

# From Start to Finish:

## An Interactive Guide to Focus Groups



THE NATIONAL MINORITY AIDS COUNCIL'S



*Our Commitment • Your Passion • Innovative Solutions*

 NATIONAL MINORITY  
AIDS COUNCIL  
*Building Healthier Communities*



The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) was founded in 1987 by a small group of minority leaders alarmed by the fast-growing incidence of AIDS in communities of color. Today, NMAC is an experienced coalition of more than 4,000 community based organizations, health departments, and community planning groups across the U.S. and its territories. NMAC's formal mission is "to develop leadership in communities of color to END the HIV/AIDS epidemic." To achieve this goal, NMAC provides educations, training, technical assistance, and other capacity building services to thousands of our constituents.

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# Overview

A host of evaluators, researchers, and scholars have written extensively about focus groups and how to conduct them. This workbook is not meant to be a compilation of their work. Rather, it is meant as an interactive guide for beginners as well as a refresher for those who currently conduct focus groups. The goal of this guide is to quickly aid potential users in understanding what focus groups are, when they should be used, and why. Implicit in this is the exploration of how focus groups can be used to collect qualitative data that informs programs, research, and future planning endeavors.

This overview summarizes each section of this workbook. We encourage you to explore all sections of this workbook in a way that best fits your needs. If you have time, please read it sequentially. If you don't have time, or prefer to skip to the section(s) that suit your immediate needs or interests, feel free to do so. Most importantly, we encourage you to not only read this workbook but to use it. Exercises throughout the workbook are designed to help you plan and conduct successful focus groups.

Section 1 begins with definitions of focus groups, their purpose, and when to use them. This section discusses the differences between focus groups and small and large meetings. You will learn how to plan a focus group and what to include in the plan based on an understanding of the guiding principles of planning. You will also learn how to recruit focus group participants. Key elements of the four "Ws" of focus groups (what, why, when, and who) are presented in matrix format to help to underscore the need for careful recruiting of participants.

Section 2 helps facilitators/moderators understand their roles and responsibilities. It includes moderator qualities and tips on how to manage equipment, logistics, and people. It presents a rating sheet for moderators to score their performance as focus group leader and ideas on how to improve facilitation/moderation skills.

Section 3 explains how to host the focus group. It includes more in-depth information on the art and mechanics of asking good questions, such as the categories of questions to ask as well as the sequencing, probes, and follow-ups. It discusses unplanned questions and how they can fit into a focus group plan. This section reviews the focus group plan details and how to engage participants during the group session. This section also presents the "dos and don'ts" of focus groups and an exercise sheet on how to host a focus group—which includes an actual layout that you can remove, adapt, and use.

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Section 4 examines other focus group formats and their purpose, including the rapid, telephonic, and Internet-based focus groups. For the latter two, this section includes protocols and guiding principles associated with these groups.

Section 5 gives examples and tips on how to draft focus group goals and objectives, questions, and group activities. It also discusses how to use surveys during focus groups and useful types of questions.

Section 6 provides sample preparation and a focus group training plan, timeline, and checklist.

Section 7 provides tips and examples for analyzing focus group data. It includes a key data analysis worksheet and ways to share reports.

References and the appendices conclude the workbook. These valuable sections include a sample group facilitator guide, a group preparation worksheet, focus group checklist, a formatted focus group follow-up report, and exercises from the workbook.

Enjoy!

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# Section One:

## Defining Focus Groups

### The “What” (Definition) of a Focus Group

- A focus group has been described as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.” (Larson, Grudens-Schuck, & Allen, 2004).
- Focus groups are a means of qualitative data collection.
- Focus groups can humanize evaluations by getting to the reasons behind the numbers.
- This form of data collection provides rich descriptions of processes, people, and when combined with other data, provides a holistic picture of a program.
- Focus groups are a qualitative method for gathering research data.
- Focus groups can provide answers to important questions such as: how much, when, where, what, and why.

### The “Why” (Purpose) of a Focus Group

- The purpose of focus group data is to gather specific information about a certain topic.
  - Focus groups are created for a well-defined purpose or “focus” or topic.
  - Focus groups can help discern ideas about behavior, for example, why people do what they do.
  - Focus groups afford a great deal of group information and group discussion data—they are not created to focus on individual situations.
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- According to Morgan & Krueger (1998), “Focus groups sacrifice details about the individuals in favor of engaging the participants in active comparisons of their opinions and experiences.” (p. 31)
  - Focus groups can also be an equalizer, giving a voice to people who may not answer surveys or who feel that the best way to give input is to verbally give their opinion.

## The “When” (Protocol) to Use Focus Groups

- Why not have a focus group around every topic and use this as the means of collecting information? While focus groups can be used for many purposes, including program and survey instrument development, they are different from group gatherings. Table 1 on the following page may help you decide why and when to host a focus group versus other types of groups.

## Timing is Everything

- Focus groups last between 45 -90 minutes. Limited time is allotted to encourage a specific discussion rather than a stream of consciousness talk. Try to adhere to the designated time as closely as possible.
  - Have a check-in half way through the focus group so that the group is aware of the remaining time.
  - Prioritize questions: Ask the most important ones first so that the key questions are answered, earlier in the session.
  - Keep the questions short, even if they are open-ended questions, so that responses can be easily captured from a variety of people.
  - Keep the questions simple so that they do not have to be explained or repeated.
  - If needed, a “Round Robin” approach will allow people to speak in turn. Those who respond will do so with the idea that they need to say something short in order to allow the next person to respond.
  - Skip over a question if it has already been sufficiently discussed earlier.
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Table 1: When to Use Focus Groups vs. Small and Large Group Discussions

Application	Focus Group	Small Group	Large Group/ Discussion
<b>Identify problems</b>	Recommended	Recommended	Limited use
<b>Design programs</b>	Limited use	Limited use	Not recommended
<b>Evaluate programs</b>	Limited use	Not recommended	Not recommended
<b>Educate or inform participants</b>	Not recommended	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Build consensus</b>	Not recommended	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Purpose</b>	Designed to encourage divergent thinking and disclosure of personal perceptions and behaviors.	Designed to study and generate ideas and solutions.	Designed to build consensus, educate, or persuade.
<b>Participant selection</b>	Participants are selectively invited, based on similar characteristics.	Participants invited or required to participate because of their organizational affiliation. Similarity between participants is not a qualifier and may be a limitation in some situations.	Open to everyone in any organization or community.
<b>Group size</b>	Group size from 6 to 12	Group size from 6 to 20	Group size from 6 to 100 or more
<b>Environment</b>	Open, trusting environment	Open, trusting environment	Open, trusting environment

Adapted from Larson, Grudens-Schuck, & Allen, 2004.

## Exercise: When to Use Focus Groups or Other Group Types?

Fill in the Focus Groups columns with either “Recommended,” “Limited use,” “Not recommended,” or the specific response required.

Table 2: Application of Focus Groups vs. Small and Large Group Discussions

Application	Focus Group	Small Group	Large Group/ Discussion
Identify problems		Recommended	
Design programs	Limited use		
Evaluate programs			Not recommended
Educate or inform participants	Not recommended		
Build consensus		Recommended	
Purpose			Designed to build consensus educate or persuade.
Participant selection	Participants are selectively invited, based on similar characteristics.		
Group size		Group size from 6 to 20	
Environment			Open, trusting environment

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## Planning a Focus Group

Conducting the focus group requires planning and resources. These resources—which include physical space, materials, equipment, incentives, criteria for selection and time—can vary depending on the type of focus group being conducted. With modern technology, focus groups can be very cost-effective and only require telephones, computer access, and Internet service.

Overall, when planning a focus group you will concentrate on the following four areas:

1. **The right people to conduct or organize the focus group.** In addition to the facilitator/moderator, organizers can include the note taker, staff who set up the room and provide name tags, and stakeholders who help develop the questions.
2. **Recruiting the right participants requires planning.** The program director, study director, other program staff, volunteers, or an outside agency can all do recruiting. Time is particularly important for recruiting participants. Participants often need follow-up reminders and attention to ensure that they arrive or are available at the time scheduled.
3. **The moderator needs a certain set of skills.** He or she must be able to keep the group on task and focused on the topic. The moderator also must be able to draw out those who are reluctant to talk. Depending on the group and topic, some moderators may need to be representative of the population (such as female when the topic is sensitive to the audience—for example, domestic partner violence or rape), or someone who can relate to the group, is sensitive to the group, and is very knowledgeable about the topic.
4. **Analyzing and reporting.** Know what you want to say and how you want to say it at the end of the session. It will take time to analyze but this is a key part of the planning.

## Guiding Principles for Planning: Time, Talent, and Money

Make sure that you have enough time, talent, and money to conduct the focus group.

### Time

- Time to develop the questions
  - Time to find the location
  - Time to find recruit the participants
  - Time to analyze the data
  - Time to write the report
  - Time for more than one focus group on the issue
-

### Talent

- Talent in facilitating a meeting
- Talent in finding participants

### Money

- Incentives for participants
  - Payment for the logistics
  - Payment for a recruiting company
  - Payment for focus group staff
  - Payment for transcription
- **Note:** It is important to have more than one focus group per topic. Each focus group discussion is unique because there will be different people in the group, and therefore, different opinions and points of view. However, when the answers all seem to be similar, this can indicate that the topic has been exhausted.

## The “Who” (Sample Participants) of a Focus Group

**Participants:** A focus group brings together a relatively comparable group of 6-12 individuals. These individuals are recruited and, when possible, given an incentive for their participation.

### Criteria

- **Review the objective** of the group; keep the criteria neutral and in sync with the goal and purpose of the group.
  - **Get the right people** in the room. Carefully select the potential candidates from a designated group in order to gather information from a person of a certain ethnic group, a person who is living with a particular disease, or a person who is working in a particular industry. If you want to find out whether African-American women or Latino men who have sex with men use NMAC’s programs, you should recruit those populations. If the members of the group are too diverse, sufficient information may not be garnered to answer the questions.
-

- Make sure that the **individuals in the groups are similar**. If you want front line workers in an industry, try to ensure that no supervisors are in the meeting; this could hinder the front line staff interests in sharing their honest feelings about their work.

## Recruitment

- **Over recruit** to get the actual number that you need.
  - Depending on the objective, have a **general call** for a particular type of participant who matches the criteria.
  - You can also individually invite or select participants. Organizations or experts in the field with a specific type of experience can provide needed information. Even in these cases over invite to get the desired number to participate in the group. Some emergencies may occur to prevent others from attending.
  - One way to help make sure that recruitment goes as plan is to have a checklist. (See the “Appendix D: Sample Focus Group Checklist” on page 74).
-

## Exercise: Focus Group Recruitment

Select the best answer for each question or sentence.

Answers

- |  |                          |                                     |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. What group type is brought together by a focus group?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | A. 6-12 people                      |
| 2. How many individuals should be included in a focus group?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | B. Over-recruit                     |
| 3. When selecting potential candidates, what group should be carefully considered?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | C. Designated group                 |
| 4. Individuals within the focus group should be _____.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | D. Relatively comparable group      |
| 5. To get the representative number for your focus group, you should _____.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | E. Similar                          |
| 6. What other ways are participants recruited?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | F. General call                     |
| 7. A particular type of participant that matches the focus group criteria can be selected using this method? | <input type="checkbox"/> | G. Incentives                       |
| 8. When possible, what should be given to increase participation?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | H. Individually selected or invited |

Answers: 1-D; 2-A; 3-C; 4-E; 5-B; 6- F; 7-H. 8-G.

