Focus Groups
A Focus Group Is . . .

What

• A carefully planned discussion
• To obtain perceptions of a defined interest area
A Focus Group Is . . .

Where

• In a permissive, non-threatening environment
A Focus Group Is . . .

Who

- Approximately seven to ten people
- With common characteristics relating to discussion topic
A Focus Group Is . . .

How

• Conducted by a trained interviewer (moderator, facilitator).

• Three focus groups are the minimum for a study
Why Do Focus Groups?

• To collect qualitative data
• To determine feelings, perceptions and manner of thinking of participants regarding products, services, programs or opportunities
• Attitudes and perceptions are developed in part by interaction with other people
• To promote self-disclosure among participants
• It's dangerous to take "customers" for granted
When to Conduct Focus Groups

• Before a program begins, during a program or after a program ends

• Focus groups are effective when
  o People have something to share (motivations)
  o The goal is to understand human behavior

• Focus groups are not effective when
  o People are divided or angry
  o The goal is to gather factual information
  o Organization is trying to improve its image
Selecting Participants

• Participants are similar
• General selection rules:
  – Set exact specification
  – Maintain control of the selection process
  – Use the resources of the sponsoring organization in recruiting
  – Beware of bias
  – Develop a pool of eligible participants and then randomly select
Incentives for Participants

- Money ($20-$50)
- Food
- Gifts
- Positive, upbeat invitation
1. Set meeting times for interviews
2. Contact potential participants by phone or in person (2 weeks before meeting time)
3. Send a personalized invitation
4. Phone (or contact) each person the day before the focus group
Moderator Skills

- Is mentally prepared
- Selects appropriate location
- Records the discussion
- Uses purposeful small talk
- Has a smooth & snappy introduction
- Uses pauses and probes
- Uses subtle group control
- Controls reactions to participants
- Selects the right moderator
- Uses an assistant moderator
- Uses appropriate conclusion
Beginning the Focus Group Discussion

• The first few moments in focus group discussion are critical.
  – Create a thoughtful, permissive atmosphere
  – Provide the ground rules
  – Set the tone

• Recommended introduction pattern:
  – Welcome
  – Overview and topic
  – Ground rules
  – First question
Asking Questions That Yield Powerful Information

• Use open-ended questions
• Avoid dichotomous questions
• "Why?" is rarely asked
• Use "think back" questions
• Carefully prepare focus questions
• Consider standardized questions
Systematic Analysis Process

• Start while still in the group
• Immediately after the focus group
• Soon after the focus group--within hours analyze individual focus group
• Later--within days analyze the series of focus groups
• Finally, prepare the report
Focus Group Analysis Tips

When analyzing focus group data, consider…

• Words
• Context
• Internal consistency
• Frequency or extensiveness of comments
• Intensity of the comments
• Specificity of responses
• Find the big ideas
Reporting Focus Group Results

• Use a communications strategy
• Use an appropriate reporting style that the client finds helpful and meets expectations
• Strive for enlightenment
• Make points memorable
• Use narrative or bulleted format
• Give thought to the oral report