

# Focus Groups Design & Implementation Skills-Building Workshop



## *Play It Safer Network*

Flin Flon, Manitoba  
September 18 & 19, 2006

Prairie HIV Community-Based Research Program  
In collaboration with Nine Circles Community Health Centre

## Table of Contents

|  |   |
|--|---|
| The Workshop .....   | 1 |
| Evaluation .....   | 2 |
| Understanding on Focus Groups Design & Implementation..... | 3 |
| Readiness to Conduct Focus Groups .....                    | 4 |
| Barriers to Conducting Focus Groups .....                  | 4 |
| General Aspects of the Workshop .....                      | 5 |
| Conclusions .....  | 5 |
| Appendix.....  | 6 |

## ***The Workshop***

### **Origin of the workshop**

Covering a large geographic area of 72,000 sq km the Play It Safer Network's goal is to implement a community-based strategy to address HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and hepatitis C virus (HCV) through education, prevention, treatment, and medical and social supports. The area includes the Manitoba communities of Flin Flon, Snow Lake, Cranberry Portage, Wanless, Sherridon, Cormorant, Grand Rapids/ Grand Rapids Cree Nation, The Pas /Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Easterville/Chemawawin Cree Nation, Moose Lake/Mosakahiken Cree Nation, and Pukatawagan/Mathias Colomb Cree Nation. The area also includes the Saskatchewan communities of Creighton, Denare Beach, Sandy Bay, Pelican Narrows, Deschambault Lake and Peter Ballentyne Cree Nation. The Knowledge, attitude and behaviours survey was distributed to high schools, youth centres, post secondary institutions and correctional centres in the off reserve communities. High schools in the communities of Grand Rapids, Snow Lake, Flin Flon, and Sandy Bay, post secondary institutions in The Pas and Creighton, and The Pas Correctional Centre have participated in the survey. These communities represent a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds. The Network operates by establishing and strengthening collaboration throughout the region.

Currently, with support from the AIDS Community Action Program (ACAP) from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) the Network is conducting an assessment of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours/practices around sexuality, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C among youth. One hundred and twenty-five youth in the region responded to a comprehensive survey early in the year. Youth aged 15 to 24 were mostly engaged through schools and youth services. Now, the Network is ready to feed back the results of the survey to the youth and inquire on the best approaches for prevention within that population. To fulfill this objective, the Network decided to carry out focus groups in four different sites.

In order to strengthen their capacity to conduct focus groups the Network approached the Prairie HIV Community-Based Research Program. The Community-Based Research Facilitator of the program and the Research and Evaluation Coordinator at Nine Circles Community Health Centre prepared and delivered the two-day workshop.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the workshop were:

1. To understand focus group interviewing as a data collection method.
2. To become familiar with designing, implementing and analyzing focus groups.
3. To identify strategies for disseminating focus group results.

## **Topics and Workshop Methodology**

A number of short presentation preceded hands-on activities relevant to the topics. The topics covered in the workshop were:

- An introduction to focus groups as a qualitative data collection method
- Planning focus groups including sampling, promotion and participant recruitment, and logistics
- Ethics in focus groups
- Development of focus groups interview guides
- Development of alternative data collection tools in focus groups
- Roles and responsibilities of focus group facilitators and facilitator's assistants
- Focus Group facilitation
- Qualitative data analysis
- Report writing and dissemination

The activities consisted of large or small group activities where participants had to apply the concepts to their own "real" case, i.e., the series of focus group participants have to design and implement with youth on knowledge, attitudes and practices/behaviours on HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and sexuality. The participants discussed sampling, recruitment and logistic issues for each community, developed a preliminary set of questions or ideas for the question guide, discussed any ethical issues they may need to take into account considering general matters and the specific community contexts. A short question guide based on participants' work was utilized to practice focus group facilitation. Focus group facilitation consisted of "playing out" a series of common situations facilitators and group participants may face when moderating or participating in a group. The activity was also used to collect data that would later be used for a data analysis exercise. To conclude the workshop, participants develop a series of dissemination activities that could guide the devolution of information to the community as well as potential actions for change or improvement of systems and activities that eventually would assist youth in the area.