## Reference Sheet: The 4 Ws of Focus Groups

The “What” (Definition)	The “Why” (Purpose)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus group is “a <b>carefully planned series of discussions</b> designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.”</li> <li>• Focus groups are a means of <b>qualitative data collection</b>.</li> <li>• This form of data collection provides rich descriptions of processes, people, and when combined with other data, provides a holistic picture of a program.</li> <li>• Focus groups <b>provide some answers to important questions</b> like how much, when, where, what, and why.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of focus group data is to <b>gather specific information</b> about a certain topic.</li> <li>• Focus groups can assist <b>discerning ideas about behavior</b>, such as why people do what they do.</li> <li>• Focus groups can also be <b>an equalizer in giving a voice to people who may not answer surveys</b> or who feel that the best way to give input is to verbally give their opinion.</li> </ul>
The “When” (Protocol)	The “Who” (Sample Participants)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups <b>last between 45-90 minutes</b>.</li> <li>• Have a <b>check-in halfway</b> through the focus group so that the group is aware of the remaining time.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritize questions</b>: Ask the most important ones first, so that the key questions are answered earlier in the session.</li> <li>• <b>Keep the questions short</b>, even if they are open-ended questions, so that you can easily capture responses from a variety of people.</li> <li>• <b>Keep the questions simple</b> so that they do not have to be explained or repeated.</li> <li>• If needed, a “<b>Round Robin</b>” approach allows people to go in turn. Respondents will keep their answers short in order to allow the next person to respond.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Participants</b>: A focus group brings together a relatively comparable group from 6-12 individuals. These individuals are recruited and, when possible, given an incentive for their participation.</p> <p><u>Criteria</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review the objective</b> of the group; keep the criteria neutral and in sync with the goal and purpose of the group.</li> <li>• <b>Get the right people</b> in the room. Carefully select the potential candidates from a designated group in order to gather information. If your group is too diverse, you may not garner sufficient information to answer the questions.</li> <li>• Make sure that individuals in the <b>groups</b> are <b>similar</b>. If you want front line workers in an industry, try to ensure that no supervisors are in the meeting; this could hinder the front line staff interests in sharing their honest feelings about their work.</li> </ul>





# Section Two: Role of the Moderator/Facilitator

## The Role of the Moderator/Facilitator

The key to a successful focus group is the moderator/facilitator. This person will ensure that discussions stay on point, that all questions are answered in the right sequence, and that all participants contribute and are probed in those areas where answers are not complete.

Here are some tips for facilitators:

### 1. Be prepared

- a. Review the focus group checklist, protocol, and any other available materials.
- b. Have all materials arranged and the room set up prior to the participants' arrival.

### 2. Create a warm and safe environment

- a. Obtain participants' informed consent (written and/or verbal).
- b. Allot time for introductions.
- c. Establish ground rules.
- d. Begin with an icebreaker question.
- e. When possible, provide food and drinks.

### 3. Stimulate conversation

- a. Ask questions and follow-up prompts to encourage deeper discussion.
- b. Allow for brief silences after a question has been asked—sometimes participants need time to think about their answers.

### 4. Remain objective

- a. Remain objective and withhold judgment (consider both verbal and nonverbal cues).
  - b. Do not provide your own opinions.
-

- c. Do not share knowledge or resources during the focus group. If required, review incentives.
- d. Be careful not to react to responses/ideas in favorable or unfavorable ways.

#### **5. Listen carefully and check for understanding**

- a. Listen carefully.
- b. Signal to participants that you are listening: by nodding, maintaining good eye contact, and thanking participants for their input throughout the group and at the end.
- c. Paraphrase for the group, as needed.
- d. Clarify any unclear participant responses and any unclear questions in the guide.

#### **6. Manage the group**

- a. Encourage feedback from all participants, which may mean offering certain individuals specific opportunities to speak.
- b. Do not let one or two people dominate.
- c. Use interactive techniques such as checking in periodically to ensure that everyone is still paying attention.

#### **7. Enjoy!**

- a. Focus groups are not only a reliable way to collect data, but they can also be very rewarding and engaging for the participants and the facilitator!

## **Characteristics of a Focus Group Moderator**

Not everyone can be a moderator/facilitator. Some moderators need to be paired with another moderator who is a member of the target population because, by themselves, they may have limited knowledge of the population (see the example below). Others have not received training to moderate a group.

Example: An AIDS researcher was planning a focus group with prostitutes who were also intravenous drug users. The topic was the use of condoms and sterilized needles in AIDS prevention. The right moderator had to be selected. This had to be someone familiar with the culture of the target audience. The wrong facilitator would not have generated the open dialogue needed to capture rich information. So, options included having a trained facilitator work in conjunction with a member of the target group or training a counselor who is known and trusted by the target group. (Krueger, 1998, p. 7)

A moderator has the following basic characteristics. (Krueger, 1998, p. 42-44) These are listed in no particular order and the importance of some characteristics can depend on the target audience.

### **Someone who understands group processes**

- Knows how to control a group.
- Knows how to keep the conversation on track.
- Knows how to end the discussion of one question and move onto the next question.

### **Curiosity**

- The moderator should really have an interest in the topic.
- The moderator should have some questions about the topic. This helps to show curiosity.

### **Communication skills**

- The moderator should be clear about what is being asked and convey this curiosity.
- The moderator's language should be appropriate for the audience while at the same time reflective of the program.

### **Friendliness and interest in people**

- The evaluator should demonstrate warmth and caring.
- The moderator should be friendly, but not overly so.
- The moderator should have respect for each person.

### **Non judgmental and listening skills**

- Be open to new ideas.
- Be tolerant of people and behaviors that are different than their own.
- Be flexible with some rules and accommodating special needs, but still in control of the group process.
- Be an active listener who listens carefully and can reflect back.

## **Strategies for Addressing Common Problems**

Moderators/facilitators may face issues ranging from environmental distractions to personal behaviors that can disrupt the effectiveness of the group session.

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Table 3: Preparing for Potential Distractions and Other Logistical Problems

Problems	Solutions
Distractions: noises in the meeting room, (i.e., music, extraneous movements, cell phones, even moderator's dress)	Try to insulate the room from outside stimulus and distractions. For example, if the room has big picture windows, close the blinds. The moderator should never draw attention away from the questions, which means avoiding excessive jewelry, cologne or perfume, or distracting clothing.
Medical Emergency	Remain calm; loosen any restricting clothing on the individual. Check for a medical bracelet with identifying emergency information; call the emergency number-911; suspend the session and call the person's emergency contact to inform them of the situation.
Too few participants	<p>Wait at least 10-15 minutes for people to arrive and then begin. Have an assistant email, text, or call those who confirmed to see if they are still planning to attend. Have an assistant stationed at the door to greet late comers so that they do not disturb others.</p> <p>Afterwards, review the invitation process to see if people received the invitation and if they confirmed. Call to see what happened. Review all aspects of the process to discern why those who confirmed did not appear.</p>
Too many participants	<p>Sometimes invited participants bring guests. Since focus groups should be limited to no more than 12 persons, too many people—particularly those who are not members of the target population—can be problematic. Thank them for their interest, but encourage them to have a seat in another room, such as a waiting room. If a group of participants was over invited and all invitees appear, divide the group into smaller ones, even if one group will have to be conducted later in the day, or have an assistant, if available, moderate a second group.</p> <p>Have toys, snacks, and books or DVD players with movies available in another room for children who come with parents. Always anticipate children, so be prepared with child friendly items.</p>
Equipment failure	Practice using the equipment several times before conducting the group. Then bring extra batteries, or back up paper and pencil copies of electronic information.

Table 4: Preparing for Potential Communication Problems

Problems – People	Solutions
Participant behavior	Always establish ground rules before the group convenes. A key rule is respect for others. If someone seems opinionated, disrespectful, rude, remind all of the ground rules. (Krueger, 1998, p. 50)
Participant comments	<p>If participants make irrelevant or wandering comments, or a person seems to dominate the discussion because he or she is an expert in the matter or has a dominant personality, the moderator should be quick to remind all that everyone’s opinions matter and all are invited to speak up on topic. Also, if a person is rambling or talking too long, use eye contact or body language, such as looking at a watch or clock. Verbally remind people of the limited time allotted for the focus group and keep the group moving forward. If a participant refuses to make any comments, even when called upon, during a break inform the participant, in a kind and sensitive manner, that all comments and opinions are welcome. Also tell the person that his/her comments and opinions were the reason why the person was invited and that no one is here to criticize. Ask if the person would be prepared to answer the next question posed and direct the next question to that person.</p> <p>If a participant discloses personal information about him or herself or others, immediately refer back to the confidentiality rule that all information should stay in the room. Also discourage participants from sharing specific information that may reveal too much information about a person or situation. Encourage all to give anonymous names if they feel that they need to describe a situation in detail to illustrate a point.</p>
Participant Questions	Participants may ask questions of the moderator, but the moderator should be prepared to respond afterwards if a question is not in keeping with the topic. If a question is in keeping with the topic, include it during the focus group but remain in control of the group by encouraging others to respond. It is important for all in the group that the moderator does not relinquish the role of authority over the group, even if others ask questions. This void in authority can be unsettling and others may fill it, even unknowingly, because they are more comfortable with control or taking such steps.
Removing Participants from Focus Groups	Sometimes people have to be removed. It is good to call for a break; individually and privately speak with the person(s) and thank them for coming, but inform them that they are dismissed from the group. Also include their honorarium and state that their participation is now over in the group. See “Dismissing a Participant” for wording that may be useful.

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## Dismissing a Participant

When you need to remove a participant from the group, during the break, smile, look the person in the eye, be firm and say, “Our discussion has two parts, and not everyone is staying for the second part. Your input has been noted and appreciated, you are free to leave. Thank you for coming.” Then offer the incentive.

Another option is to call for a break and during the second half, say to the person, “We have appreciated what you have shared; your opinion has been helpful to us. However, in the second section you will not be participating. Thank you for coming and here is your honorarium.” (Krueger, 1998, p. 68)

## Moderator/Facilitator Rating Scale

A focus group takes preparation and does not just happen, even for the moderator. The following checklist may be useful as you evaluate how well you are preparing for the focus group, managing the group, and following up after the group check all that are applicable. (Krueger, 1998, p. 96)

Before the focus group, the moderator:

- Is familiar with the topic and goals of the sponsor.
- Understands the purpose and objective of each question.
- Senses the amount of time needed for each question.
- Anticipates the topics of discussion and potential areas of probing.
- Is mentally and physically ready to moderate.
- Has sufficient technical knowledge of the topic.
- Welcomes participants and makes them feel comfortable before the session.

During the focus group, the moderator:

- Delivers a smooth, comfortable introduction that is accurate and complete, including:
    - A welcome
    - A brief overview of the topic that defines the purpose of the group
    - A description of the ground rules
    - An opening question
  - Establishes rapport with participants.
-

- 
- Asks questions as intended, unless they have already been answered in a previous question.
  - Allows sufficient time for each question.
  - Keeps the discussion on track.
  - Keeps all participants involved.
  - Listens carefully; synthesizes information and feeds it back, probes for clarification, and gets people to talk.
  - Seeks out both cognitive and affective domains; gets participants to tell both how they think and how they feel about a topic.
  - Moves smoothly from one question to another.
  - Handles different participants adeptly and conveys a sense of relaxed informality.
  - Avoids sharing personal opinions.
  - Finishes on time.
  - Brings closure to the group with a summary and invites comments on any missing points.
  - Goes to the door and thanks each person individually for coming, just as you would when guests leave your home.

After the focus group, the moderator:

- Debriefs as soon as possible after the focus group with the assistant moderator.
- Analyzes the group session or provides insight into the analysis.
- Reviews the report of accuracy.

