



Focus Group Participant Guide

Overview

Definition: What is a focus group?

A focus group is a small-group discussion led by an experienced facilitator. Focus groups are used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic and then to guide future action. The groups are usually small (less than 10 participants) and community members are selected and invited to attend based on their experience with and/or knowledge of the particular topic. Participants are asked to respond to the facilitator's questions as well as to interact with each other and respond to other participant questions and responses. Focus groups can offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion topic that is not available through surveys.

Purpose: Why are we doing focus groups?

Every three years, nonprofit hospitals, federally qualified health centers, and local health departments are required to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA). These assessments consider the needs of the community and produce in a written report that is made publicly available. Island County Public Health Department wants to better understand the community identified health needs in their county by including community voices in the form of focus groups. Focus groups are a great way to gather a lot of in-depth, community focused information in a relatively short amount of time. The findings from the CHNA are used to gauge where and how to allocate resources to address specific health needs and will inform their Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

Structure: How will the focus groups work?

Participants will be asked a series of semi-structured open-ended questions related to the focus group topic with the goal of encouraging respectful, non-threatening dialogue among and between participants. Participants are encouraged to respond not only to the facilitator's questions and prompts but also to each other's questions, prompts, and reactions. The groups will be audio recorded so the facilitator can analyze the responses after the group has concluded. We will also have a note taker participating in the group to gather high level themes and participant interactions.

Ethics

Participants should know their contributions are voluntary, the facilitator has clearly identified what level of confidentiality can be expected, and respect for individual rights, dignity, and diversity has been stated. All participants will need to verbally agree to participate and have the focus group recorded. This is not a project that requires IRB Review, i.e., not a research project, but we want to still follow good ethical practices around data collection, confidentiality, and consent.¹

¹ Harvard University IRB Guidance [What DOES and DOES NOT require IRB Review and Approval? | Committee on the Use of Human Subjects \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policies/irb-review-and-approval/what-does-and-does-not-require-irb-review-and-approval)





Focus Group Agenda

Welcome & Introductions

10 minutes

Please grab some food and find a space that is comfortable for you! We will begin with introductions.

Focus Group Structure and Purpose

10 minutes

The facilitator will explain the purpose of the focus group and the structure of the conversation. This will be the time to ask questions and confirm participation.

Focus Group Discussion

60-90 minutes

The facilitator will ask questions and participants will engage in conversation to explore the meaning of the question and how it relates to their health and well-being.

Focus Group Debrief

40 minutes

After the discussion has concluded, the facilitator will ask if anyone has any questions about the Community Health Assessment (CHA), or feedback about the focus group process. Next steps for the CHA will be shared.

Thank You & Closing

10 minutes

Please take a few minutes to clean up your space. This will also be the time when grocery gift cards are provided for participants.

