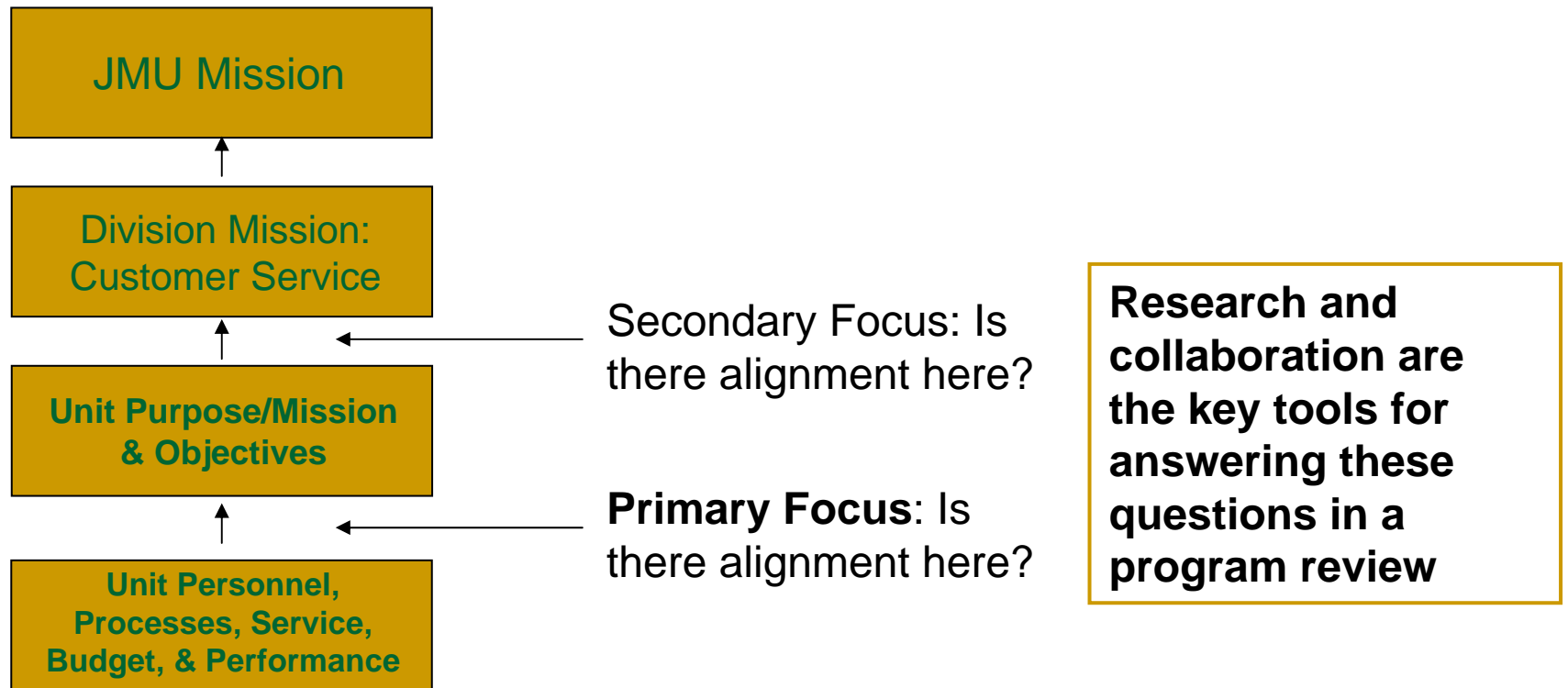

Conducting Focus Groups for Program Reviews

Today's Objectives

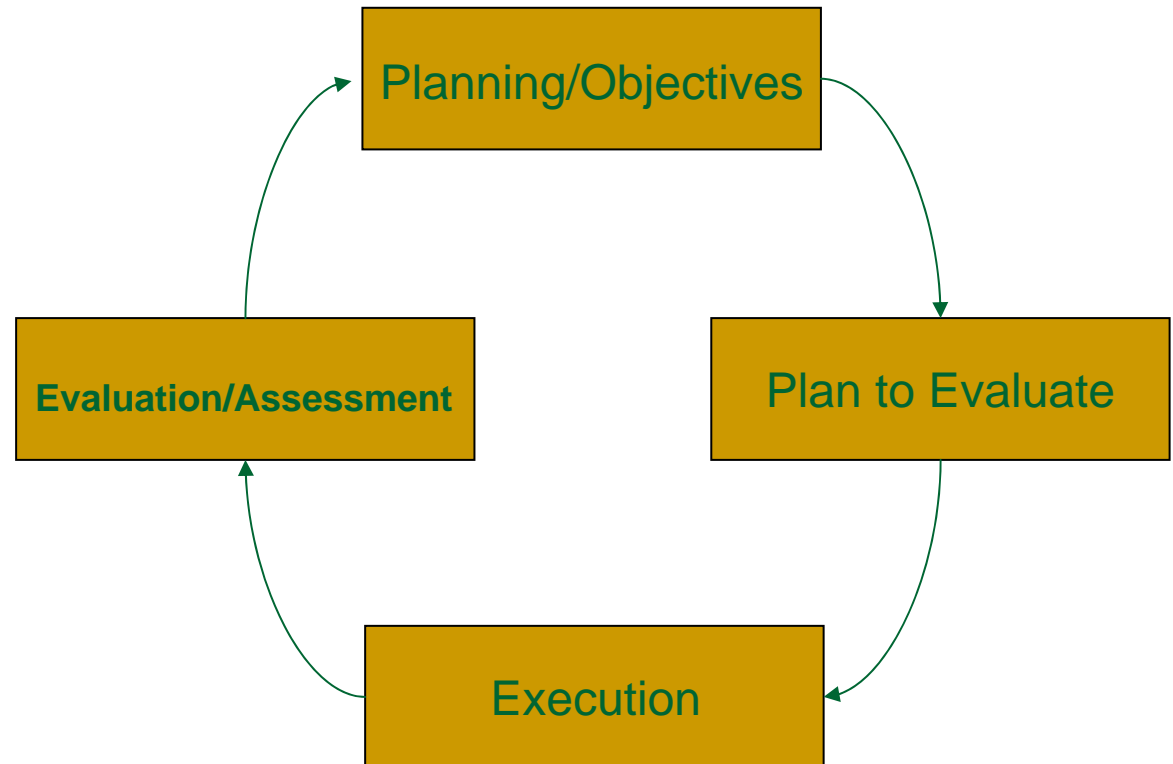
- Provide an overview of planning and conducting a program review focus group
- Answer your questions

