



## **User Innovation and Development Model Toolkit of agreed methods for use in the Project**

### **Stage One: User Engagement Cycle**

Observation; User needs analysis; stakeholder analysis; brainstorming

#### **1. The focus group method**

Focus groups can be used as a stand-alone qualitative method or in combination with other methods such as participant observation and individual interviews. They are similar to group or individual interviews, but the defining feature is group interaction.

“The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1997)

Focus groups can be a good method to generate ideas for new products/initiatives. They are also seen as being more efficient than conducting several individual interviews. Focus groups are particularly useful when “gaining access to a sense of participant commonality is the central concern” (Parker & Titter, 2006).

##### **1.1 Planning the focus group**

What is the purpose of the group? Do all the focus groups to be conducted have the same purpose or do they develop with time?

How will the data be used?

How many groups are going to be conducted? –rule of thumb is to continue until no new data emerges.

When are they to be conducted? Where?

##### **1.2 Questions**

What are the research questions? What information do we need to be able to answer the research questions?

Decide upon the questions that will be used during the focus groups and the sequencing of the questions. Pilot the questions in advance to check that they are understood. If changes are made to the sequence of questions during the course of a focus group, this needs to be noted as it can have an effect upon the data generated. Remember that you want to be able to compare all of the findings of the multiple focus groups.

A moderator can have a set of structured pre-determined questions or a topic list.

### **1.2.1. Topic List**

The topic list has some advantages and disadvantages over the questioning route.

- Strengths-speed, conversational tone, spontaneity-but can be difficult to analyse, and difficult to reproduce for the next focus group, so reliability is brought into question.
- Questioning: analysis should be a lot easier, the reliability of the data is enhanced.

### **1.2.2. To produce your list of questions**

- Clarify the problem: what is the research question? What information do we need to answer the question
- Identify questions potential questions
- Draft questions, and categorise into how long they may take to answer- 5 , 10 or 15 minutes
- Sequence questions into the type of question that you are asking: opening, introductory, transition, key, ending
- Opening questions engender a sense of community within the group, so should not draw attention to differences
- Introductory questions introduce the subject of the research
- Transition questions enable the moderator to move into the focus of the research
- Key questions are asking about the crux of the subject matter.
- Ending questions draw the discussion to a close and aim to gather any remaining information that might otherwise be left unsaid.

### **1.3. Participants**

- A homogenous group of strangers ideally. However if participants do know each other, it is important that there is no power imbalance.
- No more than 10 participants
- Purposive sampling-participants are selected according to the purpose of the focus group. An ideal would be for participants to have a high level of involvement with the topic of the focus group.
- Invite participants well in advance of the actual event, in writing. Then phone to remind them of the event. The aim is to maximise attendance at the event and for participants to be prepared.

### **1.4. Conducting the focus group**

#### **Moderator**

Leads the discussion, but must remain neutral and not give any personal opinions or cues. An important role is to ensure that everyone has a chance to say what they wish to and that the group is not dominated by one individual who coerces the group. The moderator must try and ensure that they minimise their influence on the data.

The moderator may need an assistant moderator, who can take notes on the group interaction and watch for non-verbal behaviour.

At the end of the focus group verify summary comments with participants to check that you are representing what was said accurately.

### 1.5. Data analysis

Transcribing tapes is the most rigorous method, and then content analysis.  
Grounded theory?

Need to decide how findings from focus groups are to be compared, so need to have an agreed set of headings for all focus groups. This can only be done after the initial focus groups to see what themes emerge.

How are the findings going to be reported? Need to include the most important themes, most noteworthy quotes and any unexpected findings  
(Breen, 2006)

#### Checklist

Date/time of focus group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Venue	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participants list attached	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recording method	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant consent forms attached	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refreshments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Duration of focus group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Question schedule/topic list attached	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summarise main points and check for agreement with participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes on session attached	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transcript (or alternative) of session attached	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analysis of focus group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comparison with other focus groups	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### Notes

- Venue: neutral ground if possible
- Participants: who is expected, who attended. Names and roles/job titles
- Method of recording the focus group: audio/video tape; notes; other. (If audio tape is used, will have to ask participants to introduce themselves so their voices can be identified, but this may be a good practice as an ice-breaker)
- Participant consent forms (if recording the focus group need to ask for consent to do so). Ensure that participants know that their privacy will be respected and they won't be identifiable in reports etc.

- Refreshments: decide upon timing or whether they will be available throughout
- Duration: between half an hour and an hour recommended
- Moderating: introduction; overview of the topic; ground rules; first warm-up question
- Questions: between 5 and 10?
- Conclusion: thanking participants for their help. Summarising the main points made during the discussion and checking for agreement.
- After participants leave, immediately debrief and make notes on the session
- Analysis of focus groups: what method will be used? how will they be coded to allow for comparison?

## References

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- Krueger, R. A. and Casey, M. A. (2000) Focus Groups: a practical guide for applied research. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Sage.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997) Focus groups as qualitative research. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sage.
- Parker, A and Titter, J (2006) Focus group method and methodology: current practice and recent debate. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* 29 (1), p23-37.
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