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Webinar: How to Organize and Conduct a Focus Group

Dr. Anne Janku: Well, it looks like it's 2:00 eastern time zone, time to get started. My name is Anne Dannerbeck Janku. I'm in Columbia, Missouri and I welcome you all to this webinar this afternoon on how to organize and conduct a focus group. The impetus for this topic came from the development of the equity and inclusion toolkit and there's a part in there that looks at focus groups and how to conduct them and certainly in trainings too we've encouraged programs to conduct focus groups. And so Caroline and I thought it would be a good idea to have a webinar and go over some of the basics of how to conduct one. And so that's what we'll do this afternoon.

I got my start with focus groups many years ago where I connected with the marketing director of a major corporation who conducted focus groups all the time. And his were pretty high powered. The kind where he would stand on the other side of a one way mirror and observe focus groups and he had a way to communicate with the facilitator to ask more questions and things like that. I've never done that kind of a focus group where we had those kind of extra supplemental resources but he did give me a template for how to develop a focus group and that'll be shared with you and we'll be talking about it some.

So I've conducted focus groups with really two main groups of individuals. I've conducted focus groups with Spanish speaking individuals from Central and South America on a variety of topics. And I've also conducted many many focus groups with individuals who are involved in the justice system somehow either as professionals, as people who are involved in the justice system on the other side or family members both youth and adults in a variety of settings as well including in correctional institutions as well as out in the community. And I've compiled an information to help you think about conducting focus groups.

So, we'll first of all, look at some general considerations for conducting focus groups and then we'll use that template that we're sharing with you to go over how to organize a focus group. So let's go ahead and begin. So the first question is well should I even conduct a focus group as opposed to getting information other ways? Consider that we often collect statistics on participants in our treatment court programs. And maybe we collect sociodemographic information. And so we can split out the statistics based on race, gender, age groups, various things.

Well, whatever those statistics tell us is only part of the story. There's a lot of other information that we don't understand based on counting things. So, we can do surveys, written or oral surveys and use information we already know to figure out a little bit more about how people sort out based on things like where do you live? We can also do interviews at times or focus groups where we can get more detailed information about people and how they think about certain topics.

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For instance, you may be developing marketing materials for your program. Maybe a brochure, a video, something else. And it would be really helpful to have feedback before you complete it and go to the trouble to distribute it to find out what kind of an impression it will make on the people you're trying to reach. And so that might be one reason to do a focus group.

And I'm interested, we're probably all interested if you're thinking about doing a focus group, what's your topic? What would you like to do a focus group about? Can you let us know that in the chat box? I'll give you a minute here to think about that and maybe fill it in before I move on and then maybe we'll come back to it in a little bit.

Focus groups give us the opportunity to find out more in-depth about the how and the why, the way people are thinking. And we won't get maybe the whole range of views because of who we invite to our focus groups but what we will get is a much better understanding of individuals and how they think about things.

Great so we have some people that are actually interested in the topic that, great, about how different individuals, different groups experience treatment court and recovery. These are great topics to definitely to focus on in a focus group. So let's go on and delve into this more.

So, the question then becomes well who do we invite to a focus group? That's often where we start. What are the specific demographics of the population we want to include in a focus group? For example, could we include both men and women in the same focus group or would we need to do separate ones for them? And it depends and it depends on things such as what's the nature of the kind of questions you're going to ask? Could they have a gender specific component such as something about relationships? Or is it more general information? For example, maybe you want to talk to family members of people in your program. Well there you could probably include both men and women. Whereas if you want to get more information about specific experiences of people, then you will probably want to, that are related to gender, then you would probably do them a little bit differently.

Looking at some more of your questions here. So for example, say you want to do a focus group on parenting and the challenges and experiences of people who are parents in the program. That's another one where having a mixed group may be possible. Definitely. Then another question is should I offer incentives for people to participate in the focus group? And that'll depend on things such as what is the perceived cost? The inconvenience for individuals to participate in this focus group? For

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example, if you want to interview professional people from the community or from the courts, the focus group could be part of their normal job hours and so it's not really an inconvenience. But, say you want to interview people who have already finished your treatment court program. For them, asking them to reengage and come back is much more of an inconvenience. So, offering them some kind of incentive might be helpful.

