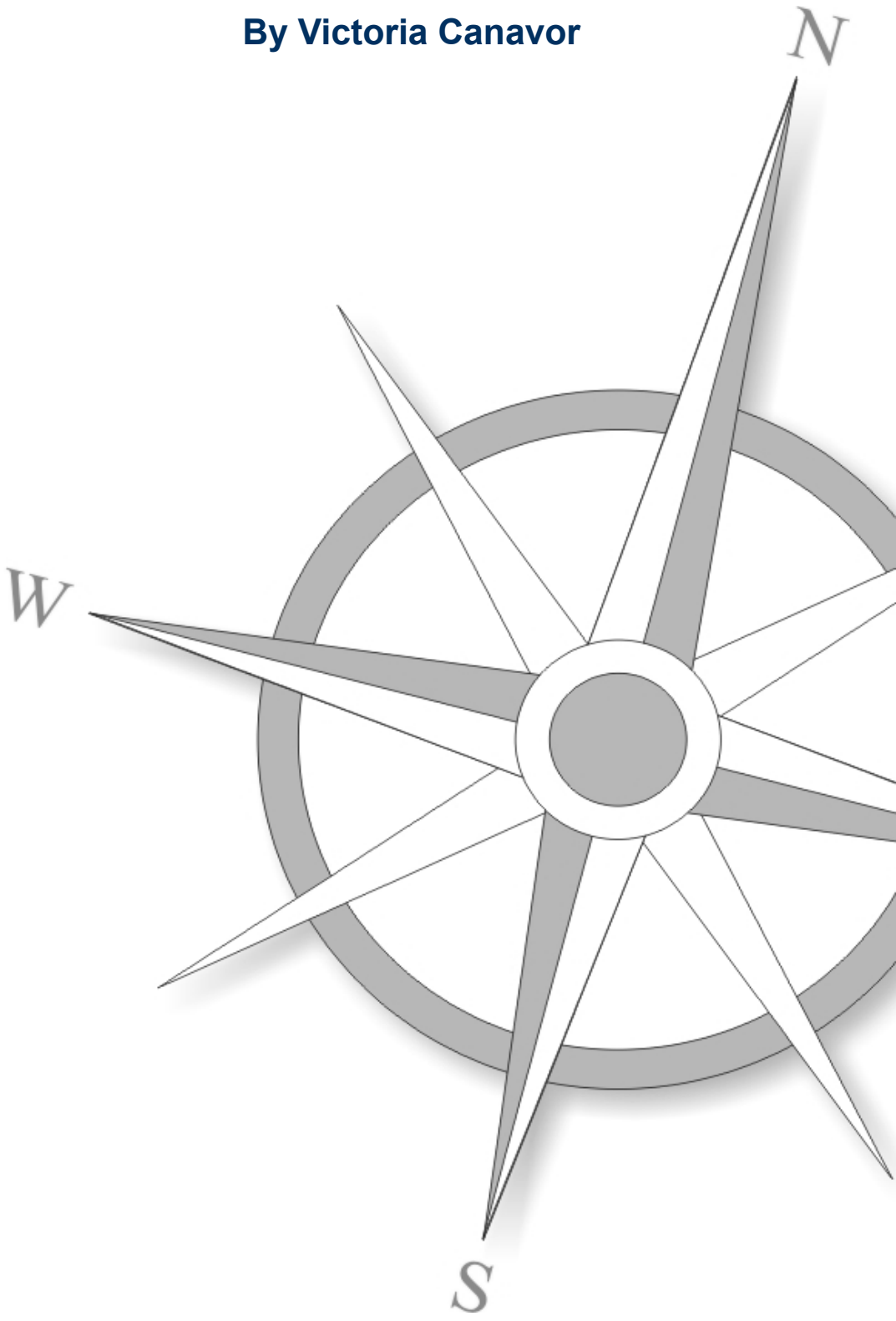
# From Proposal to Presentation:
## *The Focus Group Process at NDI*

**By Victoria Canavor**




NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

# From Proposal to Presentation: The Focus Group Process at NDI

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# From Proposal to Presentation: The Focus Group Process at NDI


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## PREFACE

Undertaking a focus group or survey research project might seem as easy as adding a few descriptive sentences to a proposal, but the research process requires a great deal of time and money. It is not something that can be done in just a week or with one or two trainings. Methodologically sound research entails serious preparation, close attention to detail and expertise.

A number of NDI programs have integrated research into activities intended to help political parties, government officials, and civil society leaders become more responsive to and representative of citizens. Party programs have used focus groups in particular as a tool to help parties develop more informed policies and messages, create new outreach strategies and organize issue-based campaigns.

It is for this reason that the Political Party Development Team produced "From Proposal to Presentation: The Focus Group Process at NDI." The guide is designed to help NDI program staff in the field and in D.C. plan for and conduct—with the assistance of an outside research consultant or firm—a series of focus groups. The first four chapters introduce qualitative and quantitative research, explain how to prepare a proposal and budget, describe the NDI procurement process for hiring a consultant or firm, and outline considerations specific to party programs. The remaining four chapters look at focus group methodology, the role of the moderator, writing the moderator's guide, and preparing presentations and reports appropriate to your target audiences. Scattered throughout the guide and appendices are examples and lessons learned from NDI programs.

There are many people within and outside NDI who contributed to this guide, in particular Ivan Doherty, senior associate and director of political party programs, and Jim Della-Giacoma, senior advisor of the Citizen Participation Team. In addition, Ken Wollack, Paul Rowland, Stephanie Lynn, Scott Kearin, Joe Gleason, Terry Hoverter, Oren Ipp, Conor Bohan, Erin Mathews, Amy Gray, Tricia Keller, Mark Feierstein, Susana McCollom, John Moreira, Raymond Kuo and several other colleagues kindly offered suggestions, resources and support.

We wish you the best of luck as you begin your research project. Though organizing focus groups is a lot of work, when done well, the results are worth it.

—Victoria Canavor, Political Party Development Team

# Introduction

***Research and NDI***

## USING THIS GUIDE

Perhaps your team is thinking about conducting focus group research to determine how voters in Morocco feel about political parties or how women in Slovakia view democracy. You've just started working at NDI or have moved to the field. Sounds like an interesting project, but where do you start?

This guide will help you and other NDI staff understand how to put together a focus group research project—beginning with the proposal and ending with the presentation. Use the guide to answer basic questions about the focus group process. If you need more detailed information on public opinion research, please feel free to contact the Political Party Development Team. In addition to this guide, we have focus group proposals, moderators' guides, presentations and reports, along with other manuals and documents that may be helpful.

Most NDI programs with a public opinion component will require a research specialist, so this guide is geared towards working with a professional consultant or firm. Some programs have relied on in-house experience and knowledge to conduct research, but they should not be used as a model for teams unfamiliar with the intricacies of public opinion research.

## ABOUT QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Public opinion research is a strategic tool used by political parties, governments and organizations worldwide to determine messages, targeting and policy development. Research is a central part of any political party organization, helping to inform policymaking with citizens' views, develop strategy, create effective and responsive platforms and messages, and identify voters. Issue organizations such as the Sierra Club and the National Education Association also conduct research for similar purposes, while corporations may use research to determine employee attitudes, test new logos, advertisements or products, or position themselves in a market.

There are two main types of public opinion research—qualitative and quantitative. You're probably more familiar with the survey, or poll, a type of quantitative research that involves asking a large number of people a specific set of close-ended questions. With proper sampling and analysis, quantitative research allows us to generate percentages and make predictions.

Qualitative research, unlike quantitative, does not use statistical methods as the primary means to gather and sort information. Instead, qualitative research is marked by observations—words which describe the issue in question.

# Introduction

Focus groups and interviews are among the various types of qualitative research. Focus groups are designed to facilitate the expression of thoughts and attitudes in open-ended questions, providing an opportunity to hear voices "behind the numbers."

Researchers often conduct both qualitative and quantitative research for a project. When used in conjunction with quantitative research, focus groups allow researchers to explore questions and issues prior to developing a survey, and help explain responses and probe further after a survey.

*A focus group provides an opportunity to hear the voices "behind the numbers."*

## NDI AND FOCUS GROUPS

NDI has conducted focus group research in more than 45 countries around the world, including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, Morocco, Nepal, Venezuela and Yemen.

Why is this a popular tool in NDI programming? Focus groups can bring citizens into the policy-making process. Although research is not a substitute for representative government or effective public consultation, NDI can use it to help strengthen democratic institutions by taking the public into account—often for the first time. By having a forum to freely voice opinions, concerns and attitudes, participants are able to contribute to the larger dialogue taking place.

**NDI HAS CONDUCTED RESEARCH IN:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | Haiti | Namibia |
| Angola | Indonesia | Nepal |
| Bahrain | Iraq | N. Ireland |
| Bolivia | Kenya | Pakistan |
| BiH | Kosovo | Panama |
| Bulgaria | Lebanon | Serbia |
| Cambodia | Liberia | Slovakia |
| Colombia | Macedonia | S. Africa |
| Croatia | Malawi | Sudan |
| East Timor | Montenegro | Venezuela |
| Ethiopia | Morocco | WB/Gaza |
| Guatemala | Mozambique | Yemen |

Through public opinion research, NDI has helped political parties, civil society organizations and government officials to understand the strategic value of listening and responding to constituents, helping them to become more responsive and representative. Focus groups are also useful for local partners by giving them access to independent and reliable information in places where such data is hard to find. Additionally, focus groups can serve other international institutions such as the UN, regional bodies, embassies and government cooperation agencies in their analysis, planning and evaluation as well as in preparing education campaigns.

NDI has experience with survey research (or polling) as well. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Nepal and elsewhere, NDI polls have revealed voters' concerns and priorities, examined reform issues, and tracked voter attitudes both

preceding and following elections. In general, however, NDI more frequently uses focus groups, which provide depth and insight not found in survey data.

A policymaker may not listen to what NDI staff say. But when supported by focus group or survey results, the advice is harder to ignore; the voices of citizens themselves are more persuasive. In essence, results can provide hard evidence.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Political party and governance programs in Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Montenegro, Cambodia, Haiti and elsewhere have regularly incorporated research into their activities, with the primary objective of helping parties or officials to become more responsive to citizens' concerns. Several citizen participation programs have also employed focus groups in planning and implementing programs. In East Timor, South Africa, Mozambique and other countries, NDI has used focus groups to help shape civic education efforts and monitor and evaluate programs.

The content of NDI's focus groups has varied widely. Topics range from general attitudes toward democracy and the responsiveness of political leaders to subjects like secondary education, pro-poor policies and security sector reform. A few examples:

- In Indonesia in 2004, NDI conducted focus groups to help parties sharpen their campaign strategies ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections. The research helped NDI and the international community to better understand the phenomenal rise of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the broad base of support his candidacy was attracting.

- In Liberia in July 2004, NDI worked with a group of local NGO partners to conduct a round of focus groups. The results guided future civic and voter education efforts and helped NDI to understand citizens' attitudes during a difficult transition from civil war to peace.

- Focus groups in Northern Ireland in February 2003 revealed voters' deep distrust of political parties—and the need for these parties to reconsider strategies and reform. The findings were used by NDI to help party leaders, press officers and candidates soften their language and deliver more effective messages.

# Introduction

- In Haiti in September 2002, focus groups effectively demonstrated to political party leaders the expectations, hopes (or hopelessness) and frustrations of their citizens. By sharing this data with each of the parties, NDI obtained buy-in for future political party programming.

- In 2001, a series of focus groups in East Timor helped measure citizens' level of democratic knowledge ahead of Civic Forum, a planned grassroots participation program. In 2002, a new round of focus groups revealed frustration with absent members of parliament, giving NDI added impetus to push ahead with a constituency outreach component in the face of MPs resistance.

- In Bulgaria in 2001, focus group research served to explore citizens' attitudes and media attitudes toward NGO activities, as well as determine parliamentarians' awareness of and willingness to engage with NGOs. The research helped to identify key issues and party caucuses were able to use the information to better craft strategy.

- In Mozambique in the early and mid-1990s, NDI's research enabled the international community to design more effective civic and voter education programs.

In some countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where NDI is establishing an office or developing new programs, research has played a crucial role in understanding the political landscape, shaping NDI's programmatic approach, and establishing a profile for the Institute. In addition, research has helped NDI to evaluate its own programming, such as in the West Bank and Gaza, where focus groups demonstrated Civic Forum participants tended to have a greater sense of trust in local government officials than non-Civic Forum participants.

*For information on incorporating research into your political party program, please read Chapter 4. For more information on the use of focus groups in civic programs, please contact the Citizen Participation Team. You can also refer to the May 2003 Civic Update.*

# Chapter 1

## *Understanding Focus Groups*

1

Before you can write a proposal or hire a consultant or firm, you should decide what type of research is appropriate for your program. Do you want to understand the opinions and perceptions of a particular group of people? Then focus groups would work well. Do you want to understand the national mood or support for a particular party or behavior? Perhaps a survey would be better.

Neither method is inherently superior. Ideally, we could combine quantitative and qualitative research methods to learn even more for our programs. Limited budgets and a lack of infrastructure, though, often preclude this from happening.

## WHAT ARE FOCUS GROUPS?

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*"A focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Each group is conducted with six to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussions are relaxed, and often participants enjoy sharing their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments of others."*

—Richard Krueger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*

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Focus groups are small, targeted discussions led by moderators who seek to create a comfortable environment for all participants. Conducted in a series in order to draw out patterns, participants in each group are selected based on common demographic characteristics or experiences. Focus groups are typically comprised of six to ten people—large enough to exchange ideas and opinions, but small enough for everyone to participate in the discussion.

A skilled moderator uses a discussion guide of open-ended questions that follows a logical sequence and addresses topics related to the research's purpose. This open-ended format allows participants to respond in their own words, and lets researchers explore attitudes and opinions in a more in-depth manner. Discussions typically run from 90 to 120 minutes, possibly longer in some countries.

**WHAT'S IN A FOCUS GROUP**

- ☑ Six to ten participants with common demographic traits
- ☑ A skilled moderator
- ☑ A guide with open-ended questions

# Chapter 1

1

## WHY FOCUS GROUPS?

Focus groups let us:

- Measure the depth of emotion and feeling around issues.
- Understand *why* something is most important to people.
- Hear how citizens discuss issues and the language they employ.
- Gain insight into the reasons people feel and behave the way they do.

Focus groups reveal not just what people think, but also why they think that way, how they formulate opinions and how strongly these opinions are held. They allow researchers to probe important issues, and also let participants raise unexpected issues or concerns. The organized discussion format enables participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not emerge during in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys.

This type of research can help in assessing concepts, policies and messages, creating new ideas, and planning for quantitative research. The findings provide context and understanding, and are best used to inform decision-making processes. Focus groups are especially helpful in understanding the language people use when discussing particular ideas or concepts.

Qualitative findings, however, cannot be projected to a larger population. No matter how many groups you conduct, the results will not be statistically reliable.

## ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES



Focus groups have both strengths and weaknesses.

### ADVANTAGES

- Focus groups reveal insights and nuances that other research methods, such as surveys, can't. They can help discover hidden feelings and motives.
- Participants have the opportunity to volunteer information and express detailed feelings, opinions and attitudes.
- They provide language and context, explaining how participants communicate about this topic.
- They are more cost effective than individual interviews or a survey (though this depends on the number of groups conducted and locations selected).
- They capture a wider range of responses than individual interviews.
- Groups produce concentrated amounts of information on a precise topic of interest.
- The format allows for visual or audio props (such as campaign manuals or ad testing).
- The discussion group format can challenge and thus moderate extreme or unrepresentative viewpoints.

### DISADVANTAGES

- Focus groups are a non-scientific form of data collection.
- Results cannot be quantified.
- The small number of participants and lack of random selection limits the ability to generalize to a larger population.
- They present a logistical challenge: coordinating different schedules, selecting sites, finding the participants, hiring and/or training moderators, and more.
- They allow for a limited number of questions.
- A skilled moderator is required, one who is able to encourage participants to express their views and also keep the discussion on track.
- Participants may not express important concerns due to the group setting; the personal interaction may bias opinions.
- The researcher has less control over data collection because participants shape the discussion.
- They can be time consuming and difficult to interpret. Reports are subjective analyses of opinions, beliefs and assumptions.

# Chapter 1

1

## WHEN TO USE FOCUS GROUPS

Before proposing focus groups, make sure they are right for your program.

### USE FOCUS GROUPS WHEN[1]:

- ☑ You are looking for a range of feelings that people have about a specific topic.
- ☑ The purpose is to uncover factors that influence opinions, behavior or motivation.
- ☑ You need to hear the language people use to talk about an issue.
- ☑ You want to understand differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people (such as men and women, elites and the uneducated).
- ☑ You want to identify trends.
- ☑ You want ideas to emerge from the group.
- ☑ You want to pilot test ideas, messages, materials or policies.
- ☑ You plan to conduct a survey and want to inform the process.
- ☑ You need to shed light on survey data already collected.

### DON'T USE FOCUS GROUPS WHEN:

- ☒ You need statistical projections (e.g., 30% describe politicians as "corrupt").
- ☒ Other methodologies can produce better quality information.
- ☒ Other methodologies can produce the same quality information for less.
- ☒ You want to educate the participants.
- ☒ You want people to come to consensus.
- ☒ The environment is emotionally charged, and a group discussion is likely to intensify a conflict.
- ☒ You can't ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information.
- ☒ You are asking for sensitive information that should not be shared in a group.
- ☒ You don't plan to use the results but want to give the appearance of listening.
- ☒ You are in a politically repressed environment with very limited freedom of speech or association.

[1]Adapted from *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide to Applied Research.*

## OTHER METHODOLOGIES

### SURVEYS

Though this guide won't go into further detail about survey research, it is important to understand the difference between focus group and survey research.

A survey applies an identical set of close-ended questions to a selected sample of individuals. Survey data is statistically reliable—meaning that results can be projected to the larger population. Surveys reveal behavior and attitudes among the whole population and subgroups, such as age, gender, region, education, socio-economic class, political affiliation, etc. They can be used to predict future behavior and trends.

Focus groups are often used to help prepare topics and question wording for a survey, as well as to explore specific survey findings.

### INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews, also called key informant or one-on-one interviews, can help in preparing for focus group or survey research as well as complement it. Like focus groups, interviews give researchers room to examine and explore non-verbal gestures such as facial expressions and body language.

Interviews provide an opportunity to establish a sense of trust and explore thoughts on an even deeper level than focus groups. They allow for more flexibility in location, scheduling and range, and the one-on-one format helps avoid interpersonal group dynamics that influence responses through group pressure.

Conducting in-depth interviews is particularly helpful when working with people who:

- Are experts in their field (e.g. political or civic leaders or journalists).
- Are extremely sensitive for various reasons (e.g. political situations).
- Are in countries with limited political space, as well as restricted freedom of expression and/or association.
- Are less likely to express their true thoughts in a group setting.
- Require heightened confidentiality.
- Are difficult to access.
- Are difficult to schedule because of availability.

## COMPARING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH[2]

| ELEMENTS | QUALITATIVE | QUANTITATIVE |
|---|---|---|
| **Purpose** | To describe a situation, gain insight into a particular practice, belief, etc. | To predict something or to reveal the prevalence—how widespread is something?—of a practice or belief. |
| **Format** | No predetermined response categories (e.g.: question could ask "how satisfied are you with XYZ program?") | Standardized measures, response categories pre-determined and pre-supplied (e.g.: responses could range from "not at all satisfied" to "completely satisfied"). |
| **Resulting Data** | In-depth explanatory data from a small, representative segment of the population. | Wide breadth of data from a large, statistically representative segment of the population. |
| **Limitations** | Complicates the issues; cannot generalize results to larger population. | Simplifies the issues; can generalize results to larger population. |
| **Framework** | Draws out patterns from concepts and insights. | Tests a hypothesis, uses data to support a conclusion. May use a control group. |
| **Process** | Illustrative explanation and individual responses. | Numerical aggregation in the form of percentages, tables, etc. Responses are clustered. |
| **Approach** | Subjective. | Objective. |
| **Analysis** | Interpretative—how and why. | Statistical—what and how many. |
| **Analytical Strength** | "Face" validity—the results usually look valid. | Statistical reliability. |
| **Methods** | Varied formats for group and individual interviews; direct observation. | Standardized interviews, surveys and regression analysis. |



[2]Excerpted from *Customers in Focus: A Guide to Conducting and Planning Focus Groups*.

## SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

### BAHRAIN, JULY 2002

***Focus group question and answer***

Moderator: "When I say the word "democracy" what comes to mind for you? In just one word or a few words."

Participant: "For me democracy is that people rule itself by itself."

***Finding***

"The people of Bahrain express quite modest aspirations regarding democracy. They associate democracy with the usual array of political rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and the right to form political parties."

### SERBIA, MARCH 2002

***Survey question***

"Now, I am going to read you some pairs of statements, and I want you to tell me whether you agree more with the first or more with the second statement."

1. Women are as qualified as men to hold offices in political life, such as members of local councils or members of the parliament.
2. Women are not as qualified as men to hold offices in political life, such as members of local councils or members of the parliament.

***Finding***

"Three-quarters (73%) of the public agrees that women are as qualified as men to hold political office…"

# Chapter 2

## *Preparing the Proposal and Budget*

2

This chapter will help you write a proposal that describes focus groups and prepare a realistic budget.

