Checklist for Focus Group Interviews

Advance Notice

- Select locations, dates, and times that are convenient for participants.
- Contact participants two weeks (or more) before the session.
- Slightly over recruit the number of participants.
- Send each participant written confirmation of the time, date, and place.
- Give the participants a reminder phone call prior to the session.

Questions

- Questions should flow in a logical sequence.
- Key questions should focus on the critical issues of concern.
- Estimate how much time you will spend on each question.
- Use follow-up questions as needed.
- Limit the use of why questions.

Logistics

- Arrive early.
- Make sure the room is satisfactory (size, tables, comfort, etc.).
- Check background noise so it doesn’t interfere with audio recording.
- Have name tents for participants.
- Place the digital recorder or a remote microphone on the table.
- Bring extra batteries, name tents, lists of questions.
- Bring pens and copies of handouts and visual aids.
- Arrange food.
- Plan topics for small-talk conversation.

Moderator Skills

- Practice the introduction without referring to notes.
- Practice the questions. Know the key questions.
____ Be well rested, alert, and fully present.
____ Welcome participants.
____ Create a comfortable, open atmosphere.
____ Use probes and pauses.
____ Manage the time.
____ Make sure everyone has a chance to share.
____ Avoid head nodding.
____ Avoid verbal comments that signal approval.
____ Avoid giving personal opinions.

Immediately After the Session
____ Check to see if the recorder captured the comments.
____ Download the digital audio files to your computer.
____ Debrief with the research team and audio record the debriefing.
____ Prepare a brief written summary of key points if needed.
Responsibilities of Assistant Moderators

1. Take responsibility for all equipment and supplies. Make sure you have enough of all the items needed. Consider designating a focus group box or briefcase to hold all the necessary equipment and files.
   - List of participants with phone numbers
   - Consent forms (if needed)
   - Extra sets of the questioning route
   - Visuals or handouts
   - Name tents
   - Extra five-by-eight-inch cards
   - Honorariums
   - Receipts for honorariums
   - Audio recorder
   - Microphone (if needed)
   - Marking pens
   - Pens, pencils, crayons, paper
   - Notepaper, tablet
   - Spare batteries
   - Flip chart

2. Take responsibility for refreshments. Arrange for the refreshments, and set them up in the room.

3. Arrange the room. Arrange chairs and table so everyone can see each other. Be attentive to background noises that would affect the audio recording.

4. Set up the equipment, and verify that it is working properly.

5. Welcome participants as they arrive.

6. Sit in a designated location. Sit outside the circle, opposite the moderator, and close to the door. If participants arrive after the session begins, meet them at the door, take them outside of the room, and give them a short briefing as to what has happened and the current topic of discussion. Then bring the late participant into the room and show him or her where to sit.
7. Take notes throughout the discussion. Be attentive to the following areas of concern.
   - **Well-said quotes.** Capture word for word as much of the statement as possible. Listen for sentences or phrases that are particularly enlightening or eloquently express a particular point of view. Place quotation marks around the statement or phrase and indicate name of speaker. Place your opinions, thoughts, or ideas in parenthesis to keep them separate from participant comments. If a question occurs to you that you would like to ask at the end of the discussion, write it down in a circle or box.
   - **Nonverbal activity.** Watch for the obvious such as head nods, physical excitement, eye contact between certain participants, or other clues that would indicate level of agreement, support, or interest.
   - Make a sketch of the seating arrangement.

8. **Monitor recording equipment.** Occasionally glance at the recorder to see if the recording light is on.

9. **Do not participate in the discussion.** You can talk only if invited by the moderator. Control your nonverbal actions no matter how strongly you feel about an issue.

10. **Ask questions when invited.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator will invite you to ask questions of amplification or clarification.

11. **Give an oral summary.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator or assistant should provide a brief summary (about two minutes) of responses to the important questions. Invite participants to offer additions or corrections to the summary.

12. **Hand out the honorariums.** Be sure that participants sign that they have received the payment and then thank the participants for attending.

13. **Debrief.** Following the focus group, participate in the debriefing with the moderator. Record the debriefing.

14. **Provide feedback on analysis.** Read and provide feedback on the analysis.
What Is the Research?
You have been asked to take part in a research study sponsored by (name of organization). The purpose of this study is to find out (describe goal of the study). This study will benefit others in the community in the following ways: (cite direct and indirect benefits to participants and organizations).

Why Have I Been Asked to Take Part?
You have been invited to participate because you have important insights about this topic (e.g., you have observed or participated in the program, you have experience with the topic, someone close to you has experience with the topic, etc.).

Voluntary Participation
This discussion is voluntary—you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do not take part, it will have no effect on services or opportunities proved by local organizations and agencies. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. You may leave the group at any time for any reason.

Risks and Benefits
We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time. There are no personal benefits for taking part in this research. Your insights and that of others may be helpful to researchers as they seek insights on this topic.

Audio Recording
The discussion will be audio recorded to ensure that we have accurately captured the comments of each individual. Your privacy will be protected. No names will be used in any report. The discussion will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recording will only be available to the research team. The recordings will be stored in a secure location and will be erased when the analysis is completed.
Payment (if applicable)
For participating in the discussion, you will receive (state the incentive).

Questions
Do you have any questions regarding this study? If you have any additional questions about the study, you may call (cite the phone number).

☑ Yes, I agree to take part in the focus group study

Name ____________________________
Signature __________________________
Date ____________________________