Focus Groups: How to Use Them and When

Barbara McNeice-Stallard
Director
research@mtsac.edu
Ext. 4109

Annel Medina
Educational Research Assistant Analyst
amedina95@mtsac.edu
Ext. 5505

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Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, you will be able to state two things that are important to know about focus groups.

Overview

- Focus Groups are...
- Use Focus Groups when...
- Number of Focus Group questions to use is...
- Number of Focus Groups to conduct is...
- Focus Groups should be held...
- Number of invitees per Focus Group is...
Overview (continued)

- Recruitment
  - Ask programs to recruit for you
  - Making your pitch
- Roles: Moderator versus note-taker (neither from program under review)
- Conducting the sessions
- Analyzing the data
- Report
- Make changes based on what you’ve learned

Activity: Focus Group in Action

- Random assignment to roles:
  - Moderator
  - Note taker
  - Focus Group participants

Example Questions

- **Opening** (to get them acquainted and feeling connected with each other and the moderator)
  - Please tell us your name and what you do at Mt. SAC. (5 minutes)
- **Introduction** (begins discussion of topic)
  - When you hear “Mt. SAC”, what comes to mind? (5 minutes)
Transition (moves smoothly and seamlessly into key questions)

- What would you tell a best friend or family member about Mt. SAC? OR Suppose you were trying to encourage a friend to become employed at Mt. SAC, what would you say? (5 minutes)
- What persuaded you to join Mt. SAC? (5 minutes)

Key Questions (Obtains insight on areas of central concern in the study)

- What would it take for Mt. SAC to get a gold star? If Mt. SAC was to receive an award, what would it be for? (10 minutes)
- If you could change one thing about Mt. SAC, what would you change, and what’s the main reason that one thing needs changing? (15 minutes)
- As a group, can you tell me five positive things about Mt. SAC, no matter how small that positive thing is? (15 minutes)
- Suppose that Mt. SAC was a person, how would you describe that person?
  - Have you changed as a result of being in Mt. SAC? If so, how have you changed and what made you change? (15 minutes)

Ending (helps researchers determine where to place emphasis and brings closure to the discussion)

- If you were responsible for marketing Mt. SAC to other students, what key point would you stress in the advertisement campaign? (10 minutes)
- Write down on a piece of paper one or two phrases or sentences that best describes your experience with Mt. SAC. (5 minutes)
Summary Depending on the Focus Group, the Moderator and/or Note Taker could give a short two to three minutes summary of the key points and big ideas from the group. After the summary, the Moderator asks:
- How well does that summarize what was said here? Anything else to be added? (5 minutes)
- Is there anything else about Mt. SAC you would like to share? (5 minutes)

Analysis

See practice sheet

Report

An outline for your report might be...
- Overview & Purpose (1 paragraph)
- Method (1/2 page or less)
  - Subjects/Participants
  - Focus Group Questions
  - Procedures (how did you do it – recipe)
- Findings (2-3 pages)
- Conclusions & Recommendations (1 page)
Check-in: Student Learning Outcome

Please state two things that are important to know about focus groups.