



Focus Groups 101: Using Focus Groups Effectively in Community- Based Participatory Research

June 28, 2013
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Introduction
(1:00 – 1:20)

Welcome/Icebreaker

Learning Objectives

Defining terms
(1:20 – 1:40)

Principles of focus groups

Different applications of focus groups

Examples of focus group projects

Designing a focus group project

(1:40 – 2:20)

Selecting and recruiting your groups (10 minutes)

Developing the moderator guide (10 minutes)

Group activity (2:00 – 2:20)

BREAK (2:20 – 2:30)

Basics of facilitation
(2:30– 3:00)

Building rapport

Facilitation tips

Active and reflective listening

Group Activity (2:40 – 3:00)

Analyzing and reporting

(3:00 – 3:20)

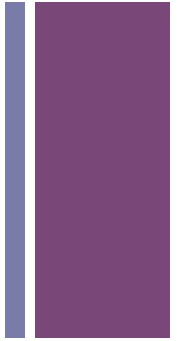
Options for managing and coding data

Tips and examples of reporting

Questions?

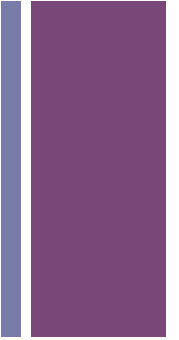
+ Learning Objectives

- Understand the basics of focus groups including how and when to use them effectively
- Learn specific ways to design focus groups including the development of questions and facilitation tips
- Describe ways you can use focus groups in your work with the community, including CBPR projects
- Learn how to analyze, report and share your results
- And.....



+ *Hey, let's get together and do a focus group!*

But can we call it a Focus group?!



+ History and Definition

A structured group interview designed to answer specific research questions

Focus groups were originally used within marketing research

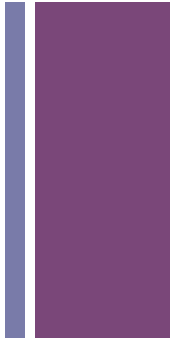
- From the 1980s on, social scientists have used the technique to examine issues related to health and other social issues

Compared to other methods, focus groups make it possible for researchers to observe the interaction among participants

- Reduces the role of the researcher and gives more weight to participants' opinions



Defining a Focus Group



- The focus group has been defined as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger and Casey, 2000, p. 5)
- Groups are typically 6 – 10 people from similar backgrounds; influence each other
- Focus groups are carefully planned and conducted by a skilled *moderator*.
- Focus groups are NOT:
 - Decision-making groups; brainstorming groups
 - training groups; conflict resolution groups; Rap or buzz groups; or therapy groups

+ Principles of Focus Group Research

- When carefully designed and executed focus groups can:
 - Provide data-driven suggestions for policy, programmatic, or organizational changes
 - Trigger future research (e.g., survey development)
 - Used with and amplify power of other methods -- Triangulation
 - Or they can stand alone!
- Important factors – grounded in principles of scientific research
 - Design, recruitment, moderation, data analysis

Research purpose	Example of FG study
<p><u>Exploratory:</u> Develop familiarity with concepts, test methodological techniques, understand settings, formulate hypotheses, identify informal respondents</p>	<p>Researchers plan to conduct a survey with low-income urban kids in order to develop an innovative tobacco control and youth empowerment project. Before developing the survey, the team wants to understand what kids think about tobacco, why kids use tobacco, tobacco's social and behavioral consequences, and tobacco control activities. They want to know about the terminology kids use to talk about tobacco and issues surrounding tobacco. After a few focus groups with a selected group of kids, the team develops a survey that uses meaningful language and targets salient issues.</p>
<p><u>Triangulation</u> Use of multiple methods to enhance validity and enrich data</p>	<p>After conducting and analyzing the survey (& maybe using focus groups to pre-test), the same research team hold a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews to help them understand the results.</p>
<p><u>Phenomenological</u> Finding meaning; how individuals experience, perceive</p>	<p>During the second years of the project, the research team interviews 100 youth in ten focus groups to explore the program's impact: What does the project mean to the kids; what does empowerment mean to the kids in the project; how has tobacco control impacted their feelings of empowerment?</p>



