Attention to ending sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and stalking on campuses increasingly focuses on engaging men as allies. Most colleges now encourage men to participate in awareness-building events like the White Ribbon Campaign, Red Flag bystander intervention campaign, or Walk a Mile in Her Shoes. These events take a gender neutral approach that provides space for men to be involved, however, rarely provide opportunities for critical reflection on masculinities as a component of violence prevention strategies. In addition, the impact of prevention activities designed to engage men remain few in number. Campuses often need to learn more from males in their communities to improve the development and effectiveness of activities to engage men in ending sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

Focus groups are a useful and manageable way to gather information from the men in your campus. A focus group is a form of qualitative research that involves a small group of participants, usually somewhere in the range of six to twelve people, who are part of or connected to your intended audience(s). The focus group is run by one or two moderators who are skilled at asking questions, at making people feel comfortable, and at keeping their judgments and opinions out of the discussion. The discussions are documented with video or audio recording or note taking to capture participants’ responses. Usually three to four focus groups are conducted on a particular subject.

Examples of topics you can investigate related to engaging men include:

- the attitudes of men on your campus toward sexual assault, stalking, and domestic and dating violence
- their knowledge of masculine social norms on campus
- their assumptions and knowledge about their role in prevention
- their involvement in reducing violence on campus
- their responses to healthy masculinity programming you are developing
- their feedback on programming after it has been implemented

Focus groups are advantageous because they are inexpensive, fairly easy to organize, offer the opportunity for more in depth feedback, and allow for the possibility of participants building upon one another’s responses.

**Different Types of Focus Groups**

*Formative focus group evaluation* guides the development of a program in its early stages. It helps form or shape a new program by investigating the needs of the population to be served. This assessment type can be useful for a needs assessment or to test program plans, messages, and materials before
launching a full-scale program or campaign. While formative assessment helps identify your audience’s needs and concerns and the appropriateness of your approach, outcome focus group assessment takes place after you have implemented the programming and explores whether its impact. What, for instance, did men learn through a curriculum or how did they respond to a campaign’s messages?

### Recruiting Participants for a Focus Group

In terms of recruiting participants, identify the audience your engaging men programming is intended to reach. Will your programming be for all the men on campus? Will it be solely for fraternity members? For athletes? Male peer educators? GBTQ students? Will it be intended to reach a certain age group? First-year male students? If the programming is intended for all the men on campus, make sure, to the extent possible, that the diversity of the campus is represented in the focus group participants. Do this by designating different focus groups for different groups of men on campus.

Make a list of who would make good contacts for outreach to your intended audience and see if they can help you recruit. Go to where the men congregate and approach them there. Appeal to them for their help in making the campus a better place for everyone; tell them that their voices and insights are vital. Since men can be defensive about sexual assault, stalking, and domestic and dating violence, make clear when you recruit that you are interested in developing positive programming around healthy masculinity. If you have difficulty recruiting, interview a few people who have agreed to participate to see what ideas they have about recruitment that might help you.

### Who Should Facilitate the Focus Group?

Should a male or a female facilitate focus groups on engaging men? There is not a general answer to this question. It might be better for a male to facilitate when trying to learn about campus men’s attitudes toward gender-based violence since it is possible participants would say what they assume a female facilitator would expect to hear. On the other hand, if a male facilitator doesn’t have the skills necessary to facilitate, then a female facilitator who does would be better. Many of the skills required of a focus group facilitator go against traditional norms of masculinity, so the male facilitator must be comfortable acting against those norms. These skills and their connection with gender norms are explained in the next section.

You can learn more about conducting focus groups at:


### Facilitator Dos and Don’ts

Gender stereotypes have long been associated with the skill of listening – men are bad at it, women are better. Men are socialized to speak rather than listen, so much so that there are idiomatic words describing men speaking over women – “manerrupting,” for instance, which is a frequent phenomenon in the working world. Since listening is of central importance when facilitating, this inclination to speak rather than listen runs counter to the skill set necessary to run a focus group. Here are some of the focus
group facilitator “dos” and “don’ts” that run counter to gender norms associated with men and listening.

