

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 explain 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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