**FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH**

A focus group may be a good way to gather data from several participants in a short amount of time. Though it sounds like an easy way to do things, it takes a lot of thought and planning to prepare for a productive focus group. A focus group does not relieve the researcher from the ethics and etiquette of good research.

**Before the Focus Group**

* Define the purpose, i.e. objectives of the focus group. This should be very specific. Don’t try to discuss too many topics.
* Establish a timeline. When to recruit, when to hold the focus group, when to finish the project report.
* Identify participants.
  + How many
  + Key attributes
  + Names and contact information
* Generate the questions. Test them out. Be sure they are really pertinent to your purpose.
* Develop a script. There are usually three parts:
  + Opening: facilitator welcomes the group, reiterates the purpose and context, explains the ground rules, makes introductions, etc.
  + Questions: the facilitator asks the questions.
  + Closing: session wrap up including thanking the participants, telling them how the data will be used, when the project will be completed.
* Select a facilitator. A focus group facilitator should be able to deal tactfully with outspoken group members, keep the discussion on track, and make sure every participant is heard. The facilitator should be knowledgeable about the project.
* Arrange a location. This should comfortably accommodate the participants. Consider ambiance, accessibility, availability. If you are planning to record the session, is the technology available.
* Recruitment/Invitation. Should address the following
  + When
  + Where
  + How long
  + Topics
  + Other participants
  + How to join

**Conduct the focus group**

* Consent Process should include discussion of:
  + Risks
  + Benefits
  + Topics
  + Voluntary, may leave the group
  + Who will be participating
  + Manner and form of data collection
    - Audio/video recording
    - Note taking
  + How raw data will be protected and who will have access
  + Information/contact of researcher and the IRB
* Confidentiality Statement
  + Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This should be noted in the consent discussion and on the consent form. i.e., “Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.”
  + You may ask participants to maintain confidentiality for sensitive or above minimal risk topics by including a non-disclosure statement in the consent form. i.e., “\_\_\_\_I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session.

(If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please see the researcher(s) as you may be ineligible to participate in this study.)

* Signing of the form. The researcher gets the signed copy. The participant should get a copy.
* Begin the session.
  + The facilitator should introduce her/himself
  + Explain the means to record the session.  Make sure you record the session!
* Carry out the focus group as per the plan and script. The facilitator should have some room for spontaneity, i.e., asking spontaneous questions that arise from the discussion, probing deeper into a topic.
* Attention to the following items will help ensure success:
  + Set the tone; lay out the ground rules; remind the participants about confidentiality
  + Make sure every participant is heard; draw out quieter group members.
  + Monitor time closely; don’t exceed time limits.
  + Keep the discussion on track; try to answer all or most of the questions.

**After the Focus Group:**

* Tend to your notes immediately.
* Review the tapes.
* Transcribe the tapes.
* Summarize the session.
* Write the report.