Advantages & Limitations



Advantages

- Cost-effective
- Interactions among participants enhance data quality
- Shared or divergent views can be quickly assessed
- Enjoyable to participants

Limitations

- # of questions restricted
- Available response time is limited
- Facilitating focus groups requires group process skills beyond just asking questions
- Minority perspective easily lost
- Work best when participants do not know each other
- Controversial and highly personal issues are tough topics
- Confidentiality cannot be assured
- Good for macro, not micro analysis



POWER RESIDES IN THEIR BEING FOCUSED

+ Design: The who, what, when, where and how

- Researchers responsible for:
 - Who should be in focus groups
 - What to ask
 - When to conduct groups
 - Where to conduct groups
 - How many groups to conduct
 - How to analyze, report, and present data



Give yourself 6-8 weeks lead time for a focus group study



Step 1: Groups

Selecting “Breaks”



- Breaks are variables you will use to screen potential participants
- The dimensions along which the population is likely to vary
 - E.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, age, occupational/organizational role
 - Dependent on research questions!
- All participants screened based upon this criteria



Step 2: Groups

Group Blueprint



- Visual representation of the groups based upon major variables
- Helps determine how variables will interact
- Guides decisions such as exclusion of groups, etc

Tip: Homogeneity of groups is helpful – 1-2 groups per category is typical. Heterogeneity of groups is okay as long as participants can speak about topic, feel comfortable with each other, and are homogeneous on key variables

+ Group Blueprint Example

Race/Ethnicity	Gender			
	Female		Male	
White/European American	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Mixed RACE/ETH	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8

Include a mix of age, relationship status, and education



Step 3: Recruitment of groups

- Approach must not bias results
- Participants must be adequately screened
- Depending on setting – recruitment conducted by researcher, staff member, or community leaders
- Will take Minimum of 5 days – but can take up to 2 weeks!

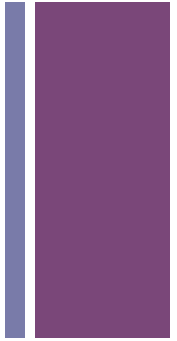
Examples of recruitment methods:

- *Snowball method*
- *Convenience sample*
- *Members of a relevant organization*
- *Professional recruiter*

Stick to your “group blueprint” and consider incentives for participants



Group Exercise: First Steps in Designing a Focus Group Project



- Working with your team – start to design your own focus group project based on a current project you are working on; or a particular issue of interest in your community
- Use the handout to help guide your discussion:
 - Think about your research question
 - What are some key variables that will most likely affect the data (*here's where you think about factors such as age, ethnicity, particular neighborhood*)
 - Use these variables to draft a “group blueprint” that will help you recruit your participants
 - Finally, what are possible methods you could use for recruiting participants? How might you partner with community members to recruit?

