Overview

- Qualitative research & the online group discussion method.
- Benefits & limitations of bulletin board discussions.
- Using a bulletin board platform.
- Possible applications of bulletin board discussions in tobacco control.
Qualitative Research & the Online Group Discussion Method

Qualitative Research

- Small, targeted samples.
- In-depth conversations (interviews or discussions) concerning the reasons people act or think the way they do.
- Often used to inform survey questionnaire design &/or 'get behind' (bring a deeper understanding to) survey data.
- More than quantitative, success in qualitative relies on researcher engagement with the participants.
Online Group Discussion Method

- Online variation of the traditional face-to-face focus group.
- Synchronous & asynchronous.
- Our focus today is on asynchronous discussions or “bulletin boards.”
- Text-based discussions facilitated by Web-based platforms specifically designed for this purpose.

continued

Online Group Discussion Method (cont.)

- Like traditional focus groups, discussions are led by a moderator & participants are screened & recruited via email &/or phone.
- Discussions are held over 2-3+ days & participants can contribute to the discussion at a time and place that is convenient for them.
- Platforms can accommodate large groups (up to 30 participants), although this is not recommended.
Benefits & Limitations of Bulletin Board Discussions

Benefits

- **Convenience** – Can participate anytime & anywhere (with Internet access) based on participant's schedule.

- **Removes geographic barriers** – Can bring together geographically-dispersed &/or hard-to-reach population segments.

- **Choice of device** – Participants can use a computer or smartphone.

- **Depth, “richness” of information** – Can elicit highly-interactive, detailed discussions, and the length of discussions allows the moderator time to follow-up with/get to know participants.

- **Vividness of information** – Participants can choose to upload an image or video to explain the meaning of their responses.

*continued*
Benefits (cont.)

- **Breadth of information** – Length of discussions allows the moderator to introduce a range of topics.
- **Moderator-observer discussions** – Virtual backroom allow observers to send notes to the moderator & discuss the discussions while in progress.
- **Data** – Lots of it (which is also a limitation).
- **Built-in transcriptions** – Written responses/dialog (along with uploads) can be exported in various formats & accessed online anytime.
- **Cost & time effective** – Especially compared to face-to-face discussions. There is no travel or costs associated with travel, facility, & (possibly) recruiting. A basic charge for utilizing a platform for a three-day board is around $600.

Limitations

- **Time intensive** – Moderator must devote a great deal of time to: getting participants to show up, engaging participants in discussion so they don't drop out, monitoring the discussion & following up participants' comments often, and conducting the analysis & creating meaning from the outcomes.
- **Difficult to manage** – Keeping track of the discussion can be very difficult if there are too many: participants (more than 12), topics, &/or questions.
- **Sample bias** – Method favors people who are literate, capable of understanding how to use the bulletin board platform, & who have Internet access.
- **Lots of data** – Reams of transcripts & a tremendous amount of input can be overwhelming & demanding on the analyst's time.
- **Ethical considerations** – Like all research online, confidentiality is tenuous given issues of data storage, other people involved (observers, participants), and uploaded profile photos & other images/videos.
Using a Bulletin Board Platform: EPA Case Study

 To develop a behavioral & social science research agenda within the EPA's overall research program.

 Conducted a series of interviews & face-to-face discussions with behavioral & social scientists ("experts") across many disciplines.

 To gain deeper insight from a greater number of experts within cost and time parameters, EPA elected to conduct bulletin boards.

 Three boards were conducted, each ran three days with 12-15 participants in each group.
Email Invitation to Participate

Good Afternoon

You are among a select group of behavioral and social scientists the U.S. EPA is asking to participate in an online scientist-to-scientist community meeting in April.

Background: The National Center for Environmental Research (NCER) manages the extramural research activities of the EPA Office of Research and Development (ORD). Given the role of NCER within the ORD and as a result of recommendations from an external review panel of scientific experts, NCER is seeking to establish a research agenda for Behavioral and Social Sciences as it impacts and affects environmental protection as well as the evolution of environmental policy.

