FUNDAMENTALS OF CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS & KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Hearing from stakeholders in their own words and voices!

Going beyond your survey data!

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CPES
Center for Prevention Evaluation and Statistics

Prevention Training Technical Assistance Service Center
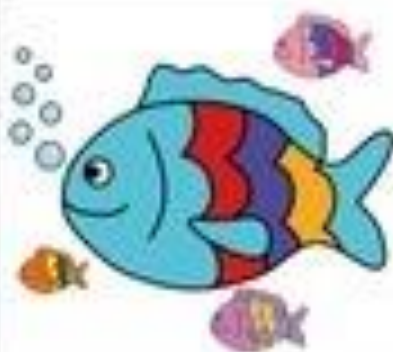
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Who are we?

- Confidentiality
- Questions?
- Cameras & Microphones
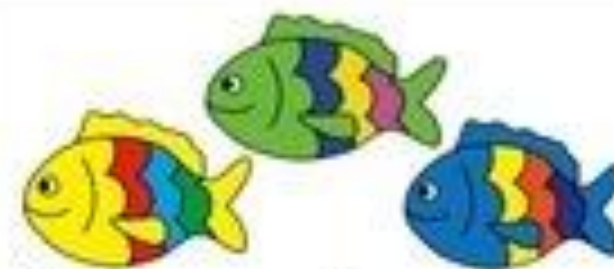- Share
- Slides

- Recruit stakeholder participants
- Ask the right questions
- Effectively facilitate group discussions (both in-person and virtually)
- Gain actionable information to further your work
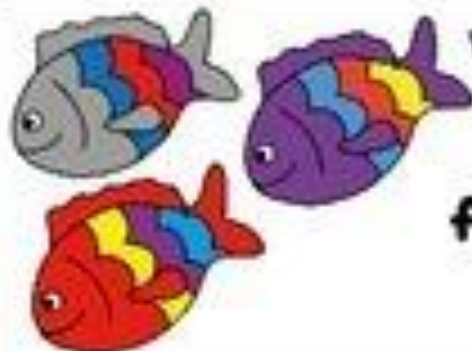- Address equity considerations

Icebreakers

If you could take all of us one place, where would we go?

What is your favorite desert?

What is your favorite food?

Would you rather be too hot or too cold?

What is your favorite game?

What is your most favorite memory?
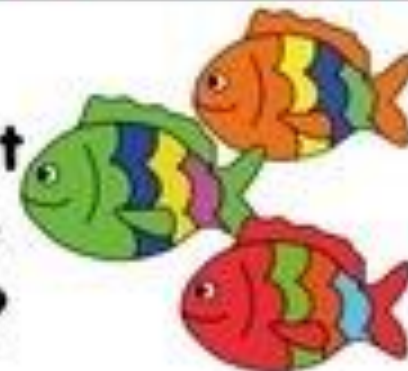
Qualitative data - Focus groups & key informant interviews

- Qualitative vs. Quantitative

Why hold a focus group or key informant interview?

- What information is needed or expected to be gained from the focus group?

- How will the information be used?

