



10 strategies for conducting virtual focus groups: Considerations for the virtual newcomer, persons living with disabilities, farmworkers, and Tribal communities.

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Abstract Information: Virtual qualitative data collection was necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic. While many agencies are transitioning back to in-person evaluation work, conducting virtual (remote) focus groups will likely continue to be popular, especially for underserved communities with historical barriers to participation, such as physical limitations, lack of transportation, and childcare responsibilities. Best practices in qualitative data collection and focus group facilitation, as well as lessons learned from virtual focus groups, are readily available. However, collecting virtual qualitative data that best serves communities with limited English proficiency (LEP), persons living with disabilities, and individuals who do not use videoconference technology on a regular basis, are important considerations. This session will:

1. Review lessons learned from six virtual focus groups conducted with rural farmworker, Tribal, and Spanish-speaking (limited English proficiency) communities, as well as a focus group for persons living with disabilities. Recommendations will be provided and attendees will have peer-to-peer opportunities to share resources and virtual facilitation and data collection strategies.
2. Discuss strategies, software, and technology for effective and affordable collection and analysis of qualitative data, as well as pre-focus group considerations for recruiting and preparing participants who do not use videoconferencing technology on a regular basis. For persons living with disabilities, including those with physical speech impairments or difficulties, strategies to collect, record, and transcribe qualitative data will be shared. For Spanish-language focus groups, our strategy to

analyze qualitative data in a culturally responsive manner by monolingual and bilingual researchers will also be discussed.

Relevance Statement: Importance of the proposal to the field of evaluation:

Virtual qualitative data collection requires special considerations for those who do not use videoconferencing technology on a regular or daily basis, as well as for some persons living with disabilities, some rural, farmworker, or tribal communities, and/or some individuals with limited English proficiency. Respectively, these populations groups have unique cultures, experiences, strengths, and practices that sometimes may not easily lend themselves to traditional focus group strategies or virtual focus groups. This presentation will highlight the mistakes our team made, the lessons we learned, successful strategies that were employed, and recommendations for conducting virtual focus groups in the future with these groups.

Implications for evaluation practice:

This session will increase capacity of evaluators to identify and deploy strategies for effective virtual focus groups with certain populations. Focus groups are an effective evaluation technique to obtain in-depth knowledge about a program's strengths and weaknesses and can complement quantitative program data collection efforts. While many agencies are transitioning to in-person evaluation work, conducting virtual focus groups remotely will likely continue to be popular, especially for those with traditional barriers to participations, such as physical limitations, commutes, childcare responsibilities, or other time commitments. Further, effectively collecting data and working with agencies who do not require evaluation activities or departmental evaluations as a normal part of their daily programmatic functions is an important consideration - ensuring all parties are privy to the goals of the evaluation are key when conducting qualitative data collection activities.

Value to the audience:

In addition to increasing knowledge and skills for conducting effective virtual focus groups with those who do not use videoconferencing technology on a regular or daily basis, persons living with disabilities, tribal communities, or individuals with limited English proficiency, the session will also cover specific software utilized for recording, capturing, transcribing, and analyzing qualitative data, as well as facilitator/data collection strategies for capturing data virtually from those with physical speech impairments. Conducting virtual focus groups will likely continue; equipping evaluators with information to consider when conducting these types of evaluations will be of value to those who work with these populations or conduct qualitative data collection activities.

Reflection of relevant standards of quality in evaluation practice:

We feel this proposal reflects AEA Guiding Principles D ("honor the dignity, well-being, and self-worth of individuals and acknowledge the influence of culture within and across groups"), B4 ("learn new concepts, techniques, skills, and services necessary for competent evaluation practice") and AEA Evaluator Competency Domain 3: Context ("understanding the unique circumstances, multiple perspectives, and changing settings of evaluations") and Domain 5.7 Interpersonal ("facilitates constructive and culturally responsive interaction throughout the evaluation").