SPF-SIG
Focus Group Training

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Training Schedule

10:30  Welcome/Introductions
10:45  Focus Group Overview
11:15  Focus Group Design and Planning
12:00  Lunch
1:00   Focus Group Design and Planning continued
1:30   Focus Group Demonstration
1:45   Discussion/questions
2:00   Practice Groups
2:15   Break
2:30   Discussion/questions
3:00   Community Focus Group Project
3:30   Dismiss
Humored Rumor
Why focus groups?

- Qualitative method generates a better understanding of experiences and beliefs
- Spontaneous reactions and ideas
- Useful way to get information for data-driven decision making:
  - Assessment – defining the problem
  - Capacity – what is in place, what is needed
  - Planning – what is the perspective on the goal
  - Implementation – how things are going, fine-tuning
  - Evaluation – what is working, what can be improved
When to use focus groups

Consider focus groups when:

- Looking for a range of ideas/feelings people have about something
- Trying to understand differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people
- The purpose is to uncover factors that influence opinions, behaviors, or motivation; gather insight into complicated topics
- Researcher needs information to design a large scale quantitative study or help shed light on data already collected
When not to use focus groups

Don’t consider focus groups when:

- You want people to come to a consensus
- You want to educate people
- You don’t intend to use the results but want to give the appearance of listening
- You need statistical projections or other methodologies can provide better quality information
- You can’t ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information
Project – Start to Finish

- Environment
- Recruiting
- Moderating
- Analysis & Reporting
Environment

- Comfortable atmosphere
- Circular or U shaped seating
- Quiet
- Non-confrontational
- Casual
Recruiting - Group Composition

- Who **is not** invited is as important as who **is** invited
- Avoid polar opposites
- Familiarity
- Moderator impact
Group Composition (cont.)

- 5-12 participants per group
- No more than 2 hours
- 3-5 groups
The single most important element of a successful focus group!!

A skilled Moderator has the following characteristics:

- A creative mind
- Analytical skills
- Verbal skills
- Intellectual ability
- An eye for detail
- A tolerance for disorder
- Listening skills
- A capacity for empathy
Moderator Objectives

- To create the appearance of a free-flowing, relatively unstructured event
- To involve the entire group in the discussion
- Must be capable of dealing with outspoken group members
- Must keep the discussion on track
- To project a naïve attitude without being phony
A vital role in the focus group process!!

A successful Assistant Moderator provides the following skills:

• Detailed note-taker
• Observer of non-verbal behavior
• Additional eyes and ears for the moderator
Assistant Moderator Objectives

- Capture quotes
- Note non-verbal cues
- Observe wording/timing of probes
- Highlight key points/themes
- Note follow-up questions
- Gather big ideas, hunches, or thoughts
Analysis

The foundation for analysis includes:

- Comparison of perceptions
  - body language
  - flow of conversation
  - questions that required lots of probing

- Notes

- Tape recording

- Coding transcripts
Analysis (cont.)

- Analysis of qualitative data
- Generalizability of focus group data
- Pseudo statistics
Planning is essential!!
Planning

Start with fundamental questions:
- What is the problem the study is to address?
- What led to the discussion of this study?
- What is the purpose of the study?
- What kinds of information do you want?
- What types of information are of particular importance?
- Who wants the information (or to whom do you want to give the information)?
- How will you use the information (or what do you want them to do with the information)?
Planning for an effective focus group must begin weeks in advance.

Things to consider in the planning stage:
- Contacting and inviting participants
- Locating a site
- Planning for food or snacks
- Tape recording/note taking
- Organizing materials for the session
- Developing and testing questions, including specific probes
- Moderators guide
Planning: Participants

- Direct, personal contact two weeks prior
- Personalized follow-up letter
- Reminder phone call
- Resist the urge to distribute discussion questions in advance
- Be prepared for “guests”; be clear in the invitation if participation is limited
- Have an inclement weather plan – even if the event is in summer months
Planning: *Location*

- Select a convenient location that is easy to find
- It must be able to accommodate the group comfortably – in a circle or U shape
- Minimalized setting
Planning: *Refreshments*

- Snacks or a meal should be provided
- Logistical considerations of a meal vs. snack
- Boxed lunch option
- Small token of appreciation if not food
Planning: Tape Recording/Note-taking

- Audio taping is generally acceptable.
- Note taking vs. flip charts
Planning: Materials
Planning: **Materials**

