

Focus Groups

1. Focus Groups are different to Comment Groups in that they intentionally explore one issue or an aspect of a single objective in the consultation. Comment Groups are the process we use to cover general small group input on the basis of all objectives. Comment groups are open and anyone is encouraged to sign up. The greater the variety of age, interests and background in a comment group, the better.
2. Focus groups gather people who have a particular interest in an issue and they are invited to participate on the basis of their interest, commitment or ministry in this area. Be cautious about representation in this group and check with the leadership that it has not been hijacked by a particular lobby group within the church.

E.g. A focus group on Youth Ministry, the needs of both young people in the church and in the community.

E.g. A focus group on Men's Spirituality, the spiritual needs of males and the experience of men as a part of church life.

E.g. A focus group on outreach within a new neighbourhood development expecting 300 new families in the next 3 years.
3. Focus groups may meet a number of times and may take a longer time to explore the issues or the objective in any given meeting. It may be that a Focus Group convenes on worship and meets 5 times over the consultancy for 2 hours each meeting.
4. While they are less formal in process than comment groups, to be effective focus groups need thoughtful preparation and wise facilitation. This is important particularly in keeping the group 'on task' and clear on its briefing. This will be framed by the consultation objectives, time frame and terms of reference.
5. Resources are often gathered and shared in comment groups and time given to listen to each other, discuss issues in depth and even invite specialist resource people to the group.
6. If a focus group is convened it is important that this is not the only input on the objective or issue being explored. Ensure that opportunity is given in general comment groups, interviews and congregational meetings for others to give input. This can help avoid the potential for the Focus Group to get off course.
7. If the issue is complex and needs more time and work, a recommendation in the consultancy report can be made that a Working Group be established to more fully explore the issue over 6 - 12 months. Members from the Focus Group can be nominated for this group.