**UC ANR Needs Assessment Workshop, September 14, 2018**

**BEST PRACTICES FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS**

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**Before the focus group**

* Invest adequate time to acquire background knowledge on the focus group topic.

**At the beginning of the focus group**

* Assure participants that their responses are confidential. Participants may be concerned about the potential repercussions resulting from sharing their opinions.
* Tell participants that they don’t need to answer any questions that they are not comfortable answering.
* Tell participants that they can withdraw their participation at any time during the focus group.
* If the focus group is being recorded, remind participants of this before turning on the recorder(s).
* Take a few minutes to orient participants to the purpose of the focus group.

**During the focus group**

* Honor the knowledge and experience of the participants.
* Show respect for participants.
* Try to have one participant talking at a time.
* Practice good listening skills.
* Practice good communication skills.
* Maintain a permissive and non-threatening environment, so participants are not forced to change their opinions out of any external pressure.
* Refrain from sharing your personal views on any topic.
* Keep the conversation going and balance diverse opinions.
* Use a variety of strategies to involve people.
* Try to connect with emotions, attitudes and unconscious behaviors of the participants.
* Use skillful probing, have pauses and good body language (e.g.: have eye contact with all the participants).
* Know when and how to move on to the next question.
* Encourage participation. Try to involve everyone. But, don’t overdo it.
* Encourage both positive and negative feedback.
* Deal effectively with negative feedback. Don’t get angry or frustrated with negative feedback.
* Refrain from asking “why” questions that participants may be unable to answer. (e.g.: Once the participants give an explanation for their opinions, don’t keep asking “why” questions to an extent they start feeling uncomfortable).
* Paraphrase responses and read out to ensure accuracy and agreement.
* Quickly adapt to the environment and culture of the group.
* Be empathetic.
* Be prepared for unexpected situations.
* Use humor in conversations. However, ensure that is appropriate for the culture and context.

**After the focus group**

* Tell participants how the data will be used and ask if they want to see the results.
* Provide a rough timeline for the project.
* Share your contact information and encourage participants to contact you if they have any follow-up questions.

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