THE HEALTH COMMUNICATION UNIT

at the Centre for Health Promotion
University of Toronto

Using Focus Groups

Version 2.0 June 30, 2002

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Additional copies of this resource are available free of charge in Ontario only. Please direct requests to (416) 978-0522 (phone) or hc.unit@utoronto.ca. This workbook is also available on our website at http://www.thcu.ca.

This workbook was developed as a resource guide to accompany a one-day seminar. The content is structured around the logical steps of implementing a focus group. The material is relevant and practical but not comprehensive. We encourage users of this workbook to supplement the information contained in this workbook with the more comprehensive information available from the books and articles provided in the resource list.

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Contents

Introduction

DEFINITION OF A FOCUS GROUP

- A focus group is a formal discussion with 8–12 people on a specific topic. The group is facilitated by a leader who keeps participants focussed on the topic of interest.
- The purpose of a focus group is to collect in-depth information from a group of people which represent the population of interest.

TYPES OF FOCUS GROUPS

An exploratory focus group is used to increase understanding of an issue, to generate hypotheses, in concept development and pilot testing.

Phenomenological focus groups seek to understand the experiences and outlook of respondents (as consumers, potential consumers and/ or opinion leaders)

Clinical focus groups are used to examine unconscious mechanisms operating within people that impact on their behaviour or predispositions to behaviour (i.e. mood) (Calder, 1977).

Overview of Focus Groups

- Definition of a Focus group
- Advantages of focus groups
- Disadvantages of focus groups
- Steps in conducting focus groups

ADVANTAGES OF FOCUS GROUPS

- The main advantage of focus group methodology for collecting information is that it allows for in-depth discussion and probing on an issue of interest. You can collect opinions of more than one person in one session and the interaction between group participants can result in increased elaboration on a topic and broader insight into understanding an issue.
- Focus groups provide a tremendous amount of information at a reasonable cost. In most cases they are less costly than conducting 8–12 in-depth interviews and cheaper than most quantitative data collection methods.
- Opinions of more people are obtained within a shorter time frame, compared to in-depth interviews.
- Clients can benefit by observing the group if a room with a one way mirror is used.

DISADVANTAGES OF FOCUS GROUPS

- Potential for participants to influence one another's opinions.
- Focus groups do not provide quantifiable information about a population.
- The number of questions which can be asked is limited as the response time for each question is increased by the number of participants.
- While focus groups provide the researcher with in-depth responses to their questions, this type of data is more difficult to analyse than quantitative data.
- The quality of the information collected is dependent on the skills of the moderator.
- For some populations and topics focus groups are not effective because the social context influences the responses more than what the researcher would want.
- Focus groups can be difficult to conduct with populations which have hearing, cognitive or communicative impairments.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP

1 Clarify purpose
   - Why conduct a focus group?
   - Who are the stakeholders?
   - Who is the population of interest?
   - What issues need to be explored?

2 Assess Resources
   - What external resources will you need?
   - Which in-house resources can you make use of?

3 Decide on Methods and Procedures
   - What is the total number of groups needed?
   - What is the desired composition of the groups?

4 Write Moderator's Guide
   - Decide on main questions of interest

5 Recruit Focus Group Participants

6 Logistics of the Focus Group
   - Location and time
   - Budget

7 Facilitate Focus Group

8 Analyse Focus Group
   - Preparation of the data
   - Programs available for analysis

9 Interpret and Disseminate Focus Group Results

10 Take Action

Step 1 Clarify Purpose

Step 1: Clarify Purpose of the Focus Group(s)

- Why conduct a focus group?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- Who is the population of interest?
- What issues need to be explored?

CLARIFY PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- The step clarifies the rationale for conducting a focus group, the issues and population of interest and identifies who is interested in the focus group results.
- This step is important in ensuring that the focus group technique is the appropriate methodology and will guide the development of the moderators guide and recruitment procedures.

WHY CONDUCT A FOCUS GROUP?

- Why have you chosen to conduct focus groups? What did you want to learn from the results and/or what decisions need to be made from the results? Clearly write down your focus group research questions.
- Does your reasoning fit the following description for uses of focus groups? If not, perhaps you should consider a different method.

Use of Focus Groups

- Focus groups are primarily used to explore issues and clarify how people feel about the topic under investigation. They are also used:

  - As a precursor to development of a questionnaire and methodology for quantitative research (learn people's language, determine best response categories, explore parameters of an issue)
  - to generate hypotheses
  - to gather consumer impressions on new product concepts or resource materials
  - to generate ideas for new creative concepts
  - to clarify previously obtained quantitative results
- Focus groups *should not* be used to:
  - replace quantitative techniques
  - gauge general support for an idea.
  - collect interview or questionnaire data
  - explore sensitive issues or issues which are very personal to individuals where the social context would bias the results.

Who are the stakeholders?

- Who are your stakeholders and what is their interest in the focus group results?
- It is important to clearly identify who your stakeholders are and what their interests are in the focus group results. This will ensure that your design and the questions asked of participants will reflect all stakeholders interests and avoid missing information.
- Stakeholders are all those individuals who would have an interest in the question you are asking and the results obtained (i.e. Stakeholders of the program/service/product)

Who is the population of interest?