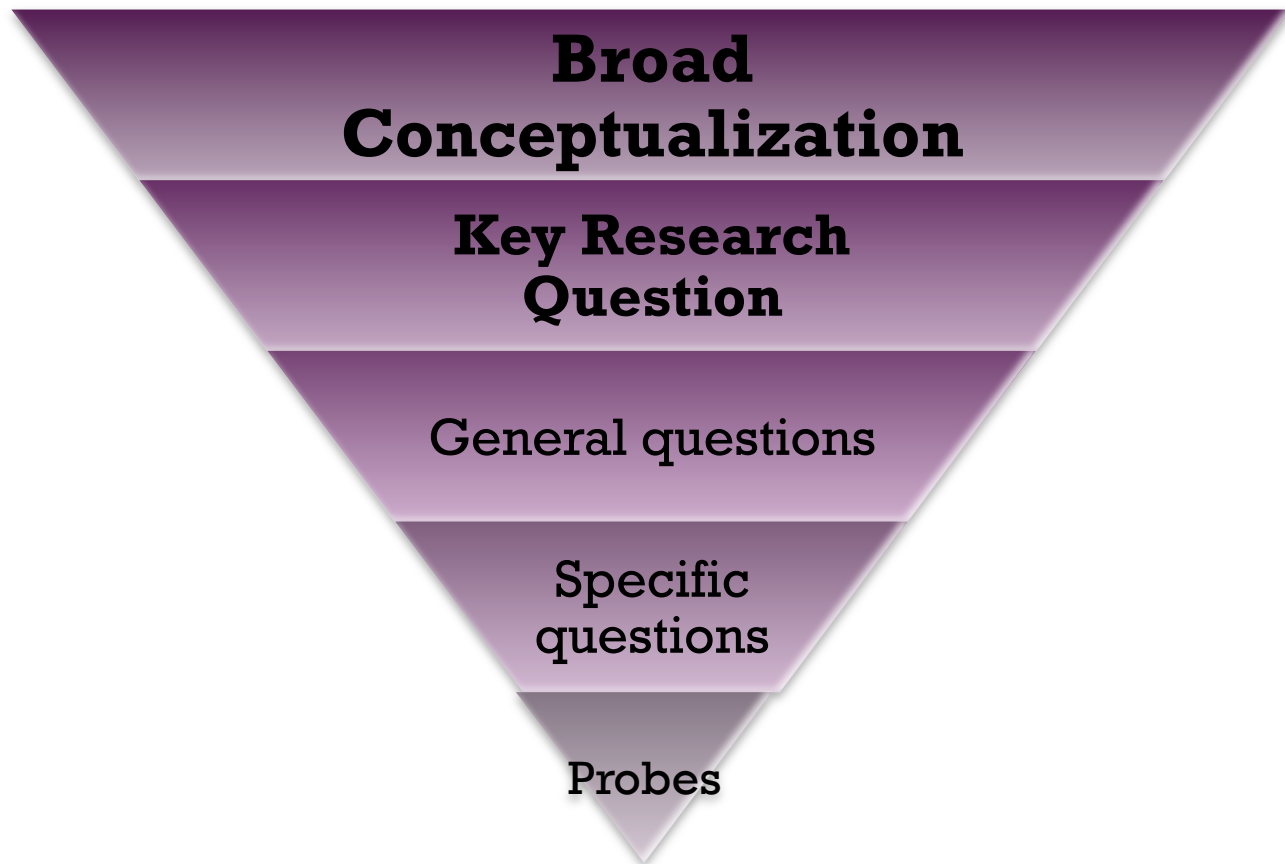


Remember – in “real life” you will want to develop a screener to make sure participants fit your desired criteria

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Step 4: The Moderator Guide

Think of a funnel:



+ Structuring your Guide

- Follow the guidelines of qualitative interviewing:
 - Clarify concepts to be explored
 - Use open-ended questions (*avoid yes/no questions*)
 - Use probing questions
 - Keep questions to a minimum of topics (*don't try to cover too much!*)
 - End with closure questions
 - Pre-test and refine





Guide Structure



- Phase I. Preamble or opening
 - Explain purpose of focus group (have consent already taken care of)
 - Put your group at ease
 - Provide ground rules

- Phase II. Introductions, ice-breaking
 - Participants relate their experience and roles to the topic
 - Moderator stimulates group interaction and cogitation on topic



Guide Structure



■ Phase III. Main Group Discussion

- Deep responses
- Connect the dots! Integrated analysis
- Broad participation
- KEY QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED

■ Phase IV. Closure

- Moderator summarizes key themes
- Theories presented to group members for their feedback
- Final comments



Guide Example and Group Exercise



- Working with your team, start drafting a few examples of questions for your interview guide
- Remember:
 - Introduction first
 - Ice-breaker
 - Main questions and encourage deeper discussion
 - Here you could have participants respond to something – such as an idea for a project
 - Finally – you want to ask closing questions and summarize



Step 5: The Interview

Moderating



- Each person has D-A-T-A on their forehead!
- Interview will most likely include: discussion, debate, disagreement and dialogue
- Do not go around the room and ask each person to respond so....
 - AVOID “serial interviewing” at all costs



Wait, you want to ask me about what?!