Focus groups, when done correctly, result in concrete findings and recommendations that make a direct impact on your targeted audiences and on your program. Before you begin, keep the following pointers in mind for the program's duration:

**Know your purpose**
When writing a new proposal for focus groups, you will need to think through your project from beginning to end. Why are you conducting focus groups? How does research support NDI's goal or particular program objectives? How will you use the findings? At each stage, you should be able to explain your goal.

**Understand what the *funder* wants**
Carefully read the program description or request for applications. You might think the funder wants focus groups with citizens, but in reality, it wants focus groups with party members (which we usually don't do). Or they may not want focus groups at all—they are asking for a different kind of academic research. If you don't follow the funder's preferences, you will need an even stronger rationale.

**Don't skimp on the focus group budget**
Research is expensive. Do not blindly guess at the budget and lowball the amount. Every aspect of the research will be affected, including the type of consultant you can hire. Shortchanging the research budget at the beginning stage will have repercussions through to the end product, your presentation and report—potentially damaging NDI's reputation.

**Realize that the process is time-intensive**
Don't try to rush through the proposal, the budget, or any other part of the process. Invest the necessary time to thoroughly review each step.

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### LESSON LEARNED #1: PREPARE CAREFULLY

"Solid, reliable research requires careful planning, skilled implementation and adequate resource allocation. Research requires a lot of work from field and D.C.-based staff. It is not cheap and cannot be done off the corner of someone's desk. It almost always takes more time than anticipated and there is always a lot of work required in writing the final report so that it satisfies all of our internal and external constituencies."

—Paul Rowland and Stephanie Lynn, NDI-Indonesia and formerly NDI-Serbia

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# Chapter 2

2

## THE PROPOSAL

Before writing the proposal text, review the following questions. The answer to each question has cost implications.

- What is the primary objective of the focus group research? Do you have any other objectives?
- How will you use the research to work with political parties, civic organizations, government leaders or others? How will they be involved in the process?
- What is the intended impact of the research?
- What other activities—message development or outreach training, for instance—will the research complement ?
- Why are focus groups—and/or survey research—the best tool for your program? Is there a strong example of similar work in another NDI program?
- What topics will you explore in the groups?
- Who will you interview? Do you have a specific recruit in mind, such as party supporters, Civic Forum participants or ex-combatants?
- How many groups will you organize? Where will the groups take place? Do security concerns exist?
- At what point in the program will you conduct the research? Is this one round of research or several rounds?
- Who will conduct the groups? An international firm, a local/regional firm, and/or an independent consultant?
- If you plan to work with local partners, do they have research experience?
- Who will identify and train the moderators and recruiters? Who will be responsible for writing the moderator's guide and the report?
- How will you share the results? What kinds of reports and presentations do you want? Who will present the findings?
- What NDI resources—time, staff, etc.—will be dedicated to this project?

## PROPOSAL TEXT

You've thought through answers to the questions on the opposite page. Now you should be ready to write a concise description of the focus group project and how it relates to your program.

Use the general guideline below to help write the text.[3] The order and level of detail varies in each proposal. At a minimum, you will want to describe:

- How the focus group research will be used with its intended target. There may be more than one target audience, such as political parties and NGOs.
- How this project fits into the overall program, and any related consultations, trainings or activities that NDI will conduct.
- The expected results.
- The focus group participants' demographics—for example, undecided voters.
- The main themes to be explored in the discussions.
- Why focus groups are appropriate in this particular context.

*You may also want to include a brief description of:*

- NDI's experience in using focus groups for this type of program, with relevant examples.
- How your audiences will be involved from start to finish, for example, obtaining initial buy-in with political parties through consultations.
- The process, including the number, location and timing of the groups.
- Who will be responsible for the design, conduct and analysis of the groups.
- How you are working with a local partner, if appropriate.
- How results will be shared with the primary audiences, as well as indirect audiences such as donors and the international community.
- When, where and how the research will be presented.

[3]Please visit Program Coordination's Intranet page to review NDI's standard proposal guidelines and process.

# Chapter 2

2

## THE BUDGET

There is no set cost for focus groups.

Unfortunately, *every* budget is different. Costs depend greatly on what type of firm or consultant you want to hire, in-country capacity to do research, the number of groups you want to conduct and many other factors.

To prepare the budget, answer these questions:

- How developed is this country? Does in-country capacity exist to do survey or focus group research? What about capacity in the region?
- What kind of firm, organization or consultant do you want to hire? *(See p. 18.)*
- How much responsibility will the firm or consultant have?
- How many groups will you organize? Where will they take place?
- Who do you want to participate in the groups?
- What NDI staff will be involved? To what extent? Will salary be charged to this project?
- Will NDI staff travel? Internationally and/or locally?
- Will the consultant travel to the country? How often and for how long? Once there (or if based there), will he/she need to travel within the country?
- Will translation be needed? When?
- What trainings—of moderators or recruiters, for instance—will be necessary? Who will conduct these trainings?
- Who will write the question guide? Observe the groups? Write the report(s)?
- How many presentations will the consultant make? Where will they take place and to what audiences?
- What other activities—consultations, workshops, trainings or roundtables—will you organize in conjunction with the research?

Focus group budgets vary dramatically. One group could cost as little as $500—or as much as $5000. Costs vary from country to country and region to region. The price depends on a variety of factors, including in-country capacity to conduct research, country size and infrastructure, type of research partner, the number and location of the groups, and the proposed demographics of the participants.

You may think $50,000 is more than enough for ten focus groups. But if only $20,000 is for the consultant to organize, conduct and analyze the groups (with the other $30,000 dedicated to NDI's internal staffing costs), you've already limited your project.

| COST FACTORS | |
|---|---|
| Consultant's time/responsibilities | Moderators' fees |
| Consultant's travel (international) | Recruitment |
| Consultant's travel (in-country) | Incentives |
| Subcontractor costs | Refreshments |
| Staff time | Observation |
| Staff travel (international/in-country) | Translation |
| Per diem (staff) | Audio/video technology |
| Per diem (moderators, consultants) | Transcription |
| Location (urban/rural) | Production (transcripts, reports) |
| Hotel (staff, moderator, consultants) | Analysis |
| Focus group design | Reports |
| Trainings (recruiters, moderators) | Presentations (international) |
| Trainings/consultations (targets) | Presentations (D.C.) |
| Local focus group facility/hotel room | Communications (phone, Internet) |
| Local travel | Overhead costs |

### LESSON LEARNED #2: AVOID FALSE ECONOMIES

"Careful consideration should be given to the budget allocations. While not every program has the money to spend on a big name firm, professionalism should not be sacrificed in the name of cost-savings. Focus groups can be conducted by local firms or with individual consultants, but they still cost money and require a great deal of planning.

The Institute has a wealth of expertise but remember—there are costs associated even with in-house staff time. Skimping can result in an unreliable product. Always get a reality check before submitting the budget to a donor."

—Paul Rowland and Stephanie Lynn, NDI-Indonesia and formerly NDI-Serbia

# Chapter 2

2

## PLAN FOR OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

Your budget will determine whom you can hire, and so it is important to think through the best approach when preparing the budget. As mentioned earlier, NDI rarely conducts research without hiring outside expertise. There are several potential options. Consult with the Program Coordination Team on donor rules and regulations, which may impact the type of firm you can contract. *For more information on engaging outside experts, please see the next chapter.*

**Contract an international research firm**
A U.S. or international firm will be the most expensive option. These firms have consulted for high-profile clients in the U.S. and abroad, and offer international research expertise and numerous staff for the project. This type of firm brings credibility and can be seen by NDI's partners as unbiased and neutral. However, the costs will be higher than for a local firm or independent consultant. The U.S. firm will probably hire its own subcontractor—a local polling firm or organization—whom they will oversee. Plus, the firm may not have in-depth knowledge or understanding of the country.

**Contract a local or regional research firm**
A local or regional research firm, if the capacity exists, will most likely be cheaper than a U.S. firm. The staff live there and understand the political and social context. But, the local firm or organization might have less research experience and may not be familiar with accepted standards for sound methodology. This approach might seem cheaper, but only if NDI can avoid investing a lot of staff time and other resources to make up for lack of experience.

**Contract a local or regional research firm—**
**but ensure quality control via a paid international consultant**
Working with a local or regional research firm (if one exists) while providing oversight via an international expert can work well. At a lower cost than the first option, the consultant can offer international perspective and provide quality control and guidance on each step, especially the moderator's guide, the methodology and the analysis. With his or her oversight, the local firm recruits participants, trains moderators, coordinates the logistics and conducts the groups.

**Contract an international research expert to work closely with NDI staff**
Like any of the other options, there are advantages and disadvantages in hiring an independent consultant. The consultant will most likely be cheaper than a firm, requiring less overhead and offering more time and flexibility. The consultant often becomes a full member of the NDI team. On the downside, the international consultant must depend heavily on NDI and its partners. An additional challenge is the limited number of available and qualified consultants who have the desired combination of skill sets and knowledge of every aspect of focus group research process—including methodology, moderators, question guides, analysis, political and strategic expertise, international experience, appropriate level of seniority for the target audience, and knowledge of NDI.

**UNDERSTANDING CONSULTING FIRMS' BUDGETS**

Consulting firms don't present their proposals in the same way as each other, or the same way as NDI, so comparisons can be difficult. The examples on pp. 20-21 demonstrate this challenge. Keep in mind that these firms are building in their profit, and are entitled to do so.

**Partner with or sub-grant to a civic organization**
Partnering with a civic organization depends greatly on your program objectives. If building local capacity is part of your objective—or the sole option because of a limitation in available expertise—you will need to carefully plan for costs associated with at least one consultant and many trainers, as well as staff time. One or two trainings or consultations is not sufficient to create skilled researchers. Appropriate technical assistance would include comprehensive trainings, guided practice and ongoing consultations. Some programs have conducted study missions to increase exposure to focus group methodology. Another approach is to expose a local organization to an international firm hired by NDI.

**Have NDI staff organize the groups with the help of an expert to train the moderator**
Teams should not consider this option unless they have the necessary expertise on focus groups and time and resources available for such a time-consuming project.

## ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF GROUPS

How many groups should you conduct? For most NDI programs, between 8 and 12 focus groups would be appropriate. After a certain number—many researchers say 12—you get diminishing returns. If you're considering more than 12, you may wish to explore another type of research.

In some fractured countries, NDI has conducted larger numbers of focus groups to gain insight into particular sub-group perspectives. Covering all ethnic groups does not make the focus group research "more representative."

## DETERMINE THE GENERAL TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS TO RECRUIT

If you would like to interview a mix of citizens, the recruit shouldn't be too hard. The more demographics you specify (women, aged 18-24, rural, illiterate, specific-party supporters with children), the more your recruit will cost.

## IDENTIFY POTENTIAL LOCATIONS

Where you want to conduct the groups—for instance, in both cities and in hard-to-reach rural villages—will have an impact on your budget. You will need to build in time for the moderators, recruiters and traveling NDI staff, and money for local travel.

# Comparison Between Three International Vendors: Yemen, August 2005

## Firm A = $73,000 plus travel, lodging and communications

This price includes costs associated with the design, execution and analysis of 12 focus groups; local travel for our regional research partner; three weeks of on-site management of the research plan by Ian Marquardt, including attendance at focus groups; in-country research presentations by vice president to NDI or other specific parties. Specific research costs include:

Travel and lodging for Firm A team members, communications and other expenses will be billed separately and at cost. Firm A will charge the NDI per diem for each day a team member is in Yemen. In addition, we expect that NDI will provide a simultaneous translator for Firm A staff while in country.
This prices includes costs for 10 focus groups at $4900 each, plus travel at $11,500.

- Guide development
- Recruiting
- Facility fees
- Moderator fees
- Participant incentives
- Simultaneous translator
- Audio taping
- Video taping (if permissible)
- Arabic translation and English transcription of all research materials
- Analysis and report writing

## Firm B = $60,500 plus additional local partner costs

The focus group price includes all of the costs for conducting the groups (recruiting, incentives to respondents, facility and hosting charges, moderating, translation of guides, transcripts in English) as well as our time for designing the moderator's guides, management, analysis and reporting.

Travel costs assume two round trip coach class tickets to Yemen from New York (one trip to conduct the groups, another to report the results), plus costs for lodging, transportation, meals and communications for approximately four weeks in country and transit (includes presentation time in November) as well as costs for a trip to Washington, D.C. to present results to NDI/Washington.

## Firm C = $69,000 plus 10% contingency and travel

The estimated cost of this study is 10 focus groups for $69,000. This estimate is subject to a 10% contingency to cover small changes in exchange rates, specifications and estimating error. This cost is also inclusive of professional time for Firm C to send a senior researcher to Yemen to monitor the focus groups, as well as all coordination time for GfK Turkey. It does not include travel expenses, which would be invoiced at cost. Deliverables include:

- Project management
- Recruitment/screening
- Development of study materials
- Translation of discussion guide
- Qualified moderators
- Travel expenses for local partner
- Facilities
- Audio recording of all groups, and video as appropriate
- Full English language transcripts
- Distribution of incentives for eight respondents per group
- Debriefing of topline results in your office or teleconferenced
- A presentation at NDI's Washington, DC office
- An electronic presentation
- Hard copies of the presentation

# Comparison Between Two International Vendors: Venezuela, October 2002

## Firm A = $47,600 for 10 groups

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Local partner sub-contract**<br>Recruitment, facilities, Spanish and English-language transcripts, moderators and local travel and lodging.<br>@ $2,000 per group | $20,000 | |
| **Oversight, analysis and presentation by Firm A**<br>Oversight of recruitment of participants; training of moderators; drafting of participant screening questionnaires; drafting of focus group guides; observation of eight focus groups and analysis of 10 transcripts; drafting of report; presentation of findings and recommendations to Venezuelan party leaders and NDI staff. | $25,000 | |
| **Travel expenses**<br>2 $700 roundtrip economy class airfare DC-Caracas, plus per diem of $248/day (x 5 days in country to observe groups) and (x 2 days in country for presentation), plus taxis and other incidental travel expenses. | $2,100 | |
| **Communication**<br>Telephone, fax and delivery charges | $500 | |

## Firm B = $21,500 for 12 groups

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Project direction**<br>Design the focus groups guides and exercises for the groups sessions. Design and organize the selection of focus groups participants and categories assigned to the different groups. Moderate focus groups discussions. Analyze the results and prepare the final report (in English). Present a report in Washington. | | $12,400 |
| **Field work, local expenses, travel, communication** | | $9,100 |
| Tickets for three for Buenos Aires-Venezuela-Buenos Aires | $1,392 | |
| Hotel - 12 nights ($109/night) for three persons | $3,600 | |
| Per diem - 12 days ($88/day) for three persons | $3,168 | |
| Local coordinator for recruiting and receptioning groups' participants and locations in the selected areas and the gift for the participants | $940 | |
| Local travel: a car for 3 trips (1 per day for 3 distant locations) | NDI | |

# Chapter 3

## *Hiring Outside Expertise*

3

Congratulations! Your proposal has been approved. Next, you will need to hire a research firm or consultant.

## PROCUREMENT GUIDELINES

Below you will find general guidelines for the procurement process. Visit the Operations and Human Resources teams for more information and for related forms.

**If hiring a firm, and the contract amount is more than $10,000:**

- You must route the contract through D.C. *before* the firm begins work.
- Along with the contract, you must include a decision memo that outlines the services the firm will provide and why you chose the company or organization.
- Include the Request for a Proposal (RFP) and three competitive bids. Even when a company is clearly the best choice, bids from other companies help establish market rates and cost effectiveness.
- NDI's Vice President or President must sign the contract.

**If hiring a firm, and the contract amount is between $5,000 and $10,000:**

- You do not need to route the contract through D.C. before starting work.
- Submit the contract, decision memo, RFP and three bids with the reconciliation.
- Your country/program director can sign in the field.

**If hiring a firm, and the contract is under $5,000:**

- The contract should be submitted with the reconciliation.
- There is no need to write a decision memo or gather bids.
- Your country/program director can sign in the field.

**If hiring an individual consultant:**

- This will be a personal services contract under Human Resources, rather than a vendor contract process under Operations.
- There is no need to acquire bids or write a decision memo.
- The selected consultant will be provided a daily rate.

So, if you are hiring a firm and it will cost more than $5,000, your first step is to write a Request for a Proposal (RFP).

# Chapter 3

## PREPARE A REQUEST FOR A PROPOSAL (RFP)

3

Start by writing an RFP to send to potential bidders. The Operations team can give you examples from previous research projects as well as review your draft.

A clear RFP will ensure the bidding process is open and fair by giving each competitor the same information. A straightforward RFP will help firms write correctly targeted proposals, making it easier to compare them. If you are vague about what you want, the firm will make its own suggestions. These ideas are valuable, but may differ from what you had in mind. It also means that the proposed budget may not reflect the eventual costs.

As a general guide to writing RFPs, you should:

- ☑ State what the RFP is for—for example, eight focus groups in Slovakia.
- ☑ Provide background on your program, either within the text or as an attached appendix. You can also provide a terms of reference.
- ☑ Explain your objectives. What do you want to learn? How will you use the results?
- ☑ Provide specifics. How many groups would you like? Where and with whom?
- ☑ Provide a realistic timeline. When would you like the groups to take place? What is the deadline for the final report and presentations?
- ☑ Explain the consultant or firm responsibilities, which could include:
  - Training moderators/recruiters/trainers
  - Recruiting focus group participants
  - Writing the moderator's guide
  - Providing skilled moderators
  - Conducting and observing the groups
  - Providing translated transcripts
  - Producing written report(s) and presentation(s); presenting findings
- ☑ State what information you would like in the consultant's proposal. At the least, requests should include:
  - The firm's qualifications, including the proposed team's bios
  - A description of relevant experience, such as previous work in the country/region or a similar environment
  - A description of the services provided for this project
  - The proposed budget, including all costs (such as fees, communication, translation and travel)

## OBTAIN THREE BIDS

You need to obtain three bids. Remember that not every firm will respond to your RFP so your initial mailing list may include five or six firms. Consult with the Program Coordination Team on donor rules and regulations; in some cases, NDI needs a waiver to use a non-US firm located outside the country. Many donors, including USAID, have rules regarding prior approval of contracted work.

The Operations Team recommends that you send the RFP to firms that market themselves as being able to provide the required service—even if you think they may not have the necessary experience or resources. Determining the most qualified firm should be done after the bids have been received.

Provide a reasonable deadline for the firms' responses. Just like it takes NDI time to prepare a strong proposal, the firm needs time. A firm will usually learn more about the country and political context, research costs, recruit potential subcontractors, and identify potential locations and demographic characteristics of the focus group participants. This helps it prepare a knowledgeable proposal with a realistic budget.

Follow up with the firms to see if they will bid or have questions. Because of client obligations, time constraints, conflicts of interest or other reasons, some firms will pass. If this happens to your team, be prepared to send the RFP to additional firms. Again, allowing enough time is important.

## EVALUATE THE BIDDERS

Remember that you are hiring a firm not just for data, but also for analysis and strategy. If you're not interested in the consultant's advice, keep this in mind. Don't pay for unnecessary experience or name recognition.

Firm and consultant prices range depending on experience, size, reputation and other factors. There are several U.S. firms who have done more than one project with NDI. These firms include Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Lake Research Partners, Penn & Schoen, and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research.[4] These are big names in the public opinion world, which means they are usually more expensive. Sometimes, however, they are willing to donate time or to reduce costs for NDI.

If you hire a well-known firm, you are not necessarily hiring one of the principal names. This isn't bad. A qualified but lesser known analyst may have more time to devote to your project and cost less. There are also smaller but well qualified firms that have produced strong findings for NDI. In addition, there are firms that may be interested in NDI but have not yet worked with us.

An independent consultant trying to build his or her portfolio could be cheaper than hiring one of the larger firms, where he/she might have worked prior to going solo.

*See pp. 18-19 in Chapter 2 to learn more about the advantages and disadvantages of different types of firms and consultants.*

[4]For more about consulting firms, ask the Political Party Development Team.

# Chapter 3

3

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

**Relevant expertise**
Does the firm have experience in your country or region? What about other relevant experience, such as past research projects in post-conflict environments?

**Reasonable budget**
Are all possible costs—communication, local and international travel, translation, etc.—included in the proposed budget? What about subcontracting costs?

**Understanding of NDI's objectives**
Does the proposal indicate that the consultant understands the main goals of the research and how you plan to use the results?

**Trust**
Is the consultant someone that your targeted audience—political parties or an NGO, for example—will trust? Are there any conflicts of interest, such as prior work with a political party in the country? Is a firm's partisanship a problem?

**Appropriate local partner**
Has the consultant proposed a local partner (subcontractor)? Is it an NGO? A professional research firm? Does the local partner require training? Does the local partner have any political affiliations that could harm the credibility of your research? Who will manage the subcontractor?

**Sound recruitment**
Who will recruit the groups? How? Does the consultant need NDI's help, or will the firm be fully responsible?

**Appropriate participants**
Who are the suggested participants? Are the groups homogeneous? Are these the right people? Is there anyone else who should have been included, but isn't? Also, make sure that you agree with the divisions used by the firm—for instance, do you agree with how social levels are defined?

**Skilled moderators**
Who will moderate? Are the moderators already trained? What about their language skills? Will the participants be comfortable with the proposed moderators? (In Cambodia, the consultant proposed a woman moderator for all groups; NDI explained that men would not be comfortable, and so two moderators were hired.)