But then what about people who are currently in your treatment court? Should you offer them an incentive? And that depends on certainly the culture of your program. The relationship that staff have with the participants to ask them to do this. Is it something extra that they have to do? Is it being presented as something totally voluntary? But there are different kinds of incentives that you can offer. For example, I've been involved in treatment court focus groups where the participants were offered credit for community service because they did have to come in at a special time and do this. It wasn't part of what they normally did. Whereas at other times, current participants were not offered an incentive because it was, the focus group participation was considered some kind of a substitute for maybe a group session or something.

But for people where it's a little more inconvenient, offering them a gift card, a bus pass for acknowledging transportation costs might be helpful. And when you're thinking about who to invite, also be thinking about how you're going to invite them. How are you going to present to them the idea that you are issuing an invitation, you're inviting them to a focus group. Do you want to explain to them what the issue is? What the problem is that you hope to address with a focus group. And I gave you an example here.

And then what's the purpose of the focus group? Then encourage them to share their thoughts and ideas in an inclusive manner so use inclusive language. And if there is going to be an incentive, you certainly want to let them know that up front and then tell them when, where, and how long the focus group will be. And we'll talk more about that in a minute.

Now, you want to be pretty clear about the purpose of the focus group. I had a situation one time where I was interviewing, or I was going to be doing focus groups with black men in treatment court and I wasn't, I worked at the state level for the state administrator's office so I didn't have regular contact with the individuals in any particular program so I asked staff of the programs to invite people to the focus group. And I gave them some information about the focus group which I hope they would share.

Well, I got to the room for the focus group and I explained the purpose of it and one of the gentlemen said wait a minute, so this is only a group for

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black men? I don't want to do this. And so he hadn't been told ahead of time what the purpose of the focus group was so he was a bit resistant to it. But what happened was the other participants said this is really important. They essentially advocated for his participation. And I encouraged him to stay and listen and see if it was something that he wanted to participate in or not. And he did stay and he contributed and he made some great points. But the point of telling you that story is that it's very important to explain to people exactly what you're asking them to get themselves into. So you want to explain in a way that's respectful and that acknowledges them and telling them about your focus group.

Then, another thing that you have to consider up front is what we call human subjects protections. And I'm not going to go into a big, long expose on human subjects protections and institutional review boards and that sort of thing. I did want to make some points so you're aware and that is something that you begin to address right away. So, if you have a facilitator from a university to conduct the focus group, and we'll talk more about facilitators in a little bit, they will definitely need to have the focus group information reviewed by an institutional review board.

But, regardless of that, who's doing the focus group does your court have a research policy? You will want to check on that and see what it is. And then the next thing you want to look at is what are you going to do with the focus groups? Are they for research purposes? That is, you're testing a hypothesis, you're trying to get information that's informational. To build knowledge. Or is it a quality improvement initiative. And I won't go into the whole reason why that is an important difference but the fact is if you're focused on program, quality, and improvement, even if you have to have your focus group reviewed, quality improvement is generally considered to be exempt from a full board review.

Somebody has raised their hand to ask a question about this. And a few people have. You might want to put your questions in the Q&A, I don't see the chat. Let's finish this. So another thing that you will want to consider is do you have individuals who are under the age of 18. If you have juveniles that you want to do a focus group with, you will need to get, generally, permission from their parent or guardian as well as getting the ascent of the youth to participate in your focus group.

So, even if you don't need to have your focus group reviewed by an institutional review board, and I will tell you that when I worked for the state court administrator in Missouri, I would do focus groups without going through an institutional review board because it was quality improvement initiatives working with statewide committees, policy committees and things to gather information. Even though I didn't go through any kind of review process regarding human subjects, I still was

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very cognizant of wanting to protect people. To make sure that questions wouldn't upset them and that there were resources available if they did feel upset or disturbed by something that happened in focus group as well as assuring them that their identity would be protected and that the focus groups were voluntary.

