

Focus Group Planning Checklist

Directions: This checklist is designed to assist you with the planning and implementation of a focus group. It can be used as an easy guide to keep you on schedule and make sure you keep track of all of the many pieces involved in having a successful focus group.

Step 1: Decide how you will use the focus group tool

- Focus groups can be used to explore many issues or aspects of your work.

Appropriate when you want to ...	Not appropriate when you...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from interaction among participants • Explore and get in-depth and nuances of opinions • Understand differences in perspectives • Understand what factors influence opinions or behaviors • Test materials or products • Test reactions to actual or proposed services • Design or understand the results of a large quantitative study • Capture comments of the target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want people to come to consensus • Need to ask participants sensitive questions • Want to educate people • Want to generalize findings to a larger population • Are working with emotionally or politically charged groups • Want to measure program effectiveness

Step 2: Plan your focus groups

- Determine who will be invited, how many to invite, and who will do the recruiting.
- Recruit 10-12 potential participants for each focus group, and expect 6-10 to attend.
- Allow at least 3 weeks for the recruitment process.

Step 3: Prepare parent consent and participant assent

- Determine need for parental consent for focus groups based on your focus group location and agency requirements.
- Prepare the parent consent and/or participant assent forms on your letterhead and include the information that is relevant to your focus groups.
- Make two copies of the participant assent form per person in group. Participants keep one copy and sign and return one copy to the facilitator.

Step 4: Develop you focus group protocol

- Include the 7 essential elements in your protocol:
 - Welcome
 - Participant Assent
 - Group Agreements
 - Introductions
 - Opening Questions
 - Main Questions
 - Closing

Step 5: Organize logistics for the focus groups

- Choose a location that is easy to get to for participants.
- Choose a space that has enough room for people to sit comfortably.
- Determine if you can provide healthy snacks and drinks.
- Determine if you need to provide childcare.
- Determine if you need to provide transportation (bus passes, tokens, or taxi vouchers).
- Decide who will be the moderator and note taker. It is best if the moderator is a neutral person, not necessarily connected to the aspect of your program that you are exploring in the focus group.
- Moderator and note taker should familiarize themselves with the focus group protocol and questions before the focus groups.
- It is strongly recommended that you tape record the focus groups in addition to having a note taker.

Step 6: Detail to finalize before the focus groups

- Confirm that the parent consent forms have been sent out and returned.
- Confirm the location, and time with your focus group participants the day before, and answer any outstanding questions.
- If conducting your group in an off-site location (such as a school or facility), find out if there are special rules about checking in at the office, rules about where to park, and procedures for getting participants to the assigned room.
- Confirm that the food/snack/drinks are ready for delivery or pick-up.
- Create signs with directions to the focus group location.

Step 7: Supplies to take to the focus group:

- Focus group protocol and note taking template (bring two sets of each in case you need to split the group into two groups)
- Tape recorder and microphone
- Extension cord/spare batteries
- Blank tapes (if recorder uses them)
- Pens and markers
- Name tents or name tags
- Copies of participant assent forms (Make 2 copies per person in group. Participants keep one copy and sign and return one copy to facilitator.)
- Clip board (can be used as writing surface for note taker)
- Clock/watch
- Flip chart and masking tape (may be used if generating ideas/lists)
- Sign-in sheet
- Location and directions signs
- Incentives (if providing)
 - Water/snacks (plates/napkins)
 - Gift certificates/cash