The Basics: Focus groups, listening sessions and interviews

A Communities of Opportunity Workshop
July 2020
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We gather today on the ancestral land of the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish People.

We honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish Tribe, and all of the Native people who call King County home.
What will we cover today?

- What is qualitative data?
- Focus group, interview basics
- Collecting data
- Collecting data while social distancing
- Analyzing data
- Applying findings
- Questions and Resources

PURPOSE OF THIS WORKSHOP

Through this workshop we aim to equip attendees with the knowledge and tools to build local data and evaluation capacity that utilizes a strong equity approach to highlight your organization’s strengths as well as identify opportunities for new or continued program investment and development.
Remember throughout the process

- Involve community to help ensure accuracy of information
- Pay attention to equity & representation
- Ensure human subjects protection
- Protect participants (minimize risk)
- Work from evaluation questions
- Check and minimize bias

Useful, actionable information

Equitable
Community-based, participatory
What is qualitative data?

Based on opinions

I would not go back to that hospital because it felt really disorganized.

They lost my paperwork and I had to wait forever to be seen. It felt disrespectful.

The problem is they don’t have enough staff.

Experiences

Perceptions

Answers the WHY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Ideal Use</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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| Interview      | Fully understand someone’s thoughts, explore a topic or ideas, or learn more about survey answers | • can take a lot of time  
• can be hard to analyze and compare  
• can be costly  
• interviewer can bias client's responses |
| Focus group    | Explore a topic in depth through group discussion                          | • can be hard to analyze responses  
• need good facilitator for safety and closure  
• can be difficult to schedule 6-10 people together |
| Listening session | Partner with community members to explore a topic in depth with group     | • Like focus groups, can be hard to schedule  
• Extra time needed to collaborate with community partner  
• Partner can facilitate, or facilitation shared |
Collecting data while social distancing

• Think about using phone, video and online methods
  • Online focus groups
  • Phone and video interviews
  • Discussion boards/online groups for getting input
• Consider who is not reachable using the method chosen
• Story submissions
• Consider access to technology and who methods do not reach
• Learn through piloting and adapt
Collecting data during social distancing: Remote qualitative data collection

- Diaries
- Mapping exercise
- Letters (Email, mail, uploads)
- Online Discussion platforms
- Story completion through online survey (SurveyMonkey, Qualtrix)
- Asynchronous interviews using video, shared word documents
- App-based data collection methods
What ways to collect qualitative data best fit your needs and why?
Planning your data collection

• Focus group/interview/data collection guide
• Recruitment
• Logistics
• Informing participants of purpose, process and how their risks are minimized
During data collection: Why develop procedures?

• Write down data collection procedures – being specific and precise helps counter biases

• When possible, pretest or pilot your interview or focus group questions (e.g. interview a potential participant using questions, ask whether questions clear)

• Create a one-page information sheet about the purpose of data collection and how confidentiality will be protected

• Inform or request consent for participation, include
  • Purpose of effort/data collection
  • Contact person and details for any questions
  • Potential risk to participants
  • How confidentiality is kept secure

• Identify how data will be received, stored, saved and analyzed (plan for it a bit)
Interview guide: What to ask?

• Use evaluation questions to inform question selection
• Test/get feedback on questions prior to use
• Start with an introduction: welcome participants and agree on goals and group norms.
• Develop open-ended questions, with neutral follow-up questions (prompts) that you can use if needed.
• Just like developing survey questions, avoid confusing or leading questions and unclear words.
• Use accessible language
• The guide is not a script...
What is a more neutral question?

“What do you think the Mariners are doing wrong this season?”
Writing a good question

- Keep it simple: one individual question at a time
- Make question clear, specific and direct
- Use familiar, understandable language & vocabulary
- Avoid biased or loaded words/terms
- List most important questions first
- Do not force responses
- Keep guide/questions short and relevant
- Test the survey beforehand whenever possible
Logistics for in person collection

**Do’s**
- Signage so location is easy to find
- Comfortable space
- Accessible restrooms
- If needed, consider offering food & childcare
- Clear visuals (if using)
- Name tags for groups
- Way to document (notes, recording)

**Things to avoid**
- Loud/distracting environments
- Cramped or uncomfortable spaces
- Food that inhibits dialogue (i.e., especially loud, messy)
Recruitment: Who will participate?

• If needed, screen participants. For example:
  • Did you participate in XYZ program?
  • Are you a parent/caregiver of a student at ABC school?
  • Did you come to at least 3 XYZ events this year?
• If multiple groups, consider grouping by characteristic (ex: by grade, by school...)

