



**INFOSHEET:**  
**Focus Group Hosting Guide**

**SOMETIMES IT TAKES LISTENING TO THE OPINIONS AND THOUGHTS OF OTHERS IN A SMALL AND SAFE GROUP SETTING BEFORE THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS CAN BE DETERMINED. FOCUS GROUPS ARE WELL SUITED FOR THOSE SITUATIONS.**

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, focus groups create an atmosphere that puts participants at ease allowing them to thoughtfully answer questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers. Surveys are good for collecting information, but if you need to understand things at a deeper level, then use a focus group.

A good focus group requires planning – outlined here are details for conducting a quality focus group.

The purpose of a focus group is to gain information about a topic(s) of interest from the perspective of participants.

**DEFINING A FOCUS GROUP:**

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic and then to guide future action.

The group's composition and the group discussion should be carefully planned to create a non-threatening environment, so that participants feel free to talk openly and give honest opinions. Since participants are actively encouraged to not only express their own opinions, but also respond to other members and questions posed by the leader, focus groups offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys.

Additionally, because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time. In short, focus groups are a good way to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions on a topic.

Focus groups have between seven and ten participants.

**EXAMPLES:**

- A focus group of parents of preschoolers meets to discuss child care needs. Parents share their views on local child care programs, and on what could be done to improve them
- A focus group of senior citizens meets at the new senior center. What do they think of the programs being offered? What are their suggestions and ideas?

**ENGAGING CONVERSATION GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

- Only one person talks at a time.
- Confidentiality is assured. "What is shared in the room stays in the room".
- It is important for us to hear everyone's ideas and opinions – no right or wrong answers to questions – just ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable.
- It is important for us to hear all sides of an issue – both the positive and the negative.
- It is important for women's and men's ideas to be equally represented and respected.

**TIPS FOR CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP(S):**

- Obtain verbal consent.
- Establish rapport – participants are the experts.
- Follow a guide of questions – provide a framework to explore, probe and ask questions. This increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection more efficient.



## SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES FOR GUIDING THE DISCUSSION:

- Repeat the question.
- Pause for the answer.
- Repeat the reply.
- Ask when, what, where, which and how questions.
- Use neutral comments.
- Address questions to individuals who are reluctant to talk.
- Minimize pressure to conform to a dominate view point.
- Record discussion.

Following are some examples of general questions. These apply largely to groups discussing a current program or service, but they can be adjusted for planned programs, as well as for groups dealing with other concerns. The precise language and order of presentation will depend on your topic and group, but some of these questions may be adapted to your own needs.

- *What are some of your thoughts about what's going on now?* (To increase physical activity opportunities for children and youth in your community? – follow the community action model – understanding, awareness, programs, environments, policy)
- *Would you say you are satisfied with the current situation, with the way things are going on?*
- (If so) *What are you satisfied about? Why is that?* (Or, *What's going well...?*)
- *Are there things you are dissatisfied with, that you would like to see changed?* (Or, *What's not going well...?*)

- (If so) *What are they? Why is that? How should they change? What kinds of things would you like to see happen?*
- *How about this particular aspect (of the topic). What do you think about that?*
- Repeat for different aspects of the topic, with variations in style. For example, if the main focus group topic was *community policing*, some key aspects to cover might be *visibility, sensitivity, interaction, respect, etc.*
- *Some people have said that one way to improve X is to do Y.*
- *Do you agree with this? (Or, How do you feel about that?)*
- *Are there other recommendations that you have, or suggestions you would like to make?*
- *Are there other things you would like to say before we wind up?*
- Some "probes", or "follow-ups", designed to get more information on a given question:

*Can you say more about that?*

*Can you give an example?*

*Jane says X. How about others of you. What do you think?*

*How about you, Joe. [Or, you folks in the corner over there....] Do you have some thoughts on this?*

*Does anyone else have some thoughts on that?*