- Describe the population you are interested in exploring your issues with.
    - What is their demographics (age, gender, ethnicity)?
    - Where do they live?
    - What is the best way to communicate with them?
    - What is the best way to reach them?
    - Are they all very similar or are their unique differences?
- Are you interested in any sub-groups of this population?
- Determining the characteristics of your population of interest gives you some indication of how you can recruit representatives for your focus group, what would be the best group composition, and how many focus groups you will need.
- The target population may have sub-groups which will function better in a focus group if they are not mixed. For example, teenage boys may be more open and honest with their opinions if teenage girls are not present. It may be advisable to segregate groups by gender, age, race etc.

What issues need to be explored?

At this stage it is helpful to begin a list, based on all the stakeholders interests, of the issues which need to be explored.

Chapter 2

Step 2 Assess Resources

ASSESS RESOURCES—DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- This step explores the resources you have available so that you can design an evaluation that will be within your budget.
- Assessing your resources allows you to evaluate which resources you have available "in house" and which you will need to contract out.
- The evaluation of resources is crucial to ensuring the questions you want to address can be answered within the project's budget.

INTERNAL RESOURCES

1 When planning a focus group, there are a number of considerations to be made with respect to the resources needed. If conducting the groups in-house, the following resources will have to be assessed:

- *Budget*
  - How much money has been allocated for this project?
- *Staff availability*
  - How many staff are available?
  - Do they have the skills you need?
  - Are they interested in the project?

Step 2: Assess Resources

- Internal resources
- External resources
- Advantages of Doing Qualitative Research "in house" versus out sourcing

- *Facilities/equipment availability—*
  - Is adequate space available to hold the group?
  - Is a computer available with software to analyse the data?
  - Do you have a sensitive tape recorder?
  - Do you have phones to recruit participants?
- *Time available before you need results*
  - How much time do you have before you need the information?
  - How much time do you have to put towards organizing and conducting the focus groups?

2 After assessing internal resources, if any gaps are identified in the resources required, they can be filled by external resources.

3 Some of the benefits to undertaking the focus groups internally include:

- *Cost savings*

  Costs may be kept down by not having to pay for an outside professional
- *Expertise*

  The organization involved is more knowledgeable about its own product or service than any outsider
- *Confidentiality*

  Occasionally the topic of interest is confidential and the organization feels more comfortable handling the groups internally

Chapter

3

Step 3 Decide on Methods and Procedures

DECIDE ON THE METHODS AND PROCEDURES— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- Decisions regarding the protocol for the focus groups are made based on the type of information being sought, the budget available for the project, timing considerations, and the target population.
- It is important to consider all the factors influencing how the groups will be conducted early in the process of planning. The way in which the groups are conducted will affect the quality and usefulness of the information collected.

NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS

- There is no set rule for the number of focus group sessions needed. Two groups is generally the minimum. Ideally you want enough groups to ensure that you haven't missed any information. If after a three or four groups similar themes are emerging with no new themes coming up additional groups may not be necessary.
- If you are only able to do one or two groups, interpret your results with caution. The results of the one group alone will give you some direction but may not have captured all the information possible.
- The number of focus groups required also depends on these factors:

Step 3: Decide on Methods and Procedures

- The number of groups required
- Size of the groups
- Composition of the groups

- the budget allotted to the project (more $ you can do more)
- the complexity of the topic (more complex—more groups needed)
- the variability in the responses obtained (more diverse—more groups needed)
- how many population sub-groups need to be studied

SIZE OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S)

- Focus groups usually range in size from 8 to 12 participants.
- The size of the groups may be influenced by:
  - The amount of money available for participant incentives can limit the size of a group because you can only have as many people as you can afford to pay (if incentives are provided).
  - The complexity of the topic: the more complex the topic, the fewer participants you should have in order to give all participants ample opportunity to share their opinions.
- With regards to group size, it has been found that the number of ideas generated is not increased by increasing the number of focus group participants.

COMPOSITION OF THE GROUPS

- The ability to obtain useful information will be enhanced if an environment is established in which participants feel comfortable and free to express their ideas and opinions.
- Depending on the issue under discussion a more homogenous group may be preferable in order for participants to feel comfortable.
- Nonetheless, certain circumstances decrease the ability and/or necessity to maintain homogeneity within groups such as:
  - budget limitations often preclude the ability to conduct separate groups with people of different ages and gender.
  - focus groups for which it is difficult to find a sufficient number of qualified participants
  - when the subject matter is such that individuals with different demographic profiles would have no trouble discussing it together.

Chapter

4

Step 4 Write the Moderator's Guide

WRITE THE MODERATOR'S GUIDE— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- The moderator's guide is the outline of the discussion which is to be carried out during the focus group. Writing the guide involves deciding on all topics to be discussed and organizing them into a logical format for discussion.
- A moderator's guide that is well-written and developed jointly by the moderator and stakeholders is crucial to ensuring that the moderator is able to collect the desired information from the participants.

