PIRE

Native American Technical Assistance Provider Webinar Series

Focus Groups, Part 1

Who is the Presenter? Cathleen Willging

- **Medical Anthropology**
  - Gender and sexuality
  - Health systems and policy
  - Mental health services
  - Native American studies
  - Rural health

> I ONLY USE MY ANTHROPOLOGY SUPER POWERS FOR GOOD

- **Applied Anthropology**
  - Community-based participatory research
  - Intervention adaptation, development, and evaluation
  - Implementation science
  - Qualitative research methods

Webinar Agenda

Part 1 (April 18, 2019)
- Background
  - Definition
  - Advantages/disadvantages
- Process issues
  - Logistical considerations
  - Sampling and recruitment
  - Setting ground rules
  - Developing and asking questions
  - Troubleshooting the unexpected

Part 2 (May 2, 2019)
- Data preparation and management
- Coding and analysis
- Report writing
- Ethical considerations

Personal Disclosure

- I have a **love/hate relationship** with focus groups due to:

  – **Biases** instilled in me during my research training

  – **Uncritical** use and misuse

  – **Energy** it takes to organize them!

  – Built in capacity for **unpredictability**

  – **Euphoric feeling** that follows a group done well

My Worst Focus Group Experience

- **Waiting room** in a strip-mall methadone clinic closed for lunch hour; **clients banged on the door** for entire hour
- **Too many participants** (counselors) showed up to get a $25 gift card, but were unfamiliar with discussion topics
- **No good place** to record, plus notetaker who organized the group was **late**….
- **Questions** concerned training for specific intervention and on supervision practices
  – Few participants had actually received the training due to high turnover
  – Uninvited supervisor wouldn't leave room
- This webinar is designed to help you have the **BEST** focus group experience!

Background

What are Focus Groups?

- A **method** of data collection in which 6 to 10 (some say 8 to 12) participants convene to discuss and provide data on particular issues

- Focus groups are qualitative interviews; **NOT** problem-solving or decision-making sessions

- **Goal** is to get good data in a setting where people think and talk about their own views in relation to the views of others

What Focus Groups Are Not

- Individual interviews

- Public forums or town hall

- Round Robin exercise

- Free-for-all event

History of Focus Groups (circa 1950s)

- Developed in recognition that consumer decisions are shaped by **talking with others**

- Market researchers began using them to learn how consumers make buying decisions and get insight into their product **preferences**

- Sociologists also began writing about their value in **social science research**

Advantages of Focus Groups

- Learn about the views of **multiple participants in one place** and in the same amount of **time** it would have taken to interview one or two people

- Assess the **reactions of participants** to various ideas and to each other

- Gauge the strength of participants' **commitment** to their views and the **changes** that happen when different ideas are considered

Advantages of Focus Groups

- Potential for **efficiency and maximizing use of resources**

  - Can collect a lot of information in a **short period of time**

  - Typically require **less data preparation and analysis time** (compared to individual in-depth interviews)

  - Can **quickly assess** the extent to which there is a consistent, shared view or diversity of views

Advantages of Focus Groups

- Efficiently develop **locally valid surveys** (i.e., identify appropriate questions and response categories)

- **Field-test** a survey or questionnaire for coherence

- **Usability testing** and **evaluation**

- Get input into and assess reactions to a **program**

- **Community assessments**

- **Cross-check data** from other methods

- Feedback can be **more specific and meaningful** than data from individual questionnaires and surveys

- Tend to be **enjoyable** to participants because they draw on "human tendencies as social animals" (Patton, 2015)

Disadvantages of Focus Groups

- Can be **difficult** to pull together

- Number of questions is **restricted**

- **Limited response time** for each participant

- **Less control** vs. other data collection techniques (i.e., structured interview)

- Require **group processing skills** beyond asking questions (i.e., negotiating participants who dominate discussions)

Disadvantages of Focus Groups

- Participants whose viewpoints represent minority perspectives may be **reluctant to speak up**

- **Not representative**

- Not particularly appropriate for examining **controversial or highly personal** issues

- Take place **outside natural settings** where social interaction usually occurs

Process Issues

Preparing for Focus Groups

- Determine **<u>focus</u>** of the discussion beforehand

  - Keep in mind that average group takes **90 to 120 minutes** (30% of this time may be spent on organizing and informal socializing)

