What is a focus group?

- A user-friendly and enjoyable qualitative research method where 8-12 people with shared experience gather for 60-90 minutes to discuss a particular topic, called the “focus.”

Why use focus groups as an institutional research tool?

- IR offices often focus too narrowly on quantitative measurements. Qualitative methods, such as focus groups, collect unique data that supplements quantitative data and contributes to effective decision making (Raby, 2010).
- Focus groups can
  - Discover the voice of meaningful groups
  - Uncover motives and meanings
  - Generate rich insight about important, well defined topics (Stewart & Shandasani, 2015).

Benefits of using a focus group

- Gives research participants immediate rewards
- Can increase participant interest in, and ownership of, overall campus assessment
- The stakeholders pay attention; the data come “straight from the horse’s mouth.”
- Allows for observation of in-group interaction surrounding the topic of interest (Stewart & Shandasani, 2015)
- Complements other methodologies
- Findings can genuinely surprise researchers with unexpected issues and perspectives.

Examples of focus group research at UVU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group topic</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Wide &quot;Inclusive Initiative&quot;</td>
<td>Faculty, Students and Staff all had different definitions and ideas about inclusivity and diversity. While some thought UVU did not have any problems with inclusivity, others had specific examples of times they had been excluded. Overall, responses provided a depth of understanding about these issues not available through only quantitative methods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leave-of-absence process and communication</td>
<td>Students were unclear about the purpose of completing the Leave-of-Absence process, and dissatisfied with lack of confirmation that files were successfully submitted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes of Female students toward becoming S.T.E.M. majors</td>
<td>Many young women had made decisions regarding STEM majors prior to college. Early intervention offering young women opportunities to have successful interaction with STEM experiences at a younger age may prove beneficial.</td>
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How to conduct a successful focus group

Design
- Form focus groups around a discrete, “focused” topic.
- Ideas for selecting participants include the following: (1) focus on extreme or deviant cases, (2) assemble a diverse group to observe interactions, (3) invite critical, relevant cases, and (4) select participants based on viewpoint rather than demographic characteristics.

Recruitment
- Use online surveys to recruit and screen participants.
- Confirm attendance via telephone.
- Over recruit; some people won’t show up.

Logistics
- Bring consent forms, rosters for contact information, signs to help participants find the room, etc.
- Make parking arrangements, if necessary.
- Have two researchers in the room; moderator and note taker. Moderator should have as few distractions as possible.
- Check recording equipment and bring extra batteries.
- Arrange seating so participants face each other.
- Bring incentives: food, movie tickets, etc.

Don't underestimate the time required to recruit, remind, arrange for food, incentives, etc.