

#### 4b.TS1 How Can We Design Focus Groups to Give Us the Best Information Possible?

- Seek advice from the people with whom the focus groups will be conducted about the advantages and disadvantages (and likely consequences) of having single or multi-race groups.
  - ○ Some people are more candid about racial issues in single race groups. In addition, people can be at different stages with respect to their understanding or willingness to discuss emotionally charged topics such as internalized oppression or white skin privilege in mixed race groups. Further, people may feel more free to discuss their perceptions about why community conditions are as they are in single race groups – particularly if the people in the groups do not know or are not in control of how the information will be used.
  - ○ Because so many things affect our comfort and candor in discussing racial issues in multi-racial settings – our own experiences, community norms and history of race relations, individual preferences, the group sponsoring the focus groups, the skill of the moderator – it is best to consult with the people with whom you will be talking about their preferences.
  - ○ It is also useful to try different variations to see which elicit the most helpful information.
- □ Also think about differences within racial groups that might have an effect on the discussion and decide whether or not to hold separate groups of like people.
- ○ Think about culture, ethnicity, language, political experience, immigrant and refugee status, age, class, and gender as other distinctions within groups that can affect the ability of every participant to speak comfortably and candidly.
- □ Remember that focus groups are a research tool for collecting information from a group of individuals through discussion prompted by a set of questions.
  - ○ The goal is to get thoughtful, candid answers from each participant, not to forge a consensus or to elicit conflict.
  - ○ Tools and resources about holding community conversations and encouraging citizen participation may be helpful, while understanding the specific purpose of a focus group in evaluation is to gather information. See the tools and resources listed in Stage 1, part c “Engaging and Learning from the Community - General” and “Engaging

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- and Learning from the Community - Specific to Issues of Race.”
- The skills and background of the focus group moderator are critical to creating a setting in which all participants feel comfortable sharing their beliefs, feelings, and experiences.
  - ○ Often, moderators are selected from the same racial, ethnic, or cultural group as the focus group participants.
  - ○ Moderators need to be skilled in managing group dynamics to provide psychological safety for all participants.
  - ○ It is the responsibility of the moderator to draw all participants into the conversation and ensure that their thoughts are included.
  - □ Review the focus group guide – the set of in-depth questions that the moderator uses to guide the discussion – to ensure that the topics will be broached in ways that make sense for the participants and are as free of cultural bias as possible.
    - ○ Remember that all prompts or questions presume some value or belief system and consider whether the questions you are using allow people to express their culturally specific values and beliefs.
    - ○ For example, do the prompts or questions presume that a particular condition or experience is more desirable than others, and does that assumption hold true for the people in the focus group?

See “Keys to Cultural Competency: A Literature Review for Evaluations of Recent Immigrant and Refugee Service Programs in Colorado,” <http://www.coloradotrue.org/>, and other tools and resources in Stage 1c.