Focus Groups
What Are Focus Groups?

- “A group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Powell et al. 1996)
- In-depth, qualitative interviews
- Generate data through group discussions
Role of Focus Groups

- Preliminary or exploratory stages of a study
- Confirm relevance of a survey
- Develop hypotheses
- Evaluate or develop a particular program of activities
- Assess program’s impact
- Generate further avenues of research
- Post-quantitative studies – explain anomalies that arise
- To complement other methods of research
Role of Focus Groups, cont.

- General education – getting to know the customer
- Idea generation (most valuable, least used)
- Develop/screen concepts
- Product planning
- Communication Refinement – understand how your communication is received
- Strategic planning
- Packaging/ names/promotion
**Focus Group Size**

- Between 6 and 12 people
- Small groups are easily dominated or lacking in opinions
  - Mini groups (3-4 people)
- Large groups lack cohesion and can become disorganized
- Point of diminishing returns – too many participants add nothing new
How are participants selected?

- Determined by the needs of the study
- Try not to select members who know each other
- Recruitment
  - Newspaper ads (community newspapers)
  - Flyers (libraries, agencies, hospitals)
- Usually based on the similarity of group members
  - Such as age, status in a program, race, SES, etc.
The Role of the Moderator

- Main purpose is to maintain group dynamics
- Keep the group “focused” without inhibiting the flow of ideas and comments
- Facilitate interaction between group members
- Probe for details
- Make sure everyone participates
- Understand the underlying objectives of the study & provide clear explanations of the purpose of the group
Role of Moderator, cont.

In order for the moderator to be effective, the following must be clear:

– What are the Objectives?
– What are the priorities?
– What will you use the information for?
– Who will use the information?
– What questions should be answered?
Types of Questions

- Open-ended
- Avoid questions where responses can be “yes” or “no”
- Avoid leading questions
- Examples of appropriate questions
  - What do you mean?
  - What is it about X that you like/dislike?
- Ask the group questions as a whole
- Ask others for comment on each other’s experiences/attitudes
Moderator Tips

- Use informality
- Avoid giving personal opinions – appear neutral
- Use first names
- Encourage diverse opinions
- Make it fun
- Encourage interaction between group members
- Probe non-verbal communication
- Pay attention to what people are not saying
Advantages

- Inexpensive
- Allows facilitator to explore unanticipated issues and encourages interaction among participants
- Spontaneous reactions and ideas
- Many different perspectives on a topic
- Groups provide checks and balances, thus minimizing extreme views
Disadvantages

- Susceptible to facilitator bias
- Discussions are easily side-tracked
- Can be dominated by one person
- Does not generate any quantitative data
- Information can be difficult to analyze