

Communication Campaigns

Focus Group Guide For Message and Channel Testing



Division of Public Health Sciences
Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy

Jennifer Ross, PhD¹
Melinda Pankratz, PhD, MPH¹
Kimberly Wagoner, DrPH, MPH¹
Parissa Ballard, PhD¹
Scott D. Rhodes, PhD¹

¹Wake Forest School of Medicine

Purpose

This focus group moderator guide was developed to test new or existing communication campaign messages, and identify ideal channels. It is a compliment to the Effective Substance Use Prevention Communication Information Guide published October 2018.

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Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content of this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the NCDHHS.

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Focus Group Moderator Guide: Questions for Message Testing

OVERVIEW

This guide provides an example focus group script for testing communication campaign messages and dissemination channels. It is organized to include a section header, notes where applicable, and the script, which is indented and in italics. This guide can be customized for new or existing campaigns. Places where customization is needed are underlined and in brackets. Additional resources for conducting a focus group are included on page 6. A checklist for conducting focus groups is on page 7. A template for note-taking is on page 8. This template can also be modified to hand out to participants for individual message ratings or rankings.

GETTING STARTED

Greeting

Welcome and thank you for being here today. We really appreciate you taking the time to participate in this discussion. My name is [enter name] and I will be the moderator for our discussion.

Role

My role today will be to ask some specific questions, to involve everyone, and to keep the conversation going. We have a lot to cover, so I may need to change the subject or move ahead with the discussion. But, please stop me if you want to add anything or if you have any questions. Our discussion today will last about an hour and a half.

We are fortunate to have some help today. I'd like to introduce you to our co-moderator, [enter name]. She may ask some clarifying questions as they come up.

Consent and Assent

Note: Review and sign consent forms, providing an opportunity to ask questions before proceeding.

Purpose

Just to remind you, we are here today [fill in specific to your project]. The main thing we are interested in today is hearing from you about your ideas, opinions, and concerns as they relate to messages we are going to show you about [fill in specific to your project]. Your participation in today's focus group will help us gain valuable insight on how to make these messages more effective.

Note: If you are planning to adapt existing messages to fit your campaign or test to ensure they are right for your target audience, here is some text to include:

These messages were originally developed for [original campaign outcome and target audience]. We are hoping to use them, or modify them for [current campaign outcome and target audience]. During the discussion, please keep this in mind and provide recommendations or thoughts on how they could be used for the purpose of our campaign.

Note: if you are planning to audio record, here is some text to include:

Our conversation is being audio-recorded to help us remember what is said. Since this is a group discussion, we cannot turn off the recorder but feel free to simply say you do not want to answer a question. Everything said here today will be confidential. Nothing you say will be connected with your name. We would also like everyone in this group to keep things confidential, so whatever you say and whatever you hear someone say, we hope that it will not go out of this room. We hope you will feel free to speak openly but also be aware of our limits in protecting your confidentiality.

Note: you can choose to turn off the audio recording. See resources at the end for more information about audio recording.

How to Participate

Today you will be participating in a group discussion. It's not an interview where I ask a question and each person answers the question and we move on to the next one. Instead, we'll be putting topics on the table and the idea is for everyone to participate in the discussion with each other. It's particularly helpful if somebody says something and you're sitting here thinking, "Yeah, that's sort of the way I think about it or feel about it" and you share that. We also want to hear from you if you are thinking, "NO, that's not the way I do it. That's not how I think about it." We want to hear both similarities and differences within the group. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Ground Rules

We have certain things we need to cover, but everyone will have the chance to share their opinions or experiences. We want this to be a very open discussion. There are just a few ground rules we want to make certain you are aware of. These are just to help everything go smoothly.

- 1. Please talk one at a time in a voice that can be heard by everyone.*
- 2. Please don't have side conversations with your neighbor. What you have to say is very important to us.*
- 3. You do not need to talk directly to me. You can respond directly to the person who has made a point, but please do so respectfully. And you do not have to be called on in order to talk.*
- 4. We ask that no tobacco products be used during the focus group session. We do not have any planned breaks.*
- 5. Please check now to make sure your phones are on silent and do not use them to look up information during the focus group. We want to know what you know and think.*

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Introduction and Icebreaker

To help us get to know each other, please tell us your first name and one thing you like to do in your free time.

RATING MESSAGES

Note: In addition to displaying the messages, consider handing out a booklet with messages to everyone in the focus group. The booklet will allow participants to provide individual message rankings or ratings. Request their return at the end of the focus.

Note: you can discuss messages as a set, or individually, one at a time. Questions here are framed as one at a time. Clearly label messages, and repeat the questions for each individual message.

Note: please try to get participants to state which message they're referring to if they are talking about a specific one.

Now we're going to show you messages about [fill in].

Here are the messages we want you to look at. Please take a couple minutes to look at them.

Okay, now we are going to discuss the messages. If you make comments about one message in particular, please state which one so we know.