And so, I encourage you if you do focus groups to stress the voluntary nature of participation. Even if people show up in the room for it, maybe they felt like they had to because their whole group from treatment got sent today to do this. But stress that it's voluntary and there's going to be no repercussions or consequences if they don't participate. And then you also, we're going to get into how do you record the information and so you'll want to assure them too that their identity is protected there. And I will explain other ways of protecting identity as you go through this.

So, how many people do you invite when you want to have a focus group? You ideally want to have about eight people who are in the room participating in the focus group. If you get too many people there, then everyone won't have a chance to talk and too few, you can do it with less than eight but for a robust conversation, eight people is ideal. So that means you want to invite ten to 12 people. Because there will be some people that even if they say yes, for whatever reason they won't be there for it.

So, and then you have to consider well who is going to deliver the invitation? And so if it's current or previous participants to your program, often there's a staff member who has a good relationship with them and they can invite them. If it's people from the community or other professional adults, oftentimes you'll get a better response if the judge is the one who issues the invitation. It means a lot to have a judge invite you as a busy community professional person to attend a focus group.

And then there's also the question of well, how many focus groups do we need? So if you are an individual program and you're thinking about doing a focus group to look at, say, Latinos in recovery, what's the process like? How do they experience it? You have to look at your demographics of well how diverse a group are the Latinos? And what would be a meaningful way to possibly have more than one group? Maybe separate groups for men and women. Maybe you have enough participants in your program that you can divide them up by country of origin. Or maybe language is another factor to consider and how would you perhaps divide them up based on whether they were comfortable speaking English or preferred speaking Spanish. How long they've been in the country is another factor. What generation? There's lots of different ways.

If you are more someone operating at the state level, and you're wanting to

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do focus groups, then you'll want to think about maybe are there regional differences that will matter? Or is there enough standardization and given what I want to know, I could just go to one program and interview people there and do a focus group with them. Now, sometimes you start to get into the logistics of this and you realize that it's going to be honestly too complicated maybe for whatever reason, to gather people together for a focus group. It might be easier to reach out to individuals separately and do interviews with them.

Another kind of situational contact that can impact whether you do focus group or interviews is if you want to interview people in a correctional facility, once or twice I've been able to organize focus groups but it takes a lot of logistics on the part of the staff in the facility to organize that. Sometimes it's just been a lot easier to simply do interviews. And so part of interviews versus focus groups is about the logistics of it.

I'm trying to get your questions as they come in and keep moving so I hope I'm getting your questions and your comments. So in terms of ultimately in terms of how many focus groups are needed, it's a matter of how much variation you think there is across the group of people who could potentially be part of the focus group. Or how much similarity there is and how much that matters.

Now, who should facilitate the discussion? This is a key role. Who is going to be the facilitator of the discussion? Should it be program staff? I generally would say that you don't want someone who works with the participants on a regular basis to be the facilitator. To be in the room when this discussion goes on because it may constrain the individuals in the focus group. Even if they love your program they still may not feel free to say everything they want to say. Now, having said that I do know that there are program coordinators around the country who feel they have been very successful at facilitating focus groups among their participants. It depends on what the topic is. If the topic is maybe related to how do we market the program better, then it's not really getting into any kind of commentary about impacts of different staff or different elements of the program, then you could maybe have program staff do that.

But, anytime you're going to get into questions about your program, the people involved in it, and how they impact participants, you want to stay clear of asking program staff to facilitate. Sometimes you could get someone else who works maybe in the court system or somehow connected to the system in which you work but not having any direct contact with the program or the participants. That may work. I was kind of in that role when I was the research manager for the state court system. So I would go out to the different programs and conduct focus groups and those went really well in terms of getting a lot of good feedback on

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individuals, individual staff, and individual program impacts. I heard the good, the bad, and the ugly from participants. They felt comfortable talking to me. But it depends on the connections that the staff person would have with your program. And then sometimes it's better to get an outside researcher which brings up questions then of well, do they expect compensation or why would they do it? I'm looking again at your questions.

