



FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are typically small groups of individuals (ideally 8 to 10) invited to meet with the expressed purpose of voicing their thoughts, ideas, or opinions around a topic of particular interest. Unlike surveys, focus groups provide the opportunity to collect in-depth information. By asking a series of questions and recording participants' responses, the persons facilitating the focus group collect information that is later analyzed to enhance insight and understanding.

BENEFITS OF A FOCUS GROUP

- Represents a large number of ideas, opinions, perspectives
- Can be structured to include diverse identities and/or focused on select demographics or identity groups.
- Can be leveraged as a standalone strategy to inform action (e.g., needs of graduate students who are parents), or as an initial strategy to inform assessment planning (e.g. what data do we need in order to address X?), or as a follow up strategy to understand results of existing data (e.g. survey data, suggestion box, observed trends in usage, etc.)

TYPES OF FOCUS GROUPS

- Structured –a script supports consistency across multiple groups. Facilitators do not pose follow-up questions that are not in the predefined script.
- Semi-structured – provides initial set of questions. Facilitators pose follow-up or additional questions based on participants' responses. As such, these may vary across groups but provide a pathway to delving more deeply to understand participants' experiences.
- Unstructured –may begin with a very open-ended prompt. However, the facilitator does not utilize predetermined questions and follows participants own thoughts and observations

LOGISTICS

- Focus groups are most effective if they are between 45 and 90 minutes long.
- When possible host 3 or 4 focus groups with different groups of participants.
- Each group in a planned series should follow the same protocols. For example, utilize the same introductory messaging and questions to guide discussion.
- Ideally there should be two facilitators, one to facilitate dialogue and another to keep observational notes and a record of participants' responses.
- If different facilitators will host focus groups on the same topic, facilitators should meet to discuss expectations for supporting consistency across groups. In lieu of meeting, there should be a guide for facilitators.

- Identify and invite potential participants based on the purpose of the focus group and shared experience. Participants can be selected random, recommended by colleagues or peers, based on who volunteers, based on a common experience (Student Org Presidents) or identity (identifies as having a disability).
- Before beginning the conversation, facilitators should emphasize confidentiality, and participants should indicate consent before participating.

ANATOMY OF A FOCUS GROUP

- **Engaging Participants**
Introduce the topic, and ask a broad warm-up question like *How have you engaged with XXXX?* or *What is your favorite part of XXXX?*
- **Exploring the Topic**
Ask questions intentionally selected to produce data you need to understand participants' experiences, perspectives or ideas. You might ask things like *How satisfied are you with XXXX and why?* or *How could we improve XXXX to better meet your needs?*
- **Winding Down**
Use an open-ended question that provides an opportunity for participants to clarify or add to the conversation. You might ask *Is there anything I haven't asked about related to XXXX that you want to discuss?* or *Is there anything else you want to share about your experience with XXXX?*

COLLECTING & ANALYZING FOCUS GROUP DATA

- Take notes or record the discussion(s)
- Code the data (Identify common categories or themes across responses)
- Make notes as you code. How do things connect, what are the larger issues and concepts?
- Look for larger "buckets" that individual codes or themes align with.
- Identify key quotes that illustrate your themes.
- If you hosted several groups on the same topic with different demographic/identity groups, you might look for similarities or differences in response themes/trends.
- Write a brief summary highlighting major themes, unusual findings, outliers, differences between groups, or other findings of note. You can use direct quotes to emphasize points you are trying to make in the summary.