**Target locations**
Where will the groups be held? Are they all in one city, several cities, rural areas?

**Proper facilities**
What facilities will be used? Focus group facilities (which probably do not exist in this country)? Hotels? Homes? Is this a place that participants will feel comfortable?

**Careful analysis**
How will the consultant analyze the data? Will the analyst observe the focus groups, or rely solely on notes and transcripts? Will transcripts be provided to NDI?

**Plausible timeline**
What is the consultant's timeline? Does it seem realistic? Does the timeline meet your expectations, and have at least a small cushion in the event that there are recruiting problems or transcript delays?

**Resources**
Who will be the main analyst? Is there a team working on your project or one person? Who will serve as NDI's primary contact?

**Seniority**
How important is the firm's name recognition for your program? (This may determine how much attention your project is given and the overall price.)

**Appropriate messengers**
Who will present the findings? To which audiences? Do you need someone to go to the Hill? Present the research to senior policymakers?

**Clear presentation**
Look at the overall proposal and its presentation. Is it well written and organized? If not, the moderator's guide, report and presentation may be of similar quality.

**Language ability**
Does the firm need to speak a language other than English?

**Strong samples/references**
Are examples of previous reports attached to the proposal? If so, take a look and see if you like the format. If you're not impressed, you should consider another consultant. Has the consultant provided references? Check these out—especially if they include other teams at NDI.

## NEGOTIATE

Keep in mind that nothing in the firm's proposal is final. You should discuss the proposal with your team, determine what you like and don't like—and then negotiate.

If you like a firm, but can't afford the proposed budget, tell them. A proposal takes time and effort to write, and the consultant should be interested in working out a compromise arrangement. Firms often provide a "menu" of options, so that you can tailor the research to suit your budget. If the proposal includes exactly what your program needs, but is way too high, then there's probably no point to negotiating.

# Chapter 3

3

## COMPLETE THE PAPERWORK

You've selected a firm. Now you must write a decision memo that explains your choice. The decision memo, bids and contract should be reviewed by the Operations team, which will then circulate the documents to Accounting, Program Coordination and NDI's Vice President for final approval and signing.

**Decision memo**
The decision memo should outline the bidding process and clearly state why a particular vendor has been chosen. The selected vendor is often the lowest bidder, but other issues—such as experience, quality of work or other non-monetary issues—can and should be factors. Include your team's rationale for selecting the winning company.

Also, make sure to include an accurate cost comparison. In some cases, vendors submit different style budgets that don't illustrate the full cost of the service. For example, for a multi-survey project, one vendor may submit a budget for the total package while another's proposal is for solely one poll. In such cases, a chart comparing vendors' cost may be helpful.

**Purchase approval and contract**
Where possible, use NDI's standard vendor contract, which can be found on the Operations Intranet page. If necessary, you can also amend the firm's contract to ensure it meets NDI's needs and terms and conditions. The firm's proposal is appended to the contract as a description of work. You will need to route a formal contract amendment/ modification if additional work is added or the cost increases. Additional costs cannot be paid beyond the limit in the contract without such an amendment.

**CAUTION FOR CONSULTANTS**

The consultant or firm should understand that it is not permitted to use the NDI research project to create new in-country business clients or to obtain a client such as a political party or candidate, which would undermine NDI's programming. NDI's express approval is required for opinion-editorials or other release of NDI data.

## WORK WITH YOUR CONSULTANT

Once the contract has been signed by all parties, there should be a great deal of interaction between NDI and the consultant or firm. The firm has been hired for research expertise, but you are the expert on your program. Work closely with the consultant and act as a partner.

If you don't review the proposed participants, you may end up interviewing the wrong people. If you neglect to read the moderator's guide, important questions might not be asked. If you just glance at the report, you could inadvertently release sensitive information that will damage NDI's relationships on the ground or with funders. Beyond that, NDI has a unique perspective on the country and the people—knowledge that the consultant will need and value.

Just as NDI prefers to coordinate discussions with USAID or NED, we should provide one voice to the consultant as much as possible. Otherwise, there could be conflicting conversations and decisions. Decide who will manage the process for NDI and serve as the primary NDI representative with the consultant.

If possible, you and your team should meet with the consultant *before* any final research decisions are made. This initial meeting or conference call will provide an opportunity to discuss your project in greater detail and to explain NDI's overall goals. Be ready to explain what you're hoping to learn, and how you will use the information.

Hopefully you've picked a firm that has previous exposure to the country or region. You should still provide as much information—such as background reading, previous research and census or other statistical information—as possible to the consultant in order to help him/her begin the project.

## ESTABLISH A TIMELINE

You will want to set up a realistic timeline to ensure you receive the results when you need them. Firms are often overly optimistic when it comes to planning a timeline.

In the U.S., organizing focus groups is usually a two-week process, though it depends on who's doing the recruit, the locations, the demographics, holidays, and so on. In other countries with poor infrastructures, organizing groups can be much more difficult and time-consuming. Here is a simplified timeline that does not include travel time:

**Weeks 1 and 2—after signing contract**
Determine participant demographics.
Identify dates and locations for all groups.
Locate suitable facilities.
Draft and finalize screeners (the questionnaires used to recruit).
Train recruiters.
Recruit the groups.
Identify and train the moderator(s).
Draft and finalize the moderator's guide.

**Weeks 3 and 4**
Convene, observe and record the groups.
Consultant provides brief summaries based on notes and observation.

**Week 5, 6 and 7**
Recordings are transcribed. Translation takes additional time.
Consultant reviews and analyzes the transcripts.
Consultant circulates a draft presentation to NDI, which NDI carefully reviews.
Consultant presents findings to selected audiences.
Consultant circulates a draft report to NDI, which NDI carefully reviews.
Consultant finalizes and releases report(s).

# HIRING FOR NEPAL RESEARCH

***Contributed by Terry Hoverter, Asia Senior Program Officer***

In late December 2003, the Nepal Team selected an international polling firm to work with a local polling firm (AC Nielsen ORG MARG) conducting focus groups and two nationwide polls. In order to select the international firm, the Nepal team took several steps that required a significant amount of staff time and preparation.

Request for Proposal (RFP): The first step in the process was to draft an RFP. This RFP detailed the scope of the work that the international firm would undertake, its relations with the domestic partner and the information the Institute wanted to capture. I worked with Nepal Director Scott Kearin and Victoria Canavor on the format, content, language and appendices to include. This took time, given the political sensitivities of the Nepal context and the information the team wanted to relay to the international polling group. [See Appendix C.]

Soliciting Bids: The Institute selected three firms to which we would send the RFP. The Team allowed approximately 2 1/2 weeks to submit proposals.

Analyzing the Bids: All three firms submitted bids. Over the course of two weeks, I analyzed the bids and sought advice on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals.

Negotiating with Firms: The Team selected two firms based on the strength of their proposals. To ask targeted questions about their proposals, and get a feel for the personnel that would be working on their programs, we had meetings with both groups. Before the meetings, we analyzed each proposal and identified questions.

Selecting a Firm: The Team selected one of the polling firms. This is not the end of the process, just the beginning of another phase: brokering a contract.

Writing/Finalizing a Contract: Drafting a contract was the next stage in the selection process. This was not difficult to do; Operations has examples that are easy to modify. Once the contract was routed through Operations, the firm was given the opportunity to examine the contract before signing.

*Lessons Learned:*

Selecting a polling firm is a significant time commitment.
The Nepal team began its selection process at the beginning of December 2003 and finalized the contract in early February 2004. The amount of time I personally spent working on this process was considerable.

Drafting an RFP isn't easy.
While program managers and directors have the NDI proposal to fall back on, polling firms don't (unless you give it to them). This means that the RFP needs to be as thorough as possible in order to get the goals and activities across. Doing it right the first time avoids needless phone calls and follow-up. Keep the RFP short—two to three pages—but think about what appendices might be useful.

Negotiating is an art form.
Negotiating with a potential firm is not easy or fun, but it is necessary. Most likely, you will get two or more bids that you like on paper. At this point, it is critical to dig deeper and examine some of the intangibles such as work experience and personalities of proposed staff. To break a tie, we met with representatives from both firms. These meetings tipped the scale.

*See Appendices for more information on Nepal, including an interview with the former country director.*

# Chapter 4

## *NDI Party Programming*

4

## WHY FOCUS GROUPS

Limited NDI budgets usually don't allow for both focus group and survey research. Party programs often employ focus groups, though the Institute has also conducted survey research in some countries, mostly in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia.

Reasons for using focus groups—instead of a survey—in a party program include:

**Focusing on concerns, not "horse race" numbers**
NDI does not want to make the research about which party is getting the most support. In a survey, the main findings include party support, party identification and voter preference numbers. This can be distracting and takes away from the real focus: the issues, concerns, priorities and perceptions of citizens.

**Understanding "why"**
Rather than just getting at the "what," focus groups tell our programs "why." A survey identifies major concerns ("economy" and "healthcare"), but focus groups can explain *why* these are the primary issues. Instead of learning that a majority of citizens rank parties lower than any other institution, the discussion format helps explain why citizens have such a poor perception of political organizations. Focus groups can link issues that a survey might not connect.

**Concrete evidence**
The open-ended conversation provides word-for-word evidence of how citizens feel. A political party may dismiss survey research conducted by an outside organization as untrustworthy or worthless, but will find it harder to ignore actual statements by citizens.

**Adaptability**
Many places lack the basic infrastructure needed to conduct a valid survey. The focus group methodology adapts to the countries in which we work. Standards exist and should be followed, but scientific expertise is not required to organize groups or interpret findings.

**Visual interaction**
Focus groups are particularly useful for testing language and messages. Participants can respond to visible demonstrations and paper materials.

# Chapter 4

## HOW TO USE FOCUS GROUPS IN PARTY PROGRAMS

4

**To better understand the political environment and parties' perceived role.**
In a place where NDI has not previously worked with parties, focus group research can complement information gathered in a political party assessment. Focus groups might test general concerns, perceptions of democracy, views of political institutions, expectations of political parties and leaders, strengths and weaknesses of individual parties, methods for outreach, messages and other related topics.

The results can help NDI understand how out of touch parties might be, and whether new outreach techniques or party reforms are needed. For the parties, research demonstrates the beneficial and concrete nature of NDI's programming, and helps to obtain their interest and buy-in for longer-term party strengthening activities. The results can convince parties of the need to change.

**To help parties prepare campaign strategy and message.**
Assisting parties with campaign strategy and message development is a frequent objective of party programs. Party leaders often assume that they know what voters want, or base campaigns on outdated information. Parties' outreach activities might reflect little understanding of their electorate: for example, promoting a peace plan when voters are more concerned about joblessness.

Using focus group results, parties can craft stronger messages that respond to voters' concerns. With NDI's assistance, they may initiate more direct methods of outreach, plan more effective campaigns, build broader membership bases, or organize Get Out The Vote activities.

**To help parties develop more participatory and issue-based policy development processes.**
Party policies and platforms are often poorly—or not at all—developed, formulated without formal or informal discussion with party members or target voters. With no two-way communication taking place, those at the grassroots level have few opportunities to contribute to a party's policy program. NDI helps parties to consider their policy development process, taking into account party members' and voters' concerns and priorities. In addition to formal research, parties may consider other forms of outreach, such as survey canvassing, town hall meetings, or discussion groups with civil society representatives.

This type of work is highly specific to each party and may not be appropriate early in an NDI program. Party programs more traditionally begin with general capacity building and later move to strengthening parties' internal democracy; for example, reviewing by-laws, improving organizational structures, creating two-way communication methods, or modifying the candidate selection process.

**To help parties in governance.**
Governing and opposition parties must continue to be policy-oriented in a way that is responsive and accountable to the citizens. While survey research is particularly useful for determining priorities and views on a national scale, focus groups provide an opportunity to test language, policies and methods of outreach.

**To help unify parties in coalition.**
Though focus groups are more often used by NDI to help test parties' individual strengths and weaknesses—and thereby create identities and messages that differentiate—research can also be used to help partner parties work together. Instead of focusing on what separates the parties, the research can help identify common challenges and perhaps formulate a consistent message that solidifies and broadens a coalition's base.

In countries with an un-level playing field, research can provide a timely reason to bring parties together for multiparty dialogue. Shared findings would focus on citizens' concerns and perceptions of parties overall (for example, "none of the parties are offering solutions"), rather than each party individually. NDI teams should carefully consider the format and setting for this type of activity.

### LESSON LEARNED #3: INTEGRATION IS KEY

"Research should not be a stand-alone project. The results of polling and focus groups should be worked into many aspects of the overall country program.

In Serbia and Indonesia, we have shared polling and focus group results with national leaders, to be sure, but real value comes from using the information in other settings as well. Working the data into message development seminars, voter contact training sessions and Get Out The Vote workshops gave our programs consistency and magnified the impact of the research.

We used the research results in the design of our own programs. Research has helped us understand the electorate in Serbia and in Indonesia better, thus helping us to put together programs that are directly relevant to political party members."

—Paul Rowland and Stephanie Lynn, NDI-Indonesia and formerly with NDI-Serbia

# Chapter 4

## HOW NOT TO USE FOCUS GROUPS IN PARTY PROGRAMS

4

**Don't train parties to do their own focus group research.**
Training party members to directly conduct their own focus groups is usually misguided. There is an inherent conflict of interest: parties become defensive of critical information when asking questions, listening to respondents or analyzing results. The recruit, moderator's guide and analysis may be unduly influenced, and a subjective process becomes even more subjective. If a party officer identifies himself, the results are biased and potentially spoiled; if he doesn't, there is an ethical question regarding the sponsor of the research and improper statements of confidentiality. If parties attempt survey research, they run the risk of relying on unreliable numbers and, again, biased data.

*What to do instead:*
The parties should learn about the research process and other methods for collecting information, for example, survey canvassing. For professional-quality research, hire an outside expert or firm with a non-biased perspective. Before conducting the groups, explain to the parties how and why focus groups are conducted and ask for input on potential topics and questions. After completing the analysis, share key findings with the parties. Help them understand how to interpret the data and incorporate the results into their short- and long-term strategies, message development and outreach methods. If NDI's budget is too limited, look for other sources of public opinion research.

**Don't confuse party "members" with party "supporters."**
NDI does many focus groups with party supporters (or non-supporters), but we don't often conduct formal research with party officers or members. Arranging party focus groups with official party members is difficult and time-consuming. Since you must depend on party staff and their membership lists (if these exist) to provide names and information, confidentiality is a challenge. Those who participate may be selected because the party leaders trust them to say the "right" thing.

*What to do instead:*
Learning what party members think and feel is important for the internal process of any party. While focus groups may be the wrong tool, consider organizing discussion groups, led by someone who knows how parties operate, such as a former politician from another country. A professional focus group moderator isn't necessarily the right fit. Other sound options include in-depth interviews with policy makers, party officers and others opinion leaders, or having party leaders tour branch offices for open discussions.

## KEY POINTERS

**Obtain buy-in**
You will want buy-in from the party leaders early in the process. By actively collaborating with NDI, the parties will have a greater comfort level and understanding of the focus group process. In consultations before the research begins, explain how focus groups work, how political research is used around the world, and what the parties can expect to learn. Ask about their interests and/or concerns and discuss the consultant's unbiased credentials. To help establish trust, some teams have had research consultants take part in initial consultations and trainings.

Report back as the project progresses and prepare findings that can eventually be presented to the parties. The same applies to work with local or international NGOs and civic organizations.

**Incorporate the process**
Don't forget that the research is part of a larger NDI program. The focus groups should not be a stand-alone project. In most cases, NDI doesn't want to just help parties become aware of what citizens think—the objective is to help parties better communicate.

Do the parties need training on focus group methodology? Do they know how to use the results strategically? Does NDI need to organize workshops on policy or message development? What about voter outreach techniques that build on the more targeted messages?

**Think strategically**
Just as parties need to use the information strategically, so does NDI. You can find numerous complementary ways to use the results. Do you want to encourage open and transparent dialogue between parties and citizens? Consider convening town hall meetings where parties can present their platforms to citizens; a multiparty debate on the major issues identified in the research; or organizing a roundtable for political parties and civil society organizations to discuss shared challenges.

**Maintain confidentiality**
Not all information should be widely circulated. The focus group findings may point to weaknesses within a particular party or problems with the leadership—not the type of information that parties will want shared. Every step that NDI takes should assure partner parties that sensitive results are confidential. You can release a report that describes general concerns and perceptions but also consider giving each party its own confidential report and presentation. This may ensure that parties don't automatically dismiss results.

**Ensure careful delivery**
Think about how you want to release and present the results. Program objectives should determine the release process.

Then you will want to broadly circulate the overall findings. For a party strengthening program, NDI can prepare tailored, confidential presentations and/or reports for each party, and also publicly release a general report in non-specific terms.

If you plan a roundtable to discuss the results, will parties be comfortable? No party wants to be pointedly criticized in a multiparty discussion. If civil society, citizens, and/or the media are invited to take part in discussions, carefully think about the agenda, format and facilitator. You don't want parties to "grandstand" for the audience.

The messenger is as important as the research results. Is it better to have the outside consulting firm present the findings, or NDI? What presentation style will make the most positive impact on your intended audiences?

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**LESSON LEARNED #4: SHARE WIDELY**

"The power of research comes not from having the data but how we share it with our partners. We've been most successful using research in our programs when we've shared the data with the central leadership and the local leadership of parties as well as the implementers of party campaigns—candidates, spokespeople and campaigners. Research can bring power to our strength as trainers and to our partners who use the findings to their advantage.

We have conducted briefings for civil society partners and for other implementing organizations both in Indonesia and Serbia [where previously posted]. The US Embassy, USAID and other diplomatic missions have always found the information useful as well. The international and local media have also found that research conducted by NDI helps provide some much-needed context to events."

—Paul Rowland and Stephanie Lynn, NDI-Indonesia and formerly with NDI-Serbia

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## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS

Several citizen participation programs have employed focus groups in planning and implementing programs. In East Timor, South Africa, Liberia, Mozambique and other countries, NDI has used focus groups to help shape civic education efforts and monitor and evaluate programs.

NDI programs sometimes include a secondary objective: to increase in-country understanding and capacity to conduct public opinion research. This could mean working in partnership with a local NGO, academics, the media, or a nonpartisan firm. Examples of this type of program include Georgia, where we are building the capacity of local partner International Society For Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), and Sudan, where we are working with the New Sudan Centre for Statistics and Evaluation. In Serbia, NDI's work has led to an established and nonpartisan organization, CESID, which conducts election monitoring and public opinion research. Building a person or organization's capacity to conduct research is not an easy objective to achieve and there are many challenges to this type of work. *For more information on the use of focus groups in civic programs, please contact the Citizen Participation Team.*

# FOCUS GROUPS IN HAITI

***Contributed by Conor Bohan, Former Resident Senior Program Manager in Haiti***

In 2002, NDI launched a two-year political party assistance program in Haiti to train emerging provincial leaders from nine parties. As part of this program, NDI contracted an independent Argentinean public opinion research firm (Graciela Romer & Associates) to conduct a series of nationwide focus groups on Haitians' attitudes towards democracy and political parties. The focus groups were designed to explore citizen attitudes toward democracy, the electoral process and political parties, as well as their opinions and expectations regarding the current political and economic crisis in Haiti. NDI also hoped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of political parties in Haiti, possible solutions to the current crisis and potential barriers to political and electoral participation.

In September 2002, 12 focus groups were conducted in six cities around the country. Participants were recruited from both rural and urban areas and from a variety of socio-economic, educational and age levels to best reflect a representative cross-section of the Haitian population. Participants were not screened for political preferences. NDI shared the findings with parties participating in NDI's program, as well as with members of the diplomatic and NGO community. Given the sensitive nature of the study, NDI shared with political party leaders only information regarding their respective parties.

In societies like Haiti with low education levels, poor infrastructure and strict socio-economic divisions, it is often difficult to distinguish rumor from fact and to accurately gauge the opinions of the majority of citizens who have long been excluded from public debate. The focus groups proved very useful in gauging public opinion. The results provided solid evidence for what many observers suspected but few could prove. A representative of one embassy said that she was delighted with the report as she finally had something to send to the home office which provided independent verification of the analysis she had been providing.

*"The results of the focus group provided solid evidence for what many observers suspected —but few could prove."*

On the domestic political front, the parties' reactions were mixed. One political leader refused to accept the results because they reflected badly on his party. He chose instead to question the methodology. However, another political leader admitted that the negative perceptions of his party were accurate and has since devoted much personal time and energy to NDI's training program. Thus the focus groups allowed NDI the additional benefit of gauging the openness and seriousness of the political leaders we would be working with and provided information to party leaders, which pushed some to introspection and then to action.

On a visit to OAS headquarters in Washington, D.C., we gave copies of the focus group results to the officials we met. The next day we were asked for a copy by someone who had visited the Assistant Secretary General the previous day and saw the report on his desk. We subsequently received requests for the report from both the Haitian and American press.

In the end, focus groups can serve several purposes at once. They are certainly useful tools for getting a feel for the prevailing opinions in places where NDI is going to work, and then using the information to develop and plan programs, curricula, target audiences, etc. They can also be useful for local partners be they NGOs, political parties or parliaments, giving them access to independent and reliable information in places where that is hard to come by. Additionally focus groups can serve other international institutions such as the UN, regional bodies, embassies and government cooperation agencies in their analysis, planning etc. And of course, if the report is released to the press it may have a wide public distribution.

