

## A Step-by-Step Approach to Conducting a Focus Group

Below is a brief outline of the eight steps recommended in focus group research. MAPP recommends the use of focus group resources or guidebooks to ensure effective implementation.

1. Decide if focus groups are the right tool for you to get the information you need. Focus groups are useful if the discussion among participants will help provide insight, the group atmosphere will stimulate honest response, the discussion can be limited to well-defined topics and the logistics can be managed.
2. Determine who should participate in your focus group(s). Consider factors such as social class, life cycle, user and nonuser status, age, culture, literacy/formal education, etc.
3. Draft a screening questionnaire to help recruit and place participants.
4. Develop a topic guide. There are four primary stages of the focus group discussion; the topic guide should follow this basic flow:
  - a. Introduction – The moderator provides an overview of the goals of the discussion and introductions are made. (Approximately 10 minutes.)
  - b. Rapport Building Stage – Easily answered questions are asked to encourage participants to begin talking and sharing. (Approximately 10 minutes.)
  - c. In-depth Discussion – The moderator focuses on the main questions in the topic guide, encouraging conversation that reveals participants' feelings and thoughts. (Approximately 60 minutes.)
  - d. Closure – The moderator summarizes the impressions or conclusions gathered and participants clarify, confirm or elaborate on the information. (Approximately 10 minutes.)
5. Design forms for the moderator and note taker to use. The moderator may want a summary sheet with a reminder of key information about participants. The recorder (which all focus groups should have) can use forms with the focus group questions on it, or another option is a two-column format organizing comments and quotes in one column and observations and interpretations in the second.
6. Draft a self-evaluation form. The self-evaluation form can help the moderator to improve his/her skills over time.
7. Practice a focus group discussion in advance so that everything will run smoothly. Then, conduct the focus group(s), being sure to tape them so that everything is captured.
8. Organize your notes for the focus group report. After conducting the focus groups, the moderator and note taker should review notes to fill in gaps and ensure accurate and complete information has been gathered. Keep a list of participants who were at the focus group sessions (i.e., have a sign-in sheet) so that you can keep them informed about next steps and gather additional feedback.

*References: Academy for Educational Development. Skill-Building Guide for Making Focus Groups Work . Washington, DC: 1995.*