

## WERA Focus Groups, Spring 2024

### Research Questions

- What are the gaps in support?
- How does your district/school support aspirations for postsecondary life?

**Population:** 11th/12th graders with a range of post-graduate plans (not all college-going)  
Ideally, all will have a completed HSBP with clearly articulated vision for post-hs activity.

**Sites:** Bellingham, Clover Park, Highline, Peninsula, Quincy, Ridgefield, Spokane

### Ask students to complete demographics form

- Race
- Gender
- Grade level
- School/School District
- Parent education level
- GPA
- Schools/programs/employer currently applying to or anticipated applying to

## Focus Group Protocol (60-90 minutes)

**Warm Welcome (5 mins):** The goal is to learn names and become comfortable with one another to prepare to engage in the focus group together. We'll have 3 - 5 minutes to greet each person by name and share one thing you like.

Example: My name is Stephanie and I like hiking. / Hi Stephanie, thank you for sharing. Hi, my name is Joe and I like pizza. / Hi Joe, thank you for sharing! MOVE TO NEXT PERSON.

Alternative Prompt: To better align the warm welcome to the content of the focus group, you can ask students to greet each person by name and share what they anticipate doing after graduation. This is a more personal question.

The facilitator should use their knowledge of the group to determine a prompt that is the best fit for the participants. The facilitator can choose to replace this with a different warm welcome.

### High School Experience

- **How have your HS courses prepared you for your next steps in your career/college path?**
  - What is it about these classes that feels like they're preparing you?
  - (Listen for: rigor, pace, amount of hw, teacher quality, etc)
  - (Listen for: working on college application personal statement, "talking about the college experience")
  - Have your HS courses introduced you to any career paths that interest you?

### Access to Caring Adults

- **Has anyone helped you in your postsecondary planning? Who were they and what did they do?**
  - Who do you talk to about your future aspirations? Has there been a teacher, mentor, or coach?
  - Do you think that all school staff respect all post-high school outcomes? What about the plans of your friends?
  - Who in the school has given you the message that you should think seriously about college? (or not?)
  - Where did the most useful information about your post secondary plan come from? (Did it come from counselor appointments or an “advisory” class? Or someplace else?)
  - Is there a difference in the kind of information related to your postsecondary planning that you’ve received in-school versus outside of school?

### Access to College and Career Resources

- **What college and career support have you received? What did you like? What hasn’t worked?**
  - For workforce and military students: What support have you received for entering the military or workforce after high school? Is there information you still need?
  - What kind of information did you receive around ... (Applying for programs / Applying for jobs (Followup - Did anyone help you complete your applications?), Tuition / Financial Aid (FAFSA), Housing / Independent living costs)

### Current gaps

- **What is the biggest challenge you face in your next step?**
  - If you could go back in time, what would you have told your younger self?
  - In what ways could your high school improve in the way they support students in their postsecondary planning? (Possible topics: HSBP, counseling/advising, financial supports, identifying potential career paths)

### Closing

- **Is there anything else you’d like to share regarding your preparation for your year after you graduate from HS?**
- **Optimistic Closure: Quick Whip Around:** Typically this is done standing in a circle, but it can be done seated in an arc or round. Ask for a volunteer to start and then move around the circle. Participants can choose to pass.
  - *Suggested Prompt:* **What is one thing you learned from our focus group or one wonder that you have as a result of participating in the focus group?** (The facilitator can choose to replace this with a different optimistic closure.)