

# Designing and Conducting Focus Groups

## Definition

Focus groups are small group discussions used to learn more about the experiences and perceptions of a segment of a population.

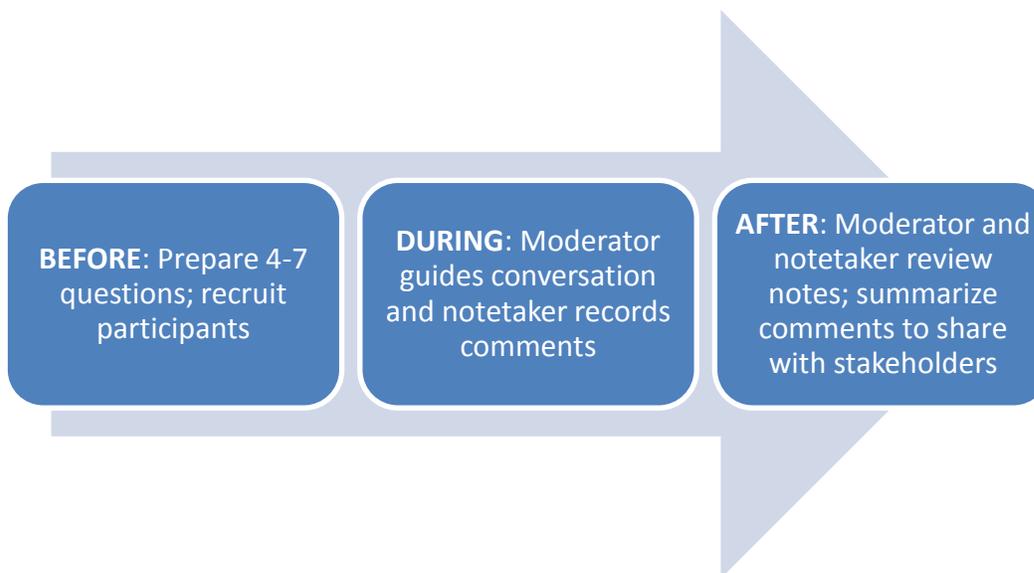
## Purpose

Focus groups are designed to promote self-disclosure and are most successful when participants feel comfortable, respected and free to give their opinion without being judged.

## Common Topics

Customer satisfaction, organizational development, understanding employee/student concerns, planning and goal setting, needs assessments, quality improvement efforts, or policy making and testing.

## Process



### DO:

- ✓ Address a single topic in depth.
- ✓ Select participants who are similar to each other in a way that is important to the research.
- ✓ Ask participants to respond to a small set of oral questions in a discussion format.
- ✓ Include 6 -12 participants per session.
- ✓ Conduct a minimum of 3 focus groups per topic.

### DON'T:

- ✗ Expect the group to reach consensus on the topic.
- ✗ Ask yes or no questions.
- ✗ Allow the group size to become too small or too large.
- ✗ Express judgment when moderating a focus group.

## **Developing Focus Group Questions**

1. Write questions as open-ended questions requiring more than a yes or no response to evoke conversation among the group members.
2. Construct simple, one-dimensional questions using words with which the participants are familiar.
3. Avoid technical jargon and acronyms participants may not understand.

## **Conducting a Focus Group**

1. Establish a welcoming and open environment with some basic ground rules:
  - a. Emphasize there are no right or wrong answers to the questions.
  - b. Ask participants to listen respectfully to each response.
  - c. Have all attendees turn off cellphones.
  - d. Require that only one person speak at a time.
2. Role of Moderator:
  - a. Facilitate the conversation.
  - b. Present questions in a conversational style, one at a time, and allow processing time if needed.
  - c. Probe deeper into responses by providing appropriate prompts.
  - d. Manage the conversation to encourage equal time for all participants.
3. Role of Recorder:
  - a. Record focus group basics such as date, time, topic, and number of participants.
  - b. Briefly summarize responses including both positive and negative points of view.
  - c. Capture interesting quotes and note non-verbal communication that may be useful.
  - d. Assist the moderator in monitoring time.

## **Writing the Summary Report**

1. Recap and review
  - a. Spend 15-20 minutes after the session to debrief and review the notes.
  - b. Take this opportunity to begin summarizing themes presented during the conversation.
2. Prepare report
  - a. Finalize a summary of overall themes.
  - b. Provide a summary of responses for each question.
  - c. Add direct participant quotes from each session.
  - d. Delete all focus group participant names.
  - e. Proofread and edit the report to ensure accuracy and clarity.

Source: Krueger, Richard A. and Mary Anne Casey. 2009. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition); SAGE Publications, Inc.