

Resource: Holding focus groups

Purpose

- Focus groups are a great way to gain the insights and perspectives of a small group of individuals.
- Focus groups allow you gain insights on the needs, interests, and preferences of older adults. They can also be used to assess the usability or 'age-friendliness' of a space or community.
- The strength of focus groups is that you can really dig deep into how community members are feeling and thinking about an issue.
- It also is a great way to bring people together who can learn and share with each other.
- The drawback of using a focus group is that the individuals cannot be assumed to represent the entire community.
- A focus group that does not reflect the demographics of the greater community may not provide you with the information you are seeking.

Tips and suggestions

- Try to have no more than 10 people at a focus group. Too many people can result in the voices of some people not being heard. Hosting multiple focus groups may be necessary if there are more than 10 people interested in participating.
- Plan to have at least 2 hours for the focus group. It typically takes longer than expected to discuss an issue so it is best to set the time aside.
- Prepare about 5 questions that you would like to discuss in the focus group. Too many questions will not allow you to delve into a discussion as much as you would like.
- You may need to have one person facilitating the focus group. The facilitator will ask the questions, ensure that each person is having a chance to talk, moving the discussion along if it gets off track, and monitoring the dynamics and emotions of the group.
- You may also need a recorder. This person will take notes on what is being discussed. You may also find it helpful to tape-record the discussion.
- Ensure that focus group participants have provided consent to participate in the interview as well as to have it tape recorded.