GET ALL THE INFORMATION YOU CAN, WE'LL THINK OF A USE FOR IT LATER.
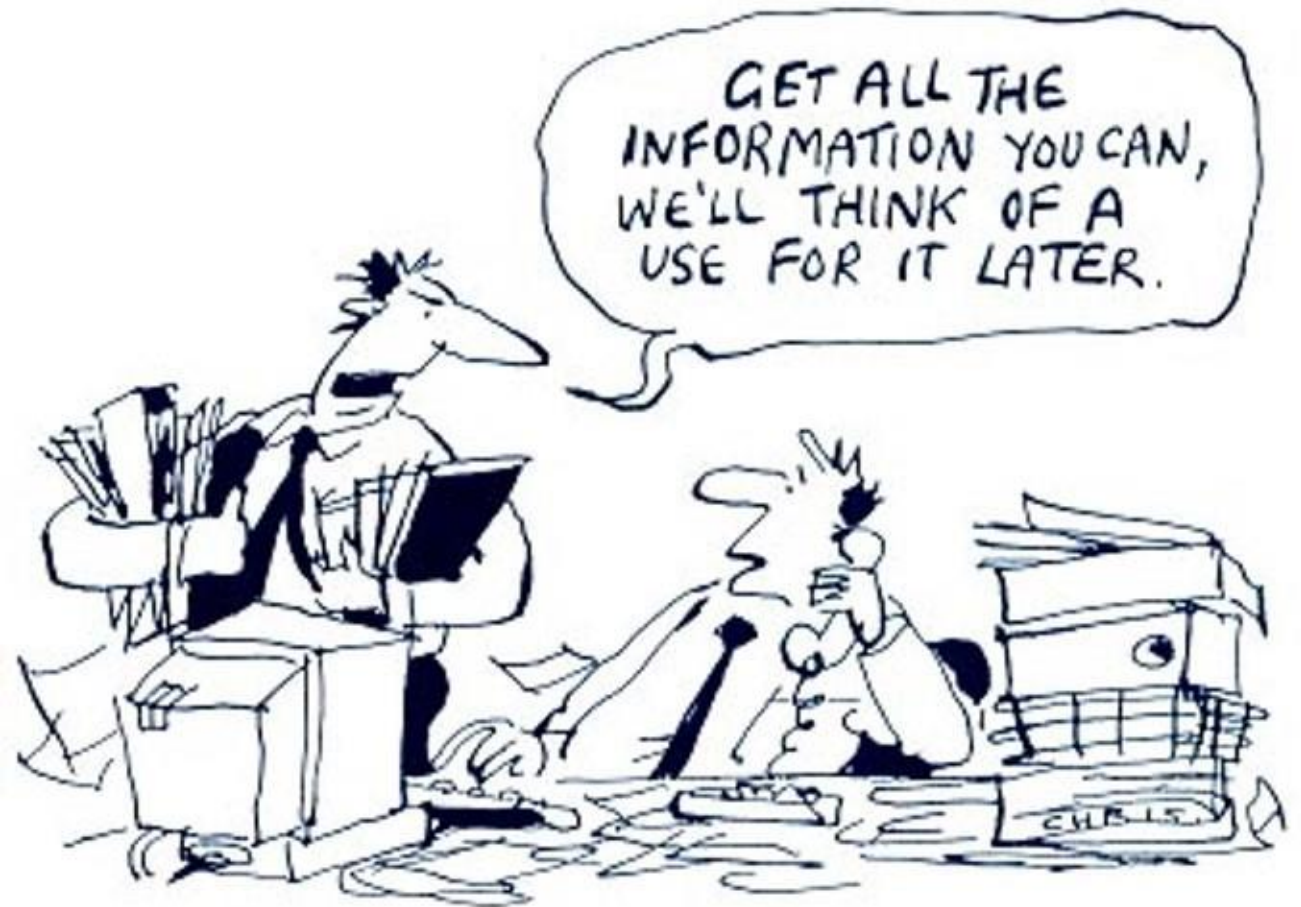
Quantitative vs. Qualitative Data 101

Surveys

- Ability to provide representative data (of the entire school, community etc.)

- Answer the "What?" "How much?" "How often?" "To what extent?"

- Provide anonymity

Focus groups and key informant interviews

- More nuanced detail on complex ideas or processes

- Answer the "How?" or "Why?"

More benefits of qualitative data.

- **Go beyond your survey data!**
  - Further assess needs, gaps, and strengths in your community
- **Hear from stakeholders in their own words and voices!**
  - Unearth conditions or attitudes in your community
  - Learn about emerging issues
  - Corroborate and validate local, state or national survey data
  - Test assumptions

What are focus groups? A small group of people who usually **share common traits/characteristics/experiences** (age, background, geography,) assembled to **participate in a guided discussion**, on a particular topic.

Purpose =

- to draw upon participants' **attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and experiences** in a way not typically feasible using other methods.

- to identify and explore **behavior, attitudes and processes.**

- to better understand **challenges, test assumptions, and create initial change ideas**

What are Key Informant Interviews? Qualitative in-depth **interviews** with a person who knows what is going on in the community

Purpose =

to collect information from a wide range of people—including community leaders, professionals, or residents—who have **firsthand knowledge**, particularly **informed perspectives** or interest in the topic or community

Key Informant Interviews

- Build on participant's knowledge and/or expertise

- Referrals to other stakeholders

- More easily conducted than Focus Group

Which one should I choose to do?

Focus Groups:

- Promote discussion between participants on a specific topic
- When interaction among interviewees will yield the best info (ex. community norms)
- When individuals might be reluctant to give info one-on-one (ex. good for idea generation, problem identification and definition, evaluating messages for an intervention)

Key Informant Interviews:

- When interviewing one person at a time will yield the best info because of sensitive topics peer pressure or social desirability.
- When stakeholder has unique expertise or role in community.

Equity & Cultural Competence

Meet	**Meet the diverse needs of your community members** Non-English speakers/English language learners, LGBTQ+ youth
Reduce	**Reduce participation barriers** Conduct group at central location/provide childcare/dinner/incentive/Zoom
Improve	**Improve effectiveness of programs and practices for all community members** Strategies that represent all subpopulations. Don't take a one size fits all approach.

Key equity considerations.

- Who are your participants?
  - Gender
  - Race
  - LGBTQIA+
  - Socioeconomic
  - Language
- Do participants have access to transportation, technology, childcare etc.?

How do focus groups and key informant interviews fit into the strategic prevention framework (SPF)?

Assessment:
- Profile population problems, resources and readiness to address needs and gaps

Evaluation:
- Monitor progress on selected change indicators
- Use results to improve, replace or sustain activities & strategies

Nuts & Bolts

Capacity

- Staff

- Experience

Approval

- Institutional Review Boards

Recruitment

Consent

Logistics

Data analysis

Information dissemination

Who should be included?

