

# How to run focus groups



## Solutions for equality and growth



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# Introduction

## Who is this guide for?

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This guide is for anyone who wants an overview of how and when you might organise and run a focus group. It will be especially useful for anyone who is thinking of collecting community opinions on an issue or service, or for those who engage in policy and campaigning work.

## What is in this guide?

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The guide explores:

- key research ethics
- what a focus group is
- when to use focus groups or individual interviews
- planning and running a focus group
- key skills and resources required to hold a focus group
- practical tips
- templates for you to adapt and use in your own research.

## What is a focus group?

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A focus group is a method of research involving a small group of people (usually six to eight participants) who are guided through a discussion by a moderator. Focus groups can be used to explore a variety of different issues, to test solutions, to explore the group's perspective of a problem and to generate ideas.

Focus groups can be used to generate the following outcomes:

- to gather background information about an issue
- to generate and test ideas (which can then be explored through complementary avenues of research to build a stronger evidence base)
- to stimulate new ideas and encourage creative participant-led solutions
- to identify potential barriers or problems with a new service or programme
- to gather client impressions of a service, organisation or institution
- to confirm or develop what you have found in the desk research.

The key to running a successful focus group is in your ability to make the

participants feel secure and relaxed. A well-run focus group is able to provide a richer understanding than you may get from a personal one to one interview or a survey. The dynamics within a well-run focus group tend to lead to more contextualised and developed answers than participants are likely to share during individual interviews.

However, focus groups are not ideal tools for capturing the views of a wide range of individuals since the sample size remains very small and selective. Focus groups are used to generate personal opinions and attitudes, it would not be appropriate to evidence this in terms of numbers or statistics and actually may undermine the quality of your research. For example, it may not be suitable to state that “50% of the participants in this research preferred soft drinks to water” when you are basing this on a poll of just eight people. When deciding whether or not to use focus groups you should begin by thinking about who you are trying to influence and what will influence them. Are you interested in human experiences or numbers, or both? Focus groups are great for qualitative (narrative) research but will not be useful for generating fast numbers. If you require numbers to support your research then you should think about a complementary survey and a mixed method (using both qualitative and quantitative) approach.

Similar to other types of qualitative research, focus groups should be used to identify important issues that can then be explored further through surveys or studies involving a larger, more representative group of people.

Focus groups as a research method have additional benefits to those already mentioned, in particular they allow you to pick up on nonverbal information which may be important to your research (for example, excitement, doubt, hesitation or stress). They also help you to understand the causal link between why people behave in a certain way or hold a certain set of beliefs. This can be useful when designing, introducing or commissioning a service or programme.

By becoming more externally focused, focus groups can help your organisation grow and improve the way it operates.

## When will focus groups be useful?

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Focus groups can be a useful tool to help you better understand the needs, preferences or priorities of your service users and clients<sup>1</sup>. A focus group can also help you to learn more about the concerns within a particular community and allow you to use this information to guide future action. The responses you gain at a focus group can help to explore a wide range of issues affecting your clients (and people in general), and this can help to shape and develop your policy and campaigning work. For example, if you are thinking about the barriers self-employed people face in your local community, it might be useful to hold a focus group to identify challenges. You can then use this to generate solutions and launch a campaign to highlight what

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<sup>1</sup> This guide will continue to reference the needs of ‘clients’ but the term can be interchanged with service users if this is more relevant for your organisation.

needs to change.

The responses you gather at a focus group are typically open-ended and can be embedded in personal experiences or a story. This type of research will produce responses that are very different to the kind you can expect in a survey or other quantitative methods of research. Both research methods are useful and can be used together to complement each other. However, ultimately your chosen methods for research should be driven by your own needs and purposes, and the resources available to you.

A focus group can be useful, when:

- you are thinking about introducing a new service or programme
- you want to uncover underlying causes for problems
- you want to identify local issues
- you want to prioritise the specific areas in which there is a need for action
- you want to explore practical or workable solutions
- you want to ask questions that can't be easily asked or answered on a written survey (e.g. through the use of visual prompts, sharing information etc.)
- you want to complement any existing knowledge you have gained from written surveys or desk research.

