

OBJECTIVE:

Youth will learn strategies for running a successful focus group and agree on a focus group protocol.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Butcher paper, tape, and markers.
- Copy *Focus Group Facilitator Roles and Responsibilities* (Master Copy 3.16a), *Tools for Focus Group Facilitators* (Master Copy 3.16b) and *Check List for Focus Group Facilitators* (Master Copy 3.16c) before the session: one copy for each participant.
- Three main responsibilities of a facilitator written up on the board or butcher paper (see III below).
- Copies of *Interview Protocol Design* worksheet (Master Copy 3.14b) developed in Session 14.
- Copy and cut out the *Facilitation Scenarios* (Master Copy 1.14c).

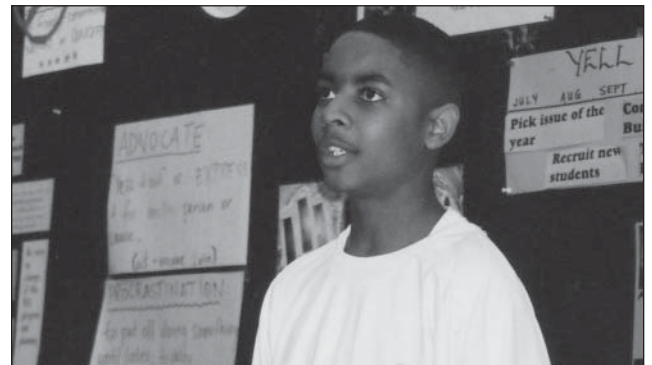
I. OPENING: ATTENDANCE, SNACKS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AGENDA OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

Remind students of their talk show presentations from the previous session and what they discussed about focus groups. In this session, they will practice facilitating a focus group with the interview questions they developed for their research project.

II. WARM UP: SILENT LINE UP BY TV HOURS (10 MINUTES)

Ask youth to stand up and silently arrange themselves in a line according to the number of hours of TV they watch each week – from fewest number of hours of TV watched to most (point to where the most and the fewest go). They can make signals and nod, but nothing else. Once they are lined up, have them go down the line and say how many hours they watch. Debrief: Ask the people who watch the most TV, what do we know about the people who watch the least TV? Then ask the people who watch the least what they know about the people who watch the most. Have them generate as many ideas as they can. Then ask the group, “What do we know about the people in the middle?” After the group has named all of their assumptions about each of the groups based on the amount of TV watched per week, ask “What do we really

Focus Group Facilitation



know about anyone based on the amount of TV they watch?” Can we really know anything about someone for sure based on the amount of TV they watch? What else would you need to know? This is a great opportunity to talk about how the mind likes to categorize and make meaning, even when all of the facts are not present, and about how we make assumptions about people and things based on limited information. Tie this to the importance of evidence and inquiry!

III. FOCUS GROUP FACILITATION (25 MINUTES)

Explain that, like the host of a talk show, a focus group facilitator has a particular role. This person asks questions to get people talking and keeps the conversation going. This process of keeping everything in order and guiding the conversation is called facilitating. To facilitate means to make easier or less difficult, to help move forward. A facilitator is responsible for three main things:

1. Making sure everyone has a chance to participate.
2. Creating a safe and trusting atmosphere.
3. Listening and asking questions.

Step 1: As a group, brainstorm strategies for recruiting focus group participants and facilitating a focus group. What are some activities or strategies that a facilitator could use to get people to share their ideas and opinions? Think about a talk show host: how does he or she get people to talk and express themselves? (Record these.)

RESEARCH METHODS AND TOOLS

Session 16

90 minutes



If you decide to run a focus group, you will need to recruit at least six to 10 people for an hour-long conversation. What are some ideas you have for getting people to participate in your focus group? (Record these.)

You either audio-tape or video-tape a focus group to record what everyone says. What are some ideas for how you could organize the main ideas from a focus group when you listen or watch your tape? (Record these)

Step 2: Hand out the *Tools for Focus Group Facilitators* and *Check List for Focus Group Facilitators*. Review the sheets with the youth and have them add ideas from the brainstorm.

IV. FOCUS GROUP ROLE PLAY AND PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT (40 MINUTES)

Step 1: Divide youth into three groups, and give each group a copy of the interview protocol they developed for their research project in Session 14. Have each group assign a facilitator.

Step 2: Give groups 10 minutes to plan and practice a scenario where the facilitator is doing a good job with at least one of the three main responsibilities: listening, creating a trusting atmosphere, or making sure everyone has a chance to participate. Give youth about 10 minutes to plan their scenario and then three- five minutes to present it to the group. Make sure they are using the questions from their interview protocol in the planning and role play.

Step 3: After each group presents, ask for feedback from everyone. What did the facilitator do well? (Remember to bracket constructive criticism with positives!). Revisit the interview protocol with the youth and ask if they would revise any of the questions for a focus group. Which questions work the best? Which ones would you revise? Anything that would be interesting to add?