The Focus of a Program Review



SACS Focus

In support of a
clearly stated
mission...



Phase 2: Committee Research

<i>Most studies will include</i>	<i>Some studies will include</i>
Personal Interviews – Individual attitudes and opinions. Issues	Surveys – For units with large numbers of customers
External Reviewer – Expert, outsider's review	Peer Studies/Best Practices
Focus Groups – Perceptions, trends, material for survey	Internal Process Studies
Document Review – Published reports, binder, websites, etc.	Etc.
Committee Collaboration – Committee members' existing knowledge base	

Focus Groups

- A gathering of 8-12 unit constituents assembled to discuss unit performance through moderated discussion
 - A purposeful, yet informal discussion of issues
 - Questions are prepared in advance but not held to legalistically
 - Usually a moderator/facilitator and at least one note taker
 - Normally, more than one focus group is conducted for a given review
 - Much more a discussion or dialogue than a “survey” – not all questions must be answered by all participants.

Focus Group Objectives

- Encourage each person to speak his/her mind
- Develop an understanding of the “language” of unit constituents
- Determine perceptions and misconceptions
- Explore terms and concepts thoroughly
- Ask “why?”
- Hear the unit’s “story” from the group’s perspective
- Generate ideas for unit improvement

What a Focus Group is *Not*

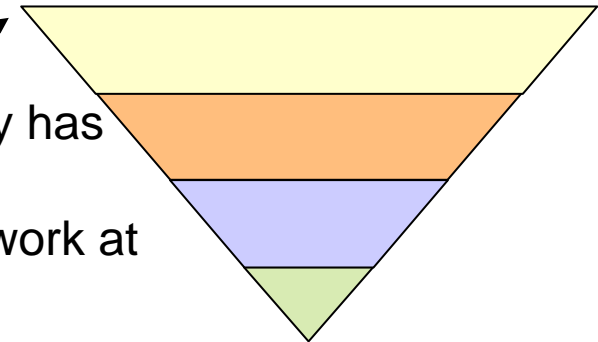
- A statistically reliable survey
- Research of a representative sample
- A gripe session
- A lecture
- A source of statistical conclusions

Focus Group Steps

1. Establish moderator and note-taker(s)
2. Arrange time, date, and location
3. Determine 12-20+ participants who share a common connection with the unit
4. Send out initial invitation letters 4 weeks in advance (samples will be available)
5. Arrange for light refreshments
6. Make telephone follow-up call
7. Determine participants and send reminder e-mail
8. Complete work on questions and strategy
9. Send final reminder e-mail one week prior

Moderator Strategies

- Use an inverse pyramid approach to questions
 - Start with broad, “soft” questions
 - What do you think are the one or two most important ways in which computer technology has changed your work life?
 - What is the most fulfilling aspect about your work at JMU?
 - Work toward more specific questions and questions that may be more emotionally charged
 - Let’s talk about your last interaction with the Help Desk. How did it go? Was your problem solved quickly? Were you made to feel important?
 - What mistakes do you think the university is making in its approach to diversity?



Moderator Strategies

- Develop ways for the people to relax
 - Refreshments, opening ice breaker, introductions, etc.
 - Promise to start and end on time (90 minutes tops)
 - Assure individual confidentiality/anonymity
- Be alert – look for opportunities to ask follow-up questions or pursue topics initiated by the group members
- Spread the conversation around, don't be afraid to call on the quiet ones and gently interrupt the dominators
- Remember the goal is to harvest perceptions, ideas, concepts, etc.
- Assure the members of the group that their opinions matter. (In fact, their opinions are all that matter in a focus group such as this.)

Focus Groups

■ Sample questions

- ❑ Let's talk about how you interact with the unit. What does that usually look like?
- ❑ What are stories you can share that illustrate the unit's strengths and weaknesses?
- ❑ What are areas in which the unit doesn't seem to understand your particular needs?
- ❑ If you were put in charge of the unit, what's the first change you would implement?
- ❑ As a group, let's see if we can list 7 ways in which the unit could be more effective.