

An Overview of Focus Group Methodology

- **Number of sessions:** To get a good sense of your audience, you will need to conduct several focus group sessions. You want to hear enough opinions to be able to see patterns and themes in the responses. However, the number that's right for your project will depend on what you are trying to learn and the resources at your disposal. If the responses you are hearing from participants seem consistent, you may be able to do as few as two sessions in a single round.
- **Time required:** A focus group session typically takes from 90 minutes to two hours.
- **Number of participants:** A focus group usually includes seven to ten people. The idea is to keep the group small enough to allow everyone to speak, but large enough to capture a range of views and experiences.
- **Choosing participants:** Since focus group research is not meant to be statistically representative, you do not have to recruit participants at random, but you do have to select them carefully. This means that you will need to decide on some criteria for both inclusion and exclusion. Here are some issues to think about when you are setting these criteria:
 - Because you do not want them to form opinions in advance of the session, participants should not know too much about the specific subject before the meeting. Of course, this would not apply to situation where the purpose of the focus group is to get feedback from knowledgeable people like intermediaries or providers.
 - For most focus groups, participants should not know each other. People who are acquainted with each other may be reluctant to express their views freely, or may take part in side conversations, which need to be discouraged. Also, their relationship may distract other participants from the subject at hand. However, this may be unavoidable if the session involves people such as information intermediaries who work together

(e.g., counselors at senior centers or the benefits staff of a large company).

- Ideally, participants should be fairly homogeneous with respect to race, ethnicity, language, literacy level, income, and gender. The more the participants have in common, the more likely they are to express themselves freely, talk in greater depth, and stay focused on the topic. And they are less likely to be inhibited or sidetracked by the differences among them. However, it's not really feasible to create groups that are perfectly homogeneous; what's more realistic is to apply some of the same inclusion and exclusion criteria in different markets so you can see whether similar people respond differently.
- **Compensation:** Sponsors of focus group research usually compensate the participants in a focus group for their time in cash or some other way (such as gift certificates or a meal).
- **Cost:** The cost of one round of focus group research depends on how many sessions you conduct, whether you use a professional moderator, the compensation you provide to participants (including assistance with travel or child care expenses), the facility you use, and how you plan to analyze and report the results.

Source: http://www.talkingquality.gov/docs/section5/popups/methodology_pop.htm
From: http://www.talkingquality.gov/docs/section5/5_3.htm

Other resources:

<http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm>

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