# Focus Group Hints & Tips[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Focus groups can be more effective if it is limited to 1-2 topics
* Should/must the protocol go through and IRB review?
* For new and/or multiple facilitators
  + consider using a more structured protocol/ interview guide
  + Avoid questions that can be answered with a single word or phrase
  + Use transition language to shift between topics
  + Draft follow up probes for questions that could have multiple directions for responses
  + Consider sequencing if some questions may be considered sensitive topics
  + Make sure you are familiar with the protocol before the session
* Consider using a short questionnaire that participants can complete while they are waiting for the group to start
* If pre-registering participants for focus groups,
  + Send a reminder 24 hours before the session
  + Plan for no-shows
* If using a recording device
  + Who will have access to the recording?
  + Where will it be stored?
  + Will the recording be transcribed?
* Think about how you want the results to be summarized
  + What will the facilitator/notetakers provide?
    - Session summary notes
    - Data analysis
  + What types of responses are you seeking – short answer or longer narratives
  + Organized by question?
  + Organized by themes that emerge from the responses

### Session Logistics

* Arrive early – you’ll have things to do
* Set up room so that the facilitators can see all participants
* Consider using table tents with participant names
* Test recording device in the space for the session – make sure it will pick up all participant voices
* Written or digital note-taking

### Managing the Conversation

* Don’t underestimate the value of an “easy” first question, it acts as an icebreaker and provides information on the topic
* Try to keep your talking to a minimum (no more than 15 percent of the time)
* Stay on topic as much as possible – participants will have the opportunity to share other information after the questions are completed.
* Silence is okay – it can take time for participants to formulate a response.
* You may ask clarifying questions if you don’t understand a response.
* Do not get into debates or offer your opinions on the questions or topics discussed
* Encourage, but do not force, everyone to participate in the conversation
* Be careful to not impose a personal agenda onto the group
* Plan for different participant scenarios
  + Dominating voice
  + Someone who never speaks
  + Someone who has an agenda and keeps trying to change the topic

1. Source: Schuh & Associates. (2009). *Assessment methods for student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)