Request: As part of the development of the Behavioral Sciences Research Agenda, the U.S. EPA is asking you to participate in an online meeting among behavioral and social scientists from various disciplines across the U.S. The online meeting format is very flexible, allowing you to participate at any time from your office, home, or any other location with a high-speed Internet connection. This online meeting will be held over a 3-day period beginning on Monday April 25, 2011. From Monday April 25 to Wednesday April 27, you will be required to log into the meeting site twice per day at a time convenient to your schedule (anytime from 12:01 a.m. until midnight EDT) and respond to the facilitator’s questions posted daily, as well as engage with the other participants. The discussion will focus on how the behavioral sciences have addressed environmental issues, identifying gaps in behavioral sciences research related to the environment, and prioritizing the gaps and issues within the behavioral sciences research community as they relate to environmental protection. All participants will receive a summary report of the outcome.

You are among a small group of behavioral and social scientists being asked to share your knowledge and insight with the U.S. EPA in support of this important activity.

Please confirm that you will participate in this online meeting by responding to this email message by Friday, April 22, 2011 with the following information to Audrey Glynn, PhD, Scientific Consulting Group, Inc., 301-670-4646, aglynn@scgcorp.com.

Bulletin Board Platforms

- There are many –
  - iTracks
  - Dub
  - Artifact
  - Revelation
  - VisionsLive
  - FocusForums
  - 20|20’s QualBoard
Using the Platform: Discussion Guide

### Project Timeline - Behavioral Sciences Online Community Group A

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<th>Project Sections</th>
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You can add as many sections to your project as required. We recommend condensing your discussion into three segments: Introduction, Reflected and Analysis. This will help participants follow along. We also recommend creating no more than 10 questions in a given section.

###DAY 1: Introduction & Learning Curve

Hello and welcome to the first day of our three-day discussion on behavioral and social science research related to environmental protection and policy. My name is Margaret Roller and I have been asked to facilitate this discussion. I am not an EPA or other government employee but rather a 35-year professional in research methods. My graduate training is in psychology.

Our discussion will run from Monday April 22 to Wednesday April 24. I will post one or more questions each day — ideally in the morning (12:00 a.m. GMT) and then later in the day (1:00 a.m. GMT). Please log into this site at least twice a day and respond to these questions. I encourage you to log in as many times as you like and comment as often as you like. Although this is an online discussion I am anticipating an active conversation with all of us contributing to the discussion and engaging with each other.

You should have received instructions on how to reply and comment in this online format. In the course of our discussions, you may want to send me material to review and incorporate in my analysis. If so, please send your documents directly to my email address at margolin@research.com.

Margaret Roller
Using the Platform: the Discussion

Using the Platform: the Discussion (cont.)

Moderator (Moderator)

How effective or impactful have past behavioral/social science research efforts been in terms of benefiting environmental protection and/or policy? Has the research impacted change?
Using the Platform: the Discussion (cont.)

Project posted on March 29, 2013, 11:09 AM.
In your section, so shalt subset has facilitated an online seminar related to important areas related to environmental protection and policy. Below are some important observations that you might find interesting in the seminar.

I think some work has been done on business compliance with EPA requirements and implications of these programs. Research involves participation in industry advocacy and some research on the engagement, partnerships, and stakeholder-organized population participation.

Clearly the work has begun, but it is extremely fragmented and grossly underfunded. Lack of the European Union for an excellent model of open access, government-funded work. There needs to be funding for institutional and methodological work, as well as some studies and empirical research.

Publicly, there is a lack of behavioral science, and it has done quite a bit to help understand economic behavior, but that is sometimes applied to environmental protection and policy. My name is Maria Hunter and I have been asked to facilitate discussion. I am not an EPA or other government employee but rather a 35-year professional in research methods. My graduate training is in psychology.

