



Sample Focus Group Questions for Current CTE Learners

Below are two sets of sample focus group questions, based on the intent and goals of the learner focus groups.

ONE

The first set of focus group questions is meant to give current CTE learners the opportunity to describe their experiences in CTE, with an emphasis on questions that draw out information about barriers, challenges and inequities as well as information about supports, services and relationships that can help counter inequities. State and local leaders should pick one or two categories of questions to ask at any given time as it would be overwhelming to attempt all of the questions.

TWO

The second set of questions addresses learners' perspectives on CTE learner voice and engagement activities. Within this set, the first group of questions is more appropriate for state CTE agencies, institutions, districts or programs that are just getting started with learner voice activities, while the second group is intended for those who have already implemented learner engagement activities and are seeking to evaluate their effectiveness from the learner perspective.

Probing questions are only one part of a focus group experience. In addition, focus groups require sensitive, experienced facilitation; thoughtful scheduling; logistical considerations about recording and note-taking; and follow-up communications to let learners know if and how their input will be used. Tips for how to conduct learner focus groups can be found through the [UC-Berkeley YPAR Hub](#), [Collecting Student Voices for Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design](#) from the California Community Colleges, the [Improving CTE Programs with Data and Evidence Guide](#) from The RP Group, and the [Student Focus Group Resource Guide](#) from WestEd-Public Agenda.⁴¹



QUESTIONS ABOUT CTE EXPERIENCES, SUPPORTS AND RELATIONSHIPS

FOCUS GROUP OBJECTIVE:

To get input into how effectively and equitably CTE programs and related supports are serving learners to inform programmatic and policy decisions going forward.

CTE DECISION MAKING

1. Tell me about your decision to enroll in this CTE program. What led to you choosing to enroll in this program?
2. How did you find out about this CTE program? What kind of reputation does it have locally?
3. Who was involved in your decisionmaking process for enrolling in this CTE program? Who helped you make this decision?
4. What, if any, roadblocks did you encounter when enrolling in this CTE program? How could we make enrolling easier?
5. What, if any, potential concerns did you have before enrolling?
6. In your mind, what made this program the right option for you?
7. If you were giving advice to a friend or sibling who is thinking of enrolling in this program, what advice would you give?
8. What is the best way to attract learners like you to CTE who are not already participating in CTE?

when first making the decision to enroll?

6. What would this program look like at its best? What could this program do more of? Less of?
7. How can I, as an instructor/counselor/administrator/state leader, improve your CTE experience?
8. Imagine you could change the way that growth and success is measured in CTE. What would growth or improvement look like for you as a CTE learner? What would success look like for you?

(Specific topics to probe may include access/application to program/school/college, cost, instructors, course options and quality, work-based learning, CTSOs, career prep/skills, flexibility, time requirements, job opportunities, engagement)

CAREER PLANNING AND TRANSITION

1. Where do you go for guidance or advice on how to meet your career and education goals?
2. How supportive are the people in your life of your education and career goals?
3. How are the classes you are taking now preparing you for what you want to do next? In what way does your CTE program feel connected or relevant to your long-term goals?
4. What kind of further education, training or credentials do you need to meet your goals?
5. What opportunities are you aware of for further education, training or credentials in the CTE field you are studying, either at the school/college you attend now or somewhere else? What opportunities do you wish were available?

CTE EXPERIENCE

1. What have you enjoyed about this CTE program? What have you gained from this CTE program?
2. What has made you feel welcome, supported or valued in your CTE program?
3. What has been challenging or frustrating in your CTE program?
4. What has made you feel uncomfortable, marginalized or discriminated against in your CTE program?
5. What do you know now that you wish you had known



CTE SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

1. What challenges or barriers do you face to participating and being successful in CTE?
2. What supports or services does your CTE program provide now to help you participate and be successful in CTE?
3. Which of these supports or services have you used? What was your experience using these supports or services? Were they helpful to you or not?
4. What supports or services that are not yet offered would make participating and being successful in CTE easier for you?
5. What supports or services would help you move successfully along your education and career pathway and reach your goals?

