



Waushara Food Connections

Central Wisconsin Community Action Council, Inc.

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Focus Group Facilitation

Thank you for facilitating our focus group! Each focus group discussion should last about an hour and a half. Please arrive at least 20 minutes early.

Set chairs up in a U or O shape (around a table if available). If new chairs must be added as participants are seated, expand the circle rather than creating a second row of chairs. This allows all participants to see each other.

Try to begin the group on time, within 5 minutes of the agreed starting time. If some participants come late and miss some or all of the introduction, give them a copy of the introduction script. After they have read it, have them sign in and introduce themselves to the group. The assistant facilitator can guide this so that discussion is interrupted minimally.

Expect to stay about 15-20 minutes after the focus group discussion ends to answer any participant questions, review the notes taken (adding comments), and clean up.

Supplies you will be given:

- **Paper and markers** for name tents. Have participants make one with their first name.
- **Sign in sheet and pen.** Please ask each participant to sign in at the point indicated in the introduction script.
- **Flip Chart and markers.** Start the first sheet with "Welcome to the Focus Group!" Try to write in alternating colors so that answers are easy to read.
- **Masking tape** for putting completed flip chart papers on the wall.
- **Notebook and pen** for recording private notes
- **2 recording devices with blank media.** Please use both simultaneously. Turn them on when indicated in the introduction script. If using a tape recorder, please remember to flip the tape when it is close to running out.
- **Extra copies of the introduction script** to be given to latecomers if they miss it.
- **A current listing of grocery stores**
- **A current listing of farm stands** that may be useful for you in Q5.

Facilitator Roles

We suggest that **one facilitator lead the discussion and write on the flip chart** while the **other facilitator(s) assist. The assistant(s) have many responsibilities:**

- **Time-Keeper.** Keep an eye on the time and signal the leader if the conversation needs to be moved along. Alert the leader when there are 15 and 5 minutes left before the end of the 1.5 hour session.
- **Recorder.** Make sure the recording devices are turned on at the point indicated in the introduction script. Check on them periodically to see that they are still working. Flip the tape when it is close to running out. **Make sure everyone has signed in and given their consent to be recorded.** (If participants refuse to be recorded but would like to stay and participate non-verbally, that is fine. You can count their answers in the tally, but if they speak, please don't take any direct quotes of what they have said.)
- **Conversation Helper.** Assist the facilitator as needed to ensure that only one person is speaking at a time and that the conversation is redirected if it gets far off track. Make sure everyone is participating; encourage silent participants to answer questions. It is difficult for the discussion leader to do all this alone, especially while writing on the flip chart.
- **Private note taker** These notes are taken down in the notebook, not on the flip chart. These private notes should include the following:
 - *Observations of the group.* Are people excited or lacking in interest? Do people have a lot to say, or are they reluctant to speak? Are some people dominating the discussion while others are silent? Is the group cohesive or are there great differences of opinion? Do the above factors change depending on the question? Group composition: How many men/women/older adults/young people/couples/children, etc?
 - *Identifiers.* Link answers with identifying information. Examples: Single mother says...; Half of those who said yes to Q4 are older adults.
 - *Quotes illustrating the varied opinions being presented.* There is much value in capturing the exact words that are used by participants. These words are the actual "data," the essence of the meeting. Try to capture as much of the conversation as possible using the exact words that people speak. These quotes will be included in the final report.
 - *Summary of key discussion points.* As each question is posed, individuals will offer their opinions and these will be written on the flip chart, but there is often some nonverbal communication that also relays the group's perceptions, feelings, and thoughts on the issue. These reactions should be captured by the note taker and summarized along with the general discussion. Note that the group does not have to reach consensus. The summary can give all sides of the issue.

If there are 2 assistants, one should be the private note taker while the other focuses on time keeping, recording, and helping move the conversation along. **If there are more than 2 assistants**, two people should take notes. **If there is only one assistant**, do your best to multi-task and take brief notes as best you can. After the session ends, note takers should do their best to fill in the gaps with the other facilitator(s).

As mentioned, **notes** will be taken privately and on the flip chart. Note takers can provide greater insight than can a tape recorder. Recording devices often do not pick up sound as well as you might expect; therefore, it is important to consider the private and flip chart notes as the first source of information with the recording device as backup.

