

Focus groups and community consultations are an excellent way to get feedback on ideas, plans and strategies. The information you collect will help shape your initiatives and inform your decision making. Providing these opportunities for input ensures the community is aware of what you are doing and feels engaged in the process to develop options for them.

Focus Groups

Focus groups provide opportunities for in-depth consultation using the following format:

- Six to ten participants with a particular interest, involvement or stake in the subject being discussed.
- Between one to two hours in length.
- Facilitator guides the discussion and probes for answers using a loosely structured list of questions.
- Atmosphere is informal and interactive with participants doing the majority of the talking.
- Facilitator keeps the conversation focused and ensures everyone has the opportunity to provide input.

Focus groups are useful for: obtaining in-depth responses to an issue; creating an environment where people feel comfortable participating; and, providing opportunities for deliberation and debate. Additionally focus groups are easy to organize given the small group size and limited human and financial resources needed.

Community Consultations

Community consultations bring together interested people for information on and discussion around an issue. They can provide information to the community, gather information from the community or do a combination of both by allowing for an interactive exchange.

Community consultations follow the following format:

- Open to the public and can attract either a small or large group based on the level of interest in the issue being discussed.
- Last between two to four hours but need to be flexible to ensure everyone is heard.
- During the consultation, presentations are given related to the issue with a general discussion taking place afterward.
- Facilitator introduces presenters, engages participants and encourages discussion.
- A list of questions is prepared by the facilitator in advance to ensure community input is received in all relevant areas.
- Participants can be asked to fill out a short questionnaire at the end of the consultation to provide specific input on relevant issues.

Community consultations allow community members to better understand and influence issues that affect them. They also provide decision-makers with valuable insight into community perspectives around specific issues. These consultations require a lot of organization and resources (human and financial) so they should only be considered if planning large projects (e.g. developing new facilities) or implementing community-wide changes. If you are just trying to inform people about your programs or services, focus groups might be a better option.

Organizing a Focus or Community Consultation

1. Select a date and location.
2. Develop invitations/communications to publicize the event, including contact information on how to RSVP.
3. Send any background materials to participants and/or prepare materials that will be given to participants.
4. Develop a facilitators guide that will include questions and specific timeframes that the facilitator will follow to keep everything on track and focused.
5. Develop an evaluation form that will be given to participants.
6. Confirm final numbers and order any catering.
7. Conduct the focus group or community consultation.
8. Summarize feedback received and evaluation results.
9. Follow-up with participants about the results of the consultation and any next steps that result.

Tips

- Clearly articulate the overall purpose or goal of the consultation – people need to know why you have asked them to participate.
- Ask people to introduce themselves to break the ice and allow both you and others to know who is in the room.
- Explain how the consultation will work – time frames, confidentiality, asking questions, etc.
- Ask permission before using tape recorders or cameras.
- Provide logistical information such as washroom locations, refreshment, etc.
- Make an effort to involve all participants in the discussion.
- Thank participants for their input.
- Provide participants with proceedings of the meeting and next steps.



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For more information on the *CAAWS Women 55–70 and Physical Activity* project please contact caaws@caaws.ca or visit the website at: www.caaws.ca/women55plus/index.cfm

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