(Specific topics to probe may include tutoring, guidance/ advising, financial aid, access to transportation, access to child care, access to technology, mentorship, flexible scheduling, accessibility such as translation/interpretation/ alternative text)

6. What individuals or organizations do you turn to for support if you face a challenge or barrier in your education? In your career? In your personal life?
(Specific individuals or organizations to probe on may include instructors, counselors/advisers, family members, faith leaders, community groups, former/current employers)

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IN CTE

1. Consider the person you are in your CTE program compared to the person you are at home or with friends. How similar or different are these two versions of yourself?
2. How well do your CTE instructors understand your interests, hopes, worries, challenges and barriers? How well would you say your instructors “get” what it is like to be you?
3. Whom in this CTE program do you have a relationship with? How has this relationship affected you? This relationship could be positive, such as with a friend or mentor, or it could be negative.
4. Thinking about your closest relationships in this CTE program, are there any defining moments or steps that developed these bonds? *(Specific individuals to probe on may include other learners, instructors, counselors/advisers, administrators)*

Several of the focus group questions in the previous sections were suggested by members of this workgroup and learners who contributed to this toolkit. Others are adapted from existing focus group resources:

- [Advance CTE Focus Group Discussion Guide](#)
- [Equitable Futures Designing Pathways With Young People Toolkit — Activity: Mapping Young People’s Pathways](#)
- [Center for Community College Student Engagement Focus Group Discussion Guides](#)

QUESTIONS ABOUT LEARNER VOICE IN CTE

FOCUS GROUP OBJECTIVE:

To get input into how the CTE system has leveraged and can effectively leverage learner voice in the design, assessment and improvement of CTE programs and policies. While the questions below focus on CTE programs, they can be adapted to ask about input into CTE policy.

INTRODUCTORY

1. How would you prefer to provide feedback or input about your CTE program? *(Specific topics to probe may include filling out surveys, participating in focus groups, participating in the CLNA, giving input about program development and review)*
2. What is the best way to let you know about opportunities to provide input about your CTE program?
3. What could we do to make you feel welcome, supported or valued when providing input?
4. How would you prefer to contribute outside of the classroom to improve your CTE program or to represent your CTE program? *(Specific topics to probe may include serving on or leading advisory boards/committees, coordinating events, speaking up as a CTE ambassador)*
5. What is the best way to let you know about opportunities to help improve or represent your CTE program?
6. What could we do to make you feel welcome, supported or valued when helping to improve or represent your CTE program?
7. What supports or services would make participating and being successful in these activities easier for you? *(Specific topics to probe may include access to transportation, access to child care, access to technology, flexible scheduling, compensation, accessibility such as translation/interpretation/alternative text)*
8. About how much time would you be willing to invest in providing input? In helping to improve or represent your CTE program?
9. What type of compensation or recognition for participating in these activities would be most valuable to you? *(Specific topics to probe may include cash stipend, gift card stipend, scholarships, academic credit, independent study opportunities, awards, publishing your name)*



INTERMEDIATE/EXPERIENCED

1. In what ways has your CTE program asked for your feedback or input? How did you find out about opportunities to give feedback or input?
2. What has made you feel welcome, supported or valued when providing input?
3. What has been challenging or frustrating when providing input?
4. What has made you feel uncomfortable, marginalized or discriminated against when providing input?
5. What changes were made to your CTE program as a result of your input? Were you satisfied with the changes made and the timeline of change?
6. What would improve these opportunities to give input?
7. In what ways has your CTE program asked you to contribute outside of the classroom to improve your CTE program or to represent your CTE program? How did you find out about opportunities to help improve or represent your CTE program?
8. What has made you feel welcome, supported or valued when helping to improve or represent your CTE program?
9. What has been challenging or frustrating when helping to improve or represent your CTE program?
10. What has made you feel uncomfortable, marginalized or discriminated against when helping to improve or represent your CTE program?
11. What changes were made to your CTE program as a result of your contributions to improving or representing your CTE program?
12. What supports or services were provided to help you participate and be successful in the activities you just described?
13. Which of these supports or services did you use? What was your experience using these supports or services? Were they helpful to you or not?
14. What supports or services would make participating and being successful in these activities easier for you? (*Specific topics to probe may include access to transportation, access to child care, access to technology, flexible scheduling, compensation, accessibility such as translation/interpretation/alternative text*)
15. About how much time have you invested in the activities you just described? Was that too much time, not enough time, or just the right amount of time?
16. What type of compensation or recognition have you been offered for these activities?
17. If you received any compensation or recognition, was it valuable to you? Why or why not?
18. What type of compensation or recognition would be most valuable to you? (*Specific topics to probe may include cash stipend, gift card stipend, scholarships, academic credit, independent study opportunities, awards, publishing your name*)