## What are you trying to find out?

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You can use focus groups to both explore ideas and to confirm them, or even achieve a combination of the two. Exploratory focus groups will typically help you to:

- better understand how a group perceives a problem
- brainstorm potential solutions within a group setting
- identify areas where further research is needed (e.g. you may use a focus group as a starting point and then follow up with one-to-one interviews with a few selected participants)
- identify areas where there is a need for (immediate) action
- design surveys targeted at a larger group of people (e.g. the community)
- give some context to unclear or conflicting survey responses (e.g. to explain *why*).

In contrast, if you already have a good understanding of the issues from your desk research (or other types of research) focus groups can also be used to confirm or evaluate your ideas. In this instance, confirmatory focus groups may be more useful and can help you to:

- evaluate how well solutions are being implemented

- gather feedback and opinions on a new project, service or campaign you are proposing
- confirm and build on what you have learnt from survey responses or other research collected.

The key to deciding whether or not focus groups are going to be helpful to you is to make good research decisions:

1. **pick your issue:** use your client information, local evidence forms, your advisers' and volunteers' insight and expertise, your own knowledge of local changes and developments and any national or external studies as potential sources of information.

Remember to think about whether there is an equality issue or impact? Do you need to hear from a particular demographic to explore this further?

2. **narrow down the issue:** does your issue relate to policy or processes, or both? Does your topic have a national, regional or local focus?

Think about who has the power to make the changes you need and what might persuade them. Think about the context to your research, is there a current opportunity to influence change (either locally or nationally)?

Are you best placed to look at this issue? In some cases there may be other (specialist) organisations that are better placed to explore the topic. In those instances it is best to work with the other organisations to reach a mutual goal rather than competing with them.

3. **collect any existing evidence:** depending on evidence you routinely collect in your organisation, you may already have a wealth of data, expertise and insight which would prove really valuable for your research.

Remember to think about what data and information you already have in your local office, have you tried using this to achieve change yet? You may not need to conduct further research if what you have uncovered is sufficient for your topic.

4. **design and conduct your research:** use the design of your research to address any gaps in the existing evidence. Remember to think about the purpose and aims of your research when developing a research question.

Do you need to understand the issue or the impact of it? You may even focus on a particular equality dimension to show barriers or disproportionate impact. Do you need to show the scale of the issue (in which case perhaps focus groups alone are not useful)? Or do you need to show all of these?

5. **use your evidence:** when planning your research you must think about how you intend to use the results. One of the greatest downfalls with focus groups can be in the failure to apply the results to the intended

purpose.

# Why and when would you use a focus group?

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Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus groups can explore attitudes and opinions that are not likely to be captured in other forms of research.	Focus groups rely heavily on the skills of the moderator and this may affect the quality of the evidence gathered.
Focus groups are a good way of gathering data using fewer resources (time and money) than other types of research (such as large surveys or one to one interviews).	The analysis of the focus group can be complex and the data gathered will depend on the skills of the note taker and on what they pick up from the responses.
Focus groups can be used to solve problems, generate ideas and explore issues in detail in a way that is not possible in other types of research.	Focus groups are difficult to recruit for, and since attendance is voluntary, an insufficient number may attend a planned focus group.
Responses can be clarified and expanded upon with probing follow-up questions to help you fill any gaps in your research.	There is a risk that the discussion may become polarised, causing participants to adopt a more extremist stance than they began with.
Often the way a response is given is more valuable than the response itself (for example, the impact of a long pause or reluctance to answer). These nonverbal responses can be noted and interpreted when analysing the findings.	The personal stories collected during a focus group can be time consuming and may not allow you to fully explore the detail of the issues during the course of any session.
When the dynamics in a focus group are conducive, the focus group becomes a fluid discussion between participants. Group members can react to and build upon each other's	The focus is on group, not individual, opinions and this may reinforce bias or false consensus within some participants who feel they have to

responses to build a deeper understanding of the issue.	agree with the group even if they do not.
Focus groups can be a good medium to generate new ideas or solutions to a problem.	Dominant personalities may overpower and steer the group's responses unless the moderator controls the session. This may also make some participants reluctant to discuss sensitive issues.
Running a focus group does not require the setup of any equipment (although a recording device is recommended) and they allow flexibility in terms of location, duration, and in number and types of participants.	A focus group consists of a small number of individuals which means that it is not a representative size to draw conclusions from.
Focus groups allow you to explore shared experiences and to speak to a target demographic about a certain issue.	Focus groups are difficult to recruit for and incentives may need to be offered which can bias views and opinions.

