A MODERATOR’S ROLE

The first few moments in focus group discussion are critical. The moderator must create a thoughtful, permissive atmosphere, provide ground rules, and set the tone of the discussion. A moderator introduces topics to be discussed, typically in the following order:

1. Welcome participants. Share why they were selected and the purpose of the focus group sessions.
2. Provide an overview of the topics to be discussed.
3. State ground rules to ensure constructive dialogue.
4. Introduce questions and post the questions for all to see using a table tent card.
5. After introducing the final question and gathering feedback, thank the participants.

SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR MODERATORS

“Good evening and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join us to talk about educational programs in this county. My name is _______ and assisting me is _______. We’ve been members at _____ Church for ____ years. The Council charged us to help leaders gather information from members about their perceptions of ___________. We want to know what you like, what you don’t like, and how our programs might be improved. We are having discussions like this with several groups within our faith/local community. You were invited because you have participated in ___________, so you’re familiar with what this _____ does, and you all live in this section of the county. There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we’re just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, as long as they’re constructive in nature.

You’ve probably noticed the microphone. We’re recording the session because we don’t want to miss any of your comments in case we can’t write down your comments quickly enough. We use first names only and we don’t indicate names in our reports to ensure people’s confidentiality. The information gathered will be merged with information collected at other listening sessions. Our consultant will prepare a final report based on the information that is shared.

At the beginning: We’ve placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other’s names. Let’s find out some more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your first name and where you live.

During wrap up: Thank you for sharing your perspectives with us today. Your feedback will be very helpful as we explore our next steps for living into our mission and vision. If you’d like to learn more about the collective results... (indicate where they can later find the results).”

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- Use 5-second pauses to allow participants to jump into the conversation.
- Probe deeper to gain clarity: “Would you explain further?” “Would you give an example?” “I don’t understand.” Listen for and seek to clarify inconsistent comments.
- Provide recorder with adequate time to capture comments; remember to record the session.
- Maintain a neutral posture and response to comments shared by participants.
- Avoid offering short verbal responses such as “that’s good” or “excellent.”
- Have strategies for addressing dominant talkers, encouraging shy participants, or dealing with ramblers.
- Provide helpful transitions, if needed, when moving from one question to another.
- Conclude the session by reviewing the purpose, summarizing feedback, and thanking people.
- Consider asking “on a scale of 1-10 (10=Very)” questions, having people vote with their fingers.
- Consider asking “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” questions in rapid sequence around certain items.