

County of Los Angeles – Department of Public Health
Substance Abuse Prevention and Control
FOCUS GROUP INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

The following instructions have been created to help Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC) providers conduct reliable and valid community-based focus groups. Environmental Prevention Services (EPS) and Comprehensive Prevention Services (CPS) contractors are required to conduct a minimum of four focus groups, two among individuals aged 18-24 years and two among adults aged 25 and older; however, agencies are strongly encouraged to do more where possible to ensure that the priority problems and contributing factors are identified in targeted community(ies). Topics must be generated from the needs assessment data to investigate gaps in findings or divergent, inconsistent, or particularly strong or surprising results as documented in the Local Key Findings Summary, Environmental Scan Summary, and/or Survey Summary.

PURPOSE OF FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are organized, moderated discussions among a select group of community members for the purpose of understanding shared attitudes, perceptions, and experiences on topics related to alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and community conditions. Unlike key informant interviews, participants in focus groups are usually community members who do not necessarily have expertise or specialized knowledge in specific areas but may have important observations or experiences that will underscore key AOD issues in their communities. For instance, whereas a key informant interview may involve a politician who has voted for underage drinking ordinances within the community, a focus group may involve a mother of two teenagers who have reported underage drinking.

To allow participants ample time to talk about topics in depth, focus groups are generally small (6-10 participants) and last 1-2 hours. The most effective focus groups do not try to address too many questions so that everyone is allowed to have their say and so the moderator can follow-up with relevant lines of inquiry. One major topic area per focus group with 5 key questions (and any necessary follow-up questions or “prompts”) is recommended.

FOCUS GROUP PLANNING

There are several key steps involved in planning and implementing key informant interviews as a means for data collection. Review the following activities and prepare accordingly with your community partnership members.

1. Gather and review existing data from the Local Key Findings Summary, Environmental Scan and Survey Summary;
2. Determine what information is needed and develop focus group questions and prompts (i.e., follow-up questions that will facilitate deeper discussion);
3. Brainstorm about community participants who can provide relevant answers;
4. Select an appropriate location to conduct the focus groups;
5. Determine whether focus groups will be conducted in languages other than English (e.g., Spanish, Khmer, or Korean) and obtain an approved translation of the consent form from SAPC;
6. Work with Service Planning Area (SPA) partners to select incentives;
7. Purchase incentives and prepare the Incentive Tracking Form;
8. Develop a Discussion Guide or form with pre-determined questions that will help guide the discussion;
9. Role-play the session and practice asking the pre-determined questions and prompts;
10. Determine how sessions will be documented, including whether they will be audio taped;
11. Develop a form for taking session notes;
12. Obtain audio recording equipment (if applicable);

13. Designate a moderator and note taker and ensure they meet training requirements (listed below);
14. Schedule focus groups at least one week in advance and at times convenient for participants; and
15. Plan to send thank you notes or emails to participants.

The following items are required to conduct the focus group:

1. SAPC Focus Group Questions form (attached),
2. SAPC Focus Group Documentation form (attached),
3. One pen for each focus group participant,
4. At least two pens or pencils for the note taker,
5. Badges or signs indicating assigned participant numbers (which will be used to address the participant during the session),
6. Form for agency note-taking (developed by the provider),
7. Scratch paper for participants to write down ideas,
8. Focus Group Discussion Guide (developed by the provider),
9. Audio recorder (where applicable),
10. Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved informed consent forms,
11. Incentives,
12. Incentive Tracking Form (attached),
13. A copy of this protocol.

Staff

A minimum of two staff will conduct the focus groups: one to moderate the discussion (moderator) and the other to document the proceedings by taking notes (note taker). Because notes are often incomplete or difficult to read or understand later, SAPC strongly encourages audio taping the focus group as well, although this is not required. Where applicable, the note taker will audiotape the focus groups. Focus groups may not be videotaped.

