Conducting a Focus Group: App Function and User Experience

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Essential Question(s)

- What features and functionality would improve the user experience for families?
- How can we increase the likelihood families will use this app regularly?

Summary

Focus group sessions collect data by observing naturalistic behavior and moderating conversations within a group setting. This qualitative method offers valuable insight for a needs assessment or pilot testing in the early stages of product or process development. Focus groups can also be used to evaluate outcomes in the later stages of development. This resource provides information about how to conduct a focus group for K20's QUEST app. Although this resource is specific to the QUEST family app, feel free to diverge where needed to meet the needs of your circumstances.

Learning Goals

Attachments

- Anomaly Report—Conducting a Focus Group.docx
- Anomaly Report—Conducting a Focus Group.pdf
- Consent Form—Conducting a Focus Group - Spanish.pdf
- Consent Form—Conducting a Focus Group.pdf
- Focus Group Checklist—Conducting a Focus Group.docx
- Focus Group Checklist—Conducting a Focus Group.pdf
- Interview Guide—Conducting a Focus Group.docx
- Interview Guide—Conducting a Focus Group.pdf
- Troubleshooting Guide—Conducting a Focus Group.docx
- Troubleshooting Guide—Conducting a Focus Group.pdf

Materials

- Audio recording equipment
- Focus Group Checklist (attached)
- Interview Guide (attached)
- Consent Form / IRB Modification (attached; one per participant)
- Mobile device with the QUEST app downloaded (one per participant)
- Troubleshooting Guide (attached)
- Anomaly Report (attached)

Session Goals

- Observe the natural behaviors of cohort parents and families using the app.
- Record audio of the interview, including the questions and following discussions.
- Document reactions, group dynamics, and other relevant observations.
- Analyze the data collected.

Preparing for a Focus Group

The QUEST app provides families knowledge about college readiness, college access, and options to pay for college. The app delivers content in short, engaging lessons on these topics to give families and students the grounding they need to utilize available resources.

The design of this focus group provides valuable insight to help the QUEST app developers and content creators meet our ultimate goals of students entering and succeeding in postsecondary education. This qualitative research method gathers data through moderated discussions so the identified needs are from the perspective of GEAR UP cohort families.

Use the attached **Focus Group Checklist** to help you plan your event. Before you conduct the focus group for QUEST, it's important to find relevant participants. The target audience are first-generation families or families who lack the knowledge to prepare students for postsecondary education. To answer the two research questions—What features and functionality would improve the user experience for families? How can we increase the likelihood families will use this app regularly?— it's important to select participants that represent the intended QUEST app audience.

Participants

Find six to eight participants that meet most or all of the following criteria:

- Parent or guardian of at least one 7th–12th grade student attending a GEAR UP cohort school
- Member of a low income group or have a student who would be a first-generation college student
- Limited knowledge of postsecondary education
- Likely to feel comfortable sharing their perspective and experiences openly in front of the other research participants

Although care should be taken to find a homogeneous group based on the criteria listed above, variation is still needed based on age, gender, marital status, and level of comfort using mobile devices. Sessions may be conducted in languages other than English. This resource includes Spanish versions of each handout.

Research Team

The research team should consist of a moderator and a recorder. The moderator focuses on facilitating the discussion while the recorder takes detailed notes. Focus group methodology relies on discussion between participants rather than a direct question-and-answer format between facilitator and participant. Therefore, it's important the moderator be skilled in their ability to listen, probe, and direct group interactions (Williams & Katz, 2001).

Determine a set of questions prior to the event and include them in the **Interview Guide** for the moderator, so they have time to prepare for the session. Carefully construct questions that are open-ended and lead to discourse among participants. It's also important to identify the central questions that need to be asked so the moderator can make in-the-moment adjustments due to time constraints or other limitations.

Setting

Before the event, secure a space for the group. Reserve a space large enough to accommodate the participants and research team. Find a room that is separated from the traffic and noise of the venue. If possible, arrange seating in a circle.

Remember, a focus group works best when the participants feel comfortable sharing their perspectives freely.

Conducting a Focus Group Session

Arrive early to set up, test equipment, and ensure the setting is appropriate.

As participants arrive and enter the room, greet them and let them know you are going to wait until all participants have arrived before going over the session expectations. Let them know they will be using the application on their own mobile devices or those provided by K20.

Remind everyone their participation is appreciated and voluntary. Let them know where they can find the bathrooms.

When everyone is seated, read the *Session Introduction* script found in the attached **Interview Guide**. Where it's noted, pause and pass out the attached **QUEST Focus Group Consent Forms**. This form is available in both English and Spanish. Be sure to collect all signed forms before moving forward.

After collecting the consent forms, pass out the K20 phones and restate the process of where to find the QUEST application. Walk around to ensure all participants are viewing and interacting with the QUEST application. Assist participants when necessary, but if any try to engage you remind them there will be an opportunity to share their thoughts after exploration of the application.

Follow the instructions in the attached **Troubleshooting Guide** if participants have any technical difficulties. If needed, technical difficulties or other anomalies, such as someone showing up late, the room being too noisy, a parent communicating in a language other than English or Spanish, etc., can be noted on the attached **Anomaly Report** and added to the session notes.

After participants explore the application for 10 minutes, follow the *Discussion Introduction* script found in the Interview Guide. Next, begin asking the *Questionnaire* questions in the Interview Guide.

Remember, the job of the moderator is to keep the discussion going and on track. Encourage participants to reply to one another's comments, provide space for reluctant participants to respond, and redirect anyone dominating the discussion.

The recorder should take notes of participant responses, but more importantly add context to the audio recording by noting observations about participants' behavior and their interactions with the app.

After the session has ended, return all equipment to the K20 Center. Provide the research team with all signed consent forms, a copy of the Interview Guide, a copy of the audio recording of the session, and a copy of the recorder's notes. Alert the research team to any technical issues you may have experienced during the session.

Resources

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