

Not everyone in a target audience will make the changes the Extension educators would like them to make. Yet, **HERE'S THE BIG PICTURE:** to reduce or eliminate the problem that Extension's educational program is designed to address (water quality, food safety, herd health), requires that almost all of the target audience make behavior or management changes.

### BENEFITS OF TALKING ABOUT BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Identifying early in the program the problems or difficulties the participants have in making changes, provides the educator with an opportunity to address those barriers the next time the program is run and at an early point in the program **BEFORE** a new group of participants try to make changes.

To increase the likelihood of the participants' willingness to identify a lack of change and what prevented or limited the change, try this technique called Secret Pooling in a focus group-like discussion between multiple sessions in a program or post program.

Say to the participants in a focus-group-like discussion (after talking about changes): *Not everyone may have had a chance to make changes. In a moment, I'm going to ask you to think about the problems you faced in making changes related to [the issue in this program]. Please take a small card in the center of the table and write down the most challenging problem you had in making a change. Use two to three sentences. Write so I can understand your writing, but don't put your name on it.*

*When you're finished, fold the card in half and put it in this basket I'm passing around.*

When everyone has placed a card in the basket, say: *You can see I am shaking up the cards in the basket and passing the basket around. Everyone pick one card and read it quietly.*

*As a group, now let's hear and talk about the problems that this group faced in making changes. When you are ready, read the problem on the card to the group and indicate*

- *Why you think this might be a problem*
- *One way this problem or challenge could be overcome and changes made.*

### TO EASILY TALLY BARRIERS

Keep track unobtrusively on a note card of:

- The number (and %) of participants who did *not* make changes
- The array of barriers that emerged from the group. This information is useful for teaching this session the next time for their barriers and potential solutions reflect the thinking of the target audience and can be more valid.

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## OTHER BENEFITS OF USING SECRET POOLING IN A FOCUS GROUP-LIKE DISCUSSION TO LEARN ABOUT BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Secret pooling can

- Be a good technique to use among people who know one another.
- Provide a quiet means of learning the barriers to change.
- Overcome participants' reluctance to discuss their lack of change, publically.
- Protect participants' anonymity.
- Educate other participants to other barriers thus demonstrating that no individual is alone. Research has shown this information is *very interesting to most participants!*

## ANOTHER USE OF SECRET POOLING TO EVOKE DISCUSSION

Stimulate a more balanced discussion of a sensitive topic or the negative aspects of a topic in a committee meeting by presenting a question for discussion, giving the group a moment for reflection, and then asking committee members to describe on a card, their position and perhaps a reason for it. After collecting the folded cards in a container, have the cards chosen randomly from the container by each member of the committee. Have each committee member read the position and reason out loud, and *agree or disagree with that position and give reasons*. Just like in a focus group, revealing the ideas of someone else on the card

- Disassociates a viewpoint from the person who made it, possibly reducing bias about the viewpoint.
- Aids those who tend to be reserved, but insures that their ideas will be heard.
- Retards those who tend to be too dominant in committee meetings by insuring others' ideas will surface in a balanced way.

## LEARNING ABOUT IMPACTS

See previous TIPSHEET #94 for ensuring a lively discussion among participants about program impacts. <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS94.pdf>. You may want to discuss the impacts first and then the barriers to change.

## OTHER FOCUS GROUP MODERATING TECHNIQUES

Kiernan, M., Kiernan, N.E., & Goldberg, J. (2003). Using Standard Phrases in Qualitative Interviews. Tipsheet #69, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS69.pdf>.

Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2005). Focus Group Moderator Critique. Tipsheet #73, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS73.pdf>.

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The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2011). Ensuring full disclosure among participants about the BARRIERS TO CHANGE. Tipsheet #95, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS95.pdf>.

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