## Improving Group Facilitation

There are a number of ways to better facilitate a group; the following list is not exhaustive. What other ways can you improve your facilitation skills? Use this list to check against your own list of ways to improve group facilitator/moderator skills.

- Get feedback from a coach or an assistant who was present.
  - Review the recording of the session to get a sense of your pace and wording.
  - Type your own transcripts.
  - Observe other moderators' focus group sessions.
  - Attend a class on focus group moderation.
  - Read about ways to facilitate focus groups.
  - Work with or chat with other facilitators to get their tips.
-



## Exercise: The Moderator/Facilitator Role

Fill in each statement with the correct missing word.

1. The key to a successful focus group is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. This person ensures that the discussions stay on \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Encourage feedback from \_\_\_\_\_ participants.
4. Obtain participant's informed \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Establish \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Allow for brief \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Withhold \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Listen \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Begin with an \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Manage the \_\_\_\_\_.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Choices: judgment, point, carefully, moderator/facilitator, ice-breaker, group, ground rules, introduction, all

### ANSWERS:

1.) moderator/facilitator 2.) point 3.) all 4.) consent 5.) ground rules 6.) introductions 7.) judgment 8.) carefully 9.) ice breaker 10.) group



# Section 3:

## Planning the Focus Group

### Developing a Plan

Developing a sound plan is the most important part of conducting a successful focus group. The plan should address questions such as: What are you trying to achieve? Is the focus group the best way to achieve it? If so, who will you invite? How, when, where, and what will you ask them?

Consider the following steps when developing a plan.

Table 5: Developing a Focus Group Plan

Step	Action
1	Plan in writing what you want to do.
2	Create a timeline with completion dates for steps in the process.
3	Create a budget (remember to include some money for emergency items such as extra food).
4	Recruit via mail, telephone, email and or in –person.
5	Select an appropriate moderator/facilitator for your audience and subject.
6	Analyze and review the questions and answers as well as surveys.
7	If information gathered is confidential, select only those who need to see the report.

## What Do You Hope to Accomplish?

*The most important part of the plan is the answer to this question:  
What do you hope to accomplish through this focus group?*

Understanding what you want to accomplish will focus you on your goals and objectives. It will also help you consider what you want to ask, of whom, how, when, and where. There are no right or wrong answers. However, we encourage you to complete this table in order to plan your focus group.

**Table 6: Planning Questions and Answers**

Questions	(Your) Answers
Why do you want to have a focus group?	
What is your budget for this activity?	
Do you want to have people convene at your venue or another space?	
Who will you invite?	
What do you want to ask them?	
Do you need one focus group to answer your questions or will you need two or more groups with different participants to answer your questions?	
How will you report the findings? (Is an oral report sufficient or will you need a report with more analysis?)	

## What Questions Will You Ask?

When planning a focus group, asking the right questions is very important. The next important consideration when planning a focus group is the questions that you want to ask.

Many different types of questions can be used. One format allows different categories of questions to be used at different times. These questions include: opening, introductory, transition, main or key, and closing questions. Table 7 shows the types of questions and their purpose followed by an example of how to use it.

**Table 7: Question Categories**

Question Type	Purpose
Opening	Participants get to know one another Example: <i>Please go around the room and give name, title and name of your organization (facilitator starts as an example).</i>
Introductory	Begin the discussion on the topic Example: <i>(Explain the purpose of the focus group and what we hope to accomplish-to learn why...)</i>
Transition	Moves smoothly and seamlessly into key questions Examples: <i>(When you think of ... what comes to mind?)</i> <i>(Thinking back over the years, how have you handled...)</i>
Main (Key)	Main focus group questions. Examples: <i>(What will you do now to help you in this situation?)</i> <i>(Tell us about what you have tried to help your organization to...)</i> <i>(What has been the outcome?)</i> <i>(What do you need in terms of resources to help you now?)</i>
Closing	Wrap up questions, final thoughts Example: <i>(Any additional thoughts on this topic? What recommendations do you have?)</i>

Excerpted from Krieger, Richard A. *Developing Questions for Focus Groups*, (Sage Publications, Inc. 1998), p. 22.

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# Hosting the Focus Group

## 1. Welcome Table/Participant Survey (-- minutes)

A welcome table should be set up with nametags, markers, and surveys. Include a welcome sign with the following instructions:

**WELCOME!**

*After making yourself comfortable and enjoying some food and drink, please:*

- *Fill out a name tag*
- *Complete a participant survey*

## 2. Introduction (10 Minutes)

### Welcome, Thank You, and Logistical Information

- Welcome the group.
- Thank the participants for coming and for completing the participant survey.
- Point out where the restrooms are located and any other logistical information as needed.

### Facilitator and Note Taker Introductions

#### Background/Purpose/Sponsorship

“The purpose of today’s conversation is to discuss [PURPOSE STATEMENT].”

More specifically, point out where discussion group outcomes are posted on the wall.

**By the end of today’s session, we will be able to:**

1. Describe/Identify/Explain/Compare/Discuss
2. Text

“As you may already know, these discussion groups are sponsored by...

“The information you share today is very important. Your opinions will help guide [Host Organization and/or X?] to develop policies for reducing barriers to HIV testing throughout the District of Columbia.”

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## Confidentiality

“Before we begin our discussion today, I want to assure you that everything we discuss here today is confidential. The things you say may be put in a summary of this discussion, but there will be no way to identify who said what, and your names will not be included in a summary report.”

*If applicable:*

“In addition, please note that neither the facilitator nor the note taker is an employee of [Host Organization]; we are independent evaluators capturing your confidential thoughts and opinions.”

*Optional:*

“As a courtesy to the discussion group participants, [Host Organization] will prepare a brief summary of findings from this discussion group series.” (*Indicate total number of focus groups*). “This document will be emailed to you in approximately X month(s).”

## Note taking and Recording Session

“We will be taking notes and audio and /or video recording the discussion so that we can accurately report the important information that you will be sharing. Again, this information will be kept confidential and will be deleted or destroyed once the final report is created.

“Is this OK with everyone?” (*Note: “If this is not acceptable to any individuals, we will request that they not participate, since the recording and note taking is important.*)

“Because we are using an audio recorder, please speak slowly and one at a time so that all opinions can be clearly heard.”

## Ground Rules

“I would like to review some basic guidelines that will be used during our discussion:

1. There are **no right or wrong answers** to the questions being asked today; all ideas are good ideas.
  2. Be respectful of others desire to speak. Again, try not to talk at the same time and **if you have recently spoken, try to defer to others**; unless the comment is very important to you.
  3. We also welcome and **respect different points of view**. Please answer what you truly think, regardless of the opinions of the other group members.
  4. If you are uncomfortable with a question, **feel free to pass**. You are under no obligation to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable in any way.
-

5. We ask that you **share your honest feedback** so that the greater community can benefit from your opinions.
6. Although you may tell colleagues that you have participated in a focus group around this topic, we ask that you please not share any specific information you hear in this group with anyone outside the group even if you do not mention names. In this way each individual's perspectives can **remain confidential.**"
7. (Other ground rules.)

"Finally, during today's discussion, there are quite a few things to talk about. At times, we may need to stop the discussion in order to move forward. I apologize in advance for this approach."

### Participant Questions

"Are there any questions at this point?"

*(Pause)*

### Participant Introductions

"Let's begin our discussion while introducing ourselves.

"As we go around the room, please tell us:

- Your name.
- Your grade/school/profession/organization.
- An icebreaker question (ideally linked to the topic)."

## 3. Objectives

### Objective 1: (X Minutes)

"Thank you for your introductions and for starting our discussion on..."

I. ?

II. ?

- a. Follow-up A
- b. Follow-up B

### Objective 2: (X Minutes)

I. ?

II. ?

*(Continue with this format through the last objective.)*

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## 4. Closure (10 minutes)

- Summarize/review the main objectives/points that arose during the group discussion.
- Ask for comments or questions.

*(For this last question, go around the room so that each member of the group has an opportunity to share his/her thoughts.)*

## 5. Appreciation for Participation (X Minutes)

- Speak about the next steps in reviewing the focus group findings.
- Reminders about focus groups incentives, if necessary.
- Restate appreciation for participation.

# Do's and Don'ts of a Focus Group

## Do's

- Set up a room with chairs in a circle, boardroom style, or U shape. Facilitators should sit with the group and not outside or away from participants.
  - Have a flipchart or another visual aid with each question or series of questions on a separate sheet.
  - Have viable markers of different colors to emphasize different points.
  - Get consent to tape and/or video record as an option for responses.
  - Have a tape recorder with extra batteries to capture the discussion, or use a video camera when acceptable.
  - Have a note taker present to note highlights of the discussion.
  - Have at least several pens on hand.
  - Set up refreshments at one end of the room and encourage participants to snack prior to the session beginning.
  - Explain to all that information is *confidential*.
  - Provide some type of "incentive" as a thank you for group participation.
  - Host the meeting at a facility that is convenient or known by most. This can eliminate trouble locating the venue and reduce the time waiting for group members to assemble.
-

- Know the participant's needs. If transportation is needed to get to the site, help the participant obtain it. If child or older adult care is needed, arrange for this with the participant ahead of time. It may be convenient for the participant to bring along dependent(s), but negotiate this prior to the group meeting. Also, make sure the setting is large enough to accommodate all participants.

## Don'ts

- Don't conduct a focus group **without clear objectives** and specific questions.
  - Don't allow non-participants to join the group.
  - **Don't allow eating** while the session is being conducted; it distracts from attention.
  - **Don't allow people to leave early**, if possible. It breaks up the unity of the session.
  - **Don't ask general questions.** The questions should be very specific and geared to obtaining information on a certain topic. You do not want your focus group to wander from topic to topic. You are seeking in-depth feedback on the selected topic.
-

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## Exercise: Do's and Don'ts of a Focus Group

Please answer the following questions.

1. Name two or three **Do's and Don'ts**.
  2. Why should **participants not eat** during a focus group?
  3. Why are **markers of different colors** needed?
  4. What is the **role of the note taker**?
  5. Why is it important to **stress** that all information is **confidential**?
  6. What should be done if a participant does not agree to be **taped or recorded**?
  7. Why is it important to have a facilitator **sit amongst the group**?
  8. Why should **non-participants be excluded** from an active focus group?
  9. What extra **Do's** should be included? Why?
  10. What extra **Don'ts** should be included? Why?
-



# Section Four:

## Other Focus Group Formats

### Telephone Focus Groups

Telephone Focus Groups (TFGs) are discussions conducted by telephone. This form of engagement is very similar to having a conference call except that the moderator is trained in TFG.

**Advantages:** TFGs have the potential for greater participation and diversity. They can allow for more flexibility because no physical space is required; people can gather together in one location or be in various places. Many will not need transportation, parking, or even child care since they may not need to physically leave one place. These flexible options may facilitate recruitment of participants.

TFGs can be conducted with limited resources and at varying levels of sophistication. They resemble a conference phone call. With more sophisticated telephone equipment, it is possible to have special features such as a console with lights and names to identify speakers, special switching devices that allow only one person to speak at a time, and lights that indicate when participants are talking.

A TFG can be a less intimidating arrangement because participants do not have the same peer pressure or nonverbal, body language awareness that may exist in face-to-face focus group settings.

**Disadvantages:** A principle disadvantage is the lack of nonverbal communication. It may be difficult to understand if someone is uncomfortable or inconvenienced over the phone.

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## Online Focus Groups

Online Focus Groups (OFGs) are discussions conducted by online resources such as web and video conferencing, Internet websites, and social media networks. OFGs should have moderators trained in or familiar with the modality; these are often used with participants in various locations.