  - Range and scope of topics are **<u>limited</u>**

  - Allow for **flexibility** in questions and responses (in order to generate new information)

  - Risk of **boredom** if discussion is too focused

Choosing a Study Population

- Factors influencing **choice of the study population**

  1. Purpose of the study?
  2. Who is this study intended to help?
  3. Intended audience?

Choosing a Study Population

- Typically include people of **similar backgrounds**

- **Purposive sampling** procedures versus representative sampling procedures

- Sampling to the point of **data saturation** or **redundancy** (may be too costly, however)

- Focus group gurus recommend conducting **3-4 groups** per population category of interest

Identifying and Recruiting Participants

- Possible **sampling strategies**:
  - List sampling
  - Advertising
  - Snowball or network sampling
  - Asking for assistance from service organizations
  - Asking for assistance from community liaisons
- Ideally, you don't want folks who know each in the group

Identifying and Recruiting Participants

- Challenges in Native American communities
  - People are **likely to know one another** (and sometimes very well)
  - **Deference to elders** in mixed-aged groups
  - **Deference to community leaders**
  - **Heterogeneity** in cultural perspectives (which is actually a good thing), but some folks may hesitate to share their views for a lot of understandable reasons
  - Concerns about **privacy** and **confidentiality**
  - Others?

Identifying and Recruiting Participants

- Invitations

  - **Telephone invitations**, followed by letters describing: purpose, content, structure, location, sponsor

  - More effective if **someone known** to the potential participants sends the invitation

  - **Face-to-face** invites can work well too!

- Consider transportation and baby-sitting needs

Choosing a Site

- Comfort

- Convenience, accessibility, and size

- Perceptions (**how participants feel about the site**)

- Potential for interruption

- Noise level

Ensuring Privacy and Confidentiality

- **Confidentiality cannot be assured**

- Participants, however, can be reminded to please keep the conversation confidential

- General informed consent procedures should be implemented

Valued Skills/Qualities of Facilitators

- Have **language skills** matching those of participants

- Can **function well in a group** setting

- Have no **strong opinions** about topics in question, or can withhold these opinions; doesn't use groups as a platform for their views

- Are **good listeners**!!!

- Can **summarize ideas** of participants in a manner that is consistent with what's expressed

Valued Skills/Qualities of Facilitators

- **Remember:**
  - A direct service provider who delivers or has a vested interest in a new program that is being asked about might not be the best choice of facilitator
  - Just because a person is good in a one-on-one interview context doesn't mean they will be similarly skilled in focus group facilitation
  - Same lesson holds for persons skilled at working with communities (i.e., organizers, advocates, coalition leaders, etc.)

Responsibilities of Facilitators

- Keep the discussion **on topic**
- Ensure that the **topics are culturally acceptable** for the majority of group participants
- Help participants **avoid extremely personal disclosures** that they might regret later
- Make sure focus group is **not a therapy group**
- Make sure every participant has a chance **to speak and to listen**

WHO ME!? I THOUGHT you'd NEVER ASK.

Responsibilities of the Recorders/Scribes

- Help **greet** people
- **Set up** equipment and food items (avoid chewy, gooey, and crunchy substances)
- Take comprehensive **notes**
- Help resolve **unexpected problems**
  - Like latecomers…

Conducting Focus Groups

- **Introductory remarks**

  – Explain **purpose**, why participants have been invited, and why their voices are important to the project

  – Explain **roles** of facilitator and recorder

  – **Ask permission** to audio- or video-tape (folks should also have advance notice about this)

  – Have everyone **(briefly) introduce** themselves (be prepared to negotiate local etiquette expectations)

Conducting Focus Groups

- Explain the **ground rules**

  – **Everyone** should participate

  – All ideas are **equally valid**

  – There are **no right or wrong answers**

  – Each person's view should be **respected**

  – **Respect** each other's confidentiality

Sample Ground Rules

In other groups, it's been helpful to say a couple of things about how the group works. First, because we really want to hear what everyone thinks, if it seems like someone is not speaking up, we may ask him/her what he/she thinks. At the same time, we'll ask everyone to please not interrupt so that we make sure everyone gets a chance to talk. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Finally, we ask that everyone please agree to keep whatever is said in here private. While it's okay to talk about the focus group generally, we ask that each of you not talk to anyone about what specific people say today.

