

Implementation Group



Cabinet Office

# Focus groups

# Focus groups are very different from other qualitative fieldworks...

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- Unlike interviews, people in focus groups reflect on other peoples views, whilst constantly refining and sharpening their own original point.
- Facilitators role will be more active, picking our points to expand and controlling the direction of the group.
- Focus groups should have 6-8 people and last no more than 2.5 hours
- If you want a more structured way to test hypotheses, try a workshop (Pinpoint link)
- If you have a tight timescale, try the 'Delphi' technique of sending around a fieldwork findings document for people to comment and feedback on (Googlesheets is excellent for this!)

# Stage 1 and 2

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## Setting the scene...

- Management and preparation is vital and can pre-empt difficulties later
- Personal introductions, outline the topics covered, set within their context
- Don't be too lengthy or technical but stress thanks and the value of contributions
- Outline that participants should speak up if they have a point and there are no right/wrong answers.

## Introductions...

- Use round-robin introductions as an opportunity to draw out more info and set the tone and level of detail you are looking for
- Intros are important to gain familiarity, each member speaks and listens, and introduce their backgrounds and thinking
- You can use these intros later to draw different viewpoints into the conversation
- You should also speak about why you have chosen the people in the room. If they are the same say why, if they are different, say why.

# Stages 3, 4, 5

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## Opening...

- Open a wide topic to encourage participation
- You must be verbally active in the opening of the topic
- It is harder to break silence, the longer it goes on, get people talking!
- Slowly step back as conversation picks up

## Discussion

- Introduce/signpost the main discussion point
- If relevant areas are not spontaneously raised, direct the flow of the conversation
- Actively listen, observe, use simple language
- Try to balance contributions within the group

## Close...

- Finish on a positive and 'completed' note with possibly discussing the merits of group led resolutions
- Pace your interventions and signposting times throughout the discussion. Do not just abruptly finish the debate
- 'As a last thought...', 'before we finish...', 'has anything been left out before we start to conclude...'
- Stress once again how helpful the discussion has been and again, explain how, why, and where the information is going to be used.

# Facilitation tips...

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- Use open questions to encourage descriptive answers
- Highlight comments made and ask for the viewpoints and experiences of others in the group
- Highlight differences of viewpoint and encourage expansion and explorations with others in the group
- Actively listen and observe. The group will balance and regulate itself but know when to guide, when to manage, and when to participate in the discussion
- Encourage and explore emerging issues
- Encourage thoughts on the links and relationships of discussion factors
- If there is a rare moment of group consensus, play devils advocate