



How to conduct a focus group

**Dr. Andrea Reupert &
Associate Professor Darryl Maybery**



How to conduct a focus group?

Three phases (Krueger, 1988)

1. Conceptualisation
2. Interview
3. Analysis and reporting



Conceptualisation phase

- **Why are you conducting a focus group? Just because its easy doesn't (necessarily) mean it is appropriate**
- **What type of information do you need?**
- **Who should be in the focus group?**
 - Heterogeneous or homogenous?
 - How many? (around 6-10)
- **Develop a plan, timeline and estimate resources, including budget**



Consider and reflect

- **Are focus groups an appropriate way for you to evaluate your program? (go through what focus groups can and can not do);**
- **If so, who would you target for your focus group?**
- **When would you do it?**
- **What resources and skills would you need?**



Focus group set up

- **Have an incentive to encourage attendance e.g. food helps**
- **Personalise invitations and remind (phone or send friendly reminders)**
- **Ensure location is easy and accessible**
- **The whole interview process should be NO longer than 2 hours.**



Interview phase: Developing the questions

- **Around five or six questions (less than 10) in the first language of participants**
- **Keep the questions conversational and natural**
- **Use open ended questions, avoid yes or no questions**

What did you think of the program?

versus

Did you like the program?

- **Prompt with “think back” questions**
- **One-dimensional (one at a time)**
- **Don’t ask ‘why’ questions.**
- **Arrange in a logical sequence.**
- **Get feedback on the questions, before you use them in the focus group.**



Who should run the focus group?

The program facilitator?

What might be some problems associated with that? What might be some advantages of that?

Remember that as the facilitator, participants might not want to tell you everything they think about the program. On the other hand, as the facilitator they know you and might feel more comfortable.



Interview phase

Moderating skills:

keep the discussion flowing in the right direction

- **You might want to have two people running the focus group – one to take the lead and the other to deal with notes/recorder/unexpected surprises**
- **Build trust/rapport – engage in small talk but without talking about the issue**
- **Record the discussion – notes or tape recorder – if you use a recorder you must have (written) consent.**



The focus group



- 1. Welcome and introduction**
- 2. Overview and topic; purpose, importance**
- 3. Ground rules – one person speaks, treat with respect,**
- 4. The first question should be easy, ‘break the ice’**



Throughout the focus group

- **Pause and probe** – wait after a participant has finished speaking
- **Probe** – “would you explain that further” and “would you give an example of that”
- **Manage the group** – “what do others think?”; the group go around;
- **Active listening** – forward lean, head nodding but be careful you do not communicate judgements



Have a formal conclusion

- **Don't leave the important questions to the end**
- **Use closing type questions, "is there anything we should have talked about but didn't?"**
- **You might like to summarise main points – and check that you are right and/or if anything is missing**
- **Thank and conclude formally so people know that it is ended**



Analysis and reporting phase

- Go back to your evaluation question
- Look for **strong** themes arising from the interview – either because a lot of people were in agreement and/or because of the passion involved;
- Ideally the other moderator should independently do the analysis at the same time



Process of analysis

- **Immediately when finished the focus group, both moderators independently write down what they think was important**
- **Listen to the tapes/look over notes – have you missed anything?**
- **Compare notes, observations, talk about your respective findings**
- **Identify participants' words to support your findings**
- **The two moderators should arrive at a summary that is mutually agreeable**



Reporting

- **Who needs to know? Format will change depending on the key stakeholders. Will you provide back to participants?**
- **Reporting should include**
 - Raw data e.g. Participants' words
 - Descriptive statements that summarise groups of statements
 - Interpretation – what does the data say about the program?
 - Where to from here? What changes will I have to make to the program? What next?