Okay so these are good questions. So someone wants to know if you invite ten or 12 and they actually all show up, which does happen, what do you do? I would definitely keep them all. I wouldn't send any away because how are you going to pick who you send away? You could make that work certainly. If you switch from focus groups to interviews would you need to get IRB approval beforehand? Yes. You would for the same reason that you originally got IRB approval even if you change the methodology you'd have to go back and at least it would be an amendment to your application.

Something else to consider in choosing a facilitator is you want someone who is a good listener which may seem obvious. But you want someone who can be fairly self-aware about the amount of talking they're doing and know when to shut down. And you may have to have a facilitator going, to let them know if they're talking too much. You want someone who can fade into the background because you want the focus on the participants, the topic they're discussing.

And I also recommend as a facilitator that you be very mindful even about things like how you dress and be kind of subdued in how you dress and how you present yourself to the group.

Then you also want to have a co-facilitator if at all possible. This is that individual who can be monitoring what's going on and do that click to let you as a facilitator know that maybe you're talking too much at times. That they can check the recording devices and I recommend that you use not just one but two in case something happens to one but they can be making sure that they're working okay. They can take notes about what's going on, the feel of the room, what's happening. They can observe body language of participants because sometimes as a facilitator, you're very keyed to what people are saying but you're maybe not observing the body language of other people to know if they're feeling uncomfortable, if they seem like they want to say something but yet they're reluctant to do it. And the co-facilitator may also think of some kind of a follow-up question to ask.

Okay so someone has a question before I move on. Would you need an IRB approval for interviews on policy improvements? That is, while I've

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given you the basics, you would have to take that up either with your local IRB, your institutional review board, or take it up with your court whatever their policy is as far as that sort of thing. I know when I was working for the state, and I was getting ready to do focus groups for the first time in treatment courts, I did contact my local university and run by them what I wanted to do, I contacted their institution review board staff and talked it over with them. And they said they would be willing to review what I wanted to do but from their perspective I really didn't need to bring it to an institution review board or things like policy questions. But you definitely want to take that up locally with your courts.

So another thing is where to hold the focus groups. And in part, it's going to depend on where your participants are and how easy it is for them to get to different places. The kind of questions you're going to ask. I know I've held focus groups in courtrooms at the beginning of the day before most anyone else had been there because that was the one time we could do it. I've held them at treatment offices, in group rooms. I've held them out in the community with individuals too. It should be somewhere that's fairly convenient for participants in terms of the location and the time.

So, for example, if you have participants who need to report to court in an hour, hour and a half for a hearing, maybe you could arrange to have the focus group right before that. And it also needs to be somewhere that's safe for participants. And I think especially if you want to hold focus groups before or after hours, how safe is it for participants to get from their neighborhood to your program. I had women say that we don't like to do anything after dark because we have to take the bus and it just gets more and more dangerous the later it gets in the evening. So you'll want to think about things like that in terms of when you do your focus groups.

Now, that brings up another question too. So maybe you hold your focus groups before a court hearing. And you have people who work. And so that's not a convenient time for them. But they're very interested in providing input. So sometimes you can be flexible and find a way to maybe have a conversation with individuals who can't make it to the focus group but they still want to give their input and so you're doing a hybrid of focus group and interviews. But it's good if you can be responsive to individuals who want to participate but they can't because of time or location. Find a way to let them still have a voice.

Materials that you'll need, things to think about. People talk, they get thirsty. So you want to have some kind of a drink. It could just be bottled water or something like that. Another thing is to offer refreshments. It's very common to offer some kind of food to eat. What I have here, quiet food because if you, say, give people packages of potato chips or something that are all crinkly and make noise, it could interfere with the

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recording or even in the room hearing what people are saying. So you'll want food that's quiet. And I know at times I've tried to be real health conscious and have cut up fruit and things like that. And then I get feedback that well, you might as well serve donuts because that's what everybody likes. So, think about that.