- Building Rapport – establishing a connection with participants
 - Facilitates comfortable, open communication
 - Influences participants' willingness to answer questions
- Participants are the experts – you are there to learn from them
- Become familiar with some of the critical issues affecting the community represented by participants
 - Avoid unintentional insult
- Balance Rapport with professionalism

What are some issues that may be sensitive in the communities where you will be conducting focus groups?



General Rules of Moderating



Communication among group members is the primary facilitation task



Keep discussion focused ... in a group of ten, the number of possible interactions between members increases to 3000!



Gate-keeping is key – dominating, blocking, etc. can even happen in a conversation with only 2 people!!





Hints to enhance participation



- Use name-tents and refer to participants by name
- Respond positively and encourage further contributions – AVOID putdowns...
- If a participant goes off topic – invite comments later
 - *“That will be important later...”*
- Avoid passing group members over
- Make eye contact with quiet participants – withdraw contact from dominators
- LISTEN!!!

+ Active and Reflective Listening

- In focus groups, listening emphasizes: analytical and comprehension level
 - HINTS for better listening:
 - Suspend judgment
 - Be patient, but help speaker come to closure
 - Restate main ideas to ensure that you have heard them correctly
 - Ask for clarification
 - Be aware of posture
 - Control distractions

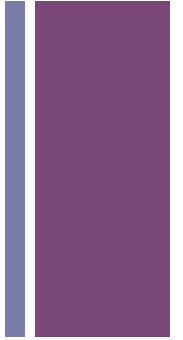
Be aware of nonverbal cues (e.g., smiling, squinting, arms folded, yawning, watch looking, frowning, squirming, sitting forward or back in seat, head nodding)



Moderation in a nutshell



- Stay focused
- Milk to dry – ask if everyone has had a chance to respond
- POPCORN technique
- Keep the ball in play – if ball get thrown back at you – throw it right back
- D-A-T-A
- The dominators and quiet ones know who they are
- It is THEIR time to speak, not YOURS
- Don' t comment on responses – *a simple – ok, thank you, or anyone else? Will do.*
- Re-ask questions if need be – don' t rephrase
- Summarize briefly at end of each *section (on your guide)*
- Start and stop *ON TIME*



Group Exercise

- Now it's your turn to practice your moderations skills....



Step 6: Final stage

Analyzing data



- Have tapes transcribed
 - Find your own method – (e.g., verbatim or structured)
 - Remember to link participants back to screening questionnaire
- Coding options:
 - Open coding
 - Analyze/code major emergent themes related to your key questions
 - Start with broad concepts – move to categories that relate back to your key research questions
 - Follow the outline of your protocol
 - Analyzing data question by question and develop concepts, summary statements; quotes that illustrate
 - Turn questions into headings; organize data by question



Example 1 – Open Coding



Name: computer

<Documents\Parent Focus Group 2> - § 4 references coded [1.27% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.35% Coverage

Recreational computer or video use – the video use, I don't care about. The computer – yes, I do, and it's because of –

Woman: It's a necessity nowadays.

Tiona: Exactly, and I have one, and it's awesome. And my daughter can type 20 words at 8 years old a minute.

Reference 2 - 0.38% Coverage

Tiona: She's been typing since she was 3. But at the same time, it could be a bad thing because of all the things that are on it, so you have to make sure you have all your parental –

Woman: You monitor them, that's right.

Tiona: Yup, monitoring her, and having all your parental blocks.

Reference 3 - 0.33% Coverage

He has his own TV in his room and his own videogame system, but I buy him educational games, so I don't really worry about him playing the games because they're educational games, so play an educational game, I'm not really worried about what you're doing.



Example 2: Coding by Question

Name: Cynicism\ability to make change

Description: includes physician's role in affecting obesity issues, also ability to intervene effectively, efficacy of clinical interventions

<Documents\Interview 13> - § 3 references coded [3.71% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.88% Coverage

You know we all sort of believe in screening and early intervention but there's not a lot of evidence for which of these areas has the strongest evidence base for showing that if you screen and identify and intervene you'll change behavior and change outcomes.

