

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

Objectives and Methodology

General Objectives:

This project examines resilience indices using a business self-assessment developed by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, and tailored for Alaska-based fisheries businesses. By transferring resources and tools developed for businesses experiencing environmental hazards in the Gulf of Mexico, we will increase the impacts of Southcentral Alaska's resilience efforts and further demonstrate the applicability of business self-assessments on the forefront of affected coastal ecosystems and economies. We will convene our network of partners including fishery industry leaders, resource managers, business owners and resilience experts to evaluate the product ([Alaska Fisheries Resilience Index](#)) and identify target audiences that will be the end-users of the product. Involving end users in the product development will offer insight into perceptions of resilience, including climate observations, coastal hazards, risk perceptions, and perceptions of success.

Methodology:

A focus group human subject research interview method is used to obtain information of a qualitative nature from a predetermined and limited number of people. Focus groups can provide stories, quotes, and first-hand experience with fisheries resilience. Participants "piggy-back" on the comments of others and add a richness to the dialogue that could not be achieved through a one-on-one interview. The following focus group interview instrument is designed to gather information to evaluate business resilience self-assessment products, and insight into preferred product delivery methods (see [Focus Group Checklist](#)).

Fisheries business members who live in the Kachemak Bay area will be identified and recruited for group interviews, since this is not a sensitive or personal topic snowball sampling recruitment may be a technique used (see [Recruitment Strategy](#)).

To maintain privacy and confidentiality, we will ask everyone in the group to not identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion (see [Consent Form](#)).

Script and questions were developed based on the categories of resilience in the index to identify which primary indicators and metrics will be considered for inclusion in the self-assessment (see [Focus Group Script](#)).

Results from these methods will be used to guide further action in tailoring the business self-assessment before deployment in trainings, publications and other delivery methods (see [Data Analysis and Reporting](#)). Focus group findings will ensure that the final self-assessment meets local business needs and allows room for consideration of both the biophysical and socioeconomic characteristics of the end users.

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

Recruitment Strategy

Members of a focus group should have some characteristic that they share in common. Characteristics used as criteria for determining focus group membership include occupation, past participation in different fisheries, age, or a combination of these. Even though participants in a focus group are homogeneous in terms of one or two desired characteristics, the group must also include enough diversity in other characteristics to provide an accurate portrayal of the group's collective opinion. The goal is to build in enough variation for contrasting ideas but not so much that participants are inhibited and defer to those they perceive to be more experienced or knowledgeable on an issue.

Members of the target audience are a source of information regarding the recruitment of focus group participants (snowball sampling). They can provide valuable information about who to invite, the best time and place to hold the focus group, and feedback on what questions to ask of the group.

Recruitment Points of Contact in Target Audience:

North Pacific Fishermen Associations
Alaska Fishermen Network
United Fishermen of Alaska
Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association
Kachemak Shellfish Mariculture Association
And others based upon expert and network recommendations

Recruitment Email

Hello _____,

As a fisheries business stakeholder, we would like to invite you to a small group lunch or dinner to discuss your experience with challenges that you have faced with a changing environment and your opinions on a business self-assessment tool.

Kachemak Bay NERR has been developing a business self-assessment to understand if individual fishing businesses and Alaska fisheries are prepared for environmental change and natural disasters. Over the next few months we will be hosting focus groups with local stakeholders to further adapt the index to fit the needs of our fishing communities, along with a more comprehensive workshop in the spring.

If you agree to participate, you will be part of an hour and a half focus group with other residents of the Kachemak Bay Region. We will supply the self-assessment tool in advance, and will provide a great meal, either lunch or dinner depending on dates and times chosen. We would greatly appreciate any feedback on how to make the tool more suitable to small Alaskan fishing businesses, as well as any feedback on the supplemental resources provided.

Attached is the draft tool for review:

- Alaska Fisheries Business Resilience Index: This is a business self-assessment document to score business resilience to environmental change. Each section is paired with applicable locally relevant resources to help the user improve their score.

Thank you for sharing your expertise!