Another thing to consider with food is who provides it? If you're working with a community of underserved individuals and you want to do a focus group with them, maybe in their neighborhoods there's a small business owner who's trying to start some kind of a business involving food. And maybe you could actually get your food or even gift cards from the neighborhood where your participants are from. That could be the kind of gesture that lets them know that you really do value them. It's also useful to provide paper and pencils so that maybe participants they want to note something down. They don't feel comfortable actually saying it in front of the group but they want to share something with you and that's one way to let them do that.

And then the final thing is that you really want to avoid in general, addressing people by their name. Because that's identifying information. Instead it's useful to give them each a number or a letter and have it on a little card in front of them so that you can say two, you have something, what do you want to tell us? And then five, do you agree or disagree with that? So you have a way to address people and identify them on your recording without giving away their name.

In general, like I said you want to have two digital recorders to record it. I would definitely not recommend that you just try to write notes down. Because you'll probably miss those really great quotes that you may not even notice at the time but later you'll go back and it's like that was gold, that quote. That was really good. Sometimes the co-facilitator writes out the first couple words of each individual what they start to say as a way to keep track of shifts in who's talking and that may be useful for you to do that. And you also, sometimes the co-facilitator instead of writing out the first couple words, simply notes the order like five talked and then six talked and then two talked and notes like that for various reasons too. Sometimes you want to maybe connect up things that people say and that's a good way to do that.

Another thing to consider is do I want to record sociodemographic information about individuals? Do I think that's going to somehow matter? And generally if you're doing quality improvement kinds of focus groups, you probably won't need that level of detail about participants to do comparisons between young and old and other various ways of identifying and comparing people. But if you're doing a research project where you're really collecting information trying to build a knowledge

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base and maybe understand differences between different demographic groups, then perhaps you will want to record sociodemographic information such as okay two is a female middle aged mixed race. One is a young female of Hispanic origin. Things like that. So those are some of the kinds of things you may want to consider depending on how much you get into the research part.

And then your participants. So you've invited people, you have your agenda for what you want to ask them. Here's what can happen and it typically does do you can expect it, this first one. It doesn't matter what you ask me, I have a point I want to make. So perhaps I, as a facilitator ask what has been the most helpful thing for you in treatment court? And you wanted to make a point about how terrible the selection is in the vending machine of the courthouse. And you're going to bring that up regardless of what I ask. So sometimes you have to let people bring up what it is they want to talk about even if it's just for a short period of time.

And then you have participants who accepted the invitation because they just really want to listen and learn. And we'll talk more about what to do to encourage people who aren't talking to talk. Because we really don't want that person there. We don't need to just have observers. We want everyone to be willing to participate actively. And then you have the individual who just loves an audience and will talk as much as you let them. And those are the people that you have to respectfully cut off at times so that other people can talk too and you don't have one person dominate the whole discussion.

And then at times you have participants who are advocates for other participants, for staff, for you as a facilitator trying to get questions answered. And that's okay. But be cautious not to let them take on too much of a role as advocate.

And then, formulating your discussion questions. You want to capture the range of experiences that people have. That's part of the beauty of focus groups and because one person will make a comment, it triggers an idea in someone else. And you get that discussion back and forth. That's the beauty of focus groups and why often they are more effective than individual one on one interviews because you have people interacting and sharing ideas. You have to watch for your own biases. So someone may say something that you just think is like right on and you agree with them completely and you're like that was a great comment, I agree. Don't say things like that. Say thank you for your comment, now here's someone else. Maintain neutrality. You don't want them to know what your biases are, what you're thinking.

Also, you want to avoid the socially expected response. So, even asking a

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question like how did the treatment court help you, sets them up to think that you expect them to say that treatment court helped them. And maybe it doesn't. So, things like that you want to avoid. Try instead to use words or phrases like how, why, help me understand, compare this experience with another one. Those are the way to frame up questions using those kind of words and that's where you will then get your range of experiences.

