

College Student Political Engagement Study

Resources and Information

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Online Resources

On the CIRCLE web site you will find several files that you can download for use on the project.

These resources can be found at:

http://www.civicyouth.org/CollegeStudentPoliticalEngagementStudy06_index.htm.

On this webpage you will find:

- An electronic form of this full document
- A template for a spreadsheet to track focus groups
- A calendar for the project
- Updates related to the project

A. Project Information

Why Do This Study

This study, a partnership between CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) and the Kettering Foundation, is a follow up to two efforts.

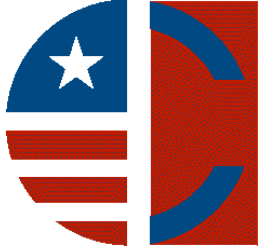
In 1993 the Kettering Foundation published *College Students Talk Politics*. This report still stands as a watershed document because of its unique contribution with students' naming their politics for themselves through focus groups. The research report also was one of the first studies to paint a picture of college students as turned off from conventional politics.

Second, recently CIRCLE published a literature review on college student political participation (this report is online at www.civicyouth.org). The paper concludes that "among interesting trends in need of greater exploration that we believe focus group data could help illuminate include the following:

- Better awareness of the emerging movement among college students to define an alternative politics which is more participatory, open, inclusive, and deliberative—a trend first noted by David Mathews in the forward to *College Students Talk Politics* which has only grown in the decade since.
- Greater understanding of the recent trends toward increased participation in conventional politics, especially seen in the 2004 election.
- Deeper insights into the connection—and lack of connection—between involvement in community service and political engagement.
- Emerging practices for engaging college students in public life, and especially on the role that colleges and universities can play in educating for democracy."

This project will be a similar effort as the 1993 study in that it will seek to create opportunities for students to name their experiences and beliefs for themselves using their own language through focus groups. The study will also follow up on some of the above conclusions drawn by the literature review and by doing so seek period-specific influences on student political attitudes.

Who Are We



CIRCLE

(The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)

www.civicyouth.org

CIRCLE promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life.

Working on this project:

Peter Levine, Director

Abby Kiesa, Youth Coordinator



The Charles F. Kettering Foundation

www.kettering.org

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation was founded in 1927 "to sponsor and carry out scientific research for the benefit of humanity." Since the early 1990s, the foundation has worked on strategies to strengthen democracy. The primary question addressed by its research today is "What does it take to make democracy work as it should?"

Working on this project:

Nick Longo, Associate

Ileana Marin, Senior Program Associate

How is the Study Designed

This research project will involve 12 campuses across the country. We have chosen to focus the project on 4 year school and on college students 25 years old and younger.

We have chosen to focus the research on a particular generation of students. With the resources available to us, we have built a group of 12 partner schools that represent both institutional and geographic diversity.

CIRCLE will travel to each campus in the fall of 2006 and spring of 2007 to facilitate 3-4 focus groups of students from that campus. Each focus group will have 8-12 students, therefore, a total of 24-48 students will be involved from each campus. Each focus group will last 2 hours. As a result, the commitment of a focus group participant is only 2 hours. Focus group participants will receive food at the event and a \$20 gift certificate at the conclusion of the focus group.

The folks working on this project were intent on trying to gain insights into the nuances of students' civic and political attitudes. As a result, we want this study to be informed by the experiences of those working with students on campus, and of course by students themselves. We are trying to work with each campus to develop a recruitment strategy appropriate to that campus.

Each focus group will be audiorecorded and CIRCLE will have these audiorecordings transcribed upon completion of the project. Additionally, focus group participants will be asked to complete a short survey at the end of the discussion (see survey later in the toolkit). Each campus will receive a written transcription from each focus group from their campus as well as the data from the student surveys from their campus.

As the study progresses we will be thinking about how to follow-up on the focus groups. We encourage you to share any ideas with us about how you think we could follow-up on the focus groups on your campus or nationally.

How Campuses Can Leverage Participation

There are many ways for a campus to benefit from participation in this project.

- Creating campus-specific questions to add to the focus group protocol
- Designing recruitment on your campus so that we compare student groups using the focus groups (ex. Students from public high schools and private high schools)

After transcribing the focus groups that take place on a campus, CIRCLE will provide campuses with the information from focus groups on their campus, as well as student responses to a short survey. We highly encourage campuses to use the data from their campus. A few ideas:

- Use focus group information from your campus in your program/office annual report
- Inform service and civic engagement programs and recruitment

- Use the data in correspondence with school administrators
- Forge a faculty link so that student or group participation in the research project could gain course or independent study credit
- Organize the project as a student or group service learning project
- Include the research findings in student leader trainings
- Cite the study and student quotes in grant proposals
- Share findings with faculty and encourage and invite additional research on campus

Who Do We Want to Hear From

This study is about students under 25 years old at 4 year institutions of higher education. Focus groups should contain students from a wide range of majors, backgrounds, and experiences with politics. While focus groups should contain “engaged” students, those actively involved in a program or student organization devoted to civic or political engagement, we are particularly concerned with recruiting participants who do not have any or have very little experience with conventional political life (either intentional or unintentional). By using random lists or doing very intentional recruitment, we will be able to hear from a more representative group of students from each campus.

