

# 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 results?

Is this topic of sufficient interest and breadth to generate 60-90 minutes of discussion among the participants?

Does this topic lend itself to qualitative research, specifically focus groups?

## 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

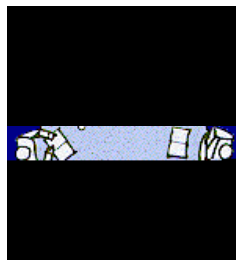




## Getting Participation

- Ensure that you have chosen an interesting topic
- Contact participants via email, phone, or mail
- Ask them to RSVP and commit to a time and place
- Contact again to remind the day before the group
- Choose a good time during the semester, week, & day
- Choose a convenient, neutral location
- Use incentives to increase participation
- Serve refreshments

## Task #3 Design the Moderators Guide



## 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  
team (2 hours)**

## **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**
- Make participants feel comfortable and appreciated**
- Offer greetings to the group(s) from appropriate stakeholders who will discuss the importance of their participation**
- Conduct the groups**

## **During Focus Groups**

- Remain available outside room to answer questions or deal with any problems**
- Prevent additional participants from joining the group once introductions are completed**
- Remind co-moderators when only 10-**

# 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,