

PHCRED Short Course

Conducting Focus Groups

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This session shall adopt an interactive problem orientated approach using attendees' own work experiences to address questions raised concerning the application of focus groups to research and evaluation work. In this way it is hoped to maximize the benefits of learning about focus groups by collectively addressing practical and pertinent issues around the interests for those attending. There will be an applied focus dealing with the focus group method and how to enhance this approach.

The session will be orientated around the three basic stages involved in focus group work:

- Designing the Focus Group Work
- Running the Focus Group(s)
- Post Focus Group Issues

I have listed a range of questions pertaining to each stage that should be considered by anyone looking to apply the focus group method.

Using examples from your own work, work through each stage of questions in your groups. We shall discuss our answers collectively (and more) after each session.

Taking one topic from each group or scenario address the following...

Stage 1: Designing the Focus Group Work:

- 1. Why is the focus group method a good way of addressing this area?**

 - 2. Generally, what kinds of questions would you like answered in the focus group(s) and how would you ask them?**

 - 3. How would you decide the number of groups to run, how large they should be and the types of people to recruit for each of them?**

 - 4. How would you recruit people to the focus groups?**

 - 5. How would you set up the room(s) for conducting the focus group?**

 - 6. What are the ethical considerations of conducting focus groups in this area and how would you address them?**
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Stage 2: Running the Focus Group(s):

7. Are there any potential practical problems you can envisage running the focus groups and how would you address these?

8. List the issues that you would include in your introduction to participants at the beginning of the focus group.

9. How will you ensure an ‘authentic’ understanding of what is being said? (‘validity’ issue).

10. How will you ‘wind up’ and end the Focus Group?

Stage 3: Post-Focus Group Issues

11. When will you begin to analyze your findings?

12. How do you know your interpretations are correct?

13. How would you answer the following criticisms of this work?

- (i) ‘You cannot generalize from the findings of Focus Groups!’**
- (ii) ‘Focus Group reports are always bias!’**
- (iii) ‘Focus Groups are unreliable!’**
- (iv) ‘Focus Groups are so artificial and unnatural the findings are always questionable in the real world!’**

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