

Conducting Focus Groups

Created by: Sabine Eustache & Andrea Brooks
Florida Department of Health, Bureau of
HIV/AIDS
Evaluation Consortium Members



Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Purposes

Potential M&E purposes of focus groups

- Provide in-depth information
- Focus groups can be used as part of a mixed method approach to evaluation



Steps to Planning a Focus Group

- Identify objectives
- Select participants
- Develop budget & timelines
- Generate questions
- Select a moderator
- Prepare a moderator guide
- Select a date, time and location
- Gather materials



Step 1: Identify Objective

Steps to planning a focus group

If the objective is not identified, the focus group discussion will become derailed quickly and yield useless data. So consider the following:

- What is the point of the focus group?
- What information are you looking for?
- Why? What is the context?



Step 2: Select Participants

Steps to planning a focus group

- Identify the demographics of participants
- Develop a recruitment plan
- Screen and recruit participants



Step 3: Create a Budget and Timeline

Steps to planning a focus group

- Identify related expenses
 - Is there a cost?
 - What are you willing to spend to obtain the desired learning?
- Create a realistic timeline
 - When must the project be completed?
 - When do you want to act on the learning?



Step 4: Generate Research Questions

Steps to planning a focus group

- Identify the problem or need
- Confirm that the questions reflect the problem/need
- Generate 5-10 questions
- Check sequence and tone of the questions
- Keep questions open-ended
- Move from general to specific



Step 5: Select Moderator

Steps to planning a focus group

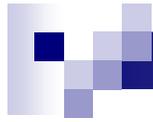
- Look for experience
- Interview candidate and check references
 - Should be pleasant, engaged, attentive and interested
 - Should have conceptual and analytical skills
- Specific roles and responsibilities



Step 6: Prepare a Moderator Guide

Steps to planning a focus group

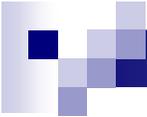
- Prepare in advance
- Develop guide around the overall research question
- Use as an outline/guideline during group
- Be flexible



Step 7: Select Date, Time and Location

Steps to planning a focus group

- Choose a time that is likely to draw the type of participants you want
- Choose a setting with little distraction
- Choose a location that is easily accessible



Step 8: Gather Materials

Steps to planning a focus group

- **Required Materials:**

- ✓ Notepads and pencils

- ✓ Flip chart or easel paper (newsprint)

- ✓ Markers

- ✓ Tape

- ✓ Name tags

- ✓ Food and refreshments

- ✓ Focus group script (moderator guide)

- ✓ List of participants

- ✓ Watch or clock



Conducting a Focus Group

- Begin focus group:
 - State the purpose of the focus group
 - Address confidentiality
 - Explain format and role of participants
 - Indicate length of session
 - Provide contact information
 - Ask if they have any questions
 - Obtain permission to record group

- Facilitate focus group

- Close out focus group



Step 1: Explain Purpose

Conducting a focus group

Examples of how to present concept to participants:

- *“Focus Groups are discussions about a particular topic.”*
- *“We use them to learn what you think about this topic.”*
- *“Most people love to be asked their opinion and they're generally not shy about voicing it.”*
- *“We want to hear from each of you since everyone has a different opinion about things. ”*



Step 2: Address Confidentiality

Conducting a focus group

- Note terms of confidentiality
- Explain who will have access to responses
- Discuss analysis of responses
- Discuss use of comments as “quotes”



Step 3: Explain Format

Conducting a focus group

- Provide an agenda and review
- Establish ground rules
- Indicate the intent to record
- Inform participants of any other issues pertaining to the format



Step 4: Indicate Length of Session

Conducting a focus group

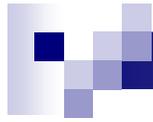
- Focus groups typically last from 45-90 minutes.
- Breaks?
- Refreshments
- End on time



Step 5: Provide Contact Information

Conducting a focus group

- Identify contact person
- Provide contact information
- Provide back-up contact (if needed)



Step 6: Ask if There Are Any Questions

Conducting a focus group

- Give participants an opportunity to ask questions
- Provide clarifying information as needed



Step 7: Ask Permission to Record

Conducting a focus group

- Reiterate need and intent to record
- Request permission to initiate recording
- What will you do if someone says “no?”



Step 8: Facilitate Focus Group

Conducting a focus group

Follow moderator guide

- Initiate discussion with a question
- Probe when needed
 - Repeat question
 - Pause for an answer
 - Repeat reply
 - Ask *when, what, where, which, and how* questions
 - Use neutral comments



Step 9: Close out Focus Group

Conducting a focus group

- Declare that the session is done
- Thank participants for their time
- Explain next steps (use of information)
- Provide contact information (again)



Analysis and Reporting of Focus Group Data

- Analyze and Interpret focus group data
- Translate results into actions
- Create report

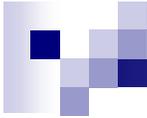


Step 1: Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis and reporting of focus group data

Analysis of focus group data

- Transcribe notes and recordings
- Create summaries for each question/topic
- Note outliers or comments that changed the direction or tone of the group conversation
- Read, read, read
- Check with a colleague for reliability



Step 2: Translate Results into Actions

Analysis and reporting of focus group data

The greatest failure in the use of focus groups is that the information is not used.



Step 2: Translate Results into Actions

Analysis and reporting of focus group data

Tips for translating results into action:

1. Review summaries and discuss implications in context of research question(s)
2. Highlight the main themes, issues, problems
3. Prioritize information
4. Identify action steps to address priorities items
5. Check with colleague(s) for agreement or disagreement



Step 3: Preparing final report

Analysis and reporting of focus group data

The final report can take many different shapes, but always should include:

- Background and purpose of the focus group
- Methodology including the research questions, participants, and details of the sessions
- Results – major findings
- Conclusions and Action Recommendations



Benefits of a Focus Group

- Inexpensive
- Rich information
- Diverse opinions and ideas
- Data supplements other sources of data
- Multiple uses:
 - Can be used for survey development
 - Can assist in decision making



Limitations of a Focus Group

- Facilitator bias
- Dominant participants
- Qualitative not quantitative data therefore not generalizable
- Data can be hard to interpret
- Info = what people “say” they do, not necessarily what they “actually” do