

Reimagining Faith Formation

Focus Group Research Guide

An excellent way to gather information about people in the *congregation and* community is through focus groups. Organize two focus groups of eight to twelve people from among the target audience. Select a diversity of people in each focus group, reflecting ethnic/cultural diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and spiritual and religious diversity (from the actively engaged to the “churchless” thus some of the members of the focus groups may be from the congregation and some from the community).

Meet for about one hour in different locations and times. Remember that people who are not involved in church may be hesitant to come to a meeting at church. Have two people lead each focus group – one to record (on a computer or tablet is preferable) and one to ask the questions. The recorder can also ask follow-up questions as appropriate.

Introduction by Focus Group Leaders: *Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to be in this focus group discussion. This discussion is an important element in our congregation’s desire to better serve its people and its surrounding community. I have a few questions for us to discuss; during this discussion, we will be taking a few notes so that we can more accurately recall our conversation. While this information will inform our study, no names will be attached to any of this discussion.*

Use the following questions as a guide for developing your focus group interviews – adapt the number and character of the questions based on the selection of your target audience(s). Each focus group needs to ask the same questions so that comparisons can be made across the two groups. Keep the group moving through the questions; don’t get “stuck” on any one question. The goal is to surface lots of information from group members, not to conduct a group discussion of the questions.

Focus Group Questions

(Questions in [] are intended as follow-up questions.)

1. How would you describe our target audience (age group, families, whole community) in key words or phrases? What are some of the important life issues that our target audience is experiencing today?
2. What are the significant spiritual issues that our target audience (age group, families, whole community) is experiencing today?
3. What is most important to you about being a Christian today?
4. How do you live your Christian faith? Name some of the ways you put your faith into practice.
5. Can you tell me about how our church helps you [and your family when appropriate] grow as Christians? How does the church support, strengthen, and challenge your faith? [What practices and/or experiences are of importance to you and your faith?]

6. How would you describe the community life at our church? [Do you see people experiencing a life-giving spiritual community of hospitality, welcoming, love, and support?]
7. How do you see people experiencing worship at our church? What words would you use to describe the worship experience? [Do they speak of it as engaging? Is worship at our church easy to understand? Does it seem relevant to daily life?]
8. How is our church engaged in service to the community and the world? What is our target audience doing to live out our mission and service to the community and world?
9. For parents: How does our church nurture the faith life of the whole family? How does our church equip parents/grandparents to share faith and live faith practices at home?
10. How can our church help you to continue growing as a Christian? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see our church offer for your age group?

Compiling and Analyzing Focus Group Results

Use the following process to find the key themes that have emerged from the focus groups: (The goal is to “make as much sense as you can” out of what you have heard):

1. Compile the responses for each question from both of the focus groups.
 - Enter all your notes from the each of the focus groups into a computer file, thus collating all of the responses into one document for each focus group, question-by-question.
 - Print the collated responses to each question on separate newsprint sheets. Place the newsprint sheets on the wall. (Do this and the following processes for each of the two focus groups).
2. As a team review the responses to each question.
 - If you find responses to a question that are identical in language or similar in content, give these identical or similar items the same number beginning with #1.
 - Continue to do this for all related items. Some items will not relate to any other items...let them stand alone.
3. Next place blank sheets of newsprint on the wall. Name and write in one phrase or sentence the core content of each of the most frequently mentioned responses. These are themes.
4. Develop a summary report for each question that focuses on the top priority themes but also includes all the items. For some questions this may only be 4 or 5 themes; for other questions there may be as 8 or 10 themes.
5. Finally, compare the themes and items from each of the focus groups with each other. Look for commonalities and differences. Develop one list of top priority themes.