- Optimal size: Virtually 6 to 10, In-person up to 12
- Participants who will provide meaningful insight into the area that you are trying to explore.
  - Sub-populations (Equity) - Do participants represent a wide range of roles, perspectives, & social identities?
- How many focus groups should I aim to do?
  - Hold separate focus groups by demographic/affinity group:
    - Adults, youth, young adults, parents, community members
    - Spanish speakers
    - LGBTQ+ youth/parents of LGBTQ+ youth
- **TIP: Reach beyond the people you typically hear from!**

How do we RECRUIT focus group participants?

- Aim for twice as many participants as you want!
  - Incentives (e.g. Electronic gift cards, Food if in person)
- Set appropriate date, time, and location
  - Think about equity when selecting location
- Make personal contact with potential participants
  - Use connections e.g. Tap into partners, coalition members and other community groups!
  - People want to share their experiences & knowledge
  - For youth, partner with an existing organization (e.g. Schools, Boys & Girls Club, Teen Center)
- Send a reminder email that confirms participation and communicates the relevant details of the event
- Make a reminder phone call or text the day before

Developing your PROTOCOL

Your protocol consists of EVERYTHING you need to cover during your focus group:

1. A welcome or introduction stating the purpose of focus group (how data will be used, confidentiality considerations (INFORMED CONSENT) & facilitator/ notetaker bio)
2. Ground rules
3. Demographic questionnaire
4. Focus group questions
5. Thank you/Incentives

What do you want to know? Developing your list of questions.

WE'RE HAVING A FOCUS GROUP TO TEST WHICH QUESTIONS TO ASK IN OUR NEXT FOCUS GROUP.

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- Identify area(s) to hone in on
  - TIP: Don't be too broad or let your focus be derailed
- Pilot or Test your questions
- Limit focus group to 1 hour
- Include 1 or 2 'warm up' questions
  - TIP: Order Matters!
  - TIP: Important to set the tone
- Conclude with **wrap up** question that brings the discussion back to the central themes or ideas.

Who is in the room? Why are they participating?

EXAMPLES:

For parents:

- **How old are your children? In what grade(s) are your children? How many years you've lived in this community.**

For other stakeholders:

- **What is your role in community? Why did you decide to participate in the discussion today?**

Ask questions appropriate to the knowledge & expertise of participants.

Youth Prevention Examples:

Intro: Let's talk about youth use of alcohol and access to alcohol.

1. Among your peers or friends that drink, has it become easier, the same, or more difficult since COVID restrictions have been in place to get alcohol?

2. Where are youth in your community <u>getting</u> alcohol?

    ▪ Probe: from home (with or without permission), older siblings or friends, at parties?

    ▪ Probe: Have you seen a change since COVID restrictions have been in place about where youth are getting alcohol?

3. Where are youth in your community <u>using</u> alcohol?

    ▪ Probe: at home, at parties, outside spaces, cars?

Include probes when writing your questions.

- *A probe is = a question or statement which encourages participants to add to or elaborate on something which was said*

- For broader questions probing questions help you get more specific responses

- Common Examples:
  - Tell me more about that…
  - Would you give me an example of what you mean?
  - Does anyone else feel that way or feel differently?

- Prevention Example:
  - Are your friends or peers <u>vaping</u>?
    - Probe: What substances are they typically vaping – THC, nicotine, flavor only?

## How do I include follow up questions from my survey data?

Examples:

- In our student **survey**, we asked students about how they were feeling. A large number of students reported feeling **anxious, lonely and depressed**.

  ➤ **Does that resonate with you? What do you think are some of the drivers behind why students may be feeling this way?**

- In our student **survey**, we asked students about their substance use. Students' rates of alcohol use in our school exceed national, state and regional norms. We also asked students why they drink. Grades 9 and 10 reported the #1 reason is "friends/peer pressure." Grades 11 and 12 reported "to have fun."

  ➤ **Does this ring true? What factors might contribute to high rates of alcohol use? What factors might contribute to the grade specific responses?**

Consider equity when developing questions

- What is your greatest substance or substance-related issue of concern for your community?
  - PROBE: ask about specific age groups or subgroups within the community (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+ neighborhoods)

What makes a good question?
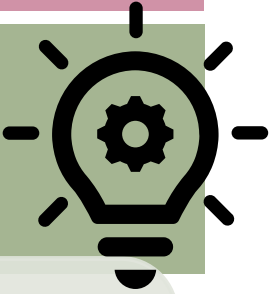
Language matters

- Consider participants' level of receptive language
- Avoid using acronyms, and jargon
- Use neutral language
- sound conversational and natural

Short

- Good questions are usually short, open-ended and one dimensional (they ask about ONE thing at a time).

Based on participants' knowledge

- Good questions are based on participant's knowledge, perspective and/or feelings.

Common pitfalls

➢ AVOID

- closed-ended questions (e.g. Yes/No or True/False)

- leading questions: (e.g. "Since most kids drink on weekends in the town park, how often do you and your friends drink?"