DETERMINE WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Refer back the reasons for wanting to do a focus group and to the list of issues you identified in step 1. These issues are the starting point for the development of your guide.
- The questions included in the moderator's guide will flow from the issues you want to explore and the questions you want to answer.
- The number of questions is usually limited to 10 to 12 well-developed questions for a 2 hour focus group. The number of questions is influenced by the topic, the specificity and detail required and the characteristics of the participants.

Step 4:
Write the Moderator's Guide

- What is a moderator's guide?
- Determine what questions to ask
- The use of probes
- Format of the Guide
- Obtaining feedback from stakeholders

- Focus on the 'need' to know questions and leave the 'nice' to know questions as options if there is enough time remaining at the end.
- A moderators guide is not a questionnaire, so it should not be cluttered with detailed questions.
- The questions should be general in nature with suggested probes that could be used to stimulate discussion and elicit details.

PROBES

- Probes are short comments or questions which can be used to further explore certain discussions or stimulate discussion around specific sub-topics.
- Probes are used only when the moderator feels that the participants require further direction or encouragement in their discussion. For example, in a group exploring participants' reactions to promotional materials, the moderator may probe respondents on the topic of distribution of the materials with "what about distribution on the Internet?". However, this probe would only be used if participants had not yet mentioned this medium.

FORMAT OF THE MODERATOR'S GUIDE

- The questions in a moderators guide flow the best with general, easy and non threatening questions to more specific, focussed, and value laden questions. The guide can be subdivided into topic sections with each section following a similar flow from general to specific.

  A moderator's guide will usually contain the following sections:

Introduction

During the introduction the moderator will generally introduce him/herself, give a brief summary of the topic to be discussed and alert participants to the presence of any recording devices in the room. The moderator may also stress that there are no right or wrong answers, that all comments are welcome and will remain confidential. The participants will also be asked to introduce themselves during this portion of the group. Introductions should be brief.

Warm-up

The warm-up section usually involves the initiation of discussion on a general topic related to the topic of interest. These questions help to set the stage and allow participants to reflect on their experiences and collect their thoughts on related or similar issues.

Key Content Section

In this portion of the group, the discussion is more specific and moves into obtaining participants' opinions and feedback on the topic of interest

Summary

This section of the guide involves asking participants for any further comments on the topic and for any additional information that may have been omitted or forgotten.

Closing

In this section the participants are thanked and some explanation is usually given regarding what will happen to the results.

OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM THE STAKEHOLDERS

- A draft of the guide is developed by the moderator based on his/her understanding of the needs of the stakeholders. The draft should outline the questions to be asked, as well as describe any other materials to be used in eliciting information from participants.
- It is very difficult and time consuming to develop draft guides in a group. We highly recommend the moderator or evaluator write the first draft. It is much easier for a group to discuss a draft and make revisions —much like we're doing now!
- Once the draft is complete, it should be reviewed by the stakeholders for any suggested changes to the content and/or format.
- The final version of the guide should be a product of the interactive process between the stakeholders and moderator.

OTHER TIPS AND GUIDELINES

- If threatening or sensitive topics are to be introduced, they should be preceded by non-threatening topics in order to allow sufficient time for the moderator and group members to establish rapport with one another.
- As a rule of thumb, items should proceed from general questions to more specific items.
- The moderator's guide should not be viewed as structured protocol, but rather as a flexible guide.
- Consulting the literature related to the topic or other specialists in the field can be helpful in constructing the moderator's guide.

Examples of Moderators Guides Follow

Dietitians of Canada Nutrition Month 1998

Needs Assessment Focus Groups

Moderator's Guide

Final Version—August 7, 1997

INTRODUCTIONS

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Thank-you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. The month of March has been designated Nutrition Month. During this month they provide information and resources to the public in an attempt to help people make healthy food choices. In the first half of this focus group, we will be asking for your opinions and perceptions of what nutritional information would be most useful to you and the best ways to present that information. The second half of the discussion will focus on past promotional materials used during Nutrition Month. In particular, we would like to ask for your input on how to:

1 improve on materials used in the past,

2 make materials more appealing and

3 increase their usefulness

Your opinions and feedback will be used to guide future campaigns and in the development of materials for Nutrition Month, 1998.

Your comments are completely confidential. Your name will not be associated with any comments you make during this discussion. This is an opportunity to be heard, I encourage you to speak up. I also encourage you to speak about yourself and your experiences. There are no right or wrong answers, please feel free to be totally honest.

The format of our discussion is informal. Tracey will be recording the discussion and as you can see there is a tape recorder in the middle of the table that will ensure we record all information correctly. We want everyone to have an opportunity to share their ideas, so as a facilitator, I will sometimes call upon you to share your ideas, or, if you are speaking more than others I may have to interrupt you in order to give other people an opportunity to comment. Please don't be offended. It is not that we don't want to hear what you have to say, it is just that we have only two hours to cover a large topic and want everyone to have equal opportunities to comment. Are there any questions or concerns?