Avoid questions that's closed ended questions that lead to a yes no answer. Did treatment court help you? That's going to get you a yes or no. Not what we want. So try to avoid those. Also avoid setting them up. Don't you think that culture really matters in treatment court? That or isn't it good that you have such a diverse staff? You may want to find out about the diversity of the staff, other things like that but don't set it up this way. That clues them in on what they think you want and you don't want them to do that.

And then finally, realize you're going to identify some leading questions. The most important questions you want to ask during this focus group. And sometimes it may be just five. And then you'll have follow-up questions but recognize that you probably won't get all your questions answered. This isn't like an interview where you just go down and follow the script exactly. Because of the ebb and flow of the discussion, you may ask your very first question and then your very last question, that topic comes up. And so you go there. And so there's a bit of a flow to it that's different than a structured interview certainly.

And then the final point to consider is how do you analyze the content and get useful results? And here's something I would encourage you to think about and if you're considering focus groups is there an audience? Is there a policy group? An advisory group? Some group who's making decisions maybe setting policy or practices who would really benefit from information, the feedback that you get from your focus groups. So, from the very beginning, think about who the information is for. And that also may help you open doors to being able to do your focus groups. For example, I was once, the one time I was able to organize focus groups in a correctional facility I was working with the Department of Corrections Task Force on parenting from prison. And they let me set up focus groups then with men to talk about parenting.

And other times when I've tried to set up focus groups I was working with policy groups who weren't involved with the treatment court. Or who weren't involved with corrections. And so then they wouldn't let me do focus groups in the facility. So it does seem to really help open doors if you have a group that you can work with.

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So, I will, so focus groups are usually 60-90 minutes. We'll get to that here shortly. So, there's two ways to gather the information. You've done a recording. You can listen to the recording and take notes. Or you can transcribe the recording and then read back through the discussion and from there, pick out themes, quotes, things like that. Now, I will tell you I do have a bias. Even though it takes longer, I encourage transcribing the information in the discussion. And you can skip the ohs and the buts and the coughing and things like that and record the gist of it but I found it actually was helpful and I often transcribed my own focus groups because then I was listening to what was being said again even as I wrote it down.

A few times I've had the court transcriptionist record the focus groups and then they actually recorded every cough and things like that. But that's usually beyond what we need. You can use the results of the focus group's information you gather in a variety of ways that you may not even have anticipated. And I give you some examples here, some quotes that I have pulled out of focus groups I've done with black men about their experiences in treatment court. Just so you can see the power of their voice. So that first one is talking about didn't want to be told what to do, how dare someone come and try to tell me how to live my life. That was experienced at orientation. And so it led to a real change in the program and how they conducted their orientation. They started to use more motivational interviewing, more question and answer framework instead of just focusing on telling people what to do. Those rules, they start talking about benefits.

And then the second one, when you've been arrested and locked up you get used to a system. People enter drug court with the idea just like that it's just like the rest of the system. That is a challenge that we can respond to. We can address how do we let people know from the very beginning that our program is different than the rest of the court system? That's our marketing strategy showing people it's different. And then that third one, rules but no benefits. And that's really led, I know at NDCI it led us to develop some marketing materials that focus more on benefits. So those are some examples. What people, the voice of the people and being able to bring it to policymakers, to judges, to other staff, is very powerful.

So now, so that's the background. And now I'm going to briefly go through the template that Bonnie is getting to you and also just so you know, in the equity and inclusion toolkit, pages 47-49, there's an example of a completed template including the questions. I find it really helpful every time I've done a focus group I've used this same outline and it helps you to organize your ideas for what you want to do and it helps you then to be able to communicate with others who are involved. The people you have to get permissions from, the people who are going to do actually issue the invitations. The people who are going to help you find a place

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and food and everything else as well as the participants. So I encourage you to use this.