V. CLOSING (10 MINUTES)

Outline next steps for planning and implementing your focus group. You can also assign this as a small-team take-home task.

Facilitation Tip:

If you have not already done so, this is a great point to introduce a facilitation workshop for youth: See Unit 1, Sessions 12 and 14 for some ideas.

Focus Group Facilitator Roles and Responsibilities

- Set group agreements up front.
- Keep the discussion moving and on topic.
- Ensure that participants feel safe and respected.
- Encourage people to have different ideas.
- Make sure every participant has an opportunity to speak and to listen.
- Include a co-facilitator who takes notes, manages the audiotape, and helps with focus group logistics.
- Stay neutral! Avoid reinforcing one point of view over another.
- Help people expand on their comments by asking follow-up questions like, "Can you give an example of what you mean?" or "Can you say more about that?"
- Use body language that shows you are interested in what people are saying.
- Allow participants time to write down their responses so it gives them time to think.
- Set up a group dynamic. If people are talking too much to you and not to the group, tell them you are going to leave the room for a few minutes to let them talk about a particular issue and when you return you want to know what they came up with together.
- Allow for silence. Pause before changing topics or asking follow-up questions. This is the time that people who are hesitating may jump into the discussion.

Tools for Focus Group Facilitators

Brainstorming is useful to generate lists of ideas/thoughts/opinions on core subjects. (For example: What makes a teacher a good teacher?). Use a flip chart to record ideas.

Mapping is useful in understanding how people see and relate to their physical and social environments. People in the focus group can be given a map and asked to draw where they hang out, or where they feel most comfortable. Relationship maps can also provide information about personal relationships. Participants can be given a diagram with them as a circle in the middle surrounded by circles, and asked to fill in the circles with the people, organizations, and other resources around them.

Collages and drawing are useful for producing conversations about a subject. Participants can be asked to make a collage about a topic and then present and discuss its meaning with the group. You can analyze the collage as well as the discussion.

Guided visualizations are useful for getting people to “think outside the box” and develop concrete images of where they are going and what they would like to make happen. For example, have the group imagine a classroom in which everyone feels respected and then ask them what they saw: what did it look like?

Check marks or stars are useful during brainstorming sessions. If someone repeats an answer that is the same or similar to what is already recorded, write a check mark or star next to the idea. This allows the group to see that the idea was raised by several people and also helps people feel that their comments are heard and relevant.

“Parking lots” are useful for tracking ideas or concerns that are not relevant to the current conversation but are still important to follow up on at a later date. Prior to the session, designate a space on the board or paper to record these topics or ideas. At the end of the session, you may want to refer back to these and ask for some ideas or strategies in assuring that they are incorporated or addressed.

Snacks and drinks help keep people focused during the session. If you are recording the session, avoid crunchy snacks or individual plastic bottles. Snacks also let people know that you are thinking of their welfare and are appreciative of their time.

Check List for Focus Group Facilitators

BEFORE THE FOCUS GROUP:

- ✓ **Set the TIME:** The focus group should be at least 60 minutes and no more than 90 minutes (25 percent of sessions is usually devoted to socializing and eating).
- ✓ **Pick the PLACE:** It should be a place that is convenient for people to get to, comfortable for everyone, and quiet. You don't want to hold a focus group in a room where others are walking in and out, or where there is another activity going on.
- ✓ **Recruit PARTICIPANTS:** Think about what kind of people can help you answer your research questions. You need to identify people who have diverse experiences and perspectives to give you useful information. Depending on your question, you may want to have representatives from all different groups (all ages), or just one group (Latino students). Also consider the comfort level of participants: Would a single-gender group get you more candid information than a coed group?
- ✓ **Provide INCENTIVES:** Food during the focus group, gift certificates, prizes, and the like can increase participation.

DURING THE FOCUS GROUP:

INTRODUCE YOURSELF, THE PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP, AND GROUND RULES.

- ✓ Explain the purpose of the focus group.
- ✓ Thank participants for being there, and let them know that they are important to your study.
- ✓ Explain the facilitator's and recorder's roles and ask permission to video or audiotape. Get signed consent forms.
- ✓ Establish ground rules (e.g., everyone should participate; all ideas are equally valid; there are not right or wrong answers).
- ✓ Ask if there are other agreements to add.

USE AN ICE-BREAKER TO INTRODUCE EVERYONE AND INCREASE COMFORT.

ASK YOUR QUESTIONS.

- ✓ Have a list of questions in an order that starts broad and moves to more specifics.
- ✓ Use open-ended questions.
- ✓ Ask follow-up questions like, "Tell me more about what you are saying."

CLOSE THE DISCUSSION.

- ✓ Thank everyone for coming.
- ✓ Let them know how you will use the information.
- ✓ Get their contact information so that you can send them your final report/findings.

AFTER THE FOCUS GROUP:

- ✓ Review your audio/video tape of the discussion. Listen for the most common ideas. Pay attention to who says what. For example: Do adults tend to think differently than students?
- ✓ Send thank you notes if you have time.