

CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is a group of individuals, usually six to eight, brought together for a more or less open-ended discussion about an issue. This qualitative research tool provides a subjective, but not statistically valid, understanding of the larger community's attitudes. Your partnership will need to decide if this type of tool will be helpful in completing your community assessment. Below is a brief list of key tasks and components to consider when conducting a focus group. Following this list are additional references on how to conduct focus groups.

When to use a focus group:

- ✓ You're considering the introduction of a new program or service
- ✓ Your main concern is with depth or shading of opinion, rather than simply with whether people agree
- ✓ You want to supplement the knowledge you have gotten from written surveys
- ✓ You know or can find someone who is an experienced and skilled group leader
- ✓ You have the time, knowledge, and resources to recruit a willing group of focus group participants

Before you begin:

- ✓ Recheck your goals
- ✓ Consider other methods
- ✓ Find a good leader
- ✓ Decide who should be invited
- ✓ Decide about incentives
- ✓ Prepare methods
- ✓ Recruit members

When the group meets:

- ✓ Review the purpose of the group and goals of the meeting
- ✓ Encourage open participation
- ✓ Set the tone by asking an opening question and making sure all opinions on that question are heard
- ✓ When all your questions have been asked, ask if anyone has any other comments to make
- ✓ Tell the group about any next steps that will occur and what they can expect to happen now

After the meeting:

- ✓ Make a transcript or written summary of the meeting
- ✓ Examine the data for patterns, themes, new questions and conclusions
- ✓ Share the results with the group
- ✓ Use the results!

Focus Group References:

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