

## Focus Group Administration Guidelines

*"People who possess certain characteristics and provide qualitative data in a focused discussion to help understand the topic of interest."  
Krueger & Casey (2000) p 10*

In general, best practice is to conduct focus groups with between 6 – 12 participants. Groups that are too large discourage participation of all participants and may promote the discussion of topics unrelated to the facilitated discussion. Smaller groups can be more comfortable and can be easier to facilitate and accommodate. That said, too small will limit the range of experiences captured.

<b>When to Use a Focus Group</b>
You are looking to collect a range of ideas from participants.
You aim to understand differences in perspectives between groups of people.
Your goal is to uncover factors that influence opinions, behaviours & motivations.
You want ideas to emerge from the group discussions.
You want to pilot test ideas, materials, plans or policies or documents reactions to or experiences of existing ones.
You need information to design a large-scale quantitative study.
You need more information to shed light on quantitative data already collected.
The intended audience places high value on capturing the actual comments or the language used by the participants.

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Help in understanding perceptions, beliefs & opinions  Allows for direct & indirect feedback  Participants build on each other's ideas  Flexible & dynamic  Low cost  Larger number of participants	Facilitation requires skill  Information cannot be generalized  Training and analysis takes time  Harder to control the discussion  Groups can influence individual responses  Can be difficult to ensure attendance

## Kinds of Focus Group Questions

- **Opening Questions** – questions that break the ice and encourage every member of the group to talk or contribute. It is important that these questions do not uncover differences between participants that would limit individual participation.
- **Introductory Questions** – these questions provide participants with the first opportunity to think about the topic that will be discussed at greater length. This should be straightforward and would often prompt participants to recall experiences or information.
- **Transition Questions** – help to link the opening and introductory questions to the key questions the focus group facilitator is trying to get it. These questions facilitate participants' deeper connection with the subject or topic at hand than was covered in the first set of questions.
- **Key Questions** – these questions are the most important in the focus group analysis. These are the questions that form the bedrock of what the facilitator is trying to unearth. The most time should be spent on answering these questions and facilitators should focus on building up to these questions throughout the beginning of the discussion.
- **Ending Questions** – these questions help conclude the discussion and allow for participants to reflect on their previous answers and to provide any additional information they did not have an opportunity to share.

Focus Group Questions should:

- Be conversational rather than Yes/No
- Use words participants are familiar with
- Be easy for the moderator to say
- Be clear, short, open-ended and usually one-dimensional
- Follow a clear sequence – shorter, simpler questions at the start
- Move from general to more specific, complex ideas
- Each have a distinct purpose and each contribute to the overall goals of the focus group
- Not make assumptions about whether an experience was positive or negative
- Not assume that participants understand all terms, concepts or language used

Useful question starters:

- What prompted you to...
- What influenced you...
- Tell me about a time when...