### Advantages:

- Allows for a greater potential for participation.
- Easier for moderating.
- Transcripts are available immediately. It may be easier to identify a community of like minded persons based on this modality. (For those who are online and involved in certain social network groups, they may be easiest to ask to participate in a topic of interest to this network.)
- Confidentiality may not be an issue if you do not use video conferencing or trace IP addresses.
- There may be less inhibition to share opinions since there is the chance of more anonymity with online groups.
- Video streaming is the technology used to conveniently and securely transmit both live and recorded audio and video over a standard Internet connection. With a video streaming provider, you can transmit live video and audio of your focus groups that are taking place in different locations thus eliminating the need to travel. Check whether this service is free or at cost before making a decision to use it. Also, inquire of their ability to archive the video and audio; many online focus groups have the ability to record and archive this same focus group information electronically.

### Disadvantages:

- Minimal nonverbal communication and requires familiarity with technology.
  - Those without access to the Internet or with slow Internet connections are excluded from participating.
  - Limited benefit for those who have very low levels of literacy or typing ability.
  - May be problematic for those who have special needs unless there is a voice-activated feature.
  - Participants must have access to an appropriate device, such as a computer, tablet, smart phone, etc. (Silverman, 2011)
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## Rapid Focus Groups

What is a rapid focus group and how it is used? It is usually an in-person gathering of selected individuals around a particular topic that requires urgent attention. This topic is usually an emergency situation, a new issue that must be added to an ongoing session, or an important topic to decision makers or funders.

Because the focus group facilitator needs to gather information about one issue, the questions are fewer and more in-depth on the pros and cons of this topic. Often with rapid focus groups there is not much pre-planning. There may not be a tape recorder available, so try to use any new technology, such as a smart phone or tablet that allows for recording. Also assign a member to take notes to capture salient points.

The report from a rapid focus group must be done quickly—in hours as opposed to days. Therefore, summarize the key points and pull out select quotes.

After quickly describing the situation, the facilitator may ask the following types of rapid focus questions:

- What is the problem?
- Who is affected?
- What might be done?
- What barriers exist?
- What are the incentives?
- What are the recommendations?

### **Advantages:**

- Quick input from target audience.
- Focused on issues.
- Ability to quickly gather ideas and solutions to deal with the situation.
- Can be immediately conducted after another meeting or in place of a meeting.

### **Disadvantages:**

- Limited resources are available due to the sudden need for a group.
- No planned or scheduled time so invitees may have limited availability.
- May not have all the necessary details if a true emergency is taking place so the group is responding to limited information.
- May have inconsistent note taking.

## Focus Group Features

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Features	Traditional	Telephone	Online
Require participants' technology proficiency	✗	✗	✓
Cost effective	✗	✓	✓
Limited size	✓	✓	✓
Transcript availability (immediately)	✗	✗	✓
Non-verbal cues reading	✓	✗	✓
Observer availability	✓	✗	✓
Participant direct attention	✓	✗	✗
Participant diversity	✗	✓	✓
Relative anonymity	✗	✓	✓
Computers and internet requirement	✗	✗	✓
Reading of information during focus groups	✗	✓	✓
Lengthy data analysis	✓	✓	✗
Facilitator technical proficiency	✗	✓	✓

**Legend:**

✓ = Yes

✗ = No



## Exercise: Features of Focus Group Formats

Fill in the Features columns with either ✓ for "Yes" or ✗ for "No" based on the various focus group formats.

Features	Traditional	Telephone	Online
Require participants' technology proficiency			
Cost effective			
Limited size			
Transcript availability (immediately)			
Non-verbal cues reading			
Observer availability			
Participant direct attention			
Participant diversity			
Relative anonymity			
Computers and internet requirement			
Reading of information during focus groups			
Lengthy data analysis			
Facilitator technical proficiency			

### Legend:

- ✓ = Yes  
✗ = No

## Protocol of Non-Traditional Focus Group Formats

Features	Online	Telephone
<b>Set-Up</b>		
Technology set-up (logins and passwords)	✗	✓
Topic guide availability	✓	✓
Evaluation sent via email, if needed	✓	✓
Moderator preparation on modality	✓	✓
Question set-up within modality	✗	✓
Ground rules are very important because there is no body language to determine if someone is uncomfortable with the discussion or how things are said.	✓	✓
<b>Recruitment</b>		
Sample selection	✗	✓
Letters regarding study's purpose, objectives, and participation	✓	✓
Confirmation letter of participation including web link, login, and password information	✓	✓
<b>Actual Event Date</b>		
Grant participant access	✓	✓
Monitor modality activity	✓	✓
Reminder regarding the ending of Online and Telephone focus groups	✓	✓
Thank you acknowledgement	✓	✓
Completion of the Online and Telephone focus groups	✗	✓
Data Generation	✗	✓
Transcript availability	✓	✓

**Legend:** ✓ = Yes      ✗ = No

---

# Guiding Principles of Telephone Focus Groups

## Preparing for the Telephone Focus Group

- Share questions or discussion topics and ground rules in advance with supporting documentation. If you want participants to look at visuals, place them, labeled and in the order that they will be used, in a packet and mail or email. Send these to participants in advance of the focus group.
- Helpful ideas about questioning:
  - Limit number of questions to about 5-8.
  - Prepare introduction questions to be asked of each participant.
  - Ask your most important questions towards the beginning of the call, but after a critical mass are on the call.
  - Sequence the questions in a logical or orderly flow.
  - Assign an amount of time to each question, but use it as a general guide.
- Limit the call/session length to at most 60 minutes; optimal time is 30-45 minutes.
- Moderator/facilitator should become familiar with modality used.

## Before the Focus Group

- Invitation made by phone, writing, or email to participants several weeks in advance with confirmation of their direct-line phone number and email addresses.
- A confirmation letter is sent reminding participants of date, time, and instructions for connecting with the conference call or online format (information on the portal or website being used) accompanied by all consent forms.
- Optional: Consider making a reminder call or email one hour or one day before the focus group.

## During the Focus Group

Participants call a designated number or an operator calls and connects participants.

*or*

Participants log into the website or portal before the actual group time.

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- 
- Welcome participants and have them identify themselves during sign in.
  - Once a sufficient number have joined the discussion, begin the focus group.
  - Remember to engage all participants on the call or portal/website.
  - Provide a short overview of the study.
  - Review ground rules.
  - Consider asking participants to reflect for a moment or jot down something on a piece of paper and then read the comments.
  - Periodically use round robin responses.

## Concluding the Focus Group

- Bring closure to the group by asking ending questions such as, “Have all things been considered?” or, “Have we missed anything?”

**Consider using three valuable questions at the conclusion of the telephone focus group, as time permits:**

1. Of all the things we talked about, what—to you—is the most important thing that was said?
2. The purpose of the study is to ... (briefly describe purpose). Have we missed anything?
3. What advice do you have regarding today’s format or questions? (Krueger & Casey, 2002)

## Do’s and Don’ts of Telephone Focus Groups

### Do’s

- Get consent to record responses.
  - Explain to all that information is confidential.
  - Provide some type of “incentive” as a thank you for group participation.
  - Host the meeting during a time that is convenient for the participants.
  - Know the participant’s needs before the meeting; for example, specific limitations regarding typing and hearing.
  - Understand the format and usage of the modality. The facilitator should become familiar with the modality before the actual session/meeting.
-

- 
- Confirm participation within the focus group a week before the event.
  - Set up modality before the actual session/meeting with the appropriate questions.
  - Confirm letter of participation, including login and password information.
  - Grant participant access.
  - Download the focus group transcript upon availability.
  - Share questions or discussion topics in advance with supporting documentation.
  - Remember to bring closure to the group by asking ending questions such as, “Have all things been considered?” or, “Have we missed anything?” questions.
  - Emphasize the benefits of the focus group modality to the participants.
  - Test the modalities format 48 hours before the actual session/meeting.
  - Follow the thread of the conversation carefully to understand the participants’ opinions.
  - Allow ample time for participant responses.
  - Periodically check to ensure that participants are still on the call and no one has been dropped.
  - Encourage participants not to sign-off until after the evaluation.
  - Provide an evaluation for participants to assess the modality.

### Don'ts

- Don't conduct a focus group without clear objectives and specific questions.
  - Don't allow non-participants to join the group.
  - **Don't allow people to leave early**, if possible; it breaks up the unity of the session.
  - **Don't ask general questions.** Ask very specific questions geared to obtaining information on a certain topic. You do not want your focus group to wander from topic to topic, as you are seeking in-depth feedback on the selected topic.
  - **Don't confirm only once.** Participants need to be reminded of the upcoming focus group call multiple times, especially if they are unfamiliar with the format.
  - Don't send confirmations without a reasonable time frame.
  - Don't have distractions when the focus group is occurring.
  - Don't engage only a few participants on the call.
-

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## Guiding Principles of Online Focus Groups

### Preparing for the Online Focus Group (Similar to Telephonic Focus Group)

- Share questions or discussion topics and ground rules in advance with supporting documentation. If you want participants to look at visuals, place them, labeled and in the order that they will be used, in a packet and mail or email. Send these to participants in advance of the focus group.
- Helpful ideas about questioning:
  - Limit number of questions to about 5-8.
  - Prepare introduction questions to be asked of each participant.
  - Place your most important questions towards the beginning of the call, but after a critical mass are on the call.
  - Sequence the questions in a logical or orderly flow.
  - Assign an amount of time to each question, but use it as a general guide.
- Limit the session length to at most 60 minutes; optimal time is 30-45 minutes.
- Moderator/facilitator should become familiar with modality used.

### Before the Focus Group

- Invitation made by phone, writing, or email to participants several weeks in advance with confirmation of their direct-line phone number and email addresses.
- A confirmation letter is sent reminding participants of date, time, and instructions for connecting with the online format (information on the portal or website being used) accompanied by all consent forms.
- Optional: Consider making a reminder call or email one day and at least one hour before the focus group.

### During the Focus Group

Participants log into the website or portal before the actual group time.

- Welcome participants and have them identify themselves during sign in.
-

- Once a sufficient number have joined the discussion, begin the focus group.
- Remember to engage all participants on the call or portal/website.
- Provide a short overview of the study.
- Review ground rules.
- Consider asking participants to reflect for a moment or jot down something on a piece of paper and then read the comments.
- Periodically ask participants to all type their responses to a question.

## Concluding the Focus Group

- Bring closure to the group by asking ending questions such as, “Have all things been considered?” or, “Have we missed anything?”

**Consider using three valuable questions at the conclusion of the telephone focus group, as time permits:**

1. Of all the things we talked about, what—to you—is the most important thing that was said?
2. The purpose of the study is to ... (briefly describe purpose). Have we missed anything?
3. What advice do you have regarding today’s format or questions? (Krueger & Casey 2002)

## Do’s and Don’ts of Online Focus Groups

### Do’s

- Get consent to record responses.
  - Explain to all that information is confidential.
  - Provide some type of “incentive” as a thank you for group participation.
  - Host the meeting during a time that is convenient for the participants.
  - Know the participant’s needs before the meeting; for example, specific limitations regarding typing and hearing.
  - Understand the format and usage of the modality. The facilitator should become familiar with the modality before the actual session/meeting.
  - Confirm participation within the focus group a week before the event.
-

- 
- Set up modality before the actual session/meeting with the appropriate questions.
  - Confirm letter of participation, including web link, login, and password information.
  - Grant participant access.
  - Download the focus group transcript upon availability.
  - Share questions or discussion topics in advance with supporting documentation.
  - Remember to bring closure to the group by asking ending questions such as, “Have all things been considered?” or, “Have we missed anything?” questions.
  - Emphasize the benefits of the focus group modality to the participants.
  - Test the modalities format 48 hours before the actual session/meeting.
  - Follow the thread of the online conversation carefully to understand the participants’ opinions.
  - Allow ample time for participants to type their responses.
  - Periodically check to ensure that the connection is still strong for all participants and everyone is still available online.
  - Encourage participants not to sign-off until after the evaluation.
  - Provide an evaluation for participants to assess the modality.