# The different types of focus groups

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Focus groups can vary considerably in size and composition, however you should choose a style that best fits your aims or research topic:

## **Constructed focus groups:**

- Typical group: lasts between one and two hours, with around eight participants
- Extended: you can extend the duration of the session up to three hours (which allows exploration of more complex or detailed topics)
- Mini group: can be used to explore difficult, sensitive or challenging topics, with around four to six participants.

## **Ready made groups:**

- Groups of friends: can be useful with young people or where friends share the commonalities that you are interested in
- Support or community groups: allow you to explore complex topics in a group where the participants are already comfortable with each other.

## **Structured workshops:**

- Solve problems: workshops can be used to generate ideas, explore detailed issues or to co-design the improvement of a service/ programme. These groups can engage more participants; from anywhere between 15 to 20+ individuals
- Within larger workshops, you can also choose to incorporate smaller sub-groups to cover a range of issues.

# Planning your focus group

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If deciding to use a focus group, there are a few key issues that you must remain mindful of:

- **the purpose of your data:** the questions you ask during a focus group will mostly be determined by the purpose of your research and how you intend to use the results. You can use your focus group to explore differences in opinion, define the problem, encourage creative thinking and develop solutions within the session.
- **subject matter and sensitive issues:** when engaging with shared experiences, you must become familiar with the critical issues affecting the community. While the purpose of the research is to learn from the participants, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the sensitive issues ahead of time to moderate the discussion. This can also help to minimise the risk of participants feeling offended or insulted.
- **selecting the participants:** the composition of your focus group will, again, be largely determined by your research questions. However, you should ensure that your selected participants share an identifiable key criteria that fits your research. For example, if you are exploring how cuts in welfare benefits impact on single mothers, participants should include single mothers.

You may choose to select a random sample (e.g. a random pick from a larger pool), a convenience sample (e.g. a readily available pool of people) or a mix of these. It is also important to ensure that the selected participants represent the diversity of the larger community (e.g. including participants from rural as well as urban communities). In some circumstances it may not be suitable to invite men and women to participate in the same focus group (e.g. focus groups about domestic violence services).

- **group size and focus group time and location:** you need enough

participants to get a discussion going but not too many so people can be heard.

When planning your focus group you should decide on a time of day (or evening) that is convenient for the participants and responsive to their life circumstances. For example if the majority of your participants are likely to have children it may not be suitable for you to hold a focus group during the school opening/ closure times.

Focus groups should be conducted in locations that are accessible, spacious enough for your group size and convenient and comfortable for participants. Overall, the room must be quiet and have a good level of privacy to allow full participation. Think about accessibility, any reasonable adjustments or child care you need to offer to ensure that you can speak to the people you need without barriers.

## How to recruit the participants

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Recruiting participants can be the hardest of all focus group planning related tasks, however following the guidance below will help to mitigate the risk of a low turn out.

The first step would be to draw up a list of possible invitees and map out your relevant criteria and the diversity of the group (e.g. benefit receipt, gender, ethnicity, income bracket, disability). You should limit your set of criteria to no more than four or five as narrowing down with more criteria could make recruitment very difficult. Think about why the criteria is needed, what you will be excluding by narrowing down to this level and whether it is necessary. Where possible (and appropriate) you should try to represent the community equally. Think about who you would need to speak to, why you have chosen that group in particular and how you might start to find your potential participants.