## A CASE OF SELECTIVE PERCEPTION: LOOKING AT THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S 2001 DEFEAT

As Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski write in "Why Parties Fail to Learn: Electoral Defeat, Selective Perception and British Party Politics," in *Party Politics*, parties often think they understand the predominant policy mood and voters' priorities better than they do. The authors examine the 2001 loss of the Conservative Party in the U.K. and identify one reason they call "selective perception." The term refers to a problem with which NDI party staff are very familiar—parties' preference to pay more attention to positive news that supports their views while dismissing negative information that would require change. For Conservative leaders, this meant they "'missed the target' as they misunderstood the position of Conservative voters and the location of the media voter." *Below is an excerpt of the article.*

"There are many ways in which selective perception could operate among political elites. Successive elections could be expected to reinforce the perception that the party in government was in tune with the electorate, even if the policy mood had been gradually shifting over the years in reaction to government policy. Any electoral defeat can always be attributed to multiple scapegoats rather than to the unpopularity of the party's basic principles and programmatic policies. Of course multiple opinion polls are published in modern campaigns, as well as focus groups used by campaign professionals. But this evidence can always be discarded ('the only poll that matters is the one on the night'). In interpreting the public mood, Herbst (1995) suggests that politicians commonly follow many different cues, such as communications with activists, conversations with local constituents and debates in the news media, as much as more scientific techniques of opinion polls and focus groups. Politicians have many indications of the position of the electorate, and in the run-up to the 2001 British general election Conservative MPs may have simply discounted the accumulating gloom of opinion polls if they mistrust them in favour of other indicators of public opinion, such as contact with constituents ('people on the doorstep are overwhelmingly supportive'), editorials in the daily press or discussions with colleagues, activists and members.

In social psychology, the concept of selective perception suggests that we often see what we want to see, and in particular we tend to pay greater attention to views congruent with our own, rather than those in conflict. If this common psychological mechanism operates among politicians, it suggests that they often exaggerate how far voters share their beliefs, and they pay most attention to indicators that confirm positive support ('the audience at the rally was very enthusiastic'), discounting contrary evidence ('but you can't trust the polls').

If selection perception plays an important role for political leaders as well as for the mass public, in the case of British elections this theory suggests that the Conservative Party may have failed to revise its policy programme to any major degree in 2001, despite its massive electoral defeats in 1997, at least in part because many Conservative politicians misperceived the changed position of the median British voter, and also misjudged the location of its own voting base. The core of the Conservative campaign in the last election revolved around the twin pledges of tax cuts and Euroscepticism. In this regard, Conservative politicians may have believed that they were offering popular policies in the 1997 and 2001 general elections, even when they were far from their strategic optimal position, because the zone of acquiescence had moved leftwards since the Thatcher era. Selective perception may explain why Conservative politicians misunderstood the shift in the policy mood, stranding them too far to the right of the zone of acquiescence, despite the plethora of monthly polls published from 1997 to 2001 repeatedly demonstrating the unpopularity of the Conservative policies (Crewe, 1992, 2001). By contrast, the theory suggests that the Labour and Liberal Democratic parties may have been more centrally located within the zone of public acquiescence, and less likely to mistake the position of their supporters due to problems of selective perception."

# Chapter 5

## *The Methodology*



This chapter briefly explains focus group methodology. Separate chapters follow on the role of the moderator and preparing the moderator's guide. These chapters are not designed to support the independent organization of focus groups, and should not be used for that purpose.

Focus groups are small, targeted discussions led by moderators who seek to create a comfortable environment for all participants. Conducted in a series in order to draw out patterns, participants in each group are selected based on common demographic characteristics or experiences. The moderator uses a discussion guide of open-ended questions that follow a logical sequence and address topics related to the research's purpose. This open-ended format allows participants to respond in their own words.

*In preparing for focus group research, remember that:*

**Focus groups are not representative**
Focus group data is not scientifically reliable. No matter how many groups you conduct, you will not obtain a representative or national sample. Including all ethnic groups does not make the methodology a representative sample or survey.

**More focus groups ≠ more value added**
Regardless of country size or population, your program will rarely require more than 12 focus groups. Increasing the amount to 24 or 36 does not mean better or more reliable results. Convening focus groups in all geographic areas does not make the sample representative.

**Focus groups are time-consuming**
Focus groups take a great deal of time to plan—even with a professional firm or consultant involved—and require strong attention to detail. At a minimum, it will take between six weeks and two months to prepare for, conduct and analyze focus groups. Local, regional and national elections and holidays will have an impact on your timeline.

**Every stage is important**
The early stages of research, such as recruiting participants, are as important as the final report and presentation.

**The moderator's role is crucial**
Skilled, trained moderators are essential for successful focus groups.

**Focus group participants are homogeneous**
Participants in each group should be fairly homogeneous, sharing pre-selected demographic characteristics identified by you and the consultant.

# Chapter 5

## THE BASICS

5

**Size**
A typical focus group includes six to ten participants. A group with more than ten participants can be hard to control and limits each person's opportunity to share insights and observations. A smaller group size allows for more in-depth discussion, but may not offer enough stimulation.

**Length**
A typical focus group lasts between 90 and 120 minutes.

**Moderators***
Skilled, trained moderators are essential for the successful conduct of focus groups. The ideal moderator is interested in the conversation, and creates an atmosphere that is spontaneous, non-evaluative and non-threatening. *See Chapter 6.*

**Participants***
Participants in each group are relatively homogeneous. Besides gender, other demographics may include education, level of income or social class, literacy and political affiliation. *See "Recruitment" later in this chapter.*

**Screeners**
Carefully scripted questionnaires, called "screeners," help identify appropriate participants. The short survey may include demographic, vote and party preference or other questions. A screener questionnaire does not reveal the specific topic that participants will discuss in the focus group. If the respondent meets a screener's criteria, he/she is asked to participate.

**Incentives***
Organizers offer small incentives to help ensure participants attend. Incentives can be creative. Some items that have worked well include gift certificates to a local grocery shop or a form of entertainment, phone cards and Internet cards.

**Reminders**
To further ensure participation, organizers follow up—via in-person visits, phone calls or letters, for example—with those who agreed to attend during the initial screening.

**Moderator's guide***
The questions assembled by researchers and asked by the moderator are called a "guide" rather than a "questionnaire" because they are more of a subject and question guide, or template, than they are a script. Questions are open-ended. *See Chapter 7.*

**Location***
The ideal venue for each focus group is comfortable, accessible and neutral for the participants.



*See "COST FACTORS," Chapter 2.

**Observation***
Besides the moderator and participants, the observer also plays an important role. Facial expressions, body language, group interaction and spoken language cannot be transferred onto paper. *See "Observation," this chapter.*

**Refreshments***
During the sessions, participants are offered refreshments, such as cold drinks or snacks that can be eaten quietly. Local culture determines what is provided.

**Translation***
If the observer does not understand the language, it is important to have a strong bilingual translator present during the groups. Guides and transcripts are translated from local languages into English or vice versa.

**Confidentiality**
Detailed information about the participants, such as last names or contact information, remains confidential. Observers are provided with a list of participants' first names, age, education and other pieces of background information.

**Recording***
So that reliable transcripts can be produced, each group is recorded.

**Transcription***
Each recording is transcribed so that those analyzing the data do not rely on sketchy or uneven notes. Transcripts are irreplaceable.

## THE VENUE

You and your consultant should locate facilities that are:

**Comfortable**
The venue should be large enough to hold 15 people comfortably without too many distractions or outside noise.

**Accessible**
The venue should be in an area that is easy to reach and easy to find for the participants. If not, consider providing transportation.

**Neutral**
Keep political considerations in mind. The venue should be a neutral place in the community that is free of political connections.

*See "COST FACTORS," Chapter 2.

# Chapter 5

## RECRUITMENT

5

Recruiting participants is one of the most important steps in your project. Carefully think through who needs to be in each group and why, and work with the consultant or firm to design feasible recruiting procedures. A poorly managed process will damage your findings' credibility.

*"The hardest part of the entire project was the recruit."*

—Amy Gray, NDI-Croatia

Common demographic characteristics to consider include:

- Gender
- Age
- Race
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Voting behavior
- Voting intentions
- Education
- Literacy
- Socio-economic class
- Place of residence
- Marital Status
- Prior involvement in an NDI program

**Allow time**
Allow time for the recruiting to take place. The more specific your recruit—i.e. the more demographic characteristics you are trying to fill for each group—the longer it could take.

**Avoid familiarity**
Your participants should not be familiar with one another, as familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure. Also, avoid participants who have already participated in several focus groups.

**Avoid power dynamics**
Try not to gather individuals with direct or indirect power over others, for example, party leaders and branch officers.

**Screen recruits**
A short list of questions called the "screener" [see Appendix E] is used to determine appropriate participants. The screener ensures that participants fit your criteria. Recruiters will use the screener when they approach potential participants.

**Recruit more participants than you need**
If you want eight or ten participants for each group, recruit at least 12 or 14 people. Despite your best efforts, not all of them will appear. *See "Re-screen," opposite page.*

**Track and remind participants**
All participants should be tracked in one central location, by either the local firm, the consultant or NDI program staff. If possible, the recruiters should re-confirm their participation within 24 hours of the groups. This helps ensure that participants attend.

## BEFORE AND DURING GROUP SESSIONS

**Arrive early**
The focus group team—the moderator, observers and NDI staff—should arrive early to properly prepare the venue and touch base.

**Prepare the room**
Arrange the seats so that everyone faces each other throughout the discussion. If you have a rectangular table, the moderator can sit at one end, with two participants on the other end. You can also remove the table and arrange the chairs in a circle.

**Greet participants**
As participants arrive, greet them and bring them to the discussion room. Consider having the moderator already present in the room. Though the moderator should be careful to keep the conversation informal, light conversation builds rapport.

**Re-screen**
Introduce a second questionnaire to gain more information on the participants. These questions will overlap with the original screener and may add questions about family, religion, income, newspaper or radio preferences, or other topics. It also helps ensure that a busy participant has not sent a friend or family member as a delegate.

Use the re-screener to help determine which participants to include. If the participants are illiterate, one of the project team members can ask the questions. In the U.S., organizers thank unneeded participants for their time, provide the incentive and respectfully dismiss them. For NDI projects, discretion must be left to the consultant or team's knowledge of the area and local custom. You may consider creating a second group if enough participants are interested.

**Communicate with the moderator**
Before the groups begin, discuss the maximum number of notes that will be sent to the moderator. While notes are helpful at times, too many distract the participants and the moderator, and may decrease the moderator’s leadership strength and/or credibility.

Set aside time to discuss any issues or suggestions immediately following each group session. This may include slight changes to the guide or comments for the moderator.

**Record for transcription**
Ensure that your recording equipment is reliable and fully charged. If responsible for the tape recordings, keep an eye on the tape during the session. At the end of the sessions, tapes should be clearly labeled with date, time, place, topic and participant characteristics. Use high quality tapes.

Transcripts require funds and take time to translate, but they are invaluable. You will need to make sure to have someone transcribe—and translate if necessary—each discussion.

# Chapter 5

5

## OBSERVATION

The observer plays an important role in the success of a focus group. The observer, and translator if present, should be as unobtrusive as possible. Observers can sit in the room next door or watch a closed circuit television.

Tips for observers include:

- ☑ Be clear on the purpose of the research. Remember the objective(s).
- ☑ Arrive at least 45 to 60 minutes before the scheduled start of the focus group to avoid running into participants and to help prepare. Don't forget to make a stop at the bathroom.
- ☑ Review the moderator's guide and be familiar with the intended flow of the discussion.
- ☑ Prepare note-taking forms in advance.
- ☑ Trust the moderator.
- ☑ Don't expect the moderator to ask every question on the guide or follow the order exactly.
- ☑ Realize that every minute of the discussion will not be meaningful and not all responses will provide insight. Expect that some comments will not directly relate to your topic.
- ☑ Be somewhat flexible on time allotted for each section of the guide. The moderator can speed up or slow down if necessary.
- ☑ Realize that participants forget the ground rules sometimes and talk all at once, talk too softly, stray from the topic of conversation, have a side conversation, or change their minds.
- ☑ Listen carefully to what participants say, but avoid judging or evaluating comments. Listen to misinformation; expect different opinions and ways of thinking.
- ☑ Avoid selective listening—paying sole attention to those points that support an already established or preconceived notion.
- ☑ Listen to what is not being said as well as what's being said.
- ☑ After each group, the observer should prepare short summaries.

# Chapter 6

## *The Moderator*

6

## THE MODERATOR'S ROLE

The moderator plays a crucial role in the success of a focus group. It might seem easy to moderate a discussion, but real skills come into play that can only be acquired with experience.

The moderator:

- Guides the discussion along specific paths.
- Directs the conversation to allow perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes to emerge.
- Actively listens without adding his or her own opinion.
- Creates a space for participants to exchange ideas.

A good moderator:

- ☑ Remains neutral
- ☑ Listens well
- ☑ Appears enthusiastic and engaged
- ☑ Is kind yet firm
- ☑ Has a sense of humor
- ☑ Creates a trustful atmosphere
- ☑ Demonstrates flexibility
- ☑ Shows respect
- ☑ Asks questions clearly and precisely
- ☑ Applies a combination of questioning techniques
- ☑ Uses sophisticated naiveté
- ☑ Probes for additional information when participants give vague answers
- ☑ Encourages expression of differing views

The ideal moderator is interested in the conversation, and creates an atmosphere that is spontaneous, non-evaluative and non-threatening. The moderator does not become a defendant of any one concept or try to educate participants. Rather, his or her role is to explore respondents' feelings and opinions.

# Chapter 6

6

## TRAINING MODERATORS

There is no one correct type of moderator or moderator style. When planning groups with your consultant or firm, remember that your goal is to create a comfortable environment for participants.

Skilled moderators may be available through a local firm or partner organization. To ensure these moderators are qualified, an international consultant will often spend a few days on the ground determining their strengths and weaknesses and providing additional training.

If no trained moderators are readily available, NDI has successfully located potential moderators through universities or NGOs and, in some countries, recruited journalists. Using an expert in facilitating group discussion, NDI provides the selected moderators with serious training and preparation.[5]

In either circumstance, you and the consultant or firm should help each moderator understand the project's overall goal, as well as specific objectives for each discussion. Provide your moderators with background reading, and meet before the groups to review and answer questions or to make minor changes.

## MODERATING GROUP DISCUSSIONS

While your guide may plan for a two-hour discussion, the conversation may go longer than planned. Establish priorities for the moderators. What absolutely must be asked? What answers can you live without? Preparing your moderators is key.

The moderator should become familiar enough with the guide not to depend on it word for word. During a group discussion, the moderator should:

- Be aware of what is said and has been said.
- Evaluate whether the information provided contributes to NDI's objectives.
- Determine what unanticipated but important information is being obtained.
- Know when and how to probe for more information.
- Know when to clarify.
- Know when to retrace or make a point.
- Know when and how to move participants to another topic or link a comment with a previous statement.
- Carefully keep track of time.

[5]See NDI-South Africa "NDI Focus Group Moderator and Recruiter Handbook."

Establishing trust is essential. The moderator should warmly greet participants, smile when he/she sees the group, and make eye contact.

The moderator alone has a copy of the guide. The moderator keeps the conversation directed toward relevant topics and prevents side conversations. This requires the moderator to be direct and sometimes to remind participants about time limitation.

**MODERATOR GROUND RULES**

- ☑ Address participant concerns
- ☑ Establish control
- ☑ Stress confidentiality
- ☑ Stress independence
- ☑ Use sophisticated naiveté
- ☑ Don't give away own opinions
- ☑ Address problems before they arise
- ☑ Embrace the group

The moderator may write participants' names on table tents or name tags that are visible to everyone. This will help the moderator's approach seem more personal. For instance, he or she could ask "What do you think about that, Hannah?" The moderator should include those sitting next to him/her in the conversation and talk to every "hour" as if looking at a clock.

The moderator should listen to the conversation even after the group comes to an end. Participants may have comments for the moderator they were uncomfortable sharing with the larger group.

## MODERATOR CHALLENGES

When participants wander off topic, the moderator can say: "Wait, how does that relate to [X]?" or "Interesting point. But how about _____?" or "Let's get back to _____."

Sometimes the conversation slows. If this happens, the moderator can carefully:

- ♦ Challenge a respondent—put him/her on the defensive in order to get the discussion moving.
- ♦ Say something controversial to elicit opinions.
- ♦ Play devil's advocate.
- ♦ State an untruth and have participants defend or reject the statement.
- ♦ Practice a form of sophisticated naiveté: "Oh, I didn't know that. Can you tell me more about it?"

A participant may ask the moderator for his or her opinions or ideas. Neutrality is important; the moderator shouldn't share them. Instead, the moderator can direct the question back to the group and ask: "What do you think?"; What would you do?"; "What's your hunch?"; "Why do you feel that way?"; and "I'm here to get your opinion!"

# Questions and Comments Moderators Say

Adapted from *How to Get Beneath the Surface in Focus Groups* by George Silverman:

- How so?
- In what way?
- What else?
- How is that for you?
- What does [X] mean for you?
- Just say anything that comes to mind.
- Explain to me...
- Say more.
- Keep talking.
- Don't stop.
- Tell me about... Tell me more about that….
- I'd like you all to [discuss, decide]...
- Tell me what goes on when you...
- Describe what it's like to...
- Think about a situation in which you -------. Tell me about it.
- Give me a [picture, description] of...
- Give me some examples/three examples about [X].
- So, the message you want me to get from that story is...
- I don't think I'm getting it all. Here's what I've got so far, tell me what I am missing.
- Help me understand.
- So, it sounds like you're saying...
- Somebody sum this all up.
- Tell me everything you know about [X].
- Let me pose a problem
- I'm wondering what would you do if...
- What I'd like to hear about is how you are dealing with...
- That's helpful. Now let's hear some different thoughts...
- Let's hear a different perspective on this.
- Let's see, we haven't heard from...
- Can someone turn that [wish, dream, request] into a reality? Does anyone know how to do it?
- Let's turn this complaint into a problem. How can we solve it?
- How might someone do that?
- What am I not asking?
- How important is that concern?
- I can't seem to read the group's reaction to that. Help me out.
- That got quite a rise out of everyone. What is everyone reacting to?
- You seem to have a lot of excitement and energy around that. Talk to me from the excitement.
- What's bothering you?
- How come the energy level of the group just went down?
- Who can build on this last idea?

# Chapter 7

## *The Moderator's Guide*

7

A moderator's guide, or guidelines, is the basis from which you will explore questions and ideas with focus group participants. The guide is a concrete tool for NDI, the consultants and the moderators to solidify the research objective. It helps to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Using a guide means each focus group is conducted in a similar fashion, making the results more reliable. You put the questions in context for the participants and you help the moderator stay on track and on time. Think of the guide as a template, rather than as a script.

**In a moderator's guide, a good sequence**[6] :

- ☑ Has an easy beginning
- ☑ Is sequenced so that conversation flows naturally
- ☑ Moves from general to specific
- ☑ Uses the time available wisely

**While good questions**[7]**:**

- ☑ Sound conversational
- ☑ Use words the participants would employ when talking about the issue
- ☑ Are easy to say
- ☑ Are clear
- ☑ Are usually short
- ☑ Are usually open-ended
- ☑ Are usually one-dimensional
- ☑ Include clear, well thought out directions

**The format of a guide may be:**

Structured: A defined set of questions is used to guide the group. This is the most common approach.

Semi-structured: Topic areas are used to form a discussion guide outline, but no specific questions are included.

Unstructured: A broad purpose statement is used instead of a guide, and the participants determine the subject matter.

[6] *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 2003.
[7] *State Affiliate Focus Group Team Training, NAEYC Annual Conference*, 2001.

# Chapter 7

7

## PREPARING THE MODERATOR'S GUIDE

The more clarity you have about your objectives, the easier it will be for you and your team to write the moderator's guide. To prepare the guide:

- Review your objectives.
- Use your objectives to determine the scope and structure of the guide.
- Be realistic about what you can achieve.
- Set priorities, and make sure your project team understands what you can reasonably achieve in the time you have.
- Provide clear instructions to the moderators.
- Remember that it's a guide, not a script.
- Remember the guide will be translated into the local language(s).

Carefully review the draft guide. Are there important questions you think are missing? Questions that may not translate well into your program country's language or culture? Highlight these issues for your consultant, who might not be aware of a problem or may have previous experience to prove the question works.

A generally consistent guide is important for the overall comparison of data. At times, you may need to tailor the guide for a particular audience, for instance illiterate women.

## GENERAL SEQUENCE

**Introduction**
The moderator provides information on what to expect during the session, and establishes rapport and trust with the participants by getting a sense of their concerns about the nature and structure of the discussion. The goal is to create a comfortable environment so participants disclose opinions and feelings.

**Transition**
Transition questions set the stage for in-depth conversation by obtaining a snapshot of the participants' overall perceptions or views about the topic. These non-threatening questions move the discussion into the next stage.

**In-depth investigation**
These questions generate detailed information about participants' views toward the most important issues in the moderator's guide—the ones that relate to the core purpose of the focus group.

**Closure**
Closing questions create an opportunity for participants to alter or clarify positions they made in earlier discussions, and prepare participants for the discussion's end. The moderator thanks participants and reminds them why their input is important.

