

The **6-month Focus Group** aims to explore lasting changes from the program, in participants' lives, including shifts in self-efficacy, knowledge, and ongoing engagement with support services. Using open discussion and art-based activities, the group reflects on both intended outcomes and unexpected impacts from the program.

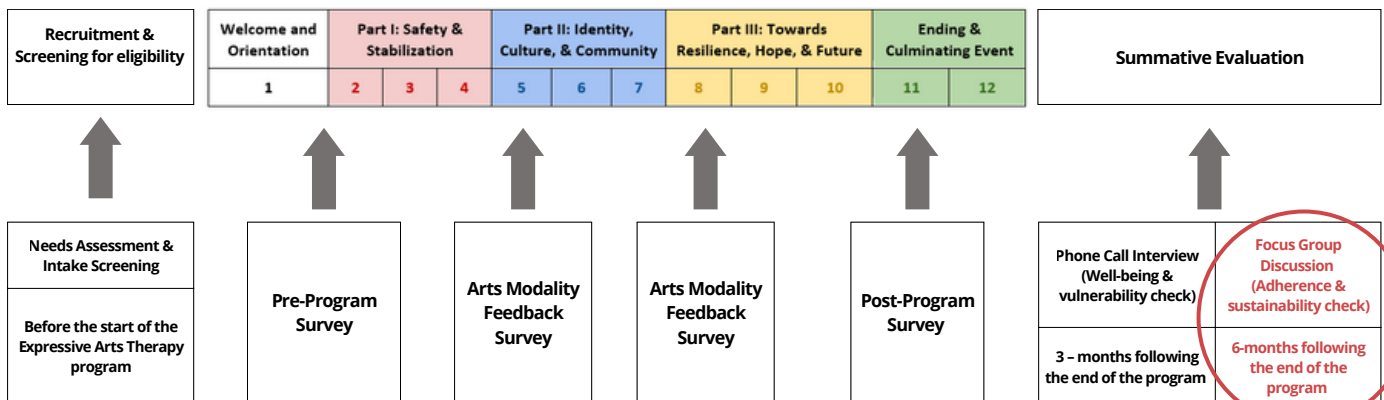
This focus group is conducted in-person, six months after the program concludes. Focus groups are facilitated by a peer researcher, a trained placement student or volunteer, with interpreters as needed.

Key Themes: Program Feedback, Accessing Settlement Resources, Community Belonging, Mental Wellbeing, Adopting Art Activities

Special Considerations

- Be flexible with attendance, as some participants may be unable to join in person due to work, training, or new commitments that emerged after the program.
- When appropriate, offer a hybrid format that includes both in-person and online participation.
- Hold the session in the same location as the original HEAL program to maintain comfort and familiarity.
- If language support is required, involve a native speaker of the participant's preferred language.

Program & Evaluation Cycle



Reference: Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (2025). Tool: 3 Month Post Program Check In.

This tool is produced for the project titled: "HEAL - Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life" funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (Arrangement # 2223-HQ-000042) for Preventing and Addressing Family Violence for a period of 4 years. This project is approved by the REB of the Community Research Ethics Office (Canada) Corp., c/o Centre for Community Based Research, 190 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G5 (CREO REB file # 277). Email: creo@communitybasedresearch.ca. Telephone: 1-888-411-2736.

This checklist serves as an initial guide for key considerations in delivering HEAL Program 6 month focus group. It is not an exhaustive list, but rather a tool to spark dialogue and support individuals and organizations in developing or enhancing program evaluation efforts.

Preparation Phase

- Identify and train facilitators implementing the focus group discussion guide to ensure activities and goals of the discussions are met.
- Arrange session date/time that suits participants schedules. Share expectations of the session (e.g. duration, activities in brief, take aways, format, accommodations and accessibility resources etc.) to prepare participants.
- Arrange for interpretation as needed and/or contract hire a facilitator that speaks the same language as participants.
- Prepare materials for documentation (e.g. recording devices, notes, sticky notes etc.) to capture the session.

Materials

- Audio Recorder
- Coloured A4 sheets
- Pens, Pencils, Markers, Oil pastels
- Large chart paper
- Colourful sticky notes
- Coloured A4 sheets

While this checklist provides a helpful starting point, tailor this tool to meet the diverse needs of your facilitator teams. Adopt and make this tool relevant to your context. Reflect and learn together.