Next, start recruiting these people through as many channels as you can (by email, phone, local media, through social media or a letter). Participants can be invited to attend using:

- client lists
- your own data
- local press or media
- 'doorstepping' (a door to door search, or even standing just outside the door of your organisation to engage with people that come, don't come in and may be interested but hesitant)
- other organisations (any community groups or local organisations)
- agencies (at a price, you can get an agency to put a list of participants)

- together for you however it is not recommended unless as a last resort)
- communications (put out as many 'adverts' as you can. Think about your ideal group and target the locations where you think they would see this information (this could even be your reception). Don't be afraid to use social media to get the message out!
- snowballing (where you contact one person and use them as an ally to find more people who fit the criteria)

Explain the general purpose of your research and the discussion topic. You'll also have to give an indication as to what the date, time and location will be for the focus group (but be prepared to be flexible if this time does not work for many of your potential participants).

Finally explain the method you will use to record the participant responses, summarise who will be there on the day and explain what incentives you are offering for their time. Keep this as brief as possible and provide contact details so that people can get in touch to find out more.

Remember that your participants have generously agreed to schedule in this focus group alongside their busy lives and they may be likely to forget. It's a good idea to send the participants a quick note (or to telephone them) a day or two ahead of the focus group date to ensure that they are still coming and have made all of the necessary arrangements. If you have had no direct contact with the participant, it may be a good idea to get your link or contact to the participant to send through the message. It is important that you respect this anonymity as it may be crucial to the participant's attendance.

At this point you can also confirm details of the venue and give them a map or directions of how to get there. Explain that you will be there half an hour before the focus group and ask them to kindly arrive 15 minutes before the start time to settle in, allow time for lateness and to complete paperwork. If you feel the participants will need time to prepare answers, you can send them copies of the interview questions and let them know of your intention to audio record the session.

Despite all of your preparation, it is also good idea to over-recruit to a focus group (with around two extra participants) as often people will have to cancel at the last minute or fail to turn up on the day.

## Your focus group team

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Like with any successful team, it's important to have a briefing meeting before the focus group with your focus group team. Before the participants arrive, you should sit down with your focus group team and review the purpose, issues and objectives of the focus group. This will enable your note taker to pick up on the relevant details and serve as a memory aid for the focus group moderator.

Conducting focus groups requires a small team, comprised of a:

1. Researcher
2. Moderator (often the same person as the researcher)
3. Note taker (assistant; logistics support on the day)

Your role as a researcher is to share knowledge, lead the content of the discussion and to undergo passive, individual learning. The researcher may also be the moderator for the group as long as they remain a neutral third party member. A moderator's role it is to:

- build trust amongst the group and secure their buy-in
- keep participants focused, engaged and attentive
- obtain the participants' consent
- ensure the participants feel safe and comfortable in sharing their views and experiences
- set out some ground rules at the start of the session
- set the scene and explain the purpose for the session
- be willing to listen and encourage participation from all the group members
- be flexible, but ensure that the group is generally on time and focused on the topics
- challenge and support participants (for example in the event of breakaway conversations)
- use prompts and probes to identify underlying beliefs, reasoning and experience
- politely and diplomatically enforce ground rules throughout the session (as needed)
- tackle arguments or personality clashes by separating conflicting individuals
- summarise the discussion from time to time to check that you are getting a good understanding of the participants' comments
- remain sensitive to gender or cultural issues.

Participants must feel comfortable in expressing themselves freely where there is no conflict of interest. In some situations, where the topic being discussed is particularly sensitive or difficult, it may help to bring in an external, independent moderator who is able to remain impartial and lead the focus group.

The role of a notetaker is to make notes and observations throughout the focus group session. These notes will prove invaluable if there are any problems with your audio recorder, however, they can also complement the audio by adding an additional nuanced layer to the data recording. For example a notetaker can pick up on useful nonverbal communication or explain pauses in the discussion in a way that the audio device simply can't record. You should schedule in a few minutes midway through the focus group to speak to your notetaker privately about any prompts or follow ups that you need to make before the focus group ends. It is very likely that the notetaker has picked up on something that the moderator has missed and this should be used to influence the moderator's

leading of the group. A notetaker's role is to:

- have good listening skills
- be observant and attentive to the way in which participants respond
- have good writing skills (there will be a lot of information to note down)
- be able to summarise comprehensive discussions into a concise format (i.e. not minuting the discussion word for word)
- to ensure that any equipment they need for the session is well prepared (i.e. audio recording device, notepad, any forms for participants and extra pens)
- act as an observer and not to participate in the discussion
- remain impartial and not to share any opinions about the topic (in the presence of any participants)
- be attuned to the different participants and escort any distressed participants outside should they need time/ privacy to recover
- ensure that participants complete the relevant consent forms, equal opportunity monitoring forms and other paperwork
- to hand out incentive vouchers and liaise with participants after the event.

