

Running and Managing Focus Groups

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What are Focus Groups

"Focus groups are ...in-depth qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people brought together to discuss a host of topics" (ASA Series, 1997, p. 1)

Characteristics of Focus Groups

- Focus group members are usually selected because of something in common
- Involve between 4 to 12 people and usually last 1 to 2 hours
- Conducted in a series with a minimum of 3
- May select different types of group and compare their opinions around a common topic. However because groups are selected it is not possible to compare results in a quantitative sense

What Happens

- When recruiting people provide a brief description of what the group is about and reassurance that participation is voluntary
- Data are generated through the group discussion
- The focus group is conducted by a person who is trained and who provides some guidelines to the group for the discussion
- Questions are open ended
- Questions are neutral so the content of the question does not influence the answer
- Questions are sequenced so they proceed from less intimate topics to more personal questions
- Ideally questions are placed before the group and they discuss it among themselves rather than answering directly to the group leader with no interaction
- Information is gathered about not just what people think, but why they think the way they do

Key References

ASA Series (1997) **What is Survey? What Are Focus Groups?**, Section of Survey Research Methods, American Statistical Association.

Download from <http://www.amstat.org/sections/srms/brochures/focusgroups.pdf> March 23, 2003

Morgan, D.L. & Kruger, R. (1998) **The focus group kit (6 vol)**, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA

Kruger, R.A. (2000) **Focus Groups: A practical guide for applied research**, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA