

# Focus Groups

Engagement range	Consult
Difficulty level	Medium (some previous group consultation needed)
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To discover community issues
Number of people required to help to organise	One-three, depends on the audience size and level of complexity
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Small (up to 11) Medium (11-30)
Issues/resources to think about	Venue; Catering; Moderator/facilitator; Audio and visual recording; Overhead projector; Data projector/screen; Response sheets; Depending on age group, may require child care.
Innovation level	Low to medium

## Description

Focus groups are used for exploratory studies, and the issues that emerge from the focus group may be developed into a questionnaire or other form of survey to verify the findings. Relatively inexpensive, focus groups can provide fairly dependable data within a short time frame. Focus groups are a technique used to find out what issues are of most concern for a community or group when little or no information is available. They allow people to answer questions, but also to bounce ideas off one another, and hence provide more detailed information as people share and elaborate on their issues. Where large-scale objective information is needed, a minimum of four focus groups and as many as 12 may be needed to collect all the information needed. Using independent researchers to run groups and analyse data will ensure objectivity for organisations which need to maintain transparent processes.

## Objectives

- To discover the key issues of concern for selected groups.
- To determine what are the concerns that would prevent a proposal going ahead
- To identify the issues that are of concern to a group or community.

## Desired Outcome

- Detailed knowledge of the issues that concern a specific group or community.

## Uses/Strengths

- Highly applicable when a new proposal is mooted and little is known of community opinions.
- Can be used to develop a preliminary concept of the issues, from which a wider community survey may be undertaken.
- Can be used for limited generalisations based on the information generated by the focus group.
- Particularly good for identifying the reasons behind people's likes/dislikes.
- Produces ideas that would not emerge from surveys/questionnaires, because the focus group allows opportunity for a wider range of comments.

## Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Such small groups may not be representative of the community response to an issue.
- May be confronting for some to be open about their opinions depending on how well people know one another.
- People must be able to operate within their comfort zones.
- Requires careful selection to be a representative sample (similar age range, status, etc.).
- Skilled facilitators should be hired.

## Step by Step Guide

1. Randomly select six–10 people affected by or interested in the community issue to make up the focus group.
2. Book venue; arrange catering if meeting goes across a meal time; hire a facilitator.
3. Prepare preliminary questions.
4. Send reminders to participant with time, date, venue and questions.
5. Brief participants and the facilitator on the aims and objectives of the session.
6. Establish ground rules: keep focused, maintain momentum, get closure on questions.
7. Encourage shy participants if they feel anxious about revealing their opinions/feelings.
8. Engage a co-facilitator to record issues raised by individuals (may use audio, a/visual, and/or written notes).
9. De-brief the participants and the facilitator.
10. Compile a report of proceedings for the organisers, and offer a copy to the participants.