You should also schedule in some additional time for immediately after the session so that the focus group team can regroup and share feedback. During this time, you should review the notes of the discussion while it is fresh in your minds and discuss any areas that seemed particularly important or relevant to your research topic. It is at this point that you would capture any new insights that have emerged as a result of the discussion with the team.

## Prepare the focus group topic guide

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A topic guide is a rough list of questions, prepared ahead of the focus group and divided up into sub-set categories (or themes). The purpose of the topic guide is to loosely structure the focus group and to lead the discussion (as naturally as possible) through your research topic area.

Your topic guide, its structure and your questions will entirely depend on what your subject matter is and who your potential participants are. It is important to keep your desk research and your key research questions in mind when you are designing this topic guide. Remember that a focus group session does not run for a long time and so you must be selective in what you choose to ask and when. For example, you should not open with any large important questions as it will take some time for the group to feel comfortable in expressing their opinions.

While it is fine to keep the topic guide and questions in front of you during the

focus group, you should direct your attention to your participants and should feel comfortable in asking the questions. Be careful in where you place your topic guide and keep it close to you so that the participants cannot see or read ahead as this will bias their responses. It is a good idea to run through the questions with your focus group team a few times ahead of the session to ensure that your notetaker is briefed properly and that you plan out approximate timings.

The best way to prepare a topic guide is to structure it into broad themes and then within this into specific questions (you may even want to preempt some responses and build in some ready-to-use prompts or probes).

Avoid trying to cover too many issues as it can be off-putting for participants, and read questions aloud to your group to ensure that they are clear, simple and not too lengthy. A good focus group topic guide (and its questions) will:

- be qualitative in focus (asking what, where, who, when and how?)
- be open ended to allow for detailed responses
- be followed up with or probed further if necessary (such as “why?”, “could you give an example?”, “could you tell me more about that?” etc)<sup>2</sup>
- be specific questions (and not contain many questions in one go)
- begin by asking about positive experiences before moving on to negative experiences
- not be biased by your own opinion (think about the way you phrase the question)
- not be closed (where the participant can answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’)
- move from general broad questions to more specific questions (within each theme). This allows the discussion to flow naturally and feels less intrusive to the participants. You may even think of adapting your focus group topic guide according to the makeup of the focus group participants.

## Running your focus group

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On the day and before participants have arrived to the focus group venue, you must make sure:

- you set up the room and ensure that signage in the building is clear
- you inform the front desk receptionist that you are expecting guests and familiarise yourself with the housing keeping notes (e.g. toilets, fire drills, evacuation points)
- you have planned any sub-group activities or break out groups (and where will these take place)

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive list of examples, see appendix 1 of HSE, *How to organise and run focus groups*: [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/focusgroups.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/focusgroups.pdf)

- that you have set up your audio recording device (and that you have bought along the relevant consent forms for the participants)
- that you know what incentives you will be offering and that your team is aware of the process around this
- make sure you have everything you need with you (use our template checklist in the final section of this guide)
- arrange any refreshments and ensure that participants can help themselves
- consider and review any accessibility issues or adjustments necessary.

Once participants begin to arrive, it is important to create a positive, encouraging and welcoming environment. Avoid discussing the subject matter (as it can influence your participants' responses) and try and keep them out of the focus group room if possible. Conversation should be kept to polite pleasantries until you are ready to begin the focus group. This is also a good opportunity to explain the confidentiality and consent requirements before the focus group begins and to get participants to fill paperwork in while they wait.

## Beginning your focus group

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The beginning of your focus group and your first few questions will be critical in putting your participants at ease and encouraging discussion.

Before you ask any questions, welcome the group and introduce yourself and your team. Check that all participants have completed the consent forms and that they understand the confidentiality policy and risks. Cover any housekeeping notes and then begin by recapping the purpose of the research and the objective for the session (be careful not to give too much away as it could bias the responses). At this point it is generally a good idea to pause for any questions or queries that the group may have.