Implementation Phase

- Sessions are led by integrating art and evaluation activities to mimic the expressive arts programs. Prioritize participant-led conversations and adjust the pace of the session based on the group's literacy levels and needs. Make evaluation fun and exciting! Use your creativity and imagination.
- Continue to incorporate self and co-regulation techniques throughout the session to remind and reinforce learnings from the program. Take breaks throughout, sharing requires processing and vulnerability.
- Emphasize to participants the purpose of feedback: to make a meaningful difference to others in the communities that are interested in expressive art programs for mental health and wellbeing. It is important that participants understand how, why, when, where and who is being impacted by their feedback.
- Use the session guide to complete the following focus group sections: 1) opening discussion 2) rectangle survey activity 3) collective poetry activity 4) conclusion and next steps.
- Once session has ended offer gratitude and give aways to participants. Leave space and time for participants to mix and mingle following the session or if they have any further questions.

Wrap Up Phase

- Share upcoming Arts and Culture visits, community arts programs, and additional evaluation sessions.
- Following up with participants that have disclosed needing additional support and follow-up no more than 2-weeks following the conversation to ensure promptness of support.
- For any artwork created by participants, make sure to record participant's interpretation of their work. Be sure to store data collected as outlined by your agency data storage regulations.
- Conduct facilitator debrief to document the highlights, challenges, and improvements of the tool.

TOOL : 6 Month Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

Hello, welcome to our 6 – month follow-up group discussion. Thank you for taking the time today to come in! Today's discussion will take 2-3 hours and we will be sharing about our experience participating in the [insert program name]. We will have breaks and refreshments throughout the session, please help yourself.

[Facilitation team introduces themselves if they are new to the participant group.]

Consent *Just as a reminder, please be aware that your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can decide not to participate, to withdraw your participation at any time, and to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you do have concerns or questions about resources or support, I will be able to provide you with information after the interview. Everything that you say is confidential and your name will not be associated in any way with your responses.*

Also, we will be audio-recording this conversation so that we can accurately capture your responses. If at any time you do not want me to record something, let me know and I will turn off the recorder. We will delete the audio recording after an anonymous transcript of our conversation is created. The information you share with me will be kept confidential, which means that in no way will your words be identified to you.

This focus group aims to learn more about your experience in the [insert program name]. Your feedback is valuable in learning more about the effectiveness of the expressive arts therapy intervention, and what kinds of resources and services can support you best in your life and in situations of violence.

Just a quick reminder - we are in a group setting, so let's make sure everyone has a chance to share. All thoughts and comments are welcome, and let's be respectful of each other's views.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

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Rapport Building and Introduction Questions

Let's begin with a simple check in activity,

[Repeat any check-in activities that were previously well received by the group to develop familiarity and comfort.]

Thank you for taking part in the check-in activity. Since we are all feeling a bit more settled and comfortable, let's go ahead and begin our conversation.

1. How has everyone been?

- Does anyone want to share any major changes in their lives since completing the program?

2. What was your first impression of the [insert program name]?

- Was it what you expected?
- Is there anything which surprised you?
- What did you want to see more of?
- How would you improve the [insert program name]?

3. Have you been able to benefit from any other programs or services since joining the [insert program name]?

- How was your experience with accessing these services? For example, services related to safety, gender-based violence, settlement, etc.

4. How has the [insert program name] made any changes to your community involvement or feeling of belonging within the community?

- How have you been involved, engaged, connected, or felt supported in the community?

Improvement Towards Better Mental Health Outcomes

Evaluation Tool – Rectangle Activity

This tool was designed as an adaptation of the work by Professor Daniel Buckles (Carleton University) on evaluation in a participatory action research. It allows for people to engage in discussion and to move around and engage in arts-based methods if they are more comfortable.

Materials: Coloured A4 sheets, pens, pencils, markers, oil pastels, 3 large sheets of paper

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Improvement Towards Better Mental Health Outcomes

Instructions:

1. Prior to the session, facilitators prepare 3 large pieces of paper. Each paper is labelled: Disagree, Neutral/Don't Know, Agree.

For this activity, we will be reflecting on the changes in your life since completing the [insert program name]. As you can see, we have three sheets of paper here labelled Agree, Not Sure, and Disagree. We will be passing around some coloured A4 sheets that we will use to answer if you agree or disagree with the following statements. You can also explain your answer by writing on the paper sheets.

2. Participants are asked questions by peer research and/or evaluation facilitators related to [insert program name] experience and outcomes (see questions/statements below).

