GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Instructions on how to set up a research activity based on focus groups, for a co-production project.

Date: 07/01/2022

Version: V1

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How to use this INTERLINKER

Focus groups allow you to gather a range of information and perspectives in a short time period in an encouraging way. They are particularly useful during the initial stages of a co-production process to bootstrap the **investigation of current practices** in the creation and delivery of a public service, as well the **needs and desiderata** for improved and new services.

This INTERLINKER provides **a list of operational steps** to help you set up a research investigation based on focus groups for your co-production project. It includes a **template for writing down the research plan** underlying a (set of) focus group(s).

TIP: Given the potential variety of the topics to investigate, their context and the different participants to involve, it is advisable to prepare a brief research plan for each round of focus groups to conduct, to enable accountability and facilitate data collection and analysis.

Are you looking for actual templates and examples for focus groups to be conducted at different stages of a co-production project?

A set of reusable templates for focus group materials and examples of executed research plans is available for inspiration. See the INTERLINKERs:

- "FOCUS GROUP Template for investigating co-production processes"
- "FOCUS GROUP Template for investigating challenges and opportunities of current public services"
- "FOCUS GROUP Example of Research Plan".......
- ....

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PREPARE A RESEARCH PLAN FOR A FOCUS GROUP

Follow the steps to clarify your objectives and prepare the necessary material.

01 Briefly **describe the research aim**, the expected type of results and how they will be used in the co-production process. Clarify why a focus group (or a set of focus groups) is an appropriate choice at this stage of activities.

02 Define the **context of the investigation**, i.e. the service or process that is investigated, the aspects that need to be clarified, the different points of view that should be taken into account.

03 List the **key topics** to investigate. These will be then expanded in the questions and other stimulus material that will be used to facilitate the focus group.

04 Define the **criteria to select the sample of participants** to the focus group, whether they are service end-users or providers. Consider which are the variables significant with respect to the research goals, considering socio-demographic variables (like age, genre, place of residence, job,.....) and behavioural (familiarity with technology, interaction channels with the PA, role in service co-production, ...).

05   **Balance the participants sample** according to the different variables, to reach heterogeneity. Create a contact list for participants that also includes useful profile information. Negotiate a date for the focus group and send out invitations.

06   **Prepare the material** that will be used to facilitate the discussion. Check the templates and examples within the INTERLINK platform to look for inspiration.

07   **Prepare the consent forms** that will be distributed to participants. Make sure that appropriate ethical concerns are solved, for example in case some of the focus groups involve children, elderly or disabled citizens or recordings are made.

08   **Sort out logistic details.** Select a comfortable place and consider offering refreshments. Decide who will moderate the discussion and collect notes. Consider whether incentives and rewards are appropriate to foster participation and favour involvement in follow-up initiatives.

09   Decide **how the collected material will be managed**, where it will be stored and how it will be anonymized and protected according to the privacy norms.

10   **Analyse the collected material** and prepare a summary of results for communication and discussion within the research team, and for future reference and comparison. Whenever appropriate, share the results of the investigation with the participants.

TEMPLATE FOR RESEARCH PLAN

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01. RESEARCH AIM

Why is a focus group necessary? How will the collected data be used?

The focus group will be helpful to ....

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02. CONTEXT OF INVESTIGATION

Which is the context of the investigation? Which is the co-production process or the (existing or future) public service to investigate?

The investigation will focus on ....

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03. KEY ASPECTS

Which main aspects need to be investigated?

The focus group will touch the following aspects:

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

04. PARTICIPANTS SELECTION CRITERIA

Which categories of people will be invited? Which variables are important and should be taken into account in selecting participants?

The focus group will involve (consider a group of 6-12 participants):

- members of public administrations (.... people)
- service providers (.... people)
- experts (.... people)
- citizens / end users of public services(.... people)
- ....

Variables important during the selection (consider dimensions that are relevant for your project):

Participation to the co-production process

1. organization of the participant (involved Public Administrations, other related bodies)
2. role (position inside the organization)
3. task (responsibility with respect to the process/service; different people may have different areas of action)
4. ....

Socio-demographic variables (particularly relevant when service end-users are involved)

1. age (to be carefully considered if elderly and children may be affected by the service)
2. genre (may be important for certain types of services)
3. city or region (in case location is a significant element of the service context)

4. state of origin (whenever the opinion of foreign citizens is important)
5. family structure (when this may influence the needs about public services)
6. job (when this may influence the needs about public services)
7. digital literacy (possibly consider people with different digital skills)
8. level of use / potential use of the public service to be co-produced
9. ....

05. PARTICIPANTS

List in more detail how many participants to involve for the different categories.

Participant	Contact	Profile information
ID01		
ID02		
ID03		

06. FACILITATION MATERIAL

How will discussion be facilitated and guided during the meeting?

Prepare stimulus material (e.g. keywords, questions, scenarios, storyboards....) that will help participants reflect on the research topics and stimulate the discussion. Checkout the following INTERLINKERS for some reusable templates:

- FOCUS GROUP Template for investigating co-production processes
- FOCUS GROUP Template for investigating challenges and opportunities of current public services
- FOCUS GROUP Template for scenarios development

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07. CONSENT FORMS

Prepare the information sheet and consent form to be distributed to participants at the beginning of the focus group.

Personalize the template for information sheet and consent form provided by the INTERLINK platform according to the needs of your project.

Inspect examples of information sheets and consent forms for inspiration.

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08. LOGISTIC DETAILS

When and where will the focus group be organized? Who will administer the questions and collect the feedback? How to ensure a comfortable and rewarding experience?

Date: ....
Place: ....
Moderator: ....
Assistant for note taking: ....
Refreshments: ....
Incentives/Rewards: ....

09. DATA MANAGEMENT

Decide where and in which format the information collected with the focus group will be stored. Set up access limitations to protect the confidentiality of the data. Check that the anonymisation of responses has been performed correctly.

Where data are stored: ....

Who is responsible: ....

Who can access: ....

Anonymisation method: ....

10. DATA ANALYSIS

Schematise the collected information by summarising the most relevant statements. Apply thematic analysis to classify the statements and create an affinity diagram: aggregate similar features under a single label; groups of labels can then be aggregated under the same theme. Derive the findings that relate to the research goals and summarise them in a research report. Prepare a presentation to communicate the results to the research group and to other project stakeholders.

Reuse the templates for focus group analysis, focus group results report and focus group results presentation offered by the INTERLINK platform.

Inspect examples of analysis, report and presentation of focus groups performed by other co-production projects for inspiration.

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