

## SANKOFA FACT SHEET

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## Tips on Conducting Focus Groups

A focus group is a carefully planned discussion among a small group of people (typically 8 to 12) with certain similar characteristics, who interact in a group setting facilitated by a trained moderator. The facilitator or moderator uses a predetermined outline to guide the discussion and assure that desired topics and questions are addressed. Focus groups results provide valuable insights into the prevention needs of different populations but cannot be assumed to represent the views of the broader population. Focus groups are usually used for exploration, investigation, identification of present practices, understanding motivations, new idea generation, communication refinement, and strategic positioning.



## Steps in Conducting A Focus Group:

**1. Preparing for Session**

During this step, you should identify the major objective of the meeting, carefully develop five to six questions, plan your session, call potential members to invite them to the meeting and send them a follow-up invitation with a proposed agenda, session time and list of questions the group will discuss. Attempt to select members who don't know each other. Plan to provide a copy of the report from the session to each member and let them know you will do this. About three days before the session, call each member to remind them to attend.

**2. Developing Questions**

Always first ask yourself what problem or need will be addressed by the information gathered during the session, e.g., examine if a new service or idea will work, further understand how a program is failing, etc.

**3. Planning the Session**

Keep in mind that the session should last one to 1.5 hours. Over lunch seems to be a very good time for others to find time to attend. Sessions should be held in a conference room, or other setting with adequate air flow and lighting. Configure chairs so that all members can see each other. Provide name tags for members, as well. Provide refreshments, especially box lunches if the session is held over lunch.

It's critical that all members participate as much as possible, yet the session should move along while generating useful information therefore you should set ground rules. Consider the following agenda: welcome, review of agenda, review of goal of the meeting, review of ground rules, introductions, questions and answers, wrap-up. You should plan to record the session with either an audio or audio-video recorder. Don't count on your memory. If this isn't practical, involve a co-facilitator who is there to take notes.

**4. Facilitating the Session**

Major goal of facilitation is collecting useful information to meet the goals of the meeting. Introduce yourself and the co-facilitator, if used, and explain the means to record the session. You should try to carry out the agenda. Carefully word each question before that question is addressed by the group. Allow the group a few minutes for each member to carefully record their answers. Then, facilitate discussion around the answers to each question, one at a time.

After each question is answered, carefully reflect back a summary of what you heard (the note taker may do this). Ensure even participation. If one or two people are dominating the meeting, then call on others. Consider using a round-table approach, including going in one direction around the table, giving each person a minute to answer the question. If the domination persists, note it to the group and ask for ideas about how the participation can be increased. At the close of the session, tell members that they will receive a copy of the report generated from their answers, thank them for coming, and adjourn the meeting.

**5. Immediately After the Session**

Verify if the tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the session. Make any notes on your written notes, e.g., to clarify any scratching, ensure pages are numbered, fill out any notes that don't make sense, etc. You should write down any observations made during the session.

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