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

Focus Group Checklist

Advance Notice

- _____ Send each participant a letter or email confirming time, date, and place.
- _____ Contact participants two weeks before the session to provide them with background materials and confirm their participation.
- _____ Give the participants a reminder phone call the day prior to the session.
- _____ Arrange food/beverage

Questions

- _____ Questions should flow in a logical sequence.
- _____ Key questions should focus on the critical issues.
- _____ Limit the use of “why” questions.
- _____ Use “think-back” questions as needed.

Logistics

- _____ Arrive early.
- _____ Make sure the front conference room is set up appropriately (tables, chairs, sound, etc.).
- _____ Have enough copies of handouts and visual aids (consent form, index, business resource guide)
- _____ Set up food and beverages.
- _____ Have name tents and sign up sheet for participants
- _____ Test the recording equipment, make sure background noise doesn't interfere.
- _____ Set up notetaking template.
- _____ Set up large notetaking pads with markers for facilitator to use
- _____ Seat experts and talkative participants next to the moderator.
- _____ Seat shy and quiet participants directly across from moderator.

Facilitator Skills

- _____ Practice introduction without referring to notes.
- _____ Practice questions. Know the key questions. Be aware of timing.
- _____ Be mindful of the input you are trying to collect.
- _____ Listen. Are participants answering the question?
- _____ Use probe, pause, or follow-up questions as needed.
- _____ Visual Notetaking on large format pads
- _____ Avoid verbal comments that signal approval.
- _____ Avoid giving personal opinions.

Notetaker Skills

- _____ Monitor time for the facilitator, let them know when specific time markers have been reached.
- _____ Record the key points and themes for each question.
- _____ Note any strategies or questions that elicited especially useful responses.
- _____ Ask any good follow up questions that may have been missed.
- _____ Note any specific quotes that would be good to include in the index, (who spoke and when).

Immediately After the Session

- _____ Check to see if the tape recorder captured the comments.
- _____ Debrief with the research team.
- _____ Flesh out notes and prepare a written summary.
- _____ Send out a letter/email to participants thanking them for their participation.
- _____ Identify which direct quotes we want to include and contact speaker for their consent.

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

Consent Form

Researchers:

Description:

You are being asked to participate in a focus group exploring your experiences with the challenges fishing businesses face with regards to a changing environment and your opinions on a self-assessment tool for business preparedness. If you agree to participate, you will be part of an hour and a half focus group with other residents of the Kachemak Bay Region.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop at any time and you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to. Nothing will happen to you if you choose not to answer any questions or if you decide not to participate.

Confidentiality:

Your responses in the focus group will be confidential. We would like to record the conversation to ensure that the researchers' notes are accurate. However, only the researchers who conduct the focus groups will have access to the complete focus group notes and recordings. Data will be compiled in such a way that you cannot be identified. We will not attach your name, address, or any other identifiable information about you to any of your responses, or to any reports or publications describing the results of this study. Although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally repeat what was said.

Potential Benefits and Risks:

Your participation in this study requires a commitment of time on your part. However, if you decide to participate, your willingness to share your experiences and knowledge may provide valuable insights for improving business self-assessments for all fishermen and fisheries related-businesses in Alaska. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you personally with respect to your personal or professional status from participation in this study.

Compensation:

In appreciation for your participation in our study during meal times, we are offering lunch or dinner.

Contact People

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the project director. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

Signature

Your signature below means that you have read the information above and agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them now or at any time during the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

A copy of this consent form is attached for you to keep.

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

Focus Group Script

Introduction

Good morning and welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion about fisheries business resilience. My name is ____, and I will serve as the moderator for today's focus group discussion. Assisting me and taking notes is _____. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about the challenges fishing businesses face with regards to a changing environment. You were invited because you are all stakeholders in our fishing community. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will ask. _____ and I will both be taking notes to help us remember what is said. We are also audio recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We have name tents here in front of us today, but no names will be included in any reports. Although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally repeat what was said. Please sign the provided consent form and feel free to get up and get more refreshments if you would like.