Dos
- Show an interest in the responses of all participants
- Use a strategy of “not knowing” to avoid expressing an opinion
- Demonstrate empathy for all participants, regardless of their backgrounds
- Use active listening and questioning skills to learn and communicate respect

Don’ts
- Don’t interrupt anyone speaking
- Don’t let one or two people dominate the conversation
- Don’t insert your personal opinions or judgements into the conversation (they will likely influence what participants say)
- Don’t shut down anyone whose opinions you consider wrong

To build out these lists further, we can turn to Naomi Henderson’s "Qualities of a Master Moderator" (QMRR, December 1989), where she identifies 25 qualities that make a good focus group facilitator. For the beginner, Quirk’s Marketing Research Media narrows Henderson’s 25 down to a more manageable 12. Since someone considering running focus groups on a campus is not intending to become a professional moderator, we narrow the number even further:

1. Genuine interest in people, their behavior, emotions, lifestyles, passions and opinions.
2. Acceptance and appreciation for the differences in people, especially those whose lives vary greatly from your own, what Henderson refers to as unconditional positive regard.
3. Good listening skills, the ability to hear both what is being said and to identify what is not being said.
4. Good observation skills, the ability to see in detail what is happening or not happening and to interpret body language.
5. Interest in a wide range of topics and the ability to immerse yourself in the topic and learn the necessary knowledge and language quickly.
6. Good oral and written communication skills, the ability to clearly express yourself and to do so confidently in groups of all types and sizes.
7. Objectivity, the ability to set your personal ideas and feelings aside and remain open to the ideas and feelings of others.
8. Ability to think and function on at least three different levels simultaneously.


As was suggested in the beginning, the primary skill is listening. If participants don’t feel listened to, their contributions will likely be substantially reduced, and the information gleaned from the focus groups will be less informative.

You can learn about active listening skills at: http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html
Sample Questions for Learning about Men’s Concerns

Here are some focus group questions you might ask before you have begun program development in order to assess the knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes of some of the men in your intended audience(s).

1. What do you know about sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence? Where did you learn what you know?
2. What have you learned about preventing sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence on this campus? Where and how have you learned it? What would you change?
3. What do you think men’s role should be in preventing sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence on this campus?
4. What do you think unhealthy masculinity is? Healthy masculinity?
5. If healthy masculinity might play a role in preventing sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence on this campus, what do you think that role might be?
6. What should male students on this campus learn about preventing sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence? What should male faculty, administrators, and staff on this campus learn?
7. Would you take a piece of paper and jot down the three most important things you think we’ve talked about?

Sample Questions about Program Development

After you have developed ideas and/or products for engaging men programming, gather men from your intended audience(s) to solicit feedback. After establishing the purpose of the focus group and asking some opening questions designed to relax participants, here are some questions you might ask.

1. What words/feelings do you associate with this _____________ (logo, program name, etc.)? What do those words/feelings mean to you?
2. What do you like best about ________________ (some aspect of the engaging men program you have shown them or described)?
3. What do you like least about ________________ (some aspect of the engaging men program you have shown them or described)? How would you change it?
4. Where does your attention go when you look at/listen to/watch this ________________ (poster; video ad; audio ad; etc.)?
5. Which would you choose among these three options (three different messages/words; three different images, etc.)? Can you explain what about the option you chose appeals to you?
6. Would you make a list of where on campus you think it makes the most sense to place engaging men ads?
7. How do you think men on campus will respond to this engaging men programming? What would you take away from this engaging men programming?
Sample Questions about Program Outcome

You have implemented your programming campus-wide and now want to find out if it is having the impact you intended. The participants in these focus groups should not have participated in any of the program development focus groups because the goal is to learn from men whose experience of the programming has been uninfluenced by previous knowledge.

Rather than this document providing sample questions to use in focus groups to find out this information, it is best for you to create them using the intended outcomes you have developed for your programming. For instance, if one of your intended outcomes is “Ability to identify traits of healthy masculinity,” you could ask: “If you learned anything about healthy masculinity during the past few months, where did you learn it and what did you learn?” Or if an outcome is “Increased belief that men on campus can prevent sexual assault, stalking, and domestic and dating violence through bystander intervention,” you could ask, “How many people here saw these (bystander intervention) posters on campus? What did you take away from them?”

Making Use of Your Findings

The results of your focus groups can serve you in various ways. Analysis should begin by considering the intent of the study. For example, if the purpose is to narrow possible choices for developing the program, intricate analysis is probably not necessary. Look for consistent patterns of agreement in participants’ responses to help you decide what to rule out and what to use when developing your program. The results can be considered verifiable when multiple people would come to similar conclusions using the available documents and the raw data. Ideally, the moderator(s), anyone observing the focus groups or note taking should be involved in the analysis.

On the other hand, writing a formal report could be useful if you might need to inform a broad group of people about the reasons for choices made while creating the engaging men program. The process for creating such a report can become elaborate, but here are some descriptions that make it very manageable:

http://psu.uidaho.edu/focusgroup/evaluation/09.html
http://www.focusgrouptips.com/focus-group-results.html