Why Focus Groups

Over the past few decades many pundits and politicians have shared any number of opinions about how, why and whether young people are engaged in civic and political life. In fact, after the 2004 election major media outlets reported that the young people had not increased their rate of voting, while in fact 18 to 24 year olds had turned out at a rate of 11% more than in the 2000 election. Why would this occur when the data clearly pointed in the other direction? Did a quick glance at some data confirm suspicions that young people are unengaged?

At some point in our lives we are asked to take surveys. Either when you buy something, over the phone, or on the web, we’ve all done it. That means that at some point we’ve all most likely had the experience of trying to answer a question and not know which answer to pick. As much as we stare at the answers, none of them seem to characterize our experience, and so we just pick one that is kind-of close.

Focus groups are meant to eliminate the way in which participants must put themselves in a previously determined category/answer. Focus groups that are

done well allow participants to use their own language to describe opinions, experiences and knowledge.

We will never know the exact answer to this question, but this study is attempting to portray a picture of the political engagement of college students using their own words.

What Will the Focus Groups Address

Questions asked of the students in the focus groups will address their experiences with public policies, with volunteering and with social issues generally. The focus groups will also contain a few interactive activities where students will contribute their perspectives and opinions on the political system.

A few questions from the focus group:

- Is there a public issue or cause that has motivated you to take action?
- Do you have informed perspectives on social issues?
- What public policies affect your life most on a regular basis and how did you learn about this policy?
- Have you ever engaged in an act you think of as a political act? What was it? What made it political?

Question Review

The focus group protocol was “tested” in six(6) focus groups at the University of Maryland in May 2006. The focus group questions were also used to facilitate discussions among students at the Kettering Foundation PPW. These students also gave substantive feedback on the language, order, and content of the focus group questions. The focus group protocol will be adapted based on the reflections from these two events.

Campus-Specific Questions

A few campuses have requested adding a few campus-specific questions to the focus group protocol. CIRCLE is open to discussing this and encourages campuses to consider this. Our reflections on adding questions would revolve around the additional questions’ impact on the flow of the conversation.

How will a Focus Group Actually Run

Each focus group will last two (2) hours.

A CIRCLE staff member will facilitate each focus group and will bring the equipment for audio recording.

Our experience suggests that it is an enormous assistance to the project, particularly the transcription, to have someone keep track of the order in which students speak during the focus group. We will likely ask that a member of the campus team help us with this.

General Outline for the Focus Group

Time	Section	
20 minutes	Introduction	Overview of Procedures, Consent Forms
Audio Recording Begins		
90 minutes	Focused Questions	This section will include short answer questions, open ended questions, and a couple of group activities to vary students' opportunities to contribute.
Audio Recording Ends		
10 minutes	Conclusion	Brief student survey, Distribution of gift certificates

College Student Political Engagement Study Pilot Focus Groups

Focus Group Protocol

Materials Needed:

- protocol
- audio recorder
- surveys
- consent forms
- name tents
- markers
- food and drinks
- pen and paper (for taking notes)
- laptop (for taking notes)

Before the group arrives:

- Set up the room so that all participants can see each other
- Make sure that food and drinks are easily available
- Put a consent form and name tent in front of each seat
- Set up the recording device and do a sample recording from different places in the room to make sure you can pick up different voice levels in all areas of the room

When the full group has arrived:

- Introduce yourself and what CIRCLE is and does
- Share with the group that before starting the conversation you want to go over: what this information will be used for, explain the confidentiality of this research, and talk about ground rules for the discussion
- Explain the purpose of the focus groups and what will happen with the information

What CIRCLE is going to do with the info

- These insights will be reviewed by the research team and used to inform a larger national research project
- The insights and comments collected in each focus group will be transcribed and added to the total comments made by all of the young people involved (Individual students' names will remain confidential).

- We are partnering with a group on campus (name the group) and they will use the transcriptions to inform student programs on this campus. They, however, will NOT use your name either.
- We will likely not do school comparisons or say anything about a particular campus unless something really very much stands out.
- CIRCLE is a non-partisan organization. We are not trying to put words in your mouth or ask you questions that lead you in a particular direction. You can be partisan if you want, clearly. If at any point you feel as though I am asking you a question that leads you to a particular answer, please tell me because I do not want to do that.
- Ask the group if they have any questions

▪ **Confidentiality and Feeling Comfortable During the Discussion**

In order to actually conduct these focus groups we have gotten permission from the [insert campus name] IRB. Has anyone heard of an IRB? It is the office on campus that approves research to be done on campus or the research that campus folks are doing off-campus. They are there to protect you. As a result of our desire to do ethical research and what the IRB has asked us to do, there are a bunch of ways we will protect your confidentiality.

