

Points for Consideration Focus Group Interviews (FGI)

Overview:

Small group interviews directed by a moderator, the group usually shares some characteristics or interests. The discussion is recorded and later analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques.

When to use FGI:

- To gather more in-depth information
- To gather additional information
- To increase validity of findings
- Exploratory of a study or program, during a study or a program, and to evaluate a study or a program

Steps:

- 1) Planning
 - a) State the objectives of the FGI and determine the agenda.
 - b) Determine the sample; usually a group of 6-12 for each FGI, the group should share some characteristics or interest. Purposive sampling is usually used for FGI, which means the selection of the participants is based on their knowledge about the topic, because we are looking for in-depth information and generating discussions.
 - c) Design the questions 4-5 questions are ideal, 12 questions are maximum and not recommended. Use simple wording and easy to understand questions, try to pre-test the questions and modify as needed.
 - d) Identify a moderator who has some knowledge about the topic. The moderator should follow the agenda, ask follow up questions, and manage the group dynamics by giving everyone the opportunity to share their thoughts.
 - e) Identify an assistant moderator who will take notes and manage the recording.
 - f) Consider audio recording your FGI AND taking notes. The audio recording is necessary to capture everything said and the tone of the participants while taking about a particular issue. Taking notes is important in case you lose your recording for any technical reason.
 - g) Allow between 90 minutes and 2 hours for your FGI
 - h) Send invitations to participants ahead of time and get confirmation. The ideal number for a group is 8 participants; you might need to send your invitations to 10 participants.
 - i) The invitation should include the purpose of the FGI, the location, date, and time.
 - j) Send reminders to all participants confirmed their attendance
- 2) Conducting
 - a) The moderator and the assistant should arrive at the location ahead of time for preparations.
 - b) Start a friendly conversation with participants before the FGI, but don't discuss the key issues of the FGI.
 - c) Quiet and shy individuals should be seated right across the moderator, while individuals who might dominate the discussion should be seated to the side of the moderator.
 - d) The moderator should take some notes to decide on next questions.
 - e) The assistant should take detailed notes and make sure to record the discussion as well.
 - f) The moderator needs to probe and ask for more information.

- g) There is no right or wrong answer, so the moderator should not show agreement or disagreement to responses
 - h) Allow enough time to each question and each participant, usually the rule of thumb, is you continue until not more new information is generated. But at the same time, you need to stick to the planned 90 – 120 minutes plan.
 - i) At the end of the group discussion thank the participants for their time.
- 3) After
- a) Immediately after the FGI, the moderator and the assistant should check the recording and reflect on the interview
 - b) Prior to conducting another FGI it is recommended that the moderator and the assistant listen to the FGI and write any comments or recommendations for the next FGI.
 - c) The FGI data is analyzed using qualitative techniques and guided by the objective of the FGI.
 - d) In the final summary or report consider using quotations from the FGI to support your findings.

Advantages:

- 1) Generates good number of ideas through a process very similar to real life situation, where participant interact in discussion and listen to others.
- 2) The process allows the moderator to ask for clarifications.
- 3) The results are not presented in a complex statistic format, but rather in a report using quotations form the discussions.
- 4) Relatively inexpensive.
- 5) Gives the researchers the opportunity to increase the sample size as needed.

Disadvantages:

- 1) Compared to individual interviews the researcher has less control as the process is designed to allow participants to interact with one another.
- 2) Data analysis requires skill and experience, as the researcher needs to carefully consider the context.
- 3) A well-trained moderator is a critical key of success.
- 4) Group dynamics vary based on the participants and the moderator.
- 5) Time commitment from all participants at the same time makes it harder to bring participants together. Choosing a location and time that are convenient to all participants can be challenging.

References:

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Morgan, D. L., & Krueger, R. A. (1998). *The Focus Group Kit*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.