- Sign for door
- Tape recorder, blank tapes and batteries
- Watch/clock
- Name tents
- Marking pens
- Writing tablets
- Copies of questions
- Note-taking paper/flip chart
- Roster of group attendees
- Location address, phone, and contact person
- Small tablets and pens/pencils for participants
- Scotch and duct/masking tape
- Tissues
- Paper towels/napkins
- Coffee pot/coffee/cream/sugar/cups/utensils
- Extension cord
Planning: *What to ask*

- Establish what you really want to know
- Think about what you want to ask - then ask yourself why
- Never ask yes or no questions
- Avoid the “why” trap
- Use familiar language
Planning: *What to ask* (cont.)

- Brainstorm the issue
- Prepare questions
- Sequence questions
- Estimate the time for the questions
- Get feedback
- Test the questions
Planning: *Five Types of Questions*

- Opening questions
- Introductory questions
- Transitional questions
- Key questions
- Ending questions
Planning: **Sequence of Questions**

- Easy beginning
- Sequenced
- Move from general to specific
- Uses time wisely
Planning: Good Question Qualities

- Sound conversational
- Use familiar words
- Are easy to say
- Are clear and short
- Are open-ended
- Are usually one-dimensional
- Include clear, well-thought-out directions
Planning: *Phrasing a Question*

Sometimes the best questions are not questions at all. Useful probes for information might begin:

- Give me an example
- I’d like you to discuss
- Tell me about
- Describe what it’s like
- Explain to me
- I’m wondering what you would do
The moderator’s guide is your script for the session, beginning with your introduction:

- Welcome the group
- Outline the session
- Promise of confidentiality
- Volunteer nature of participation
- Informed consent
- Guidelines for the discussion
- Group introductions
- Focus group topic questions
- Summary
- Closing
Planning: Flow

To help direct the flow of the conversation you might try:

• That’s helpful. Let’s move on to the next topic.
• This is a great discussion but we need to move on.
• Remind participants of the tape recording and the need for only one person to talk at a time
• Require total group involvement
• Remind participants that “we want to give everyone a chance to talk”
Planning: *Feedback*
Planning: Feedback

Probes to stimulate a conversation or redirect the discussion:

• Say more
• Keep talking
• Don’t stop
• What am I not asking that is important to you
• I’m not getting it, help me out
• Can you give me an example of what you mean?
• Say whatever comes to mind
• I see people nodding (shaking) their heads; tell me about it
• Who can build on this discussion
• Before we move on, let’s hear any last comment
• Let’s hear a different perspective on this
• That’s helpful. Let’s hear some different thought
Focus Group Day

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early for preparation.
- Arrange sign-in table in a prominent location so it can not be missed.
- Post signs on doors to direct participants to room.
- Set up meal or snacks for easy access.
- Test the recorder in advance by stating your name, location, date, and time of focus group.
- Be ready to welcome individuals as they arrive.
Conducting the Session

- Be informal
- Encourage divergent thought
- Do not insert personal opinions or knowledge into the discussion
- Promote interaction among participants
- Be a subtle clock watcher
Debriefing After the Session

- What are the most important themes or ideas discussed?
- How do these differ from what we expected?
- How did these differ from what occurred in earlier focus groups?
- What points need to be included in the report?
- What quotes should be remembered and possibly included in the report?
- Were there unexpected or anticipated findings?
- Should we do anything differently for the next focus group?
Tips

- You can never over plan for a focus group
- Manage the recruiting process actively
- The best moderators are objective and active listeners
- More focus groups do not guarantee better research objectives
- Moderator-Assistant Moderator advance communication is a must
- Keep people on track
- Control people who try to monopolize the conversation
- Be non-judgmental
- Remember to probe
- Don’t talk too much
- Control your setting
- Thank your participants
Questions
Focus Group Demonstration
## Do’s and Don’ts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be an active listener/observer</td>
<td>Show what you know</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be a naïve listener/observer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wear clothing that “fits in”</td>
<td>Pull rank/show off</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be an equal with participants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use first names</td>
<td>Correct, criticize or pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laugh with participants</td>
<td>Express a point of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have all your questions planned</td>
<td>Ask leading/double barreled questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treat questions like inkblots</td>
<td>Ask yes/no questions</td>
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<td>Ask for explanation and examples</td>
<td>Be embarrassed if you don’t understand something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe</td>
<td></td>
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Community Focus Group Project
Final Questions/Comments