

Focus Groups

Target Audience: Leaders at all levels

Purpose

To foster and support today's diverse Air Force by seeking to better understand the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of our Airmen enabling commanders to make improved decisions.

Description

A focus group is a form of human behavior research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward an idea or issue. Focus groups are used to help spot trends by providing details relating to the how, why, and when of a situation or concern. They provide a means of evaluating ideas and programs that influence Airmen living and working in the local area. One or two people is a meeting – not a focus group; eight to ten participants are needed to generate meaningful conversation. Assembling and guiding your focus group is accomplished by a moderator and recorder. The overall results of the focus group should govern the shape of the summary and report as much as possible thus giving the decision maker information from which to make a good decision.

Employ

The following document on page 2 provides an overview and step-by-step instructions for setting up, collecting data, and reporting the findings from your focus group.



How Focus Groups Can Help Your Unit





Overview



- **Introduction**
- **What is a Focus Group?**
- **Can My Unit Benefit From Focus Groups?**
- **Your Focus Group in 10 Steps**
- **Constructing the Session**
- **Session Introduction**
- **Question Types**
- **Extract the Data**
- **Report the findings**



Focus Group Introduction



This slideshow provides an understanding of focus groups and how they can increase understanding the attitudes and behaviors influencing today's Airmen.

The creation of a focus group and the extraction of its useful, pertinent data is explained step-by-step.





What is a Focus Group?



Definition: A focus group is a form of human behavior research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward an idea or issue.

Group Size: One or two people is a meeting - not a focus group. You need eight to ten participants to generate meaningful conversation.

Location: Provide an environment that puts participants at ease and will allow them to thoughtfully discuss the topics.

Running the Show: You need a moderator and a recorder. The moderator kicks things off and ensures discussion flow. A recorder assists, observes reactions and takes careful notes.



Can My Unit Benefit From Focus Groups?



Focus groups are used to help spot trends (good and bad) by providing the details relating to the how, why, and when of a situation or concern.

When is the best time to stand up a focus group?

Anytime decision makers desire a better level of understanding from a particular group.

Who are the best individuals to take part in a focus group?

Members in the same age group and rank tier seem to yield the best results. A mix of ages and ranks can be risky causing honest conversation to be inhibited.



Your Focus Group in 10 Steps



- 1. The action officer (CC?) selects topic(s) for the focus group discussion. **Example:** Has there been recent “situations” within my unit and/or the Air Force that may indicate deviation from our Core Values?**
- 2. Identify the area of concern. Focus group members should be of similar demographics (i.e. age and rank) to that of the area of concern.**
- 3. Select two individuals at or above the demographics of the group members. One moderator will initiate, guide the discussion, maintain flow, and keep the group on track. The recorder assists but, is primarily tasked to take notes and observe member’s reactions. Moderators should be approachable, good listeners, and able to adequately capture the comments and mood and of the group.**



Your Focus Group in 10 Steps



- 4. Select a location and time for the meeting. A conference room with comfortable seating for 10 works nicely. Avoid gathering first thing in the morning or at the end of the day.**
- 5. Invite eight to ten people (remember #2) to take part in your focus group. Commanders and first sergeants are great resources for candidates.**
- 6. Construct topic driven question(s) for the focus group to discuss.**



Your Focus Group in 10 Steps



- 7. At the predetermined date, time and location, conduct the focus group.**
- 8. After the session, the moderator and the recorder compare notes and compile a list of responses then, complete a report.**
- 9. Submit the report to the action officer.**
- 10. Information garnered is useful in selecting topics, depth, etc. for projects.**



Constructing the Session



The moderator and recorder begin with introductions and should spend at least 5-15 minutes with small talk to put the members at ease. Topics such as: “tell us your hometown and why you joined the Air Force” have worked well in past sessions. It is very important to put the members at ease prior to starting the main discussion.

The following two slides are examples of session introduction and question types.



Session Introduction



“Thank you for your participation in this very important focus group.”

“I am _____, and this is _____, we are assigned to _____ here at _____ AFB.”

“The purpose of this session is to capture your perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward various themes.”

“Information gained will be used to help build further understanding used by our organization and possibly the entire base.



Question Types



Engagement Questions: Introduce participants and make them comfortable with the topic of discussion

Example: “Lets go around the room: Tell us your name, your hometown and why you joined the Air Force.”

Exploration Questions: Get to the heart of the discussion

Example: “What does the word “Commitment” mean to you as you perform your daily Air Force duties?”

Exit Question: Check to see if anything was missed in the discussion

Example: “Does anyone want to add anything that might have been missed on the topic of Commitment?”



Extract the Data



Immediately following conclusion of the focus group, the moderator and recorder review and summarize the notes taken at the session. Following the review, these questions are suggested for the report:

- **What have you discovered?**
- **Is the knowledge something you know already, or is it new?**
- **Does the knowledge confirm a hunch?**
- **How does the knowledge change your perspective?**
- **What else do you need to know?**
- **What major themes emerge?**
- **What insight have you gained?**



Report the Findings



The overall results of the focus group should govern the shape of the summary and report as much as possible. **Important! The report uncovers findings but does not suggest solutions.**

Summarize the report by importance of findings and major topic rather than by sequence of events in the discussion.

Example:

- Reason for focus group
- Participant demographics
- A brief description of key findings
- Highlight issues that are relevant to the target audience



Has this presentation helped you? Your comments and feedback are very important to this project. Please send suggestions to: thomas.norling.1@us.af.mil



OPR: Norling/PACE/DSN 487-8283/20 Feb 2015

Roadmap Alignment: 2.3.1



Air Education and Training Command

“The First Command”