the statement: "Students at Henry Clay feel they belong."**

**If you completely disagree, you go to the spot for "one", and you will be over here \_\_\_\_\_ (point out the spot again.) If you completely agree, you will go to the spot for "ten," over here \_\_\_\_\_. If you are somewhere in the middle, are you a 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or whatever? Talk with each other and find the place on the spectrum that represents your true views.**

[If people need help, repeat the instructions. Don't make suggestions about where they may want to place themselves.]

[Pause until they get in place.]

[When it's time to start hearing from them, it may be smart to restate the question.]

The statement is, "Students at Henry Clay feel they belong." Where are you on the scale of one to ten? [Get each student to say, quickly, where he or she is standing. Repeat for the microphone what you see/hear.]

Let's get everyone's reasons for where you are standing, starting with \_\_\_\_ (the student closest to 10, maybe?)

[Use spontaneous follow-ups, and be encouraging to the participants, who have to put themselves literally on the line in order to answer this question. You definitely want to find out as much as you can about each person's reason for being where s/he is.]

Thank you for that – please take your seats.

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(Elapsed time) 0:58

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 7: For this next question you will need this piece of paper and your pen or pencil. [Pass out sheets that already have the prompts typed on them.]

**This time we want you to finish the three sentences you see on the page. As before, you don't need to put your name on this, and we will be taking it up.**

**Please finish these three sentences:**

**"I feel excluded at Henry Clay when**  
\_\_\_\_\_"

**"I feel included at Henry Clay when**  
\_\_\_\_\_"

**"I would feel more a part of Henry Clay if**  
\_\_\_\_\_"

[Pause to give the participants time to do the task.]

**Now who would like to tell us how you finished one or more of these three sentences?**

[Use spontaneous follow-up questions to keep encouraging the students to say verbally more about what they wrote down on paper. Good follow-ups for this question: "Tell us more about that." and "Who else wants to tell us what you've written?"]

*Take up the papers.*

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(Elapsed time) 1:05

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 8: What, if anything, prevents unity at Henry Clay?**

(Elapsed time) 1:15

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 9: What, if anything, prevents school pride at Henry Clay?**

(Elapsed time) 1:22

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?**

This is your last chance! What would you like to say that you haven't gotten to say yet?

[If needed, you can explain that this question includes "any topic we did not cover that you want to talk about" or "here's some time for you to add to things you said earlier if you did not get done."]

[You can still use spontaneous follow up questions here if you have not run out of time. If people say things that could use more explaining, you can always say, "Please tell us more about that."]

(Elapsed time) 1:25

(Actual time) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank people for coming, and say goodbye.