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Clinical Commissioning Group



ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL

What are Focus Groups?



Focus Groups?

- A qualitative research method
- “In depth interviews examining a key issue with a group of people, that take place through discussion.
- Group discussion to generate information makes focus groups different from any other form of interview.
- As a facilitator you have to focus discussion on things you want to examine.



Qualitative v Quantitative research.

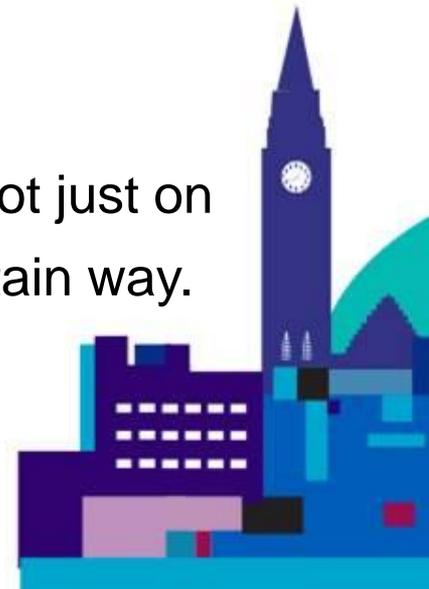


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A focus group aims to:

- Find out the range of views that exist.
 - Find out where there are widely held views.
 - Gain a better understanding about the reasoning, motives, awareness, and any important insights that are not immediately obvious.
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- This is a qualitative method of engagement focussing not just on the response but what made a person respond in a certain way.
 - How many answer a certain way is not the key thing.



Quantitative research.



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- Quantitative engagement will look at how many said something.
- What percentage have a certain view.
- This is done using a survey with questions that can be analysed by examining how many gave a certain answer.



When to use focus groups.



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- Focus groups work best when what interests the researcher also interests the participants
- Focus groups can be used to explore open questions and probe issues in depth.
- Use them when you want to understand diversity – to understand the variety of peoples experiences and perceptions.
- Don't use them if you want statistical data – you cannot generalise the results to a larger population.



Ways of recording focus groups.



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- Written notes are essential for recording focus group discussions and converting them into usable data
- Recording the conversation can be useful to check key points after the session.
- Transcribing recorded conversations is very time consuming and can be quite difficult
- Flip charts are useful for recording responses.
- Ideally one person facilitates and one person records.



The data you get.



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- A conversation is the literal data you get from a focus group. You need to plan what conversation is required and facilitate to achieve this.
- The final outcome of the group is the report – this can take a long time depending on the nature and complexity of the subject and the breadth of views expressed.
- You need to look for patterns, repetitions, contradictions, agreements and differences.



Size and make up of a group



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- A focus group should last between 1.5 to 2.5 hours
- Around 12 participants is ideal to get a wide range of views but give everyone the chance to speak
- Try to get a good mix in the group
- When deciding how many groups to hold the aim is to cover the full range of perspectives that exist within the population you want to consult
- The number of groups you run depends on the underlying diversity about what people have to say on the subject. 3 – 5 is a typical number to explore diversity and separate the content of the discussion that is unique to a group



Recruiting



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- Recruiting can be conducted by the researcher, volunteers or an outside agency
- Contact will usually be via social media, your own website, local press releases, by telephone, or by letter



Number of focus groups



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- Any focus group project needs to run more than one focus group to be able to rely on the results unless the entire sample population is in that group. Whatever the outcome of one group, the researcher will never know if that group was unusual or biased in anyway.
- Subsequent groups need to be run to be sure of the full range of perspectives. In fairly straightforward situation where there is likely to be a moderately wide range of perspectives, you will need to run 3-5 focus groups, drawing on at least 30 individuals from your sample population. This is a minimum whether the sample population is the whole of a city or a very small user population.



Composition of focus groups



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- Participants recruited to a focus group have been chosen because they are linked by the issue for discussion, although there may be a wide range of views and perspectives amongst them about the issue.
- To ensure free-flowing discussion it is important that within a group there are a range of perspectives if possible.
- The result may then be that each group reflects a different range of perspectives. Good examples would be running separate groups for frontline staff and for managers, or separating groups with extremely different socio-economic circumstances.