Probes	Questions
	1 What nutrition information would you be interested in receiving or find useful to receive? Is there any nutritional information that you have found confusing or unclear in the past?
Radio, T.V., Internet, pamphlets, posters, magazines	2 Given the topics you have mentioned, how would you like to see this information presented to the public? ▸ Why do you prefer to receive nutrition information in this way? ▸ Are there ways that you would not like to receive nutrition information?
Tips, articles, recipes, question and answer, quizzes, etc. (Use only if not mentioned)	3 In what format would you like to receive this information?
Home, workplace, grocery stores, public transportation etc. (Use only if not mentioned)	4 Where would you like to receive this information (Locations)?

"All Foods Can Fit"

Distribute "All Foods Can Fit" Pamphlet to participants.

The "All Foods Can Fit" pamphlet was provided as an insert in the March, 1997 issue of Chatelaine.
Please take a moment to glance through each page.

Questions	Probes
1 What do you think the main message(s) are? Do you feel that the information provided in the insert is useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the most useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the least useful? ▸ Would this information help you to make better food choices? ▸ Is there other information you think would be valuable?	
2 Thinking about how the information is presented or the layout , ▸ What are some things you like about the way the material is presented? ▸ What are some things you don't like about the way the material is presented? ▸ Are there things you would change about the way the material is presented?	Is it easy to read the information? *Is the layout attractive and/or appealing?* (Use only if not mentioned)
3 Do you feel that distribution through the Internet is an effective means to give you nutrition information?	

Chapter 4

"Fast Facts About Nutrition"

Distribute Fast Facts about Nutrition Fact Sheet.

The Fast Facts about Nutrition Fact Sheet was used during Nutrition Month 1997 and is currently located on the Dietitians of Canada Website. Please take a moment to look over this sheet.

Questions	Probes
1 What do you think the main message(s) are? Do you feel that the information provided in the insert is useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the most useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the least useful? ▸ Would this information help you to make better food choices? ▸ Is there other information you think would be valuable?	
2 Thinking about how the information is presented or the layout , ▸ What are some things you like about the way the material is presented? ▸ What are some things you don't like about the way the material is presented? ▸ Are there things you would change about the way the material is presented?	Is it easy to read the information? *Is the layout attractive and/or appealing?* (Use only if not mentioned)
3 Do you feel that distribution through the Internet is an effective means to give you nutrition information?	

The "Good", the "Bad" and the Well Balanced Diet

Distribute the "Good", the "Bad" and the Well Balanced Diet Fact Sheet.

This fact sheet was also used in the 1997 Nutrition Month Campaign and is also currently located on the Dietitians of Canada Website.

Questions	Probes
1 What do you think the main message(s) are? Do you feel that the information provided on the fact sheet is useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the most useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the least useful? ▸ Would this information help you to make better food choices? ▸ Is there other information you think would be valuable?	
2 Thinking about how the information is presented or the layout, ▸ What are some things you like about the way the material is presented? ▸ What are some things you don't like about the way the material is presented? ▸ Are there things you would change about the way the material is presented?	Is it easy to read the information? *Is the layout attractive and/or appealing?* (Use only if not mentioned)

Chapter 4

Internet Web Sites

Distribute web pages

The following are samples of web pages taken from the Dietitians of Canada Website. As part of the "virtual kitchen", visitors to the Website can select various foods on which to receive additional information. Please briefly read through these samples.

Questions	Probes
1 What do you think the main message(s) are? Do you feel that the information provided on the fact sheet is useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the most useful? ▸ Which aspects do you think are the least useful? ▸ Would this information help you to make better food choices? ▸ Is there other information you think would be valuable?	
2 Thinking about how the information is presented or the layout, ▸ What are some things you like about the way the material is presented? ▸ What are some things you don't like about the way the material is presented?	Is it easy to read the information? *Is the layout attractive and/or appealing?*

Comparison of Promotional Materials

Record the number of participants who chose each option for the following questions

Of the 5 promotional materials we have reviewed today,

- Which do you feel contains the most useful information?
- Which would help you make better food choices?
- Which material was the most appealing and easy to read?
- Which would you be most likely to use/read?
- Of the methods used to communicate nutrition information during last year's Nutrition Month, (insert in a national magazine, the Internet), which would you prefer? Which method do you think would be the most useful in reaching the public?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS C PARTICIPANT INFORMATION NEEDS REVISITED 10 Minutes

Now that you had an opportunity to see some promotional material,

- Is there any other nutrition information that hasn't been mentioned already that you would find useful?

Now that you had an opportunity to see the format of some of the promotional material.

- Is there any format you feel would be most appropriate for you?

  Eg. stories/ myths/ quizzes / articles / recipe tips / etc.
- Do you have any other recommendations?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS D PERCEPTIONS OF DIETITIANS

if time permits

- Have you ever had any interactions with a dietitian?
- In your opinion, what does a deititan do? Anything else?
- How would you obtain the services of a dietitian? Do you know where they work?

Defining the Client-Practitioner Relationship

Moderator's Guide

Objective

Describe client expectations and advise on educational strategies to improve client practitioner relationship.

