Discussion Outline for APHA Roundtable Session 225369
Learning about Learning from the Public:
Large and Small Group Public Engagement Methods

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I. Things large forums and small group discussions have in common

A. Both require the same commitment to the public engagement process and to the participants.

B. Both require the same planning to structure a productive agenda, prompt useful discussions, develop facilitation guide, etc.

C. Recruitment for either is easier and more diverse if participants are paid. Payment amount should probably depend more on length of engagement and whether engagement stretches over more than a day than on whether engagement is large or small.

D. Both benefit from partnerships with local community organizations and public health agencies.

E. Both require the same thought about what information is necessary to collect during recruitment (e.g., only the demographic information that will be used to adjust recruitment in real time to reach those who are under-represented among early registrants) and during the on-site registration or evaluation process (e.g. additional demographic information that may be useful in data analysis following the meeting).

F. The same evaluation process could be employed with each. However, if audience response technology is being employed during a large forum anyway, you could consider using it during an evaluation process.

II. Large forums and small groups can be alternatives or companions to each other

A. Large forums are more likely to draw media attention and generate interest that extends beyond an event's confines. Small groups are inherently more intimate. Choosing between them depends on engagement purpose, utility of media attention, budget, logistics and timing.

B. Conducting small groups first (or only).
1. Small groups can be useful if you need to hold a succession of meetings that target different subpopulations or geographic regions. (Not that a large group

can't targeted to a particular subpopulation, but conducting multiple, targeted, large group meetings will end up being more expensive than conducting the same number of small group meetings.)

2. Small groups can be used to pilot method and questions, identify issues that merit a larger discussion.

C. Conducting large forums first (or only).
   1. If you're confident in your method and questions, large groups can generate more information faster from a larger cross-section of the community.
   2. Small groups can be used later to explore additional issues, target particular subpopulations or delve more deeply into issues raised in the large groups.

III. Large forums (> 100 people)

A. Labor, cost-intensive
   1. Either labor or cost-intensive (or both) to recruit participants, seek and respond to media, manage registration, handle meeting planning (catering, room arrangements) and plan the meeting itself
   2. Commonly entail both large group discussions (in which all participants are invited to participate in a discussion within the group as a whole) and smaller round-table or break-out discussions (in which participants are divided into small groups for discussions that are then reported back to the forum as a whole).
      a. Deciding who participates in which small groups can be random, self-selected or determined in advance by the organizers.
      b. Each small group can discuss the same topic or different topics, depending on the meeting's purpose.
   3. Small group facilitators and note-takers must be trained in the meeting's process and oriented to the topic, whether using professionals or volunteers.
   4. Staff required on the day:
      a. Lead facilitator and note-taker for work that's done in the forum as a whole
      b. Usually, speaker(s) for educational content
      c. One facilitator and note-taker for every 8 – 10 attendees for small-group/breakout discussions
      d. 2 – 3 people to staff registration table, handle logistics with caterer, etc.
      e. Communications person to field media requests, convey ground rules re: onsite cameras, etc.
      f. Optional: One person to run audience response technology
      g. 2 – 3 people to serve as roving experts during small group discussions; experts should be available on both subject-matter and process/facilitation; lead facilitator and educational speakers can serve in this capacity

     5.   After the meeting, notes from each small group discussion will need to be synthesized with notes from large group discussions that occurred during the forum. Report ends up being longer and more-time consuming to write than a report of a single, small group engagement of comparable length.

  B.   Audience Response Technology (ART—keypads for instantly polling the audience)
     1.   Allows you to "hear" everyone in the room
     2.   ART is one tool in the facilitation toolbox. It is not useful in all settings, and should be employed only when it serves the meeting's purpose.
     3.   Limited to certain kinds of questions: T/F, Y/N, multiple choice, ranking. Possible responses limited by number of keys on the keypad (usually 9 or 10)
     4.   Questions must be carefully formulated, unambiguous
     5.   Possible to improvise questions on the spot
     6.   You can choose whether to display the audiences' aggregated responses on the screen.
        a.   When polling as part of the main agenda (i.e., not for meeting evaluation purposes), you will probably want to display the responses. They are what drive the discussion.
        b.   When using polling during the evaluation component, you probably won't want to display responses.
     7.   Requires familiarity with the technology and computer savvy; must be practiced in advance; can rent the expertise, by renting technology from someone who will come to the meeting to run it
     8.   Multiple purposes/timing:
        a.   Prompt or focus discussion during the beginning or middle of the conversation: Take the temperature of the room; identify areas of early agreement and disagreement; foster discussion of topics on which there is a greater range of opinions
        b.   Instead or in addition to early polling: Poll final results at end of conversation. Don't over-interpret data. Consider leaving room for brief discussion/explanation after polling.

IV.   Small groups (<15 people)

  A.   Less labor intensive
     1.   While developing the agenda, discussion exercises, facilitation guide, etc., is just as time-consuming as it is for larger meetings, logistics and recruitment are easier for a single, small event.
     2.   Staff required on the day:
        a.   Facilitator (who can also assist with any catering or meeting logistics)
        b.   Note-taker (who can also assist with any catering or meeting logistics)
        c.   Optional: Speaker(s) for educational content

  B.   Holding successive small events can become efficient if the agenda, exercises and facilitation guide need little adaptation for multiple events.

C.   Significant adaptation may be required to meet different cultural or language needs from meeting to meeting. Real-time language translation is easier to manage in smaller events.

D.   Small groups may offer more scheduling flexibility, e.g., splitting a 6-hour event into 2 evenings. Retention on a second night for small groups is probably more likely than for large, though participants might need to be paid more to encourage them to come twice to an event than to come to a single event.