3. Provide participants with writing utensils (e.g. markers, pens, pencils) and time to respond to each of the statements in the coloured paper and pin them on the charts labelled Agree, Neutral/Don't Know, Disagree. Participants are asked to share more about their responses if they wish before continuing to the next statement.

5. Peer researchers will gather the chart and the audio recording, transcribe the notes into usable data to be analyzed and reported on.

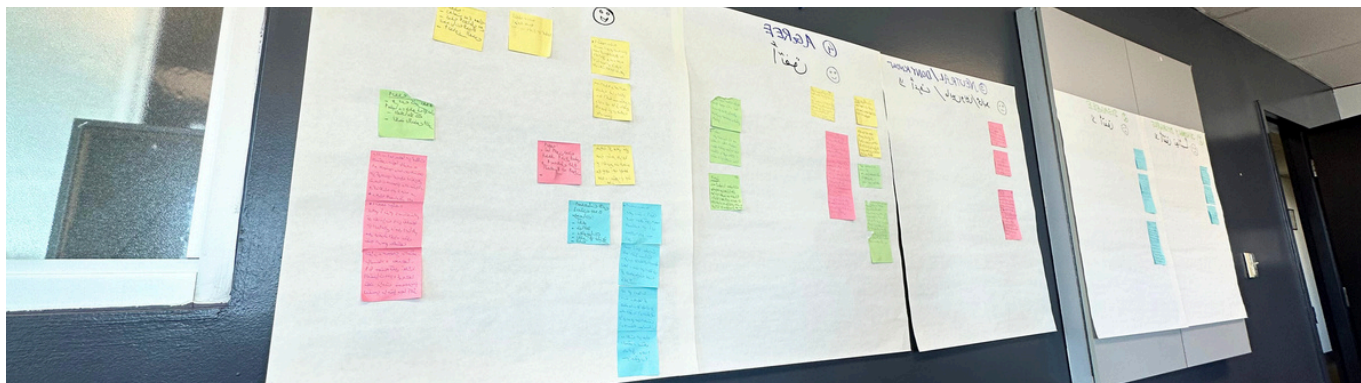
Questions/Statements:

1. I have gained a more positive outlook on my life after the [insert program name].

- Please explain how so / If not Why not?

2. I use the art activities from the [insert program name] often.

- Ex: to manage stress, to increase positivity, self-esteem, confidence, sense of control, or sense of belonging, etc. Write what art activities you have been using / if no, Why not?



TOOL : 6 Month Focus Group Discussion Guide

Improvement Towards Better Mental Health Outcomes

Questions/Statements:

3. I have gained coping strategies (skills, knowledge and techniques) through this program that I implement in my life.
 - Please describe how you are implementing the strategies / If no, Why not?

4. I am more knowledgeable about my rights as a newcomer and the kinds of support available to me.
 - Please describe something you learned. (What is something I learned in this program? such as: healthy relationships, human rights, psychoeducation etc.) / If no, Why not?

- 5. I have reached out to support resources or others for help, since joining the program Ex: reaching out to my network of support, and accessing resources in the community. Please describe one source of support for you. / If no, Why not?

Closing Focus Group: Collective Poetry Activity

Participants and facilitators gather around the main table. Place 3 sheets of chart paper in the center and distribute coloured A4 paper to each participant.

Before we come to a close, we have one more activity. We will be co-creating three poems by reflecting on our experiences from this program. I am going to ask everyone three questions. For each question, you can write a word or a sentence as a response and place it on the designated charts. Once everyone is finished, someone will read out all the responses and that will be our poem. We will repeat the process for the second and third question until we have three separate poems. Does that sound okay?

Okay, great. [read the first question].

1. Give participants time to write their responses and place it on the designated chart.
2. Ask if someone in the group would like to read out the responses.
3. Repeat the process with second and third questions.
4. Thank the participants for creating the poems and allow participants to discuss their thoughts and reflect on the poems

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Closing Focus Group

5. Make sure all three poems are photographed by a volunteer or placement student.

6. Questions to ask for each poem:

- One word or sentence to describe how you are feeling at this moment.
- One word or sentence to describe something unexpected that you experienced or learned - through/while in - the program.
- One word or sentence to describe a change or growth moment following the completion of the [insert program name].

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this discussion and for sharing your experiences after completing the [insert program name].

I will be available after this session if anyone has any questions or concerns. Please reach out to me if you are in need of support. [Share any upcoming social gathering or events planned]



Images of focus group activities: Left, collective poetry. Right, focus group discussion.