

Focus Group Basics

Planning and Preparation

- **Identify the objective of the focus group.**
- **Develop a focus group facilitator's guide that includes the following:**
 - Focus group agenda (e.g., welcome; review of agenda, meeting goals, and of ground rules; introductions; questions and answers; wrap-up)
 - Ground rules (e.g., no right or wrong answers, be respectful of others, expectation of confidentiality)
- Five to six carefully developed questions.
 - Questions should move from general to more specific.
 - Questions should be open-ended.
 - Avoid questions that solicit a yes/no response.
 - Use warm-up questions to get people comfortable with the situation.
 - Use probing questions as necessary to clarify responses.
- **Identify and secure a convenient location for the meeting.**
- **Plan to record the session with either an audio or audio-video recorder.** Don't count on your memory. If this is not practical, involve a co-facilitator or note-taker to take notes.
- **Scheduling:** Allow 1½ to 2 hours for the meeting.
- **Setting and Refreshments:** Hold sessions in a conference room or other setting with adequate air flow and lighting. Configure chairs so that all members can see one another. Provide name tags and/or name table tents for all participants. Provide refreshments.
- **Recruit participants.**
 - **Identify potential participants.** Focus groups typically include 6-10 "similar" members (e.g., similar age group, status in a program, etc.). Identify specific individuals to invite. Or, as an alternative, identify a target group of individuals, then screen and select participants from that group.
 - **Invite potential participants to the focus group meeting.** Keep in mind that you may need to be creative with your recruiting! Some suggestions include: posting an

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- invitation flyer in the community center, sending personal invitations to community letters via letter or email, announcing the meeting at a community event, and making personal phone calls to members of a community organization.
- **Selecting participants.** Select participants who are likely to be participative and reflective. If possible, select participants who do not know each other.
 - **Send a formal follow-up invitation to selected participants.** Include a proposed agenda, time, and location, as well as a list of focus group questions or topics that the group will discuss.
 - **Remind participants a few days before the scheduled session.** About three days before the session, contact each member to remind them to attend.

Facilitating the Session

- **Introduce** yourself, the note-taker, and the co-facilitator (if used).
- **Explain** that you will be recording the session (e.g., videotaping, audiotaping, or simply taking notes, but that you will not reveal identities).
- **Carefully state each question.** Allow the group time to think about the question before jumping in. Give them time to think.
- **Summarize** what you have heard from the group after each question has been answered.
- **Ensure even participation.** Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak. If one or two people are dominating the session, call on others to give their opinion. You may want to consider using a round-table approach: move around the table in one direction to give each person an opportunity to answer the question.
- **Closure.** Close the session on time and thank everyone for their participation. Invite participants to email or call to elaborate on a question, if they care to do so. Offer to send them a copy of the report generated from their answers.

Immediately After Session

- **Verify if the audio/video tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the session.**
- **Make any last minute notes** (e.g., fix illegible handwriting, ensure that pages are numbered, clarify any notes that don't make sense, etc.).

- **Debrief** with your note taker and/or facilitator.
- **Write down any observations made during the session** (i.e., what was the nature of participation in the group? Were there any surprises during the session?)
- **Make notes about overall impressions.**

Within 1-2 Weeks of the Session

- Make a list of key responses, summarize comments, and identify themes.
- Write a brief report summarizing your findings.
- Distribute the report to focus group participants and invite their comment.

Other Resources

Barnett J. Focus Group Tips for Beginners. Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning. <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/orp/orp1.htm>

Bloor, Michael, Jane Frankland, Michelle Thomas, and Kate Robson (2001). Focus Groups in Social Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

CDC. (2008). Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Focus Groups. Evaluation Briefs. Centers for Disease Control. Available on-line: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief13.pdf>

Guidelines for Conducting Focus Groups. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CUTS/focus.htm>

Krueger, R. A. Focus Group Interviewing Handouts. Available on-line: <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html>

Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Involving community members in focus groups*. Focus group kit, 5. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Marczak M, Sewell M. *Using Focus Groups for Evaluation*. University of Arizona. Available on-line: <http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/cyfar/focus.htm>

Morgan, D. L., Krueger, R. A., & King, J. A. (1998). *Focus group kit*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.

Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS: Conducting Focus Group Interviews. USAID Center for Development and Information. Available online: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnaby233.pdf

Rennekamp, R.A & Nall, M.A. *Using Focus Groups in Program Development and Evaluation*. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. Available on-line: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/AqPSD/Focus.pdf>

Stewart, David and Prem Shamdasani (1998). "Focus Group Research: Exploration and Discovery" in Leonard Bickman and Debra Rog, Editors, *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp. 505-526.