

Advantages to using focus groups

- Good for groups with lower literacy levels (e.g., children, English as a second language).
- Rich data - obtain information in participants' own language. The group dynamic allows for participants to build on one another's responses and generate ideas that they might not have thought of in an individual interview.
- Moderator can interact with the participants, which allows for follow-up questions.
- Information is provided more quickly than if people were interviewed separately.

Disadvantages to using focus groups

- Requires a trained moderator.
- Quality of the discussion and usefulness depends on the skill of the moderator.
- Data is difficult to analyze (e.g., identifying an individual opinion from the group opinion).
- The sample may not be representative of the population.
- Less control over the data collected.
- The data collected lack confidentiality and anonymity.

When to use focus groups

- Power differences exist between the participants and decision-makers.
- Want to gain an understanding of the culture of a group.
- Need to gain a large amount of information in a shorter period of time.
- Want to explore the degree of consensus on a topic.
- When group discussion or interaction among participants would bring out insights and understanding that would not be ascertained through questionnaire items or individual interviews.
- When assessing program effectiveness.
- Desire feedback regarding an instructional tool, website, program, etc.

Suggestions for conducting a focus group

- Optimal size: 6-8 people.
- Time: 1-2 hours.
- Need a trained moderator that the participants do not know.
- Create a comfortable atmosphere (e.g., provide food and refreshments).
- Be conscious that some participants may not feel comfortable voicing their opinion in front of others. Additionally, some may feel pressure to conform to the group consensus.