Focus Group Analysis:

A Guide for HIV Community Planning Group Members

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HIV Community Planning Group (CPG)

Focus Group Analysis Guide

The following is a guide that CPGs can use when analyzing their own focus group data. This guide is written to provide CPGs with simple research based techniques for conducting qualitative data analysis.

NOTE: CPGs also have the ***option*** *to hire someone to: 1) create focus group topic (interview) guides, 2) facilitate focus group sessions and or, 3) conduct the data analysis. Some suggestions for the types of people to hire may include a researcher, graduate student or an individual from the community with at least 2-3 years of experience in doing qualitative data collection and/or analysis (depending on what is needed) and a background in social science, public health or nursing. Please see* <u>*Guide for hiring an External Analyst*</u> *for more information on how to proceed with this option. If, as a CPG, you elect to hire someone to complete items 1 or 3 listed above, that individual would need to be involved with the entire process from start to finish. It is also recommended that the individual hired attend an abbreviated version of the Bridging Theory and Practice course in order to become more familiar with factors that influence behavior (FIBs) as they pertain to HIV prevention and the tasks of the HIV Community Planning Groups.*

Whether the CPG decides to hire someone or complete the analysis process themselves, one of the first action items for the CPG is the formation of an Analysis Committee. This committee will oversee and guide the analysis portion of the community assessment process, which may include hiring a professional analyst to analyze any portion of the assessment if this option is chosen.

CPG members are encouraged to use the steps listed below, as they will serve as a guide during the analysis process. (These steps are written as instructions for whomever you designate to take the lead in analyzing the data).

- **Form an Analysis Committee.** This group designated by the CPG will take on the task of analyzing the focus group data. These members should have a working knowledge of the factors that influence behavior. If committee members are not familiar with FIBs, they should attend a *Bridging Theory & Practice* course *(Please see your UT Southwestern TA representative for more information)*. Members of this committee will be responsible for uncovering the key findings of the focus groups, producing a written report and presenting this report to the CPG. Analysis of qualitative data can be very time consuming; however the end result can be very gratifying. Members of the committee should be made aware of the time commitment. This time includes attending focus groups, listening to tapes, reading transcripts and notes from focus group sessions, analyzing the data and creating a summary report of the findings. In addition, focus group facilitators and note takers will be particularly valuable members of the analysis team.

- **Designate Team Member Responsibilities**

    1. Designate an analysis committee chair who will run committee meetings; communicate with CPG co-chairs, the DSHS planner and UT Southwestern TA provider assigned to your respective planning area, and make sure that team members receive all of the required information/instructions.

    2. Assign two or three people to each focus group session. Most people will be analyzing more than one session.

    3. Designate your report writers. The writers will be responsible for compiling notes from the analysis results of the focus groups into a summary report.

- **Ensure fairness and confidentiality.** A good analysis is as free from bias as possible. Ask committee members to identify and recognize their own biases and to push them aside before they start their work. Request that they let the data guide them and not their own biases.

- **When to conduct analysis.** Beginning the analysis immediately after the focus group session will enhance its quality. Facilitators and note takers should debrief immediately following the session. They should compare notes and discuss key topics that arose from the conversation. The debriefing can be tape recorded or someone can take detailed notes so that those working on the formal analysis will have benefit of the entire discussion. Additionally, when conducting multiple focus group sessions, analyzing the data immediately after each session will decrease the potential for confusing different sessions with one another.

- **Getting ready to analyze the data.** Gather all of the data that you have for the focus group session(s): topic guide(s), audio tapes, transcripts of the session(s), observation notes and debriefing notes.

Now let's get started!

- **Topic Guide Review.** Review the topic guide (focus group objective(s) and specific research questions) before looking through transcripts, listening to tapes or working from observer notes. The research questions will be used in the first stage of organizing the data for the analysis process. Please see the section on ORGANIZING THE DATA for more info.

- When reviewing transcripts, notes or listening to tapes, remember that you are looking and listening for emerging themes or patterns as they relate to the (FIBs). Read or listen intently to the transcripts, notes and tapes several times. The more you look over the material the more familiar you will become with it and the more obvious various themes and patterns will become. Identify what words, phrases or sentences typify FIBs. When identifying FIBS, keep the following three items in mind:[1]

    1. Several people *within a focus group* repeated them or made very similar statements.
    2. People *from several focus groups* repeated them or made very similar statements
    3. When someone in the group made a statement, a substantial number of people in the group demonstrated agreement either verbally or nonverbally.

- **Create a UNIQUE identifier (code) for focus group participants.** This will help analyzers to identify who is saying what and when, without revealing the identity of the participant. This will also help analyzers identify if the conversation was dominated by one or more persons and not reflective of the entire group. Work with the transcriptionist to select codes prior to analyzing the data if at all possible. **(Use something simple like, Participant 1: "John," can be coded as P1; and so on)**

- **Listen to the tapes [if used].** In order to pick up on the tone and intensity of participants remarks, analysis committee members are encouraged to listen to the tapes from each focus group session. Listening to tapes will allow the committee members to capture major issues and themes that may have been missed by the observer's notes. Document key phrases, words, etc., that arise from the focus group discussion. Compare what you hear with what is written on the transcripts.

