

## **Triple Play: Focus Group Protocols**

### **TRIPLE PLAY**

#### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH NEW PLAY BUYERS— DESCRIPTION OF THE EXERCISE**

Each participating theatre will conduct a minimum of two focus group conversations. The general idea behind these focus groups is to recruit six to eight single ticket holders for an upcoming performance of a new play to come to the theatre an hour and a half early for a group discussion immediately prior to seeing the play. The discussions may reference that evening's performance as an example of a new play, but the conversation will be about audiences' attitudes towards new plays in general, rather than about any one play in particular.

Discussions should be held in a location convenient to the theatre lobby (e.g., a Green Room, rehearsal space, or even a quiet corner of the lobby may be appropriate). Ideally, the moderator and respondents will sit around a small table. For an 8:00 p.m. curtain, respondents should be asked to arrive at the hall by 6:30 p.m. for the pre-performance discussion. Food and refreshments should be provided. The discussion should start no later than 6:45 p.m., and finish by 7:45 p.m.

Make sure all respondents have nameplates, with their first names only. (Hint: fold an index card in half). We suggest preparing a handout for Question 1 in advance of the focus group session, as well as reflecting on aspects of the play that might be considered "risky" to use as probes for Question 3 (see below).

Playwrights will participate as recorders (in an observation role), and should not sit at the table with the respondents, but should be positioned unobtrusively somewhere behind the table. Playwrights may be introduced as an associate of the theatre, but should not be identified as a playwright.

Recorders should capture the gist of the discussants comments on each topic in a Word document, typing notes directly into a copy of the topic guide. Whenever possible, they should identify the speaker in their notes so that individual responses can be interpreted in light of other statements by the same person. Occasionally, when a respondent says something particularly insightful or revealing, it is helpful to capture a few of these comments word-for-word, as they may be included in the summary report.

The recorder's notes will serve as a memory aid to the theatre's moderator when they prepare their reports on the exercise. After the interviews, the moderator may add their own observations, comments, and reactions to the recorder's notes, and this will become the surviving record of the conversation. It may also be helpful to make an audio recording of the interview, which can be consulted if portions of the focus group discussions aren't fully captured in the notes. However, it is very time consuming to listen to audio recordings of interviews, and we don't expect that level of effort.

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Immediately after the discussion, the partners should debrief and make a short list of key findings. It is essential to do this immediately afterwards, or the next day. Otherwise, the data will quickly fade from memory.

### Reporting and Synthesis Process

Following the second focus group, the theatre partner will type up brief summaries of key observations from the conversations (no more than three pages), and share it with the playwright who served as the recorder. The playwright may edit or embellish before the summary is submitted to WolfBrown. The purpose of these reports is to think across both focus groups and capture the range of viewpoints that were heard, while keeping in mind that we can't generalize about all audiences based on this small sample. We also invite the moderators to reflect on what they heard and note things that they found particularly interesting or surprising. WolfBrown will provide a template to assist the theatre partners in composing these summary reports.

Once these reports have been submitted, they will be compiled into a single Google document and shared with all of the participating theatres. WolfBrown will then schedule a webinar with the theatre personnel in order to discuss the findings and identify key themes. Based on this discussion, WolfBrown will add a summary of the key findings at the top of the Google document, which the theatres may then view and edit.

The final step of the synthesis will take place once the reports from both the interviews and the focus groups are available. At that point, theatres will be given access to the playwrights' interview report, and playwrights will be given access to the theatres' focus group report, allowing for a comparison of themes from both methodologies. TDF/TBA will then select 3 or 4 of the playwrights who will work independently to compose final syntheses that summarize the research findings and highlight lessons learned. These papers may be used as a source of dialogue for the convening at Arts Emerson.

