Activity 1: Planning a focus groups

Working in twos, you should consider how you might explore the issue of 'Campus Crime' through focus group research.

First, discuss and note down your responses to the following questions:

1. How would you select groups to participate in the study? How does the selection of these groups relate to your research problem?

2. Are there any methodological or ethical problems you might encounter in researching this topic via group discussion?

Imagine that you have selected as your participants ECRs and HDRs at Griffith University. You have invited appropriate participants to take part in a particular focus group. You now need to prepare for the session.

1. Allocate the roles of facilitator and note taker (see handouts on roles and responsibilities)

2. Identify your main objective(s) of the meeting.

3. Develop the focus group guide. The discussion guide should include about six key questions that cover the topics and issues to be explored. The guide should be designed with the overall research questions in mind and should be constructed to ensure that topics covered in the focus groups relate to the research objectives.

4. Consider how you will begin the session (the welcome, overview of the topic and purpose, ground rules, etc.)
Qualities of an effective focus group facilitator

Consider:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of the focus group facilitator?
2. What qualities does the facilitator need to possess to conduct a quality focus group?

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Keep participants focused, engaged, attentive and interested
- Monitor time and use limited time effectively
- Use prompts and probes to stimulate discussion
- Use the focus group topic guide effectively to ensure that all topics are covered
- Politely and diplomatically enforce ground rules
  - Make sure everyone participates and at a level that is comfortable
  - Limit side conversations
  - Encourage one person to speak at a time
- Be prepared to explain or restate questions
- Diffuse and pre-empt arguments
- After the focus group, work with the note-taker to debrief immediately after each focus group

Effective Facilitators:

- Have good listening skills
- Have good observation skills
- Have good speaking skills
- Can foster open and honest dialogue among diverse groups and individuals
- Can remain impartial (i.e., do not give her/his opinions about topics, because this can influence what people say)
- Can encourage participation when someone is reluctant to speak up
- Can manage participants who dominate the conversation
- Are sensitive to gender and cultural issues
- Are sensitive to differences in power among and within groups

Source: OMNI Toolkit for Conducting Focus Groups
Roles and responsibilities of Note takers

Consider:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of note takers?
2. What qualities do note takers need to possess to record a focus group effectively?

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Ensure that the ground rules for the focus groups are written clearly on a flip chart
  - One person talks at a time
  - Confidentiality if assured
  - Everyone's ideas and opinions are important
  - All sides of the debate are important
  - All ideas should be represented and respected
- Record major themes, ideas, comments and observations regarding group dynamics in hand-written notes
- Complete the debriefing discussion with the facilitator immediately after each focus group
- Keep all notes of the focus groups discussion. These should be stored with other data collected

Effective Facilitators:

- Have good listening skills
- Have good observation skills
- Have good writing skills
- Are able to take comprehensive notes (but not necessarily word for word)

Source: OMNI Toolkit for Conducting Focus Groups