

FACILITATING A FOCUS GROUP:

BACKGROUND

- A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a Moderator. 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 nonthreatening 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 Moderator, focus groups offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through interviews.
- 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 thoughts, feelings and opinions on a topic.

CHECKLIST

Before you start:

- Plan: Think before you start, look before you leap.
- Know your subject, have at least two up to date, peer reviewed articles on your subject
- Consider other methods [We will cover this in a later lesson]
- Check your goals. Ask: "What do I hope to learn?"

- Sample population – homogeneity
- Ethical approval
- Devise main question to be addressed by Focus Group and develop 2-3 questions for the group to consider to arrive at the answer to the main question
- Convene the Focus Group and send participants information several days before the date of the group [examples will be provided], including:
 - Covering Letter
 - Information Sheet
 - Interview Schedule [Details of the questions]
 - Debrief sheet

During the Focus Group:

- Conduct a pilot study
- Welcome participants and open the group, advise of the length of time allocated for discussion and draw attention to the interview schedule
- Check that recording equipment is working and can pick up all voices
- Take brief notes to allow for technical failure and familiarise yourself with the seating plan to aid transcription and analysis
- Remind participants of the consent form they will have signed and remind them of the anonymity surrounding the group [this needs to be recorded]
- Try to make sure that any participant's ideas don't get lost, encourage full participation
- Have some prompts ready to aid discussion:
 - "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, ####, Do you have some thoughts on this?"
 - "Does anyone else have some thoughts on that?"

- Give notice when the Focus Group is coming to an end
- End by thanking participants for their participation and remind them of the debriefing process [We will address this in a later lesson]

After the Focus Group:

- Debriefing process
- Transcribe the session
- Store recording and transcription in accordance with the Ethical Codes of Practice of UWTSD and the Data Protection Act
- Analysis Data [Thematic Analysis]
 - What patterns emerge?
 - What are the common themes?
 - What new questions arise?
 - What conclusions seem true?
- Reflect on your learning from this process