- Explain that we'll be recording your discussion and that you want to emphasize that no one's individual names will be used in the research. We'll be collecting your name for tracking purposes only and only the research team will see them. To reinforce this we'll also be using fake names once you turn on the recording device.
- Remind the group that what's talked about in this room is confidential, so if you talk about it outside of this do not refer to anyone specifically using their real or fake name or any distinguishing characteristics.
- Additionally you see the consent form in front of you. If you have not yet, please read this form. [Give time to read the form fully] To be explicit, basically this form says that: you are 18, you know this is research and you know the purpose of the research, you know this is entirely voluntary and that you can leave at any time, and that the gift certificate you receive at the end of the focus group is taxable income. Also, if you do want/need to leave the focus group, that's okay, I just want to ask you to tell me. I want to point out that there are two moments where it would be a good opportunity to let me know this and this is during the two activities that we will do. One is with the paper on the wall and another is with a bunch of images on the table. Does anyone have any questions about the consent

form? [Be sure to answer all questions and wait to see if any questions arise.]

Then if you understand the form, you have no questions or your questions have been answered, if you would like to stay then please sign the consent form and pass it forward.

- For those who are done: Ask people to write a fake name on their name tent that will be used to address them for the discussion. Make sure that you can see all of the names.
- See if there are any questions

▪ **How the Discussion will run & Ground Rules**

- Tell the group that for the sake of a respectful discussion you want to ask them to follow a few guidelines.
 - Step up, step back: if you know you talk a lot say your piece and wait for others to speak before adding more. If you're a quiet person, try to push yourself to chime in. We want to hear from everyone.
 - There are no right or wrong answers in this discussion and everyone's experience is valid. We can discuss ideas and discuss actions, but don't attack people
 - Don't talk while others are talking and don't talk over people, wait for them to finish what they're saying
 - Ask the group if there are any they'd like to add

▪ **Start audio recorder**

- Remind the students that from here on out they will be addressed by their fake name to preserve their confidentiality

▪ **Discussion Questions**

Practices

Now I'm going to ask you a series of questions about your time and activities. When we're done, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about all of the activities combined.

Have you ever volunteered your time for something? If yes, what? [make sure it's clear who was organizing the volunteer work if it was not an individual thing]

Is there a public issue or cause that has really sparked your attention more so than others? Is there a public issue or cause that has motivated you to take action? [If they haven't taken action, ask why.]

Do you have informed perspectives on public and societal issues?

Follow-up questions about answers given to the above questions:

What do you see as the most fundamental purpose of these activities?

Do you think these activities we just discussed relate to public policy? If so, how?

Public Policy

What public policies affect your life most on a regular basis and how did you learn about this policy? I'm not talking about campus-based policies.

I'm going to name a word and I want you to write down what immediately come to mind when you hear what I say. This might be another word, an idea, or a picture, anything. [Ask the group to do this for: "government", "democracy", "common good" and "community". Use what you've written down to start writing on the big pieces of paper on the wall that have these four words on them. You can write these words or use them to draw or elaborate, anything you want to put up there that this word makes you think about. Take your time to look at each word and what others have written. (Get the group back together after at least 5-6 minutes. Persuade a few people to go into more detail about the words they wrote down or what they put up on the paper for each word. Try to ask about any contradictions or similarities in what has been written down for the words.)

Using the Language of Politics

Take a minute or two to look this next group of photographs on the table. I want you to pick the one that most represents "politics" to you and put it in front of you. We're going to go around the table and talk about why you picked the picture that you did. If someone takes the one you wanted, then pick the next most representative picture. (The photographs would represent a range of activities including: voting, a public meeting, a protest, a politician speaking, a political press conference, a political fundraiser, a party, a group discussion, a church, a group meeting, etc. Push people to go into more detail about why they choose the picture that they did.)

What do you think college students think about politics? [Consider differences from responses to above questions about law and public policy, push students to explain any differences]

Have you ever engaged in an act you think of as a political act? What was it? What made it political?

Do you think there's anything in your life that make you more or less likely to follow or engage in the political system? For example, when I was in high school I played sports and the girls' sports didn't get as much funding as guy's so I started to ask questions about that because I was a girl and it affected me.

Do you think that it is more beneficial to address public issues by...volunteering, advocating for particular changes in the way government works, voting, organizing people, or giving money? What is the least beneficial? Why?

Do you think that the political system is addressing the genuine needs of the public?

Where would you say you learn about politics and the political system?

What has influences or currently influences your opinions about politics and the political system? [make sure to understand HOW this occurs]

Schooling and Politics

How do you think your experiences in high school affect your engagement in college?

