Things to Consider with Human Subjects and Focus Groups

• When planning your focus group think about the content of the focus group question and select a location that is convenient and appropriate for discussing that topic.
  o Depending on the context and topic of your focus group, be aware of the risk of “outing” participants:
    ▪ via door signs, sign-up sheets, and other artifacts of running the focus group.
      • For example, you wouldn’t want to put a sign on the meeting room door stating, “Cheaters focus group here”
    ▪ by advertising for the focus group and then holding the focus group in a location where participants would be viewed entering the focus group.
      • For example, if you put up flyers in an office stating “Are you thinking about quitting your job? Attend focus group on X date in Y room to discuss work motivation,” those people who are seen entering the focus group would be known as thinking about quitting.

• In all recruitment materials and consent discussion, make sure to inform the participants of the focus group topic and the possible types participants.
  o If not fully disclosing the topic to the participants, you must justify why in your protocol
  o Participants need to know who may be present while they discuss issues – this is particularly true if participants may know each other.
    ▪ Be aware of the impact that relationships between participants might have on responses and data quality (e.g. focus groups run with groups of professional colleagues may not engender candid and thorough responses)

• Make sure to communicate through the consent forms and preliminary focus group instructions that participants in the focus group should respect the confidentiality of fellow participants. That information shared in the focus group should be treated as private and that it should not be shared with anyone outside of the focus group.

• Inform participants that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed

• Inform all participants in the informed consent and in preliminary focus group instructions if they will be audio/video-recorded or observed by outside observers

• If implementing a focus group outside of the US or with special populations within the US, you must take special care with the customs, laws, and practices of that group. This may include seeking permission from leaders within that group, paying attention to gender lines etc.
• If you will perform “member checking,” or another activity that involves checking in with participants after the focus group (to go over transcripts, findings, clarifications, etc.), include information about how this will be done in your IRB submission, and include information about the activities in the consent form.
  o If you plan to send transcripts out to participants via email, DO NOT include any identifying information on the transcripts or in the transmittal email.

• Important information to include in your IRB submission about the focus groups:
  o If you will have the participants do an activity during the focus group (example trying products) go into detail about what they are expected to do.
  
    o Make sure to note number of participants, number of focus groups, and length of each focus group.
  
    o Describe how you will contact and follow up with participants
  
    o Will any services, resources, or counsel be available should the participants need it?
      ▪ Ex: crisis hotline, trained individual on call, referrals
  
    o What does compensation look like?
  
    o What are the risks associated with the focus group?