Client Focus Group

# Background

A client focus group works well to collect:

* stories about how a program or service has affected a client’s life
* ideas about how to improve programs
* comments about the ways in which programs are working well.

## Is a client focus group right for your agency?

Before you hold a focus group, consider the following:

* Would your clients feel comfortable meeting and sitting with one another in the same room?
* Would your clients feel comfortable discussing the support services they receive in front of other people?
* Would your clients come to a focus group?
* Would the clients you most want to reach attend a focus group?

If the answer to any of the above is “No,” consider doing interviews with individual clients or distributing a survey instead.

You may also want to consider doing both an annual client satisfaction survey and an annual focus group. These will provide different ways for clients to provide feedback and allow you to gather a range of information about your programs and services.

## Additional questions to ask before holding a focus group:

* Will you need to hold separate focus groups for different groups of clients? (E.g., women, youth)
* Who is most likely to attend a focus group? How will you hear from people who won’t attend?
* What are the potential power dynamics within the group?
	+ Will clients feel safe providing negative feedback about programs?
	+ Will clients understand that what they say in the focus group will not be linked back to them, and that notes provided to the Executive Director will not contain personal names?
	+ Will there be shared confidentiality among all focus group participants? (I.e., Will participants not share what was said during the focus group with others?)
	+ Are there potential personality conflicts that might disrupt the focus group? (E.g., someone dominating or steering the group?) Note that trained facilitators can manage these dynamics.
* Do you have a neutral facilitator to lead the group?
	+ A facilitator should be someone who does not regularly provide support services, interact regularly with clients, or manage services at the agency.
	+ The facilitator should not be someone who is seen as having power to deny or limit a client’s access to services at the agency.

# Advantages and disadvantages of client focus groups:

## Advantages

* The group gives you the chance to hear personal stories about a program’s success.
* You can learn more about how a program is affecting people’s lives.
* Your clients are present, so you can ask for explanations or for more details about specific points.

## Disadvantages

* Facilitators need to be neutral (i.e., someone who does not have the ability to deny or limit a client’s access to services at the agency )
* It takes more time and effort to analyze the information that you collect. (For assistance with data analysis, fill in an evaluation service request on the EBPU’s home page: <http://www.ohtn.on.ca/evidence-based-practice-unit/>.)

Focus Group – Sample Introduction

**Please note: Information on informed consent can be found at The Learning Place (**[**http://www.cbrlearningplace.ca/**](http://www.cbrlearningplace.ca/)**) and on the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board page (**[**http://www.research.utoronto.ca/about/boards-and-committees/research-ethics-boards-reb/**](http://www.research.utoronto.ca/about/boards-and-committees/research-ethics-boards-reb/)**).**

**The EBPU also provides assistance in developing consent forms (**[**http://www.ohtn.on.ca/evidence-based-practice-unit/**](http://www.ohtn.on.ca/evidence-based-practice-unit/)**).**

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Welcome and thank you for coming today to provide your feedback about the services provided at Shamrock Health Services.

My name is X, and this is Y.

I am from Z Agency. I do not work for or have any relation with Shamrock.

If you have any questions about the consent form, please let me answer the questions before you sign the form.

Before we begin the focus group, I’d like to go through the consent form.

*Go through the consent form that you have created. You can cover the following topics, which are often included in a consent form:*

* Purpose of the focus group
* Who is eligible to participate in the focus group?
* Process – what will happen?
	+ Y Person will record the comments and discussion points but will not record any personal names.
* Participants’ “Need to Know”:
	+ Your participation is voluntary.
	+ You can refuse to answer or skip any question.
	+ You can leave the focus group at any time.
	+ You can say as little or as much as you wish.
	+ Your participation will remain confidential and your answers anonymous. Your name will not be recorded.
	+ Your participation will not change your relationship with Shamrock or affect the services you receive.
* Participants’ Responsibilities:
	+ It is expected that all focus group participants will maintain confidentiality and not share what was discussed in the group outside of the session.
* Compensation:
	+ If applicable, you will receive money or a voucher for participating in the focus group.
* Benefits and risks:
	+ There is no direct benefit to participants (other than compensation if provided).
	+ The indirect benefit is that the information you provide will help improve services at Shamrock.
	+ You will be discussing information with a group of participants with the responsibility to maintain confidentiality. However, Shamrock cannot be held accountable in the unlikely case that other participants share information beyond the group.
* Feedback of the findings and how they will be used.

If you have questions or comments after the group finishes, you can contact This Person at ###-###-### or thisperson@shamrock.earth

Before you sign the consent form, do you have any questions about the focus group, the form, or how Shamrock will use the information?

*[Collect signed consent forms, witness them, and provide a copy to the participant. Keep another copy for Shamrock. Once all of the consent forms are signed and witnessed, seal them in an envelope with the date and Client Services Focus Group as the title.]*

*When all consent forms are signed and witnessed, begin the focus group.*

Sample Focus Group Questions

1. **In your general experience, what works well with the support services provided for clients at Shamrock?**
2. **What services do you like the most? What do you like the most about the support program?**
	* *Some people might talk about a specific service or the whole support program—either is fine.*
3. **What services do you like the least? What do you like the least about the support program?**
	* *Some people might talk about a specific service or the whole support program—either is fine.*
4. **What challenges have you experienced when accessing services at Shamrock?**
* *Is there anything that makes it hard for them to access services? (I.e., any barriers?)*
1. **How can Shamrock improve existing services for clients?**
2. **What additional services for clients would you like to see offered at Shamrock?**
3. **Our next question asks about your experience at Shamrock. We want to know about your experience with staff, volunteers, and the general atmosphere at Shamrock.**
	* How do you feel when accessing services at Shamrock?
	* How can Shamrock improve your experience?

*Ask about:*

* + *General environment / experience when they walk in the door*
	+ *Safety / comfort level*
	+ *Respect / How individuals are treated / Confidentiality*
	+ *Experience with staff and first contact volunteers*
1. **That is all the questions we have today. Do you have any other important issues, comments or feedback that you would like share?**

1. **Do you have any questions for us?**

**Thank you for taking the time to share your important feedback with us!**

**We will use the information to improve the supports that we provide.**