How do we learn about and experience politics on campus? What does your campus do and do you think it works? (Encourage them to think broadly, beyond courses)

Looking Forward

What is one change in politics that would make it more appealing to you? Why are you in favor of that? (Go around the table and ask each person for their idea. Push them to explain their underlying values that favor that change.)

Conclusion

How was this? Was it weird? What was it like to be asked these questions?

▪ **Survey**

What you see going around the table is a brief survey. This survey is a selection of questions from CIRCLE's national youth survey that we do every four years. There are 26 questions half of which are demographic questions and the other half opinion questions. We will use the demographic info to look at the answers

of groups, like women or first-years. We will also use it to check our work, to make sure that we haven't got a overrepresentation of any group in our project.

You can check all that apply for the demographic questions and please let me know if you have any questions.

**Complementary Survey
College Student Political Engagement Study**

Directions: Please answer the following questions by putting an 'X' on the line that most represents your answer to the question.

1. Thinking about the problems you see in your community, how much difference do you believe YOU can personally make in working to solve problems you see?

- Great deal of difference
- Some difference
- A little difference
- No difference at all
- Don't know

2. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement #1: It is my RESPONSIBILITY to get involved to make things better for society

Statement #2: It is my CHOICE to get involved to make things better for society

- Statement #1
- Statement #2
- Depends
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

3. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement #1: Government should do more to solve problems

Statement #2: Government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals

- Statement #1
- Statement #2
- Depends
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

4. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement #1: Politics is a way for the powerful to keep power to themselves

Statement #2: Politics is a way for the less powerful to compete on equal footing with the powerful

- Statement #1
- Statement #2
- Depends
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

5. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement #1: The political system is filled with unnecessary conflict

Statement #2: There are so many competing groups in politics that conflict is unavoidable

- Statement #1
- Statement #2
- Depends
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

6. How much difference does it make whether the Democrats control the government or the Republicans do?

- A lot
- Some difference
- A little difference
- No real difference
- Don't know

7. On the whole, would you say the political system in this country IS or is NOT responsive to the genuine needs of the public?

- Is Responsive
- NOT Responsive
- Haven't thought much about it
- Don't Know

8. Thinking about problems in your community, how much difference do you believe that people working together as a group can make in solving problems you see?

- Great deal of difference
- Some difference
- A little difference
- No difference at all
- Don't know

9. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement #1: My age group is unique and distinct from other generations

Statement #2: There is nothing particularly unique or distinct about my age group

- Statement #1
- Statement #2
- Depends
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

10. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement #1: Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient

Statement #2: Government often does a better job than people give it credit for

- Statement #1
- Statement #2
- Depends
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

11. In politics today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Something Else/Other
- Don't Know/No opinion

12. In general, would you describe your political views as ...

- Very conservative
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Very Liberal
- Don't know

13. Do you see volunteering and/or community service activities as...(Choose One)

- A form of politics
- An alternative to politics
- A complement to politics
- Has nothing to do with politics

14. Were you born in the United States, or in another country?

- Born in US
- Born somewhere else
- Don't know

15. Do you consider yourself to be Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, some other religion, atheist or agnostic?

- Catholic
- Protestant (include Baptist, Episcopal, Jehovah's Witness, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Church of Christ, etc)
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Other
- Atheist/Agnostic
- Don't Know

16. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

If you answered yes to the above question, would you describe yourself as a born again or evangelical Christian?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

17. Are you married, living as married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?

- married
- living as married
- widowed
- divorced
- separated
- never been married
- don't know

18. Are you now employed full-time, part-time, or not employed?

- Full-time
- Part-Time
- Not Employed
- Don't Know

19. Were your parents born in the United States or in another country?

- Both in U.S.
- One in U.S./one in another country
- Both in another country
- Don't know

20. What was the last year of school your mother completed? If you were raised by a stepmother or some other female relative, please answer for that person.

- No High School
- Some High School
- High School graduate
- Some College
- College graduate
- Graduate or professional school or degree
- Don't Know

21. What was the last year of school your father completed? If you were raised by a stepfather or some other male relative, please answer for that person.

- No High School

- Some High School
- High School graduate
- Some College
- College graduate
- Graduate or professional school or degree
- Don't Know

22. What is your race?

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Latino/Hispanic
- Other
- Don't Know

23. Do you personally know or work with someone who is gay or lesbian?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If you answered yes above, is that person yourself, a member of your family, a close friend, coworker, or an acquaintance?

