Using Delphi Method for Needs Assessment Training 2025

Using Focus Groups in Delphi Method to Conduct Participatory Research: Implications for Extension

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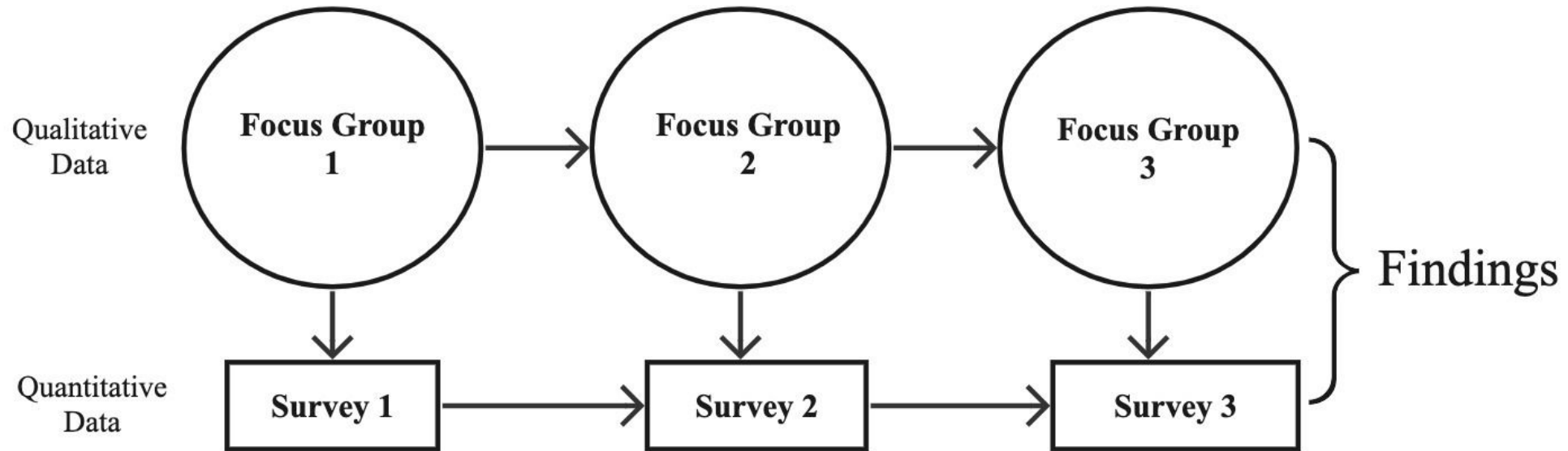**August 12, 2025**

About the Study

- Part of a larger **multi-year research project** to expand the customer-base of farmers markets shoppers

- Sought to identify **needs**, **barriers,** & **possible interventions** to increase access to farmers markets for low-income shoppers & people of color.

- **Mixed-methods** design with **community-engaged approach**.

Why we modified Delphi method

- **Virtual** community-engaged method during pandemic.

- **Member check** preliminary needs assessment findings to ground truth by confirming accuracy, seeking consensus, & gleaning additional qualitative feedback.

- **Build consensus** with opportunities for mutual understanding, trust building, compromise, & buy-in between stakeholders.

- **Prioritize** top barriers & possible interventions based on different expertise & lived experiences.

