Focus Groups
Design and Process

What is a focus group?
- A focus group consists of small group discussions used for the purpose of learning more about the experiences, perceptions, and emotions of a segment of a specific population. A focus group collects data from homogeneous people in a group situation through a focused discussion.
- The intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants.
- Focus group interviewing is about paying attention, being open to what people have to say and being nonjudgmental. It is about creating a comfortable environment for people to share. It is about being careful and systematic with the things people tell you.

When is a focus group used?
- A focus group can be used for planning advertising campaigns, policy making, goal setting, and quality improvement.
- A focus group can also be used for evaluating customer satisfaction, employee/student engagement, organizational development, and the like.

What is the process?
- First, plan and prepare.
  - What is the purpose of this focus group? What is the problem being addressed? What information do you want? How will the findings be used?
  - Who can give you the type of information you want? How many groups do you need? What are your available resources?
  - What are the rights and ethical boundaries surrounding your participants?
  - How much time do you have?
  - What questions should you incorporate?
    - Write open-ended questions to spark conversation instead of single-word responses.
    - Construct simple questions using familiar terms and avoiding judgmental tones or phrases.
    - Avoid technical jargon, acronyms, or other ideas that may confuse participants.
    - Write more questions than what is needed, and divide them into levels based on priority.
- Second, conduct the focus group using a moderator and recorder/note-taker.

How should you establish a welcoming and open environment that allows for honest responses?
   a. Indicate that all cell phones or portable devices should be turned off or on silent and put away.
   b. Emphasize that no right or wrong answer exists and that respondents are welcome to indicate when they do not know the answer to a question.
   c. Ask all respondents to listen respectfully to each other and wait until the previous person is finished before they provide feedback.

What is the role of the moderator?
   a. The moderator facilitates the discussion and listens attentively.
   b. He/she presents singular questions that will prompt conversation.
   c. The moderator allows for time to process the question while also probing deeper should the situation require it.
   d. He/she manages the conversation so that all participants have roughly the same amount of time to speak.

What is the role of the recorder/note-taker?
   a. The recorder notes basic information such as the date, time, topic, and number/demographics of participants.
   b. He/she also summarizes responses from all points of view.
   c. The recorder captures quotes of special importance as well as nonverbal communication (i.e., body language) of participants.
   d. He/she helps monitor the time.

Finally, review and summarize.
What should be done with the observations?
   a. Spend the 15-30 minutes immediately following the focus group interview to debrief and review notes.
   b. Make note of themes and ideas that can be pursued further with subsequent focus groups.

What is placed in the summary report?
   a. Finalize overall themes (i.e., big ideas) of responses.
   b. Provide summaries of responses of individual questions.
   c. Incorporate direct quotes to provide insight.
   d. Remove all focus group participants’ names to protect confidentiality.
   e. Proofread, edit, and clarify as needed.

What are some tips?
   • Keep the topic of the interview focused.
   • Select participants who maintain similarities in ways that are important to the research goals.
   • Include 6–12 participants per session.
   • Conduct a minimum of three (3) focus groups per topic.