- allowing participants to derail conservation to their specific interest. Don't be shy!

Group Activity – Correct common focus group questions

- **In what park do most upperclassmen gather to drink during the weekend?**
  - Assumption re: frequency MOST
  - Assumption gathering in PARK

➢ **Better wording**: For those students that drink, are there common gathering locations in town? Other out of town locations?
  - Probe: are these gatherings typically H.S. students of all ages? Upperclassman?

- **Do students in this town vape?**
  - Problem: Yes/No (may not elicit details necessary to identify or address issue)

➢ **Better wording/Open ended:**
- How much, if at all do high school students vape?
- To what extent do you think students vape currently compared to last year?
  - Prompt: If change, ask why (e.g. what has influenced) a change in vaping behavior?
- What substance, if at all, do students in this town vape most frequently vape
  - Prompt: nicotine, marijuana, flavor only

- **Is allowing your high school students to practice drinking at your home a good idea?**
  - Problem: Yes/No

➢ **Better wording/Open ended to encourage conversation around community norm, better understanding of respondent's feelings about issue.**

- How do you feel about allowing your high school students to practice drinking at your home?
  - Probe: to what extent has there been education around the effects of alcohol on the adolescent brain?

Logistics

- Space (in person)
  - Set up (circle style)
  - Accessibility
  - Signage
- Time
  - Most likely will start late, optimal start time
  - Keep early arrivers busy (consent, survey tool)
- Recording (in person)
  - Bring recorder & extra batteries, TEST ahead
- Food (in person)
  - Logistics, cost
- Incentives
  - Gift cards

Facilitation - your team

Primary Facilitator

Responsible for asking questions and keeping conversation on track

Equity – do we include a bi-lingual facilitator?

Note-Taker/Back-up

Responsible for keeping track of topic coverage, noticing quiet participants, helping facilitator with logistics

Clearly define each person's role ahead of time

Facilitation – introduction

Tip: Have a written script (Protocol)

Example:

"Welcome! My name is [ ], and I will be the group leader for today's discussion. Let me start by thanking you for participating in this project. We are talking today to teens in [Town/City] about your recent observations and experiences and your perceptions about other teens in in [Town/City] . During our discussion, we will be touching upon areas that include the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and use of alcohol and other drugs. We are particularly interested in knowing where teens in [Town/City] typically access SUBSTANCE (S) and what factors might encourage or discourage youth substance use."
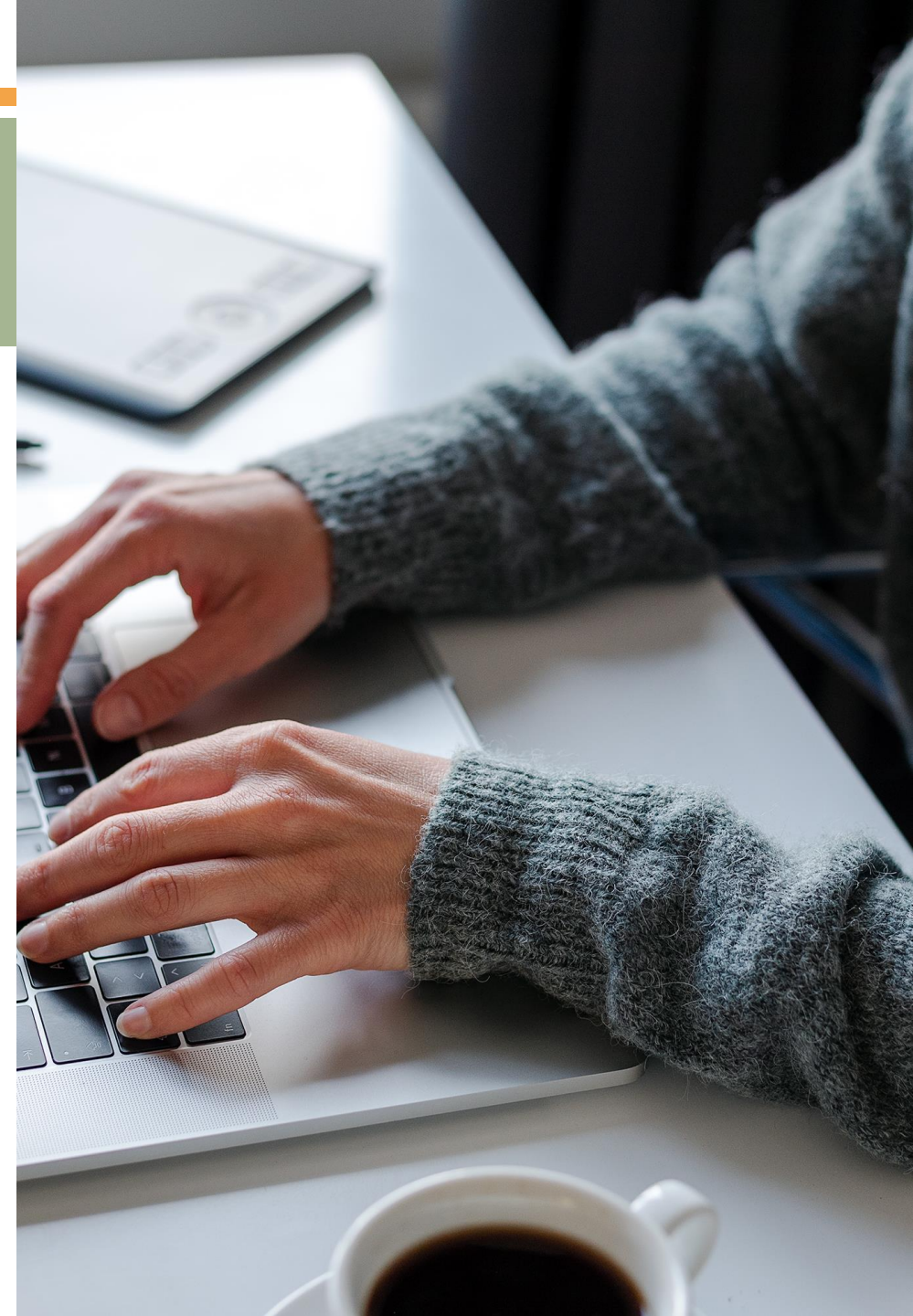
Facilitation – establish your ground rules