### Don'ts

- Don't conduct a focus group without clear objectives and specific questions.
  - Don't allow non-participants to join the group.
  - **Don't allow people to leave early**, if possible; it breaks up the unity of the session.
  - **Don't ask general questions.** Ask very specific questions geared to obtaining information on a certain topic. You do not want your focus group to wander from topic to topic, as you are seeking in-depth feedback on the selected topic.
  - **Don't confirm only once.** Participants need to be reminded regarding the upcoming meeting multiple times, especially if they are unfamiliar with the format.
  - Don't send confirmations without a reasonable time frame.
  - Don't have distractions when the focus group is occurring.
  - Don't use capitalized words and expressions. It could be perceived as shouting.
  - Don't use acronyms and emoticons in the wrong context during the focus group.
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## Exercise: Questions to Ponder

1. What **focus group format works best** for your intended group and specific objectives?

2. What next steps are needed to:

Get Started?

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Conduct the Focus Group?

---

Conclude the Focus Group?

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3. What **learning is required** on behalf of the moderator/facilitator on the modality?

4. What **other considerations** are needed based on the **focus group format**?

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# Section Five: Tips

The following tips are excerpted from Shattuck and Associates, which provides client-focused research, planning, and evaluation services to health and education organizations (<http://www.shattuckandassociates.com/>).

## Drafting Focus Group Goals and Objectives

1. Define the goal (purpose) of your focus group.
  - Consider how you would complete this sentence: “By the end of the focus group, we will be able to ...”
  - Use active verbs such as:
    - Describe
    - Explain
    - Identify
    - List
    - Compare
    - Create
  - Keep objectives short and simple and focused on the main goal of the discussion.
  - Also, limit objectives to 1-3, depending on the time available for discussion.

### **SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP OBJECTIVES**

By the end of today’s discussion, leaders of Youth-Serving Organizations (YSOs) in Washington, DC will be able to:

- Explain at least three current barriers facing YSOs in their efforts to increase youth HIV testing numbers by 25 percent;
- Define at least two ways YSOs can increase the number of youth receiving HIV tests by 25 percent; and
- Identify at least three essential resources and supports that YSOs would need to effectively increase youth HIV testing numbers in Washington, DC by 25 percent.

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## Drafting Focus Group Questions

1. Use open-ended questions to stimulate discussion. (*Exception: some introductory questions.*)
2. Narrowly focus each question and ensure the focus is directly associated with an objective.
3. Keep questions short and simple.
4. Choose your questions carefully; time is limited so prioritize questions.
5. Move from the general to the specific. (*Mental image: a funnel.*)
6. Be cautious about “leading” questions, such as those that imply a value judgment. Note the difference between:
  - Can you explain why this example does not agree with the question? (leading)
  - To what extent do you agree or disagree with that statement?(non-leading)
7. Include prompts: follow-up, clarifying questions that can assist participants in responding, such as:
  - You mentioned that you agree with that statement a lot, please tell us why.
  - You gave us reasons for your agreement with the statement. Could you expound on how this affects your agency?

### **SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

- Who needs to be involved to ensure the success of this HIV prevention campaign?
  - What should their role be?
  - What did you think about the presentation?
  - What do you like best about the proposed HIV educational campaign?
  - When you hear the words “female condom,” what comes to mind?
  - Where do you get new information about HIV/AIDS prevention?
  - Which HIV risk behavior is of greatest concern to you? Tell us why.
  - Think back to when you began working in the area of HIV education. What attracted you to the field?
  - How do you see injection drug use among DC youth today?
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## Focus Group Activities

Use the following activities to make your focus group more interactive. These strategies can energize a group and spur more meaningful, in-depth discussion.

### At-Your-Seat Activities

1. **Think-Pair-Share**

This activity is best used to “level the playing field” so that people who need more time to think before responding have that opportunity. Facilitators ask participants a question and ask them to quietly think of their own response. Then, they are directed to pair up and discuss their responses together. Finally, there is an opportunity for participants to share their responses with the full group.

2. **Round Robin**

Typically used at the beginning and end of a focus group, a “round robin” question specifically asks participants to respond—even if the response repeats another answer or a verbalized “pass.” The facilitator can direct the participants to respond in the order in which they are sitting, such as around a circle, or he or she can ask for full participation before posing the question.

3. **Index Card Activities**

Participants are asked to record their responses on an index card. This helps when time is short, when answers may be sensitive/private, when the facilitator is looking for responses from the full group, and when discussion needs to be sparked.

4. **Paper Surveys**

Paper surveys are most often distributed at the beginning or end of a focus group. Most focus group surveys are used, at least in part, to gather demographic data; however, they may also have other purposes. For instance, pre-surveys may ask participants about their opinions regarding the focus group topic to better understand participants’ opinions before the discussion starts. Post-surveys may include satisfaction questions related to the focus group and/or the facilitator, questions related to their interest in the topic discussed, and reactions to the focus group experience.

5. **Scenarios/Case Studies**

Scenarios or case studies can be used to trigger discussion by giving participants another perspective through which to explore the focus group topic.

### Out-of-Your-Seat Activities

The following activities are good with focus groups of 10-12 members:

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**1. On-the-Wall Surveys/Sticky Dot Activities**

By posting survey questions on the wall, participants must leave their seats to respond. If markers are provided, participants may also respond to brief, open-ended questions (for example, “What word or phrase comes to mind when you hear...?”). Ideally, the facilitator will follow-up with open-ended questions that elicit a rich discussion. If questions are close-ended, participants can use a “sticky dot” to answer. By placing a sticky dot under a question or statement, this will demonstrate or support a particular statement or position. [Some consider this exercise as responding with their feet.]

**2. Brainstorming: Whole Group and Small Group**

One way to spark discussion in a group is through a group brainstorm. This may be done with the whole group, and the facilitator can record each response on flip chart paper. Alternatively, the group can be divided into smaller groups and each given their own paper to record their responses. Usually these small groups have a reporter who then presents the responses from the small group back to the larger group.

**3. Human Voting**

Voting can be done by asking individuals to stand up (or sit down) based on their responses. Alternatively, you can designate various areas of a room for particular responses; participants will need to stand by the area that corresponds to their answer/opinion.

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# Section Six: Focus Group Preparation

Use the following sample focus group preparation worksheet to review the logistical details required to successfully conduct the focus group.

---



# Sample Focus Group Preparation Worksheet

**Topic:**

**Sponsored by:**

**Host Organization(s):**

## FOCUS GROUP OBJECTIVES

By the end of today's discussion, [Host Organization] will be able to:

- Describe/Identify/Explain/Compare/Discuss
- 
- 

**Date of Event:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Facilitator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Note Taker:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total # of participants:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Total # of Men:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Total # of Women:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Materials:

Facilitator's Guide/Script

Registration Form

Note Taker's Guide/Pad/Laptop

Handout: W-9

Markers

Handout: Participant Survey

Name Tags

Handout: \_\_\_\_\_

Index Cards

Flip Charts

Sticky Dots

Food/Drink/Incentives

Pens/Pencils

Paper Goods

Audio/Video Recorder

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Extra Batteries

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact:****Room Setup:**

The host organization will set up registration outside of the room. Inside the room, a welcome table will be set up with participant surveys, nametags, pens/pencils, markers, and sticky dots, if appropriate. Setup will also include flip chart(s) with markers and the note taker's computer station and electronic equipment.

**Flip Chart Posters:**

*Objectives*

**Flip Chart for Brainstorm/Discussion Notes:**

*"Topic 1" (page X)*

*"Topic 2" (page Y)*

---



# Section Seven:

## Focus Group Data Analysis

### Analyzing Focus Group Data

1. Whenever possible, attend each of the focus groups that you will be summarizing.
  2. Immediately following the focus group, discuss the session with any observers.
  3. Summarize each focus group soon after it ends. Analyzing data is easier if it is fresh in your mind. These steps commonly include:
    - a. **Listening to audio** and/or **video recording** and adding to your notes, as applicable
    - b. **Identifying key themes** under each objective
    - c. **Providing supporting quotes**, as applicable
    - d. **Noting trends** from words and comments
    - e. **Noting unique** or **unexpected comments**
    - f. **Analyzing survey data** using software, as applicable
    - g. **Considering recommendations**
  4. Based on the data analysis conducted, prepare a report of findings using the research question(s) and key findings from the major themes and quotes. Consider using the “Sample Key Focus Group Points Worksheet” on page 64 to assist in creating the final report. It should contain the following:
    - a. Demographics on the focus group
    - b. Purpose of the focus group
    - c. Focus group questions
    - d. Key findings
    - e. Recommendations
    - f. Tables to display key findings for themes. This format presents the information more clearly.
  5. Meet with key stakeholders to review the report and discuss its implications.
-

6. Place the focus group into context with other information you have gathered (such as surveys, interviews, and research data).
7. When appropriate, develop an action plan to address the main focus group findings and recommendations.

## Example of Analyzing Focus Group Data

### Step One: Read the Narrative Completely

*Below is an example of a story told about two women and their thoughts upon learning of their HIV positive status. This is not a verifiable story. Therefore, we assume that the characters listed, Bulelwa and Eunice, are fictitious.*

“Many of the women described being washed over by a dreadful recognition of the immediacy of their death, which seemed to override all other concerns with a staggering cognizance that “when a person is HIV, she’s supposed to die.” (Centre for Social Science Research, 2003)

Bulelwa: “Since I heard that when a person is HIV she’s supposed to die...so I was thinking of those things, dying or what...Oh it was bad...and the counselor told me everything, that this isn’t the end, this is not the end of the world, I can live for as long as...I mean for a long time, I can live for a long time, all those things, but I didn’t accept it at that time.”

Eunice: “Okay, she said she’s very worried about her status because when she heard somebody passed away she know that she’s got HIV and she passed away. She’s very worried about that...she stay[ed] two weeks without sleeping thinking about this problem.” (Centre for Social Science Research, 2003, p. 16)

### Step Two: Identify Main Themes from the Narrative

Bulelwa: “Since I heard that when a person is HIV she’s supposed to die...so I was thinking of those things, dying or what...Oh it was bad...and the counselor told me everything, that this isn’t the end, this is not the end of the world, I can live for as long as...I mean for a long time, I can live for a long time, all those things, but I didn’t accept it at that time.”

Eunice: “Okay, she said she’s very worried about her status because when she heard somebody passed away she know that she’s got HIV and she passed away. She’s very worried about that...she stay[ed] two weeks without sleeping thinking about this problem.”

Word Themes

Major Themes

Coping	HIV and Dying
Dying	Response to Dying
Illness	
HIV	

## Step Three: Identify Main Themes from the Narrative with Associated Quotes

On dying:

“Since I heard that when a person is HIV, she’s supposed to die...so I was thinking of those things, dying...”

“...when she heard somebody passed away, she knew that she’s got HIV and ... passed away.”

Response to dying:

“...this isn’t the end, this is not the end of the world, I can live ...for a long time.”

“I didn’t accept it at that time.”

“She stay[ed] two weeks without sleeping, thinking about this problem.”