- **Read the transcripts multiple times.** It is recommended that tapes from each focus group session be transcribed **<u>verbatim (word for word)</u>** in order to capture the exact words, phrases, etc., voiced by the participants. Read through the transcript, preferably at one sitting, highlighting major issues and identifying emerging themes. Listen to the audio tape of the focus group at least once, and follow along with the transcript to ensure that all of the information was captured accurately. Document and use a highlighter or post-it notes to identify key phrases, words, etc., that are in the transcript.

- **Read the focus group notes.** Reading the notes taken by the note taker and observer will enhance the data from the tapes, especially if the note taker documented any nonverbal communication that is not reviewable on the audio tapes.

[1] Adapted from Analysis Basics, Partnership for Kentucky Schools

- **Organizing the data.** The first step in organizing the data for analysis is to assemble the responses according to each research question in the topic guide. This will allow you to compare focus group responses from identical topic guide questions from different populations. Highlight major quotes, key points, and or themes that emerge from your review. These include things the participants seemed most interested in talking about or the main focus of the conversation, and, in particular, any indication of FIBs. Since the ultimate goal of the focus groups is to identify emerging themes around FIBs for the purpose of selecting interventions, it is highly recommended that the next two steps involving categorizing the data be done in the following order: 1) Categorizing the responses* for each research question according to FIB domains (Risk Appraisal, Emotion and Arousal, etc.,) and 2) Code responses according to which specific FIB each closely represents. These codes will then be used to label and categorize quotes, themes, and key points so that conclusions can be drawn from the data. For example, the FIBs: relationship development, illusion of invulnerability, perceived severity, social capital, misconceptions about risk, and peer pressure can all be used as codes. Examples of these FIBs can be found in the *Bridging Theory and Practice* manual or see your UT Southwestern TA representative. *A more detailed workshop has been developed by UT Southwestern that covers how to code qualitative data, and introduces two techniques for analysis.*
  ** Some responses can overlap and may be categorized in more than one FIB Domain.*

- **Interpret the data.** Once codes have been established, compile all of the notes from your review of the audio tapes, transcripts and observer notes. You are now ready to make an explicit link between the data and the focus group objectives. Look for patterns among participants' responses. In addition, it is also suggested that you ask yourself these questions* as you review the data: [2]

  - "What was known and then confirmed or challenged" by the focus group data?
  - "What was suspected and then confirmed or challenged" by the focus group data?
  - "What was new that wasn't previously suspected?"

  When answering these questions, it is critical to:

  - Be open to alternative explanations about the data, particularly if the data confirm your assumptions.
  - Accept whatever the data reveal, even if it is discomforting to the institution sponsoring the focus group or clashes with your original research assumptions.

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[2] Adapted from Richard A. Krueger, Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research (California: Sage Publications, 1994).

When conducting qualitative analysis, it is important that those doing the analysis agree or come to a consensus about the codes assigned to the major quotes, key points, and themes in each focus group. It is advisable to have someone not familiar with the material sit in on discussion of the data in order to have a neutral viewpoint. The purpose of this is to let at least one person to challenge your conclusions and verify the analysis.

Verification is important because it safeguards the integrity of the analysis. It is accomplished by collecting sufficient evidence to support your conclusions, and organizing that evidence in a systematic fashion. This allows for similar conclusions to be drawn by other involved using the same raw data.

- **Report findings.** A final verbal and written report or summary of the analysis should be completed and presented to the CPG Co-Chairs and or assembly. This final report will aid the CPG in selecting and or matching up evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and FIBs for inclusion in the HIV Area Action Plans (AAP). This summary documentation or final report **should** include the major quotes, key points, and emerging themes identified from the review of tapes, observer notes, the focus group topic guide (objective and questions) and the transcripts of each focus group session.

Please keep in mind the following points when reporting your findings: [3]

- **Be as objective as you can.** Try to maintain your objectivity as you interpret the words of participants, decide what weight to give different points of view, and draw conclusions from findings. The more objective you can be, the more likely that your findings will be credible.

- **Leave behind preconceived ideas or personal opinions.** Go into the analysis with an open mind. Avoid lifting quotes out of context, jumping to conclusions before reading all of the transcripts, or giving undue weight to one theme or another because it supports your own agenda.

