

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The group of participants is guided by a moderator (or group facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion amongst themselves.

The strength of FGD relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices.

FGDs can be used to explore the meanings of survey findings that cannot be explained statistically, the range of opinions/views on a topic of interest and to collect a wide variety of local terminology. In bridging research and policy, FGD can be useful in providing an insight into different opinions among different parties involved in the change process, thus enabling the process to be managed more smoothly. It is also a good method to employ prior to designing questionnaires.

Detailed Outline of Process

FGD sessions need to be prepared carefully through identifying the main objective(s) of the meeting, developing key questions, developing an agenda, and planning how to record the session.

The next step is to identify and invite suitable discussion participants; the ideal number is between six and eight.

The crucial element of FGD is the facilitation. Some important points to bear in mind in facilitating FGDs are to ensure even participation, careful wording of the key questions, maintaining a neutral attitude and appearance, and summarising the session to reflect the opinions evenly and fairly.

A detailed report should be prepared after the session is finished. Any observations during the session should be noted and included in the report.

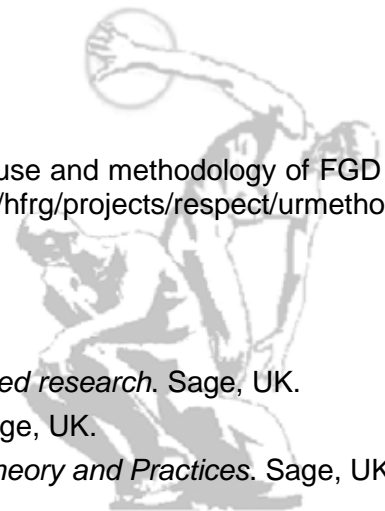
FGDs can also be carried out online. This is particularly useful for overcoming the barrier of distance. While discussion is constrained, the written format can help with reporting on the discussion.

Further Information

A simple and useful starting point, with a basic description of the use and methodology of FGD for project evaluation purposes, can be seen at: <http://www.ucc.ie/hfrg/projects/respect/urmethods/focus.htm>.

Textbooks for conducting FGD are available, such as:

- Krueger, R.A. (1988) *Focus Groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Sage, UK.
- Morgan, D.L. (1988) *Focus Group as Qualitative Research*. Sage, UK.
- Stewart, D.W. and Shamdasani, P.N. (1990) *Focus Groups: Theory and Practices*. Sage, UK.



There are a number of sites that provide detailed step-by-step guides on how to conduct FGD for research and education purposes. These include:

- <http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU19.html>
- <http://www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm>
- <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/focus.html>
- <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/food2/UIN03E/uin03e03.htm>
- <http://edf5481-01.fao2.fsu.edu/Guide6.html>

For a guide to focus group applications in marketing and social science see:

- http://www4.nau.edu/cee/ci_doc/current/resources/5_Kleiber.pdf