And so I'll just briefly go through the different parts of it. So first of all, you definitely want to have a clearly articulated idea of what's going to be discussed at the focus group. Experiences of people, the ideas that you all shared up in that chat were ones that make total sense in terms of the kinds of discussions, what you want to discuss. Then you'll want to list out briefly, not actually put the questions but what are going to be the discussion areas? What is it you're going to talk about in the focus group? And you can get feedback that way too about what else, if you have, say, a policy group that you're going to be reporting to about the focus group. You can get ideas from them about what they want to see covered in the discussion.

So someone, this is a good question here. If you're doing focus groups with underrepresented groups, and you only have a very small number of such individuals, so say you have one or two women of color express intersectional gender and ethnicity and race. Well I guess my question would be then do you really have to describe them to that level of detail? And another thing that you can do that I find effective is when you ask questions, not ask them to necessarily specifically share their personal experience as a person who identifies in a certain way. But acknowledge that they are part of a group. They may know other people in a similar kind of a situation in general terms, ask the question. For example, when I was doing focus groups with Latin men, I didn't have the opportunity to talk to people who hadn't come into the program. But I could ask them you know people in a similar situation who maybe haven't come into the program, why do you think they don't? So asking questions that are more general may be one way to help with that.

So, description you want to think carefully about who to invite to your focus group. Is it people who are currently in your treatment court program or in treatment court programs maybe around the state or the region in different kinds of treatment courts, and different demographics groups. You want to be very specific about who you'll invite. You'll also want to think about who is going to help me if I'm the facilitator I really shouldn't have direct contact and a relationship with participants of the focus group. So, who am I going to go to for help in issuing invitations and recruiting people? And that's where you want to invite that person or you want to have that person who's going to the inviting have some very specific talking points to use to explain the purpose of the focus group and who's going to be there.

And like I said, this comes from the script, we've already talked about this, should include eight to ten participants. I've had situations where, I

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had one situation where we were going to do a focus group with people who had already graduated or finished the program. And we didn't have enough gift cards for everyone and so there was going to be a drawing and there were two gift cards available. Well, three people showed up for the focus group and I only had two gift cards. So, then I had to work something out to provide the other person with something, an incentive as well to be fair. But you want to be mindful of things like that.

So, ideally you want to have your participants and facilitators sit around a table or if you don't have a table available, at least in a circle of chairs but a circle or it could be a rectangle or something, where they're looking or facing each other so they really are having a dynamic discussion. The co-facilitator like I said takes notes, makes sure the recording is going on. Facilitator can briefly introduce themselves. Not go into any big spiel about it, explain the purpose of the focus group. Let people know it'll last 60-90 minutes and it'll be taped. Shorter than 60 minutes you really aren't going to have time for a meaningful discussion and get many questions done given the effort you've made to get everyone there and organization the focus group. Longer than 90 and people's attention starts to lag.

Explain the purpose of the focus group. Set some ground rules and here's some examples of ground rules. You may have others that you would use. We'd like you to share your honest thoughts although you don't have to answer every question. At times you may not agree with what someone says but that's okay. You want that dynamic, you want to encourage that in a respectful way. Please speak up and share your perspective. We want to hear the pros and cons of all the ideas today. So, lots of rules essentially about encouraging people to speak up and share their views even if they're different from other people.

Being respectful and then this is a really important one. We have a limited amount of time. So I might have to interrupt from time to time to keep things moving. And you sometimes do. But we also have to be cognizant of cultural differences in how people might respond to questions. Not everyone will give you a straightforward direct answer to your question. Sometimes the answer comes in the form of a story which can take time to tell. But those are often the times where you get really good insights and useful information from people.

You also want to assure them and even if you go for an intuitional review board and they have to sign a consent form before they really sit down at the table, you want to assure them that their participation is voluntary, that they don't have to answer questions they don't want to answer. And that their identity won't be connected to the answers and let them know you're recording the discussion but only very few people are going to actually listen to that recording or read the transcript. And there's other kinds of

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protections too that you'll want to be thinking about for people.