1. Attention - noticing

- *When looking at this message, what caught your attention first?*
- *How could this message be improved to better catch attention?*

2. Message comprehension and credibility

- *What do you think this message means?*
- *Is there anything that is confusing or unclear about this message?*
 - Probe if unclear: How can we make it clearer?
- *Is this message believable? Why or why not?*
 - Probe if most people don't think it's believable: How might we make the messages more believable?
- *How relevant is this message to [fill in your key outcome]?*
- *How relevant is this message to you? [target audience]?*
 - Follow up: How can we make it more relevant [to outcome and audience]?

3. Message reactions

- *Did you learn any new information from viewing this message?*
 - Probe: *What new information did you learn? What did you already know?*
 - Follow up: *Did this message make you want to seek out more information?*
- *What do you like or dislike about this message?*
 - Probe: *What was distracting, ineffective?*

4. Message Design Considerations

- *Are there any additional message design considerations we haven't discussed?*
 - Probe: *Colors, font type, font size*

5. Perceived effectiveness [comparison of all messages]

- *Which of these messages do you think would be the most effective at [fill in your key outcome]?*
- *Which of these messages do you think would be the least effective at [fill in your key outcome]?*
 - Probe: *What made this message more [less] effective than the others?*

6. Message Placement Considerations

- *Where do you think the best place to put these messages would be?*
 - *Why? Will you see them frequently?*
 - Probe: [provide multiple options to elicit feedback, including online, social media, at events, etc.]

Before we move on to the next message, do you have any additional feedback for how to make this message more effective?

Note: If you are want to reduce the number of messages, consider having participants rank messages individually at the end of the focus group. This will help you determine the final messages to use in your campaign.

CONCLUSIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Is there anything else we have not yet discussed that you would like to mention related to what we've been talking about?

Note: If collecting any demographic information, do that here.

Please turn to demographic information page and fill it in. This will help us better understand how different people rated the messages. But we will not link your name to this information or to the conversation. Once you are done, please hand the sheet back to me, and we will give you your incentive.

Thank you for participating in our focus group.

Note: If you are providing a handout on the topic, distribute with incentives.

Additional Focus Group Information

There are numerous existing resources on conducting focus groups, including topics such as:

- Selecting participants to match the goal of your focus group
- Number of people to include in focus groups (usually want about 5-8)
- Recruiting focus group participants
- Providing informed consent
- Ideal focus group seating arrangements
- Roles of focus group members, including moderators, note takers, and participants
- Analyzing focus group results

We recommend the follow resources for more information:

1. The National Cancer Institute's *Making Health Communication Programs Work*; <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf>
 - Chapter on Communication Research Methods, pgs. 127-141
2. Richard Kreuger's guide for conducting focus groups.
 - <https://richardakrueger.com/focus-group-interviewing/>
 - There is a useful downloadable handbook on this page: <https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>

Focus Group Checklist

Focus Group Date and Time:

Location:

of confirmed participants:

Task	Who	When	Check Box
Send email reminder to individual about upcoming focus group		2-3 days before the focus group	
Print & bring focus group moderator guide		Prior to focus group	
Bring laptop & take notes; template for notes		Prior to focus group	
Print & bring consent forms		Prior to focus group	
Print & bring booklets/messages		Prior to focus group	
Print & bring any resource handouts		Prior to focus group	
Bring all necessary FG materials Pens, nametags, markers		Prior to focus group	
Prepare focus group site (room temp, lights, chairs, etc.)		Prior to focus group	
Participant check-in list		Prior to focus group	
Bring refreshments		Prior to focus group	
Audio recorder x2 and extra batteries		Prior to focus group	
Incentives		Prior to focus group	

Notes Template

Focus Group Date and Time:
of confirmed participants:

Location:
Type of Material:

Message Rating Step	Message Rating Notes
<p>1. Attention - noticing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When looking at these messages, which one caught your attention first?</i> • <i>What caught your attention about this message?</i> • <i>How could these message be improved to better catch attention?</i> 	
<p>2. Message comprehension and credibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you think the message means on these campaign materials means?</i> • <i>Is there anything that is confusing or unclear about these messages?</i> • <i>Are these messages believable? Why or why not?</i> • <i>How relevant are these messages for increasing secure medication storage?</i> • <i>How relevant is this message for you?</i> • <i>How can we make these messages more relevant to parents?</i> • <i>Which message is most relevant for increasing secure medication storage? Why?</i> 	

Message Rating Step	Message Rating Notes
<p>3. Message reactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did you learn any new information from viewing these messages?</i> • <i>Did these messages make you want to seek out more information?</i> • <i>What do you like or dislike about these messages?</i> • <i>Which message did you like the most? Why?</i> 	
<p>4. Message Design Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are there any additional message design considerations for our community we haven't discussed?</i> 	
<p>5. Perceived effectiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Which of these messages do you think would be the most effective at increasing secure medication storage?</i> • <i>Which of these messages do you think would be the least effective increasing secure medication storage?</i> 	
<p>6. Message Placement Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where do you think is the best place to put these campaign materials?</i> • <i>Why? Will you see them frequently?</i> • <i>Does the best place to put these campaign materials differ by message?</i> 	
<p>7. Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Before we move on to the next campaign materials, do you have any additional feedback for these materials in our community?</i> 	

Message Rating Step	Message Rating Notes
8. Ranking <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please rank Campaign materials from most to least favorite.	

Include one note template for each material discussed.