

Facilitating Effective Focus Groups

How Advocates Can Inform a Coordinated Community Response

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Principles of a Coordinated Community Response

Overview of Principles

Keep battered women at the forefront of your work

- The key to grassroots organizing is to include the voices of those your organizing on behalf of
- The outside monitoring agency/coordinator or a practitioner in the system is the driving force but systematic change has little benefit for battered women if the agency or person leading the effort does not communicate and listen to the voices of battered women or advocates
- Keeping battered women at the forefront of the work allows the most appropriate response to be formulated to meet their needs within the institutions they must navigate

Know the people and the work they perform

- Knowing the system and the people who work in them is as valuable as knowing the realities of the women who pass through it
- Most of the work involved in systems advocacy builds on understanding the inner workings of each system and the people who carry out its various functions. Some of the best allies in this advocacy come from within the institution itself
- Changing a system requires a thorough knowledge of how it works and the roles various practitioners play within it at each level

Institutionalize a cohesive response

- When forming a CCR, create a mission or vision statement and revisit your intent periodically (an annual time to review the MOU aids in this focus)
- The process of CCR intervention work is continual. Regular meetings keep people informed and routinely refocused on current issues
- Institutional change is a slow process. Many conflicts arise or the attention shifts from intervention work to prevention efforts (especially in small communities with few domestic assaults). Continue to review, collecting new information; examining data and information on response: FOCUS GROUPS

How are focus groups useful?

Duluth Safety Audit

A partnership between PAVSA and Mending the Sacred Hoop that resulted in institutional change

www.mshoop.org

- Fill in gaps in data
- To collect data that hasn't been collected
- Gather community opinion and experience
- Cost effective in comparison to individual interviews
- Proven method to improve services and response

Getting started

- **Carefully draft your invitation/flyer.** Examples show some ideas, and things to avoid. Don't forget to use social media and email to share your flyers, and personally invite as many members of your target audience as possible.
- **Draft your questions.** A focus group session should be around one and half hours. Narrow yourself down to 1 or 2 open ended questions.
- **Choose moderators.** This is a key role as the moderator must be able to read body language and other cues in addition to facilitating conversation. Ideally two people should moderate; an experienced facilitator and someone to take in depth notes.
- **Set up logistics.** Determine your dates and times, incentives and food. Book a comfortable, well ventilated, accessible space.
- **Recruiting people.** When possible, build groups of similar ages, gender and backgrounds. Vastly different focus groups can inhibit dialogue from participants. To assure a diverse study, host more than one group session. 8-12 people per group is ideal.

Recruiting Participants

Decide who

Utilize existing
lists and
groups

Contact
organizations;
Ask for names

Over invite

Screen

If you had a group next month, who would you invite?

Recruiting (continued)

- Remember participants don't always have a vested interest in your study. It can be difficult to get people to show up for a focus group, even after they have committed to attending.
- Invite a few extra people, anticipate the fact that a few people may not show.
- Screen your participants thoroughly. Do they live in the impacted area? Do they fit your intended demographic? This will highly impact the information they can share.
- Send ground rules, confidentiality statement prior to meeting.
- Call two days prior to the event to make a friendly reminder.
- Don't forget the snacks!

Purpose

Why it is important

Who is sponsoring the work?

How you got their name

What will be done with results?

Confidentiality

Conversational and personal

Why you're inviting them

How participating will guide the outcome

Incentives are a highly effective method of improving attendance

Non-monetary; light meal, snacks, childcare provided

Small stipend

Gift card

Gas Card

Small personal gift

NOT marketing merch

Facilitation

- Your best tool for successful facilitation is a well planned out guide. Draft your questions carefully. The examples will give you some ideas.
- Provide clear information about the process and how the information is gathered and used.
- Introduce yourself, give a brief background of the purpose of the focus group, include statements of how participants are instrumental in gathering and providing the provide data and information
- Establish rapport; give time for participants to get familiar with each other and comfortable in the space.
- Set carefully some ground rules, confidentiality, allow others to speak,
- Reiterate confidentiality, ensure that you have signed confidentiality/release of information documents.
- Ask your open ended question.
- Resist the urge to fill silence, use humor if possible
- Repeat responses when possible for clarity

Guide the conversation

- Keep the topic focused and relevant to the participants.
- Let participants respond on their own terms, and define the issues that are important to them, but keep the group focused on the key topics.
- Give everyone the opportunity to comment – particularly those who may find it difficult to contribute.
- Respect participants' right not to discuss sensitive topics but support them if they wish to do so.
- Politely manage saboteurs. These are participants who may try to take over the discussion or deliberately provoke others. Their views are valid but ensure they don't stop others participating.
- Redirect dominant participants when necessary. Everyone should have time to speak.
- Ask for feedback periodically to summarize and clarify key points.
- Observe body language. If someone pulls a face, perhaps they disagree with the last point made. Ask them about it.

How would you deal with the following;

A silent participant?

One participant dominating the conversation?

A disagreement between participants?

An unfocused group?

Native Women's Focus Groups - Duluth Safety Audit of Native Women Who Have Reported Sexual Assault



Focus Groups

- Begin with smudging
- Description of Safety Audit & Purpose; including taking notes
- Listen; observations
- Comfort by listening, validating
 - Multiple assaults, traumatic experiences; assault & system
 - Normalized lack of response
 - Financial hardship
 - Alcohol Use, homeless women, myths regarding NW
 - Victim Blaming
- “All I wanted was law enforcement to contact me to validate that I had been raped; this would have been enough.”

Audit Findings & Gaps

- The audit found problems with the systemic response to Native women who reported sexual assault to the DPD from evidence collection to investigation to prosecution.
- Audit team reviewed 35 police reports comparison to focus group participants, the manner in which they were investigated was highly inconsistent, few received follow-up contact, none resulted in prosecution.
- Investigations & charging decisions hinged more on perceptions of Native women's credibility than on the totality of circumstances. Determination based on credibility affected how cases were initially investigated.
- There was a lack of and need for sexual assault advocacy specific to Native women. PAVSA needs to increase the number of Native women involved as staff, volunteers, board members.
- Officers' investigation reports of sexual assault need practical methods for assessing safety of sexual assault victims.
- Attempts to ignore race and racial dynamics stem from well-intended efforts but actually exacerbate racial tensions between the Duluth Native and the DPD.

Closing

- Bring the conversation to a close
- Summarize and clarify key points
- Thank everyone for their time – be sincere. These conversations can be hard work for everyone
- Let everyone know how you'll share your findings
- Offer resources for coping with trauma if appropriate
- Close with cedar/sage or song

Post-Group Analysis



Closing thoughts on the Safety Audit

For the audit team members and the institutions they represent, we all shared a sense of compassion and humanness and even shame, there is a modicum of justice that has begun. Our vision is that the work will move forward and will not stop with this project, seeking justice for all women who are survivors of sexual violence, for Native women, it has been the first stone thrown into the river that creates the rippling effect of outward movement that will prevail so that our voices may be heard and justice will be achieved.



Sources

The following sources were utilized in the preparation of this presentation:

- [Mending the Sacred Hoop: A Guide for Conducting Focus Groups](#)
- [Nonprofitinclusiveness.org: Information Gathering, Step 4 of the Inclusiveness Process](#)
- [The Sage Pub: Participants in A Focus Group](#)
- [Knowhownonprofit.org: How to Run A Focus Group](#)

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