- Family
- Close friend
- Co-worker
- Acquaintance
- Self
- Other
- Don't know

24. What year in school are you?

- First
- Second
- Third
- Fourth
- Fifth
- Other

25. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

____ Transgender
____ Other

26. What is your major?

Participating Campuses

We are thrilled to be partnering with the following campuses to host focus groups:

Bowdoin College
Brunswick, ME

Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS

Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Providence College
Providence, RI

Tougaloo College
Tougaloo, MS

University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, CA

University of Dayton
Dayton, OH

University of Maryland-College Park (Pilot Focus Groups)
College Park, MD

University of Massachusetts Boston
Boston, MA

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Minneapolis, MN

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM

Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, NC

B. Roles and Responsibilities

Table of All Roles and Responsibilities

Timeline	Phase of Project	CIRCLE Responsibilities	Campus Responsibilities
August- Early October 2006	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cover expenses related to project when needed -Provide campuses with draft IRB application, help submit -Provide campuses with recruitment guidelines, strategies, and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review draft and submit IRB (Institutional Review Board) application -Work with CIRCLE to develop recruitment plan -Work with CIRCLE to set dates for focus groups
October 2006 – April 2007	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Confer with campuses about recruitment strategies, provide suggestions -Coordinate travel -Facilitate focus groups -Purchase gift certificates for focus group participants -Audio record all focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recruit for 3 to 4 focus groups that approximately represent the campus' student population (8-10 students per group, 24-40 students in total) -Track participation in focus groups -Reserve rooms for focus groups -Help figure out snacks/food for groups -Attend focus groups and help track student contributions -Provide CIRCLE with relevant local information regarding the focus groups and travel
May –July 2007	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Transcribe all focus groups -Review all transcripts -Write report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Campuses have opportunity to analyze their campus' data (CIRCLE will provide each campus with the transcripts and survey data from their campus)
Fall 2007	Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Share report with relevant organizations, students, and campuses -Conduct workshops at national and regional conferences 	

C. Timeline

Date	Activity
August 21-31	Campus Team Call, Develop Campus-Specific Recruitment Strategies, Discuss Appropriate Dates
August 21 through mid-September	Develop and Submit IRB Application
By Mid-September	Set Calendar of Focus Groups
Unknown	Receipt of IRB Approval/Waiver
Three (3) Weeks Prior to First Focus Group on Your Campus	Recruitment Begins (this timeline may change depending upon the recruitment strategy chosen)
Last Week of September through the end of November	Focus Groups
By 4/31/07	Follow-up

August 21st Through Mid-September

CIRCLE will work with campuses to submit IRB* applications to the appropriate on-campus office as well as financial paperwork (provided by CIRCLE) to CIRCLE in order to receive the funds (please note: receipt of check will likely take 6-8 weeks).

**Each campus has an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is responsible for approving all research done on campus. Time necessary for approval processes range, but to be safe we should allow 3-4 weeks to complete the process.*

October 2006 to April 2007

Focus Group Recruitment

Recruitment will begin after IRB approval is received and 3 weeks prior to the date of the first focus group. A plan for this recruitment will be developed in order to submit the IRB application. Focus groups on each campus will involve a group of students that approximately represents a campus' student population. As a result, each campus will work with CIRCLE to develop a plan specific to their campus.

Focus Groups

Similar to above, the focus group dates will be dependent upon each campus' schedule, how the approval process progresses at each school, and travel schedules as a CIRCLE representative will facilitate every focus group.

Follow-up

For Campuses Given Financial Assistance

After all of the focus groups are completed, we will ask you for a final account of expenditures.

Additionally, by the end of April 2007, we would like a description of how you have used the information from the focus groups on your campus. For example, your description may answer questions such as:

Did you create a report or summary of the focus groups on your campus? If so, please include.

Who were the results shared with?

What do you think about the results from your campus? Were they surprising? Why or why not?

How will the results factor into your work or the work of others on campus?

D. Financial Information (IF APPLICABLE)

Overview of Funding Process

Each participating campus will receive a \$1,200 grant from CIRCLE to contribute to the expenses incurred as a result of participation. In addition to the \$1,200, CIRCLE will provide significant time and assistance with the focus groups. In particular, CIRCLE will also pay for focus group participants' gift certificates and moderate the focus groups. The \$1,200 grant from CIRCLE should cover expenses related to the project. Below is a summary of what expenses CIRCLE will cover and what expenses are to be covered by the \$1,200.

Budget Item	To Be Covered by \$1,200 Grant From CIRCLE	Responsibility of CIRCLE (in addition to granting the \$1,200)
Space for 3 to 4 Focus Groups	X	
Food/Snacks for 3 to 4 Focus Groups	X	
Gift Certificates for Focus Group Participants (\$25/participant)		X
Easel Paper for Focus Groups	X	
Travel to Campuses		X
Transcription		X
Copying	X	X
Time of Student/Staff/Faculty to organize focus groups	X	

Please note that campuses will be expected to complete a financial agreement with CIRCLE. As CIRCLE is based at the University of Maryland, the financial agreement will be with the University of Maryland Foundation. In order to begin the process of getting funds dispersed, each campus must contact Barbara Cronin, CIRCLE Financial Director, at bacronin@umd.edu or 301.405.6337. Then an agreement will be sent from CIRCLE to the campus contact person, who will get the appropriate authorized signature on the agreement and return it to CIRCLE. Receipt of the funds will likely not occur until 4-6 weeks after the receipt of the signed agreement.