Modified Delphi Method

Qualitative Data

Focus Group 1 → **Focus Group 2** → **Focus Group 3**

Quantitative Data

Survey 1 → Survey 2 → Survey 3

Findings

Modified Delphi Method

	Modified Delphi	Traditional Delphi	Focus Group Method
Type of method	**Mixed** method	Quantitative	Qualitative
What it is	A planned and systematic **combination of focus groups and surveys** after each round of Delphi	An iterative survey that begins with open-ended elicitation round followed by 2 close-ended rounds asking expert panel to rank items from round 1	A planned, relaxed dialogue among small group of people on a specific topic
When to use	To **understand the needs, barriers, issues in-depth**, beyond ranking of the Delphi items	To develop and achieve expert consensus on a complex issue or when available knowledge is subject to uncertainty	To identify problems and encourage divergent thinking in a group setting
Who is at the table	**Experts and community stakeholders** with lived experiences	People with organizational affiliations or expertise in the area	People with similar characteristics and lived experiences
Main benefit	Gaining **richer contextual information** in addition to **achieving consensus**	**Achieves consensus** which can be challenging when working on complex issues	In-depth information on the common needs, issues, barriers
Limitation	**Time-consuming** to run and analyze data	Not recommended for outcomes evaluation	Not recommended for decision-making

Our process

What we did

- **3 consecutive virtual Delphi focus groups** (Zoom)
- **3 surveys followed each focus group** (Qualtrics)

Who was invited

- **Expert panel**: farmers market vendors, low-income shoppers, community advocates, and farmers market managers
- **Inclusive space** for **English and Spanish**-speaking **participants** with **real-time simultaneous interpretation**

Format

- **Focus groups** included a total of **12 people**, with opportunity for smaller breakout group; safe space for open discussion
- **Delphi Survey** link and QR code were provided at the end of each focus group; opportunity to express opinions anonymously

What we found: Barriers

Barriers	% Agree/ Strongly Agree (n=12)
Lack of awareness about which **forms of payment** besides cash are accepted at markets	90
Lack of awareness about **market season**	90
Lack of awareness about **CalFresh/Market Match** at market	89
Lack of awareness about **pandemic EBT** (Electronic Benefit Transfer) at markets	89
Lack of awareness about **market locations**	80
Lack of awareness about **market dates**	80
Lack of awareness about **market staff available** to assist with questions	80
Lack of awareness about **market times**	70

What we found: Interventions

Interventions	% Somewhat Important/ Important (n=12)
Making sure **new CalFresh users know about CalFresh** and **Market Match**	100
How important is it to use the following advertising channels to increase awareness about the farmers markets? **Radio**	100
How important is it to use the following advertising channels to increase awareness about the Farmers Markets? **Signage, road signs, street banners**	100
How important is it to advertise markets in the following ways? **Inform community residents about CalFresh eligibility**	100
How important is it to advertise markets in the following ways? **Coupons/vouchers**	100
Other Marketing Interventions: **Make info booth easier to find**	100

Lessons Learned about the Method

- Provides **qualitative information** to understand the 'why' behind consensus.

- Requires **significant time** and people power for planning, delivery, & data analysis.

- Holds promise for **application in Extension**.

- Replication needed to **refine delivery** of innovative method.

Using the Findings in the Field

- Resulted in a list of **consensus priorities** which were later whittled down based on feasibility

- Method led to both **data overwhelm** _and_ **data validation** of what was already known anecdotally.

- In hindsight, community partners wished the method was…

    - more **targeted** to fewer variables

    - **built off of what had been previously tried** & failed

    - more time to explore **divergence**, disagreement, & contention

Continued Reflections

- Additional processes may be needed for iterative process of **ideation**, **program design, & feasibility planning**

- Consensus **≠ Rank order by highest priority** (e.g. prioritization given limited resources)

- Consensus **≠ Interrelated topics** (e.g. a suite of interventions that work together)

- **Be clear** about by who, how, when, and why info will be used to ensure results are actionable.

- Follow up to understand **ongoing impacts over time**

Citation for more information

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Delphi Method with Virtual Focus Group Series

Goal: prioritize research-based
- **barriers** to accessing farmers markets
- **interventions** for shopping at farmers markets

Research data

Round 0

Filter research-based interventions with market managers

Round 1

Share research findings
+
Discuss, reflect & refine barriers and interventions

Survey 1

Round 2

Discuss, reflect, & refine barriers and interventions

Survey 2

Round 3

Discuss & Converge on top barriers and interventions

Survey 3

Consensus on top research-based barriers & interventions