

Focus Groups

FOCUS GROUP BASIC RULES

PURPOSE

- Generally use focus groups with some type of survey.
- Focus group discussion supplements standard survey results.
- Can't generalize to larger population.
- What do you want to understand? Behavior, attitudes, subject knowledge.
- Provides qualitative data.
- Explores topics in-depth.
- Allows topics to be addressed from multiple dimensions.
- Attribute meaning to the topic.
- Will suggest what participants (students, faculty, constituent groups) think are important.
- Can generate survey questions from outcomes of focus group.

PARTICIPANTS

- Many interpersonal group dynamics which will influence the outcome.
- Be aware of different status levels of participants.
- Participants responses intended to score points with those in higher positions.
- Make sure participants are speaking on their own behalf.
- There are those that go along with others to gain something.
- Status of those in the group is important/theme individuals with groups.

FACILITATOR

- Remember agendas of others will come up.
- Everyone needs to be given equal opportunity and encouragement to talk and participate.
- Focus group facilitator must be a neutral person
 - Create an environment for open discussion, non-judgmental environment
 - Be mindful of who sits next to who in case of (expert know it all participants)
- Don't ask a lot of questions, keep them open ended.
- Have questions prepared in advance with follow-up questions.
- Prepare probes.
- Prepare more questions than you might need in case what you think will generate a lot of discussion doesn't.
- Questions should be neutral.
- Do not want demand characteristics/what we already know and believe.

LOGISTICS

- Usually group of 6 -12 participants
- Meet for an hour or two
- Set Ground Rules
 - Create environment for open discussion
- Record group discussion with permission of participants
- Transcribe
- Listen for content
- Someone other than the facilitator should be taking notes.

FACILITATOR PROVIDES:

- Agenda
- Introduction
- Objectives
- GROUND RULES
- Quick intro of participants
- Questions and discussion
- Closing
- Short questionnaire or survey to gauge degree of participation