

Conducting Focus Groups with RIM Communities: A Guide for Health Departments

Focus groups are an effective method to gather qualitative data and in-depth insights from the community. Focus groups enable public health departments and others to collect information on anything from challenges and solutions to beliefs and perceptions in order to reveal true community attitudes and opinions.

A typical focus group usually involves six to ten respondents brought together with a moderator to take part in a planned discussion. During the focus group, respondents will be asked a series of predetermined questions to discover their thoughts and feelings about a particular topic, product, or area of interest. All of this results in an open-ended, free-flowing discussion that will then be used to make informed decisions.

Tips for Conducting a Focus Group

- Ideally 6-10 people
- Comfortable environment, curricular seating (if possible) with physical distancing; focus groups can also be held remotely via a web conference platform
- Note-taker or tape recorder
 - Consider a standardized form for key points, themes, follow-up questions, and quotes
 - Be familiar with your questions
- Have an introduction prepared
 - Welcome, introduce moderator and team
 - Overview and any ground rules
- Use 5-second pauses to allow people to speak
- Use open-ended questions and avoid “yes” “no” questions
- Use probes: “Would you explain further, or Could you give an example?”
- Use a summarizing conclusion
 - Review the purpose of the group and ask if anything has been missed
 - Thank everyone for their time and help

Sample Interview Guide

Introduction and Consent

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. This discussion should take about 60 to 90 minutes.

My name is [name] from [organization]. I am joined by my colleague [name], who will be taking notes during this focus group.

Today, our goal is to learn more about your community here in [location] and understand some of the things that make it easier or harder to keep you and your families safe from the Coronavirus [adjust based on goals of focus group].

We will be using what you tell us today to help us [name local health department], and local leaders understand how to help the community. We are here to listen to you. You are the experts for your community, and there are no wrong answers but rather different points of view.

Please share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. We will take notes because we know you all have important information to share, and we don't want to miss that, but we are not writing down names.

Your participation here today is voluntary. You can choose not to respond at any time. If you agree to participate, please say yes.

Focus Group Questions

Questions for Youth

1. What are your main concerns about Coronavirus?
2. Has coronavirus had an impact on how you socialize with your friends and social circles?
 - Has it had an impact on your family?
3. What have you heard about preventing the spread of coronavirus?
 - Where do you and your friends get your information?
 - Where does your family get their information?
4. What do you think is causing people in your community to get coronavirus?
 - Additional probe: What kind of social gathering activities are people in your community doing?
5. What are some things you can do to help stop the spread in your community?

- Additional Probe: Have you seen any good social media campaigns, tik tok videos, mask decorating challenge, door to door education?
- 6. What are some ideas you have to encourage your friends and family to help stop the community spread?
 - How can it be more “fun”?
- 7. What should we keep in mind when developing or sharing information about coronavirus for you and your family?
 - Additional Probe: Where is a good place to make sure information is available to the community? Is there a language or information level of the community? How many people access and use social media in your community? Who does the community trust the most?
- 8. Are there questions about coronavirus that you need answers to? If so, what are those questions?

Questions for Adults

1. What are your main concerns about coronavirus?
2. What do you think is causing people in your community to get coronavirus?
3. What are things people in your community are doing to protect themselves from coronavirus?
 - What seems to be their main concerns or objections?
 - What would make it easier?
4. What kind of social or gathering activities are people in your community doing?
 - Additional probe: Going to church? Attending family events like parties, picnics, etc.? Going shopping?
5. If you were told you tested positive for coronavirus, would you be able to stay home?
 - Would you be able to isolate yourself from family members?
 - Would you be more likely to wear a mask outside?
 - What could make it easier?
6. What would make you decide to get tested for coronavirus?
 - Do you know where to go to get tested?
 - Is it easy to get to a testing location?
 - What would make it easier?
7. What do you think needs to happen to stop the spread within the community?
 - Additional probe: Are there additional resources you or your community needs? How can community leaders help?

8. Do you know of someone who had a member of their household who had or thought they had coronavirus? What did they do?
 - Additional probe: did they stay home, did they try to isolate, did they get tested?
9. What information do you receive about coronavirus from work?
 - What actions has your employer taken to protect you and your coworkers?
 - Additional probe: from supervisors, verbally or through social media, videos, flyers, pamphlets, text messages?
10. What other things do you need to protect yourself from coronavirus at work?
 - Additional probe: the need for more translation and materials, resources, PPE, etc.
11. What actions have community leaders taken to help you and your family?
 - What else would you like to see?
12. What should we keep in mind when developing or sharing information about coronavirus for you and your family?
 - Additional probe: resources available to the community, the education and literacy level of the community, access and use of social media, who they trust the most
13. Are there questions about coronavirus that you need answers to?

Questions for Religious Leadership

1. We've heard from the community that you are all worried and that people have been following the guidelines for protecting themselves and their families from coronavirus (wearing masks, not gathering). As leaders in the community,
 - What do you think is working?
 - What's not working?
2. What do you think needs to happen to stop COVID in your community?
3. Is there information you think your community needs to know?
 - Are there things that you think your community needs?
4. What are you worried will happen to the community if nothing is done to stop COVID?

Questions for Recommendations

1. If you had a chance to advise the [HEALTH OR DISTRICT leaders] about COVID strategies in your community, what would you say?

Additional Resources

- Community Tool Box [Guide for Focus Groups](#)
- Krueger, R.A. (2002). [Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews](#)

References

CDC. (2020, November 13). Monitoring and Evaluating COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies in K-12 Schools: Focus Group Guide. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/monitoring-evaluating-community-mitigation-strategies/resources-by-setting/K12-focus-group-guide.html>