- **When reporting participants' opinions do not use numbers or percentages.** When reporting opinions expressed in the sessions, do not count up how many expressed a particular point of view and report that as a number or percentage. Doing so implies to the reader that the opinions can be projected to a larger population, which is not the purpose of focus groups. Instead, say "several participants believed…" or "most participants expressed a strong preference for…"

PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT YOUR UT SOUTHWESTERN TA PROVIDER FOR ASSISTANCE OR GUIDANCE DURING ANY PORTION OF THIS PROCESS

[3] Adapted from "From their lives: A Manual on How to Conduct Focus Groups of Low-Income Parents," Institute for Child and Family Policy; Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service University of Southern Maine

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Sample Focus Group Timeline

Action	Person Responsible	By When
1. Write a focus group purpose statement		
2. Develop screening instrument to qualify participants for focus group purpose		
3. Identify community-based organizations, outreach sites, parks, programs, shelters, etc, where participant recruitment could take place		
4. Screen potential participants for eligibility; gather phone information on the potential participants if minimum eligibility requirements are satisfied		
5. Select a facilitator		
6. Develop the questions (Topic Guides)		
7. Develop a script (Focus Group Protocol)		
8. Arrange and reserve the session site		
9. Follow up with potential participants with phone calls		
10. Make room arrangements (seating, equipment, refreshments, and so forth)		
11. Place a reminder call to the participants		
12. Gather session materials		
13. Conduct the focus group		
14. Transcribe the audio tapes and notes from the session		
15. Code the sessions		
16. Analyze sessions and write a report		

APPENDIX B: Sample Final Report

TEEN SAFE FOCUS GROUPS[4]
Final Report

I. Background and Purpose of the Report

Teen Safe is a residential crisis intervention program for boys and girls ages eleven to seventeen whose behavioral and emotional conditions require round-the-clock supervision. Services include on-site schooling, one-to-one counseling, family crisis intervention, group therapy, communication skills training, health care and recreational therapy. Clients are referred for a variety of reasons, including self-destructive behavior, sexual acting out, abuse, family crisis, criminal ideation, and anger or aggression control. Teen Safe is located in an older facility in a primarily middle-class residential neighborhood of a large urban area. It has a long and respected history among mental health referral sources, school, and city agencies as a whole. Teen Safe is one program at a single site, but is part of a much larger, multi-site organization that provides a range of human services to residents of the city.

Teen Safe embarked on a strategic planning process using a private organizational development consultant. As part of the process, a planning team was formed to champion the strategic planning process, assist the consultant in understanding the nuances of the organization, and identify elements critical to its future. This team decided that focus groups would help collect information from staff and some outside stakeholders to guide the strategic plan. The group's stated purpose for the focus *group was to find out what the staff and advisory council see as our greatest strengths and barriers in providing quality services to adolescents.* This report summarizes the information gained from the focus groups.

II. Details of the Focus Group Sessions

Three focus groups were conducted by planning consultant Pat Anser, as outlined below:

Type	Number of People	Session Date
Finance Committee	7	June 6
Staff	20	June 15
Advisory Council	12	July 8

4 Reproduced with permission from the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Conducting Successful Focus Groups, 1999. This report is based on an actual final report, but details and the name of the organization have been altered.

III. Results

There were many common themes expressed across the focus groups as well as several items that surprised the planning team members reviewing the focus group data. These are noted below.

Common Themes

- Funding is limited and is becoming more so. It is also inconsistent, making planning difficult and damaging morale.
- The location in a residential community is both a strength and a weakness. Reassuring the neighborhood that Teen Safe is a good neighbor requires extra efforts, but the payoffs are excellent. Some felt a new office space was needed.
- Many noted significant staff issues of low pay and frequent turnover.
- Many noted a need for improved communications across all the sites with which Teen Safe is affiliated.
- No one wants to pay for long-term treatments.
- Services are needed for pregnant teens.
- Staff is highly regarded as being caring, dedicated staff who maintain program structure under *high* stress.
- There is a change in population; children are presenting more difficult problems.
- There is a trend towards correctional and home-based services.
- Teen Safe needs to look for innovative programs.
- Teen Safe should consider preventive residential treatment, such as diversion programs.
- More comprehensive services are needed, including recreation and socialization counseling and services for whole families.

Some representative quotes:

"So much is changing with the environment. Less intensive treatment models, more community-based approaches. Managed care and less intensive methodology may mean we have to redefine and strengthen ourselves in new areas."

"The site is more deeply entrenched in a neighborhood than others. Need to communicate better to the community."

"Sincere desire by staff to be positive change agents."

Surprises

- Comment that we do what's best for staff, not the children (came from one respondent). It seems that at times Teen Safe is more focused on internal issues than on who we are serving and why.
- There seems to be question of whether Teen Safe will be shut down. It was a surprise that this question arose.
- Teen Safe is reviewed by some referring agencies is an extension of county corrections. We didn't know we were perceived this way.
- The emotional-behavioral treatment portion of Teen Safe's services is viewed as being of lower quality than its on-site schooling, family intervention, case management, and other services.

Some representative quotes:

"There is a poor reputation with our treatment program, whereas our shelter program has very good success and large numbers of referrals."

"What if we shut the program down? It seems that the administration is thinking this would be a viable alternative."

IV. Conclusion

The three focus groups highlighted a number of strengths, some areas for improvement, and some significant opportunities. This represents the view of people fairly close to the organization, however. The planning team may need more data from the larger environment to help it determine the better course of action for the next three to five years. Since there seems to be some immediate (and unfounded) concern among the staff that Teen Safe may be shut down, the planning team may want to act now to dispel that rumor and improve communications.