The Power is in the People!
Effectively Using Interviews & Focus Groups to Identify Needs & Assets

2007 NC CES Program Planning Institutes

Interviews & Focus Groups?

Structured discussions with individuals (i.e., interview), or a group of individuals (i.e., focus group), who possess certain identified attributes &/or characteristics of interest, designed to collect qualitative data
May be conducted face-to-face (both) or by telephone (interviews)

(Krueger & Casey, 2000)

Purpose of Interviews & Focus Groups

To more thoroughly understand participants' feelings, impressions &/or experiences
To identify particular topics of specific importance to a targeted group of individuals with shared attributes/characteristics
To explore in-depth (a) specific identified topic(s) of interest

(Krueger & Casey, 2000)

Advantages of Interviews

Explore full range & depth of a single participant's opinions, concerns, etc.
Develop professional relationships with participants through structured interaction
Provide individual flexibility while maintaining consistent structure among interviewees (i.e., Interview Schedule)

(Creswell, 1998)

Challenges of Interviews

Time consuming (for both researcher & interviewee)
Challenging to objectively analyze & compare data among interviewees
Interviewer may unintentionally bias participant's responses

(Creswell, 1998)

Advantages of Focus Groups

Explore full range & depth of group participants' opinions, concerns, etc.
Much flexibility while maintaining consistent structure among groups (i.e., Interview Schedule)
Much information in a short time period
Synergy among individual participants

(Creswell, 1998)
Challenges of Focus Groups

- Technique can be misused by poorly trained researchers
- Need good facilitators
- Groups can vary considerably & be difficult to assemble
- Difficult to objectively analyze data
- Findings often over generalized

(Creswell, 1998)

Conducting Interviews & Focus Groups

- Identify topic(s) of interest
- Develop structured & consistent Interview Schedule based upon topics
- Identify potential participants
- Select representative, but not random, participants

(Lopez & Safrit, 2001; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Safrit, Schmiesing, King, Villard, & Wells, 2003)

Conducting Interviews & Focus Groups

- Conduct session & record data
- Briefly summarize/review information recorded with participants
- Analyze data & create final report

(Lopez & Safrit, 2001; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Safrit, Schmiesing, King, Villard, & Wells, 2003)

Helpful Hints

- Use tape recorder &/or laptop to record responses
- Always take written notes (as back-up)
- Encourage a dynamic yet respectful environment (interaction)
- Be patient…every answer is OK!

(Lopez & Safrit, 2001; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Safrit, Schmiesing, King, Villard, & Wells, 2003)

References

References