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### FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE

#### Discussion Topics & Time Allocations (60-70 minutes)

5 min.	Moderators' Introduction & Explanation of the Focus Group
10 min.	Participant Introductions
25 min.	Motivations and Salience of Attributes of New Work
20 min.	Engagement, and the Playwright's Role

#### Moderator's Introduction – 5 minutes [do this very quickly]

- This is an informal focus group; introduce observers sitting in the room
- Length of discussion – about 60 minutes, no break
- Purpose – The purpose of the discussion is to explore your feelings about seeing new plays.
- Your input will provide important input to a national study of theatergoing.

#### Explanation of the Focus Group

- The confidentiality of your remarks is assured – your names will not be attributed to any of the comments in the report, so please be as candid as possible.
- If you'd like to add something to the conversation, please raise your hand and I'll call on you as quickly as possible.
- I may call on people from time to time, even if they don't have their hand up, in order to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.
- As we get into the discussion, please feel free to disagree with something and say "I have a different opinion about that..." because it's very important that we hear differing opinions, when you have them.
- Do you have any questions before we start?

#### Participant Introductions (working clockwise around the table) – 10 minutes

#### **Let's go around the table quickly and I'd like you to introduce yourself and tell us...**

- **Your name and line of work, if you work**
- **What theatres you patronize most regularly**

[call on first respondent, move quickly, be spontaneous in following up introductions with a few questions]

Probe spontaneously: **Who do you go out with, when you go to the theatre?**

Probe spontaneously: **How would you describe your tastes in theatre?**

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### Motivations and Salience of Attributes of New Work – 25 minutes

[In this module, bear in mind that some respondents may not be decision makers, or may not have had any sort of an organized decision process]

- 1. Of all the reasons why you came to the theatre tonight, how much of a factor was the play itself, versus other factors?**  
[Pass out fliers for the performance or other single-page marketing materials as a memory aid.]  
[Call on a respondent randomly]  
Probe: [repeat the question, as needed] **How much of a factor was the play itself in your decision to come tonight?** [do not spend much time investigating extrinsic motivations]
- 2. What tipped the balance in favor of seeing this play tonight? Was there any particular piece of information (or source of information) about the play that convinced you to come tonight?** [capture unaided, top-of-mind attributes; note that this question applies only to pre-purchase information, not post-purchase contextualization]  
[If someone mentions an attribute such as the plot or the playwright as a selling point, ask others around the table if that attribute was ‘plus or a minus’ in their decision process; try to engage the table in reflecting on the salience of different attributes; encourage disagreement]  
Probe: **Why was that piece of information persuasive?**
- 3. Based on what you know, is there anything about the production you’re about to see that gives you pause, or that makes you anxious or worried that you might not enjoy it?** [listen for sources of risk, voids of information]  
[Probe about aspects of the play that might be considered risky or adventurous. For example, if the play is about domestic violence or pedophilia, you might mention the theme as potentially off-putting. Or if this is the first American production by a foreign director, you might inquire whether this is seen as a potential source of concern. You should prepare these probes in advance.]
- 4. Is there any information that the theatre or the playwright could provide in advance that would help you decide whether a new play is right for you?**  
Probe: **Why is that important to know?**

### Engagement, and the Playwright’s Role – 20 minutes

- 5. Did you do anything to prepare for tonight’s experience? What did you do?**  
Probe: **Was there any contextual information that you found particularly helpful?**

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6. **If you could design “the ultimate” experience around seeing a new play in terms of things you could do to learn about the production in advance, and things you could do afterwards, what experience would you design? Suppose that you could ask the theatre or the playwright for any information or interaction. What’s the optimal experience you’d design for yourself?** [probe artfully on key points such as what information they’d like to absorb; how the information would be delivered; who they’d like to interact with; at-home versus in-theatre activities, etc.]
7. **Would greater access to playwrights, or greater interaction with playwrights, have any effect on your feelings about attending new work?**  
What access would you like to playwrights?

Wrap Up: **Is there anything else you’d like to add about your engagement with new works or playwrights?**

[Thank the participants for their time, explain how they will receive their incentive, direct them toward the auditorium for the performance that is about to start.]