



KIDS TALK MILK: Best Practices in Conducting Student Focus Groups



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Background

- Customer needs assessment involves listening to your patrons.
- Focus groups are one way to hear what your students (our customers) have to say.
- Facilitation of focus groups may affect results.

Focus Group Planning

- Recruited districts in multiple states
 - School foodservice directors
 - School administrators
- Included diverse demographics
- Obtained parental consent for student participation
 - Coordination by district officials
 - Encouraged participation



Methods

- A collaborative research protocol developed by the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division was used in a qualitative study regarding factors influencing students' perceptions of milk.
- Six research teams met for training on the data collection and analysis protocol
- Institutional approval was obtained for use of human subjects in research
- Each team conducted four to six site visits in two USDA Regions to facilitate at least three focus group sessions with:
 - Elementary students in grades 3-5
 - Middle school students in grades 6-8
 - School nutrition professionals

Conducting the Focus Groups

- Moderator guide was used with set of questions for each group
- Moderators had experience in conducting focus groups
 - Provided introduction of project and researchers
 - Reviewed participants' rights and obtained assent/consent
 - Discussed ground rules
 - Conducted follow-ups to one-word responses
 - Provided opportunities to respond to meaningful, probing questions
- Assistant moderators took contextual field notes
- Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim

Lessons Learned/Impact

- Talking with students using a semi-structured format increased researchers' understanding of students' and school nutrition professionals' experiences
- Focus groups provided:
 - An outlet for students and school nutrition professionals to voice their perspectives and opinions
 - An opportunity to understand students' decisions about milk and could be used as a format to address other school nutrition factors
- The protocol format used for this study may be useful in identifying action steps to improve the nutrition environment which can lead to less plate waste and better food choices.

Data Analysis

- Each research team identified themes utilizing the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser)
- Summary of districts' characteristics
- Description of observations in the school meal environment