Reference 2 - 0.37% Coverage

I just think that uh it's a really difficult area for pediatricians because you don't see success very often

Reference 3 - 2.46% Coverage

we have to shift the mindset so that we focus on our successes even though with regard to child weight problems it may only be 1 out of 10, 1/8 kids where our intervention has some positive impact but if that's better than if we don't do anything you know 1 out of 50 you know we've increased the odds of success by 5 or whatever you know so you know they tell the physicians just a brief intervention, a strong intervention to quit smoking, doubles the chances that someone quits or makes an attempt but still we tend to look at all the people who don't stop and feel like why bother. So I think it has to be recast because we're still by and large seeing the kid whose heavy last year coming even heavier the year before.

<Documents\Interview 18> - § 2 references coded [1.87% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.59% Coverage

if you only see them once a year, it's hard to make a lasting impact. I mean, if you only see them once a year with one of the parents, that's, uh -- you know, I would imagine it takes more than that to really see a difference in behavior.



Example: Organizing Data by Theme/Code



Table 3. *Thematic summary: Description of Appearance Standards*

Theme	Description of Theme/codes	Groups
Personal Ideals	Gender expression important; butch/femme	1,2,3,4
	Somewhere in the middle of the gender spectrum; no extreme	1,3,4
	<i>Body type</i> : bodily diversity; curvaceousness; inside that matters	1,2,3,4
	Strength/confidence	3,4
	Compartmentalization/preference for particular body parts	1,2,3,4
	Stricter standards for males, non-traditional look [bisexual]	2,4
Lesbian standards/ideals	Strict standards	1,2,4
	Diversity [sub-groups]/"All the faces of Eve"	2,3,4
	More acceptance of bodily diversity [weight not important]	1,3,4
	Gender expression [butch/femme categories; not too feminine invisibility of feminine women]	1,2,3,4 1,2
Bisexual standards	Signifiers, "lesbian look;" social context important "ex-hippie;" flowy skirt; more feminine	1,2,3,4 1,2,4
Source of standards	Community settings [e.g., bars], personal experiences, media images [famous lesbian or bi women]	1,2,3,4 1,2,3,4
Media Images/ideals	Inaccurate: stereotypical, non-representative (e.g., lack of ethnic diversity too feminine)	1,2,3,4
	objectified [male fantasy]/sexualized	1,2,3,4
	Invisibility [symbolic annihilation]	1,2,4

+ Reporting



- Base your report on your own needs --- can range from no report to a full-length report
- Organize data based on how you approached the data
 - Findings organized by each question
 - Summary of key themes with supporting quotes
 - More narrative report – major themes that emerged linked to your key research questions
- Remember to involve your community partners in reviewing report before it's final
 - Ensure accuracy of your analysis
- Share final report with the appropriate stakeholders



Example: Reporting by Question



Table 1. Ideas for Reaching Five Fruits and Vegetables

Parent Groups	
Strategy	Example
Being involved – shopping, garden	<p>“Yeah, if he is involved in the decision-making process, he’ll eat it. So we take him grocery shopping and he picks the fruit. When it’s strawberry season, he’ll pick strawberries and he’ll wash them, do the whole thing, same thing with blueberries, as long as he’s in control of what is on that table, he’s okay with the fruits.”</p> <p>“They love eating the stuff we’re growing. There was one time when my daughter was going to be six, she ate so many beans, she just ate all that was on the stalk.”</p>
The power of suggestion: Not giving alternatives	<p>“Sometimes I just suggest it. If they say they want a snack, for instance, how would you like a piece of fruit as opposed to whatever”</p> <p>“I’m trying to convince my eight-year-old, to let him know that you don’t need to ask for any fruit or any vegetable in the house. ... I think the studies have said you’ve got to offer snacking at least with the fruit and vegetables any time they want.”</p> <p>“And not having it around....no alternatives”</p> <p>“Also don’t have alternatives in the house. If they don’t have it in the house, they can’t eat it.”</p>
Tracking, keeping count	<p>“...when it comes to snacks, we say, what have you had today? Then we count. We don’t do the burgers and fries if at 4:00 in the afternoon there’s been no fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>“I try to keep a mental note of what each child had so when they ask me for a snack, if they haven’t had enough vegetables, I just don’t offer the Cheese-Its or the Goldfish or something like that.”</p>

+ Questions?



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