

CHECKLIST FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Advance Notice

- Contact participants by phone 1-2 weeks before the session
- Send each participant a letter of invitation.
- Give the participants a reminder phone call prior to the session
- Slightly over-recruit the number of participants.

Questions

- The introductory question should be answered quickly and not identify status.
- Questions should flow in a logical sequence.
- Key questions should focus on the critical issues of concern
- Consider probe or follow-up questions.
- Limit the use of "why" questions.
- Use "think back" questions as needed.
- Provide a summary of the discussion and invite comments.

Logistics

- The room should be satisfactory (size, tables, comfort, etc.).
- The moderator should arrive early to make necessary changes.
- Background noise should not interfere with the tape recording.
- Have name tags and/or name tents for participants.
- A remote microphone should be placed on the table
- Bring extra tapes, batteries, and extension cords.
- Plan topics for small talk conversation
- Seat experts and loud participants next to the moderator.

Moderating Skills

- Seat shy and quiet participants directly across from the moderator
- When having a meal, limit selections and stress fast service.
- Bring enough copies of handouts and/or visual aids.

Moderator Skills

- Be well rested and alert for the focus group session.
- Practice the introduction without referring to notes.
- Ask questions with minimal reference to notes.
- Be careful to avoid head nodding.
- Avoid comments that signal approval, such as "Excellent," "Great," "Wonderful".
- Avoid giving personal opinions.

Immediately After the Session

- Prepare a brief written summary of key points as soon as possible.
- Check to see if the tape recorder captured the comments.

RULES FOR ASSISTANT MODERATORS

1. **Take responsibility for all equipment.** Ensure that it works and is complete
 - Tape recorder
 - Microphone
 - Extension cords (power and microphone)
 - Blank tapes
 - Name tents or name tags
 - Honorariums
 - Marking pens
 - Refreshments
 - Duct tape to hold down the cords
 - Spare batteries
 - Visuals or handouts
2. **Take responsibility for refreshments.** Obtain the refreshments and set them up in the room.
3. **Arrange the room.** Rearrange chairs and table so everyone can see each other. Be attentive to background noises that would affect the audio recording.
4. **Set up the equipment** and verify that it is working properly.
5. **Welcome participants as they arrive.**
6. **Sit in the designated location.** Sit outside the circle, opposite the moderator, and close the door. If someone arrives after the session begins, meet the person at the door, take him or her outside the room, and give him or her a short briefing as to what has happened and the current topic of discussion. Then bring the late participant into the room and show him or her where to sit.
7. **Take notes throughout the discussion.** Be attentive to the following areas of concern:
 - *Well said quotes.* Capture word for word as much of the statement as possible. Listen for sentences or phrases that are particularly enlightening or eloquently express a particular point of view. Place quotation marks around the statement or phrase and indicate the name of the speaker. Place your opinions, thoughts, or ideas in parentheses to keep them separate from participant comments. If a question occurs to you that you would like to ask at the end of the discussion, write it down in a circle or box.
 - *Note the nonverbal activity.* Watch for head nods, physical excitement, eye contact between participants, or other clues that would indicate level of agreement, support, or interest.
8. **Monitor recording equipment.** Occasionally glance at the tape recorder to see if the reels are moving. Turn over the tape or insert another tape when appropriate. Attempt to do this as smoothly as possible without drawing attention to the recording equipment. Label the cassette tapes. Indicate date, location, and number of each tape.

9. **Do not participate in the discussion!** You talk only if invited by the moderator. Control your nonverbal actions no matter how strongly you feel about an issue.
10. **Ask questions when invited.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator will invite you to ask questions of amplification or clarification.
11. **Give an oral summary.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator or assistant should provide a brief summary (about 3 minutes) of responses to the important questions. Invite participants to offer additions or corrections to the summary.
12. **Hand out the honorariums and thank the participants,**
13. **Debrief the session with the moderator.** Follow the focus group; participate in the debriefing with the moderator.
14. **Read and provide feedback on the analysis.**

*From: Focus Groups, A practical Guide for Applied Research, Krueger, Richard A., Sage Publication, 1994