## QUESTION TYPES TO USE



**Open-ended**
Open-ended questions allow participants to reply as they wish. They usually begin with when, what, where, who or how. They provide a large amount of information, but can result in lengthy replies.

**Neutral**
Neutral questions leave things very open for participants to explore their thoughts and reach conclusions. This contrasts with leading questions, which are biased in their phrasing. Neutral examples include: "How do you feel about [X]?"; "How are you reacting?"; "What do you believe about…?"; and "What was that experience like for you?"

**Probing**
Probes, or follow-up questions, are a central piece of the moderator's guide. In most structured guides, probes are scattered throughout each section.

Probing questions reveal more in-depth information by clarifying earlier responses or expanding on statements made by the participants. These questions are a key task of the moderator; they prevent "data gaps." For example: "What exactly do you mean by corrupt?"; "What else?"; "Please give me an example of…"; "Does anyone feel differently about this issue?"; "Help me understand…" or "How so?" Other ways to probe include making encouraging noises, nodding, silence and (appropriate) hand gestures.

**Short**
Short questions get long answers and keep participants with you.

**Non-threatening**
Questions must be sensitive.

**General to specific**
Questions work best when they start broad and move to more specific; this means a gradual shift from less personal to more personal.

**Specific**
Specific questions require precise replies. These questions confirm or clarify points, are useful in controlling the interview, and are usually preferred toward the end of a group. The drawback: they can limit conversation.

## QUESTION TYPES TO AVOID

**Yes/no**
If necessary, yes/no questions can be used to discourage a dominant participant or to confirm a point. But, they also limit conversation and elicit ambiguous responses. Try to limit these types of questions to the end of the discussion when you want to bring certain responses into focus.

**Double-barreled**
Avoid double-barreled questions such as "How do you feel about the voting requirement and what are you going to do about it?"

**Why**
Though you are conducting research to find out how and why participants feel a certain way, avoid asking "why" questions. They put participants on the spot, restrict the range of answers, and can inadvertently make someone feel defensive.

**Leading**
All questions should convey the least amount of information about the moderator's personal expectations or opinions as possible. A leading question already has the answer embedded in the question. Leading examples include: "Would you like this?"; "Don't you believe that…?"; "Was [x] a good experience for you?"

**Questions that set up a pecking order**
Avoid questions that create a hierarchy among the participants, such as education level or income.

**Use This Checklist to Review Your Guides[8]:**

- ☐ What type of language does the topic and target audience require? Are you using "expert" words?
- ☐ Is the language informal and simple?
- ☐ Are questions short and understandable?
- ☐ What information do the questions ask for?
- ☐ How broad or narrow are the questions?
- ☐ How are they related to what you need to know?
- ☐ How "answerable" are they?
- ☐ How are participants likely to feel about the questions?
- ☐ How would you feel about these questions?
- ☐ Are the questions too sensitive?
- ☐ Is the context of the questions clear?



[8]*Customers in Focus: A Guide to Conducting and Planning Focus.*

# Chapter 8

## *Presenting and Reporting Results*

8

You have finally reached the last stage of the focus group research process, preparing the presentation and report. Though your consultant is primarily responsible for analyzing the data, you—as the NDI representative managing this project—will play an active role in preparing the presentations, finalizing the report, and distributing the findings.

To determine the most appropriate style of presentation and report for your program, review your objectives and consider:

- What is the audience? Is there more than one? For instance, do you want to share the findings with party leaders? Civic leaders? Policymakers in the country or in the U.S.? NDI's donors?
- How much and which information should be shared with each of the targeted audiences? In some cases, NDI will release all of the findings, including the moderator's guide, to anyone interested. In other cases, NDI shares select information with certain audiences, such as party-specific presentations and reports.
- When is the right time to share the results with the different audiences? Is there a particular time when you will have their attention? Before or after elections? Before you begin a key area of programming, such as message development?
- What is the most effective forum to verbally present the findings to each audience? For instance, would sharing results in a multiparty setting have the impact you desire, or would small, tailored presentations for each party be better received?
- Who is the most appropriate messenger for the findings? Should the consultant take part in all or some of the presentations? Who should represent NDI?
- What is the best format in which to present the findings? Will the targeted audience read a long report or would a short memo or executive summary work better? Would a PowerPoint presentation suffice?
- What is the best method for distributing the report(s)? Do you want to post the report(s) on NDI's or the country program's website, email the report(s) to all or select NDI partners and friends, and/or print and send hard copies?

Through the research, NDI may have gained information that could be sensitive to key partners—for instance, the political parties, USAID or the U.S. Embassy—so handle the presentation and report(s) with care.

# Chapter 8

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## PRESENTING THE FINDINGS

Before sharing the findings with outside audiences, have the consultant first present to you and your team. As with the report, make adjustments as necessary and give guidance as to appropriate information and format.

Make sure the slides or other visual aids are clear and easy to understand. The purpose is to have brief statements made visual. Quotes are useful to illustrate key points, but should not overwhelm the audience. You do not want someone reading sentences as your presenter is speaking. Also, it is preferable to have a limit of one message per slide.

The basic research methodology should be explained early in the presentation. Just as with the report, percentages should never enter into the conversation, unless they are from survey data that supports the focus group research.

Additional tips include:

- ☑ Determine the purpose of the oral presentation.
- ☑ Select a credible and well-prepared presenter. This might be the focus group consultant, the country director, the regional director or another member of the team.
- ☑ Size up your audience and tailor the presentation accordingly. Why does it care about the findings? How much time does it have for the presentation? What will your audience do with the information? What do you hope they do?
- ☑ Are these senior policymakers or other figures with little time? If so, spare them the methodological details and after a brief introduction, dive into the key findings and recommendations. Save less important issues for last, if you discuss them at all.
- ☑ If you are presenting to a larger research team, you will need to discuss the methodology in some detail. Explain who participated in the groups, where, how selected, the dates, etc.
- ☑ Be clear on why the research is new or of interest to the audience.
- ☑ Cite the most important findings first.
- ☑ Limit your points to the key findings.
- ☑ Use visuals and quotes.

## PREPARING THE REPORT

When you receive the consultant's draft report, review all of the text and proposed appendices. In addition to providing quality control, you and your team need to determine what information is appropriate to share with your target audiences. Take into account questions the key audience, for example party leaders, asked during the presentations, and shape the report with their interests in mind.

There is no perfect length for a focus group report. Some argue that a 15-page memo is best, while others believe that a 50-page report is more informative. Your audiences should determine the appropriate format of each report.

A focus group report consists of:

- An introductory statement that explains the purpose of the research, the context and the expected outcomes.
- An explanation of the methodology and limitations, including who managed the process, how the groups were recruited, who participated in each group, and when and where the groups took place.
- An executive summary that presents the main findings.
- The findings in more detail, with verbatim quotes for illustration purposes.
- A conclusion with strategic recommendations (if appropriate to the audience).
- An appendix with relevant information, such as a participant chart, and the moderator's guide if your team wishes to make this public.
- An acknowledgement of the funder, including necessary logos and language such as disclaimers.

Remember that analyzing focus groups is a subjective process. The nature of this kind of research means that questions are not asked exactly the same way each focus group, responses are dependent, and participants influence others. The author of the report must determine which trends exist and select the key findings and quotes to highlight.

As discussed in earlier chapters, focus groups are not scientifically representative. The series' participants do not represent the target population, making it impossible to generalize their perceptions and attitudes to any population group. Unless a survey has been conducted or outside research is cited, no quantitative data is present in a focus group report. The ideal report has no numbers except pagination.

# Chapter 8

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*"The goal of focus groups is to learn what is "out there," or what some refer to as the "stories behind the numbers." A powerful analysis will capture themes and pivotal thoughts that arise among participants. While descriptives add to painting a full picture, it is through analysis that the researcher captures the depth, imagery, and expression offered by qualitative research."*

—Susana McCollom, Qualitative Research Consultant

The findings should emphasize "participants" and not "citizens" or "voters." Appropriate language includes:

"Participants feel that…"
"Among the participants, there seemed to be consensus…"
"While a national survey conducted by IRI revealed that 30 percent of women were unfamiliar with democracy, participants in our focus groups were conversant…"

Inappropriate language—unless the focus groups were accompanied by a survey or outside research— includes:

"Thirty percent of focus group participants felt…"
"Women in X country perceive…" or "citizens of X country are…"

This language turns qualitative data into quantitative data, which focus group data is not.

## REPORTING TO POLITICAL PARTIES

If you plan to create individual party or other audience-specific reports, discuss this in advance with your consultant. For budgetary, time or other reasons, NDI staff in the field or in D.C. usually prepare these reports. They are confidential and have very limited distribution.

*See Chapter 4 for more information on conducting focus groups as part of a political party program.*

## REPORTING TO THE FUNDER AND EMBASSY

The primary audience will never be a funder or an embassy, yet you will most likely want to share the research findings with one or both entities. Consider developing briefing materials that inform the reader of major findings but do not breach the political parties' confidence. A meeting with the embassy or funder gives them the opportunity to ask questions and feel they are aware of what was presented to the political parties or other targets.

# FOCUS GROUPS IN INDONESIA

***Contributed by Paul Rowland and Stephanie Lynn, NDI-Indonesia***

In our several years with NDI, we have used public opinion research in various ways. We have made choices based on the local environment, the needs of our partners and funding. Whether polling or focus groups, research can serve to increase our confidence in the messages we deliver in our work. We can speak with greater authority about focusing on issues of importance to voters and know what those issues actually are. Research has been an important tool for us both in Indonesia and previously in Serbia.

In 2003 and 2004, NDI-Indonesia conducted focus group research in advance of elections as part of its political party program. We used a local firm and also brought together NDI staff and consultants to assist with the design, provide quality control and help analyze the results. The two sets of focus groups in our target provinces served as the basis for our training of party trainers and candidates.

The first set of groups probed on issues, voter sentiment, perceptions of Islam and democracy as well as attitudes towards women in politics. The data collected served as the opening session for all of our trainings; we shared with participants information about voter concerns, particularly as the lead-in for the sessions on communications and message. The results indicated an openness to voting for women, a message we shared to support women's efforts within parties to get more women nominated to party lists.

We distributed a general written report to all of the parties contesting the elections, but we also shared the data in individual party consultations with leaders at the national and provincial levels. We tailored each presentation to describe the positive news overall as well as the negative reactions heard about their party in particular. We did not share the negatives of any party with its competitors.

We then followed up the legislative elections with a second round of focus group research, this time focused on Indonesia's first direct election of its president. Our research was again presented at the national and provincial levels and a report was shared with all candidate and campaign teams. The results of the legislative elections showed parties what outreach techniques were successful at the ballot box—and which were not. In addition, NDI's credibility with the national leadership of parties increased due to other NDI activities such as Quick Count, or Parallel Vote Tabulation. As a result, parties were more open to hearing the focus group results and incorporated them into their campaign strategy, message and techniques for the presidential campaign as well.

The focus group research in Indonesia offered a look into the minds of a citizenry that wanted better jobs and more stability in their lives but did not, as some pundits argued, want to return to the authoritarianism of the Suharto regime.

# FOCUS GROUPS IN MOROCCO:
# *People's Mirror* Strategic Research Center

***Contributed by Tricia Keller, NDI-Morocco***

With funding from the NED, the *People's Mirror* was founded in February 2003 as the first qualitative research center created by NDI. Unique in the Arab world, our primary goal is to establish a better link between decision makers and citizens in political, social and economic areas. Located in NDI's office in Morocco, the center seeks to support local and international partners on two levels: 1) by conducting participatory focus group research and 2) by helping partners to translate research findings into concrete actions and strategies.

In addition to conducting research in our fully equipped center in Rabat, our team works throughout the country, in urban and rural areas, using portable equipment and the knowledge and expertise of its staff. Recently, we have also been requested to conduct projects in other MENA countries.

While we initially created the Center to support NDI programs, we now provide services to a broad range of partners at the local and international levels. The *People's Mirror* is currently on track to become a local entity separate from NDI. Because the Center will balance the need to sustain itself financially while delivering results that benefit society as a whole, staff must be trained and prepared to provide professional services while also effectively managing an NGO using both fiscal and social performance objectives.

### CREATING THE CENTER

In deciding to create and institutionalize a research center, we thoroughly considered several key issues: sustainability; the need and acceptance of public opinion research in the local context; and ability to identify and hire proper staff.

*Sustainability.* Sustainability was the first and most important issue to consider. Will there be continued funding to support the Center and its research, as well as staff development and training beyond the initial creation of infrastructure? Is there a market as well as sufficient demand for qualitative public opinion research in Morocco?

During our initial assessment we found that there were several commercial firms engaged in this field, but a vacant niche existed for public opinion research on political and social issues. Furthermore, there was indeed a growing interest in and demand for public opinion research in these areas. The NED voiced a commitment to support the Center until it reached self-sustainability and attained an adequate base of paying clients. To reach these goals, we have devoted a significant amount of time and financial resources to developing marketing strategies and tools, as well as identifying and reaching out to potential clients.

*Local views on public opinion research.* For the most part, Moroccan authorities accept public opinion research, but their level of interest in particular projects has required significant time explaining the purpose and nature of our Center to officials at various levels. However, the time spent has been worth it. In our assessment, Moroccan citizens have demonstrated their willingness to push for higher levels of freedom of expression, and we deemed it important to support them in expanding this particular area of political space.

### *"Building Bridges between Decision Makers and Citizens"*

In many of the countries in which NDI works, the position of local authorities toward public opinion research ranges from cautious acceptance to aggressive opposition. If recruiters or participants feel that they will be harassed by authorities for their association with the research, a center such as the *People's Mirror* will likely have limited success until an operational level of comfort is reached by local authorities.

*The People's Mirror* Strategic Research Center, located in Rabat, Morocco, was established by NDI with NED funding.

*Staffing.* Identifying staff with the right combination of language and social skills, experience in this field, and a sufficient grasp of the political and social issues in Morocco proved to be quite challenging. We were fortunate to recruit employees with a range of experience in field operations, polling and marketing, and sociology, and have worked to build their individual and collective capacities through continuous training. Again, with this type of center, staff must have functional areas of expertise as well as good business sense. Staff training has concentrated thus far on recruitment; moderation; interviews; analysis; marketing and outreach; public speaking; accounting; financial management; and operations.

#### PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Since 2003, the People's Mirror has conducted more than 200 focus groups for a range of local and international partners. In addition to traditional research for political parties, projects have included:

- Pre-testing educational booklets on the reformed Personal Status Code before developing and distributing sets of materials targeting illiterate Moroccan women *(British Embassy)*
- Exploring the reading habits of Moroccan youth to increase newspaper readership among this demographic *(Al Ahdet Al Maghribiya)*
- Gathering citizen input and opinions on issues before voting on related bills *(Members of Parliament)*
- Assessing employee training needs and their perceptions about ministry restructure *(Ministry of Communications)*
- Exploring perceptions of, reasons for, and ways to prevent child labor in Morocco *(UNICEF)*

While the rewards that we, our partners and Moroccans have reaped from the establishment of the *People's Mirror* have been well worth the investment of time, hard work and funding, we would encourage anyone interested in similar research centers to thoroughly assess these issues and others before embarking on such a project.

If you would like more information on the *People's Mirror* or lessons learned during its three years of operations, please contact Tricia Keller at tkeller@ndi.org.

# SUGGESTED RESOURCES

## FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

**Customers in Focus: A Guide to Conducting and Planning Focus Groups,** Technical Assistance and Training Corporation, U.S. Department of Labor.

This guide provides a thorough and easy to understand description of focus groups. Chapters include an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of focus groups; focus group design; recruiting; conducting and observing groups; analysis; and sample guides.

**What is a Focus Group?** Frederick Hartwig, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 1993 (pdf)

This guide, presented to NDI in 1993, provides a brief outline of focus groups. It describes how to recruit a group, locate a proper facility, conduct a group, ask different types of questions, and analyze results.

**NDI Focus Group Moderator and Recruiter Handbook**, NDI-South Africa, 1997 (pdf)

This manual includes an overview of the moderator's role and qualities, organizing focus groups, recruiting, and preparing a discussion guide with effective questions and probes.

**Introduction to Qualitative Research,** Graeme Trayner, Opinion Leader Research, 2005 (PowerPoint)

This presentation for NDI-Kosovo covers the basics of research, how strategic research is used in political campaigns, focus group recruitment, question development, group discussions, in-depth interviews, and analysis and reporting.

**Qualitative Research Facilitation Skills**, Cathy Forrest, Ipsos Reid, 2002 (PowerPoint)

This presentation, designed for an NDI-Serbia regional trainers program, explains the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, how to plan for and design focus groups, how to prepare a discussion guide, facilitation skills, and group dynamics.

**Introduction to Qualitative Research: Focus Groups and Interviews**, Susana McCollom, Independent Consultant, 2003 (Word)

This report, produced for NDI-Morocco's focus group center, the People's Mirror, explains the qualitative research methodologies of focus groups and in-depth interviews, the role of the observer, writing a discussion guide, types and samples of questions to ask, how to moderate, and tools for analyzing results.

**These documents are available at:**
**http://webserver.ndi.org/teams/polparties/Materials/public_opin_research/public_opinion_index.asp**

# SUGGESTED RESOURCES

**A Guide to Focus Groups for Democracy Builders: Theory and Practice from Developing Democracies,** International Republican Institute & Institute for Public Affairs, 2005 (pdf)

This IRI guide provides an overview of why focus groups are useful for politicians; explains key steps in organizing them; and offers advice for conducting research in post-conflict environments.

**Focus Groups: A Tool for Any Season, Civic Update: May 2003,** NDI Citizen Participation Team.

This Civic Update examines the use of focus groups in NDI's citizen participation programs. The Update covers examples from Angola, Bulgaria, East Timor, Lebanon, and Morocco.

**Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research**, by Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey. 3rd Edition. California: Sage Publications, 2003. Must be ordered via Internet.

This is an excellent book that covers all aspects of focus group research. Krueger is cited by researchers around the world.

## SURVEY RESEARCH

**Public Opinion Polling**, Celinda C. Lake, Lake Snell Perry Mermin and Associates, 1990 (pdf)

This manual, produced for NDI, covers the basics of survey research, with sections on sampling; designing and writing a questionnaire; interviewing respondents; interpreting results; hiring researchers; and analyzing others' surveys.

**A Primer on Polling: A Guide to Conducting Political Opinion Research,** NDI-Morocco and Brian McKee, 2000 (Word)

This NDI-Morocco manual explains quantitative research, demographic analysis, random sampling, questionnaire construction, pre-testing questionnaires, and statistical and strategic analysis.

**A Guide to Understanding Polls**, International Republican Institute, 2003 (pdf)

This IRI guide provides a thorough explanation of how to understand and interpret polls.

**Understanding Market Research**, Cathy Forrest, Ipsos Reid, 2002 (PowerPoint)

This presentation for NDI-Serbia explains the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, focuses on polling, and provides a case study from a Vancouver mayoralty election.

**These documents are available at:**
**http://webserver.ndi.org/teams/polparties/Materials/public_opin_research/public_opinion_index.asp**

# From Proposal to Presentation: The Focus Group Process at NDI

# Appendices

# FOCUS GROUPS IN AN INTERNATIONAL SETTING

## "Understanding Focus Group Research Abroad"

**Excerpted from http://www.groupsplus.com/pages/abroad.htm**
**—Thomas L. Greenbaum, President of Groups Plus**

There are some major differences in doing focus groups outside the U.S. and Canada. One cannot simply take the same materials used to conduct focus groups in the U.S. and send them to a research organization in a foreign country and expect to get comparable, or even reliable, results.

The following highlight some of the most significant differences. Naturally there are some significant differences by country, but this information should be useful as a general guideline in planning international research.

**Timeframe**
Whereas many companies are accustomed to developing a project on a Monday and having it completed by the end of the following week, this is almost impossible to do in foreign countries. Lead times tend to be much longer, with the Far East being particularly troublesome. If it takes two weeks to set up groups in the U.S., figure almost double that in most of Europe and even more than that for Asia.

**Structure**
Eight to 10 people in a group is a large number for most foreign groups, which often consist of four to six people, our minigroup. Further, the length of groups outside the U.S. can be up to four hours. Be very specific when arranging for international focus groups. Most foreign research organizations seem to adapt well to our format if properly informed and supervised.

**Recruiting and re-screening**
In general, the U.S. is much more rigid in adhering to specifications both in recruiting and re-screening. These processes must be monitored very carefully.

**Approach**
Foreign moderators tend to be much less structured and authoritative, which can result in a great deal of down time during the sessions. Foreign moderators feel this is necessary to make group members feel comfortable with each other and build the rapport necessary to get the desired information.

Also, they tend to use fewer writing exercises and external stimuli such as concept boards and photos. This must be considered when planning foreign sessions.

**Project length**
Projects can take much longer to execute. In the U.S. we are accustomed to doing two, sometimes three or four, groups a day, but in many overseas markets, one group is the limit because of the time they are scheduled, the length of the sessions, or the demands of the moderators. Also, some moderators have a break in the middle of the group, which would be very unusual in U.S. sessions.

**Facilities**
The facility environment outside the U.S. and Canada is much like the setup here 20 years ago. For example, it is more common than not to watch a group in a residential setting on a television which is connected to the group room by cable. Further, many of the facilities with one-way mirror capabilities simply do not have the amenities we are accustomed to in the U.S.

**Costs**
While varying considerably by region and country, it would not be unusual to pay almost twice as much per group for sessions conducted in Europe and almost three times as much for many areas in Asia.

