

A Practical Guide to . . .

The Focused Focus Group



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Based on the work of Dr. Bo Beaulieu, with contributions from Dr. Michael Wilcox & Maria Wiltse

OUTLINE

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What's a Focus Group?

SECTION II

How to Set Up & Facilitate Your Focus Group

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How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

SECTION IV

Your Turn

What's a Focus Group?

SECTION I



Defining a Focus Group

What's a Focus Group?

- 1 A focus group is a carefully planned discussion that's **designed to obtain perceptions and opinions** on a defined topic of interest in a **non-threatening environment**
- 2 A focus group should be a **discussion that is comfortable—and enjoyable**—for participants as they share their thoughts/ideas
- 3 A focus group is **different from a key informant interview**, which is a one-on-one discussion, though both can be rich sources of qualitative data when collecting community-level input

Getting People to Attend Your Focus Group Interviews

What's a Focus Group?

- Establish meeting times that don't conflict with existing community activities or functions.
- Contact potential participants via telephone, in person or by email about 10-14 days before the focus group session. If you are seeking professionals to be involved, do so 1-2 months in advance.
- Over-recruit between 10-25% over the number needed.
- Send a personalized invitation just after the phone, in-person or email invitation about a week before the session. The invitation should stress that the potential participant has special experiences or insights that are of value to the study.
- Contact each person the day before the focus group to remind them of the session and inquire about their intent to attend.

Six Key Features

What's a Focus Group?



People



Provide data



Conducted with a series of groups



Data are qualitative in nature



Possess certain characteristics



Discussion is focused

1. Involves People

What's a Focus Group?

- Typically composed of 8-10 people, but can range from as few as 4 to as many as 12+. Recommend you have at least 8 individuals.
- Group size is conditional on two factors:
 - ✓ Large enough to provide diversity of perceptions
 - ✓ Small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights



2. Conducted with a Series of Groups

What's a Focus Group?

- Recommend the use of multiple groups in order to detect patterns and trends across groups—at least three
- A single focus group interview is risky because moderators will occasionally encounter “cold” groups – participants who are quiet or seemingly reluctant to actively participate.

Share *your* thoughts on ways to improve and expand

RURAL HOUSING

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
MAY — 2016 5th	<i>morning</i> 9:00–10:30 or <i>afternoon</i> 1:00–2:30	Rush County Purdue Extension Office 101 East 2nd Street Rushville, Indiana 46173

Who's Invited?
Local, regional, state, and federal governmental representatives, business and financial representatives, economic-development related organizations, non-profit and non-governmental organizations and educational representatives.

Purpose
The purpose of the focus group meeting is to gain a better understanding of current housing conditions in rural areas of the state with special focus on Rush County and the area surrounding it, the factors that may be limiting the availability of quality housing in rural Indiana, and the possible strategies that local leaders and residents might consider as they seek to provide a variety of housing options for current and future residents.

Connect & Join Us
County Extension Director: *Gracie Marlatt*

765-932-5974 | gnmarlat@purdue.edu

Office of COMMUNITY & RURAL AFFAIRS
PURDUE UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PURDUE EXTENSION
LOCAL FACES
COUNTLESS CONNECTIONS

3. Possess Certain Characteristics

What's a Focus Group?

- Often composed of people who are similar to each other.
- The nature of this homogeneity is determined by the **purpose of the study** and is the **basis for recruitment**.
- The issue is essentially, **“Who do you want to hear from?”** The Extension educator and his/her planning team should decide who the target audience is and invite people who reflect these characteristics,
- Focus groups have traditionally involved people who do not know each other, but at times, this is difficult. Try to avoid involving people who know each other well.



4. Data Collection Procedure

What's a Focus Group?

- Focus groups pay attention to the perceptions of people regarding community matters.
 - ✓ They are not intended to develop a consensus, arrive at an agreeable plan, or make decisions about which course of action should be undertaken.

- Focus groups vs. key informant interviews:
 - ✓ In focus groups, participants generate their own responses, but also respond to the others' comments.
 - ✓ Key informant interviews zero in on more, specific personal information and motivations (that participants might not feel comfortable discussing in a large group) and offer a depth of content by an expert, victim, etc.



5. Makes Use of Qualitative Data

What's a Focus Group?

- Focus groups produce qualitative data that offer insights into the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of participants.
- These results are solicited through open-ended questions and a procedure in which respondents are able to choose the manner in which they wish to respond.



6. Discussion is Focused

What's a Focus Group?

- The topics of discussion in a focus group are carefully predetermined and sequenced.
 - ✓ The questions are presented in a manner that is understandable to the participants.
 - ✓ The moderator uses predetermined, open-ended questions.
 - ✓ These questions -- called the **questioning route** -- are arranged in a natural, logical sequence.