Before asking questions establish ground rules/group norms/rules of respect

1. Be clear that participation is voluntary

2. Common Examples:

   - Allowing all members of the group to speak, disagreeing respectfully, not personally attacking one another

   - Let participants know that they can respond to each other as well as to the questions asked by the facilitator

   - For virtual groups remind people to mute when not speaking, raise virtual hand

Sample Text: "At this time, I would like to set some ground rules. First, everyone's opinion is important, and we will respect what each person has to say. Second, my purpose here is to ensure everyone gets a chance to talk and that we get to talk about all the topics. You can choose to not to respond to a question if it makes you feel uncomfortable. Finally, it is important that we agree that "what is said here stays here". During the discussion people in the group may say things about themselves that they would not want repeated outside of the group. It is important that you all understand and agree with these rules before we can begin."

Facilitator asks to see thumbs up, to ensure approval from all

Facilitation - consent & confidentiality

- ➢ Secure Participant Consent or Parental Consent
  - ▪ For virtual focus groups, display consent language as it is being reviewed through chat.
  - ▪ Provide written documents in person.
  - ▪ Ask Permission to Record
- ➢ Confidentiality
  - ▪ Use first names only
  - ▪ List preferred pronouns, e.g. She/Her or They/Them (Equity considerations)

Facilitation -"DO's"

- Be aware of who is talking and who is not. Pay attention to equity of voice.
  - Use prompts to ensure that everyone is heard and that you hear a range of voices.
    - Ex. "Does anybody have a different perspective?"
  - Use "round robin" format to avoid multiple people talking at once
  - Create opportunities for quieter participants to speak.
- Treat participants as experts
- Act as if you hearing what they are telling for the first time (even if it's the 20th)
- Be neutral, impartial & non-judgmental

Lessons Learned
- Review each Focus Group/KII process
  - What worked well?
  - What did not work well and why?
  - What would you change next time?

Facilitation - use reflective listening

"A communication strategy involving two key steps: seeking to understand a speaker's idea & offering the idea back to the speaker, to confirm the idea has been understood correctly."

- So what I hear you saying is…

- It sounds like…

- Benefits:
  - Check the accuracy of your understanding
  - Participant can offer more detail
 - Summarize or elicit agreements or disagreements

Facilitation – "DON'Ts"

- Finish people's sentences or make assumptions about what is being said by someone

- Allow one or two people to dominate or derail conversation

- Permit side discussion; this can distract others from the main discussion (in-person)

- Take sides or challenge what is being said;

- Argue with participants.

- Share your own opinions (verbally or non-verbally)

- Use jargon or technical terms

Facilitation - virtual focus group tips
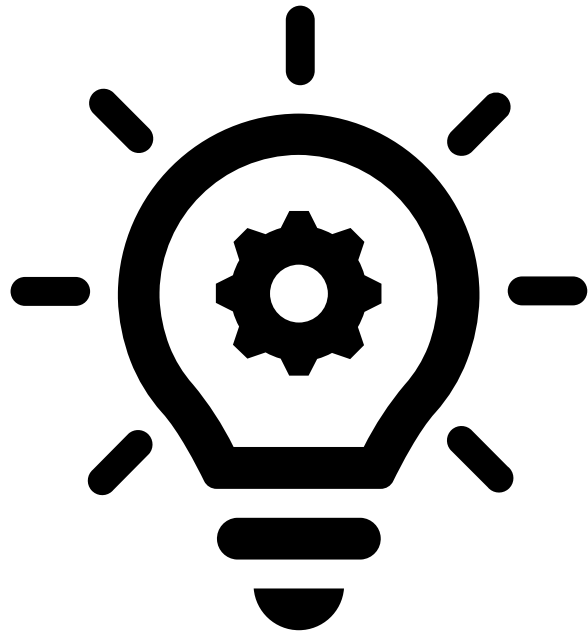
- Send a reminder with tips on how to prepare for participation (for example, find a quiet place, getting the necessary technology, completing technical checks prior to the meeting)

- Expect and encourage a slower rhythm to the conversation than in an in-person focus group.

