

NEW COMMUNITIES PROJECT

Facilitating focus groups

Overview

- Plan for 1 to 1 1/2 Hours per session
- Set an agenda, state it and try to stick to it
- Use the following ground rules
 - Keep focussed on the topic/issue
 - Maintain momentum
 - Get closure
- Try to ensure even participation
- Keep notes throughout the session

The role of the moderator

- Facilitating free flowing, *relevant* discussion
- Giving people time to speak
- Keeping the discussion on track without inhibiting the flow of discussion and ideas.
- Ensuring that all participants are involved
- Summarise and provide closure for each topic/question
- *Under no circumstances should the facilitator engage in the debate or explain or evaluate issues that have arisen in the focus group.*

Starting it rolling

- Make sure everyone is comfortable and seated around the table before starting
- Make sure you have every participant's personal details (e.g. Name, age, sex)
- Make sure everyone has their name tag on
- Introduce yourself (if necessary) and welcome participants
- Explain the means for recording the session.
- Run through the agenda –
- Consider the following items:
 - review of goal of the meeting,
 - review of ground rules
 - questions and answers,
 - wrap up.

Keeping it moving

- Try to keep everyone on topic
- Don't allow any one participant to dominate
- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to contribute before moving on
- Use probes to generate more information
- When you think you've got all you're going to get, summarise the group's opinions and move on
- Don't worry if you don't achieve perfect consensus on every topic/question

Hitting the wall

- Don't be afraid to use probes or ask for clarification
- Don't be afraid to challenge attitudes and opinions
- Encourage group members to think about attitudes and opinions previously expressed

Providing closure

- Summarise the key points from your notes and ask if anyone has anything further to add
- Briefly go over points of agreement and debate
- Tell members that they will receive a copy of the report generated from their answers
- Thank them for coming,
- Adjourn the meeting.

Finishing off

- Verify if the tape recorder worked throughout the session.
- Make any notes on your written notes
- Fill out any notes that don't make sense
- Write down any observations made during the session.
 - What was the nature of participation in the group?
 - Were there any surprises during the session?
 - What were your own feelings about the information gained?