In light of these differences, it is important that companies take action to ensure that they get the results needed from foreign research. Have the international research managed by the same people who run the U.S. studies. The alternative is to use a U.S.-based foreign research company that can be a central point of contact and will handle the details abroad...

Have the U.S. research organization that generally implements your focus groups manage the project in foreign countries by developing the specifications for groups using U.S. standards and materials such as recruitment questionnaires, discussion guides, external stimuli, etc.; training the foreign moderator; and attending the foreign groups and listening to the proceedings using a translator. The U.S. representative can direct activities by requiring the moderator to check in during the session.

While this approach to foreign research is much more expensive than simply sending some materials to a local office of your company or to a local research company to execute in the market, it does guarantee much higher quality output than you will get from the alternatives. As most companies know so well, bad research is generally worse than no research. So if you are going to conduct qualitative research outside the U.S., spend the extra time and money, and do it right. It will be a small investment over the long term.

[end]

# NDI PROPOSAL AND REPORT LANGUAGE

**NDI-Iraq report, 2003:**

This kind of research–listening intently to citizens in order to convey their hopes and aspirations to decision-makers, both Iraqi and international–is an inherently democratic, and democratizing, activity.

Focus groups are semi-structured group interviews that proceed according to a careful research design. Groups are recruited to be homogeneous (according to gender, age, education, ethnicity and/or religious affiliation) for two reasons: in order to clarify the views held by a particular sub-group of the population, and to enhance the comfort level of participants, so they feel they are among peers and that everyone involved is equally entitled to express their opinion. When done well, they are free flowing, open-ended, and often unpredictable. They are designed to elicit a wide range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions held by a selected small sample of recruited respondents on a defined topic.

Focus groups are useful in helping understand the language that people use when they discuss particular ideas or concepts. They are also useful in gaining a deeper appreciation for the motivations, feelings, and values behind participants' reactions. It is a flexible form of research that allows one to probe into issues important to the sponsors, while also permitting participants to raise other issues or concerns that might not have occurred to the researchers. As an organized group discussion, it provides a forum that enables participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys that rely on one-on-one questionnaires.

**NDI-Indonesia report, 2004:**

Focus groups are useful in helping understand the language that people use when they discuss particular ideas or concepts. They are also useful in gaining a deeper appreciation for the motivations, feelings, and values behind participants' reactions. It is a flexible form of research that allows one to probe into issues important to the research sponsors, while permitting participants to raise other issues or concerns that might not have occurred to the researchers. As an organized group discussion, it provides a forum that enables participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys that rely on one-on-one questionnaires.

Focus groups such as these can help one better understand the many shades of gray–hesitations, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. Focus groups are first and foremost concerned with understanding attitudes, rather than quantifying them. Because of the small numbers involved, however, focus group participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly and statistically representative of the larger population from which they are drawn, and findings ought not be generalized beyond the small number of participants. They offer insight into emerging ideas and popular attitudes on key issues, but it would be unsound to extrapolate to firm conclusions about what "all" or "most" Indonesians believe based on such a small sample of individuals.

The findings from this set of political focus groups in Indonesia provide hypotheses and tentative conclusions that require further investigation. A quantitative survey, for instance, could build on these kinds of findings and test hypotheses with a larger and more representative sample.

**NDI-Liberia proposal, 2004:**

NDI has conducted focus group research in a number of post-conflict environments, including East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq. Focus group research can be used to widen the views and perspectives available to policy makers and those taking part in public debate. In post-conflict societies where traditional means of communicating with the wider population have been disrupted, the Institute has found that focus group research is a useful tool to gauge the existing space for social and political discourse at the local level and develop more relevant program activities…

Focus groups interviews are small, guided participatory discussions led by a trained moderator. The research aims to provide qualitative information and capture the breadth of citizens' attitudes, opinions and interests. Participants are selected based on common demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and occupation. Groups typically comprise six to 10 people, large enough to exchange ideas and opinions, but small enough to allow everyone to participate in the discussion.

**NDI-Morocco, 2002:**

In the past, a significant number of important institutions in the Moroccan polity—the government, political parties, Parliament, civil society organizations and the media—violated a central tenet of good governance: they assumed that they "knew" what the citizens thought, what they wanted, and what they needed. Furthermore, citizens were often perceived to be external to these institutions and bodies rather than an essential part of them. In order for Moroccan government and civil society to truly service the citizenry more democratically, they have to be willing to learn from citizens and stakeholders.

Focus groups are a neutral and cost effective way to accomplish these objectives and would be of great utility to the Institute's partners. To that end NDI proposes the creation of a focus group center specializing in issues related to democracy. Specifically, NDI would work to achieve the following objectives: 1) To assist key players in the democratisation process to better understand and value the viewpoints of citizens on a variety of issues; 2) increase the understanding of focus group methodology among political actors; and 3) develop issues and hypotheses related to public opinion that could potentially be tested by local groups in broader, more quantitative surveys.

NDI has used focus groups around the world, including Morocco, to support greater understanding by political actors of the views of citizens.

**NDI-Malawi, 1994:**

Focus groups are widely used in the United States, Europe and elsewhere to assess public responses to products, advertisement campaigns and political issues. Unlike polls, focus groups cannot provide a statistical analysis of opinions or accurately estimate support for a given candidate or policy. In place of hard data, focus groups provide depth; they paint a picture of common impressions and ideas, and assess levels of understanding of a particular issue. The technique is an excellent means of gauging reaction to a planned information campaign. Moderators can solicit reactions to such material as poster, radio spots, slogans, jingles and other commonly used mass education methods. Focus groups are also less expensive than polls, and they do not rely on telephones or extensive door-to-door contact.

Focus groups have an important role to play in the developing world. Countries moving towards more representative, more accountable forms of government need a greater awareness of popular concerns and attitudes. Limited resources and communications systems often make it impossible to sample public opinion through traditional surveys. Focus groups thus provide an inexpensive tool for governments, political parties and nonpartisan civic organizations to evaluate public opinion in emerging democracies.

**NDI-Afghanistan concept paper, 2002:**

Without the active involvement of citizens' voices in political life, citizens can suffer from unrepresentative political decisions. Often policymakers make assumptions about the attitudes and interests of the citizenry and make important decisions based on these assumptions. For this reason, identifying the values, beliefs and needs of citizens and disseminating this information is key to helping policy makers and others taking part in the public debate, shape their country's political future. It also helps level the political playing field by shifting power to the hands of citizens.

NDI has a successful record in conducting such public opinion research through focus groups and polling. The Institute has successfully identified a wide cross section of citizens' opinions on a range of issues from their government and political leaders to the electoral process and democracy in general. The Institute has conducted such opinion research in Serbia, East Timor, Pakistan, Nepal, Bosnia, Macedonia, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, among other countries. These programs helped inform governments, political parties, civic organizations and donor agencies to frame policies and shape country strategies.

## Political party/NGO language

**NDI-Afghanistan, 2003:**

NDI would conduct focus group discussions across Afghanistan—in Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar e Sharif, Jalalabad and Heart, as security permits—to gauge citizen attitudes and interests on political, social and economic issues as well as to identify citizens' needs and expectations of their new government. NDI would seek to identify those issues most commonly recognized as priorities for political parties and the government to address. It is important for all stakeholders, including the government, political parties, NGOs, the public and the international community, to understand the aspirations and fears of Afghans and to appreciate the values that guide public thinking and how well these same stakeholders are perceived.

The research would gather information on citizens' perceptions of political parties, civic groups and political and governance issues, such as public confidence in a democratic political party system, citizens' relationship to local and national governments and voter confidence in a first-time national democratic election. A certain emphasis on the research would be geared toward tracing the evolution of political views since NDI conducted focus groups in April and May 2002. The Institute would call on local NGOs to assist in the implementation of the research and in so doing help improve civic groups' capacity to participate in the political system. The research would be conducted in the early months of the program in an effort to use the information gathered to inform activities that would take place in the later months of the program.

NDI would hire a consultant with experience in conducting focus group research on issues of democracy and governance in developing countries. This consultant would work closely with the Resident Director and would lead the effort in identifying participants representing different ethnic groups, gender, age and education

levels, conducting discussions and analyzing the results. NDI would organize a training of trainers (TOT), in which the Institute's consultant would train a group of Afghans on how to conduct focus groups, including recruiting, designing questionnaires, selecting and training moderators, organizing logistics and analyzing results. This will result in some Afghan NGOs developing a capacity to conduct this type of public opinion research on their own.

Political parties and the designated NGOs will be briefed and provided with a written analysis of the results so that the information gathered from these focus groups would be used to help inform the work of political parties as they create their organizations and design their platforms and advocacy strategies. NDI would share the information with IRI and IFES and rely on polling information generated by the CEPPS partners to supplement its findings.

**NDI-East Timor, 2001:**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) proposes a two-month program to provide pre-election support to the political transition in East Timor. NDI's proposed program would seek to promote dialogue among political parties and to amplify the voices of East Timorese political actors and citizens in preparation for the upcoming elections and for the subsequent transition to independence and multiparty democracy, through two primary activities: 1) to conduct a series of focus groups in order to ensure that the views of the East Timorese public inform not only policy decisions, but also the civic education campaigns currently being designed by both domestic and international organizations; and 2) to organize a series of political party roundtables in order to inform parties of citizen views and in order to facilitate dialogue among political parties toward the identification of measures that would ease rising tensions, reduce the possibilities for political violence, and promote confidence in a multi-party democratic process.

As the anticipated election date approaches in East Timor, domestic and international organizations are in the process of designing civic education campaigns that promote a peaceful, transparent and free electoral process and that encourage popular participation. These efforts, however, are much more likely to be effective if they are based on public opinion information gathered from East Timorese citizens in a systematic manner, including information on civic education messages, effective use of media, and target audiences. NDI would conduct a series of focus groups among different sectors in East Timorese society in order to measure the views of the public on issues relevant to the upcoming elections and to the transition to multiparty democracy…

A series of 10 focus group discussions, designed and conducted by NDI, would generate baseline information regarding the structure and design of effective civic education strategies in East Timor. Focus groups would be held in Dili and in four other regions in East Timor. Certain sessions would target specific audiences, such as women or youth. The focus groups would identify key components of an effective civic education campaign in East Timor, including aspects of message, media, materials and audiences.

The Institute would produce a report, to be shared at a concluding conference with domestic and international political actors, presenting both the views of East Timorese society and a suggested framework for effective civic education campaigns. This information will be critical in informing civic education programs and political campaigns that are currently being developed by the international community. NDI would conduct a series of follow-up consultations with East Timorese civic organizations and international agencies in order to produce recommendations for coordinating and implementing civic education efforts.

## Political party language

**NDI-Pakistan proposal, 2004:**

Given the need for parties to be better informed of the needs, views and interests of their constituents, NDI would conduct a series of focus groups with the assistance of an international polling firm. The focus groups would explore citizens' perceptions of political parties, their strengths and weaknesses and their role in the political process. In order to obtain the parties' support and trust for the focus groups, NDI would work with the parties, helping them to better understand the research process.

After conducting the focus groups and compiling the results, NDI would hold party-specific consultations with party leaderships, and members as appropriate, to present the findings. NDI would work with each party to strategize on utilizing the research to target particular areas of reform and consequently better respond to citizens' concerns. These consultations would complement the work of the Institute's resident staff and international experts in informing the areas for internal party reform. With assistance from its polling firm partner, NDI would then conduct workshops and consultations to help the parties utilize the research findings in their reform efforts. The format of these workshops and consultations would engage each of the major political parties on a one-on-one basis, rather than collectively, providing the opportunity for the parties to focus on incorporating the research into strategies that better respond to citizens' opinions.

**NDI-Indonesia, 2003:**

Focus Group Research: In collaboration with political party leaders, and in coordination with NDI's other program components, the Institute would design and commission focus group research to help inform party reforms, aid in the development of issue-based election campaigns, and address the issue of public confidence in the party system. NDI anticipates conducting three rounds of research: in the first quarter of the proposed program (possibly June 2003), on the eve of the campaign period (possibly January 2004), and between the legislative and presidential elections (possibly May 2004). NDI has utilized focus group research in several of its political party strengthening programs elsewhere in the world, and has found it highly effective in helping parties respond to policy platform issues and to plan strategy.

Issue-Based Campaigning: In the pre-election period, NDI would conduct seminars and follow-on consultations with political parties on the process of interpreting the results of focus group research and developing issue-based campaigns based on the results. To help in this effort, NDI would also identify international political party leaders who have made the transition from personality-based to issue-based politics to assist Indonesian party leaders.

**NDI-Serbia, 1997:**

Political parties in the FRY represent different philosophies and policies on matters of high national and republic import. They do not, however, effectively represent the interests of citizens, which, in a mature democracy, form the invisible hand of the political marketplace. The most immediate party development need in the FRY is to create better information flows between parties and the public. Political parties have little if any experience in systematically gauging genuine public opinion on public affairs, political events, government institutions, and on the parties themselves. Further, parties must use this information to inform their development of platforms and messages that respond to and represent citizens' concerns effectively and

directly. It is imperative that political parties begin the development of constant communication and consultation with the public.

NDI proposes to launch this process with a series of focus groups. Focus groups are intensive, moderated, and taped discussions of individuals grouped by gender, ethnicity, and/or political affiliation that explore public sentiment on various political, economic and social issues. They are useful and inexpensive guides to political parties in creating platforms and messages that are responsive to voter interests.

NDI has successfully employed focus groups to assist democratic parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere in developing platforms and messages reflective of voters' concerns.

At the program's outset, NDI would conduct focus groups in four Serbian cities. A focus group expert would work with the resident representative and a Serbian polling firm to select focus group participants, to design questions for discussion, and to moderate the proceedings. Serb moderators would, if needed, receive training in focus group methodology and techniques. NDI and the Serbian polling firm would subsequently analyze the information and prepare a report on the findings. The report would be distributed to political parties, nongovernmental organizations, civic groups and the international community.

NDI would show political parties how to analyze focus group information, and how political parties traditionally use the information to inform the development of their platforms, policy programs and messages as a means to respond effectively to the interests of citizens. As part of this assistance, NDI would offer instruction in the methodology of message development.

## Governance language

**NDI-Bulgaria, 2001:**

The gap between citizens and elected officials will simply not disappear with the emergence of a new majority government. With no further effort to close that gap, Bulgaria's transition to democracy will become stuck in a cycle of elections in which new individuals are regularly elected to technically democratic institutions that have no sustained interaction with citizen groups or advocacy organizations. While governing officials must become more willing to interact with civic actors with regards to legislation, outreach, and constituency services, civic organizations must also learn to represent and advocate for various sectors of the population by reaching out more effectively to governing officials. Only by working from both sides can Bulgaria ensure democratic stability by narrowing the divide between the electorate and the elected…

The need for actual democratic practices is most visible in the lack of qualitative interaction between Bulgarian citizen groups (or civil society) and their elected representatives in the parliament. While members of parliament (MPs) are technically able to solicit issue specific analysis from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as they draft and consider national legislation, in practice, there is rarely any parliamentary consultation with experts in civil society. Similarly, although NGOs are allowed to lobby members of parliament regarding specific legislation, their lack of advocacy experience or training has spoiled the effects of any access NGOs have been legally granted. Factually driven by this lack of engagement, endemic public disillusionment with previously existing Bulgarian political parties became apparent in the June 2001 parliamentary elections, which wrested parliamentary control away from the then-governing UDF and handed

it to the two-month-old National Movement for Simeon II (NMS). In the next several months, MPs and NGOs will develop the interaction habits that will carry them through the tenure of the NMS-led government.

In response to this challenge, NDI proposes a series of eight focus groups to explore basic constituencies' expectations (women, minorities, youth) regarding their new government's response to key issues, and evaluate MPs' receptivity to specific advocacy tactics. In the months that follow the research, NDI consultations with NGO and parliamentary party partners would explore the use of this information to create strategic NGO advocacy plans or draft parliamentary outreach and legislative agendas.

While the focus group research and ensuing consultations are in effect a stand-alone project, they would take place in the context of two ongoing NDI programs that independently work to strengthen NGOs' abilities to reach out to elected officials, and the parliament's capacity to actively engage elements of civil society. These ongoing programs are supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy respectively. Consequently, NDI requests funding from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy only for the direct costs of the focus group research. Through its continuing programs, NDI enjoys positive relationships with all parliamentary parties and has recently partnered with several active NGOs to conduct a voter education and get-out-the-vote campaign, Ti Izbirash. The Institute is thus particularly well placed to work with both civic and governmental actors on using the data from the proposed focus groups to create more effective mechanisms for NGO-parliament interaction.

**NDI-Malawi, 1996:**

In addition to Malawi, NDI has used focus group research in the last year in Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Bosnia and Cambodia as an effective, cost-efficient method of gaining information despite limited communication and infrastructure in these countries. The technique allows NDI to hear the views of diverse sections of a country's population, including those from rural and underdeveloped areas, and to relay the findings to the country's government, political and NGO leaders. In Malawi, focus groups allow NDI to assess Malawians' degree of knowledge of democratic concepts and practices, to ascertain legislators' approaches to their duties as elected representatives, and to explore the most effective ways that the Members of Parliament can communicate with the public. The surveys will help ensure that NDI's activities incorporate the concerns and contributions of the general public and that programs promote public participation in the legislative process.

[end]

# SAMPLE REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN PAKISTAN, 2005

In order to provide party leaders in Pakistan with timely and objective information on the public's interests and needs, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) seeks to hire an international polling firm to conduct focus group research in Pakistan. This research will provide NDI's political party partners with information on the citizens' thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards parties, including: general views and expectations of political parties; parties' role in the current political situation; how parties are perceived at the local level; their relation and outreach to local communities; and whether or not they are responsive to local needs. With the findings, the Institute would: 1) provide political parties with new insight into their perceived role in Pakistan's democratic transition; and 2) encourage the parties to become more responsive to the needs and priorities of citizens in their platform and policy development process.

This request for a proposal indicates NDI's intention to contract an international public opinion research firm to conduct one round of focus groups. Depending on the budget, NDI might also conduct a national sample survey. Proposals should therefore include two options: one with focus groups, and one including both focus groups and a national survey.

### Background

Cycles of government dismissals and military interference in Pakistan have tended to mask deep institutional problems within the parties that have yet to be addressed. In large measure, public approval of the military coup in Pakistan in 1999 was the result of citizens' disdain for the corruption and ineffectiveness of the country's political parties. Thus, while political parties are essential to the process of a return to civilian government, most observers agree that the parties pose a major challenge to democratic governance. To address these challenges, NDI is currently conducting a USAID-funded program in Pakistan to assist parties to become more responsive to and representative of their constituents' interests by undertaking internal party reform (See Appendix A for program description).

### Timeline

It is important that the results of the research be available to NDI by November 1, 2005. Please note that the month-long Ramadan holiday will begin in early October, which will make it necessary to complete focus groups and polling research by September 30th.

### Responsibilities

NDI seeks to contract an international research firm to conduct one round of focus groups, with the possible addition of a survey. If necessary, the international firm should contract directly with a local, Pakistan-based polling firm to organize the groups. The international research firm will remain responsible for conducting and supervising all research, in consultation with NDI/Washington and with the assistance of NDI/Islamabad. Specifically, the international firm would be responsible for the following tasks:

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN PAKISTAN, 2005 (CONTINUED)

- Prepare focus group guidelines;
- Manage local subcontractors, if hired;
- Recruit, organize and conduct the focus groups;
- Translate guidelines into local languages;
- Provide skilled moderators;
- Provide translated transcripts;
- Analyze the focus group findings;
- Present findings of focus groups, including a written final report, to NDI/Washington; and,
- Return to Pakistan to present finding to NDI/Pakistan and the political parties.

**Proposal Information**

Please indicate in the proposal your firm's qualifications to conduct focus groups (and survey research), a monetary bid for completing such work, and additional information pertinent to our selection process.

To assist NDI in assessing your firm's qualifications, your proposal should include the following:

- General information about your firm and its methodology;
- A list of previous clients;
- Statement of previous experience in conducting focus groups and survey research in foreign countries;
- Specifics of any work in Pakistan; and,
- A sample focus group report.

Proposals should include all costs, including time, and projected communication and travel expenses. Please provide this information for two scenarios: the first, to conduct focus groups only; the second, to conduct focus groups and a subsequent national survey.

Please submit proposals via email to Oren Ipp at NDI/Washington by May 6, 2005 (early submissions welcomed).

[Address and email provided]

[Appendix included a full program description.]

[end]

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN NEPAL, 2003-2004

At a time when Nepal has no elected representation, locally or nationally, as well as a Maoist insurgency, the need to provide a mechanism to elicit citizen input into the political process is critical. In this climate, it is imperative that Nepali citizens' concerns and priorities are incorporated into national political decision making, and that political parties receive this information at both the local and national level. In order to provide key political actors with new and objective information on the public's interests and needs, NDI seeks to hire an international polling firm to oversee nationwide public opinion survey and focus group research conducted by a local polling firm in Nepal. This research will provide information on the public's thoughts, beliefs and attitudes, including: general views of political parties, how parties are perceived at the local level, their relation and outreach to local communities, whether or not they are responsive to local needs, and parties' role in the current political impasse.

