

Task #1 Define Goals & Write Research Questions



Goals

What is the topic?

What do you hope to learn by conducting the study?

From whom? Who will be the participants?

What decisions will be made based on the study? What decisions will be made based on the study?

Sample Goals

- To explore potential topics for the QEP.
- To obtain student perceptions of the quality of the undergraduate experience at the institution.
- To conduct a SWOT analysis for the strategic plan.
- To assess satisfaction with the Library.

Research Questions

- Once an overall topic is selected, what are the more specific core topics related to it?
- Might you expect different constituencies to respond differently to these topics?
- These topics will become the main questions covered in the focus group

Sample Research Questions (For QEP)

1. What are the important student learning outcomes for our institution based on our mission?
2. In which areas of student learning are our students performing as well as we would expect?
3. In which areas of student learning do our students need to improve?
4. If you had to choose one student learning outcome in which to invest for the next 5 years, what would it be?

Task #2 Select Participants



Purpose of the Moderator's Guide

Structured moderator's guide so that all groups are asked the same questions

Communicate purpose to moderators

Communicate content of focus groups to moderators

Provide moderators with an outline for the moderator's guide

Developing Questions for Focus Groups

Selecting the Moderators

Moderators are the research tool

Use co-moderators

Quick learner / conceptual

Good listener

Express themselves clearly

Flexible in the face of the unanticipated

Knowledgeable but not “all knowing”

Empathic

A facilitator

Excellent memory

Moderator Role

“The overall mission of a moderator is to elicit inputs from the assembled group that will achieve the objectives of the focus group session established by the researchers.”

(Greenbaum, 1998, p. 46)

To “elicit inputs”

Participants are invited to share attitudes and opinions and moderator facilitates this process and establishes rapport
Explain the use of any audio/video equipment
Avoid question-and-answer sessions
Moderator listens carefully and summarizes frequently
Moderator should talk less than 1/3 of the time
Moderator can initiate, probe and encourage open participation
Make sure the opinions expressed are real
Encourage both positive and negative responses

To work with the “assembled group”

Everyone in the group should participate
The group should discuss opinions among themselves and agree or disagree or challenge each other
Moderator should try to balance input from shy people and more outspoken people

To “achieve the objectives
of the researchers”

Cover all of the material adequately
Stick to allotted time for each topic
Remain neutral and objective
**Can add and explore interesting
topics BUT not substitute them for
the agreed-upon topics**

Duties of the Moderators

**Attend training (1-2 hours) and briefing (1
hour) sessions**
Conduct the focus group (2 hours)
**Review tape & notes and conduct
individual analysis (2-3 hours)**
**Compare notes with co-moderator and
complete focus group report (2-3 hours)**
Attend debriefing session with research

Task #5 Conduct the Focus Groups



Facilities & Equipment

**Select a room that is conveniently located
in a neutral location**

Set up the room in conference room style

Facilities & Equipment

Provide expanded copies of Moderator's Guide for note-taking

Provide 2 cassette tape recorders (video taping is preferred if one way glass is available)

Provide two 90 minute cassette tapes per recorder

Provide name / tent cards

Provide 5 X 8 note cards for collecting warm-up & wrap-up data

Provide flip chart and markers

Snacks & Incentives

Provide snacks and drinks

Setting Up and Welcoming Participants

**Allow plenty of time to set up room(s)
Set up table outside room for check-in
Greet participants and ask them to sign in**

Task #6 Analyze the Data & Report Results



Analyzing and Reporting Findings

Type verbatim written responses to warm-up and wrap-up questions

Analyze for emerging patterns and themes

Include a profile chart of participants

Address issues of generalizability and randomness

Distinguish between views held by many vs. few or one

When developing themes, consider all participants who nodded or smiled in agreement

Include verbatim quotes that capture essence of themes

Present a summary for each distinct segment and then an overall summary

Present results to Town Hall meeting of participants and others in the population and ask for their validation

References

- Carnaghi, J. E. (1992). Focus groups: Teachable and educational moments for all involved. In F. K. Stage (Ed.), *Diverse methods for research and assessment of college students* (pp. 105-121), Alexandria,