The moderator should be someone who is comfortable talking in front of groups, has experience leading discussions, is knowledgeable about the topic to be discussed, and can identify with group participants. Requirements for moderators include the following:

- An agency employee assigned to the EPS or CPS contract who is 18 years of age or older (evaluator permitted);
- Live scan fingerprint clearance through DOJ/FBI on-file;
- Certificate of completion for the Department of Public Health (DPH) IRB Human Subjects Protection training or alternate IRB training if pre-approved by SAPC on-file;
- Attendance documented at the CCAT *Conducting Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups* training; and
- Other agency conducted training to ensure safety and compliance with all contract/program requirements in advance of participating in interviews or focus groups.

The moderator's primary task is to guide in-depth discussion by asking predetermined and follow-up questions (where appropriate) and making sure every participant has an opportunity to answer. This requires preventing domination of the discussion by any single person and encouraging more passive persons to participate. The moderator should encourage the frank expression of opinions and ideas and ensure that participants feel comfortable sharing their views. It is not appropriate for the moderator to express his or her own views either verbally or with body language or facial expressions. This will bias the discussion.

Note takers must meet all of the above requirements EXCEPT attending the CCAT training in person; however, note takers should receive in-house training from a staff person from the agency who did attend the

CCAT session. Experience taking notes is recommended so information is not lost due to the fast pace of the discussion.

Focus Groups may also be conducted in the Spanish, Korean or Khmer languages. Agencies must ensure that administering and supporting staff are qualified to read, speak, and translate the language effectively, and notes from the interview must be translated into English before submission to SAPC. The informed consent document must be translated in advance and approved by SAPC and the IRB and be the same version used for all SPAs.

Participants

Contractors must provide a list of proposed focus group participants, topics and questions to SAPC in the form of the Key Informant and Focus Group Recruitment and Incentives Plan, and SAPC must approve this plan before focus groups are conducted. These documents must be developed in agreement with other SPA-based EPS/CPS agencies to avoid duplication of participants and to ensure an adequate range of participants (*Assessment Work Plan [AWP] H1, H2, B4a*).

Participants will have characteristics in common that are relevant to the focus group topic. Within the group, however, it is a good idea to include individuals with diverse backgrounds to get a wide variety of attitudes among the group. For example, a group of parents may be selected as participants for a focus group investigating alcohol accessibility at parties for youth in private homes. Depending on the goal of the focus group, however, participating parents may be of differing ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants must:

- be residents of Los Angeles County;
- have characteristics (e.g. age, race, education level) representing the population at large;
- have **first-hand knowledge or expertise relevant to AOD issues** in the community.

INTERVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

Snacks and beverages for interview participants will be the only expense allowed under the contract.

Procedure

1. SAPC will provide a written consent form and script that will introduce the moderator and note taker and outline the purpose of the focus group. The moderator will read the consent form aloud while the participant(s) read along.
2. Answer any questions and obtain each participant's initials on a consent form. Do not write the individual's full name on the consent form or permit full signature. Interviewees must initial the form to be eligible to participate. Excuse individuals unwilling to complete the consent form.
3. The moderator or note taker will distribute the incentives described in the consent form and document distribution on the Incentive Tracking form. A non-cash incentive of \$20 or other amount agreed to within the SPA and approved by SAPC and DPH IRB will be offered.
4. The moderator or note taker will distribute the SAPC Focus Group Questions form (attached) and allow 5-10 minutes for participants to complete it. These questions must be completed before the beginning of the discussion.