• How many people?
  • Per focus group: 5-10 (you may need to recruit more to account for attrition)
  • “Saturation:” when you’re hearing the same thing over and over, and no new ideas are being contributed
Collecting your data

• Make sure participants understand purpose, their rights, and what will happen
• Record audio or video, with permission (may not be necessary/desired)
• Have a colleague take notes (not the facilitator)
• In many cases, you will want participants to have identities protected. If so, have nametags with just numbers or letters: Person A, Person B, etc.
• Demographic (or other) questions: Have participants fill out a short form to hand in on their way out
  • You can then connect their response to their letter or number
Confidentiality: Example

• Protecting your privacy is very important to us. Sharing your personal information during the discussion is your choice, and you do not have to answer any question you wish not to. Others in the group discussion will be asked to keep all information confidential. There is always a small risk of a breach of confidentiality, but we have made every effort to minimize this risk. Please do your part by keeping the things that others share today private.

• Some of the information, experiences, and suggestions you share today will be included in a larger report on our hospital system, but no names or identifying information will be connected to any of that information.

• Some other notes on confidentiality:
  • Participation in today’s discussion is completely voluntary—you decide if you want to participate. You do not have to join the discussion, and you do not have to give a reason. Deciding not to take part will not affect your relationship with [insert name of organization]. If you do join and later change your mind, you may leave the group at any time.
  • This is a safe space and you may share anything you wish. However, Washington State Law may require us to report a) some kinds of abuse and b) medical conditions that are under public health surveillance. Examples of things we would need to report are child abuse, abuse, abandonment, neglect, or financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult, sexual assault, serious physical assault, and diseases like HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STDs, and Influenza.
Focus group facilitator’s role:

• Create a supportive environment
• Ask focused questions, explore comments that aren’t fully explained
• Encourage discussion
• Encourage expression of differing viewpoints
• Refrain from offering your opinion, judgement, or experiences
  • This includes body language
• Keep track of time
• Maintain focus on topic & minimize trailing off topic
Tips for encouraging discussion

• Clarifying confusion about a question
• Look for meaning, don’t be afraid to ask participants to elaborate
• Probe for clarification and more information
  • Waiting (allowing silence, for people to respond)
  • Asking: “Can you tell me more about that.” or “What makes you say that?”
  • Rephrasing / summarizing back: “I’m hearing you say...” “It sounds like you’re saying...” “Let me see if I have this right... you’re saying...”
• Including others by asking, “Does anyone else feel that way? Has that been anyone else’s experience? Anyone have a different experience or see that differently?”
How to ask: Incentives

• Optional.
• Should reflect thanks for respondents’ time and information
  • Not payment for participating
  • Not enough to push people who don’t want to participate
• Can be a raffle with one or a few winners
• Can be non-monetary: special privileges, experiences, or swag – be creative! har
Analyzing qualitative data

Descriptive
- Reflect what respondents said, issues raised

Thematic
- Identify key ideas/content in data
- Can also look at relationships between content
Approaches to analyses

- Cut and paste method
- Open coding with highlighting
- Running code list
- Developing a coding scheme for thematic analyses
Finding themes in narrative

• Read one of the following scenarios (if breakout room is even number, read Morgan’s. If breakout room is odd, read Anne’s).
• Take 3-4 minutes as an individual to find one theme or key point that stands out for you.
• In groups of 3-4, discuss what your key point was – as a group, identify 1-2 key points to share back with our large group (5-6 minutes).
• Take 3-4 minutes to talk about what was easy and hard about this task, what you noticed about finding themes.
• Identify one person to share key points in chat box and/or be willing to share reflections with our large group.
Morgan, 18 years old

I really wasn’t paying attention at all—I didn’t really care [about the virus]. Trump told us it was never going to hit the United States. He said there were like three cases. I thought I definitely wouldn’t get it—if there are just a handful of cases, why would I be one? I work at a car dealership, and my GM got back from a seven-country tour, and four or five days after he got back I had a sore throat. Our receptionist got a horrible cough too. She just stopped coming to work. Last Monday, I got to my desk and just started hacking up a lung. My GM came in and said, “Clorox wipe your office and go home.” I woke up the next day and felt like trash. I felt I had inhaled glue. My throat was sticky. I was coughing. Lots of migraines. Horrible migraines. It just went from feeling great to taking a five-hour nap in the afternoon. There was dizziness and confusion. Sometimes I feel fine, then the coughing up a lung came back. There were a couple of times I’ll just be sitting on the floor hitting my inhaler.