Our discussion will run from Monday April 25 to Wednesday April 27. I will post more questions twice a day — once in the early morning (12:01 a.m. EDT) and twice in the day (3:06 p.m. EDT). Please log into the site at least twice a day and respond to these questions. I encourage you to log in as many times as you like and comment often as you like. Although this is an online discussion I am anticipating an active conversation, with all of us contributing to the discussion and engaging with each other.
Using the Platform: the Participants

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Using the Platform: the Participants (cont.)

User Profile:

- Full Name: Jonathan Doe
- Email: johndoe@email.com
- Address: 123 Main St, Anytown, USA
- Phone: 555-1234
- Website: www.personalwebsite.com

Demographics Information:

- Age: 30
- Gender: Male
- Education Level: Bachelor's
- Occupation: Engineer

Recent Posts:

- Post 1: Topic 1
- Post 2: Topic 2
- Post 3: Topic 3

Recent Comments:

- Comment 1: by User A
- Comment 2: by User B
- Comment 3: by User C

Using the Platform: the Participants (cont.)
Using the Platform: the Participants (cont.)

Using the Platform: Other Users
Using the Platform: Other Users (cont.)

Using the Platform: Tags
Using the Platform: Tags (cont.)

Using the Platform: Analysis
[The mission of the B/SS research agenda is to] support research that creates a better understanding of the complexity of individual, social, political, and economic processes in order to facilitate the development of environmental policy and protection.
Using the Platform: Analysis (cont.)

Possible Applications of Bulletin Boards in Conjunction with Tobacco Control
Enhance Survey Data

❖ As a qualitative method, online discussions can play an important role in informing & enriching your survey efforts.

❖ Help identify key attitudes, behavior, indicators associated with particular programs or population segments.
  ❖ Assist in questionnaire development (e.g., questions to ask, appropriate language to use).

❖ Help explain survey data (e.g., Why is awareness for a counter-marketing campaign so low in a particular community?)

Enhance Survey Data (cont.)

❖ Whether before or after collecting survey data, bulletin board discussions could provide useful information from various target groups.
  ❖ Youth & young adults
    ◦ Tobacco use: motivations; where, when, & with who they like to smoke; particular “triggers” or situations that increase smoking activity; stories of when they felt uncomfortable smoking.
    ◦ Awareness & perceived effectiveness of counter-marketing communications.
    ◦ Awareness & perceived effectiveness/influence of pro-tobacco point-of-sale material.
    ◦ Home life & ETS.
  ❖ Parents who smoke
    ◦ Knowledge of ETS & the danger it poses.
    ◦ Level of concern about smoking around their children.
    ◦ Awareness & use of tobacco-control services, such as quitline.
  ❖ Minority or ethnically-specific population groups
    ◦ Tobacco use & barriers to change.
Enhance Survey Data (cont.)

- Local community partners
  - Teachers’ perceptions of tobacco use among students & effectiveness of past & current school programs.
  - The extent to which physicians give their patients advice or tips to help them quit smoking & the factors that impede or facilitate these efforts.
  - Attitudes toward existing programs & barriers to greater involvement among faith-based organizations.
  - Business owners’ perceptions of the tobacco problem, the priority they place on the control and prevention of tobacco use, and on what basis they would become more involved with the programs.

- Program services’ volunteers & staff
  - Training: perceptions of past training, specific needs for training now, how training could impact the delivery of services.
  - Needed technical & support services.

Aid in Program Development

- Bulletin boards could play a role in the development of appropriate programs. For example, by:
  - Identifying motivations that drive social norms & behavior among hard-to-reach or minority population segments.
  - Collaborating with young adults to design an effective counter-marketing communications program.
  - Listening to quitline operators discuss their work & their suggestions to improve quitline services based on their experiences.
  - Asking school administrators to define & discuss the “ideal” tobacco-related program for their respective schools.
  - Collaborate with health-related programs where tobacco is a leading cause to identify ways of integrating programs & working together.
Thank You

Margaret Roller
rmr@rollerresearch.com