Assessing Using Focus Groups

Layout of Today's Discussion

What is a focus group?

When to use a focus group

Planning for a focus group

Logistics of running a focus group

Data Analysis & Results

Time for Questions

What is a focus group?

TRADITIONAL	INTERACTIVE
➢ Engages participants in discussions around pre-planned questions	➢ Engages participants in pre-planned activities to get answers to questions
➢ Typically involves group discussion, possibly partnered discussion and sharing	➢ Typically involves writing, drawing, talking with one other person, talking with the whole group
➢ Recommend no more than 7 participants	➢ Recommend no more than 15 participants

Focus groups help illustrate the story behind your data – best used in conjunction with quantitative data.

When to use a focus group

➢To learn about a particular process and how your participants experience(d) that process

➢Anytime you think you might benefit from a variety of data collection methods

➢To speak to several participants at once – efficient use of resources

➢If relying solely on focus groups, consider saturation.

Planning for a focus group

TRADITIONAL

1. Articulate the assessment goals

2. Create questions for each goal
   ◦ List prompts/follow-ups

3. Assign timeframe to each question

INTERACTIVE

1. Articulate the assessment goals

2. Assign activities to each goal

3. List materials needed to complete each activity

4. Assign timeframe to each activity

Tips for building your questions

➢Open-ended questions (avoid yes/no)

➢Avoid leading questions (bias)

➢Exclude unrelated questions (don't let people add to your focus group)

➢Avoid combining questions (loaded questions)

➢Avoid absolutes (Always, Never)

➢Limit hour-long focus groups to about 5 questions

➢Consider including icebreaker questions

➢Consider asking for volunteers for follow-up

Logistics of running a focus group

➢Piloting

➢Space/time (confidential vs. not)

➢FERPA training

➢Consent forms

➢Potential incentives

➢IRB or not

➢Who will facilitate – how many groups

➢Recording vs. note-taking (including observations)

➢Saturation

After the focus group

➢Transcription and debriefing between co-facilitators

➢Thematic analysis – coding based on responses

➢What to do with the results – what if the story is different than the numbers?

➢Closing the loop – did your results fulfill your initial goals?