Designing and Conducting Focus Groups

September 29, 2016
www.vantage-eval.com

The Five Hs (and a W) of Focus Groups

Who
What
When
Where
How
Why
Collect Qualitative Data

Why evaluate?

Motivate Funders and Donors

Improve Programs and Services

Monitor Mission Achievement

Our participants have been telling us valuable stories. We've learned so much about what we're doing right and where we can improve.

Did you get their emails? If so, we can survey them and get some real evidence.

freshspectrum.com
Strengths of Qualitative Data

✔ Explore a topic you know little about
✔ Explore an emotionally sensitive topic
✔ Explore issues with a difficult to access group
✔ Capture the “lived experience” of your program participants
✔ Give voice to the “how” and “why” of your quantitative results

Conduct Focus Groups, Specifically

Why
Top three reasons I ♥ FGs

1. Cost and time efficiencies
2. Warm fuzzy feelings
3. Quality of responses

Why

Practice!

The Five Hs (and a W) of Focus Groups

Who
What
Why
When
Where
How
Do you ask?
Clear Opened-ness

Types of Qualitative Questions

Opinion and Values
Experience and Behavior
Sensory
Knowledge
Feeling
Background

Leading Questions: So getting children to like books is really hard, right?
Implied Categories: How satisfied are you with this program?
Vague questions: Can you tell us about your experience with reading aloud?
Practice!

The Five Hs (and a W) of Focus Groups

Who
What
Where
When
Why
How

Do you ask?
Purposeful and Strategic Sampling
Practice!

The Five Hs (and a W) of Focus Groups

Who
What
Why
Where
When
How

Do you ask?
Facilitation Basics
Practice!

The Five Hs (and a W) of Focus Groups

Who
What
Why
Where
When
How

Do you conduct a FG?
Logistics Basics
Insider Tips
- Consider incentives
- Feed people (quietly)
- Provide nametags and allow for introductions
- Record the session
- Informed consent

Anonymity or Confidentiality?
- Anonymity: Identifying information will not be collected
- Confidentiality: Only the researcher can identify the responses on individual subjects

“The information you share will be combined with information from others and shared in aggregate with [org name] staff and our funders. When reporting on the results from the focus group, only anonymous and/or aggregated information will be shared.”

Other Ethical Considerations
- Informed Consent:
  - Why they are there
  - What’s in it for them
  - What the information will be used for
- Sensitive Topics:
  - Only ask what you absolutely need to know
- Invasiveness:
  - When asking about sensitive topics, frame questions gently
Thank you!

Are there any lingering questions?

As you leave, submit business card for free one-on-one session!

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# Qualitative vs. Quantitative Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qualitative Data</th>
<th>Quantitative Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Uncover meaning by understanding what, how, and why</td>
<td>Causal relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prediction by numbers and quantification</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment of Data</strong></td>
<td>Identify and define general concepts</td>
<td>Isolate and define variables</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identify patterns</td>
<td>Test hypotheses</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>Questionnaires (Surveys)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In-depth Interviews</td>
<td>Experiments</td>
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<td>Focus Groups</td>
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<td>Document Analysis</td>
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<td><strong>Question Focus</strong></td>
<td>Elicit respondents experiences, open to the full range of possible experiences</td>
<td>Pre-determined response choices</td>
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<td><strong>Sampling</strong></td>
<td>Purposefully selected group</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Random sample</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus of Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Meaning through rich description</td>
<td>Prediction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Comparison to identify similarities and differences</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process and context</td>
<td>Generalizability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled</td>
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| **Desirable characteristics of a researcher** | Creative and Critical Thinker  
Maturity and Self-Discipline  
Flexible and Reflexive  
Empathy and Sympathy  
Careful Observer—of people  
Interpersonal Communication Skills | Creative and Critical Thinker  
Maturity and Self-Discipline  
Flexible and Reflexive  
Careful Observer—of data  
Statistical Expertise |
Tips for Designing Qualitative Questions

**DO** frame questions as openly but clearly as possible

Consider whether the question can be worded using one of the following frames:

- **Experience and Behavior:**
  - To elicit behaviors, experiences, actions, and activities observable if the interviewer had been present
  - e.g., If I followed you through the program, what would I have seen you doing?

