



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES



CENTRE FOR CLINICAL GOVERNANCE RESEARCH IN HEALTH

CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP



Advice and a proposed structure for those facilitating a focus group

1 CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP

This brief note distils some core ideas on how to run a focus group. One important factor is that the participants in a focus group need to be notified in advance, and the venue should be comfortable, accessible and suitable. Book the room ahead of time and allow enough time for the meeting and a possible over-run of the schedule, just in case.

The room should be well ventilated, well lit and of suitable size, and there should be sufficient chairs. If it is to be a long meeting, consider making refreshments available.

Most people respond best by interacting around a table as relative equals. Participants should feel that the discussions are private, ie they cannot be overheard by non-participants. A confidential environment promotes free-flowing discussion, which is one of the main points of a focus group.

Advice and proposed structure for a focus group session	
1. Before the session: rehearse the ground rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aim for equal participation ▪ Display respect for others (let them finish what they're saying, no put downs) ▪ Reflect on potential political or personal conflicts before starting the group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Devise advance strategies for dealing with these; e.g. seating arrangements; pre-group requests ▪ Keep focused <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain momentum (don't get bogged down in particular issues) ▪ Get closure on particular questions so far as possible ▪ Allow space for both the 'sacred' and the 'profane'
2. Introduction: starting off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Record location, time, date ▪ Welcome participants ▪ Appreciate their time ▪ Review the goal of the focus group ▪ Introductions – around the table
3. Establish agenda: why are we here and what will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of agenda ▪ Review of purpose: why are we here? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To elicit views on the topic ▪ There is no right answer to the questions ▪ Review of activity: what will we do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questions will be introduced and responses encouraged ▪ Explain the means you will use to record the session (tape? scribe?)

4. During the process, 1: formulate your questions carefully and slowly

- Speak clearly and slowly
- Phrase your questions (if different from the prompts given) in a way that is neutral
- Do not favour one group over another

5. During the process, 2: monitor and control the politics

- Promote even participation
- Be sensitive to conflicts as they develop during the session
 - Make sure you can refer to a ground rule that says 'respect'
 - Or cut off when issues get too hot
 - But do not stifle political comments because they are at the heart of this exercise

6. Closing the session: wrap up and thanks

- Record duration of the session
- Let people know their comments will be taken seriously and that they will be written up and communicated back to them in the course of the project
- Carefully reflect back a brief summary of what was said and be explicit about what will be formally recorded
- Thank participants for their time and valuable expertise
- Close the meeting

7. After the session: tidying up

- If needed, add any notes to the ones already made during the session
- Write down any observations you can make about the nature of participation, problems, surprises
- Make sure you sift your own opinions from those given by others, and that you summarise not just those that you find important
- Leave the room as you found it.

Source: a synthesis of the focus group facilitation experiences of Centre staff

2 THE CENTRE FOR CLINICAL GOVERNANCE RESEARCH IN HEALTH

The Centre for Clinical Governance Research in Health is a research facility in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of New South Wales with a successful track record of undertaking research and evaluation projects on health sector issues since 1989. Its core interest is to investigate issues of policy, governance and leadership in the health sector. It is involved in conducting original research into clinical governance issues, providing a scholarly capability by which to evaluate health sector policies, programs and projects, and contributing to undergraduate medical, postgraduate health services management, and public health and doctoral education. To achieve these the Centre makes use of assembled expertise and collaborators, and builds on existing staff expertise through external collaborations within Australia and internationally, including with the Centre for Health Informatics, UNSW, the Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine at University of Sydney, and the Centre for Clinical Management at the University of Durham, United Kingdom.

2.1 Objectives

The Centre has 6 main objectives. They are to:

- Undertake internationally recognised inter-disciplinary research and development projects on clinician led approaches to organising and managing clinical work across the full spectrum of care
- Provide a focal point for initiating and managing collaborative research and development projects on clinician led approaches to the organization and management of clinical work involving partners drawn from other groups within the Faculty of Medicine, other departments within the University, Federal, State and Area health authorities and potential collaborators in other universities both within and external to Australia
- Provide a supportive environment for developing the research skills of young health researchers from both clinical and social science disciplines
- Develop an international research reputation not simply in health but also in the base disciplines from which Centre members are drawn viz, the clinical disciplines, policy studies, discourse analysis, sociology, organizational behaviour, psychology, health economics, social theory and anthropology
- Be an internationally recognised reservoir of knowledge and expertise on clinical work management issues with a capacity to respond to requests for advice and consultation
- Facilitate the development of education and training activities both within and outside the University in support of clinical governance.