

Planning for the Focus Group

Recruiting Appropriate Participants:

- Determine the type of participants you would like- age, education, ethnicity, race, income, parents, language, other requirements.
- Determine number of focus group needed to get necessary information (based on types of individual groups you would like feedback from)
- Sometimes agencies that work with certain demographic groups can be of help in recruiting participants.
- Make sure your scheduled time and location are convenient to the participants.
- Follow-up with participants to make sure that they are planning on attending.

Think About Analysis Issues:

- Do you need to identify each participant by his or her demographic information? If so, be sure to properly code the necessary forms.
- What type of analysis is appropriate?
 - Analysis based on transcripts- more detailed version;
 - Analysis based on summary of notes;
- What are the overarching questions that need to be answered?
- Do you need overall responses for all participants in the focus groups? Is a survey appropriate to be completed at the beginning of each focus group?
- How will the information be reported?
 - Formal written report-
 - Based on overarching themes
 - Question by question
 - General summary of all groups
 - Individual summary of each group
 - Informal feedback- written or oral

Forms:

- Determine what forms are appropriate:
 - Intake form
 - Multimedia consent
 - Consent to participate in focus group
 - Brief survey of individual opinion
- Make sure date and focus group location are listed on each form given to participants.
- Translate into appropriate languages.
 - If forms need to be translated into an alternate language, make sure that they are reviewed by at least 3 different people to insure appropriate translation.

Preparing standardized focus group protocol:

- Think about analysis issues when creating protocol.
- Try to ask no more than 5-7 questions during a one-hour focus group.
- Make sure that all information you would like the facilitator to cover is in the protocol.
- After the 1st or 2nd focus groups, determine if the protocol is meeting your objectives and is of the appropriate length.
- Revise protocol as necessary.
- Try to follow protocol as closely as possible during the focus group to maintain ability to analyze data.

Facilitating the Focus Group

Greeting Participants:

- As participants arrive, greet them and have them sign in.
- Make them comfortable, tell them:
 - where they can put their belongings,
 - where the restrooms are,
 - to help themselves to food and beverages,
 - where they should sit.
- Use this time to get to know the participants. If appropriate, eat with them and allow them to get comfortable with you. This is a good opportunity to identify the “talkers”, the “shy” participants, etc.

Beginning the Focus Group:

- Tell participants it is time to begin the focus group and direct them to the proper location.
- Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the study.
- Explain the recording/photography/note taking procedures.
- Explain basic focus group guidelines:
 - Participants should talk one at a time;
 - Participants must respect other's comments;
 - Inform participants that there is a limited amount of time to answer the questions and at times it will be necessary to move the discussion along.
- Begin the focus group discussion.

turn off cell phone

Responsibilities of the Facilitator:

- The facilitator must ensure that the focus group is recorded and documented.
- The facilitator must remain a neutral participant. Never offer personal opinions. *and recorder*
- The facilitator should be friendly, respectful and interested in hearing participants' comments.
- The facilitator should avoid head nodding and making comments such as “good”.
 - Participants might interpret this as approval and it can discourage other participants from voicing opposing opinions.
- The facilitator should not be judgmental.
- The facilitator must guide the discussion. It is important to know the goals of the focus group and determine how structured the group needs to be.
 - Are there predetermined questions that need to be answered?
 - Is it an exploratory, less structured discussion?
- The facilitator should be familiar with the focus group questions and structure.
 - Based on this, the facilitator must make sure the discussion stays on track and not allow participants to get off the subject. When this happens the facilitator must be able to tactfully guide the discussion back.
- The facilitator should probe for details without leading the participants.
 - It is important to tease out the specifics rather than accepting “I like it” or “I don't like it” as answers. If you get a response like this ask, “What was it you didn't like about it?” “What changes do you suggest?”
- It is important to get differing views. If the discussion has only headed in one direction, say something like, “We have heard from several people who really like the design, does anyone have anything different to say about the design?”

- It is the facilitator's responsibility to make sure every member of the group participates. Use strategies to engage quieter participants and stop certain participants from dominating the conversation.
- The facilitator must be prepared to hear unpleasant opinions.
- It is important to remember that each focus group is unique and you can not always apply the same format to each group. The facilitator must be flexible and prepared to make changes as necessary.

Concluding the Focus Group:

- Thank participants for their time and comments.
- Ask if participants have final comments or questions.
- Hand out participant stipend.

Focus Group Note-taking

- Make a seating chart of where participants are seated. It helps remember who said what.
- When taking notes try to write down any key quotes and note which participant said them.
- Record overall mood of the group, including any environmental or physical aspects that might affect what is said.
- At the end of a focus group, go over anything that was not clear to you with the participants before they leave.
- After participants leave, debrief with the moderator and any other observers to make sure that everyone reached the same conclusions about the group and what was said. Some possible questions to cover:
 - What are the most important themes or ideas discussed?
 - How did these differ from what we expected?
 - How did they differ from what occurred in earlier focus group?
 - What points need to be included in the report?
 - What quotes should we remember and possibly in the report?
 - Were there any expected or unanticipated findings?
 - Should we do anything differently for the next focus groups?
- These debriefing sessions should be audio-taped to help remember what was said.
- Make sure to keep a list of all focus group participants.
- Always label the tape as soon as the focus group is over.
- One side of a tape usually lasts about one hour so make sure to keep an eye on the tape recorder. (DOUBLE-CHECK TO MAKE SURE TAPE RECORDED)
- Try to make note of how the comments are said by the participants (think about body language, sarcasm, etc.). After the group is over, it is easy to misinterpret statements
- Try to take notes according to the question asked. When you go back over your notes after the group, put comments with appropriate question.
- If transcription of the tape is necessary, try to complete the transcription as soon as possible after the group so that it is still fresh in your mind.

Additional Suggestions for Conducting FOCUS GROUPS

6-10 participants per focus group most ideal

Look for not related people to form focus groups, have gender and age balance

Challenge, getting the participants there at the same time

Once at focus group site, give a brief intro with consent process, give money upfront
Set ground rules to be respectful, everyone invited to participate, want everyone to feel comfortable participating, not want to just have 1-2 participants dominate the discussions, want everyone to voice their views/perspectives

Prepare them to speak, establish a safe and comfortable environment for them to speak, explain may touch on some personal/touchy experiences, emphasize confidentiality with keeping discussion within the room

Have everyone introduce themselves.

Keep notes, let them know keeping notes is for asking follow-up questions about new issues that come up.

Make a seating chart.

Ask "what's your experience in this regard..."

Leave contact info and thank them for participating in the study.