Review of Fund Dispersal Process

1. Contact Barbara Cronin
2. CIRCLE develops official agreement with campus and sends copy to campus to be signed (this will take 3-4 weeks)
3. Campus returns signed agreement
4. University of Maryland Foundation will cut check to campus (this will take 3-4 weeks)

E. Getting Research Approved

What is an IRB

A definition of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) that we like:

A recipient administrative body established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects recruited to participate in research activities conducted under the auspices of the institution with which it is affiliated. The IRB has the authority to approve, require modifications in, or disapprove all research activities that fall within its jurisdiction.

Each institution of higher education has an IRB to monitor all research activities done on campus or by campus faculty, staff and students.

Overview of IRB Application Process

While we have researched the possibility, it is not feasible to get one national approval that would cover this project across the country. As a result, we are asking that each campus work with us to submit an application for their campus.

We hope to submit IRB applications as soon as we can. Each campus will have an application format they prefer applications to be submitted in. Abby will identify the correct format for each campus and write the draft application. Draft applications will include an overview of the protocol (already developed by CIRCLE), the recruitment process (to be developed by the campus team and Abby), and the campus-specific consent form (which Abby will develop).

Abby will provide this draft to the appropriate staff/faculty member on each campus, who will add appropriate campus information, read the draft and consult with Abby regarding any questions or suggested changes. The staff/faculty member will then submit the IRB application with the most appropriate information provided by Abby.

Moving forward with the project will be dependent upon IRB approval*, which we anticipate having no problems with. IRB meeting schedules differ, but we should expect a time period of at least 10 days before hearing anything.

**Please note that while we have talked about needing IRB “approval” in some cases this may come in the form of a “waiver”.*

IRB Process – In Short

1. Campus Team and Abby will work on recruitment strategy
2. Abby will develop a campus-specific IRB application and send to campus contact
3. Campus contact will edit application and submit
4. Campus contact will contact Abby once he/she hears back from the IRB

F. Focus Group Recruitment

Who Do We Want to Hear From

This study is about students under 25 years old at 4 year institutions of higher education. Focus groups should contain students from a wide range of majors, backgrounds, and experiences with politics. While focus groups should contain “engaged” students, those actively involved in a program or student organization devoted to civic or political engagement, we are particularly concerned with recruiting participants who do not have any or have very little experience with conventional political life (either intentional or unintentional). By using random lists or doing very intentional recruitment, we will be able to hear from a more, but not exactly, representative group of students from each campus.

Recruitment: Developing a Strategy for Your Campus

Each campus will have different ways of recruiting students because each campus is different. We (Abby and each campus’ project team) will develop a recruitment plan that matches your campus and the goals of the project. We should have a general idea of this plan before we submit the IRB application.

While not all campus strategies will be the same, our goal is that the end results will be similar: a diverse group of students on each campus.

The first step in this process will be our first campus team phone call. This call will get everyone on the same page and answer any questions that campus team members have about the project. The agenda for this call is included in this toolkit.

Language in the Recruitment Process

Politics

This project is about students’ attitudes about politics, the political system and public life.

That said, there is no denying that even the word “politics” has a stigma associated with it and often elucidates distinct emotions.

We want to try to understand students’ thoughts from a variety of perspectives and will try to do so by avoiding the language of “politics” at first. In doing so, we hope to avoid bringing this stigma and stereotypes, though clearly relevant, into the conversation from the beginning.

Below are a few sample recruitment materials. You will notice these materials use vague language like “current affairs” and “public issues”. This is a deliberate attempt not to bias the discussion or make it so that only students with a predisposition to talk about “politics” will attend the focus groups.

Compensation

As was stated earlier, we are looking to recruit students who are AND are not actively following or engaged in civic and political life. As a result, we need to appeal to a couple of different student motivations. It will likely be easier for us to recruit “engaged” students. Therefore, our recruitment will err on the side of informing students of the financial compensation and food provided for participation.

Potential Recruitment Strategies

Request Random Sample from Registrar

At the University of Maryland, where we did pilot focus groups in May 2006, we were lucky enough to get a random list of undergraduates from the Registrar’s Office. We were able to do this because we had IRB approval AND after going through another review process for the Registrar. It worked out great. But to give you a sense for how focus group recruitment can go, a list of 1,000 students (who were contacted via email) resulted in 44 confirmed students, which resulted in 33 students who actually showed up.

Relationship-Based Turn-Out

In all likelihood you are in a position to know people from all over campus. This strategy would rely on the relationships of those on the campus team to turn out a diverse group of students.

What would this look like? Developing a list of faculty, staff and student leaders who you know and could ask you to suggest students to invite to the focus group. The list would include folks from various corners of campus and include people affiliated with civic or political engagement as well as those who are not.

