

Survey or Focus Group: Which to Use When

	Use a Survey When:	Use a Focus Group When:
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want to know the “average.” You want to follow data trends. You want to compare “apples to apples.” A decision formula requires hard data. You have identified key issues through a small group format and want to know what the larger group thinks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have received unexplainable or inconsistent results from a survey you conducted that you would like to clarify. You have a deep or complex issue you want to understand. It is strategically or politically important to include a wide variety of opinions. You are trying to develop some preliminary theories of why things are the way they are. You need to generate solutions customized to a specific sub-population.
Depth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You need a little information about a lot of different topical areas. You think you already know some of the answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want to hear people’s feelings, attitudes, insights, and perceptions. You want detailed information on a specific issue or problem area. You don’t know what the issues are.
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have constructed or adopted a quality survey tool that asks only the most essential questions in a friendly and understandable format. The people you want to survey are interested enough in the topic(s) you’re asking about to complete the survey. The people you want to survey are self-motivated to provide thoughtful answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of your questions require probing or prompting to elicit useful information. People need time to ponder their answers. People are not sure how they feel until they have the opportunity to talk about the issue or topic with others. Giving people the opportunity to change and add to their original answers will enhance the quality of the data. Solving the issue requires the insights of a group of people close to the issue.
Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most people would not feel comfortable talking about the topic in the presence of others. The topic is so controversial that it would cause a distracting polarity within a group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People will provide more in-depth and revealing answers in response to a stimulating discussion. You are interested in individuals’ reflective and thoughtful remarks. You want to hear a diversity of opinion.