Focus Group

A focused discussion where a moderator leads a group of participants through a set of questions on a particular topic.

Focus groups are often used in the early stages of product planning and requirements gathering to obtain feedback about users, products, concepts, prototypes, tasks, strategies, and environments. Focus groups can also be used to obtain consensus about specific issues.

Focus groups can be used to:

* Obtain reactions to concepts, proposals, and prototypes.
* Gather insights that might be sparked by the group interaction.
* Get opinions, attitudes, and preferences from participants.

To gather more detailed data, participants can spend part of the focus group working with a prototype. After participants have worked with the prototype, they can come together and discuss their reactions to the prototype.

**Benefits**

* You can get feedback about what people do over a long period of time.
* Focus groups used early in a project can produce insights and questions from the interaction among different users or stakeholders.
* Focus groups are relatively inexpensive (assuming that participants are from the same geographical area) and can be arranged quickly.

**Limitations**

* Focus groups involve "stories" about behavior and do not examine actual user/stakeholder behavior.
* The data from focus groups is self-report data that depends on the participants’ truthfulness and recall accuracy. What people report may be quite different than what they actually do.
* Dominant participants can skew the results of the focus groups. Conflicts and power struggles can arise among participants.
* Any quantitative conclusions from a focus group may be suspect because the participants are often chosen from a convenience sample.
* Moderating a focus group is difficult. Moderators must be trained to deal with a wide range of group dynamics as well as individual differences among participants.

Focus groups are vulnerable to random events like storms, bad directions, and traffic jams.

**Outcomes**

The outcomes and deliverables from a focus group include:

* Notes and transcripts of the sessions.
* Video or audiotapes of the sessions.
* A report that describes the purpose of the study, a description of the procedures, a summary of the findings, and perhaps most important, the significant themes that emerged within and between focus group sessions.

A presentation to the sponsor and other stakeholders on the product team.

**Study Execution**

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| **​Milestone** | **​Owner** |
| ​Initiate kick-off call | ​HFE |
| ​Provide an experienced moderator | ​HFE |
| ​Select criteria for recruiting participants and draft discussion plan | ​Business Office |
| ​Recruit participants | ​Business Office |
| ​Prepare a screening questionnaire and draft a discussion guide for the focus group | ​HFE |
| ​Develop a data analysis plan | ​HFE |
| ​Conduct focus group session | ​HFE |
| ​Analyze and summarize results | ​HFE |
| ​Conduct [**After Action Review (AAR**](https://vaww.portal2.va.gov/sites/humanfactors/SitePages/AAR%20Process.aspx)) |  |

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| **​ Phase of Development​** | |
| ​​**✔** | **​Planning, Scoping & Definition** |
| **✔** | **​Requirements Gathering** |
| **✔** | **​Early Design** |
|  | **​**Detailed Design & Development |
| ​ | ​Field Testing |
| ​ | ​Deployment |
| ✔ | ​Post-Deployment |

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| **​Study Characteristics ​** | |
| ​**Timeframe** | 2-3 weeks |
| **​Level of Effort** | Low |
| ​**Data Collection** | Attitudinal |
| ​**Data Reporting** | ​**Post-Deployment** |

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| **Related Methods ​** | |
| Derived from | ​none |
| ​Complimentary Methods | ​Formative Usability Test, Summative Usability Test |
| ​Similar Methods | User Interview User Survey |
| ​Follow-Up | ​TBD |

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| **​Referenced on this page...** |
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| Usability.gov (2013). Focus Groups. Usability.gov. Retrieved February 1, 2014, from [**http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/focus-groups.html**](http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/focus-groups.html) |