



Activity 3.5: Facilitating a Focus Group

Tools Needed

Tool 3.7: Benefits and Challenges of Using Focus Groups
Tool 3.8: Tips for Focus Group Facilitation

Materials Needed

Butcher Paper
Markers
Draft focus group guide
Flip chart with focus group questions written out
Butcher paper with sample ground rules written out
Digital Voice Recorder
Pieces of paper with different roles for focus group participants

Time Needed

2 hours

Purpose of Activity

This activity will give participants a chance to practice facilitating a focus group. It will also allow the participants to become familiar with the focus group guide and to identify common challenges in facilitating a focus group.

Goals

To practice leading and guiding the focus group discussion
To test focus group questions for flow and clarity

Part I: Running Your Focus Group (35 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions

1. Facilitator should briefly go through “Benefits and Challenges of Using Focus Groups” (Tool 3.7).
2. Next, review “Tips for Focus Group Facilitation” (Tool 3.8), answering questions and clarifying as needed.
3. Finally, walk participants through the focus group guide, making sure to explain each section and read all focus group questions out loud.

Part II. Mock Focus Group (1 hour)

Facilitator Instructions

1. Before the training, prepare slips of paper with the following roles for the focus group participants (each role presents a common challenge for focus group facilitation):

“The Debater:” Disagrees with other participants and tries to turn the conversation into a debate.

“The Wanderer:” Brings up different topics, unrelated to the focus group questions.

“The Quiet One:” Gives short answers with one or two words and does not elaborate.

“The Talker:” Dominates the conversation, interrupts other participants.

“The Counselor:” Tries to help others fix their problems, providing specific advice.

“The Disrupter:” Answers cell phone and/or gets up in the middle of the conversation to go to the bathroom or take a call.



2. Choose someone to be the facilitator. Everyone else will be the focus group participants.
3. Ask the facilitator to leave the room for a few moments.
4. Hand each participant the slip of paper that specifies which “role” they will play. Ask each participant to play that role during the mock focus group. Answer any questions about the different roles.
8. Begin focus group. Depending on time, go through all or some of the guide. Be sure to keep track of time so that facilitators can practice keeping on schedule.
9. Afterward, debrief for 10 minutes by asking participants to provide feedback on the mock focus group as well as the workshop as a whole. Use the questions below:

NOTE: In addition to the “roles” you may also want to create “characters” for the participants to play. For example, if your focus group participants are public housing residents, you could have people create the following characters: someone who has been threatened with eviction, someone that has been waiting for over a year for a repair; and someone who feels like the tenant association doesn’t represent their concerns. This may help to put participants at ease and ensure a variety of issues for the facilitator to address.

5. Set the room up as if you were having a focus group. Participants should sit in a circle, close enough that the recorder can pick up all of their voices.
6. Put the flip chart with focus group questions in a place that all participants can see.
7. Explain that the facilitator is going to lead the group through a mini-focus group using the focus group guide we have created for our project.

Feedback/Debrief on Mock Focus Group Questions

- What worked or was challenging for the facilitator?
- How easy is it to ask the questions?
- Do the questions seem clear and easy to understand?
- Do the questions flow easily from one topic to another?
- How can the questions/process be improved?
- Is the facilitator doing a good job in asking follow-up questions? What are some suggestions you have for improvement?