We expect that you will have differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, disagree, or give an example, feel free to do that. Don't feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. We are here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We're interested in hearing from each of you. So if you're talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren't saying much, I may call on you. We just want to make sure we hear from all of you.

Opening

Let's begin by each person telling us your name and how you are connected to Alaska's fisheries businesses.

Introductory Questions

You have in front of you a business self-assessment tool that was provided in advance of the focus group. We will be exploring challenges fishing business face with respect to environmental change with prompts from sections of this index.

What challenges have you faced or vulnerabilities you are concerned about with respect to environmental change and fishing operations?

Transition Questions

What steps do you take to manage those risks?
How do they make your business more resilient?

Key Questions

Business and Operations:

What kind of formal business and operations plans do you have in place?
What components are included?

In what ways has having a business and operations plan benefited you in the past?

Disaster and Hazard Management:

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

What were some of the most extreme environmental conditions you worked in this season (or past seasons)?

How could you better prepare for those conditions?

What kind of emergency and disaster plans do you have for your business?

Do you review and practice them often?

Do your plans include response procedures after the initial emergency (clean up, reopening)?

Marketing/Processing

What steps do you take to ensure you have a reliable market for your product? (Can include direct marketing strategies or how to keep a processor buying your product)

How do you collaborate/participate with other businesses or organizations that support your industry?

Workforce

What methods do you use to recruit new crew?

How do you incentivize your crew to work hard and return the following year?

How do you train your crew in emergency response?

If you are the crew, what skill trainings or certifications do you pursue to ensure your employability?

Resources

What disaster awareness programs are you aware of and how do you participate? This could include disaster relief programs, emergency hotlines, or local drills.

Resource Access/Knowledge

How does your business support local resource sustainability efforts?

What local resource management or fisheries science organizations do you interact with? How so?

Concluding Questions

How do you think an index like this would be helpful to someone trying to improve their business resilience?

What changes would you recommend to make it more helpful?

Do you have any personal accounts of how you have adapted your business practices to environmental change in the past or how you may be planning to adapt in the future? For example, this season was exceptionally unconventional, are you planning on doing anything differently next season because of it?

Are there any policy changes you would like to see to better help your business adapt to environmental changes?

Is there any advice you have for new fisheries business owners to help them make their business more resilient?

When would be a good date in the spring to hold a more comprehensive workshop (in between fishing seasons when most people are in town)?

Is there anything else you would like to address that we didn't talk about?

Conclusion

Thank you all so much for participating in this focus group. Your input will help us make this tool better suited to your needs. We may follow up with some of you later on. If you are interested in learning more about this resource, we will be hosting a more comprehensive workshop in the spring. As a reminder, please respect the other participants' privacy when talking to others about this focus group.

Resilience Tools for Alaska Fisheries Businesses: Focus on Environmental Change

Focus Group Instrument Template

Data Analysis and Reporting

Data Recording

Each focus group will be recorded with audio equipment and saved for further evaluation after the event. Accompanying each audio recording will be notes taken during the focus group. The written notes will include verbal and nonverbal communication by the participants and any overarching themes dominating each topic. After each focus group the note taker and the moderator will meet to discuss their thoughts of the event and edit or add to the notes.

Analysis

For each section of the Fisheries Resilience Index the responses will be considered separately, then looked at as a whole to determine overarching themes. For each section we will identify what overall best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations were provided by the participants, specifically taking note of how the Index can be improved to better meet the needs of their business. Participant content with specific examples of how strategic business planning has helped them or how their business has had to adapt to environmental change will be identified and included in later workshops and trainings. The information taken away from the focus groups will help the final self-assessment meet local business needs and while considering of the characteristics of the end users.

Reporting

A report will be created summarizing results and highlighting key points gathered from the data to share with fishery industry leaders, resource managers, business owners and resilience experts. Findings will guide further action in tailoring the business self-assessment before deployment in trainings, publications and other delivery methods. The Focus Group Summary report and final Alaska Fisheries Resilience Index will be included in project reporting to the funder.