All presentations, handouts relevant to different areas and worksheets were distributed to all participants.

## **Participants**

A total of 11 participants attended the workshop. Participants belonged to different programs or areas of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority as well as some working on youth programs. Participants were from Flin Flon and The Pas.

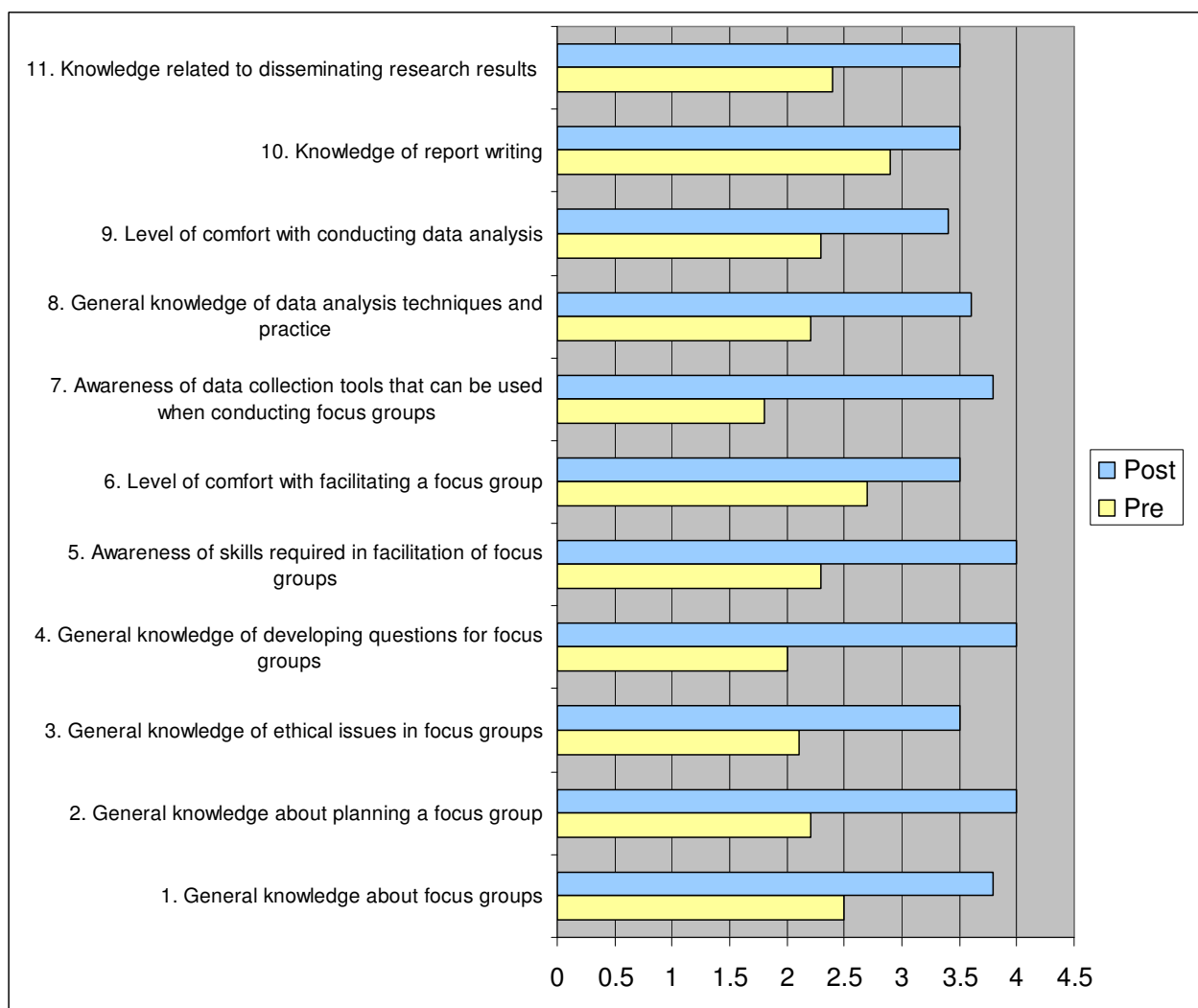
## **Evaluation**

The main method used to evaluate the workshop was the administration of a pre-workshop questionnaire administered at the beginning of the first day of the workshop and a post-workshop questionnaire that was completed at the end of the second day of the workshop.

The questionnaires were designed to learn about any changes in knowledge and levels of comfort regarding different aspects of focus groups, level of readiness in conducting focus groups, and also to measure some specific aspects of the workshop such as the logistics, facilitation, and agenda. The post-workshop questionnaire also included a question on series of questions about the barriers participants face in organizing and implementing focus groups. All participants returned both questionnaires.

## ***Understanding on Focus Groups Design & Implementation***

Part of the evaluation was intended to measure changes in levels of knowledge, comfort and practices of participants with respect to the planning and implementation of focus groups. The following graph shows the areas of evaluation and indicates the changes as result of the participation in the workshop. Participants were asked to rate themselves in the different areas on a scale of 1 to 5 from very low to very high.



The graph indicates that participants increased their knowledge, awareness, level of comfort and skills in all aspects of the method. The most significant changes happened around raised awareness of data collection tools that can be used in a focus group setting, knowledge of developing questions, knowledge of planning focus groups and facilitation skills.

## ***Readiness to Conduct Focus Groups***

We measure changes in readiness to carry out focus groups. Previous to the workshop about **half** of the participants indicated that they could plan and carry out a focus group with **a lot of** additional support; about a quarter could do it with a lot of additional support and the rest did not feel at all ready to plan and carry out a focus group.