I called my doctor, and they said, “Do you know three people who have it?” No. “Have you been to China, Europe, or these places?” No. OK, just try to get better at home. Then I was seeing the news tags on Facebook; I saw the news that there were now hundreds of cases. After I found out I couldn’t be tested, I was thinking, “Who else can’t be tested? I’m really sick and no one’s being tested.” When I cook, I don’t smell anything while I’m cooking. I can smell really pungent scents—like taking out the trash—but nothing sweet. My work and my boyfriend’s work require a positive test for us to be paid while we’re quarantined, but they don’t seem to understand that we literally will not be tested. I’ve had multiple episodes where I’ve been stuck laying on the floor, struggling to breath, head pounding, and sweating like I just ran a marathon, but I can’t afford a $30,000 hospital bill to go get an oxygen mask and still no test.
Anne, 35 years old

I tested positive for Covid-19 [last week]. I’m relatively fine; lucky, even. Around here, officials have been preparing, so much so that I was able to get a test when I needed it. Facebook sent us home many days ago, so it’s unlikely I affected a big group of colleagues. I went supply shopping weeks ago. Here’s what I didn’t prepare for: telling my kids to back away from me, while informing them that this scary thing upending the entire planet is now inside our house. Inside their mom. My daughter cried and asked if I will get better. I couldn’t hug her. My son wrote an account of it for our home newspaper. “Anne has the coronavirus but do not worry it is not the bad kind,” he wrote on the front page. “Please note that you should not be within 10 feet of Anne.”

Even when I got sick, I assumed I didn’t have it. After reading so many coronavirus stories as part of my job for weeks now, I thought I knew what to look for: a dry cough, a slow onset, a high fever. I had none of those things. Instead it hit me suddenly, with chills, aches, a mild fever, a sore throat, and a terrible headache, and then improved dramatically within three days. Now I’m just extremely tired, and because of a history of pneumonia, trying to force myself to sleep. The health department called to inform me to stay away from everyone, including my children. So who should take care of them if my husband tests positive, too? “We haven’t had that scenario yet,” the public health nurse said, offering to call me back.

Last Friday, [my husband] Jon’s doctor called to say he had it, too. The medical advice, already unclear, got more confusing. If both Jon and I have the coronavirus, should we test our two kids? No, the doctors said. You should assume your kids have it, or already did. So does that mean we can all hold each other, and be together in the same rooms? Can I take off my mask and gloves? No, the doctors said. You don’t want to give them more virus—more “viral load”—and make them or both of you even sicker. And absolutely no one can come or go from the house.
Finding themes in narrative

• What themes did you identify?
• What was easy and hard about this task?
• What did you notice about the process?
Things to remember during analyses

• Work from evaluation questions
• Methods and findings should be understandable to audience
• All data and findings should be scrubbed to protect individual identity
• Check yourself along the way against raw data
• Share findings with others, subject matter experts and community members, those impacted, to check interpretation and understand context
• Be transparent about limitations
Findings can be actionable and support equity.

- Advocate for new or expanded services
- Target and eliminate identified barriers
- Make programs more appropriate and acceptable
- Improve service delivery
Example Questions and Methods

• For example focus group protocol and questions, please see page 19 of a recent report on youth and gun violence

• A UNICEF COVID-19 focus group guide

• National Institute of Health COVID-19 Survey Questions and other tools
Tips for coding data
Coding responses

1. Familiarize yourself with the data
   a) Record thoughts and process for transparency
   b) Keep data organized

2. Generate initial codes
   a) Use a coding framework (develop with peers and review of past related work/knowledge)
   b) Document code generation, peer meetings

3. Search for themes - Analyses within and across cases allows you to look at how many people mentioned the same themes (all, some, a few), and look more easily at what common and related themes exist

4. Review themes
   a) Discuss with peers/coders
   b) Test for accuracy by going back to raw data

5. Define and name themes

6. Coding that involves training, support and reliability testing and checks result in consistent, accurate findings (especially when multiple people are coding)
How many codes?

• Your evaluation questions inform this decision.
• No magic or standardized number exists.
• Final number of themes/concepts should be minimized to keep analysis coherent, meaningful.
• Advice exists
  • Lichtman (2006) – Generate 80-100 codes that will be organized into 15-20 categories which eventually synthesize into five to seven (5-7) major concepts.
  • Creswell (2007) – Begin with a short-list of five to six provisional codes to begin the process of “lean coding”. This expands to no more than 25-30 categories that then combine into five to six (5-6) major themes.
  • Wolcott (1994) – 3 of anything major is a good quantity for reporting qualitative work.
Resources

• Designing and Conducting Focus Groups by R Krueger: https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf


• Community Tool Box:
  • Conducting Focus Groups: https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main

• Youth Development Executives of King County’s Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data Presentation: https://ydekc.org/resource-center/analyzing-qualitative-data/

• Moderating a focus group: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjHZsEcSqwo&feature=emb_logo
How do we request assistance, or ask questions about data and evaluation?

Free Data Consultation and Technical Assistance
Email: Communitiescount@kingcounty.gov

See more data and trainings, visit us at:
www.communitiescount.org