ATTACHMENT O

5. While participants are completing the SAPC Focus Group Questions forms, the moderator or note taker will complete a SAPC Focus Group Documentation form (attached). Complete one SAPC Focus Group
6. Documentation form for each focus group. The moderator or note taker will collect the completed SAPC Focus Group Questions forms, staple them together with the SAPC Focus Group Documentation form on top, and submit the packet to SAPC with the session notes and audio tapes (as applicable).
7. The moderator or note taker will assign each participant a letter or a number to be used when addressing that individual throughout the interview. Do not use participants' names when addressing them at any time during the interview and remind participants not to do so. The assigned identifier will be clearly indicated on a name tag or sign prominently displayed on the table in front of the assignee.
8. The note taker will begin the audio recording (if applicable) and test to see if the recorder is working properly. The interviewer will begin the interview using the Focus Group Discussion Guide developed by the agency.
9. Consider having participants spend several minutes in silence *individually* brainstorming responses and jotting these ideas down on scratch paper provided by the agency.
10. Ask individuals to share their initial ideas in a round-robin fashion (one response per person each time), beginning the moderated discussion only after each person has had a chance to briefly respond to the question. Participants can say "pass" when they do not have anything to contribute. Emphasize that no criticism is allowed.
11. The moderator will encourage lively, in-depth discussion by asking follow-up questions, ensuring the discussion does not get off track and giving everyone an equal chance to participate. The note taker will document the discussion by taking hand-written notes or entering notes into a computer.
12. At the conclusion of the focus group, the moderator will thank the participants and provide each participant a copy of the consent form. Make sure participants do not take any of their notes with them. The moderator and/or note taker will destroy the notes from each focus group.
13. Soon after the focus group, the moderator and note taker will read over the notes together to make sure they are legible and reflect what occurred during the session.
14. The moderator or note taker will compile and organize the data and translate the discussion into English if applicable.
15. The agency will send a thank you note or email to the interviewee within two weeks.
16. The agency will destroy any lists on file that indicate participant names.
17. The agency will submit to SAPC notes, audio tapes (if applicable), and SAPC Focus Group Question forms stapled to the SAPC Focus Group Documentation form by the deadline.

SAPC maintains the right to modify the above guidelines based on the needs of the program. Requests for modifications and exemptions to the guidelines may be granted by SAPC on a case-by-case basis. Requests must be submitted in writing to SAPC and must be received prior to the focus group activity in question. Focus Groups completed without adherence to the above guidelines will be disallowed.

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Please take 5-10 minutes to answer the following questions. Do not write your name on this form.

City/community of residence: _____ Age: _____ Female Male Transgender

Ethnicity/race you most identify with:

- African American/Black not Hispanic Asian or Asian American Hispanic/Latino
 Native American or Alaska Native Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander White not Hispanic

1. Do you think alcohol use by people under the legal drinking age of 21 is a problem in your city/community?

No If no, why don't you think it is a problem? _____

Yes If yes, why do you think it is a problem? _____

List 2 things about your community that you feel contribute to youth alcohol use in your community:

1. _____

2. _____

2. Do you think drug use by young people is a problem in your city/community?

No If no, why don't you think it is a problem? _____

Yes If yes, which drugs? _____

Why do you think drug use is a problem? _____

List 2 things about your community that you feel contribute to youth drug use in your city/community:

1. _____

2. _____

THANK YOU!

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FOCUS GROUP DOCUMENTATION

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE AGENCY FOR EACH FOCUS GROUP CONDUCTED

Focus Group Number (from Recruitment and Incentives Plan) _____

Age Range _____

Date _____

Location _____

Number of Participants _____

Group Description (e.g., homemakers): _____

City/Community: _____

Topic: _____

Moderator Name: _____

Note-taker(s) Name(s): _____, _____

Start time: _____ End time _____

Month:

Fiscal Year:

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND CONTROL FOCUS GROUP INCENTIVES (GIFT CARD) TRACKING FORM

DIRECTIONS: Use a separate incentives (e.g., gift card) tracking form for each staff person conducting focus groups. For confidentiality reasons, do not include the participant’s full name anywhere on this document. The tracking forms for all staff conducting focus groups must be maintained together on-site and include a copy of the receipt(s) for the gift cards for verification by your Contract Program Auditor and Fiscal Auditors during the site visit or upon request.

Agency Name:		Contract Type:	[EPS or CPS]	Contract #:			
Focus Group #	Participant Initials	Card Brand	Card Number	Value	Date Given	ID Code	Staff Signature
SUBTOTAL				Note: Combined subtotals for each ID Code # must equal the attached gift card receipt(s).			