

Using Focus Groups in Evaluation

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Focus groups are used for qualitative data collection in an evaluation study. They also serve as tools to increase community support for the evaluation or program.

Common questions about focus groups

1. What is a focus group?

A focus group is commonly a meeting of a small group of people selected for their knowledge and led by a facilitator for the purpose of exploring a topic, product or issue. A series of pre-developed questions are presented to stimulate conversation or solicit opinions and reactions from the participants.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups to collect data?

Focus groups can be a rich source of information about any topic of interest. The process of sharing ideas and opinions is dynamic; participants often build off of each other's comments, which results in more comprehensive findings. However, recruiting appropriate participants and analyzing focus group data can be time-intensive processes.

3. How do I use the information that is shared during the focus group?

It is important to record the information collected during the focus group to analyze the information at a later time. Electronic devices may be used for voice recording. It also helps to have a person other than the facilitator designated as a note taker. After the notes have been transcribed, they are analyzed, using several possible methods, including specialized software programs and categorizing individual responses in Excel spreadsheets.

How to use this information in your organization

Step 1: Determine what information you would like to gather and decide whether a focus group is the best method to collect the data.

Step 2: Recruit participants for the focus group that are similar to each other or that have comparable experiences. This will help ensure that the participants build off of each other's ideas.

Step 3: Facilitate a focus group in a clean and comfortable location which puts participants at ease. Make sure to set up ground rules for the discussion before the focus group begins.

This white paper was developed through information gained at the Design and Conducting Focus Group Interviews workshop instructed by Dr. Richard Krueger.