



OUTCOME:

Recieve input from your community members to improve services.

KEYS TO SUCCESS:

- Run groups before a project begins to aid in developing a public involvement strategy.
- Run groups during the planning phase to gauge changes in public opinion and reassess the project direction.
- Run groups as a follow-up to the planning project to assess the success or failure of a given strategy.
- Focus groups are often a helpful addition to surveys as they will allow any emerging issues to be explored in more depth and in a less restrictive way.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are small-group discussions that give in-depth information and views on a specific topic. The small setting gives community members and stakeholders an opportunity to freely express their opinions about topics that are meaningful to them. Adapting lessons learned from traditional talking circles, those in the group are all given an opportunity to speak during the process. For the host organization, listening to the dialog is a chance to reassess project objectives and goals.

INGREDIENTS:

- Five or six questions specific to only one topic
- Carefully crafted agenda
- Disclosure and permission forms for participants
- One brief presentation of material to set the context and explain the subject
- Eight to twelve participants who understand that their role is to give personal insights and perspectives on the topic
- One group leader/facilitator
- Meeting Room
- Incentives for participants
- Refreshments (if appropriate)
- Ample time to organize the event



PREPARATION:

Step 1: Determine what problem or need will be addressed by the information gathered during the focus group (for example, examine if a new service or idea will work or to further understand how a program is doing).

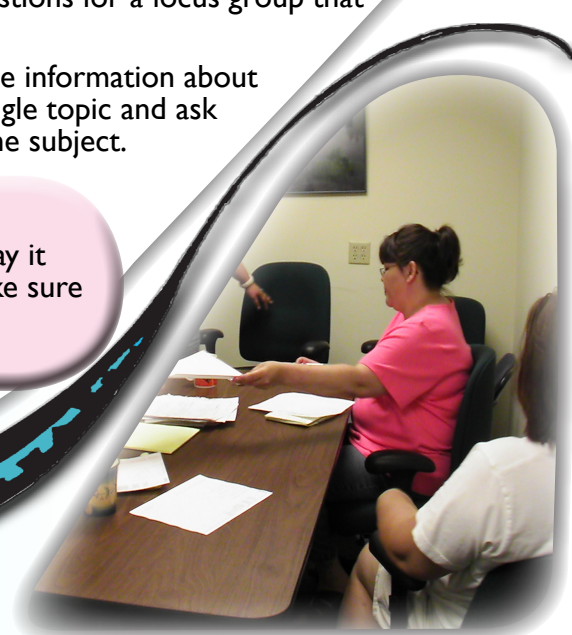
Step 2: Think of specific questions that would be helpful to include. For example, "What would keep urban Indian women from having mammograms?" or "How can we make Native women feel comfortable to come to our agency?" or "Does anybody read this newsletter? Why/Why not?"

Step 3: Develop five to six questions for a focus group that should last one to 1.5 hours.

Step 4: Do not try to get a little information about a lot of things. Determine a single topic and ask questions directly related to the subject.

TIP:

- Tape record or video tape the session so you can play it back later to ensure you capture all of the points. Make sure participants know they are being recorded.



MAKE SURE TO CONSIDER INCLUDING CANCER SURVIVORS IN YOUR FOCUS GROUP. THEY OFTEN HAVE WISDOM AND IDEAS ON SERVING NATIVE WOMEN (AND APPRECIATE BEING ASKED).

PROVIDE A COMFORTABLE SETTING AND REFRESHMENTS FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUP AS YOU MAY BE TALKING FOR AN HOUR OR TWO.



THE EVENT:

- Provide a short background on the project or topic and related issues.
- Have participants read and sign permission forms. Give a copy to the participant. Make sure they understand how the findings will be shared.
- Ask the group to help draft any guidelines or expectations for behavior such as not interrupting others, not offering judgment, and for all information to be kept confidential and anonymous. Post this list in the meeting room.
- Arrange for light refreshments.
- If able, arrange for honoring gifts in recognition of the participants' time and help—ideally an item related to the topic being discussed.

PREPARING THE RESULTS:

TIPS:

- Pass a talking stick or other method to make sure each person gets a chance to speak on each question.
- If appropriate, let your community know that you value their opinions by sharing the results in a newsletter or similar publication.

If audio or video tape is used, participants' words can be transcribed or you can use notes taken of responses during the focus group as the "raw material" for determining findings of the focus group.

Review the transcription or notes to find common themes and reactions expressed during the focus group. These themes will be the outline of your findings. Sometimes it is best to have several people review the notes to see if all reviewers find the same themes.

Look for multiple people expressing similar ideas, solutions, barriers and other thoughts around themes. In your report of the findings you may want to write a couple of sentences addressing these expressions for each theme. Store notes and tapes securely, destroy tapes and notes when done to protect participant confidentiality.

SHARING THE RESULTS:

A one or two page summary is often an effective way to present concise findings to those who participated in and benefit from your program. Decision makers, such as funders or administrators, may also find a concise summary with bullet points and key findings to be useful.

FACILITATING

1. Introduce yourself and the co-facilitator, if used.
2. Explain the means to record the session.
3. Carefully word each question before the question is addressed by the group. Then, facilitate discussion around the answers to each question, one at a time.
4. Ensure even participation. If one or two people are dominating the meeting, call on others to share. Consider using a round-table or "talking circle" approach, including going in one direction around the table, giving each person an opportunity to answer the question.
5. When closing the session, tell members that they will receive a copy of the report generated from their answers. Thank them for coming, and adjourn the meeting.