

## 2017 Via Hope Recovery Institute Application Experiential Component Guide

### **The Activity**

Via Hope would like each applicant team to plan and facilitate a **focus group** with staff at their organization. The purpose of this focus group is to help the team gain insights into the current state of the organization's recovery and resiliency-oriented change work and help the team submit an informed application. This activity will also provide you with an opportunity to experience the type of work teams are engaged in during Recovery Institute programs, and it is intended to be viewed as a learning experience.

Please note that Via Hope has provided this guide to help you consider how to meaningfully facilitate a discussion with staff at your organization that will elicit useful information and illuminate ideas that the team might otherwise miss. However, each team that submits an application is responsible for interpreting and applying the information to their setting.

### **What is a focus group?**

A focus group is a method of group interviewing used to capture insights and information from designated groups regarding a specific topic, such as recovery and resiliency-oriented culture within your organization. In a focus group, a facilitator will design dynamic questions to help identify perceptions, opinions, and attitudes from group participants.

### **Why facilitate a focus group?**

The intent of focus groups is to receive feedback regarding various aspects of your organization. Some examples of the kinds of information which can be invited from focus groups include experiences and impressions of the environment (both physical and emotional) from persons receiving services, feedback from staff regarding successes, and ideas for how to strengthen your organization's vision.

### **Strategies for organizing your focus group**

We invite you to facilitate at least one round of focus group discussions designed to identify strengths and opportunities for change at your organization. Each focus group should consist of about five to seven people, facilitated by 1 or 2 facilitators. For this exercise, we ask you to facilitate the focus group with **staff members**. Consider the following staff roles:

- Individuals who work directly with people served by your organization (case managers, peer specialists, family partners, psychiatric nursing assistants);
- People in formal leadership positions (directors, administrators, board members);

- Staff members who come into contact with many individuals who receive services, but are sometimes overlooked because their roles are not clinical (receptionists, custodians, food service workers).

### **Preparing for the Discussion**

Preparation for the discussion should include a brief outline of a few questions you would like to ask the focus group in order to help foster discussion and elicit responses to meet your objective(s). When designing your questions, understand that flexibility is a must. The intent of the focus group is to come away with lessons learned, so keep in mind that discussions may be non-linear. Below are examples of questions that may assist with fostering informative discussions.

- When have we had a profound impact on someone's life in a positive way?
- When have we succeeded, even if in a modest way?
- How do you imagine our work, our services, and our contributions would be if they were better?
- What kinds of roles would various people play?
- What do you believe is at the heart of our work? How might we move closer to that?
- What can we do to achieve our vision? How will we know when we get there- what will success look like?

### **Conclusion**

Experience has shown us that focus group participants appreciate organizational leaders' desire to receive feedback, and participants are willing to remain positive during discussions. Participants may enjoy having an opportunity to help make your organization stronger and facilitators can assist with framing questions so as to elicit helpful (not counterproductive) responses.

Following the activity, we ask that your team reflect on the experience and share what you learned by answering a series of questions.

Adapted from:

N.A. (1989). The focus group planning guide. MarketLink Strategic Marketing Services.

Retrieved October 3, 2012 from <http://www.marketlinkresearch.com/pdf/guide.pdf>.

N.A. (2012). How to write a focus group moderator guide. FocusGroupTips.com. Retrieved October 3, 2012 from <http://www.focusgrouptips.com/moderator-guide.html>.