- Ask participants to virtually raise their hands

- Ask notetaker to monitor the participation to ensure everyone is engaged
    - drop in pre- survey in chat linked to a survey monkey for demographics, gift cards etc.

- When recording ask participants to remove their last name

Now what?

- Transcribing your notes
  - Notetaker reviews and cleans
  - TIP: keep original language
- Analyzing your
  - Uncover & highlight general

  & specific themes
  - Iterative coding
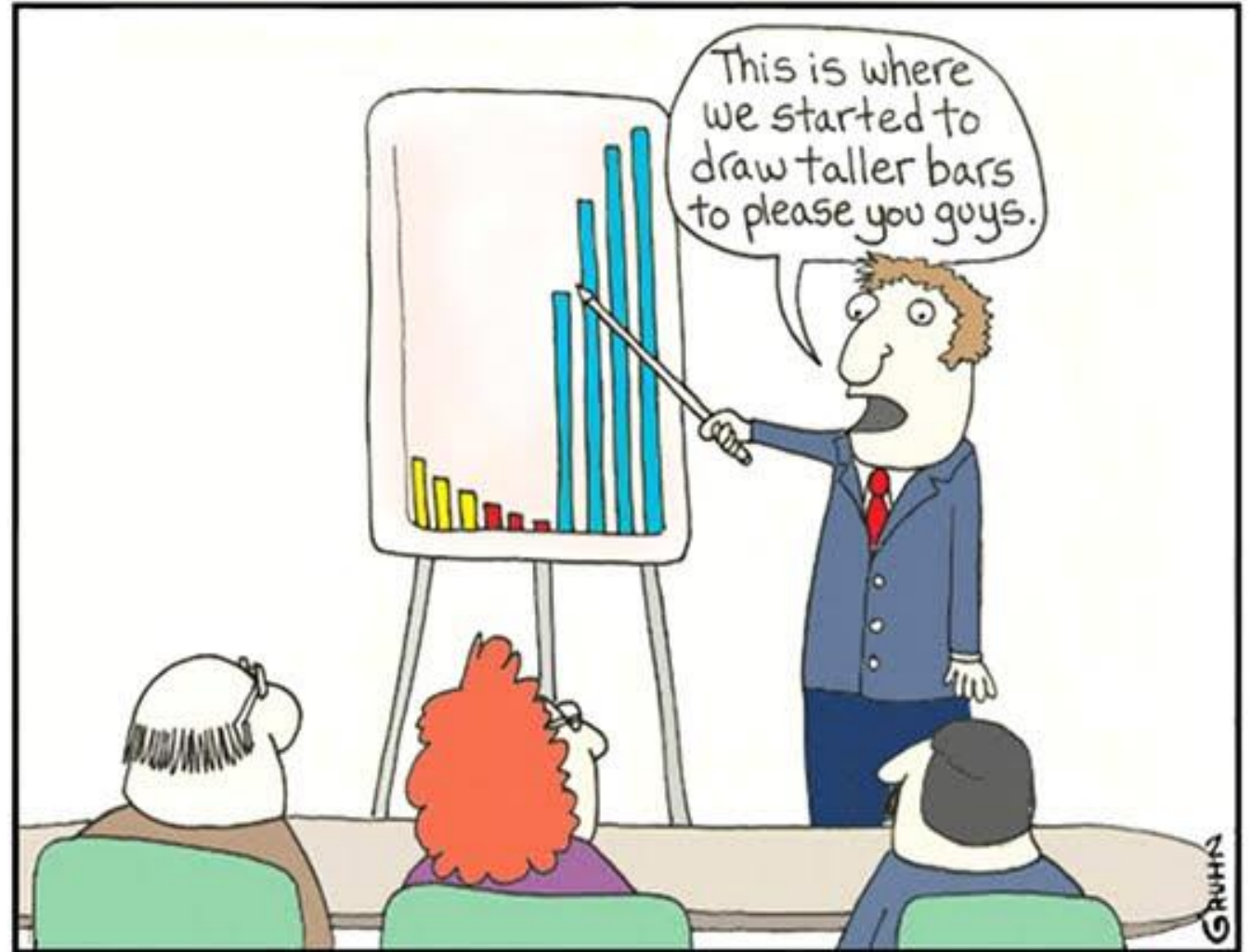
TIPS TO minimize bias

- After transcribing and reviewing the notes from the focus group, debrief the findings with your team (DO NOT INTERPRET FINDINGS BY YOURSELF)
  - What are common themes?
  - What can you learn from what was said?
  - What can you learn from what wasn't said?

CODING - The analysis and interpretation of focus group data requires a systematic & rigorous approach.