**At the end of the workshop, all participants except one were ready to carry out a focus group with some additional support. There was one person who indicated having everything she needed to carry out a focus group.**

|  | <i>Pre-workshop</i>   | <i>Post-workshop</i>   |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| a. I have everything I need in order to plan and carry out a focus group.            |                       | <b>1 participant</b>   |
| b. I could plan and carry out a focus group with <b>some</b> additional support.     | <b>2 participants</b> | <b>10 participants</b> |
| c. I could plan and carry out a focus group with <b>a lot of</b> additional support. | <b>6 participants</b> |                        |
| d. I do not feel at all ready to plan and carry out a focus group.                   | <b>3 participants</b> |                        |

## ***Barriers to Conducting Focus Groups***

Participants were asked about any organizational barriers that may prevent them from utilizing focus groups in their daily work. Most of the responses centred on access to resources, in particular *staff time*. Members of the Play It Safer Network add any work related to the Network to the tasks and responsibilities they have to fulfill as part of their jobs. While the number of members enhances the capacity of the Network, the “volunteer” nature of their contribution also limits the work that is done through the Network. In some cases, participants indicated that the need to request permission from their supervisors or managers for participation could be a barrier.

To lesser extent, *capacity* to conduct focus groups was mentioned. The main concern was regarding the capacity to obtain accurate documentation of the information, and training of assistant facilitators. Peer assistant facilitators were believed to enhance the focus group delivery model during the training. However, no peers were able to attend the training.

*Funding* to carry out the focus groups was a barrier for the group as they have to cover a large territory that requires financial support for travel. The work of the Network covers a large geographic area, presenting difficulties to engage all communities in their work, and in this case, in the implementation of focus groups.

To lesser extent other issues were the limited collaboration with some organizations or institutions, including strengthening the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations; the lack of knowledge of policies and procedures around research within the Regional Health Authority; and need to access appropriate technology (e.g., hardware and software).