Because we want to be able to remember everything that people tell us today, [scribe's name] is going to write notes about what people say. Sometimes, [scribe's name] can't write fast enough to keep up, so we're also going to audio record what is being said. This way, we can check later to make sure we get everything right. We will not write down the name of anyone here today. If your name gets recorded, we'll make sure it gets erased from the transcript.

Our discussion will take about 2 hours. We ask that you please silence your cell phones. Please feel free to get refreshments or use the bathroom at any time during our discussion. Afterwards, you'll get $40 in appreciation for taking the time to talk to us today.

Preparing Supplementary Aids

- Consider **different data collection formats** to gather demographic and other information about participants, i.e., brief questionnaires

- **Write out** the focus group process or expectations for participants (as well as for facilitators)

- **Create and distribute handouts** that describe the process or expectations, the focus group questions, etc.

Troubleshooting Problems

- **Participants don't arrive** (find out why from community liaisons)
- Some participants will show up late (it's up to facilitator's discretion whether they can join; **15 minute rule-of-thumb**)
- **Fewer than half** show up (how this is handled depends on the research design, i.e., shift to small group interview)
- **Logistical difficulties** at site (arrive early to address problems in advance of the group; keep cell phone handy)

Troubleshooting Problems

- **Don't get flustered** when things don't go exactly as planned

- **Exude confidence** (but not arrogance)

Asking Questions

- Use **open-ended questions**, particularly when the issues to be explored aren't well-understood

- For a 90 minute group, **5 to 7 core questions** may be sufficient

- Create **probes** to clarify responses

- Be ready to ask **clarifying questions** based on the content of the discussion

- The more **familiar** the facilitators are with the topic, the more likely they'll ask good questions

Asking Questions

- Questions should **NOT** be:

  – Closed-ended

  – Vague, leading, or misleading

- Or:

  – Elicit either short or yes/no responses

  – Administered per serial interviewing procedures

Asking Questions

- Questions should:

  – Be **open-ended**

  – Clearly formulated and **easily understood**

  – **Neutral** so it's formulation doesn't affect the answer

  – **Carefully sequenced** with easier, general questions preceding more difficult ones

  – Ordered so that **less intimate topics precede more personal topics**

Asking Questions

- For those **new to focus groups**, you will soon discover:

    – The first question asked might be the best question ever, but participants might use the opportunity to disclose at great depth their general thoughts about the topic at hand

    – The resulting text may be difficult to code and to analyze, but can be quite revealing….

    – Be prepared to limit the time spent on this question

Sample Questions

- Tell me about your specific mental health and substance abuse problems and how they impact your physical health and ability to access appropriate providers and services?

- We know that people with HIV have tended to indulge in high risk behavior. What are the specific behaviors that people need to change if we are ever going to stop this horrific disease?

Sample Questions

1. Why do some kids here use drugs and others don't?

    a. What is going on in the lives of kids here who are using drugs?
    b. What is different about kids that use and those that don't use drugs?

2. In our interviews, people talked about how many kids get labeled here as "bad kids," and that it's assumed that these kids are problem drug users. What can be done to keep people from being labeled in this way?

    a. How do kids get labeled?
    b. How can kids get rid of the label?

Which Sample Questions Would You Select? What Probes Would Follow?

- Are your services provided in a culturally competent manner?

- What are your thoughts about taking part in this new program?

- How have people in the community responded to this problem?

- Why don't more people recognize the value of abstinence-only education?

Try to Avoid…

- Using **jargon** unfamiliar to the study population

- Leaving participants with **incorrect information** that could harm them down the road (i.e., risks associated with a particular virus or disease)

  – Come prepared with **fact sheets** to distribute once the group is completed

- Allowing persons with **a lot power** over other participants to join the focus group or otherwise observe proceedings (i.e., supervisors of frontline staff)

Wrapping Up

- Provide **opportunity** for participants to share their perspectives after the group has taken place (i.e, stick around to chat, provide phone number and email address, etc.)

- **Clean up** the room!

- **Debrief** and compare "headnotes" (more about this during Focus Groups, Part 2)

For Further Information or…

…for more in-depth, in-person, hands-on training with fun role-playing activities… then contact:

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Shameless Appropriation from these Great Sources!

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