

## **GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGD)**

### **1.0 Introduction**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research technique consisting of a structured discussion and used to obtain in-depth information (qualitative data) from a group of people about a particular topic. The main purpose of the discussion to reveal essential information about respondents opinions, beliefs, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, experiences and reactions with the help of a moderator/facilitator. Focus groups usually share a common characteristic such as age, sex, or socio economic status which encourages a group to speak more freely about the subject without fear of being judged by others.

### **1.1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION: (FGD) : CONCEPT**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research method in the social sciences. FGDs are predetermined semi-structured interview led by a skilled moderator. The moderator asks broad questions to elicit responses and generate discussion among the participants. The moderator's goal is to generate the maximum amount of discussion and opinions within a given time period.

### **Use of focus group discussion:**

Focus group discussions may be used when one need to understand an issue at a deeper level than one can access with a survey. They are helpful for adding meaning and understanding to existing knowledge, or getting at the "why" and "how" of a topic. In addition, FGDs are a good way to verify that people's stated preferences are the same as their actual preferences.

### **1.2 GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION:**

#### **Step 1: Select field team:**

- Moderator: The moderator should have knowledge and experience in leading FGDs, and the able to manage dominant group members, and have an ability to ask open questions and follow up with relevant additional questions to stimulate conversation and reflection.
- Interpreter: The FGDs are conducted in the local language or in the language the participants feel most comfortable.
- Observer: It can be effective to have two people conducting the focus group one asking the questions (the moderator) and one writing and observing expressions, body language etc, which can give clues about sensitivities.

### **STEP-2: The types and number of groups needed**

- In each location, there should be interviews with elderly women, elderly men, adult women, adult men. If it does not inhibit conversations, age groups or gender could be mixed when it would be inconvenient to them to be separated, as long as the topic does not relate to or is affected by gender or age stereotypes, and as long as there is some possibility of also gaining disaggregated information.
- Interview adolescent girls and boys if the moderator is trained or experienced in interviewing young people under 18. Be particularly careful in interviewing younger children and consult with United Nations of Children's (UNICEF) fund in child's protection for assistance.
- Ensure, wherever possible, to target specific groups with disabilities and attempt to meet with indigenous or other minority groups.
- Group size: The ideal size is 8-12 persons, however smaller and larger groups can work well and oftentimes judgement must be made quickly on the spot so as not to offend or inconvenience people.
- The nature of this kind of work is that all the best laid plans are likely to disappear out of the window when the team arrives at the venue, and quick thinking and flexibility is required to manage the best outcome in what is likely to be chaotic circumstances.

### **STEP-3: Prepare for the individual FGD**

- Location for FGD: The meeting should be organised in a private, safe and comfortable environment and that it is accessible (especially to persons with disabilities, older persons, and women).
- Date and time for the FGD: Ensure mobilization of participants before the meeting as far as possible, and inform community leaders in advance of the discussion so that they are aware of it.

### **STEP-4: Conduct the FGD: Introduction**

- Importance should be given to introduce the focus group by explaining the reason for the visit.
- Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to answer or not, or to leave at any point.
- Make sure that the notes reflect as closely as possible what was said. When it comes in analyzing the outcomes, the more detail captured the better result it will provide.

### **STEP-5: Tips for the facilitator, observer and interpreter**

- Notice body language and expressions as relevant
- Make sure to listen to participants, non judgmentally and intervene if others are judging them, reminding them of the respect for other opinions.
- Encourage that only one person talks at a time.
- It can be helpful sometimes, especially in one on one interview, to put a question in the form of a role play.
- Explain to interpreter the importance of translating sentence by sentence and not summarizing what people say. Interviewers should help interpreters by asking only one short question at a time and by reminding them about confidentiality of the discussions.

### **Creating the Questionnaire**

- Keep the number of questions reasonable (under 10, if possible).

- Keep the questions simple and short. FGD participants won't get the chance to see the questions like in a survey.
- The wording on questions should be clear.
- Sensitive issues or topics should be asked carefully.
- The questions are to be worded in a way that cannot be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No" answer. Using words like "How", "Why" and "Who" questions will help elicit better responses from participants.

### **Question Types**

There should be three types of questions in a focus group discussion:

1. Problem questions: These introduce participants to the discussion topic and make them feel more comfortable sharing their opinion with the group.
2. Follow-up questions: Delve further into the discussion topic and the participants opinions
3. Exit question: Check to ensure that anything is not missed.

### **Length of the Focus Group Discussion**

An FGD should be between 60 and 90 minutes.

If the FGD is shorter than 60 minutes, it is often difficult to fully explore the discussion topic. If the FGD is longer than 90 minutes, the discussion can become unproductive.

### **Selecting the Participants**

Focus group discussions involve two to eight people on average. Greater than eight participants becomes crowd for a FGD and is more suited for an advisory board.

### **1.3 PREPARING FOR THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

- Be sure to make the location and time of the FGD are clear to all participants.

- If you anticipate some participants not showing up, invite 10-20% extra participants. However, be careful to not create too large of a group.
- Be sure that the FGD is in a public place that is convenient for participants. Consider the locations proximity to public transportation. If the FGD must happen out in the field, make it as comfortable and convenient for participants as possible.
- Make sure that the setting does not bias the information being collected.
- If it is important to collect demographic data from participants (like age, gender, caste, etc.) design a short form that takes no more than 2 or 3 minutes to complete. The form can be administered before the focus group starts.

#### **1.4 MODERATOR TECHNIQUES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

As a moderator, it is important to ensure that all participants are comfortable and engaged with the discussion, and that their opinions are being heard. The following techniques are helpful:

- Remain natural to ensure that everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinion. No nodding or shaking your head, raising eyebrows, agreeing or disagreeing with comments, or praising participants.
- Elicit further information from shy participants with comments like "Can you tell me more about that?", "Help me understand what you mean", or "Can you give an example"?
- Deal with dominant participants by acknowledging their opinion and soliciting other opinions. Sentences like "Thank you. What do other people think"? Can be helpful.
- Paraphrase or summarize long, unclear comments by participants. This shows participants that the moderator is actively listening. It helps the moderator to ensure he or she has understood the participant's statement.

- Ask questions deeper into new topics and ideas, as long as the information being gained is valuable.

### 1.5 Conclusion

It is concluded that the focus group guide attempts to provide practical information on how to coordinate, plan and run an effective focus group that greater yields greater insights into the information needs of local news audiences. It important to note that a well planned, well executed focus group can not only be a valuable tool to investigate the habits and practices of local news audiences but also be a very enjoyable and rewarding experience for the research team and the focus group participants.

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