

Best Practices in Facilitating Productive Focus Groups

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Wednesday, August 7, 2019
1 – 2 pm CST

Objectives/Outcomes

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- Define and understand what focus groups are and why they are used.
 - Identify best practices for focus group facilitation.
 - Identify best practices related to question design.
 - Discuss how to overcome group challenges/obstacles.
 - Discuss ethics related to focus group facilitation.

Defining Focus Groups

- A focus group can be defined as a small-group discussion guided by a facilitator in hopes of gaining responses to help learn what groups think about the organization and to guide future development.
- A controlled group interview of a specific demographic that is led by a facilitator who asks prepared questions or discusses topics that are pre-planned.

Reasons for Using Focus Groups

- Data Collection (Environmental Scan)
- Evaluation Tool
- Brainstorm new ideas
- Understand opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions
- Encourage discussion and engagement (ownership)

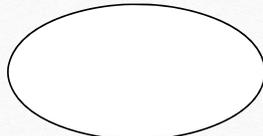
Planning Before the Session

- Have well-defined purpose, objectives, goals & outcomes
- Set a timeline & agenda - Should be done well in advance
- Prepare a sign-in sheet to gather contact information for follow-up purposes
- Be strategic about whom you invite
 - Send invitations with ample time for response
 - Monitor RSVPs
 - Send reminder and session information prior to the session
- Have a diverse group that can bring a variety of perspectives
 - Gather data about participants prior to the session

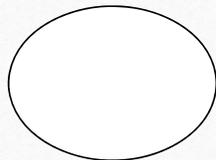
Setting & Logistics

- Provide a comfortable, accessible, space
- Arrive 30 min to 1 hr early to set up
- Provide proper signage to room and to make people feel welcome
- Keep in mind:
 - Special needs for participants with disabilities or other requirements for participation (language, etc...)
 - Refreshments for participants
- Ideal group size 10-15 but no more than 20 and no less than 6 participants

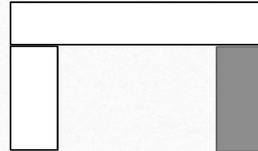
Ideal Room Set-ups



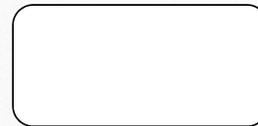
OVAL



CIRCLE



HORSE SHOE



RECTANGLE

Recommended Equipment

- Newsprint/flipchart with easel, white board or LCD projector & screen
- Video Camera or voice recorder (if needed)
- Markers
- Post-its or notecards
- Scrap paper and pens (for notes)
- Handouts (agenda, questions and background information)

Types of Focus Group Questions

- **Engagement Questions**

- How did you hear about this focus group?
- How did you get involved with this organization?
- What are your perceptions of this organization?

- **Exploration Questions**

- What types of services have you found beneficial?
- What types of programs or services would be most helpful?
- What challenges/obstacles have you come across while accessing services with this organization?

Types of Focus Group Questions

- **Exit Questions**

- Is there anything else you would like to say about...
- Is there anything else you want us to know about...
- Any last words of wisdom or feedback for the staff/facilitators?

Creating Effective Focus Group Questions

- Identify 4-6 core questions and have an additional 4-5 as backup questions
- Be clear, concise and to the point - avoid vague wording and jargon
- Know what information is already available
- Brainstorm preliminary questions, solicit feedback, refine list and run a test
- Use open-ended language (qualitative)
- Be mindful of comfort level (personal information)

Opening the Session

- Introduce yourself, others, and the purpose of the focus group.
- Explain to participants that they have been invited to share their opinions and that you will guide the discussion by asking the group to reflect on specific questions.
- Tell them what time the session will conclude.
- Explain the ground rules for the focus group discussion. These will set the tone and expectations
- Allow time for questions, and then ask participants to introduce themselves.

Sample Ground Rules

- Participation in the focus group is voluntary.
- It's all right to abstain from discussing specific topics if you are not comfortable.
- All responses are valid—there are no right or wrong answers.
- Please respect the opinions of others even if you don't agree.
- Try to stay on topic; we may need to interrupt so that we can cover all the material.
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable.

Sample Ground Rules

- Help protect others' privacy by not discussing details outside the group.
- Session will begin and end on time - will run longer than 2 hours.
- Please silence phones.
- Please minimize or eliminate side conversations - One person should speak at a time.
- A "Parking Lot" will be used for topics that need follow up or more time for discussion outside of the 2 hrs.

Effective Facilitation

- Be experienced and objective
- Be sure to facilitate introductions and do an ice breaker (if appropriate)
- Promote discussion, engagement, and fruitful responses
- Stay focused - Stick to the agenda/time constraints and re-direct when off track
- Promote equal group participation

Effective Facilitation

- Notetaking – To record or not record (session)
 - Make sure that participants are aware and give consent
 - Paraphrase and/or summarize responses to ensure accurate documentation of information
- Close the session appropriately by explaining next steps/follow-up and thanking them for their time

When to Use an Outside Facilitator

- Objectivity
- Process
- Observation
- Synthesis
- Timely

Reporting Feedback from Focus Groups

- Summarize conclusions
 - Key findings should include enlightening perceptions and critical feedback
 - Provide timely, objective summary based on information gathered
- Write a Executive Summary that includes:
 - Background
 - Purpose
 - Session Methodology
 - Results
 - Conclusions
- Decide how conclusions will be presented and to whom

Informed Consent

If the focus group is part of a research study...

- Participants should know that they are participating in research.
- Provide a written consent form for each participant to sign, which explains:
 - What the participants are being asked to do, what their rights are, and how privacy and confidentiality will be secured.
 - Be sure to provide contact information so that researchers can be reached in the future to answer questions.

Challenges with Focus Groups

- A few people dominate the group and/or sway the opinions of the others
- People are shooting down the ideas and opinions of others
- People may be resistant to publicly share their views
- There are widely differing views
- Not enough feedback or participation to acquire themes or conclusions

Ethics Consideration

- Do more active listening than talking
 - Make sure everyone feels heard and is ensured that their feedback will be used for a greater good
- Ensure that everyone feels respected, safe and not judged
- Protect participant privacy within the organization, in the community and throughout the notes and final report
- End groups on time

Resources

- Gimbel, K. (2017). Respecting your participants – Ethical considerations in focus groups. <https://www.forsmarshgroup.com/knowledge/news-blog/posts/previous-years/january/respecting-your-participants-ethical-considerations-in-focus-groups/>
- Hopps, J. (2019). Focus group best practices. <https://blog.demandmetric.com/2008/08/06/focus-group-best-practices>

Thank You!

Questions?

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