Using this information, the Institute would: 1) provide political parties and civic leaders with insight into public perceptions related to parties' role in the ongoing political dialogue, relationships with civic groups and participation in the peace process; 2) encourage the political parties to be more responsive to the needs and priorities of the Nepali citizenry; and 3) empower civil society organizations (CSOs) to identify and articulate citizens' needs to government leaders. NDI will use the results to identify party weaknesses and work with the political parties to improve their organizational and outreach skills. NDI is therefore most interested in political parties' presence on the ground, citizens' perceptions of party priorities and problems, possible recommendations for the current political crisis and for improving parties' relations with other sectors of society.

This request for a proposal indicates NDI's intention to contract an international public opinion research firm to provide oversight to a Nepal-based polling organization conducting two nationwide surveys, and two rounds of focus groups. This research will take place over one year, from January 1 to December 31, 2004.

**Background**

The research will be conducted nationwide in two phases. The first survey would be conducted within the first three months of the program and would measure citizen attitudes and interests on political, social and economic issues as well as identify citizens' needs and expectations of political parties. The information gathered from the survey will be used to increase the capacity of governance and civil society organizations and political parties to advocate for the public. The second survey would be conducted within the last five months of the program of the program, following NDI's work with the political parties and civil society organizations (CSOs) on the results of the first survey. The second survey is not intended to be a follow-on survey for estimating a shift in public opinions; instead, the surveys will take two "snapshots" of the Nepali citizenry, gathering the information that is most pressing to the Nepali people and relative to the political landscape. Before each survey, NDI, through the local polling firm, will conduct approximately 48 focus groups (24 each time) to prepare for and complement the survey.

While the surveys and focus groups would be conducted by the local polling firm selected by NDI, the international firm will be contracted to travel to Nepal three times during the course of the project to conduct analysis of local firm capabilities, train local polling staff, review the survey plan and conduct a select number of the focus groups with the local group (trip one); review the survey results from the first survey, help compile and interpret results, and possibly supervise more focus groups; and to help compile and interpret the results of the second survey (trip three).

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN NEPAL, 2003-2004 (CONTINUED)

**Timeline**

Given the current political situation and the possibility of local elections in late spring/early summer 2004, the Institute expects the first round of focus groups and the first survey to be conducted by the beginning of March 2004 in order to allow for the information to be packaged for the political parties. The second round of focus groups and the second survey should be completed by September 2004.

**Responsibilities**

NDI seeks to contract with an international research firm to conduct two nationwide surveys and approximately ten focus groups to gauge citizen opinions in Nepal. (See Appendix A for program description). NDI's office in Kathmandu, Nepal, will coordinate this effort, but the international research firm will be responsible for working directly with the local, Nepal-based polling firm to organize, conduct and analyze the research and present findings. Specifically, the international firm would handle the following tasks:

- Provide design feedback to the local firm and ensure a sound research methodology;
- Write focus group guidelines and survey questionnaires, in conjunction with the local firm and NDI;
- Assist the local firm with the implementation of the polling;
- Select the sample;
- Oversee training and recruiting of local pollsters;
- Oversee analysis of the focus group results and survey data;
- Write three reports: one following each of the surveys, and one final report; and
- Present findings to NDI staff in Washington, DC.

The Institute has already identified a local firm, ORG-MARG/AC Nielson, with experience conducting political polling. (See Appendix B for ORG-MARG/AC's proposal). The local firm would:

- Recruit, organize and conduct the focus groups;
- Translate the questionnaire into local languages;
- Field and conduct the surveys with the international firm;
- Assist with sample selection;
- Provide the international firm with details on: the national census, issues about conducting research in the Nepali context and local languages; and,
- Collect and translate the data.

Proposal Information

Please indicate in the proposal the firm's qualifications to oversee the focus group and survey process, a monetary bid for completing such work, and additional information pertinent to our selection process. Proposals should include all costs, including projected communications, and travel expenses.

[end]

# SAMPLE DECISION MEMO

To: Joe Gleason

From: Oren Ipp

CC: Peter Manikas, Jen Ganem

Date: July 2005

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To identify an international polling firm for upcoming focus group research in Pakistan, the South Asia Team issued a Request For Proposals (RFP) to five international polling firms (see attached RFP). Two firms declined to submit proposals, one committed to applying but did not actually submit a proposal, and two firms submitted proposals. The firms that responded to the RFP were Firm A and Firm B. The South Asia team met separately with representatives from both firms to discuss their respective proposals.

In the original RFP, the Asia Team asked the firms to write proposals for two scenarios: one which included focus groups only, and one which included both focus groups and a national survey. Both firms submitted proposals with budgets and details for both scenarios (see attached proposals). Firm A's proposal also included a third scenario, involving a national survey only. After further discussion internally and with the Islamabad office, the Asia Team has decided to conduct focus groups only. The two firms were asked to provide revised proposals for conducting 12 focus groups. The revised proposals (see attached addendum from Firm A and revised proposal from Firm B) were then compared and used by the Asia Team to make the final decision.

The Asia Team has selected Firm A to conduct the focus group research in Pakistan. This decision was based on the quality of the firm's proposal, as well as other factors that include:

- Firm A's extensive international experience (77 countries total)—particularly recent work in South Asia, including research in Nepal for NDI—indicates that Firm A is well equipped and prepared to work in Pakistan;
- The proposed budget was reasonable given the scope of work involved (compared to similar research conducted elsewhere in Asia) and within NDI's budget;
- Positive recommendations from NDI's Nepal and Cambodia teams confirmed the quality of Firm A's work;
- In both the proposal and during discussions with NDI, Firm A displayed a willingness to include the Institute in all development and implementation phases, indicating its readiness to be flexible;
- During in-person discussions with NDI, Firm A demonstrated a clear methodological strategy, and described a comprehensive approach to training a local partner research firm; and,
- Firm A demonstrated a solid understanding of how the research will be useful to this particular program.

## DECISION MEMO: PAKISTAN 2005 (CONTINUED)

| FIRM | BUDGET | ACTIVITIES/EXPENSES INCLUDED* |
|---|---|---|
| Firm A | $65,000 | Fees for the local sub-contractor<br>Drafting focus group guidelines<br>Observing a majority of the focus groups<br>Reading and analyzing transcripts of the focus groups<br>Training the local partner on focus group methodology<br>Overseeing the administration of 12 focus groups<br>Analyzing the focus group results<br>Travel expenses for two trips to Pakistan, totaling 10 days.<br>◆ Trip one: Observe focus groups (Firm A would observe eight, Firm B 12) and train the local partner on focus group methodology<br>◆ Trip two: Present the findings of the research to parties<br>Briefing NDI in Washington on the research findings<br>Drafting a report of the focus group findings |
| Firm B | $64,000 | |

*Activities apply to both firms

**Program Overview**

The return of elected parliaments after the October 2002 elections represents an opportunity for Pakistan's political parties to marshal forces for political reform and advance the transfer of power from the military to civilian rule. While political parties are essential to the process of a return to civilian government, most observers recognize that political parties in Pakistan present part of the challenge to democratic governance. Political parties in Pakistan are widely perceived as highly corrupt, internally undemocratic, personality driven and unresponsive to the needs of Pakistani citizens. Furthermore, entrenched party elites continue to resist efforts at reform and perpetuate top-down, centralized decision-making processes. The ability of political parties to implement internal reform is crucial if they are to play a more constructive role in Pakistan's democratic transition and the long-term success of democracy in Pakistan.

With national and provincial elections several years away, political parties in Pakistan have an opportunity to address these shortcomings and contribute to bringing about a pluralistic political environment. Democratizing their governing structures and processes—improving communication systems, broadening decision-making process and strengthening organizational structures—and supporting young, reform-minded party leaders would help the parties become more transparent and accountable, thereby becoming more responsive to and representative of their constituents. The parties would also be more likely to contest elections successfully, which in turn would help them advance Pakistan's transition to civilian rule. Certain parties are already beginning to undertake internal party reform, including, as one example, a requirement for candidates to declare their legally acquired assets. Although limited, these changes signify that parties are beginning to recognize the need to carry out internal reform initiatives.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) proposes to conduct a two-phase, 30-month program to promote the modernization and renewal of political parties by supporting the reform of internal party governing structures and processes and promoting the emergence of a new generation of party leaders committed to advancing party reform. In the first phase of the program, the Institute would assist parties establish political leadership-training programs designed to provide reform-minded party leaders with the skills and knowledge to advance internal party reform and assume positions of leadership within their parties. In the second phase of the program, which would overlap in part with the first phase, the Institute would collaborate with the parties to identify the internal organizational structures and operational processes in most need of reform, and, with the assistance of international experts, develop concrete action plans for carrying out these reforms. In partnership with an international and a local polling firm, NDI would conduct focus groups to gauge public opinion of the political parties; findings would be shared with the parties and used to guide reform efforts. Where appropriate, the Institute would introduce information and communication technologies as tools to complement and facilitate the parties' modernization initiatives.

To support the parties' reform efforts, NDI would sponsor party-specific roundtable discussions, allowing the parties to highlight the progress being made in implementing internal party reform and to recognize those advancing the modernization efforts. NDI would collaborate with its long-standing local partners, including the Center for Civic Education (CCE), to establish a sustainable program that is tailored to the needs of the individual parties and that complements the Institute's ongoing political party development programs in Pakistan. NDI would continue its inclusive approach to political party development and engage representatives from all the major parties throughout the program.

[end]

# SAMPLE SCREENER QUESTIONNAIRE

**Females, 25-40, D Class, Likely Voter, Undecided**
**Kathmandu, Nepal – September 4, 2004**

*Standard Introduction – Insure confidentiality, give AC Neilsen Contact Information*

**[DON'T ASK -- BUT DO RECORD GENDER]**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Female | **continue** | 1 |
| Male | **TERMINATE** | 2 |

1. What is your age? _____
*****Record the age given by respondent**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Under 18 | **TERMINATE** | 1 |
| 18-24 | **TERMINATE** | 2 |
| 25-29 | **continue** | 3 |
| 30-34 | **continue** | 4 |
| 35-40 | **continue** | 5 |
| 41-45 | **continue** | 6 |
| 46-55 | **TERMINATE** | 7 |
| 55 AND OVER | **TERMINATE** | 8 |
| (Don't Know/refused) | **TERMINATE** | 9 |

2. **ASK QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE CLASS. RECRUIT CLASS D.**

3. What was the last year of school you completed? (INSERT CORRECT SCHOOL LEVELS)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| None | **continue** | 1 |
| Elementary | **continue** | 2 |
| Secondary | **continue** | 3 |
| Vocational | **continue** | 4 |
| College | **continue** | 5 |

4. What is your occupation? _____

5. Which caste or ethnic group do you belong to?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Brahmin | **TERMINATE** | 1 |
| Chhetri | **continue** | 2 |
| Tharu | **TERMINATE** | 3 |
| Dalit | **TERMINATE** | 4 |
| Newar | **TERMINATE** | 5 |
| Yadav | **TERMINATE** | 6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Other | **TERMINATE** | 7 |
| (Don't know/refused) | **TERMINATE** | 8 |

X. **INSERT GENERIC NON-THREATENING QUESTIONS LIKE: DO YOU READ THE NEWSPAPER, LISTEN TO RADIO, FAVORITE SPORT, FAVORITE FOOD, ETC...**

6. As you may know, there might be elections this year. Assuming that there will be elections this year, how likely would you be to vote in the referendum, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you are certain to vote and 1 means you are certain not to vote?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | **continue** | 1 |
| 7-9 | **continue** | 2 |
| 1-6 | **TERMINATE** | 3 |

7. Now I would like to ask you about the national elections. If national elections were held today, which party would you vote for? (USE SAME SHOW CARD AS FOR THE SURVEY – INCLUDE THE MAOISTS)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nepali Congress | **TERMINATE** | 1 |
| CPN-UML | **TERMINATE** | 2 |
| Maoists | **TERMINATE** | 3 |
| RPP | **TERMINATE** | 4 |
| NSP | **TERMINATE** | 5 |
| Other | **TERMINATE** | 6 |
| (Undec./don't know) | **continue** | 7 |
| (Refused) | **TERMINATE** | 8 |
| (Will not vote) | **TERMINATE** | 9 |

8. Generally speaking, which political party do you identify yourself the most with?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nepali Congress | **TERMINATE** | 1 |
| CPN-UML | **TERMINATE** | 2 |
| Maoists | **TERMINATE** | 3 |
| RPP | **TERMINATE** | 4 |
| NSP | **TERMINATE** | 5 |
| Other | **TERMINATE** | 6 |
| None | **continue** | 7 |
| (Don't know) | **continue** | 8 |
| (Refused) | **TERMINATE** | *9* |

## SCREENER QUESTIONNAIRE FROM NEPAL (CONTINUED)

**RECRUIT and LOCATION:** We would like you to participate in a discussion group about Nepalese attitudes towards a variety of issues. This will take approximately 2 hours and will be held at: (**give local focus group facility info).** We do ask that you arrive a half our earlier for refreshments and registration. You will be compensated for your time at a rate of ____ for participating. We are asking a few select people like you to participate in our study because we value your opinion.

**Date and Time:** September 4, 2004 – ?:?? PM

**PLEASE TELL RECRUITS TO ARRIVE ½ HOUR PRIOR TO START TIME FOR REGISTRATION AND REFRESHMENTS.**

NAME _____

STREET _____TOWN _____ZIP _____

DAY PHONE _____EVENING PHONE _____

DATE _____

RECRUITER _____

[end]

## SAMPLE RE-SCREENER QUESTIONNAIRE

## Cambodia 2003

First Name: Age:

Last Initial: Marital Status:

Current Residence (City & Town) Occupation/Job Title:

Spouse's Job Title:

Gender: Male Female Number of Children:

1. Last year of school: **[CIRCLE ONE]**

Never Attended School

Primary School, Not Completed

Primary School, Completed

Secondary School, Not Completed

Secondary School, Completed

Technical or Vocational School/Training

Teacher School

University

2. As you may know, there will be national elections in July 2003. Many people will not vote in those elections. What about you are you almost certain to vote, will you probably vote, are the chances 50-50, or don't you think you will vote? **[CIRCLE ONE]**

Almost Certain Probably 50-50 Will not vote

3. In 2002, there were Common Council elections in Cambodia. In 1998 and 1993 there were national elections in Cambodia. Many people did not vote in those elections. How about you? Did you vote in these elections or for some reason were you unable to vote?

## CAMBODIA RE-SCREENER QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

**PLEASE CIRCLE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH YEAR]**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 - | Voted | Did Not Vote | Too young |
| 1998 - | Voted | Did Not Vote | Too young |
| 1993 - | Voted | Did Not Vote | Too young |

4. For which political party did you vote for in the 2002 Common Council elections? **[CIRCLE ONE]**

CPP FUNCINPAC Samrainsy

Other_____ Did Not Vote

5. For which political party did you vote for in the 1998 national elections? **[CIRCLE ONE]**

CPP FUNCINPAC Samrainsy

Other_____ Did Not Vote

6. For which political party did you vote for in the 1993 national elections? **[CIRCLE ONE]**

CPP FUNCINPAC Other_____ Did Not Vote

7. For which political party do you sympathize the most with? **[CIRCLE ONE]**

CPP FUNCINPAC Samrainsy

Other_____ None

8. Would you say that you are a very strong sympathizer to that party, somewhat strong sympathizer, a little strong sympathizer or that you are not at all a strong sympathizer to that party? **[CIRCLE ONE]**

Very strong Somewhat strong A little strong Not strong at all

**[RETURN QUESTIONNAIRE TO HOSTESS]**

# SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP SPECIFICATIONS

## NEPAL, 2004

1. No affiliations with any political parties

| Group | Date | Location | Locale | Gender | Age | Class | Likelihood of Voting | Voting Behavior |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Feb. 18 | Kathmandu | Urban | Female | 18-25 | C | Likely | Favorable toward NC |
| 2 | Feb. 18 | Kathmandu | Urban | Male | 40-60 | A | Likely | Favorable toward current gov't |
| 3 | Feb. 19 | Kathmandu | Rural | Female | 35-50 | B | Likely | Unfavorable toward current gov't |
| 4 | Feb. 19 | Kathmandu | Rural | Male | 20-30 | E | Likely | Favorable toward CPN |
| 5 | | Terai | Rural | Female | 30-45 | D | Not likely | |
| 6 | | Terai | Urban | Male | 35-50 | C | Likely | Favorable toward NC |
| 7 | | Terai | Rural | Female | 25-35 | D | Likely | Undecided |
| 8 | | Terai | Rural | Male | 18-25 | E | Likely | Favorable to Maoists |
| 9 | | West | Rural | Female | 25-35 | E | Likely | Voted CPN-UML, now favorable to Maoist |
| 10 | | Mountain | Rural | Male | 30-45 | E | Not likely | |

# SAMPLE MODERATOR'S GUIDE

## Slovakia—May 2002 POTENTIAL VOTER Discussion Groups

***[Special instructions for the moderator are in italics throughout the guide]***

**I. INTRODUCTION (10 minutes)**

a. Explain ground rules of the group *[use your standard introduction*]
Confidential & anonymous
Encourage to disagree/speak your mind
Interested in everyone's experiences and opinions; no right or wrong answers
Put everyone at ease/makes jokes
Video/audiotape/camera for observers in other room etc.

*b.* Participant introductions (*Ask each person to introduce themselves; briefly say their first name, where they live, what they do for work, whether they are married or have children)*

**II. DIRECTION OF THE NATION (20 minutes) :30**

*[This section is a quick discussion that is intended to:*
*make the participants feel comfortable expressing their opinion*
*learn what issues they think about without prompting. There is no need to probe each item raised, as long as participant has said enough about the topic that you understand their point of view].*

a. Are things in Slovakia headed in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track? *(show of hands, get a count)*

What is going right? *(Make list on a board/large piece of paper)*

What is going wrong? *(Make list on a board/large piece of paper)*

*PROBE: [if any of these items are not mentioned spontaneously, ask about:* ]

- National economy
- Education
- Healthcare
- Jobs/work
- Pension/retirement security
- Housing
- Status of women
- Privatization
- Corruption/cronyism
- Crime

b. When you look at these things that are off on the wrong track,

Which ones are the most important to fix?

Which are the next most important?

**III. LIKELIHOOD TO VOTE (20 minutes) :50**

There are a lot of reasons people decide to vote, or not to vote.

What about you?

Who is planning to vote in September's national elections, and who is unsure of whether or not you will vote? *(ask for a show of hands)*

*(Of people who are unsure about whether or not they will vote, ask):*

a. Why do you think you might not vote in September? *(probe for detailed reason; lead a discussion to get other's opinions of reasons not to vote)*

*(Of everyone, ask):*

b. Do you think there is anything at stake in this election, or not really?

c. Do you think anything in Slovakia might change as a result of who wins the September elections, or do you think it doesn't really matter who wins?

*(If no change)* Why do you think nothing will change?
*(If change)* What do you think will change? Why could that change?

d. What changes would be most important for you to see after the elections?
What changes would you most want to see?

Are there certain political parties you think could make those changes, more so than other parties? Why or why not?

Do you think those parties can win enough votes to make a difference? Why or why not?

Are there certain parties that you think are only part of the problem, that won't or can't make needed changes? Which ones?

## SLOVAKIA MODERATOR'S GUIDE (CONTINUED)

**IV. MESSENGERS** **(5 minutes)** **:55**

a. Are there certain people in Slovakia whose opinion you really respect? Who are they? What makes you respect them?
b. What do you think about … [test specific potential messengers]

**V. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT** **(15 minutes)** **1:10**

Parliament and government

a. What has the government or parliament done right since 1998?
   Why do you think they were able to be successful with those issues/problems?
b. What have they done wrong?
   Why have those things failed?
c. What have they not done, what have they failed to do?
   Why do you think they have not addressed these important issues?
   How do you think members of parliament and political parties decide what to work on, what issues to push for, or to oppose?
d. Do you see any differences between this government and the one prior to 1998? If so, what are they?

**VI. POLITICAL PARTIES** **(25 minutes)** **1:40**

a. Which political party or parties do you like the best? (write up on board)
   Why? What do you like?
   What do you look for in a political party? What should a political party do, say or stand for to win your support?
   Are there any leaders in the part(ies) you particularly like? Which ones?

*b.* Is there any political party that you would **NOT** vote for? *(write up on board)*
   Which one(s)?
   *Why?*
   *Are there any political leaders you especially dislike?*

c. Is there a political party that you used to support in the past that you no longer support? Why have you stopped supporting them?

d. Is there any party you think would be especially
   Good for women?
   Bad for women?
   Why?

e. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion about each of these women political leaders? Why? *(go through list below)*

When you think about these women, do they affect your impression of their party? If so, do they make you think more or less favorably about their party? *(go through list below)*

Former Finance Minister Brigita Schmognerova
Anna Malikova (SNS, Slovak National Party)
Anna Zaborska (Christian Democratic Party)
Olga Keltosova

**VII. SOURCES OF INFORMATION (15 minutes) 1:55**

*PROBE FOR ALL SIGNICANT SOURCES OF INFORMATION:*

From where do you get information about political parties and their policies and records?

Newspapers?
TV?
Magazines?
Billboards or public notices?
Family?
Friends?
Co-workers?
Party publications?

a. How else (from whom else) would you like to learn more about these issues and policies?
b. Are there certain sources of information you are more likely to trust or consider reliable than others? What are they?
c. Are there sources you do NOT trust? What are they?
d. Which method is most informative for you?
e. Have you ever been contacted by a political party or candidate, either through a phone call, a visit at your door, or in the mail?
   Did that contact leave you with a favorable or unfavorable impression? Why?

