Research Workshop Series
Session 3: Focus Groups

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REL MIDWEST
Regional Educational Laboratory
at American Institutes for Research

Workshop Series

2017

September 28	**Data, Research, and Evidence**
October 24	**Survey Development and Administration**
November 15	**Focus Groups**

2018

January 17	**Observations and Rubric Development**
March 8	**Data Analysis**
April 24	**Communicating Research Findings**

Agenda

1. Presentation: Planning for focus groups
2. Activity: Write focus group protocol
3. Presentation: Moderating focus groups
4. Activity: Mock focus groups
5. Presentation: Analyzing focus group results
6. Session close and evaluation

Today's goals

1. Discuss strategies for planning a focus group project.
2. Practice writing protocols and conducting a focus group session.
3. Learn about techniques for analyzing focus group results.

Planning focus groups

Focus groups

Participant interaction can provide a rich description of views and experiences.

Potential focus group goals

1. Help formulate and pretest survey items.
2. Explore quantitative survey findings.
3. Use as a stand-alone data collection method.

Gain consensus on the specific goals of the focus groups.

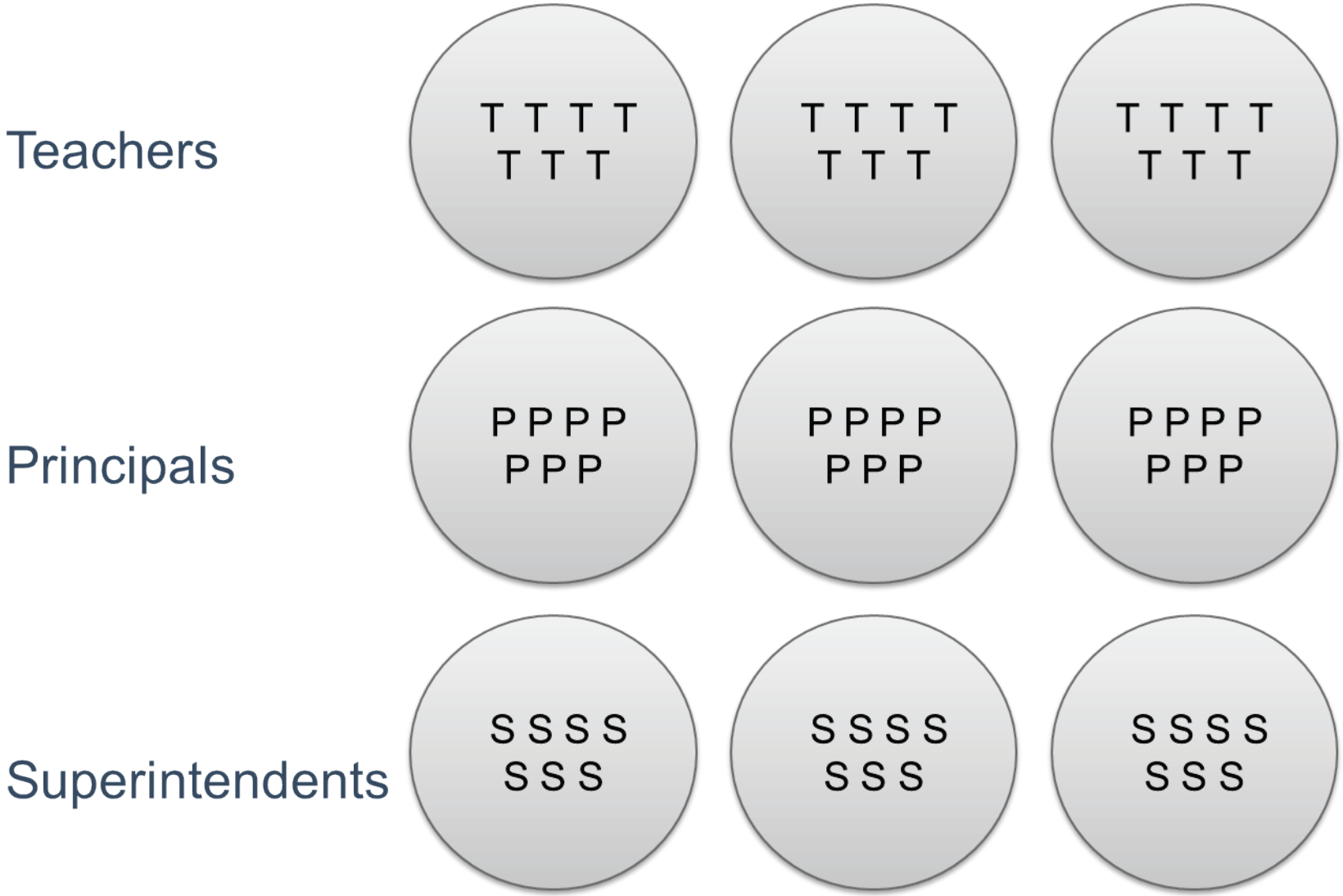
Define research goals

- How will the results will be used?
- What actions or decisions will the results of the study inform?
- What do you want to learn from the focus group study?

Decide number of groups and participants

Each focus group typically has 5–10 members.

Determine important subgroups



Recruiting focus group members

Alternative focus group modes

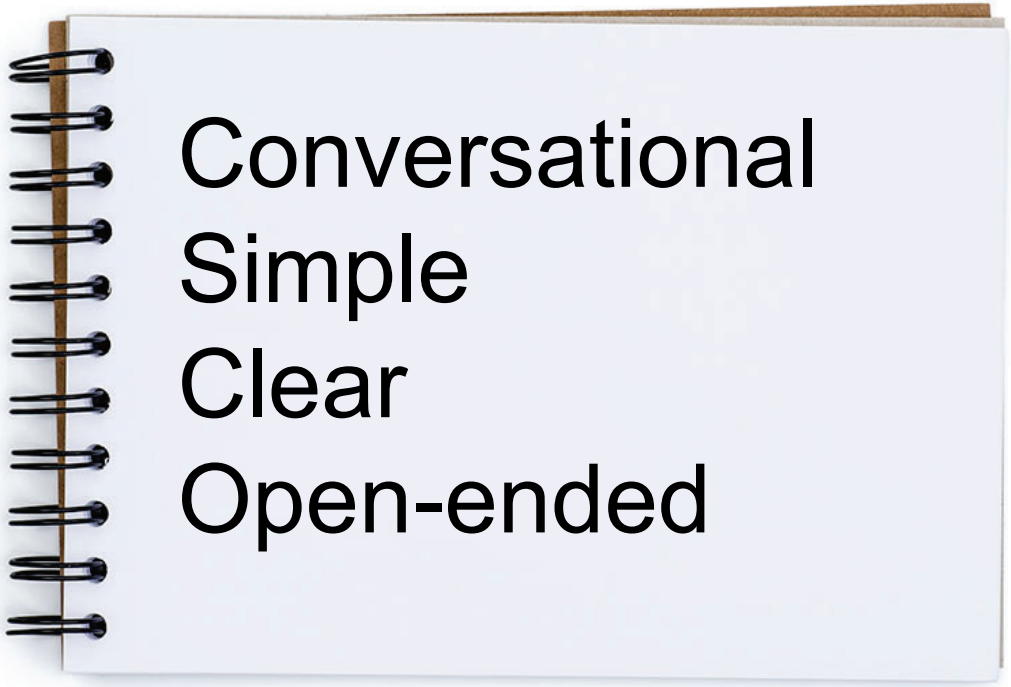
Prepare a moderator guide

A moderator guide includes an introductory script and lists questions to ask the group.

Focus group questions

Question type	Purpose
Opening	Helps participants get acquainted and feel connected
Introductory	Begins discussion of topic
Transition	Moves smoothly into key questions
Key	Obtains insight into areas of central concern to the study
Ending	Helps researchers determine where to place emphasis and brings closure to the discussion

Scripted questions should be:



Don’t ask “why” questions. Instead, ask for more information.

Can you describe more details about _____?

And how did that make you feel?

What do you mean by that?

Are there other instances where that happened?

Activity 1: Write a focus group protocol

Moderating focus groups

Moderating focus groups

Let the conversation flow while keeping it on track.

Moderators

- Stay neutral
- Engender trust
- Listen carefully
- Probe for clarity
- Demonstrate respect for all

Taking notes

Activity 2: Mock focus groups

Analyzing focus group results

Recording groups

Analysis

The “data” are the answers and remarks made by participants as well as the notes about nonverbal information from group members.

A spreadsheet can be used to record and link key comments to moderator questions and group identification. Comments can be coded for primary themes.

Sharing results

Additional resources

Much of the information in this session comes directly from these resources.

Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Morgan D. L., & Krueger, R. A. (1998). *The focus group kit*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

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