Guidelines for leading the discussion:

- **Try to not react positively or negatively to an answer.** Control personal reactions to participants both verbal and nonverbal (watch your body language and facial expressions). Acknowledge responses but avoid assigning a perceived value to the response. Don't, for example, shake your head in disbelief or use words like, "that's good" or "excellent."
- **Try to acknowledge responses in the same way for all answers.** If you say "OK" to one answer, say "OK" to all answers; if you nod to one answer, nod to all answers. Of course, if you react negatively, don't continue to react negatively! Just apologize if necessary and move on.
- **Allow time for participants to think** about their answers. A little silence is OK.
- **Keep the conversation on topic.** Interrupt people if the conversation has gone too far off track and redirect them to the question at hand.
- **Get people to talk.** Sometimes a question will not provoke people to respond adequately to an issue. You may have to rephrase the question or probe to get them to explore some related or underlying issues. For example, if people are silent for a while when asked why they may not use food pantries, probing questions might include: *Is it inconvenient for you to get there? Did you ever have a problem when you were there? Are the benefits enough to provide you with help?*
- **Understand what is said.** Use probing questions such as "Would you explain further?", "Would you give an example?", or "I don't understand." Avoid probing questions that could put someone on the defensive, like "Why would you say that?"
- **Engage all participants in the discussion.** No one is required to speak, but give quiet people the chance. Ask specific people to answer questions as needed without forcing a response.
- **Capitalize on unanticipated comments and useful directions** the discussion may take. Probe and move flexibly into unplanned aspects of the topic but be careful about unnecessary or irrelevant divergences.
- When comments related to one question are finished, **summarize** them, making sure there is agreement with the summary.

Script for a Focus Group on Food Attainment

(All italicized text is for your information)

Purpose of discussion: to assess how people get food: the stores used and why, and about other places in the community that people might go for food. To understand how our community can improve the accessibility and availability of food resources.

Introduction Script:

Welcome. Thank you for participating in this focus group discussion about how Waushara County residents get their food. A focus group is a research technique commonly used in social science research to gather information. It's important for you to know that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer to our questions. We are interested in the information that you give based on your experiences, observations, and feelings. Both negative and positive comments are useful to us.

We are collecting information about shopping patterns—the stores you use and why—and about other places in the community that you might go to for food. We are working with a non-profit community group called Waushara Food Connections. This group is conducting a study to understand how our community can improve the food resources available for all people. The information you give today will help Waushara Food Connections plan projects that strengthen the local food system while making nutritious food available and accessible to all county residents.

This focus group session will be recorded so that we can make an accurate report of your answers. Please be assured that all your responses are confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only. Our report will make no references to names. I will turn the recorder(s) on now [*turn them on*], and ask each of you to give your official consent to be recorded. To give your consent, just print your full name on the sign-in sheet that I will pass around in a moment and then in the next box, sign your name to agree to be recorded. If you do not sign your name to give your consent, we cannot quote your answers in our report.

As a token of our appreciation for your time, we will be mailing you a \$10 check to help cover your transportation costs to this session. One check will be issued per household. Print your name and address clearly on the sign-in sheet so that we can send you the check. If you are interested in more information about Waushara Food Connections, there is a box for you to check next to your name for someone to contact you. There is also a box for you to check if you would like to receive a copy of the food study once it has been completed sometime next spring. [*Pass around the sign-in sheet and pen and continue to speak while people are signing in.*]

Before we get started, let's establish three guidelines for our discussion. These rules are to ensure that we hear everything that you all have to say. [*Write the 3 rules on the flip chart under "Welcome." That way, you can point to them later if you'd like to non-verbally redirect the group.*] The first guideline is one person speaks at a time. If more than one person is talking at once, I will interrupt and ask you to take turns so that we can hear all your answers. Please don't have side conversations while someone else is talking, as this prevents us from hearing what is being said. If this happens, I will interrupt and ask that your full attention be given to the speaker. Second, let's try to keep focused on the question being asked. If the conversation goes too far off track, I will interrupt the discussion and bring the focus back by saying "Let's

redirect” and repeating the question at hand. Third, please respect everyone’s opinions. Everyone’s ideas are important and everyone will have an opportunity to speak.

So, let’s get started by going around the room and introducing ourselves by first name only. Just so we get to know each other, also tell us where you live, how long you have lived in Waushara County, and what your favorite food is. [*Write on the flip chart: Name, City/town?, How long in County?, and Favorite food?*]

Questions (*Script for you to read is in bold. Questions 2, 6, and 7 are the most important ones.*)

1. Our first question is, where do you get most of your food? *Write the question on a blank page of the flip chart. Use alternating colors to record answers on the left side of the paper only (you’ll need the right-hand side for question 2). Make sure that everyone gets the chance to answer the question. Don’t spend much time on these answers...about 5 minutes max... this is a lead-in question.*