The key to this strategy is getting a solid group of students who are not student leaders or extremely active on campus. Some discussions with your contacts would need to focus on asking for suggestions of students they may not even have strong relationships with.

Required Courses

The core curriculum (i.e. courses everyone has to take) differs at every school. Institutions that have required courses provide an opportunity for recruitment from an almost-random sample of the institution.

Recruiting from these courses would most likely come in the form of asking the faculty member or Teaching Assistant if you could make an announcement at the beginning or end of a class about the focus groups.

That said, required courses are often limited to the first and second years. If this strategy is to be used, it would only be effective if students could be recruited from classes that include students from all four years OR if there are required upper-level, or junior and senior, classes as well.

Strategic Course Recruitment

Similar to the strategy described above, this strategy relies on courses and course presentations as a source of focus group participants. In this case, however, recruitment would occur in courses from several different majors.

Student Newspaper Advertisement

These last two strategies are less intentional and would most likely act as either a back-up or last minute approach.

An advertisement in the campus newspaper, for reasons stated previously, would focus on the compensation involved in participating (\$20 and free food!!!).

Fliering

Very similar to a newspaper advertisement, fliering across campus would focus on the compensation involved in participating.

Recruitment Timeline*

One Month Out

Gather those who will participate in the recruitment process to decide: based on our stated recruitment plan, who will do what and when?

For example: who will send out the emails, who will participants respond to in order to say they want to participate, who will contact student groups, who will update Abby?

Three Weeks Out

Decide on language for the recruitment emails, etc. (Reference comments above about language)

Two Weeks Out

Begin Recruitment

One Week Out

Evaluate participation numbers. If numbers are low (i.e. 4-5 people per group) devise a plan to do another recruitment push.

Send Abby an update on recruitment.

Two Days Before a Focus Group (this might be more than one day)

Send a confirmation email to each student to confirm the date, time and location of the focus group they signed up to be in.

*This timeline might be affected by a campus break or a test week. Consequently, the timeline should be adjusted to facilitate students actually reading recruitment information.

Sample Recruitment Email

Good Morning -

You have been selected to tell us what you think (and get a free meal and \$20 while you're at it).

(Yes, this is real, it's not spam)

CIRCLE, a national research center focused on young people, is organizing several discussions (a.k.a focus groups) on campus to get a sense for [insert school name] students' aspirations, ideas and practices related to current issues and affairs. You can check CIRCLE out at www.civicyouth.org to see that they're legit.

You will join a group of 8 other undergrads for 2 hours to discuss how current issues are now and how you may like to see them different. We'll provide the food and set you up with your choice of gift certificate to a place like Amazon.com and Target.

Please email me, [insert name] at [insert email] to sign-up for the date/time that works for your schedule. Opportunities are limited, so please get back to me ASAP.

Current available times are:

TBD

This project is being organized by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), a national research center based at the University of Maryland.

I look forward to meeting you in the next few weeks.

Thank you,

Sample Recruitment Call Script

Abby: Hello, my name is Abby Kiesa, I'm calling for _____ (insert name).

Student: Yes, this is he/she. (Anticipated response)

Abby: Hey, I'm calling from the [insert campus office/program name] to invite you to share your opinions and make some money. I'm a [insert year in school] and am working with the [insert office name] and a national research center to organize focus groups of students here at [insert campus]. It's only a two hour commitment and you'd get food and \$20. You'd get to pick the time that fits your schedule. Would you be interested in hearing more?

Student: Ummm...I don't know. (Anticipated response)

Abby: All you'd have to do is tell me what session you could make, share your opinions about current affairs, and leave. That's it.

Student: Well, when are the times. (Anticipated response)

Abby: The potential times are: [insert dates/times].

Student: Okay, [insert time] would work.

Abby: Great. I've got you down for that time. It's in the [insert location]. Do you have any other questions?

Student: No. (Anticipated response)

Abby: Thanks, I look forward to meeting you.

Sample Confirmation Email

Dear _____,

Thanks for your interest in our project.

I have signed you up for the discussion on _____ (insert date) at _____ (insert time) that you indicated would fit into your schedule.

We will have food available and will provide you with your choice of gift certificate at the close of the discussion.

The goal of this project is to get a sense for what [insert school name] students think about current issues and affairs. The discussion will involve you and 7-8 other undergraduates.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have ANY questions about the project or the details. You can email me or call me at [insert appropriate number].

Thanks and I look forward to meeting you,
[insert name and contact info]

Sample Confirmation Call

This call should be made the day before the focus group:

Abby: Hello, my name is Abby Kiesa, I'm calling for _____ (insert name).

Student: Yes, this is he/she. (Anticipated response)

Abby: Hey, I'm just calling to remind you about the focus group discussion that you signed up for tomorrow. I work at CIRCLE in the School of Public Policy.

Student: Oh, yeah. (Anticipated response)

Abby: It's going to be at _____ (insert time) in the _____ (insert room). There will be food there and we'll get you your gift certificate at the close of the event. Do you have any questions?