Develop data dictionary

- Based on intent of focus group
- Initial themes
- Can be added to for emergent themes

Highlight key text

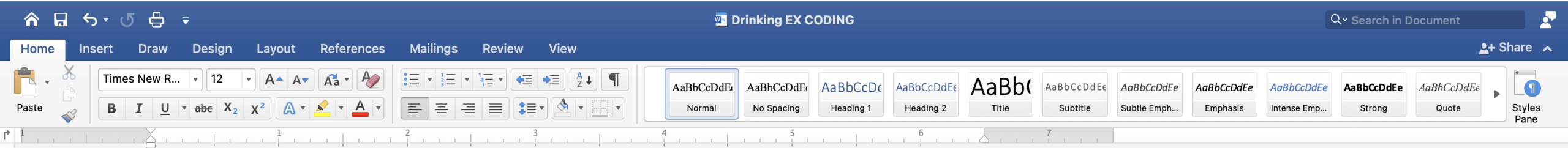Put code in comment box

Highlight quotes

Use 2 coders!!
Revisit, review/adjust after all groups are coded

Example of a coding data dictionary

Youth Substance Use Focus Group	
CODE	**ABBREVIATION in COMMENT BOX**
Youth Alcohol More	YAM
Youth Alcohol Less	YAL
Youth Wellbeing/Mental Health	YMH
Youth coping Neg (other e.g. not substance)	YCN
Youth coping pos	YCP
Parent Rules Alcohol	PRA
Parent Communication/Messaging Alcohol	PMA
Miscellaneous	MISC
Parent Rules and Role Modeling Marijuana	PRMM
Parent Rules and Role Modeling Vaping	PRMV
Community Values/Norms -- Alcohol	CNA
Peer Norms- Alcohol	PNA
Alcohol Access during COVID- changes	AA
Marijuana Access	AM
Vaping Access	AV

Coding example

Drinking?

M- Pre-covid she was getting peer pressure to vape, do drugs, drink alcohol but while in quarantine she reevaluated and "got it together". She now has fewer friends (had been a larger group) but the 2 or 3 close friends she now has hold her accountable. It is part of the culture to use substances as a high schooler.

B -During Covid he starting drinking himself and he had not drank before; started with wine while at home and now he is seeking out alcohol; has been really 'terrible'; he is drinking by himself in his room; his parents know but don't know how much he is really drinking. While drinking he is often on a call or chat with friends.

Still to scared to steal from his home (dad's house) but would be able to get from his mom's house b/c it is readily available.

What about his friends? Only him; some of his friends encourage him (tell he is funnier when he drinks) and others tell him to stop. He is concerned about the health risks

K – her dad was sent to rehab during Covid; she has only drank one time. Doesn't want to be like her dad and abandon family. Her friends are not drinking.

S- No drinking among her friends

Emily Melnick

Quote
YAL
YVL
~~CNA~~
PNA

Emily Melnick
YAM
  •attention seeking
  •drinking while alone
AA
  •at home, both with and without parent permission

Nina Chanana
PRA
AA
QUOTE (it is readily available)

Emily Melnick
YH

Nina Chanana
PRMA

Emily Melnick
PNA

Emily Melnick
PNA

Summarizing your work.

- Look at your coded themes!
- Summarize:
  - What are the participants telling you?
  - Consider frequency and magnitude of responses
  - Pull out quotes to support your themes

PFS2015 example → Summary Findings to Recommendations

SUMMARY FINDINGS

❖ There is a clear need across all communities when considering **immediate and long-term mental health supports** for youth and parents

  ▪ Teens looking for appropriate mental health therapy do not always have access to these services.

  ▪ Almost all the youth did not feel that their school counseling departments had the capacity or competence to support them in dealing with mental health issues.

  ▪ Several parents were concerned around finding 'right fit' mental health providers for teens.

  ▪ Many youth identified their concern about stigma associated with mental health and accessing therapy.

Recommendations

➢ Community and school-based campaigns to de-stigmatize utilization of mental health services.

➢ Publicize available resources for finding mental health supports in communities for teens.

➢ Provide information to youth and parents on what to expect when seeking mental health supports from the first phone call to the initial in-person or virtual visit.

➢ Develop additional teen centered mental health supports

How can focus groups & KII data inform your needs assessment, strategic plan or work plans?

- **Needs Assessment**
  - helps paint a picture of the community or region's current problems, needs, resources, norms
  - adds micro-level details to macro level data (local, state or national surveys, other quantitative data sources)
  - leads you to additional key sources (for interviews or further data collection)

- **Strategic Plan**
  - enables you to systematically identify strategies & activities that will directly address local conditions (and the 'problem' that you have identified)

- **Evaluation**
  - Use results to improve, replace or sustain activities & strategies

QUESTIONS?