Set out some basic ground rules and remind participants that:

- you are interested in their responses and experiences
- they should speak one at a time (for the audio recorder and note taker)
- you want to hear everyone's views
- they should listen to each other
- they should respect each other's views and diversity
- they should share openly and honestly their views and experiences
- you may ask them to move on to a question or re-visit a question according to the time available
- any views or opinions expressed during the focus group will be confidential and anonymised. Participants must respect this and not repeat opinions or experiences outside of the focus group.

It's generally recommended for you to begin with an icebreaker (for which you could even use a prop) tailored to your participant group. The icebreaker does not

need to be related to the topic matter at all, but just needs to stimulate conversation and give everyone a chance to speak. This time is also critical in establishing the moderator as the leader of the group and it gives them the authority to manage the group. Allow approximately 10 minutes for this introduction and avoid rushing it as it can prepare the group well for the later discussion.

During the focus group, try your best to encourage the conversation (through prompts) and to allow the group to lead their own discussion. If the dynamics of the group work well you will be able to do and say less, keep listening and let the group naturally interact over the subject matter. In these circumstances, you should keep an eye on the clock and only intervene when you have heard suitable responses and would like to move on.

Occasionally, the group's dynamics can be unhelpful for the stimulation of a discussion, particularly where there are breakaway conversations amongst two or more individuals or where there is tension in the group. In these circumstances there are a number of things you can do to get the group back on track:

- challenge and close down dominant characters (politely at first)
- watch out for responses prefaced with "I'm not racist/ homophobic but..."
- at the first instance you should ignore comments phrased like the above (as to prematurely shut the conversation down could undo all your good work in getting participants to open up, and actually they could be saying something useful)
- if the negative remarks are persistent, remind participants of the house rules to respect one another and of the fact that this is a safe space
- give quieter participants a chance to contribute (lookout for signs that they have something to say but avoid putting them on the spot)
- defuse conflicts by moving the topic on (or parking an issue)
- move into a more creative mode (for example, get the group up and ask them to engage in an exercise before sitting down in different seats)
- introduce an activity to the group that requires them to work amongst themselves (this can also give the moderator a break).

## Ending your focus group

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This is a chance for you to summarise the important things you have learnt from the focus group and to reflect on some of the emerging issues. Remember to thank the participants for their time and participation and to let them know that you appreciate their contributions. You want to explain to them the next steps in your research and agree to share with them any outputs or outcomes that come about as a result of this focus group.

At this point, you may get a few individuals who want to continue discussing the topic matter with you. You can politely thank them and share your contact details

to follow up at a later date.

Hand out any incentive vouchers and ensure that you get any outstanding paperwork signed before participants leave. With incentive vouchers, you must be mindful of what is appropriate for your focus group - think about subject matter, amount offered, duration, location and distance travelled. You should offer the same value for each research participant and ask them to complete the paperwork to confirm receipt.

# After your focus group

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Following the focus group, remember to refer back to the purpose and intended use of your research. Think about what the emerging issues are and how you can use this evidence to address some of those.

Depending on your intended outcomes, you may be required to analyse, interpret and summarise the focus group findings. You should aim to write up a summary of your notes and your team's notes as soon as possible to avoid losing any vital memories or responses. It's also easier to make out what the audio recording has recorded; this way as the stories are still fresh in your memory.

Focus groups can be used to bolster large quantitative survey data or to support ideas and solutions using your desk research. You should identify any patterns or common trends that emerge from the experiences of your participants and use this to unpick what change you can affect. Remember that the way somebody has phrased something, or the nonverbal communication that goes along with a response is just as valuable as the words spoken.

Finally, once you have transcribed your focus group findings, ensure that you have a clear plan in place to use your evidence (for example, through intense lobbying, news campaigns, producing a research report). Remember that the focus group participants and the focus group team have sacrificed time and energy towards this research and they expect to see it translated into positive action.

You can also send the participants a summary from the session and explain how the information was used once the project ended. This is entirely optional and you may wish to circulate a sign up sheet so that participants can opt in by providing their email address.