Student: I don't think so. (Anticipated response)

Abby: Okay, well, if you have any questions beforehand please email me or call me at 301.405.8261. And I'll see you tomorrow. Thanks, I look forward to meeting you.

Keeping Track of Recruitment

Once you begin recruiting, it will be necessary to figure out a way to keep track of who you have contacted and who will be attending each focus group.

You should consider the recruitment strategy employed on your campus when deciding how to keep track of who you have contacted and who the students are who will be participating in each focus group.

Things to consider doing:

- Recruitment for the pilot focus groups at the University of Maryland was conducted using a random list from the Registrar's Office. As a result, using a master list was helpful for tracking who specifically had been contacted, when they were contacted, and who had signed up for a focus group. This system may or may not be appropriate for your recruitment strategy, however, we encourage you to keep a list of where, when and how recruitment has taken place.
- Keep a spreadsheet of all of the students who have signed up for each focus group. This will help to remind you of how many students have signed up for a given focus group. On the following page you will find a sample of this. Additionally, on CIRCLE's website at http://www.civicyouth.org/CollegeStudentPoliticalEngagementStudy06_index.htm you can download the file for this sample spreadsheet.

G. Analysis

At the conclusion of all of the focus groups, CIRCLE will have the focus groups from each campus transcribed (have a written version of the discussion made). CIRCLE will send these transcriptions to each campus. As a result, each campus will have the following products of the focus groups:

- Transcriptions from each focus group, and
- Survey results from each focus group

CIRCLE will look at the focus group data as a whole in order to look for national patterns and themes. This analysis will take place during the summer of 2007.

Each campus will have the benefit of making use of the data from their campus (although focus group participants will remain confidential).

As stated previously, the questions for the survey used in the focus groups are taken from CIRCLE's national youth survey. This survey was done in 2002 and just recently in the spring of 2006. Consequently, the focus group survey data will be compared to this national benchmark data.

The 2006 national youth survey findings were released in October 2006. The raw data will be made public in 2007. These findings and raw data will be available online at www.civicyouth.org.

Student Involvement

There will be two opportunities for students who have been involved in campus organizing for the project during analysis.

First, once the report is in draft form, we would love to get feedback on it. This draft will likely be available to read in June. The report will be 20-30 pages in total. If you are interested in providing feedback on the draft report please email Abby before the end of the spring semester and she will email you when the report is in draft form.

Second, we are looking for one student to work at CIRCLE and help with analysis over the summer. This student will be someone who attended the PPW in June 2006, played a role in recruitment for focus groups on their campus, and sat in on at least one focus group. Students who are interested in applying to work at CIRCLE should email Abby their resume and a cover letter addressing their experience with research and writing and what they would like to gain from working at CIRCLE on this project over the summer. These materials should be emailed to Abby no later than March 23rd, 2007.

H. Glossary

Focus Group*

A research tool utilizing small group interviews to obtain qualitative data as well as items for questionnaires or surveys. Group interaction is an important component of a focus group.

IRB (Institutional Review Board)*

An internal body created by an institution that receives federal money for research involving human subjects; the IRB reviews all institutional research involving human subjects to determine whether it conforms to ethical practices.

Literature Review*

Section of a report that establishes the value of a research project and how it fits in with other research. It may illustrate that the research addressed a question not investigated in previous studies, filled a gap in previous research, tested a model under different conditions, corrected for errors in previous research, or resolved conflicting research findings.

Methodology#

The section of the final report in which the moderator outlines the approach used in the research, including the method of recruiting participants, the location of the groups, the external stimuli used, and so on. Methodology can also mean the approach a moderator uses to conduct the sessions.

Pilot Study*

A small study designed to test the adequacy of a proposed data collection strategy.

Focus Group Protocol

The detailed, written directions for facilitating a given focus group. This includes questions to be asked, follow-up questions, etc.

Qualitative Research*

A general term referring to research involving detailed, verbal descriptions of characteristics, cases, and settings. Qualitative research usually involves fewer cases investigated in more depth than quantitative research.

Quantitative Research*

A general term referring to research in which values of variables are characterized by numbers or symbols. Typically, many variables are measured for a large number of cases. Data are summarized and analyzed with statistical techniques.

Sample#

The participants in a focus group as research subjects.

Selection Bias

A bias exists when students in a focus group are not representative of the broader student population because of the way they were recruited or volunteered.

Self-Selection

The process through which an individual chooses to participate in a research project. For example, a student who has a number of complaints about food in a campus dining hall may self-select into a focus group to get feedback on dining hall food.

Transcription

A written record of what was said. Often transcriptions are made using an audio recording to go through after the event.

*These definitions were taken from *Research Methods for Public Administrators* by Elizabethann O'Sullivan and Gary Russell (1999).

#These definitions were taken from *Handbook for Focus Group Research* by Thomas Greenbaum (1998).