Resources

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- National CLAS Standards - A set of 15 action steps intended to **advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities**
  - **https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlid=53**

Icebreakers

- https://www.icebreakers.ws/

Institutional Review Boards

- https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/institutional-review-boards-frequently-asked-questions

Skills – Community Assessments, Evaluation, Focus Groups, Planning

- Community Tool Box
  - https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of American
  - https://www.cadca.org/resource-types/primer

Strategic Prevention Framework

- https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190620-samhsa-strategic-prevention-framework-guide.pdf

Acronyms

DEI – Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

DMHAS – CT's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. State agency for prevention & treatment of mental health and substance use.

IRB - Institutional Review Board. An IRB is an appropriately constituted group that has been formally designated to review and monitor research involving human subjects.

LPC - Local Prevention Council, a state-funded, town-based group dedicated to substance use prevention.

SPF – Strategic Prevention Framework, the public health model used in community-based substance use prevention work.

Sample text when collecting demographic or brief survey information electronically

Collect data at the start of a focus group – virtually (drop link in chat) or in-person (paper or on-line)

> "Before we begin today's discussion, please complete a quick survey that will give us some general information about who we are talking to today. Please take a few minutes and complete the survey link that I have placed in the chat box. Please answer honestly, as no one will know what <u>you </u>have said specifically – just what the people in the group reported. It will allow us to record a general profile of the group, so we will know how the group broke down in terms of your ages, gender, race and ethnicity."

Sample - Invitation & Consent

Youth Focus Group

What is the purpose of the focus group?
Your child has been invited to participate in a focus group sponsored by [NAME OF ORG]. The purpose of this focus group is to understand how COVID-19 has impacted families and youth regarding mental health and substance use. The information gained through this focus group will be used to support local and state level planning of resources and services for youth and families.

What will happen?
Your child will participate in a focus group with 6 – 12 other youth. At the start of the group youth will be asked to complete a brief anonymous survey to collect information including age/grade, gender identity, race/ethnicity and town of residence.

During the focus group, a moderator will facilitate the discussion and a note-taker will be present. Individual responses are confidential, and no names will be included in the final report. Your child can stop participating in the session at any time. There are no right or wrong answers to focus group questions. We want to hear from all the youth and would like for everyone to contribute their thoughts.

Is the focus group confidential?
YES. Your child's name will **not** be recorded with the focus group notes. Researchers from [NAME OF ORG] will analyze the data, but—as stated above—all responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in any reports. Meetings may be recorded to allow for transcripts to be created of the session. Names will not be connected to responses provided within the transcript.

Is there any compensation? [NAME OF ORG] is providing $15 electronic gift cards to all youth participants. At the end of the session, youth will be asked to provide an email address via a short on-line form that is sent directly to a staff person at [NAME OF ORG].

What if I have questions?
If you have any questions, please contact [CONTACT PERSON].

What do I do now?
If you **DO NOT** want your child to participate in the voluntary focus group, please send an email to [CONTACT PERSON & EMAIL] by [DATE] and let them know that your child will **NOT** be participating in the group. Thank you!

Another Sample - Invitation & Consent

Invitation & Consent
...to help [NAME OF ORG] understand substance use and other risky behaviors among youth in [NAME of TOWN] and the surrounding communities

We would like to talk to your child in a short group discussion on the norms around underage substance use in [NAME of TOWN]. This group discussion has been scheduled to occur on [DATE]. Your child's participation will aid [NAME OF ORG] in better planning programs in the communities to meet kids where they are in terms of this issue.

During the discussion students will be asked questions about the rules, expectations, and consequences around underage substance use; their understanding of the risks associated with underage substance use; and how [NAME OF ORG] can help them with this issue– for example, what types of programming or events could they offer teens in the community?

Students are not asked to talk specifically about their own behaviors or those of any particular person, but about the behaviors of XX High School youth in general. Before the discussion group begins the group leader will discuss with the group the importance of keeping what is said and what is heard during the discussion private. If your child finds any of the topics discussed during the group too difficult, they do not need to respond to that question and/or can stop participating in the discussion.

If you have any questions please contact [CONTACT PERSON NAME, TITLE, EMAIL]

If you **DO NOT** want your child participating in the voluntary discussion group, please complete the following and send the form back to school by [DATE]. Thank you!

Name of Child:_____

Relationship to Child:_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sample – Confidentiality & Ground Rules

Understanding Confidentiality and Discussion Ground Rules

1. The virtual session will be recorded
2. Participants will not share information provided by another participant outside of the focus group.
3. There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.
4. One person will speak at a time.
5. Only first names, initials or pseudonyms will be used during the session, participants' names will not be recorded in the notes, no identifying information will be collected.
6. Participants must let others speak and will listen respectfully as others share their views.
7. We want to hear from everyone who is comfortable sharing, if participants prefer to send the facilitator their response in the chat they will be able to do so.
8. Participants may choose not to respond to a question at any time.
9. Participants may exit the focus group at any time if they feel uncomfortable.
10. No personal information will be shared by participants.
11. Participants who are not following ground rules will be dismissed from the meeting by the facilitator.

If you have questions about any of these rules please ask the group facilitator.