- **Opinion and Values:**
  - To understand what was going on in a participant’s head—what they think about some experience/issue
  - e.g., What do you think about the presentation on immigration status?

- **Feeling:**
  - To elicit emotional responses to experiences
  - e.g., How do you feel about that? – Often a follow-up to an experience or sensory question

- **Knowledge:**
  - To understand what a participant knows about something—factual information
  - e.g., What services does the FIRC provide?

- **Sensory:**
  - To elicit a participant’s sensory experience, including what is seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled
  - e.g., What does the home visitor say when she arrives?

- **Background:**
  - Characteristics of the participant; helps to locate the participant in relation to other people, but using self description rather than closed categories
  - e.g., Where did you grow up?

**DO** probe for more information

  - e.g., Can you tell me more about that? In what ways was it difficult? When you say you eat healthier, what does healthier mean to you?
Tips for Designing Qualitative Questions

DON’T ask questions with implied categories
  e.g., How satisfied are you with this program? (Implies a Very Satisfied to Very Dissatisfied scale)
  Has the food you eat changed since you participated in this program? (Implies a yes/no)

DON’T ask leading questions
  e.g., So finding housing in Summit county is really hard, right?

DO frame questions as specifically as possible
  Practice splitting questions that ask about multiple topics, e.g., tell me about the strengths and weaknesses of the program

DO pay attention to question order
  Start easy with warm up questions about background, etc, then progress to sensitive subjects
# Ways to Select Individuals for Qualitative Data Collection (Sampling)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Why</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confirming &amp; Disconfirming Cases</td>
<td>If you see an emerging pattern about a program, seek out people who had the same or different experiences</td>
<td>Increases confidence in your conclusions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snowball</td>
<td>Ask each interviewee, who else should I talk to about this topic?</td>
<td>Helps access a population you may not otherwise be able to ask</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extreme Case</td>
<td>Seek out people that are unusual or special in some way</td>
<td>Extreme cases can teach us how to improve programming for typical program (e.g., what about their experience made it so successful and how can we incorporate those elements for all)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intense Case</td>
<td>Seek out people that experienced a program intensely, for example, that attend every Dialogue over Dinner</td>
<td>Utilizes the people who have a lot to say about a topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Typical Case</td>
<td>Seek out people who have normal or average experiences</td>
<td>Understand what happens for “most people,” profile a population’s experience with a program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stratified</td>
<td>Identify groups that may differ in their experience of a program (e.g., ethnic groups, parents of elementary school vs. middle school children) and seek out individuals from each group</td>
<td>Allows you to compare and contrast the experiences of different groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Ask whoever is around or easiest to access</td>
<td>Used because it is the easiest (saves time and money), but in the long run sacrifices quality. When you are collecting data from a small number of people, it is important to think about how to get the most out of that data</td>
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Focus Group Preparation Checklist

2-3 weeks in advance:

☐ Recruit participants (6-8 per group, ideally)
☐ Develop focus group questions and consent form
☐ Assign facilitator and note taker roles

2 days in advance:

☐ Finalize focus group questions and consent form
☐ Finalize participant incentives
☐ Plan snacks (quiet snacks, e.g., water and fruit; avoid chips and anything that crunches)
☐ Test recording device

Bring to focus group:

☐ Consent forms (and pens)
☐ Snacks
☐ Name tags/tents
☐ Recording device and extra batteries, if applicable
☐ Incentives
☐ Sign-in sheet (or, have notetaker take head count)

Immediately after focus group:

☐ Document “first reactions”
☐ Transfer recording to computer
Sample Qualitative Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

The purpose of this focus group is to better understand the experiences of [program participants/Summit county residents/other] with [insert program or service]. Specifically, we are interested in your perspectives about the [relevance of the parenting topics presented at these programs, as well as your thoughts on the frequency and format of the programs]. Information we learn during this focus group will help inform future programming. In appreciation of your time, all participants will receive [insert incentive].

Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to leave the focus group at any time. All the information you share with me will remain confidential. The information you share will be combined with information from others and shared in aggregate with [other staff, board, community?]. When reporting on the results from the focus group, only anonymous and/or aggregated information will be shared. The focus group will be recorded for analysis purposes only and will not be shared with anyone outside [organization].

Do you consent to participate in this focus group?

______________________________  __________________
Signature                          Date