

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



Selecting Participants

- ✓ Identify the population to be studied (e.g., faculty, staff, students)
- ✓ Identify subpopulations or segments of the population who might be expected to have differing attitudes and opinions (e.g., tenured vs. tenure track faculty / undergraduate vs. graduate students)
- ✓ Note that identifying multiple segments dramatically expands the number of focus groups required

Selecting Participants

- ✓ 7 - 10 persons per focus group possessing some shared quality (homogeneous)
- ✓ Shared quality differing between various focus groups segments (e.g., tenured vs tenure track faculty)
- ✓ 2-3 (or more) focus groups per segment until you achieve redundancy (e.g., 3 tenured groups + 3 tenure track groups)
- ✓ Randomly or purposively select potential participants by segment
- ✓ Over sample based on population – *How many do you need to invite to get how many to RSVP to get 7-10 to actually attend?*

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 report**
- ✓ **Obtain feedback from moderators and stakeholders**

Content of the Moderator's Guide

1. **Introduction**
 - a. **Welcome and introduction of moderator and participants**
 - b. **Process and guidelines (share views, etc.)**
 - c. **Purpose**
 - d. **Confidentiality**
 - e. **Use of equipment**
 - f. **Encourage focus on selves -- their thoughts and feelings**
2. **Warm-up question (one everyone can respond to)**
3. **Topic discussion to answer the research questions**
4. **Wrap-up question (one that brings closure to the group)**

Developing Questions for Focus Groups

- ✓ Start with the research questions
- ✓ Consider how different segments might respond differently
- ✓ Use a research team -- brainstorm
- ✓ Open ended questions
- ✓ Relatively short and easy to comprehend
- ✓ Five to six topics for a 60 - 90 minute session
- ✓ Arrange in a sequence that seems logical to participants
- ✓ Move from general to more specific questions if possible
- ✓ Include more sensitive questions in the middle
- ✓ Use Warm-Up and Wrap-Up questions to which all can and do respond

Task #4 Select and Train the Moderators



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 with a conference table and comfortable chairs**
- ✓ **Room & table should be large enough to accommodate group but not too large**
- ✓ **Co-moderators sit across from each other**
- ✓ **Set up table for snacks & drinks**

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 appropriate for group and morning, afternoon, or evening**
- ✓ **If providing lunch or dinner, have it after the group**
- ✓ **Provide incentives, ideally for each participant, and/or a drawing for each group**

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 10-15 minutes remain**
- ✓ **Thank participants as they leave**

Task #6 Analyze the Data & Report Results



Analyzing and Reporting Findings

- ✓ **Employ a debriefing process after the groups**
 1. Individual co-moderator analysis of tape & notes
 2. Co-moderator team report
 3. Conduct “focus groups” to debrief moderators in each segment (if needed)
 4. Combined analysis across all segments
- ✓ **Use Moderators Guide for reports using bullet points under each topic**
- ✓ **Answer the research questions**

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

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