

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PAGE 1/3

INTRODUCTION

Holding a focus group discussion is a good way to learn about people's interests, perspectives, opinions and knowledge about different topics. Knowing the perspectives, attitudes and desires of your target audience is essential to developing relevant video content, support services, and dissemination approaches.

CREATING AND RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL FOCUS GROUP

The following provides some tips and suggestions for creating and running an effective focus group discussion.

SETTING UP THE FOCUS GROUP

- Ideally, at least two people should be involved in running a focus group discussion. One of these will ask the questions and guide the discussion. The other person, who will sit off to the side, will take notes on the discussion. It is important that the person asking the questions not take notes on the responses. This can be very distracting and will likely inhibit an open and free discussion. If you are unable to find two people, you may consider recording the discussion and then transcribing it later.
- The optimal number of participants in a focus group is 4 to 8. You should have no more than 12 people in any focus group session.
- The focus group meeting should be held in a comfortable and quiet location.
- Information about the purpose of the focus group meetings, the topics that are to be discussed, and how the participants will be selected should be distributed to the community to ensure transparency.
- Each focus group meeting should not last longer than one hour.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PAGE 2/3

PREPARING FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

- The individuals identified to organize and run the focus group discussions should clearly define the primary objective of the discussion and come up with simple questions that can be used to stimulate a discussion among the individuals invited to participate in the focus group discussion.
- Four to eight primary questions and/or discussion topics should be developed for each focus group discussion.
- If possible, you should arrange for someone who is not the primary video dissemination facilitator to moderate the focus group discussion.
- Be sure to have light refreshments available for participants during the focus group.
- You may also want to have name tags for each participant so that the facilitator can address people directly by name.

CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP

- At the start of the session, the facilitator should greet all of the participants and make sure that they are comfortably situated. The facilitator will then want to review the objectives of the focus group and stress the confidentiality of participants' comments before starting.
- The focus group facilitator should seek to engage the members of the focus group in an open and dynamic discussion and debate about the focus group questions. The facilitator should avoid a simple question-and-answer session. Some of the most important information will emerge when the participants start discussing the question or topic among themselves. One way to do this is for the facilitator to ask one participant what he or she thinks about what one of the other participants has said. Another technique is to ask the group if anyone disagrees with what was just said, or to ask if anyone has a different opinion to share. After being prompted in this way, participants will likely start to engage in an open discussion. The facilitator should encourage participants to provide detailed responses and not just "yes" or "no" answers.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PAGE 3/3

- During the discussion, the person asking the questions should ask follow-up questions to encourage the participants to provide specific information. It is common for participants to initially respond to a question with very general and broad comments. The questioner will need to ask follow-up questions that will gently push the participants to provide specific responses.
- The facilitator should also ensure that all members of the group participate in the discussion by asking each member to respond to different aspects of the discussion. This is necessary because some participants may feel intimidated or shy about expressing their opinions in the presence of others.
- It is common for participants to take the discussion in a direction that is different from what the focus group was organized for. When this happens, the facilitator should remind the participants why they are there and then follow-up with a new question to return the discussion back to the focus on the topic.

After the focus group discussion is over, the facilitator should thank the participants for taking the time to participate. The facilitator should also explain that the results of the focus group discussion will be written up and shared with your project team to assist with improving the video activity.

The person who took notes during the discussion should immediately write a full report of the discussion. When writing up the report, make sure that participants' names are not linked to comments made during the session. This will ensure that their opinions are treated confidentially. The first draft of this focus group report should be shared with the facilitator, who will add to the report. A final version of the report should include the names of the focus group participants so that the project team can ask them for clarifying information if needed.

This guide has been adapted from the Computer System Sustainability Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Schools by Eric Rusten, FHI 360, 2010.