

TOPkit DIGEST

Bringing TOPkit Digest To You

The content in this month's TOPkit Digest is brought to you by Amy Sugar, MA, Associate Instructional Designer, Center for Distributed Learning, University of Central Florida (amy.sugar@ucf.edu) who discusses the topic of using focus groups in faculty development.

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Video Tip

How Focus Groups Can Help Your Research

Using Focus Groups to Seek Faculty Input

What is a Focus Group?

Why would I use one?



How can I do it well?

[Amanda Flaim](#), Ph.D., Development Sociology, is an Assistant Professor at Michigan State University's James Madison College of Public Affairs, and the Department of Sociology. In this [Duke University Mod-U video](#), Dr. Flaim explains what a focus group is, why to use focus groups, and how to successfully design your own focus group to acquire faculty input. To view more short videos on qualitative research methods, visit [Duke's Mod-U Social Science Research Institute YouTube channel](#).

MUST-READ ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Creative energy flourished at the TOPkit Hackathon Fall 2021 event! Take a look at the featured projects in the [Summary of Event](#) section of the Hackathon page.
- Join us for the live, virtual [TOPkit Workshop 2022, March 1-3](#).
- Take part in the live, virtual [Florida Innovation Summit 2022, February 23-24](#).

Top Tips

Facilitating Focus Groups

Seeking Faculty Input to Drive Faculty Development

Have you considered utilizing a method other than surveys to seek input from faculty? When done well, focus groups can provide helpful insight to faculty opinions, needs, and preferences to help drive decisions about the design and development of new professional development programs, training, and resources, or to make improvements to existing offerings. With the recent high adoption rate of video conferencing software, you may consider conducting virtual faculty focus groups since this modality provides

more convenience and a wider geographic reach than in-person focus groups (Archibald, M. M., et al, 2019; Johnson, B., & Odhner, K., 2021).

Regardless of the modality in which you plan to facilitate focus groups to collect faculty input, it is important to carefully plan and prepare to ensure they are successful.

#1 - Determine if a focus group is the right fit. Before jumping right into scheduling focus groups, an important first step is to determine if a focus group is the [right approach](#) to gathering the information you are seeking. Take time to identify the purpose of your study, the question(s) you are trying to answer, the information you hope to gain, and how will this information be shared and used. Answering these questions will help you decide whether or not a focus group is the right approach or if another method (e.g., survey) would be a better fit.

#2 - Prepare the questions. Take time to carefully craft [questions](#) that are open-ended and will encourage discussion amongst the participants. As you decide how many questions to ask, consider the number of participants and length of time of the focus group to ensure everyone has a chance to respond and that you have time to ask all of the questions. Additionally, write a few [follow-up prompts](#) or probing questions that you can use as needed to help clarify points or help keep the discussion going.

#3 - Think through the logistics for the modality of your focus groups. Create a [checklist](#) to outline what will happen before, during, and after the focus group to help identify the logistics and resources needed to successfully run the focus groups. For example, in person focus groups require reserving a space that will accommodate everyone and provide you with flexibility in how the room is arranged. Virtual focus groups require scheduling and inviting participants, and determining which features in the video conferencing software you plan to leverage (e.g., chat tool, hand raise tool) to engage participants.

#4 - Strive for diversity when inviting faculty to participate. While you will want to invite faculty who share a common characteristic (e.g., engaged with the same professional development offering, tested the same technology) for the purpose of your research, it is important to invite faculty who are diverse in regards to other characteristics (e.g., different disciplines, varying rank and experience, varying technology skills) so that you can hear varying perspectives. Applying feedback from a diverse group of faculty to the design and implementation of new programs and resources will help meet the needs of a wider audience.

#5 - Set the right tone. Design focus groups to be welcoming and to help participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions more openly. This involves arranging furniture in a physical space that promotes discussion (e.g., circle). In virtual

focus groups, encourage participants to turn on their cameras and utilize the gallery view to see everyone in the virtual space. Additionally, script and read an opening statement that welcomes participants, explains the purpose and format of the session, and describes how the results will be shared.

#6 - Decide how responses will be recorded prior to the session. It is recommended to have multiple moderators during a focus group session. One moderator should focus on asking questions and keeping track of time while a second moderator can take notes. For virtual focus groups, one moderator should focus on asking the questions, while a second moderator can monitor the chat and a third moderator can help address technical issues.

#7 - Plan to have multiple moderators. There are several options to record responses during a focus group, ranging from having an assigned notetaker, using video recording equipment in a physical space, to using the built-in record option in videoconferencing software for virtual focus groups. Plan ahead to decide which method(s) you will use so that you can reserve equipment and find others to assist you with this. Be sure to inform participants how you are recording their responses at the start of the session.

#8 - Consider accessibility. To ensure everyone can access and participate in the focus groups, keep accessibility in mind when planning the session. For in-person focus groups, consider participant access to the building (e.g., handicap parking spots nearby, a working elevator) and accessibility of the room (e.g., arrangement of the furniture). For virtual focus groups, remember to provide a brief orientation to the technology and features being used during the focus group (e.g. the raise hand feature) and consider enabling live transcriptions (if available) in the video conferencing software.

From The Community

Planning the Successful Implementation of Faculty Focus Groups

Explore Guides and Resources

The planning phase is key to successfully utilizing focus groups to gather faculty feedback. Explore the guides and resources below to help assist your planning and implementation of faculty focus groups. Consider how to effectively apply feedback

collected during focus groups to the improvement of faculty development offerings.

- [Conducting Focus Groups](#)
- [Conducting Focus Groups for Curriculum Review and Improvement](#)
- [Conducting Virtual Focus Groups: A Short Methodology Case Study for Social Scientists](#)
- [Preparing for Focus Groups: Qualitative Research Methods \[Video\]](#)
- [Using Focus Groups in Program Development and Evaluation](#)

Ask ADDIE

What's the Objective Here?

Using Module-Based Objectives for Student Success

Dear ADDIE,

Are module objectives all that important to create? I don't want to spend time creating something that students don't read, but I always hear that establishing objectives are something critical to do. I'm not sure what's the best way to save time for myself and still help my students.



Signed,

Trying Not to Take the Easy Way Out

[SEE ADDIE'S RESPONSE](#)

References And Works Consulted

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Top Community Topics



- [TOPkit Workshop 2022](#)
- [TOPkit Hackathon Fall 2021](#)
- [Evaluating - Checklists & Rubrics](#)
- [Developing - Using Video in Online Learning](#)
- [Developing - Tools, Techniques, & Strategies](#)

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