## ***General Aspects of the Workshop***

Participants were also asked to rate a number of aspects related to the workshop.

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| General agenda and contents (CBR, HIV, etc.) | 4   |
| General process (timing, etc.)               | 4   |
| <i>General facilitation</i>                  | 4.2 |
| Secondary items (e.g. premises, meals, etc.) | 4   |

Participants rated the workshop very positively on the general agenda and content, process, facilitation and other items (i.e., logistics). Although with marginal differences, the highest rate was given to general facilitation (4.2).

A few participants shared comments on these aspects of the workshop. One participant commented on the role of the workshop to refocus the Network into the upcoming activities and the relevance of the workshop as it was intended to address the topics the Network is set to address.

## ***Conclusions***

A few conclusions can be extracted from the implementation of this workshop.

- The workshop was very well accepted and participants increased their awareness and skills in conducting focus groups.
- The workshop was designed around a specific request from the Play It Safer Network, that is, the need to set the stage for the implementation of a series of focus groups with youth on HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and sexuality in a number of communities in the north western area of the province. The content and activities were relevant to their immediate needs.
- At the end of the workshop almost all participants indicated to be ready to conduct focus group with some additional support, while at the beginning of the workshop about the same number indicated requiring a lot or not being ready to take on this task.
- The Network still faces challenges in implementing focus groups as a research strategy. The vast geographic area the Network is set to address in conjunction with limited resources makes it difficult to reach out to all communities. Some participants also indicated further need for skills building with potential peer research assistants as they were identified as crucial partners in the delivery of focus groups.

## Appendix

### Focus Group Design Workshop Post Evaluation - Flin Flon, September 2006

Please repeat here your unique identifier code comprised of your initials and birth year, and write it on the line below. *For example, Jane Doe born in 1970 would be JD70.*

| How would you rate yourself (after having attended the workshop) on the following items?     | Please circle one |     |               |      |           |
|--|-------------------|-----|---------------|------|-----------|
|  | Very Low          | Low | Inter-mediate | High | Very High |
| 1. General knowledge about focus groups (e.g. what they are, when to use them etc.)          | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 4         |
| 2. General knowledge about planning a focus group.   | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 3. General knowledge of ethical issues in focus groups.                                      | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 4. General knowledge of developing questions for focus groups.                               | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 5. Awareness of skills required in facilitation of focus groups.                             | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 6. Level of comfort with facilitating a focus group.   | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 7. Awareness of various data collection tools that can be used when conducting focus groups. | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 8. General knowledge of data analysis techniques and practice.                               | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 9. Level of comfort with conducting data analysis.   | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 10. Knowledge of report writing.   | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 11. Knowledge related to disseminating research results.                                     | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |

12. After having attending this workshop, how prepared do you feel to be able to plan and carry out a focus group in your community?

- ☐ I have everything I need in order to plan and carry out a focus group.
- ☐ I could plan and carry out a focus group with some additional support.



- ☐ I could plan and carry out a focus group with a lot of additional support.
- ☐ I do not feel at all ready to plan and carry out a focus group.
- ☐ Other. Please describe \_\_\_\_\_

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13. What barriers exist for your organization to carry out research using focus groups? (e.g. staff, technology, capacity, money). Be as specific as you can.

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| How would you rate the following aspects of the workshop?             | Please circle one |     |               |      |           |
|---|-------------------|-----|---------------|------|-----------|
|   | Very Low          | Low | Inter-mediate | High | Very High |
| 14. General agenda and contents (overview, ethics, interviewing etc.) | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 4         |
| 15. General process (timing, etc.).                                   | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 16. General facilitation.   | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |
| 17. Secondary items (e.g. premises, meals, etc.)                      | 1                 | 2   | 3             | 4    | 5         |

*Thank you very much for completing this post evaluation!*