Size of focus groups



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- A small group of 6-10 enables everyone to participate fully in the discussion and is particularly useful where you wish to explore a sensitive or different issue in depth and full understand what people think and feel about it.
- A larger group of 10-15 participants generates discussion from a wider range of perspectives but not necessary in as much depth as a smaller group. This is particularly useful where you wish to generate ideas about an issue and include more people in your research.
- Any more than 15 people and it becomes difficult to give everyone sufficient chance to share their views and to keep order if there are disagreements. Larger groups are useful if your main objective is to generate ideas or debate an issue but are not advisable for developing an in-depth understanding of different perspectives.



Sampling

Population	The whole group of people whose views you wish to examine, e.g. general public, users of specialist services, non – users.
Population profile	The make up or characteristics of your population, e.g. age, needs, geographical distribution.
Sample Frame	A list of names or criteria and the size of your sample, including the specific proportion of people in each criteria. The group you will engage out of the whole.



Sampling



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Sampling Criteria	Specific characteristics of the sample population which you want to focus on and/or include in the consultation, e.g. men under 40, parents of young children, non users
Sampling Method	How are you going to select which individuals to consult, e.g. simple random sampling, cluster sampling etc.
Recruitment	How are you going to approach, invite and encourage people to participate, e.g. social media, by phone, by letter offering incentive payments.



Sampling criteria

- In a focus group project finding out how to better support the parents of children with special needs, the key criteria to select the parents may be the age of their children, their particular needs or the impact of the special need on their life.
- Where the families live, for example, may be unimportant, unless you are comparing the services provided in different parts of the area. The focus groups would need to include people with all these perspectives to get a reliable sense of the full range of issues.



Sampling Criteria



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- Sampling criteria are established by the researcher when a specific element of a sample population is required. A random sample drawn from a Population List would not achieve this.
- Sampling criteria name the specific characteristics of the sample population which you want to focus on and/or include in the consultation. Participants are then selected to participate on the basis of fulfilling these criteria.



Sampling Criteria



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- In a telephone survey about housing repairs, the most important criteria may be a zone within an estate, because the age and condition of housing varies from zone to zone. The study would need to include participants from each zone to give a range of views of necessary repair work.
- It is advisable to scope out all the possible criteria that may be important to your study, then to choose the 3-6 criteria that are the most important. When recruiting the focus groups, the more criteria that are specified, the more difficult and expensive it becomes to recruit people



<p>Random sampling</p>	<p>This is sometimes called probability sampling. The principal is that every possible person must have an equal chance of being chosen for the sample, eliminating any bias. This could be every 10th person on the electoral register.</p>
<p>Stratified random sampling</p>	<p>First, divide up your sample frame on basis of sampling criteria that are relevant to your project, e.g. age bands, social class. Then randomly select within each band, for example, by choosing every 10th name on a payroll or every 5th house on a particular street.</p>
<p>Cluster sampling</p>	<p>Divide your sample population into segments then select within those segments. To draw a cluster sample from the whole electorate of the UK you could select a constituency, from all the constituencies, then randomly select two wards from each of these constituencies, and then randomly select five polling districts from each ward. Then select everyone from that cluster.</p>
<p>Self-selecting</p>	<p>Adverts in the press or on social media inviting people to attend focus groups or questionnaires left in sports facilities or library's result in participants who have selected themselves rather than having been selected. People who respond may have a bias, or a dispute over a similar issue, or may represent a pressure group..</p>



Recruitment to focus groups



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Time of day for the meeting

- There is no strict rule, it can differ for each participant. You need to balance the availability of people with their work and domestic commitments. For some people, the problem of securing release from employers for the attendance at a morning meeting will be less than the problem of overcoming people's childcare and other domestic commitments in the evening. You may need to do both to reach your chosen sample.