## Basic research ethics

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There are a few key ethical principles that underpin all elements of running a focus group. This means that the research should be designed and reviewed to ensure integrity and quality. You must also be able to demonstrate that the research is independent, impartial and void of any conflicts of interest.

### **Focus group participation is voluntary**

- Participants must understand that they are under no obligation to participate and that there will be no consequences for refusing or withdrawing, at any time.

- You must secure recorded consent (preferably written) from all participants before undertaking any research (there is a template consent form in the final section of this guide for you to amend and use).
- Researchers must explain the purpose and objective of the research openly, honestly and clearly (in a way that is understandable to the participant).
- It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the participant has a full understanding of the risks and benefits that arise from participating.

### **Participant confidentiality**

- Processes are similar to recording client cases, and researchers must agree to keep any identifiers or personal information confidential.
- Researchers must explain to the participant how their confidentiality will be protected and where their data is being stored.
- No information should be publicly reported unless you have obtained written consent from the participant to do so.
- Harm to the research participants must be avoided.

# Templates for you to use

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In the subsequent pages of this guide, you will find a number of templates for you to amend and use. Remember that you will need to review the materials and adapt them to the type of focus group you intend to run.

# Participant information sheet

## 1. Information about the project

[edit this to include your own research summary]

The Solutions project is about looking for practical solutions that will help workers and people looking for work. We want to find solutions that will make equality simpler in workplaces of small employers.

This a national project co-funded by the European Union. Citizens Advice is the lead partner, and the other partners are the Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) and seven local Citizens Advice offices: Gateshead, Kirklees, Newcastle, North Liverpool, Tameside, Stevenage and York. We will be assisted with part of the project by external contractors, Coventry University, particularly with the project's focus group activities.

We will talk to a range of different workers about their experiences at work, including women, disabled people, lesbian and gay people, and people from different ethnic backgrounds. The overall aim of the project is to identify solutions to help people who work for small and medium sized employers, to help them to overcome discrimination and barriers to employment and advancement at work.

One of the activities of the project is to collect information through focus group discussions with employees/ex-employees of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and, separately, with representatives of SMEs. These discussions will contribute to creating solutions that can help both employees and employers.

## 2. Why have I been chosen/asked?

You have been chosen because you are belong to one of the groups of people that we want to talk to.

## 3. Do I have to take part and options for withdrawal?

Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any point. If you do not wish to take apart it will not affect how we provide our advice and information services to you in any way.

## 4. What do I have to do?

You will be asked to attend a focus group organised and delivered by [xxxx] staff. The group will last about 1.5 hours and will involve up to 8 other participants. The group will be asked to share views and experiences on a range of issues relating to your experiences of working and equality issues, discrimination, and barriers to employment and advancement in the workplace for different groups of people. We will be taking notes and audio recording the event and only the research team will listen back and transcribe key themes from the audio recording.

## 5. What are the risks associated with this project?

Your cooperation in this research will take up some of your personal time.

**6. What are the benefits of taking part?**

You will be part of a larger project that is aiming to [xxx]. Your contributions will help us create innovative solutions for [xxx].

**7. Data protection & confidentiality**

All information you provide will be securely kept on a password protected computer. No names or organisations will be identified within the research process unless you specifically consent to this. Data from any focus groups will be kept securely and fully anonymised. Names and other identifying features will not be used in any reports. Any demographic information we collect and use will be used purely to provide context to any quotations in the report. Any personal and sensitive data (for example, names, ethnicity, age, gender) will not be kept with the data collected from the focus groups.

**8. What if things go wrong? Who to complain to**

If you have any query about the focus group you can speak directly with the research team or alternatively you may speak to [xxx] (xxxx@xxxx.org.uk).

**9. What will happen with the results of the study?**

A report will be written and presented at a public conference in October. All data used directly from participants will be fully anonymised.

**10. Who has reviewed this study?**

The study has been reviewed and approved by [xxx].

**11. Further information/Key contact details**

xxxxx, Manager

xxxx@citizensadvice.org.uk

Tel: xxx

# Informed consent form

Thank you for attending this focus group organised by [.....]. The focus group will last about 1.5 hours and we will be taking notes and audio recording the session. All the data collected is confidential and the results will be fully anonymised. The aims of the project will be explained to you and will have an opportunity to ask questions about the research.