How to Set Up & Facilitate Your Focus Group

SECTION II



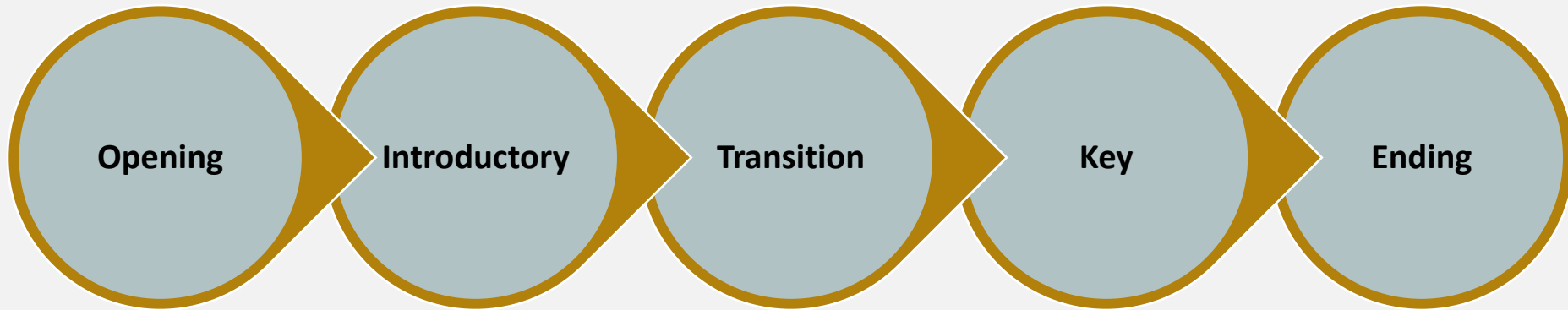
Organizing Your Focus Group

How to Set Up Your Focus Group

- 1** The key to a well-organized focus group is a process agenda. This type of agenda offers a minute-by-minute approach to managing the anticipated discussion.
- 2** Start with the end result in mind. Choose your questions based on the responses they like are likely to generate—and categorize those responses into “themes” to report on.
- 3** Embed a both a quantitative piece and an interactive piece into your 90 minutes of facilitated discussion to add energy

Types of Questions

How to Set Up Your Focus Group



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Types of Questions

How to Set Up Your Focus Group

■ Opening Questions

- ✓ This is the round robin question that everyone answers at the beginning of the focus group
- ✓ It is designed to be answered rather quickly (20-30 seconds) and to identify characteristics that the participants have in common
- ✓ It is preferable for these questions to be factual as opposed to attitude or opinion-based questions



**CONDUCTING
THE
INTERVIEWS**

Types of Questions

How to Set Up Your Focus Group

- **Introductory Questions**
 - ✓ These are the questions that introduce the general topic of discussion and provide participants an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and their connection with the overall topic
 - ✓ These questions are usually not critical to the analysis and are intended to foster conversation and interaction among the participants



Types of Questions

How to Set Up Your Focus Group

■ Transition Questions

- ✓ These questions move the conversation into the key questions that drive the study
- ✓ These questions serve as the logical link between the introductory questions and the key questions
- ✓ During these transition questions, the participants are becoming aware of how others view the topic



Types of Questions

How to Set Up Your Focus Group

■ Key Questions

- ✓ These questions drive the study
- ✓ Typically, there are 2 - 5 questions in this category
- ✓ These are usually the first questions that you tend to develop and the ones that usually require the greatest attention in the subsequent analysis



CONDUCTING
THE
INTERVIEWS

Types of Questions

How to Set Up Your Focus Group

■ Ending Questions

- ✓ These questions bring closure to the discussion, enabling participants to reflect back on previous comments that are critical to the analysis.
- ✓ These questions can help prioritize previous comments—and suggest strategies or key takeaways for final report of the focus group findings



An Example: Eastern Indiana Housing Study

Process Agenda Template

Eastern Indiana Regional Planning Council Process Agenda

Materials Needed: Process agenda, sign-in sheet, surveys to hand out, tape, flipcharts, easel, markers, power cord, laptop, projector, flash drive with PowerPoint, name badges/tents

Start Time	Minutes	Activity	Facilitator	Scribe	Notes
8:00	5	Ice Breaker	Melinda	Michael	Continental breakfast & drinks provided Q1: "How long you have lived and/or worked in this county?"
8:05	10	Intro Questions	Melinda	Michael	Q1: "What would you say are the ONE to TWO things you like most about your county?" Q2: "What would you say are ONE to TWO things that concern you most about your county?"

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An Example: Eastern Indiana Housing Study

Process Agenda Template

Start Time	Minutes	Activity	Facilitator	Scribe	Notes
8:15	10	Short paper survey	Melinda	Michael	Survey Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of housing stock allocated • Community factors • Perceptions of housing by area
8:25	20	Transition Questions	Michael asks, as he prompts participants with data points from the data snapshot created for EIRPC	Melinda	Q1: "How would you describe the current availability of housing in your county? " Q2: "Do you think there are adequate numbers of single family, multi-family and rental properties available for those who live in the county?" Q3: How would you rate the quality of homes and rental properties in the area Q4: "How do you feel about the price for homes or the monthly cost to rent a home or apartment in the county? " Q5: "Do you feel homes and rental properties are available for households from different income levels (i.e., such as higher, middle and lower income households)?"

