

Conducting Focus Group Interviews



Focus groups are used to gather information from a targeted population about their experience and opinions on a particular topic. Its purpose is to promote self-disclosure among its participants and provide useful analysis of a program or problem. When deciding to use a focus group, it is important to determine, the purpose of the group, the specific kind of information needed from the group and how the information is to be used.

The group is carried through a facilitated discussion on a clearly defined topic. The goal is to solicit the opinions of the focus group members. Focus groups can be used for a wide variety of purposes such as:

- Determining program needs
- Program design
- Pilot testing
- Program improvement
- Policy making and testing
- Outcome evaluation

Choosing Participants: Members of a focus group should have some characteristic they share in common. Participants should be chosen intentionally and invited personally.

Conducting the Interview: Focus group interviews should last for no more than 90 minutes. A moderator would welcome the group, and ask between six and ten open ended questions, with an assistant who is recording or taking notes.

Types of Questions: The questions should be short, open-ended and address only one topic at a time.

Moderating the Group: An effective moderator allows each participant to give their view; looks at them while they speak; refrains from expressing personal views and has a working knowledge of the topic.

The success of the focus group method depends on the skillful moderation of group discussions.

The moderator should be friendly, engaging and able to win the group's trust.

Analyzing Focus Group Data

Data from the interview is gathered from the moderator's memory, the assistant's notes and the recording. Analysis consists of:

- *Indexing:* Assigning 'labels' to participant responses
- *Management:* Grouping together responses within the same label.
- *Interpretation:* Develop a summary statement which is true of each group of responses.

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Major Source Rennekamp, R. and Nall, M., *Using Focus Groups in Program Development and Evaluation*, University of Kentucky College of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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Available at www.meas-extension.org/tip-sheets