**VIII. CONCLUSION (5 minutes) 2:00**

Think about why you are undecided on whether or not to vote.
What is one thing that might make you decide you would definitely vote?

[end]

# APPENDIX H

## CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING MODERATORS (1)

| GROUP DYNAMICS AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ANALYTICAL THINKING, PREPARATION, & BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE** | **PLACE A CHECK IN THE APPROPRIATE BOX**<br>**EXCELLENT**<br>**Able to do this easily** | **GOOD**<br>**Able to do with some effort** | **FAIR**<br>**Able to do with coaching and substantial practice** |
| Listens well: clarifies key points by paraphrasing participants' feelings and opinions. | | | |
| Applies a combination of questioning techniques to obtain in-depth and clear responses. | | | |
| Pauses briefly after a participant comment (this often prompts additional points of view agreement with the previously mentioned position). | | | |
| Doesn't move from topic to topic too quickly. | | | |
| Probes for additional information when participants make vague comments that could have multiple meanings. | | | |
| Asks questions clearly and precisely; rephrases questions if original wording is unclear; uses simple language. | | | |
| Enthusiastic and interested in topic. | | | |
| Actively engages participants in the discussion. | | | |
| Creates trustful atmosphere. | | | |
| Friendly and has a sense of humor. | | | |
| Encourages expression of divergent viewpoints:<br><br>After several echoes of the same idea, asks "Does anyone see it differently?" or "Are there any other points of view?" (The discussion should not be free of conflict.) Contrasts opposing opinions without embarrassing participants. | | | |
| Demonstrates respect for individual experiences. | | | |
| Responds to participant comments in a neutral manner:<br><br>Withholding personal opinions. | | | |
| Non-verbally (uses head nodding only to elicit additionally comments, such as a single nod to a person who seeks to talk, because it can signal agreement and as a result, tends to elicit additional comments of the same type.) | | | |
| Verbally (says "okay," "yes," or "un huh" and avoids "correct," "that's good," or "excellent," because they imply judgments about the quality of the comment.) | | | |

# CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING MODERATORS (2)

| ASSESSING A MODERATOR'S COMPETENCIES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ANALYTICAL THINKING, PREPARATION, & BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE** | **PLACE A CHECK IN THE APPROPRIATE BOX**<br>**EXCELLENT**<br>**Able to do this easily** | **GOOD**<br>**Able to do with some effort** | **FAIR**<br>**Able to do with coaching and substantial practice** |
| Sees patterns across responses – identifies themes and relates key points to the "big picture." | | | |
| Places comments in perspective and follows-up on critical areas. Knows "devil's advocate" positions; is familiar with all sides of an issue so can challenge participants when necessary. | | | |
| Familiar with the discussion guide. Moves easily between different sections of the questioning route. Doesn't miss key questions. Glances at the guide but doesn't read the questions. | | | |
| Reviews list of participants. Knows focus group composition before it begins. | | | |
| Focuses complete attention on the group conversation. | | | |
| Deftly handles participants who are:<br><br>**Experts.** Underscores that everyone is an expert and all participants have important perceptions that need to be expressed. | | | |
| **Dominant Talkers.** Avoids eye contact with and turns slightly away from a dominant talker. Tactfully shifts discussion (*e.g.*: "Thank you John. That's one point of view. Does anyone have another point of view?") | | | |
| **Ramblers.** When a rambling respondent dominates the discussion, asks the next question or repeats current question when rambler pauses. If necessary, interrupts the rambler, breaks off eye-contact, and asks other participants questions. Doesn't let situation drag on. | | | |
| **Shy.** Maximizes eye contact with shy participant. As a last resort, calls on the shy participant by name and offers them the opportunity to speak. Is kind and doesn't put the person on the spot. For example: *"Mary, do you have anything you'd like to add here?"* | | | |
| Able to pace questions so not caught short of time. Controls discussion. | | | |
| Able to listen to participants. Doesn't talk unnecessarily. | | | |

# SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

## IRAQ, 2003

***(Moderator in CAPS)***

**REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU ARE OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC OVERALL, WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION IN IRAQ AT THE PRESENT?**

We are personally satisfied, because everything was in the hands of Saddam, and we are not afraid now that someone will take us and put us in prison.

We want government, satisfaction, and security.

When the allied forces arrived in the central regions of Iraq, the Iraqis started fighting them. When they saw that this resistance was strong, one U.S. military leader said that if the Iraqis helped overthrow Saddam, they would establish a democracy.

I heard that there is a big sign on a tank in Baghdad which says, "Give us security, and we will give us electricity and water."

No one has authority. As an example, the principal of the school cannot put rules to govern activities at a school, even if he wants to. Even a driver can kick the principal's ass because there is no government.

**AGAIN REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU ARE OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC OVERALL, WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT AT THIS POINT?**

Nothing from the promises that America has given us has been achieved.

There are a lot of diseases like the black fever here in Iraq, and we have complained a lot to the allied forces about this, but we received no response.

We are the Iraqis and we are fighters. But the soldiers on the tanks come and throw chocolates at kids. They are humiliating us. Sometimes they just throw the chocolates by the feet to their kids, and when the kids bend over to pick it up, and they took pictures of him to humiliate. Why are they humiliating Iraqis? To send a picture about us that we are beggars, like we have never seen chocolates before.

**ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC ABOUT IRAQ FOR THE NEXT YEAR?**

If a government is not created, that means that the main situation is going to go on and on and perhaps become worse.

**WHAT ABOUT FOR THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS – ARE YOU MORE OPTIMISTIC OR LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT WHERE THINGS WILL GO IN IRAQ?**

[end]

# SAMPLE LETTER TO PARTIES

## LETTER TO A PARTY, CROATIA, 2003

Dear [X],

As NDI has informed you earlier, a research project on the attitudes and voting intentions of the currently undecided voters has started. The research consists of 20 focus groups all over the country and gages for the views of undecided voters on your party and its candidates. The research should be helpful for your party to mobilize your members and party structures to communicate well and to reach out to those undecided voters with the best possible message and communication ways.

At end of the first week of April are we planning to present your HQ with the research results. We will contact you in the next days to set a precise date and hour for the briefing with you as Secretary General and after that with your HQ.

After those briefings with yourself and your party HQ, NDI suggests to organize a tour of Croatia for your party. The aim of this tour is to motivate the regional leadership for its role in the upcoming campaign. Together with some of the research results we would provide the regional (several counties) leadership a better understanding of the party strategy, the party message and their role in a successful campaign. We would hope that you yourself or someone else of the national leadership would be available for this round of Croatia in five days!

For your party, a round across the regions has been scheduled from April 11 to April 15. On each of those five days a briefing meeting can be scheduled for the county and city party leadership. NDI suggests starting from the following concrete proposal and to define with you the hours and places together with you.

| | |
|---|---|
| April 11 | Slavonia |
| April 12 | North-West Croatia |
| April 13 | Central Croatia including Zagreb |
| April 14 | Istria - Licka |
| April 15 | Dalmatia |

NDI will contact you in the next days and looks forward to work on this project with your party in the next weeks.

Regards,

Johan Hamels
National Democratic Institute

# PRESENTING TO POLITICAL PARTIES

## FIELD REPORT, FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOP WITH PARTY A, CROATIA, 2003

On Friday, April 25th 2003, NDI held a workshop on the results of the focus group research with the representatives of Party A from their branches in northern Croatia. There were 20 participants...The group was very diverse, among the participants there were 8 women and the participants were of all age groups (more then 50% of participants were under 35) from very young (20 years) to some older party members. The NDI trainers were Johan Hamels and Antonio Matković.

The first part of the workshop was a presentation of the focus group results and we also gave special focus on the issues important for Party A, for example the perception of the party leadership among the research participants. We also built in a small brainstorming when we came to the point of Party A values. The workshop participants were divided in 5 groups and had 5-10 minutes to think about values of their party. After that time they presented their results and the most accepted attribute given to the party was “Party of projects”. This small break in the presentation and the inclusion of participants in the flow of the presentation showed as very positive for the further work that evening.

In the second part there was a role-play, where Johan asked the participants to imagine that they were from D66, a Dutch liberal party, and he was from Party A. Then they were supposed to give him advice, based on the previous presentation, on the forthcoming election campaign. Johan gave them a little information on the party so they would easily get into their role. After some difficulties at the very beginning they began to feel their role more and more, and they gave many critical comments to Johan on Party A, what should be done better, which issues should be more in the focus. What came up was the problem of too big media focus on the party leadership and neglecting other party people who could also give more credibility to the party. Also the problem of volunteers came up, how to reach them and how to work with them, the issue of connecting the success of the party only with the two known projects.

Johan gave examples from Macedonia on how to get volunteers, how and where to address them and on which things should be thought of. He also made clear the importance of the work of volunteers in the campaign and there very positive comments of the participants on his elaboration. The role-play brought them to the conclusion that the party should deal openly on more issues, specially with the ones that some other parties still aren’t taking seriously, like the military service, women abuse, minorities issues (specially Roma).

At the end the participants were again divided into groups, now three, with the task to find ways on how the party should approach the women and youth under the undecided voters. One group was put together of young party members and they were discussing about the youth issues and other two groups were dealing with the issue of how to attract undecided women voters. After 10 min they presented their results to the other groups. The young group proposed that the party should deal more with youth problems specially education and employment after graduation. They proposed the party should address university students as well as high school students and to build up a core electorate from a very young age. The problem of the military service could also attract positive attention to the party and show the youth that the party takes care of them. The other two groups came up with similar solutions on how to address undecided women voters. The party has to put more emphasis on the family care and making conditions for women to build up a career beside their care for the family. Education programs in rural areas would be very important on that issue. The themes of health care and education of their children would be very important when addressing women voters.

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# PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN NEPAL:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT KEARIN, FORMER COUNTRY DIRECTOR OF NDI-NEPAL, ON FOCUS GROUP AND SURVEY RESEARCH IN 2004-2005

*Question: What was the objective of doing public opinion research in Nepal?*

Scott: At the time we put the polling project together, because of political events in Nepal, some of the standard NDI work was unavailable to us – no elections on the horizon, no sitting parliament, and no money available from funders for political party work. At the same time, it was clear that there was no real understanding of what the people thought of the political crisis and the actors in it. Political parties thought they knew what the people wanted, but had nothing to verify that beyond their instinct. It was our thought, and USAID agreed, that polling that answered some of these questions could be useful not just to NDI's future programming, but to political parties, to civil society organizations, and to the international community.

*What research methodologies did you use in Nepal?*

Over a year-long period, we conducted two rounds of focus groups in 20 locations around Nepal and two nationwide surveys with more than 3,000 respondents each. In addition, we over-sampled about 300 opinion leaders in the second survey to see how their views differed from the common citizen. We used random sampling throughout the country with the exception of 15 districts (out of 75) that were too heavily affected by Maoist violence to be safely surveyed. These 15 districts, despite their significant geographical size, comprised only 7% of the population base. We used large samples because we wanted to be able to cross-tab with some certainty (say, the feelings of the Newar community about a particular political party) and, frankly, because the work on the ground was so amazingly inexpensive in Nepal.

We were fortunate that the surveyors (through our deliberate efforts) did not know that USAID was funding the project, as we experienced a major kidnapping (three surveyors were held for four days by Maoists) and a minor extortion ($100 was demanded by Maoists). Had we not had this "double-blind," the surveyors could have been in real danger, as the U.S. is perceived by the Maoist movement as a major enemy. Interestingly, the ransom demanded by the Maoists for the release of the kidnapped surveyors was not money, but information – 500 (expurgated – names and personal information blotted out) responses to the survey from Nepalis in that region. The Maoists were interested in learning what the public thought of them.

*How did you use the focus group research?*

As a precursor to each of the nationwide polls, we conducted ten focus groups in various representative parts of Nepal. The focus groups were an essential part of preparing the polling instruments themselves. I don't know that we would have had very good surveys without them. That being said, I think the most important aspect of the focus groups was having John Moreira from Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (GQR or Greenberg) intimately involved from the beginning and contributing the series of focus groups discussion points so that the discussions were directed in useful ways. John helped us devise the focus group questions, and the focus groups' composition, as did our local partner, A.C. Nielsen in Nepal.

Before the first round of polling, our intent was to use the focus groups to help us identify wide-ranging issues of concern to citizens so our polling instrument could be effectively designed. In the second round of focus groups (after the results of the first poll), we wanted to refine the questions of the second poll and also test

some elements of sample messages that political parties had created so we could include them in the second round of polling.

In both rounds of focus groups, though NDI personnel were observing, we kept the observation unobtrusive through closed circuit television or by using our Nepali local staff. Nepali staff from A.C. Nielsen with focus group experience conducted the groups and did very well. About 15 participants for each group were found on the street, according to our pre-determined criteria, by A.C. Nielsen staff, and they also went through a second screening the day of the focus groups, at which time about twelve would show up and two or three of the less representative of the given group were sent home with thanks and a small gift. The focus groups were kept to no more than eight or nine people. In no case did any of the focus group participants know that the project was initiated by NDI and funded by USAID, as that may have affected the responses of the participants and would have compromised the security of the polling itself.

*How did you integrate the focus group and survey results into your programming?*

We presented the data to political parties and civil society groups individually and used the data to buttress our contention that the people were disaffected from the political process and viewed it as corrupt and non-responsive, and that political parties would have to change that perception in order to regain the people's support in their conflict with the authoritarian King. During the presentations, the research prompted activists within each party to discuss and debate the issues. Some party leaders did not want to believe the public thought so poorly of them, but other party cadres pointed out that they needed to take the information seriously.

Our anti-corruption program benefited directly from this knowledge, as did our political party development program that began just after the survey grant period. Parties that did not believe the public thought them ineffective, detached, and corrupt were given a dose of reality with the poll results, which showed these perceptions were widely held throughout Nepal. As we began several rounds of political party training in Nepal, the poll's findings helped us show the parties what the real needs of the Nepali people were.

*What do you think were the major impacts, both short-and long-term, of the research?*

I think it empowered the political parties and let them know what was expected of them by the general public. It demonstrated a deep reservoir of good feeling for democracy, despite dissatisfaction with the conduct of the political parties. It showed Maoist support to be significant (between 10-20 percent) but much less than support for democracy. Perceptions of the King were ambivalent but also indicated a deep feeling of support for a constitutional monarchy, though almost zero support for an absolute monarchy. I think this data played an important role in the events that have since followed, but it is impossible to pinpoint exactly how. On the one hand, political parties saw their weaknesses and their possibilities; on the other, some royalists may have been buoyed by relatively strong support for a constitutional monarchy. I suspect that each political actor read into the survey a little of what they wanted to see, in addition to the core findings that were obvious and beyond dispute.

*How did you present the findings to the political parties? Who else did you share the results with?*

After the first round, we made individual presentations with John Moreira of GQR to each of the major political parties and discussed their weaknesses and strengths. We shared all data with the US Embassy and USAID and presented slightly expurgated data to civil society and the international community – we did not feel it was appropriate to reveal specific figures on each party's weaknesses and strengths to a wide audience and instead presented this data in aggregate for all parties. We did not want one political party to use the

## NEPAL: INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT KEARIN (CONTINUED)

information against other political parties and felt this was essential to maintain our relationships of trust with the various parties. Some of the sensitive questions about the popularity (or, rather, the unpopularity) of the King's son and others in the Royal circle were also not released generally (to the parties or the NGOs or the press or the international community), though USAID and the Embassy knew about them.

We did not involve the press after the first round, since we had a second round to conduct and publicity about the polling would have made that difficult or impossible to undertake, given the Maoist influence. After the second round was completed, we had no such constraints and made all the above presentations, plus a specific presentation to the press that was well covered and broadly reported.

*How did you approach USAID, the Embassy and other international organizations when it came to this research?*

The U.S. Embassy and USAID had a few particular questions that they wanted included in the surveys – generally related to other programs that the U.S. Government was funding in Nepal – and we included most of these questions. There was a bit of give-and-take at times as the survey instrument itself was becoming ungainly in length, but, generally speaking, the negotiations were exceedingly friendly, and we all shared in what we thought was a very fine final product. Greenberg occasionally stepped in with professional advice about what sort of questions to poll and how they should be written, and those arguments generally won the day.

*What do you think made the research project successful overall?*

It was well-conceived, well-executed and well-funded, with a real commitment to seeing it through. This was a primary project for us, not a secondary one, and we really thought that much of our future work in Nepal would hinge on the results. In addition, the civil war in Nepal meant we had to think through each step very carefully so as not to endanger the local surveyors, our local partner, A.C. Nielsen, or NDI-Nepal.

*What role did you and the NDI team play in the research?*

This was a major project, and I spent the majority of my time on this for a number of months. The entire NDI team was mobilized for it, though the primary actors were Ram [Resident Senior Program Officer], Anamika [Resident Program Manager], and myself.

*What was the role of the research firm?*

We could not have done this without GQR. Their knowledge and experience kept us from making any serious mistakes. John Moreira came to Nepal four times during the year and was completely dedicated to the project. Our local partner, A.C. Nielsen, benefited greatly from GQR's experience, and this increased their capacity and their commitment as well. Overall, there could not have been a better sense of teamwork and shared mission. This was a great project that laid the foundation for much of our future work in Nepal.

*Is there any advice you would share with other NDI teams considering focus group and/or survey research?*

We should be aware that findings in polls like these can be politically explosive and may not always follow our pre-conceived notions about the public's views in a given environment. There is a certain element of risk in polling. For example, if our polling had shown an extraordinarily high level of support for the Maoists, or an extraordinarily low level of support for democracy in Nepal, many of our ultimate objectives would have been called into question. In this sense, the focus groups, though not statistically valid scientifically, can give

indications of where the polling numbers might end up. Before publicly releasing data, it is also important to identify any possible anomalies. No polling is perfect, and a surprising isolated finding on one question may have to be viewed in the context of the entire poll, using cross tabs and all the science available.

It is also absolutely critical to have credible partners in the conduct of focus groups and the polling itself, and this may often require the guiding and neutral hand of an international polling firm like GQR, as local actors may presume bias against them if the polling is done by a local firm alone. In some countries, I imagine it would be important to hold closely knowledge about U.S. funding or involvement in the survey, so as not to bias the results or endanger the surveyors or participants. Lastly, I would emphasize the importance of reliable partners, both domestic and international, to give the polling its best chance of success.

[end]

# ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

**NDI RESEARCH PROJECTS**
**9/220/05, p. 4**

| COUNTRY | TYPE | TITLE | DATE | TOPIC | FIRM/ CONSULTANT | NDI | REPORT | GUIDES/ QUES/FQ | RFP | PROPOSAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sudan** | Focus groups | On the Threshold of Peace: Perspectives from the people of New Sudan | Dec-04 | Focus groups to explore views of citizens in southern Sudan, with focus on peace process | Tom Melia Traci Cook | Joe Andrews | Report in word Presentation (corrupt file) | Guides | | NDI proposal |
| **Bolivia** | Focus groups | Focus Group Research: Political System in Bolivia, September-November 2004 | Nov-04 | Groups on the status of democracy at national level, status of local governance and democracy, political parties in a party system, and changes in the constitution and electoral laws | Apoyo, Opinión y Mercado Bolivia | Alison Miranda | Reports in Spanish/Eng | Guides (in report, p. 63) | | |
| **Liberia** | Focus groups | War is Behind Us Now: A report on focus group research in Liberia | Oct-04 | Twelve focus group discussions to understand the political dynamics of Liberia during the transition period | Jim Della Giacoma with local CSOs | Brittany Danisch | Report | Guides | | NDI proposal |
| **Montenegro** | Focus groups | Focus Groups: General report | Oct-04 | Focus groups to collect data from citizens about current issues, with focus on economy, status, crime, and political parties | Prism Research | Erin Mathews | Report (public) Party reports (confidential) | | | |
| **Bosnia-Hercegovina** | Survey | Public opinion polls in Bijeljina, Doboj, SNSD Prijedor (local) and SNSD Banja Luka (local) | Sep-04 | Surveys to measure attitudes about elections in Banja Luka, Prijedor and Bijeljina | Prism Research | Suzanne Pearl | Reports (4) | | | |
| **Kosovo** | Focus groups | It's All About Final Status | Sep-04 | Focus groups with young to middle-aged men and women, demographic unlikely to vote in October 2004 elections | Riinvest | Sarah Workman | Presentations (in PowerPoint) with and without party-specific info Memo | | | |

Compiled by Victoria Canavor, Political Parties Team, Send updates/corrections to vcanavor@ndi.org

Additional programmatic resources on focus group and survey research are available, including a spreadsheet that lists countries where NDI has conducted research (see above); NDI proposals; requests for proposals; research firms' proposals to NDI; decision memos; moderator's guides; reports and presentations. Please see Victoria Canavor for these documents. For general questions about research, you can also contact Jim Della-Giacoma, Senior Advisor, Citizen Participation Team, 202-728-6351.

## AUTHOR

Victoria Canavor is a senior program officer on the Political Party Development Team at NDI. In this position, she supports NDI's political party programs and manages a number of global initiatives, including the Institute's relationship with the political party internationals and participation in global democracy conferences. Previously, Victoria worked at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, an international public opinion research firm, for clients such as Gore Lieberman 2000, the British Labour Party and the Israeli Labor Party, as well as corporate and issue organizations.

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