



Focus groups

Who participates?

- * Generally a group of 5-12
- * People who represent populations of interest – for example
 - * Current and previous smokers who have interacted with TIS;
 - * Professionals who have acted in partnership with TIS
- * People with insight on a specific topic - for example
 - * Parents groups
 - * Prison workers
 - * School teachers and principals
 - * Many more possibilities...

What kind of information are we looking for?

- * 'The meaning behind the facts' (Grudens-Schuck, Allen & Larson, 2004)
- * Insight and understanding more than just 'nuts and bolts'
- * Multiple perspectives on a single topic

How do we conduct a focus group?

- * Form a few key questions with follow-ups
- * Plan for 1-2hrs of discussion
- * Facilitator encourages group discussion amongst participants
- * Ideally, a second evaluator acts as an observer who takes notes on key themes, quotes, silences, and body language.
- * Incentives can help recruit participants

Limitations

- * Social norms can get in the way of genuine insight
- * Information applies only to the specialised group represented by participants

Example from Eastern Ontario Health Units Tobacco Cessation Program evaluation plan

Element	Focus Group
Format	Group Session
Size	8 - 12 participants
Length	1.5 - 2 hours
No of Sessions	Two
Participants	Program beneficiaries (Current Clients)
Forms of data	Conversations (including tone of voice) Silences Body Languages
Data Collection	Audiotape Transcript
Facilitator	Evaluator
Formats for Reporting	Selected quotations Thematic content analysis



Focus groups

Forming and facilitating focus group questions

Begin with the key reason that you are conducting the focus group

So what we are focussing on here is ...

Follow up questions to get a better understanding of what is being expressed

Please tell me/ Let's hear a bit more about how you...

This seems important, can we spend a bit more time on this?

I'm not sure I understand, can you please explain?

Try to involve everybody

Does anyone else have an example like that?

Is it always like that?

I haven't heard from you, X.

What do you think about this issue?

What examples of this issue have cropped up in your experience?

Avoid one or a few people dominating the discussion

Thanks for that, now can we hear what the others have to say

It's important to get a wide range of views here, so let's explore others' perceptions

Analysing focus group data

Unit of analysis is usually the group, not each individuals within the group – aim to understand the 'collective testimony'.

Look for:

✿ Points of consensus and disagreement –

✿ What did the group agree on?

✿ Were there times when they disagreed?

✿ Silences and omissions –

✿ were there any questions that prompted little to no response, or extended silences?

✿ These could mark points of discomfort with the topic that could be relevant to your research question.

✿ Key themes and conversations –

✿ What were the main issues raised by participants?

✿ What was the 'gist' of the story that emerged?