Focus Group Guide

Designate a time and space for your focus group, and carefully recruit only the individuals who can speak to the gaps you're trying to fill.

Since you're asking for their time, it's a good idea to offer some kind of compensation if you can (like gift cards or food).

Perhaps most importantly, be sure to listen carefully to your group and **take good notes.** It's best to appoint two or more notetakers to capture everything. Respect the participants' confidentiality by only taking notes on what is said, not who is saying it or identifying details. Some other things to consider include:

- Avoid dichotomous questions (yes/no)
- Don't ask "why" — take a passive listening role
- Don't let the conversation veer too off topic — use probing and follow-up questions to refocus the conversation

Focus groups are focused discussions. Think of it as just multiple small circle discussion rounds. After introducing everyone and setting the tone for the discussion, your first question should broadly relate to your topic, then use follow-up questions to direct the conversation more specifically. You'll want to design 2-3 neutral, open-ended questions that would lead to an in-depth conversation around your topic. Plan for follow-up questions to get at the point you want to dive deeper into. An example would be:

What are the most serious problems facing families in this community?

- A number of concerns have been mentioned. Think about teens using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. How do these problems compare to the others already mentioned?
- In your community, what is acceptable use of alcohol?
    - By adults?
    - By young people under 21?
- Tell us about the circumstances when teens drink. When and where is it most likely to occur?
- How do you think alcohol is obtained?

Once you've designed some questions, the rest of the agenda should look a little like this:

Time	Agenda	Facilitator
5 min	**Welcome** • Facilitators introduce themselves • Give context about GTY project	
5 min	**Overview** • Purpose of the Focus group • Topics that will be discussed • Encourage to share openly and establish a safe place to do so	
5 min	**Group Agreements** Decide on some ground rules. Examples include: • One one person should speak at a time • All opinions are of equal value in this space • Negative comments are welcome and helpful • No cell phones or outside distractions (fidgets are okay) • Step up, Step back • Limit side conversation to maximize time • Take care of yourself–step out for calls/breaks as needed and grab refreshments	
20 min	**First Topic** • Broad Question with follow-up specific questions	
20 min	**Second Topic** • Broad Question with follow-up specific questions	
5 min	**Thank you & Conclusion**	

Source: Peñaloza, Linda J., PhD. Focus Group Interviewing: Skills and Techniques. University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center, Division of Prevention and Population Sciences Prevention Research Center.