## Sample Key Focus Group Points Worksheet

Use this sheet to record key points from the focus groups' notes and observations.

**Words:**

Coping

Dying

Illness

HIV

**Themes:**

HIV and Dying

Response to Dying

**Quotes:**

Dying:

"Since I heard that when a person is HIV, she's supposed to die...so I was thinking of those things, dying..."

"...when she heard somebody passed away, she knew that she's got HIV and ... passed away."

Response to dying:

"...this isn't the end, this is not the end of the world, I can live ...for a long time."

"I didn't accept it at that time."

"She stay[ed] two weeks without sleeping, thinking about this problem."

**Findings:** List the findings based on key words, themes, and quotes from this focus group.

Finding 1: The women participants expressed disparaging viewpoints about having HIV and dying.

## Key Focus Group Data Analysis Worksheet

Use this sheet to record key points from the focus groups' notes and observations.

**Words:**

**Themes:**

**Quotes:**

**Findings:** List the findings based on key words, themes, and quotes from this focus group.

Findings 1:

Findings 2:

Findings 3:





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# References

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# Appendixes

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## Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol










Focus Group Name:

Location:

Date:

Meeting's Purpose [Goal or Purpose of Focus Group]	
Facilitator's Name:	Note taker's Name:
Total Number of participants:	
Total Men__ Total Women__ Total Transgendered__	
__Attached Participants' List	

### **Materials**

-  Facilitator's Guide
  -  Note Taker's pad, laptop
  -  Markers
  -  Name Tags
  -  Audio Recorder
  -  Extra Batteries
  -  Food/Drink
  -  Paper Goods
  -  Other Needed items:
-

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## Appendix B: Elements of a Facilitator's Guide

Make sure that the note taker documents all demographic and logistical information.

### Getting Started

**Brief Explanation:** Explain the reason for this focus group and what you hope to get out of this meeting. If possible, make the objectives of the focus group into the SMART model (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time sensitive). For example: By the end of this focus group, we will have an explanation of a behavior given by at least 75% of the respondents.

**Introduction:** Start the introduction with a statement thanking the participants for their time. Also explain the facilitator's role along with experience in conducting focus groups, the types of open-ended questions to be asked, and a description of how the information will be used. Include compensation, if any will be provided. Have all participants introduce themselves by highlighting where they are from and their job, school, program, and/or organization; this encourages participants to network as well as increases comfort among peers.

**Confidentiality:** Include a statement of confidentiality regarding their information given so that all are assured that it is a safe space.

### Ground Rules

**Identification:** Decide how the participants want to be identified, especially if the session is being recorded. Participants should state their name when answering so that information is compiled accurately with proper identification of participants. If participants are concerned about confidentiality, they can use whatever name they like, a number, or some other identifier.

**Responses:** Participants should speak clearly when answering the questions as fully as possible, but not to engage in a lot of discussion during the session. It is expected that there will be varying opinions. You also want to draw out those who are more silent and encourage additional comments. Also, you will likely have someone who knows all the answers, and they should be monitored as they may limit the scope of the discussion.

**Closing:** In general, close by going around the room and asking for final comments from those present on the topic at hand. Also, thank the participants again and let them know, once more, the purpose of their feedback in the group. If you want to, send a copy of the results to focus group participants.

---

**Questions:** Have your questions written. If possible, write them on a flipchart or develop a PowerPoint presentation. Your questions should be open ended but if they are 'yes' or 'no', please ask them to explain their comment. Also, have questions where you ask all participants to answer in sequence (go one-by-one around the room). You can have a combination of these methods.

---

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## Appendix C: Focus Group Facilitator's Guide - Example

### Demographic and Logistical Information

**Date:** January 1, 2010

**Start Time:** 3pm End time: 4pm

**Location:** NMAC headquarters, Washington, DC

**Facilitator:** TJ XXXX

**Note Taker:** LMXXXX

**Participants:** Total # of Participants 10 Total # Men 6 Total #Women 3 and Total # of Transgendered 1

### Brief Explanation

The Division of Community Advancement and Leadership Strategies would like to ask a group of African-American Community Based Organization (CBO) staff how interested they are in having a choice of a tiered level—beginner, intermediate, or advanced level—of NMAC trainings. Traditionally, NMAC has conducted trainings at an introductory level, but we have received feedback that CBOs would like more advanced trainings. A group of 15 African-American and Latino men and women and transgendered persons who have received NMAC services were selected at random from our list of attendees at USCA and sent invitations four weeks in advance to attend a focus group at USCA. The purpose of this focus group will be to give us specific feedback on the developmental level that they would like NMAC to offer training sessions.

**Specific objective:** to hear from 90% of the attendees if they would like NMAC to offer at least two levels of trainings on specific topics, such as organizational infrastructure.

### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. I am TJ\_\_\_\_\_ and I have been with the National Minority AIDS Council for over three years working in the Division of Community Advancement and Leadership Strategies. As a staff member, I have conducted many focus groups and have worked with a number of CBOs. Our work is funded by CDC and HRSA to conduct trainings in a variety of topics, including organizational development, development of primary care facilities, discharge planning for people living with HIV in prison, and HIV/AIDS stigma and access to care. We would like to get input from you on the level of these trainings. That is to say, how advanced should the training topics be and which topics should we offer? Historically we have provided training at the

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introductory level, which assumes that participants know little or nothing about a topic. We are interested in hearing from you if there are specific topic areas that should be presented in an intermediate or advanced level. In light of this, we will ask a number of open-ended questions. Please give us your honest answer. Let's go around the room and find out who is here. Please give us your name, where you are from, where you work and your position.

We encourage you to be honest so that we can best serve you in the future. Also because we respect your time, we will only be here for one hour; and because we value your input, we have a small token of thanks which will be distributed to you after this hour session.

## Confidentiality

We will be recording the session and there will be a note taker. All your input will be kept confidential. This means that we will not use your name or any identifying information as we summarize the data.

## Ground Rules

Let's decide how you're going to be identified. Do you want to state your first name when you answer so that as the information is being compiled, I can have an idea of who said what? Or you can use your initials, a fabricated name, or a number.

Please speak clearly and answer the questions posed.

One ground rule is that there cannot be any side conversations. You do not have to answer every question, and you have the right to pass and return to a question later to provide your comments.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4

Question 5

Question 6

Question 7

---



## Closing

Are there any final comments from those present on the topic at hand? I want to thank you all again for your time and input. We will use this to determine our training structure for the organizational infrastructure trainings. If you would like, we can send you the outcome of our decision, which, in large part, will be based on your comments today. Thank you again and here is your small token of thanks.

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## Appendix D: Sample Focus Group Checklist

### Advanced Preparation

- Carefully review the Facilitator's Guide and Example.
  - Confirm with host/organizer: the time, location, final count, incentives, and food.
  - If you are not the facilitator, confirm with the facilitator and note taker the day and time of arrival.
  - Prepare Flip Charts that can be completed in advance (for example: objectives, question).
  - Ensure that final participant recruitment calls have been made.

### Site Details

- Directions are sent.
- The name and number of the host site is available, just in case!
- The address of the host site where you can send a 'Thank You!' if appropriate.

### Materials

- Two copies of the Facilitator's Guide with questions, objective and purpose (one w/space for note taker).
  - Audio with tape (if not digital) and video recorder. Make sure the batteries are useable and/or charged and that needed materials are available.
  - Extra batteries
  - Extension cord
  - Power cord, if needed
  - Laptop or note takers pad
  - Flip chart paper and easel
  - Markers (different colors)
  - Tape
  - Name tags
  - Pens/Pencils
-

## Handouts (if applicable)

- Sign-in sheets
- Informed Consent sheets and Release forms
- Materials reviewed by participants

## Participant Incentives and Food

- Participant incentives (such as gift cards, money, or other participant compensation).
- Confirmed or arranged food, drink, paper goods, etc.

## Checklist for a Successful Recruitment

- Communicate that the focus group is important to them and will be interesting.
  - Make the contacts personal. Make the recruitment more person-to-person.
  - Build on existing relationships when possible.
  - Create criteria for selecting focus group participants to make sure that those in the room are the ones who can help you get the answers that you want.
  - Offer incentives to increase participation.
  - Make participation as convenient as possible—choose a place and time that meets participants' needs.
  - Follow up to ensure that the participants actually attend the groups.
-

# Appendix E: Sample Focus Group Report

## Increasing Youth HIV Testing in DC\*

### Focus Group Findings and Recommendations

[Date]

Prepared for:

Prepared by:

#### Contents

Executive Summary.....	X
Introduction.....	X
Methods.....	X
Participant Recruitment.....	X
Development of Focus Group Moderator’s Guide and Supplemental Materials.....	X
Data Collection and Analysis.....	X
Participant Survey.....	X
Description of Participants.....	X
Opinion-Based Survey Results.....	X
Summary of Findings by Objective.....	X
Objective 1: .....	X
Objective 2: .....	X
Recommendations.....	X
Appendix A: Focus Group Moderator’s Guide.....	X
Appendix B: Participant Survey.....	X

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\* Note: This sample focus group report consists of entirely fictitious data. Its sole purpose is to provide a template for clients to develop their own reports with their own raw data.

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## Executive Summary (from Shattuck and Associates)

With funding from... the [host organization] sponsored three focus groups around the theme of reducing barriers to youth HIV testing in D.C. During the winter of 2010, 39 individuals participated in focus groups held in the following locations: ... This report describes the findings from these focus groups and serves as a catalyst for [host organization] to further explore the issues surrounding...

### Summary of Findings from the Participant Survey

Prior to the start of the focus group, participants turned in a survey asking participants to identify personal characteristics, as well as their opinions related to (topic).

#### A. Demographic Characteristics

- A total of ## individuals participated in the focus groups.
- The vast majority of the participants (79%) were female.
- Two-thirds of the participants were between 30 – 39 years.
- Nearly half of the focus group members self-identified as White/Caucasian (46%), followed by just over one-third who identified as Black/African American (35%).

#### B. Professional Characteristics

- All of the participants (100%) worked in a youth-serving organization.
- Two-thirds of the participants self-identified as being in a managerial position.
- Over three-quarters of the participants (76%) had been with their organization for over five years.

#### C. [Topic]

- Despite a high level of importance that they personally placed on [topic], the vast majority of participants (92%) perceived that these issues were of far lesser priority at their organizations.
- Approximately two-thirds of participants (65%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements that...

### Summary of Discussion Findings by Objective

#### Objective 1: ...

When asked to identify barriers to youth HIV testing in DC, an overwhelming majority of responses (81%) focused on... Among these remaining barriers described...

---

## Objective 2: ...

Participants first shared their perceptions that policy can influence youth HIV testing numbers and, in all three focus groups, such influence ranged from moderate to great. Participants also spoke of the challenges faced by funding, as well as by inconsistent follow-through, adherence, enforcement, and implementation of policy.

*For a description of recommendations based on these focus groups, please refer to the final section of this report, “Recommendations.”*

## Introduction

With funding from... the [host organization] sponsored three focus groups around the theme of reducing barriers to youth HIV testing in D.C. During the winter of 2010, 39 individuals participated in focus groups held in the following locations: ... This report describes the findings from these focus groups and serves as a catalyst for [host organization] to further explore the issues surrounding...

This document includes a summary of the methods used in this project, a description of the participants, responses to a participant survey, an examination of findings by objective, and key program recommendations that resulted from these focus groups.

## Methods

To assist with the development, implementation and analysis of the focus groups, the [host organization] worked with an evaluation partner... The following section describes how participants were recruited for the focus groups, the process undertaken to develop the focus group moderator’s guide and supporting materials, and how data was collected and analyzed for the purpose of this report.