Focus group

Describe/understand client expectations of the interpersonal relationship and professional behaviours.

INTRODUCTIONS

Participants will have an opportunity to introduce themselves to the group before we begin.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to learn about your expectations of your relationship with your physiotherapist. By relationship, I mean how you interact with your therapist and how your therapist treats you. Also, we would like your opinions about how a professional physiotherapist should conduct themselves.

Your comments are completely confidential. Your name will not be associated with any comments you make. [__________] will be recording all the ideas and comments we discuss today and we will be combining this information with ideas collected from other focus groups. This is an opportunity for you to share what is important to you, I encourage you to speak up. I also encourage you to speak about yourself and your own experiences. There are no right or wrong answers, please feel free to be totally honest. Do you have any questions or concerns?

I will address any concerns ...

It is important that everyone has an opportunity to share their ideas. So I may call upon you to discuss your views, or ask that you allow someone else to speak who may not have had an opportunity to share their ideas.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

A General expectations (key characteristics) of how a physiotherapist should interact with a client

1. What behaviours/characteristics would you use to describe a physiotherapist who is interacting with you in a positive way?
   - How do you expect a physiotherapist to interact with you?
   - How do you expect a physiotherapist to treat you?
2. What behaviours or characteristics would you use to describe a physiotherapist who is interacting with you in a negative way?
   - What do you expect a physiotherapist not to do?

This section will be very open, with the moderator using probes to clarify what clients are saying. It will provide us with some ideas of what is 'top of mind' and hence most important.

B Expectations Specific to Different Modes of Communication

1. Thinking about how a physiotherapist speaks/verbally communicates with you?
   - What would be some positive characteristics of his/her behaviour?
   - Some negative characteristics?
2. Thinking about how a physiotherapist touches you?
   - What would be some positive characteristics of his/her behaviour?
   - Some negative characteristics?
3. Thinking about a physiotherapists manner (for example their body language, attitude, or how they look at you).
   - What would be some positive characteristics of his/her behaviour?
   - Some negative characteristics?

C Expectations around 'professional' behaviour.

1. How would you describe the behaviour of a physiotherapist who is very 'professional'? How would he/she interact with you?
2. What are some behaviours of a physiotherapist that you would consider to be not very professional?

CLOSING

Chapter

5

Step 5 Recruiting Participants

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS— DEFINITION AND INFORMATION

Step 5:
Recruiting Participants

- How to recruit participants
- Use of a recruitment screener
- Incentives for participation

- Participants must be carefully recruited and represent the target population that you are trying to study.
- The importance of recruiting focus group participants cannot be underestimated. Failing to carefully and thoughtfully recruit participants can introduce a bias into the results which are obtained from the group. If the right people are not recruited for a focus group, the information generated may be useless.

HOW TO RECRUIT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- *Convenience/purposive samples*. A convenience sample is a sample of people which are selected because they are readily available or easy to contact. A purposive sample is where you select specific participants because you need that particular person in your group.

  Although these types of samples are easy and quick to recruit, the potential for introducing a hidden bias into the information obtained with this type of sample is high.
- Participants can be recruited from the telephone directory. A recruitment screener can be used to determine if they are part of your intended target population.

- Members of a relevant organization (i.e. school, church etc.), place of employment or other local associations.
- Professional focus group recruiters have a database of general consumers who are willing to participate in focus groups. They randomly recruit people from this database for you.

USE OF RECRUITMENT SCREENERS

- A screening questionnaire should be developed that will be used to screen participants according to the characteristics of the population of interest. For example, a particular focus group may require females who are between the ages of 18 and 24, who drive a car and who have not previously participated in a focus group.
- The questionnaire is usually very brief, ranging from 4 to 6 questions, but can be very important in ensuring that the correct individuals from the target population are selected to participate in the group.

EXAMPLE OF SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Recruitment Screener

For this project we need to recruit 11 participants who are the primary food purchaser in their household. We would like to get a good mix of people from different age categories and professions.

1 Are you the primary food purchaser in your household?

- ❑ Yes Eligible
- ❑ No Terminate

2 Are you 18 years of age or older?

- ❑ Yes Eligible
- ❑ No Terminate

3 In what year were you born?

____

4 What is your current occupation?

- ❑ Homemaker
- ❑ Retired
- ❑ Self employed
- ❑ Other:

____

5 Gender

- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

- Incentives can be used, if the budget allows, in order to encourage participation in the focus group. Using an incentive may increase attendance at the focus group, but may also disproportionately attract individuals whose primary concern is to make $25–$50.

OTHER TIPS AND GUIDELINES

- Participants should be recruited one to three weeks in advance of the group and called to confirm their attendance on the day of the group.
- It is preferable if focus group participants do not know one another. Participants may respond differently when influenced by peer pressure than when alone.
- Respondents' opinions and comments will be more spontaneous if they are not aware of the topic of the discussion prior to the group.
- Recruitment of new focus group participants, or those who have never previously participated in a focus group is preferable. Using new-comers to the focus group process will discourage "know-it-alls" and promote spontaneity.

