Focus Groups
From a Practice
(and Practical!) Perspective
Today’s Talk

- FG Methodology
- Steps involved from “Fit” to “Finish”
- Practical Considerations for Success
Key Elements of Focus Groups

- Qualitative in nature (how/why/explanations of “what”)
- Homogeneous group
- Script addressing research goal
- Ideal = 8 participants
- Around a table or in a round
- Facilitator/Recorder (community setting)
- Total = 2-3 focus groups or more (never a single group)
When to Choose Focus Groups

- Timing is right

[Tünde Varga-Atkins, 2012]
When to Choose Focus Groups...

♦ Purpose is a “fit”
  ♦ Initial discovery/generate ideas
  ♦ Program/ intervention development
  ♦ Test products/materials
  ♦ Confirm/ explore quantitative findings
  ♦ Triangulation of data
  ♦ Consumer/ Provider/ “Other” View of same (basic) set of questions
  ♦ Cultural Insider
When to Choose Focus Groups

♦ FG methodology is best option for research goal and resources are in place
♦ Qualitative results desired
♦ Rich, detailed data answering “how,” “why” and descriptive “what” questions
♦ Client/agency values qualitative findings
♦ Participants “being heard” valued for
  ◆ agency decision making
  ◆ future interactions with consumers/providers/others
When Focus Groups aren’t the best choice...

- Generalizability desired
- No need for “how,” “why” and descriptive “what” answers
- Data needs satisfied
- Other method more optimal
- Team readiness to conduct/organize focus group research not there
Steps to Planning Focus Groups

♦ Identify focus group research goal(s)/objectives
  ♦ end product
  ♦ final audience
  ♦ “A success will be….”

♦ Consider supplementary data – and how it MIGHT fit in
Steps to Planning
Focus Groups

♦ Identify FG population(s) of interest
 Determine eligibility criteria or “Who do you want around the FG table?”
Steps to Planning Focus Groups

- Determine number of focus groups
- Determine IRB/human subjects protection/consent requirements needed
- Design focus group implementation schedule - allow time for logistics and resources needed before and after FGs
- Collect your team - make sure all roles are covered and everyone is trained
  - Review resource needs and make decisions about out-sourcing
Focus Group

Roles

♦ Planner
♦ Logistics
♦ Recruiter
♦ Facilitator
♦ Notetaker/ Co-Moderator
Resource Considerations for Outsourcing

- Level of experience of team/specific team roles
- Sensitive/ethical issues that dictate outside or inside facilitation and analysis
- Number of focus groups/eligibility criteria- how hard to recruit?
- Rigor of analysis needed
- Transcription
Steps to Planning Focus Groups…

♦ Design materials for review/homework strategy (if applicable)
♦ Design recruitment strategy
  ♦ Write recruitment script
♦ Write FG script, ensure “script fit”
Steps to Planning Focus Groups...

- Long term planning/logistics-
  - Participant-friendly date/time
    - Target population needs (e.g., daycare, transportation, interpreter)
  - Location with good acoustics for taping
  - Refreshments – “not loud” kind
  - Incentives
  - Recording equipment
  - Co-moderator
  - Transcription planning
Steps to Planning Focus Groups...

- Design/collect “other” documents needed, as applicable
  - Pre-focus group questionnaire
  - Debrief summary form
  - Consent/HIPAA
  - Documentation of incentive received

- Design analysis plan
A Good Data Analysis Plan

Happens…

♦ Before and after script development- what do you want to learn/measure???

Should…

♦ Address research goals/ objectives
♦ Create overall structure for analysis
♦ Be open to what you are looking for as well as what you might find
Steps to Planning
Focus Groups...

- Recruit participants
What to Consider for Recruitment

♦ “Inside” vs. “Outside” recruiters
♦ What’s in it for the recruiters
♦ What’s in it for the participants
♦ Human subjects/ IRB
♦ Where to recruit
♦ Balance issues
  ♦ General, specific
♦ Recruitment script
What to Consider for Recruitment…

♦ Time frame
♦ 5 – 10 focus group participants, ideally 8
♦ Over-recruitment considerations
♦ Similar strangers is ideal
♦ Avoid participants recruiting others
Steps to Planning Focus Groups…

- Facilitator conducts the focus group(s) and audio/video records session
- Notetaker takes fieldnotes
- Notetaker and Facilitator collect data
  - Verbal
  - Non-verbal
- Debrief Summary answers
Steps to Planning

Focus Groups…

♦ Facilitator debriefs with notetaker/client
♦ Transcribe focus group recording into written notes (if applicable)
♦ Code and categorize notes, using analysis plan/schema
♦ Analyze and synthesize notes for final product (e.g., report)
Data Coding- 3 Good Ways

1. Develop “code list” ahead of time (deductive)
2. Codes/categories “emerge” from the data (inductive)
3. Both
Data Coding, Synthesis, and Analysis...

- Small to large vs large to small coding
- Create code families, categories, large themes supported by data
- Team verified coding (ideal, but not always possible)
- Team input (ideal, but not always possible)
- Quotes to illustrate themes
- Systematic coding and analysis with verifiable procedures
Steps to Planning Focus Groups…

♦ Write/develop final product
  ♦ Audience friendly reporting of themes, synthesized findings
  ♦ Supports research goal(s)
  ♦ Quotes for emphasis and reality-building

♦ Report, community meeting, powerpoint, digital storytelling, article, intervention making/tweaking
You Are Done!

- What else can you do to learn more about focus groups?
Get Experience and Training!

- Attend a “Nuts and Bolts” experiential focus group training: two half-day sessions
- Serve as (a trained) notetaker
- Get on lists/be a participant in a paid market research study (e.g., Fieldwork Denver)
- Determine your area of interest(s) and seek coaching or a specialized training for your team
Get Resources and Knowledge!

- Attend QRMF sessions!
- Tune in to researchers on/off campus with qualitative/focus group interests
- Read books by successful practitioners
- Read peer reviewed articles with focus group findings
- Join LinkedIn groups and ask q’s (e.g., QRCA)
- Seek resources for personal “specialty” area (e.g., Quirk’s)
Thank you! Any questions?

Martha J. Tenney, MPH
martha@minedinsights.com
www.minedinsights.com