***2. Key question: Thinking about the place you get the majority of your food, Why do you use this place the most?** *Go through each answer given to question 1 and ask the question. Eg. “For those of you who answered ‘Stoneridge,’ why do you get most of your food there?” If needed, probe for variety offered, price, cleanliness, location, convenience (have them explain), etc. Write the answers in alternating colors next to the name of the place. Summarize the answers. About 10-15 minutes*

3. Now think about all the places that you go to for food, not just the one you go to most. In addition to the places we have already written down, where else do you get food? *Start a new page, titled: “Other food sources.” Write each answer in alternating colors. When answers stop coming, after a moment of silence, ask: **Anywhere else?** and continue writing answers with the number of people who use it. When answers stop again, and if only grocery stores have been mentioned so far, ask: **Where else besides grocery stores do you get food?** (If restaurants are mentioned, don’t list individual ones). As a final prompt, ask: **Think about the whole year: winter, spring, summer, and fall. Do you or anyone in your household get food from other sources at different times of the year?** Continue writing answers with the number of people who use it until conversation is exhausted. About 10 minutes*

4. Quick lead-in questions: How many of you have a grocery store in your community? *Start a new flip chart page, titled “Local Grocery” and write how many said yes. **How many of you regularly shop at your local grocery store?** Write answer. Key question: **For those of you who don’t shop regularly at your local grocery store, why not?** Write answers. About 5 minutes. Key question: **For all of you, what would make your local grocery store a more attractive option for your food shopping?** Write answers. Summarize. About 5 minutes*

5. Now let's talk about farmers' markets or farm stands. Are there farmers' markets or farm stands in your community? What are they called, and/or where are they? *Start a new page on the flip chart, "Farm stands" and write the names of the stands, or, if names aren't known, their locations. About 5 minutes. Quick lead-in question: How many of you go to a farmers' market/stand to buy food? Write answer, continue the discussion with key question: For those of you who shop at farm stands, why do you use them? Write answers in alternating colors. Key question: For those of you who don't shop at farm stands, why not? Write answers. About 5 minutes. Key question: What would make farm stands a more attractive option for all of you? Write answers. Probe for transportation, closer to home, closer to other food stores, less expensive, more variety, cleanliness, etc. Summarize the answers. About 5 minutes*

***6. Key question: Now let's talk about the obstacles you or other members of your household may encounter in getting the food you want and need. Thinking back about the times you or your household members weren't able to get the food you wanted or needed, what were the obstacles that prevented you from getting it?** *If necessary, probe for lack of money, transportation, store hours, time it takes to shop, etc. Write answers on the left side of a new sheet entitled "Obstacles." Leave yourself plenty of room for solutions in Q6. When conversation dies down: Thinking about the whole year, winter, spring, summer, and fall, what are some other obstacles you have faced in getting the food you want and need? After answers stop coming, ask a final follow-up: Are there certain times of the year that are harder to get the food you want and need? If so, why? Summarize answers. About 10-15 minutes*

***7. Key question: Now let's focus on solutions to the barriers you may face in getting the food you want and need. What can the community (government, businesses, people) do to address these obstacles?** *Add "Solutions" to the title of the "Obstacles" flip chart page. For each obstacle mentioned in Q5, ask for solutions and write them down. Summarize answers. About 10-15 minutes*

Optional wrap-up question (time permitting): What was one thing that you heard here today that was really important? *Start a new flip chart sheet, "Most important," and write answers. Summarize.*

Additional optional question (If you still have time. You can pick and choose depending on the group discussion so far.)

A) Waushara Food Connections has a two-part mission: first, to make nutritious food accessible to all county residents; and second, to strengthen the local food system. Sometimes these goals seem to conflict. For example, we want food to be affordable for residents, and we want to keep our local grocery stores. Right now many residents go outside the county to buy food at lower prices. How can we balance our goal to keep our local grocery stores with our desire to shop for food outside the county at a lower price? *Start a new flip chart sheet, "Keep grocery stores AND buy food at a good price?," and write answers. Summarize.*

Script to End the Discussion:

Thank you so much for coming today to share your opinions with us. Your responses will help us in making decisions that will assist households in your community get the food they want and need. If you have any questions, please see us. Have a great day.

After the session, the facilitators should debrief, review individual notes, try to reconcile differences in opinion, and write down the themes and main points that emerged and were discussed under each question and in general (for details, see the “private note taker” section above). Within the next few days, the facilitators should type up the notes on the flip chart and in the notebook and send them to Sara and Pam at cwcac.saram@verizon.net If you are unable to type and email the notes, please mail them to us: Sara McKee and Pamela Hughes; Waushara Food Connections; Central Wisconsin Community Action Council, Inc.; PO Box 430; Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965.

At the end of the session, please clean up and return all supplies to _____.

Thank you so much for your time and commitment!!