Then there's a discussion guide that is the actual questions. This is in the template so I'm just, it's the text that's there. So the questions that are there. You have an opening question that serves as an icebreaker and is the one time you want everyone to respond. So, a typical icebreaker question is what phase are you in your program? That's something everyone can answer. It's general information that people already probably know anyway. But that's the kind of thing you want to do because you want to encourage people to talk so, give them that first opportunity. Go around the room, have everybody answer the question.

And then you'll have an introductory question that launches them into the topic. So for example it could be like how did you decide to enter this treatment court program? And that's a kind of question that gets the group starting to talk. And then you have next, a transition question where you start to dive deeper into the specifics of what you want to talk about. So an example of one and this is in the equity and inclusion toolkit, the questions there. The question we asked was compare your experience in criminal court to treatment court. Got lots of really good insights asking that question.

And then you have your key questions that should be limited to no more than ten because you're not going through rapid fire interview style. You're really trying to get people to delve deeply into things. And also recognize that you probably won't get to all those questions.

And then I think I somehow managed to skip the slide about what do you do if you have an individual who's not talking? One thing you can do if you notice someone is really not speaking up, you get to your next question and maybe it's person number two who hasn't said anything. I'm picking on two today. So, you say to two, we'd really love to hear your thoughts on this but first I'm going to go to five who's got their hand up and see what they have to say. So you're giving that person that hasn't been talking kind of a heads up so they can prepare a response. And that's a technique that often is effective for getting someone to talk.

Another thing you can do is with that paper pencil that you have out there is encourage people to maybe write down things they want to talk about that they didn't get a chance to say. Another technique is to ask for a show of hands, who else had a similar experience? And then when they respond by raising their hand, ask them to talk a little bit about their experience.

The other final thing that I've had happen is I had an individual come up to me after a focus group and say well I really have a lot more I'd like to share with you but I wasn't able to. Would you be willing to talk to me at

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another time? And I've had face to face and phone conversations with individuals after focus groups where they could really tell me more about their own views on things. So that can happen sometimes.

And then finally you want to have an ending question where you give them the floor now to ask you questions. I've always done that whether it's focus groups or interviews. Now that I've asked you all these questions, what do you want to ask me? And it can be very random. You never know what they're going to ask you. I've had questions like well, did you, what was your childhood like? Did you have the same kind of challenges that I did? Or how is this information going to be used is a common one. So that's the kind of thing we can ask.

And then you want to debrief everyone. You want to thank them again for their participation, for giving you the information and let them know how it's going to be used because that's ultimately what's motivated them to come even if there's an incentive. People want to help, they don't want to just be helped all the time and that's definitely true for people in treatment court. You're nurturing their self-efficacy when you're letting them know they are helping the program and you. And so that's a look at focus groups. So I can take other questions that anyone might have. You can put them in the chat or in the questions.

Yes, the PowerPoint and the transcripts will be available. They will be going out to participants probably within the next week certainly. Are there any questions generating programs that you use for mitigating bias? Question generating programs. That is a good question. I have no idea if there's some like, I guess an AI artificial intelligence or something that helps you develop questions that will mitigate bias. That's a good question I don't know sorry. I certainly encourage you to check the equity and inclusion toolkit, the focus group discussion guide there it's got some questions that could be helpful at least to model something similar.

Have I ever had unintentional negative consequences for programs or clients come from one of your focus groups? Actually now we're getting kind of into the war stories. Yes. I was doing focus groups around the state with youth and boys and girls clubs and I was talking to youth about the impact of the justice system and law on them and their families and I had one focus group where multiple children started crying because they were very upset about the impacts of the justice system on their family. And we had, as we always did do focus groups with what I would call vulnerable populations, we had set up to have counselors available to talk, for people to talk to. And so the youth did avail themselves of that service. But it's useful to do that even though you may think your questions are not going to upset anybody in the focus group, let the counselors, your treatment providers know that you're doing a focus group and that something may

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come out of it that someone will need to process later. Any other questions out there?

If not, thank you all very much. I appreciate your time and attention today and I hope this was helpful to you.