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An Example: Eastern Indiana Housing Study

Process Agenda Template

Start Time	Minutes	Activity	Facilitator	Scribe	Notes
8:45	30	Key Questions	Michael	Melinda, as she posts response cards on the sticky wall	Q1: "What strategies do you recommend be considered by local leaders in order to expand the quantity and quality of housing in your county for people of all income levels?"
9:15	10	Ending Questions	Michael	Melinda, as she prioritizes posted responses on the sticky wall	Q1: "What is the MOST IMPORTANT thing that you believe the county should do to provide a good mix of quality housing – single family, multi-family, and/or rental -- to current and future residents?"
9:25	5	Closing Remarks	Melinda	Michael	We'll email synthesized notes to the whole group We'll let you know the results of the overall project (as it rolls out)

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How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

SECTION III



Analyzing Focus Group Results

How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

Step 1 | Record the Focus Group Audio

- A digital recorder is best; bring extra batteries. If possible, invest in a splitter and two microphones with long cords that can pick up sound well
- Electronic recordings will be transcribed, so explain anonymity policy to participants and warn against having “side conversations” caught on tape

Step 2 | Upload Transcriptions into Analysis Software

- Recommend outsourcing of transcription, but can be done internally by digital recorder with USB and foot pedal; upload transcriptions into NVivo as source documents from which the program will pull the text to analyze

Analyzing the Focus Group Results

How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

Step 3 | Create Nodes from the Questions

- Using the questions from your process agenda, create “nodes,” or themes, by which the text will be classified.
- If necessary, rely on field notes/debriefing session with the team to develop the node structure.

Step 4 | Assign Text from the Answers

- Using the node structure you have developed, scroll through the transcription and assign text under the themes (by highlighting, copying and pasting); this process can also be automated, but won't be as accurate

Factors to Consider in the Analysis

How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

- Find the big ideas (you do this in the process of creating the “nodes,” or themes, in Nvivo)
 - ✓ Give careful thought to the trends or ideas that cut across the entire discussion
- Consider the frequency or extensiveness of comments
 - ✓ Some topics are discussed by more participants (extensiveness) and some comments are made more often (frequency) than others
- Consider the intensity of the comments
 - ✓ Participants may talk about a topic with a special intensity or depth of feeling.
- Consider the specificity of responses
 - ✓ Responses that are specific and based on experiences should be given more weight than those that are vague and impersonal



The Analysis Continuum: Example Using NVivo

How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

Input

Output

Upload
transcription

Create “nodes”
from the ?s

Assign text from
the answers

Key themes
emerge



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Section IV

Written Report

How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

- **Cover page:** Title, person/organization receiving or commissioning the report, names of researchers, date the report is submitted
- **Summary:** Brief, well-written executive summary describing why focus groups were conducted and the major conclusions and recommendations
- **Table of contents** (optional section)
- **Statement of the Problem, Key Questions, and Study Methods**
- **Purpose of study**



Written Report

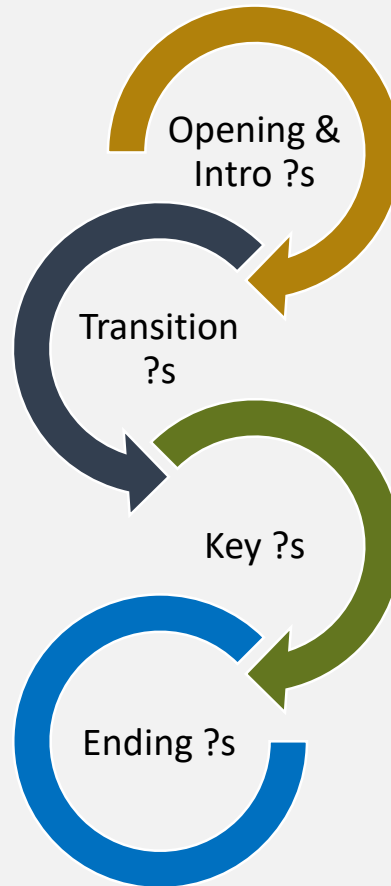
How to Analyze the Data & Present the Findings

- **Brief description of focus group interviews**
(Number of focus groups, method of selecting participants, number of people in each focus group)
- **Results or Findings**
- **Summary of Themes** (Small number of key points should be presented)
- **Limitations and Alternative Explanations**
- **Recommendations**
- **Appendix** (such as a copy of the focus group questions used to guide the discussions)



Your Turn

Question Generator Handout



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Your Turn

Final Questions?



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