The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of Focus Groups

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Abstract & Outcomes
Learning the fundamentals of developing, conducting and utilizing focus group data can be an intimidating project. We will look at the who, what, when, where, why and how to use focus groups as you determine ways to improve your advising program on your campus.

You will learn:
- The value of using focus groups
- How to design a focus group
- Opportunities for campus-wide partnerships
- How to acquire and use the data
- Why feedback is essential to your campus

What is a Focus Group
A small group of 5 – 10 individuals who are guided through a topic-based discussion by a skilled facilitator.

The Value of Using Focus Groups
- Ability to gather opinions and needs
- Observations of nonverbal cues
- Gathering data through conversation
- Depth and complexity
- Group members stimulate new thoughts
- Thoughtful answers
- Ability for participants to add meaning
- Voices and stories are powerful
- Data is empowering
Your Foundation

Knowing what you want to learn more about is key.

Designing Your Focus Group

Who to Involved

- Inviting participants
- Identify a skilled facilitator
- Identify a note taker and recorder

Think about who to involve once the data is gathered…. 

Participants

- Should you have more than one group?
- Will you be offering an incentive for participation?
- What is your inclusion/exclusion criteria for screening?
- Do potential participants understand the purpose of the focus group?

Participants

- Participants should be comfortable with each other but may not know each other
- Will Everyone feel comfortable? Things to think about:
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Power
  - Cliques
- Identify a representative sample
  - Is every population type fairly represented?
**Recruiting Participants**

- Nomination
- Random
- Existing Group
- Role/Position Type
- Volunteers
- Think about a 10-20% no show rate

**Facilitators**

- **Lead Facilitator**
  - Participant greeter
  - Introduction
  - Listener and Thinker
  - Knowledge of the topic
  - Personal views and ego at the door
  - Able to manage challenging group dynamics

- **Assistant Facilitator**
  - Participant greeter
  - Physical space
  - Note taker – words and nonverbal cues
  - Operates equipment
  - Allows Lead Facilitator to run the show

**Preparing**

- Confirm interest and availability – keep a list
- Remind participants a few days prior
- Prepare incentive if appropriate
- Choose a location
  - Easy to find – convenient
  - Available parking
  - Comfortable/familiar
- Share time commitment – 1.5 – 2 hours
- Order food and beverages
- Explore need for consent forms and intake forms
- Confirm recording equipment

**Think Environment**

- Create a comfortable atmosphere
- Create a circle for seating
- Place the recording device in a location seen by participants and where it can best record
- Place food and beverages in an area where participants can easily access them
- Be aware of lighting, temperature, and noise
Conducting the Focus Group

1. Welcome participants at arrival
2. General welcome
3. Introductions of lead facilitator and assistant
4. Intro to the purpose, use of results, and selection criteria
5. Share guidelines
   1. Respectful of others and possible different points of view
   2. Agreement is not necessary just respect
   3. Recording session – only one person speaking at a time
   4. Time to turn off cell phones
   5. Role of lead facilitator and assistant
   6. Guided discussion

Concluding the Focus Group

6. Begin to ask questions knowing
   1. Need for asking all the questions in allotted time
   2. Need for hearing from all participants
   3. Need for probing questions
   4. Need for paraphrasing comments
   5. Need for dealing with the challenging participants

7. Thank all participants
8. Share incentive if appropriate
9. Facilitators debrief to capture initial thoughts

Questions

During the Focus Group

- Open-ended questions
- Inquire about characteristics of the topic
- Inquire about influences
- Reflection of past experience
- Ask for examples

Questions

Concluding the Focus Group

- Ask about what is most important after reflecting on the entire focus group conversation
- Provide a summary and ask for feedback
- Return to the purpose and ask if anything was missed
The Data

Compiling

• Take field notes during focus group
  • Reactions
  • Insights
  • Passionate comments
  • Nonverbal communication
  • Notable quotes
• Note reflections immediately after focus group
• Transcribe recordings
  • Each participant comment should have separate line
• Insert notes into transcription
• Excel, Word, Paper???

The Data

Analyzing

• Facilitator debrief at conclusion
• Listen to recording while reviewing transcript
• Review field notes
• Identify commonalities
• Compare with others and agree on categories
• Identify themes by question then overall
• Agree on overarching common themes
• Write report, share, edit
• Consider visual of common themes
• Share final report

Now What?

Informed

Conversation is Key!

Using the Data

• Bring people together to formally discuss the report
• Give oral briefing highlighting the purpose
• Allow for questions
• Highlight meaningful findings
• Engage the group
  • What did they find interesting?
  • What surprised them?
  • Have we identified any gaps through this process?
  • Do the findings match our learning outcomes, goals, mission, vision?
  • How can we improve the current state?
• Have we discovered information that would be helpful to other groups?
Using the Data

- Who else needs this information?
- Where would we like to be? By when?
- How can we change our delivery for improvement?
- Short term changes
- Long term strategies
- Create a reasonable plan
- What are our next steps?

Curiosity remains.....
- What questions remain unanswered?

The Beauty of Feedback

- Creates informed decision-making
- Allows programs to identify gaps
- Vulnerability with a plan!
- Empowers students, advisors, leaders
- Creates community around a common goal
- Creates a culture of conversation

Opportunities for Partnerships

- Do you have similar data needs with another area?
  - Share the focus group – share the work and cost!!!
  - Share expertise - utilize facilitators from other areas
  - Space for focus groups
- Data conversations build partnerships
  - Working together to influence change
  - Working together to celebrate accomplishments
  - Working together towards a common vision and mission

Thank You for Attending

Your Feedback is Important

Your thoughts and opinions help shape future NACADA Institutes!

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