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- 3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence.
- 4. I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded (*within one week*).
- 5. I agree to notes being taken/audio recording about what I am saying as part of the research project.
- 6. I agree to take part in the research project.
- 7. [Optional] I agree to be contacted by the researcher following the focus group as follow up on my comments.  
Email: ..... Tel: .....

Name of participant: .....

Signature of participant: .....

Name of Researcher:.....

Signature of researcher: .....

Date: .....

# Expenses receipt form

Please sign below to confirm that you've been given vouchers to cover your expenses for helping [.....] with this research. This will be your only payment for this research and you're liable for any tax that might be due as a result.

By signing the form, you're also confirming that the information you've given already and will give during the research is truthful.

Thank you.

Name	Amount in vouchers	Signature
	£20.00	

# Expense receipt

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Please find enclosed, £20.00 in vouchers to cover your expenses for helping [xxxx] with our research on [INSERT DATE] Any questions please contact [XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk).

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# Expense receipt

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Please find enclosed, £20.00 in vouchers to cover your expenses for helping [xxxx] with our research on [INSERT DATE] Any questions please contact [XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk).

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# Expense receipt

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Please find enclosed, £20.00 in vouchers to cover your expenses for helping [xxxx] with our research on [INSERT DATE] Any questions please contact [XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk).

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# Expense receipt

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Please find enclosed, £20.00 in vouchers to cover your expenses for helping [xxxx] with our research on [INSERT DATE] Any questions please contact [XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk).

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# Expense receipt

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Please find enclosed, £20.00 in vouchers to cover your expenses for helping [xxxx] with our research on [INSERT DATE] Any questions please contact [XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:XXXX@citizensadvice.org.uk).

# Equality monitoring form

Date of Focus Group:

Location of Focus Group:

## Why do we ask you to help with our equality monitoring questions?

The information you give here will be used by us to give us an overall picture of who attended our focus groups. It will help us to ensure our focus groups are accessible to everyone, and it will also be very helpful to our research because we want to make sure we talk to a wide range of people.

Our monitoring is strictly confidential and we will not match your answers to this form with any other information you have given to us. We will ensure in any analysis that is made public that it will not be possible to identify you.

All these questions are optional, but it will help us if you answer as many as you feel comfortable in doing. Please tick the description that most applies to you. If you prefer not to answer any of the questions, tick the "Prefer not to say" box.

Thank you for helping us.

## Your gender

Would you describe yourself as:

Male     Female     Transgender     Prefer not to say

## Your age

What is your age?

<input type="checkbox"/> 12 - 17 years old	<input type="checkbox"/> 45 - 54 years old	
<input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 24 years old	<input type="checkbox"/> 55 - 64 years old	
<input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 34 years old	<input type="checkbox"/> 65 - 74 years old	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/> 35 - 44 years old	<input type="checkbox"/> 75 years old or older	

## About your race / ethnicity

### How would you describe yourself?

Please indicate the group you feel most accurately describes you

#### A. Asian / Asian British

- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Any other Asian Background, please say here:

#### B. Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black /African/Caribbean background please say here:

#### C. Mixed / Multiple Ethnic groups

- White and Asian
- White and Black African
- White and Black Caribbean
- Any other Mixed background, please say here:

#### D. White

- British / English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish /
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background, please say here:

#### E. Other ethnic group

- Any other ethnic group, please say here:

## About sexual orientation

What is your sexual orientation?

- Bisexual
- Gay man
- Gay woman / Lesbian
- Heterosexual / Straight
- Other
- Prefer not to say

### About religion and belief

Please tick the box that best describes you:

- No Religion
- Buddhist
- Christian
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Other Religion or Belief (please state):

### About disability and health

What do we mean when we say disability?

- Do you have a physical or mental impairment?
- Is it long term?
- Does this make it difficult for you to do the things that most people do on a fairly regular and frequent basis?

People who have a disability or health condition are entitled in law to 'reasonable adjustments' to address their needs for support.

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or a long-term health condition?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

What is the effect or impact of your disability or health condition?

**Thank you for your help.**



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