

Simple Steps to Effective Focus Groups

Overview - Focus Group Research:

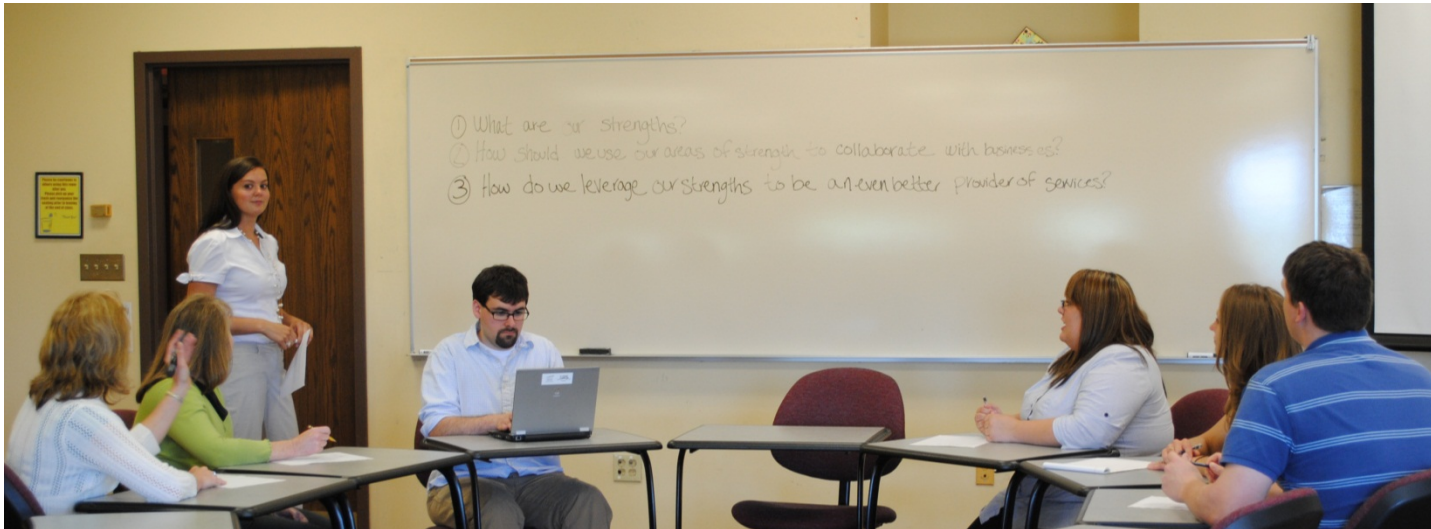
1. Purpose
2. Roles of the people involved
3. When to use focus groups for data collection
4. Time commitment

Purpose of a Focus Group

“The purpose of a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product, or service. Participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group.”

Krueger, Richard, and Casey. Focus Groups. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage Publications, 2000.

Who is in a Focus Group?



Facilitator

- Introduces the topic
- Presents the questions
- Asks follow-up questions to obtain more information
- Keeps everyone involved in the discussion



Note-taker

- Responsible for proper room setup
- Has all equipment and materials ready
- Takes accurate notes of the conversation
- Acts as timekeeper



Participants

- 10-12 people for market research
- 5-8 people to go in-depth



What a Focus Group IS:

A carefully planned series of discussions
designed to obtain perceptions on a
defined area of interest

When to use Focus Groups:

- Looking for a range of ideas or perspectives on an issue
- Trying to determine differences in perspectives between groups of people
- Researcher needs information to aid existing quantitative data

Focus Group Example:

- Likert-style survey was administered across UW-Stout campus
- Focus groups were conducted to add more information to the quantitative survey data

What a Focus Group IS NOT:

- An interview led by the facilitator
- A random group of individuals discussing a random topic
- Discussions in a judgmental and stressful environment



Don't use Focus Groups when:

- Looking for group consensus
- Educating people about a topic
- Not intending to use results

Time Commitment:

- Focus groups are time consuming
- Allow a minimum of 85 days to conduct a focus group project.

Before the Focus Group

1. Develop timeline with key milestone dates
2. Develop system for organizing project files
3. Develop budget (if needed)
4. Develop and revise questions, follow-ups and probes

Before the Focus Group

5. Hire, assign, or train personnel to coordinate, record, and facilitate the groups
6. Hold a mock focus group
7. Arrange logistics – schedule groups, book rooms, determine equipment needs, schedule make-up groups
8. Recruit participants

During the Focus Group

1. Recording/Note-taking
2. Facilitating the group
3. Note-taker responsibilities during the group
4. Time management

Recording / Note-taking

We recommend a combination of *audio recording* and *computer note-taking*



Before You Begin

- Practice your introduction
 - Memorize this as much as possible
- Consent forms
- Establish ground rules for your group
- Any questions?

Facilitating Focus Groups

- Active listener that maintains a high energy level
- Correctly uses “Pause and Probe” techniques
- Follows processes and procedures
- Creates an environment conducive to participant involvement
- Uses time well
 - Parking lot technique

Facilitating the Focus Group

Appropriate

- Uses slow (attentive/encouraging) head nodding
- Asks non-leading questions and probes
- Stays in the “background”

Inappropriate

- Uses fast, agreeable head nodding
- Asks leading questions of participants
- Becomes very involved with group discussion

Time Management

- Always start and end the group on time
- Facilitators should know approximate times for how long each question should take to answer
- Facilitator and note-taker decide how many reminders for time remaining are given



Facilitator's Five Rules of Engagement

1. Establish Ground Rules
2. Prompt, Probe, & Pause
3. Guide the Group
4. Handle Unexpected Obstacles
5. Manage Time