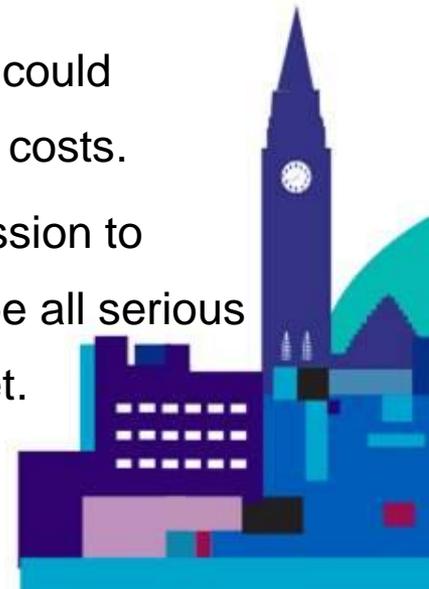
Incentives



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- Some organisations pay £15-20 for participant's giving up their time. Alternatively, you may have secured strong local support for the project already and the subject matter may be so relevant that the community is highly motivated to take part and so would attend without financial incentives.
- You may need to consider a crèche or reimbursement to cover childcare cost.
- Help with transport to and from the venue may be an issue. You could arrange bus collection, shared lifts, pay taxis or reimburse travel costs.
- Refreshments are essential. Tea and biscuits can give an impression to nervous people before they arrive at the meeting that it will not be all serious talk and dullness! You may want to consider offering a light buffet.



Sequence of questions in a focus group

Question Category	Purpose
Opening	Participants get acquainted and feel connected
Introductory	Begins discussion of topic
Transition	Moves smoothly and seamlessly into key questions
Key	Obtains insight on areas of central concern in study
Ending	Helps researchers determine where to place emphasis and brings closure to the discussion



Where depth of information is required
e.g. Insights into successful Community Heart
Health Programme



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Opening	1. Tell us your name and where you live
Introduction	2. Describe a healthy person
Transition	3. When you think of Heart Health, what comes to mind?
Transition	4. Think back to the past several years. Have you made any changes in your diet, exercise, or personal habits? Tell us about them



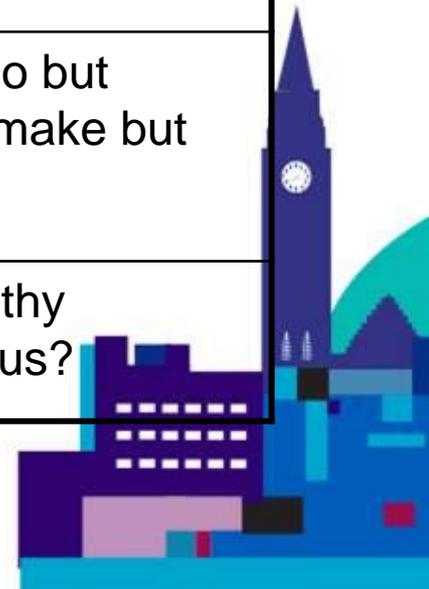
Where depth of information is required
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Heart Health Programme



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Key	5. What prompted these changes? (Follow up prompts: Friends, family and neighbours? Written information? Media messages? Medical advise? Physical health? Personal desire to change?)
Key	6. Which of those mentioned was the most influential?
Key	7. Tell us about the things you tried to do but discontinued; the changes you tried to make but were unsuccessful
Ending	We are trying to help people make healthy changes. What advise do you have for us?



Focus group format



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Greeting participants

- 15 mins
- Greet people as they arrive
- Check recruited sheets to record accurate profile of participants and/or fill in registration form
- Give people name tags written clearly in large print, usually just first name (facilitator and recorded too)
- Offer tea and coffee if provided



Focus group format

Start of session and introductions

- 5-10 mins
- Welcome and fire regulations
- Introduce yourself and who you represent/work for – say to what degree you are neutral/partisan
- State the purpose of the session and the overall project- helpful to have key points written clearly on flipchart
- Why they are there
- How they have been selected and recruited
- What will happen to the results
- Run through the format and timing of the session (including breaks and locations of toilets)
- Ask if there are any general questions of clarification



Focus group format



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Interactive discussion

- 50-90 mins
- Go round the group getting people to briefly introduce themselves and say something about themselves that is relevant to the project, e.g. if they have children, if they use a car to get to work
- Going through the designed questions in the planned order
- Accurately record discussion
- Summarising key points for discussion, asking if anything is missing



Focus group format



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Summary and end of session

- 5-10 mins
- Outline any planned feedback and/or further contact for participants
- Explain how the information from this session will be used
- What will happen next and when
- Thanks and goodbye
- Issue incentive payments and/or expenses