Step 6 Logistics

LOGISTICS OF THE FOCUS GROUP— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- There are a number of activities and details to be organized and coordinated which will increase the effectiveness of the focus group.
- The successful management of the logistics of the focus group are important in encouraging participant attendance, providing an accurate record of the focus group discussion and creating a comfortable atmosphere. Small details of the focus group process are vital to the overall quality and effectiveness of the session.

LOCATION OF THE GROUP

- Provision of the proper physical location is mandatory. The location should be central, easy to find, and allow participants to feel comfortable and relaxed.
- A large comfortable room in which 10–12 people can talk naturally and hear one another is preferred.
- The room should be free from interruptions such as phones ringing and people walking through.
- The ideal focus group room has a professional recording system and an observation room with a one way mirror.

Step 6: Logistics

- Location of the group
- Timing of the group
- Room Set-up
- Recording
- Refreshments for participants
- Typical costs for conducting a group

Chapter 6

TIMING OF THE GROUP

- Focus groups should be scheduled for time which are convenient for participants (e.g. after work).
- They are typically held at 6:00 p.m. or 8:00 p.m, however these times can be varied for some target groups to facilitate recruitment of participants. For example, physicians may be more likely to attend a session in the early morning rather than in the evening. This is an important consideration in the planning process which will assist recruitment of participants.

ROOM SETUP

The chairs in the room should be arranged so that all participants can see each other's faces, usually around a table or in a living room set-up with couches and chairs facing each other.

REFRESHMENTS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Refreshments, such as snacks and drinks should be provided to participants in an attempt to make them feel comfortable and make their experience as pleasant as possible. Ideally they would have their refreshments prior to the start of the group to avoid a lot of shuffling around and disturbances.

RECORDING THE GROUP

- There are a number of options for recording a focus group. They include:
  - Audio record the session and transcribe tapes at completion
  - Use an audio recording system, as well a person to record live on site.
  - Have a person recording on site.
  - Recording system only without transcription (not recommended)
- If audio taping the session, the audio recording device should be placed in the middle of the table in a visible location and the reason for recording should be explained to participants at the outset of the discussion (that it is too difficult to remember everything that is said). Consent to record the session should also be obtained.

TYPICAL COSTS FOR CONDUCTING A GROUP

	Focus Group (One)
Questionnaire development	$150 – $500
Recruitment	$400 – $800
Respondent Incentives	0 – $400
Facilities, travel	$300 – $800
Moderator	$250 – $600
Analysis and report	$500 – $1,000
Total	$1,600 – $4,100

OTHER TIPS AND GUIDELINES

Providing name tags for participants is important for the moderator so that she/he can call upon participants by name.

Step 7 Facilitate the Focus Group

FACILITATE THE FOCUS GROUP— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- The moderator's role in facilitating the focus group involves:
  - creating a non-threatening, supportive climate that encourages all participants to share their views
  - building a rapport with participants
  - covering important questions and topics from the prepared moderator's guide
  - facilitating interaction among group members
  - interjecting probing comments, transitional questions and summaries
  - determining how participants feel about ideas/opinions expressed by others
- The moderator plays an integral role in the conduct of the focus group. While there is a prepared guide for the discussion, the moderator is essentially the "instrument".
- Using a person within your program as the moderator can be done. However, there is the potential that she or he may be biassed or the respondents may be inhibited in sharing their opinions if they feel it would offend or upset someone involved in the program.

Step 7:

- Facilitate the focus group
- Characteristics of a good moderator

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD MODERATOR

A good moderator:

- doesn't need to be an expert on the topic being discussed,
- can build a rapport and trust with participants,
- can probe issues without reacting to or influencing participants,
- can lead the group discussion without becoming sidetracked, and can keep the participants themselves focussed,
- can control opinionated participants and elicit responses from reluctant participants.
- can keep the group discussion flowing with minimal speaking time., and
- can promote discussion among participants and not with themselves.

Step 8 Analysis

ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP DATA— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- Analysing the data consists of objectively reviewing the transcripts and identifying the main points or themes which answer the original evaluation questions.
- This step is important because it organizes the information collected and summarizes the information so that it can be interpreted.

PREPARING THE DATA

- When an audio tape is used to record the focus group discussion alone, transcription of the data from the tapes is required. A full and accurate transcription from a tape recording can take up to 5 hours for every hour of the discussion.
- If you had a person recording the groups it is still important to verify the recorded information with the audio tapes.
- If the information was not audio recorded it is important for the moderator to review the recorded notes and fill in any missing information.
- Transcripts or the word processing files recorded from the focus group should be reviewed to ensure the discussion is complete and accurate.

Step 8: Analysis

- Preparing the data
- Methods for analysis
- Steps involved in data analysis of focus groups

STEPS INVOLVED IN DATA ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS

- Analysis of focus group data can be done in a number of different ways. There are computer applications available to assist with the analysis of focus group data (NUD*IST, Ethno graph) however analysis can be done without a computer. It just takes more time and effort.
- Regardless of whether you have a computer application or are doing the analysis by hand there are two basic parts to the analysis of focus group data.
- The first part involves segregating and organizing the data into logical and meaningful segments. These segments usually follow the moderators guide's questions or subdivisions.
- The second part in the analysis is interpretive and involves developing criteria for organizing the data into useful groups (themes). This is sometimes referred to as coding.