## Participant Recruitment

[Include a full description of how participants were identified, screened, and recruited. Describe any incentives offered and how they were provided and accounted for.]

## Development of Focus Group Moderator’s Guide and Supplemental Materials

[Describe the steps involved in the creation of the Focus Group Moderator’s Guide. Include the purpose statement (if available) and objectives used in designing the focus group guide.

In addition, describe the process used to develop any surveys or handouts, including who created and edited the documents.]

---

## Data Collection and Analysis

[Describe the length of the groups, how data was recorded (for example, through note taking and audiotape) and how the data was analyzed (for example, “The data were coded and grouped according to theme. Findings were then organized by objective.”) Finally, describe how the survey data was analyzed and reported.]

## Participant Survey

Prior to the start of the focus groups, participants were asked to complete a confidential survey about themselves and their opinions regarding... The following two sections present these findings under the headings of “Description of Participants” and “Opinion-Based Survey Results,” respectively.

### Description of Participants

The participant survey included one section of demographic items that addressed their professional and personal characteristics. **Tables 2a** and **2b** present a detailed breakdown of this data.

**Table 2a** presents information on the professional characteristics of the participants. Such information included descriptive information about the participants’ school and their profession.

**Table 2a: Professional Characteristics of Focus Group Participants\***

	RAW Number (N=39)	Percent %
In what type of organization(s) do you work? (Check ALL that apply.)		
Non-Profit / NGO	23	62.2%
For-Profit	8	21.6%
DC Government	8	21.6%
Federal Government	1	2.7%
Other: (describe)	1	2.7%
What is the approximate number of full-time employees at your organization?		
Mean = 14		
Minimum = 4; Maximum = 26		
What is your profession?		

Manager	25	67.6%
Clerical/Administrative Staff	3	8.1%
Educator	2	5.4%
Nurse	1	2.7%
Intern	1	2.7%
Other: (Describe)	5	13.5%
How many years have you worked at this organization?		
3 – 5 years	2	5.6%
6 – 10 years	6	16.7%
11 – 15 years	12	33.3%
16 - 20 years	3	8.3%
21 - 25 years	5	13.9%
Over 25 years	8	22.2%

\*Due to missing data and/or “check all that apply” option, raw numbers may not add up to 39 and percent may not add up to 100.

Regarding their professional characteristics, nearly two-thirds of the focus group participants (62.2%) worked for a non-profit organization. There was an even split of participants working for a for-profit organization and for the DC government (21.6%). One participant (2.7%) indicated working for the federal government. The average student enrollment at a school was 710 students, with a range from 90 to 2,100 students.

In terms of their professions, two-thirds of the participants self-identified as a manager. Additionally, three participants identified as clerical/administrative staff (8.1%) and two as educators (5.4%). The remaining seven participants (18.9%) indicated roles unique to the group.

When asked how many years they had worked at their organization, participants responded with ranges starting at 3 years and ending at 25+ years. Over three-quarters of the participants had worked at their organization for over ten years, with one-third having worked for 11 – 15 years.

Below, **Table 2b** presents information on the demographic characteristics of the participants. Information in this table includes that of participants’ age, gender, and race/ethnicity.



Table 2b: Demographic Characteristics of Participants\*

	RAW Number (N=39)	Percent %
How old are you?		
25 – 29 years	1	2.8%
30 – 39 years	10	27.8%
40 – 49 years	9	25.0%
50 – 59 years	15	41.7%
60+ years	1	2.8%
What is your gender?		
Male	6	16.2%
Female	31	83.8%
What is your race/ethnicity?		
Black/African American	12	30.8%
White/Caucasian	19	48.7%
American Indian	0	0%
Hispanic/Latino	2	5.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	7.7%
Multi-Racial: Black/African American, White/Caucasian, and American Indian	1	2.6%

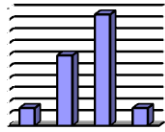
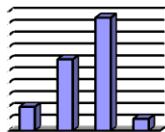
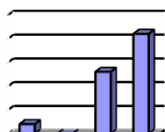
\* Due to missing data and/or “check all that apply” option, raw numbers may not add up to 39 and percent may not add up to 100.

Regarding their personal characteristics, the vast majority of the participants (83.8%) were female. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were between the ages of 40 and 59; one participant (2.8%) was under the age of 30. Nearly half of the focus group members self-identified as White/Caucasian (48.7%), followed by just under one-third who identified as Black/African American (30.8%). Three participants self-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (7.7%) and two as Hispanic/Latino (5.1%). One individual identified as multi-racial (2.6%).

## Opinion-Based Survey Results

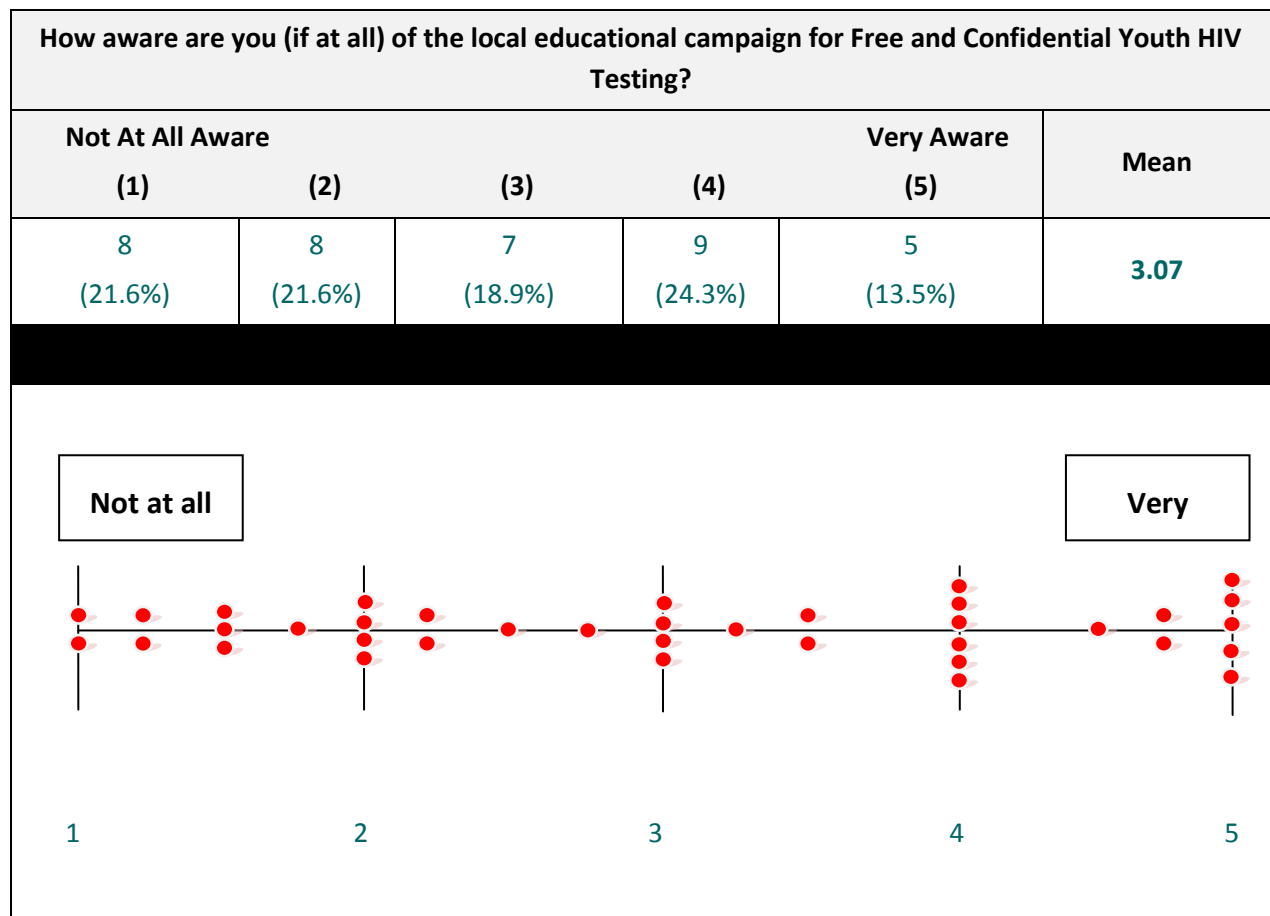
The remaining survey items focused on participant opinions regarding reducing youth barriers to HIV testing. The majority of these items specifically addressed ... More detailed findings are highlighted in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Opinions-Based Survey Results (N = 37)

Increasing youth HIV testing in DC is...	Graphic Data Representation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	MEAN
A priority at my organization.		3 (8.1%)	12 (32.4%)	19 (51.4%)	3 (8.1%)	<b>2.59</b>
A priority in my community.		4 (10.8%)	12 (32.4%)	19 (51.4%)	2 (5.4%)	<b>2.51</b>
Important to me.		2 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	13 (36.1%)	21 (58.3%)	<b>3.47</b>

As presented in **Table 3** participants were asked to reflect upon the topic of reducing barriers to youth HIV testing in Washington, D.C. As shown above...

**Table 4: Awareness of Campaign for Free and Confidential Youth HIV Testing (N = 37)**



As shown in **Table 5a**, there was a relatively even distribution of responses along the continuum, indicating a range of participant awareness of the educational campaign for free and confidential youth HIV testing. There was a slightly higher percentage of respondents on the lower end of the scale (43%) than on the upper end of the scale (37.8%), with the fewest number of participants (13.5%) indicating they were “very aware” of the mandate.

**Table 5a: Knowledge of Youth HIV Prevention Committee (N = 37)**

	Graphic Data Representation	No	Yes	Don't Know
<b>9. My workplace has a Youth HIV Prevention Committee.</b>		10 (27%)	17 (45.9%)	10 (27%)

As presented in **Table 5**, just under half of the participants indicated that they knew of their workplace having a Youth HIV Prevention Committee. These participants (N = 17) were asked a follow-up question regarding the committee. As shown in **Table 6**, participants were asked if they were members of the committee, to which four participants (23.5%) indicated yes.

**Table 6: Youth HIV Prevention Committee Membership**

	No	Yes	Don't Know
9a. Are you a member of this committee?	13 (76.5%)	4 (23.5%)	0 (0%)

## Summary of Findings by Objective

In this section, focus group findings are organized by the five focus group objectives. Opinions from all three focus groups are woven together. Commonalities are highlighted and, in cases where certain individual's and/or group's opinions deviated from the general consensus, differences are noted. Given the nature and size of the sample, caution is suggested when interpreting group-level differences; it is unknown if differences found were due to group-level characteristics, or based on the distinct composition of the participants themselves.

### Objective 1: [Describe...]

#### What are some programs or initiatives that currently address youth HIV prevention?

The focus groups began with a prolific brainstorm around the programs or initiatives that currently address youth HIV prevention. Participants from all three groups touched upon four primary categories, including: Out-of-School Programs or Initiatives; In-Schools Programs or Initiatives; DC Government; and Nothing. See **Table 8** for an itemized breakdown of participant responses.

