

HOLDING A FOCUS GROUP

A focus group held by a facilitator uses selected community members to get a sense of community needs and interests. For the groups, select a cross-section of individuals representing various interest groups and walks of life, such as parents of preschoolers, teenagers, adult learners, senior citizens, business people, advocates for people with disabilities, etc. Invite six to twelve people from one group such as teenagers to attend the meeting. Send a written invitation to each person and follow it up with a phone call. Promise that attendance will not lead to other obligations, but be sure to emphasize how important people's ideas are to the future of the library.

The idea of the focus group is to find out what one segment of the population knows. Often focus groups reveal that basic information about the library is not understood.

Sample Agenda for Young Adults (about 2 hours):

1. **Introduction** by facilitator (preferably not linked to the library)
Confidentiality
Brief background on focus groups
Importance of Planning
2. **Warmup**
Name
How long have you lived here
Something about the library:
--How often do you come to the library
--How often use the website
3. Best thing about the library
4. What would you change
5. Imagine yourself 10 years from now. You live here or in another community, you have a career, perhaps you have started a family. What does your ideal public library look like/ do/ feel like?
6. Wrap up, thanks.
7. Anything else?

Alternate format:

1. First question: **What is the library doing well?** People jot down their thoughts, perhaps three things, quickly on paper. Then go around and have each person tell one thing. Write it on newsprint. Go around until all ideas are exhausted. Ask if anyone has anything to add.
2. Second question: **What could we improve?** Do the same thing as with the first question (Nominal Group Technique). Do not criticize or judge anything that anyone says. People may suggest things the library already does. Don't explain services in depth (someone in the group may do so, however). Discussion may uncover a problem with community awareness.

3. Final question: **What do you think should be the library's priorities in the coming five years?**
Facilitator might give a few examples, such as preschool services, ebook provider. Providing too many examples will influence the results. Go around for a third time.
4. Ask if anyone has anything else to say about the library or any other ideas for the future. Invite general discussion, questions and comments. The important thing is to have people talk about what they need and how they feel about library services now and in the future. The facilitator should not be doing a lot of the talking
5. A Board member should thank people for coming and tell briefly how the information gathered. Will be part of the library plan Invite people to stay for refreshments and socializing.

Tools

Flip chart to collect information; refreshments; nametags; scrap paper and pencils; library handout with hours, services, programs

Other ways to collect community feedback:

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| Postcard survey/ phone call | opt out, questions provided ahead of time, useful if small area |
| Community Leader interviews | http://az.webjunction.org/slo-workshop-materials/articles/content/439382
Useful if Planning Committee is missing data from important group |
| Online and paper survey | http://www.surveymonkey.com/ , http://www.zoomerang.com/ or Google Apps. Libraries might borrow questions, e.g. |



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