DETAILED STEPS

1 Type up transcripts/comments verbatim.

2 Segregate and organize the information into logical groups.

3 Read through all material and formulate the different themes that are evident.

4 Read through the materials again comment by comment and assign a theme or more than one theme to each comment for each group. This step is called coding.

5 Organize the information into their themes across all groups.

6 Assess how many groups identified each theme. The more groups where a similar theme emerged the more confident you can be of its importance.

7 Describe each theme and then provide supporting comments or quotes from the material.

METHODS FOR ANALYSIS

- Paper method
  - This involves cutting up the typed comments for the entire transcript and then organizing them into their themes by physically placing the comments into theme piles.
  - Be sure to record which focus group the comment came from on each of the comment sheets.
  - This method is very time consuming and difficult when you have multiple themes for individual comments.
- Word processing method
  - If you have a spreadsheet application or a wordprocessor that has a table function with sorting ability this method works very well.
  - Each comment is put into the table as its own row. A column is set up for the comment text, the focus group number, the section it applies to, and then one or more columns for themes.
  - In the application you can type in the theme for each comment in the theme column.
  - You then simply have to sort the table rows by theme in order to organize your work by themes . All comments related to each theme will appear together.
  - In instances where a comment may fall into more than one theme you can either copy the comment into another row and apply the second theme or create a separate column for the second theme.
- Use of software applications that can be used to analyse qualitative data (i.e. NUD*IST, Ethno graph)
  - The computer applications are more advanced than the word processing methods . They allow the analyst to code the data into categories, so that segments of the text are associated with particular code(s) and can be easily sorted and retrieved. This enables the analyst to easily assemble all comments related to a particular topic for review.
  - Computer applications are much better at being able to organize the data when there are multiple themes.

    - They are also able to search on key words and organize the data according to the key words. This is very helpful for example in situations where a word is important independent of the sentence it is within. For example if you wanted to know how smokers get to the store to buy their cigarettes you could do key word searches on words like 'subway' or 'car' or 'walk'.

- Identifying themes for multiple focus groups should be done independently for each group and then merged together for sorting of similar themes.

- Ideally you should have more than one person theme the groups independently and then compare the results to create agreement on themes and the coding of the comments.

The following is an example of what an analysis would look like using a word processing application:

Grp #	Comments	Theme 1	*Theme 2*
6	Matching residents interests to different activities available.	Activities	
9	Some residents are beyond reach of activities and need different level (e.g., someone to talk to.	Activities	*Social*
11	Exercise at least once a week is critical, recreation is the same.	Activities	*Physical*
3	Allow them to make decisions.	Autonomy	
8	Encourage independence & take the time to encourage functioning.	Autonomy	
9	Each should be as independent as possible.	Autonomy	
2	Good communication, comfortable that if I mention something the staff will look after them.	Communication with staff	
4	Professionals need to discuss things with us.	Communication with staff	*Involvement*
5	Staff should accept our suggestions as help not see them as hindrances.	Communication with staff	*Involvement*
2	The food is “excellent,” “gourmet compared to what I feed myself”.	Food	
7	Filled out month worth of menus & nothing happened.	Food	
10	Nutritionists try to accommodate their food requests.	Food	
1	Lack of cupboard space is a problem.	Living environment	*space*
2	Quieter atmosphere is necessary, it is too noisy.	Living environment	*noise*
2	They have improved; painted, new drapes.	Living environment	*decor*
1	Clean food off patient’s face when finished eating.	Resident care	*Food*
4	That residents are considered as a persons with specific needs.	Resident care	*Individualized care*
6	Sometimes put to bed without being washed.	Resident care	*Hygiene*
7	Staff must always treat resident as if they know what is going on.	Resident care	

Step 9 Interpret and Disseminate Focus Group Results

Step 9:
Interpret and Disseminate
Focus Group Results

- What to look for
- Presenting the data

INTERPRET FOCUS GROUP RESULTS— DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

- Interpreting the focus group results is done in order to answer the original questions that were posed for the evaluation. It allows you to draw conclusions.
- Interpreting the results of the focus group is one of the most crucial steps in the process of ensuring useful findings which accurately reflect the opinions and views of the participants involved and answer the original questions.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The results of focus group interviews should be interpreted carefully. In interpreting the findings from group interviews, it is important to look for trends and patterns in participants' perceptions rather than using a "he said...she said" kind of analysis.
- For all three methods of analysis, the following considerations should be made in the interpretation of the data:
  - In how many groups did each theme appear?
  - Are there common trends/concerns across multiple groups?
- It is important not to ignore themes that emerge in just one or two

groups—they should also be considered when interpreting your results.

- The description of each theme should be made keeping in mind that the themes should be giving insight/answers to the original questions.

