



Focus Groups: 4-H and Youth Development

With winter programs for 4-H/youth waning and summer ones on the horizon, are there programming issues you'd like to evaluate?

A project about lack of parental support for the youth program several years ago yielded clues on *how to involve parents more, and, attract more families*. Another yielded clues on *approaches to teaching and meetings in clubs that were more acceptable to youth*. What did these projects have in common? Both went to the target audience of the program, younger youth, and teens for insights about the issue including *why* they felt the way they did and what changes they thought should be made.

To get the perspective of these young people, we used focus groups, some moderated by their peers. Young persons relish giving their opinions on serious matters; it makes them feel you are taking them seriously.

To establish an informal atmosphere, take a waste paper basket and place it in the middle of some chairs, top the basket with a large piece of cardboard as a table top, and set the tape recorder on it. This setting establishes a more cohesive group around a 'coffee table' and allows everyone eye contact with everyone else. Since the table is low, it is not a formal barrier the way some tables are and participants soon forget the tape recorder in their eagerness to talk. To implement this approach:

- Specify the issue.
- Identify the programming decisions you are considering as a *result* of the focus groups:
CHANGE THE MARKETING STRATEGY FOR CAMPS? USE HANDS-ON EXERCISES TO TEACH LEADERSHIP?
- To ensure acceptance of results, get committee and leader agreement on this issue and potential decisions.
- Write open ended questions. (If you have many questions with yes-no answers, surveys are more appropriate.)
- Brainstorm specific changes *you* are considering; insert after the other questions to avoid bias.
- Select homogeneous groups. Also, generally speaking, the less participants know one another, the more likely they feel comfortable talking about such issues; you might choose therefore, participants *across* clubs or sections of a camp for a focus group.
- Train moderators by means of role playing.

Call (814-863-7621) or write for reading materials or assistance with any step.

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Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS29.pdf>