**Table 8: Programs or Initiatives Currently Addressing Youth HIV Prevention**

<p><u>Out-of-School Programs or Initiatives (N = 42)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out-of-School Time Programs –On SCHOOL Property (N = 16)*</li> <li>• Out-of-School Time Programs – At Community-Based ORGANIZATIONS (N = 12)*</li> <li>• Out-of-School Time Programs – In CHURCHES/Places of Worship (N = 7)</li> <li>• Out-of-School Time Programs – In RECREATION Centers (N = 4)</li> <li>• Out-of-School Time Programs – In LIBRARIES (N = 3)</li> </ul> <p><u>In-School Programs or Initiatives (N = 31)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum (N = 12)</li> <li>• 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum (N = 7)*</li> </ul>
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- School-based Programs for Parents (N = 6)
- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum (N = 4)
- HIV Prevention Field Trips (N = 2)

#### D.C. Government (N = 6)

- Increased funding to local organizations (N = 4)
- Creation of Youth HIV Prevention Council (N = 2)

#### NOTHING (N = 8)

- Nothing/Not Aware/None (N = 8)\*

#### OTHER (N = 3)

- Community HIV Prevention Coordinator Positions (N = 2)
- MTV

*\*Items with an asterisk represent themes introduced in all three focus group discussions.*

## **Out-of-School Programs or Initiatives**

In all three focus groups, the most commonly discussed programs or initiatives that address youth HIV prevention were categorized as “Out-of-School Time” (N = 41). In all three focus groups, participants discussed the role of out-of-school time clubs/programs. Out-of-school time programs included those that occurred on school property before or after the school day, and included.... The out-of-school time comments also focused on programs that took place in Community-Based Organizations, such as... Discussions regarding churches or other places of worship primarily focused on “providing a safe space” after school and included how often it was open to students. At least one participant in all three groups also described a shift toward “greater openness to discuss sexual health” in places of worship today, with a participant in the first group noting that students’ HIV “statistics [are] of public information and are reported.” In two of the three focus groups, participants described additional out-of-school time programming at recreation centers and in public libraries.

## **In-School Programs or Initiatives**

Participants in all three focus groups shared specific examples of in-school programs or initiatives that addressed HIV prevention...

## **DC Government**

Again, in all three focus groups participants described how the DC government played a role in addressing youth HIV prevention. Examples of these groups included...

## **Nothing**

A total of eight participants in the three focus groups indicated that there was either “nothing” in their school that currently addressed childhood obesity, or that they were “not aware” of such programs, campaigns, or initiatives.

### Other

During the first focus group, two participants described a “Community HIV Prevention Coordinator Positions” which has increased HIV prevention efforts in their neighborhoods. Additionally, in the third focus group, one participant mentioned the perceived impact of “MTV’s new programs” on youth HIV prevention.

### Objective 2:... Describe impact of HIV testing policies

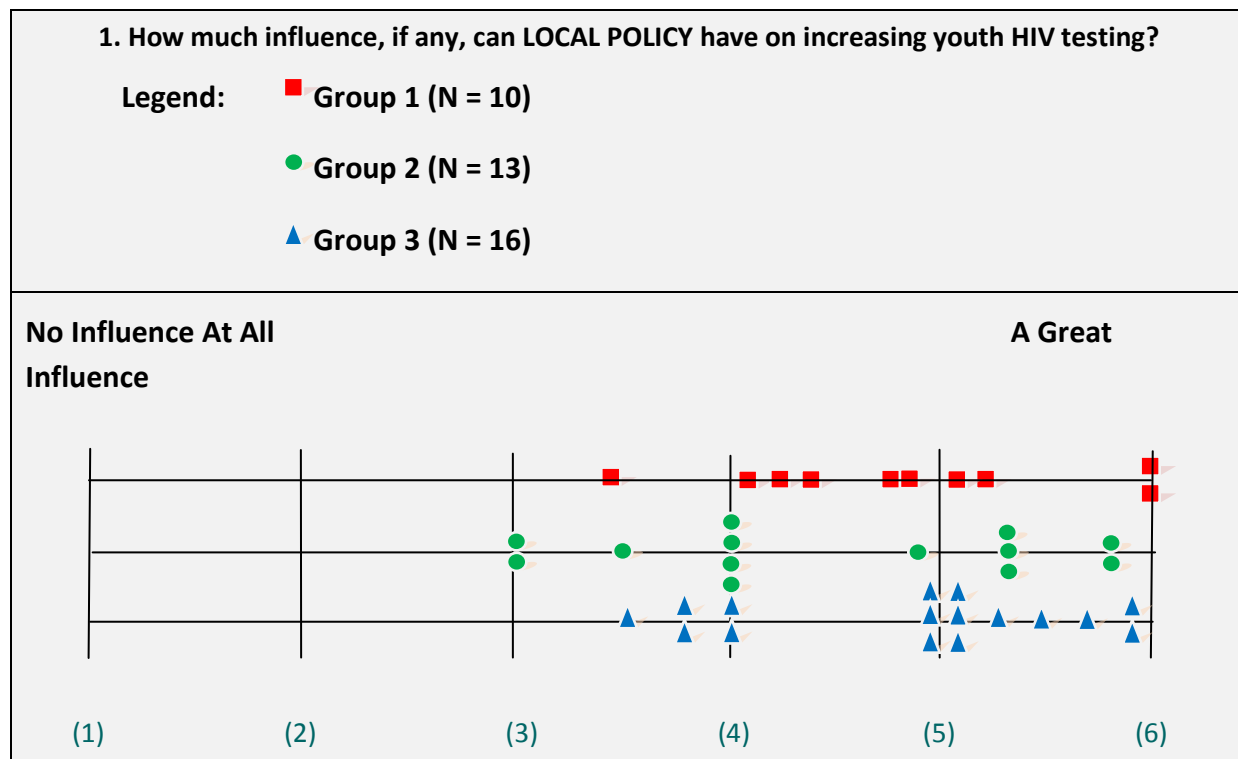
To help participants transition into a discussion on policy, they participated in a sticky dot activity. Each participant was given a sticky dot to respond to the following question posted on the wall:

#### 1. How much influence, if any, can local policy have on increasing youth HIV testing?

In two of the three focus groups, participants asked for clarification of the “policy” in terms of the extent to which it was well written and/or well enforced. In each of these cases, participants were told to base their responses on what they would consider to be “effective” policies.

Responses to both of the questions are presented in this report, beginning with **Table 9** below.

**Table 9: Perceived Influence of Local Policy on Youth HIV Testing**



As shown in **Table 9**, responses indicated participants' perceptions that local policy can have an influence on increasing youth HIV testing, and such influence can range from moderate to great. Patterns from the three focus groups were similar in nature, with responses ranging from 3 to 6, and the bulk of the responses falling between 4 and 5.5.

**Looking at Question 1 [posted], what are your reactions to the amount of influence that local policy can have on increasing youth HIV testing?**

Participants in all three focus groups responded very similarly when asked to react to the amount of influence that local policy can have on increasing youth HIV testing. Participants in each group noted that policies “can have an influence,” “can change,” “can play a big role,” and “can be influential.” However, participants also spoke of the challenges faced by inconsistent follow-through, adherence, enforcement, and implementation of policy. This was described through questions and comments such as: “Do we believe it will be followed? Who will implement it?”; “Any policy only works if followed”; “How strictly is it enforced?” In the third group, one participant noted that “HIV testing has never been given the political attention that it deserves.”

Other repeated topics were that of mandates and the specificity of the language used to craft a policy. One participant felt that only mandates would “work” because “policies have to be followed;” after asking if such a policy would be mandated, a participant asked, “is there funding?” Additionally, participants in two focus groups raised the point about the authoring of the policy. “Policy is only as good as the person who wrote it. But if [it’s] not specific enough then [we] can get around it.” An example of how a lack of specificity would be implanted was given in another focus group when a participant described how their community defined “requiring parent signatures would be taken ‘under advisement.’”

Finally, participants in the second and third focus groups brought up the issue of students’ free will, noting that, when it comes to HIV testing, “individual choice is a factor” and that we can enforce what a local policy does, “but not what kids do.”

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from the focus groups, below are outlined a series of recommendations for [host organization] to consider around the theme of increasing youth HIV testing in the District of Columbia. These recommendations are driven by participant responses during the focus groups and are intended to be concise. For a more detailed rationale of these recommendations, please refer to the main body of the report.

In addition, please note that because this report represents three focus groups composed of a relatively homogenous set of participants, it is recommended that caution be used when generalizing these findings; they are intended to be combined with additional research to support [host organization] in the potential creation and implementation of District-wide efforts to increase youth HIV testing.

### **[Recommendation #1].**

[Description/Justification]

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**[Recommendation #2].**

[Description/Justification]

**[Recommendation #3].**

[Description/Justification]

**Appendix A: Focus Group Moderator's Guide**

**Appendix B: Participant Survey**

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## Appendix F: Exercises

This appendix includes the following exercises from the workbook:

- Focus Group Recruitment
  - The Moderator/Facilitator Role
  - Do's and Don'ts of a Focus Group
  - Features of Focus Group Formats
  - Questions to Ponder
-

## Exercise: Focus Group Recruitment

Select the best answer for each question or sentence.

Answers

- |  |                          |                                     |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. What group type is brought together by a focus group?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | A. 6-12 people                      |
| 2. How many individuals should be included in a focus group?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | B. Over-recruit                     |
| 3. When selecting potential candidates, what group should be carefully considered?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | C. Designated group                 |
| 4. Individuals within the focus group should be ____.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | D. Relatively comparable group      |
| 5. To get the representative number for your focus group, you should ____.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | E. Similar                          |
| 6. What other ways are participants recruited?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | F. General call                     |
| 7. A particular type of participant that matches the focus group criteria can be selected using this method? | <input type="checkbox"/> | G. Incentives                       |
| 8. When possible, what should be given to increase participation?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | H. Individually selected or invited |

Answers: 1-D; 2-A; 3-C; 4-E; 5-B; 6- F; 7-H. 8-G.

## Exercise: The Moderator/Facilitator Role

Fill in each statement with the correct missing word.

1. The key to a successful focus group is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. This person ensures that the discussions stay on \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Encourage feedback from \_\_\_\_\_ participants.
4. Obtain participant's informed \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Establish \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Allow for brief \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Withhold \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Listen \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Begin with an \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Manage the \_\_\_\_\_.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Choices: judgment, point, carefully, moderator/facilitator, ice-breaker, group, ground rules, introduction, all

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### ANSWERS:

1.) moderator/facilitator 2.) point 3.) all 4.) consent 5.) ground rules 6.) introductions 7.) judgment 8.) carefully 9.) ice breaker 10.) group

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## Exercise: Do's and Don'ts of a Focus Group

Please answer the following questions.

1. Name two or three **Do's and Don'ts**.
  2. Why should **participants not eat** during a focus group?
  3. Why are **markers of different colors** needed?
  4. What is the **role of the note taker**?
  5. Why is it important to **stress** that all information is **confidential**?
  6. What should be done if a participant does not agree to be **taped or recorded**?
  7. Why is it important to have a facilitator **sit amongst the group**?
  8. Why should **non-participants be excluded** from an active focus group?
  9. What extra **Do's** should be included? Why?
  10. What extra **Don'ts** should be included? Why?
-

## Exercise: Features of Focus Group Formats

Fill in the Features columns with either ✓ for "Yes" or ✗ for "No" based on the various focus group formats.

Features	Traditional	Telephone	Online
Require participants' technology proficiency			
Cost effective			
Limited size			
Transcript availability (immediately)			
Non-verbal cues reading			
Observer availability			
Participant direct attention			
Participant diversity			
Relative anonymity			
Computers and internet requirement			
Reading of information during focus groups			
Lengthy data analysis			
Facilitator technical proficiency			

### Legend:

✓ = Yes

✗ = No

---

## Exercise: Questions to Ponder

5. What **focus group format works best** for your intended group and specific objectives?

6. What next steps are needed to:

Get Started?

---

Conduct the Focus Group?

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Conclude the Focus Group?

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7. What **learning is required** on behalf of the moderator/facilitator on the modality?

8. What **other considerations** are needed based on the **focus group format**?

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