HOW TO PRESENT YOUR DATA

There are many different ways to present the data. The following format is one way that will ensure the information is presented logically.

Background and purpose of the study

- why the study was undertaken
- what are the evaluation questions

Methodology

- development of the moderators guide
- number of groups held
- location of groups
- recruitment of participants

Results

- description of participants for each group
- a section for each area of interest
  - Main themes followed by sub-themes
  - Description of themes
  - supporting quotes

Conclusions and Recommendations

Appendices

- moderator’s guide
- recruitment screener

DISSEMINATE RESULTS

- It takes time and people power to share results of any study. Plan to devote some time to sharing the results with all stakeholders.
- It is helpful to provide both the written document and to have a verbal presentation and discussion.
- An appropriate time to discuss and decide on what action should be taken from the information learned is at the end of a verbal presentation where all stakeholders are present.

OTHER TIPS AND GUIDELINES

Interpretation of the results is generally improved if the individuals doing the analysis are also involved in the data collection (i.e. present at the focus group session and/or moderating the sessions).

Step 10 Take Action

TAKE ACTION

Step 10: Take Action

- How to decide which actions to take

- Taking action refers to implementing the changes suggested by the results of your focus groups.
- It is important to take action and implement changes in order to make improvements to your program/service/product.

HOW TO DECIDE WHICH ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Involve your stakeholders in interpreting and taking action on your results.
- Revisit your original goals of data collection. Your data should provide answers to your original questions.
- Write a list of recommended actions which address the outcomes of your focus groups.
- Prioritize those changes which are most important and feasible to implement.
- Set up an action plan to implement the recommended changes.
- Implement the changes.

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B

Worksheets for Focus Group Workshop

Appendix C

STEP 1—CLARIFY PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S)

Description of Program

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Why do you want to do the focus groups?

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

What are your research questions? What specifically do you need to know?

1 . . . .

2 . . . .

3 . . . .

4 . . . .

5 . . . .

How will the results be used?

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Appendix B

Who are your stakeholders and what are their interests?

Stakeholders	Interests

Describe the population of interest

Age	Gender	Ethnicity

Where do they live

The best to communicate with them

The best way to reach them

Are they similar or different?

List the issues which need to be explored:

Appendix C

STEP 2—ASSESS YOUR RESOURCES

A. What resources are available to conduct the focus group?

Staff

- ❑ Focus group moderator
- ❑ Transcriptionist
- ❑ Data entry person
- ❑ Telephone interviewers
- ❑ Data analyst
- ❑ Report writer
- ❑ Word processor
- ❑ Questionnaire writer

Information

- ❑ Sample information:
- ❑ Names
- ❑ Phone numbers
- ❑ Addresses

Supplies

- ❑ Audio and/or video tapes

Equipment

Computer with:

- ❑ Word processing software
- ❑ Qualitative analysis software
- ❑ Photocopier
- ❑ Telephones
- ❑ Focus group room
- ❑ Sensitive tape recorder

Budget ($ available for evaluation)

. . . .
Source 1

. . . .
Source 2

. . . .
Source 3

Other special skills of staff/volunteers

. . . .

. . . .

Other resources available

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

STEP 3—DECIDE ON METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Number of focus groups to be conducted?

How many groups are necessary? ____________

What can your budget afford? ____________

Description of Groups

Group #	Location	Time	# of participants	Description of Participants

Appendix C

STEP 4—WRITE THE MODERATORS GUIDE

1 Introductions

2 Statement of Purpose and Confidentiality

3 Focus Group Questions

What questions need to be asked and what probes will assist the moderator?

Part A Time ________________

1 ....

2 ....

3 ....

4 ....

Part B Time ________________

1 ....

2 ....

3 ....

4 ....

4 CLOSING

....

....

....

....

....

Appendix C

STEP 5—RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

What type of sampling methodology will you use?

- ❑ convenience/purposive sample
- ❑ random sample
- ❑ other (describe)

. . . .

Where will you get the names and phone numbers or addresses for potential participants?

- ❑ Telephone directory
- ❑ Customer files
- ❑ Organization (which one?)

. . . .

- ❑ Professional association (which one?)

. . . .

- ❑ other (describe)

. . . .

Recruitment Screener

What questions are needed in order to recruit the right participants?

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Appendix B

STEP 6—LOGISTICS

Action Plan

Tasks	*Person Responsible*	*Completion Date*
BEFORE		
Design methods and procedures	______________	______________
Write draft moderators guide	______________	______________
Review moderators guide	______________	______________
Revise moderators guide	______________	______________
Book focus group facility	______________	______________
Arrange for recording of group	______________	______________
Arrange for refreshments	______________	______________
Decide on recruitment method	______________	______________
Recruit participants	______________	______________
DAY OF		
Remind participants	______________	______________
Make copies of needed materials	______________	______________
Facilitate group	______________	______________
AFTER		
Data enter transcripts	______________	______________
Read results	______________	______________
Identify themes	______________	______________
Code comments	______________	______________
Analyse results	______________	______________
Interpret results	______________	______________
Write report	______________	______________
Disseminate findings	______________	______________