

# COMMUNICATION FOR IMMUNIZATION

E-LEARNING RESOURCES

## 05 | B. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

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**Focus group discussions, or “FGDs” are a qualitative research method.** During an FGD, a researcher and assistant facilitates a discussion with a small group of people using pre-determined questions. The aim is to gain insight into a groups’ attitudes, enablers and barriers to behaviour, influencers, preferred channels of information, knowledge, attitude, and practices. FGDs are normally conducted in the groups’ area of residence in a comfortable location such as a home, community centre, school, or café.

The FGD itself is a form of community engagement and consultation, as it provides insights into a group’s views about problems and ideas for solutions.

There are practical and ethical guidelines for FGDs, and considerations for analysing the data.

### 1. Ethical considerations:

- **Facilitators must treat all participants with courtesy and respect.**
- **Facilitators must explain the nature of the research,** why it is occurring and what will happen with the results.
- **FGD members must be allowed to ask questions** before and during the research.
- **All participants must give consent.** Ideally this should be written consent. Caretakers should sign consent for minors.
- **Participants are volunteers, and must have the option to stop** their participation at any point in the discussion.

### 2. Practical considerations:

- **Participants should be encouraged to speak freely.**
  - **Participant information must be kept confidential, unless they agree otherwise.** When citing them in your report, describe them as opposed to writing their name. For example, “a 45 years old seamstress said...” If they agree in the consent process, it’s ok to cite their first names.
  - **There must be no consequences for participants, whatever their views** – for example, on their jobs, or access to health services.
  - **Be aware of and respect cultural norms** – e.g. women and men might not mix in one group, or need to sit on separate sides of the room.
- **Two researchers should be present** – one to interact with the group, ask questions and make notes and one to thoroughly record answers by hand, and on a recording device for accuracy.
  - **The researchers should be trained and fully versed on the contents of the questionnaire.**
  - **Researchers should be good listeners, and remain neutral on issues.**
  - **Researchers should speak the local language, or have a trusted translator present.**
  - **Have materials ready for the duration of field work** - sufficient copies of the questionnaire, communication materials for pre-testing, pens, pencils, the recording device and batteries.
  - **The group should be representative of one target audience** – caretakers, teachers, health workers, or a sampling of “the community” that can include a mix of community representation. Take care, however, to select community members who are equal in status to one another, so they can speak freely.
  - **The focus group should be small** – 6-12 people.
  - **Schedule the FGD at a time that is convenient for the group.** More people will attend, and they will be more focussed on the discussion if they don’t have conflicting appointments.
  - **Schedule several FGDs for a representation of views** if the geographic scope of the research is wide.
  - **The discussion should take about an hour** – if longer, people may lose energy and interest.
  - **Provide some refreshments and if culturally expected, a small incentive** - for example, a small payment or token, such as a t-shirt, for participation.
  - **Know the participants** - in your notes, record the community, the number of people present, their role in the community, their occupations, family information and any other relevant information.
  - **Ask open-ended questions as much as possible,** which give people a chance to speak. They include openings such as “What do you think of”, “Why do you believe that”, “What are people saying”,



as opposed to “Yes or No” questions such as “Do you think...”

- **Probe** with follow-up questions if you need more information.
- **Ask a closing question such as “do you have more to add”**, which allows group members to give additional views.
- **Let people speak** – if the group begins discussing amongst members, allow them some time to do this before bringing them to the next question.
- **Ensure everyone has a chance to speak** - sometimes one person may want to dominate the conversation. Watch for visual cues from people- hands up, appearing frustrated with a dominant speaker, trying to get your attention through eye contact – and give them a chance to speak.
- **Follow up and schedule FGDs after the communication activities have been implemented**, as a way to measure whether the intervention has had an impact.

### 3. Analysing and reporting the information:

- **Clearly transcribe all of the interviews and use the same coding tools for all.**
- **Keep clear, logical folders and records.**
- **Remove any identifying data from transcripts that will be shared outside the research group** (names, specific titles).
- **FGDs provide qualitative data, so look for and compile general patterns in the responses from within, and across**

**groups.** “Most people agreed that...” or “Most people felt that...”

- **Select quotes for the report from individuals that represent the group.** For example, “My husband listens only to the religious leader, who doesn’t believe in vaccines,” -32 years old mother of three; or “I have too much work, and not enough time for outreach visits,” – 37-year old health worker.
- **Watch for outliers in the group** - comments that don’t align with the group views, that may indicate a small but important problem.
- **If there was no clear pattern, report it.** “There were several different views on the issue. They included: ....”
  - Note that if there were no clear patterns, it will be more complex to design a communication strategy or may indicate a problem with the focus group sampling methodology.
- **Report the changes and solutions the group wants to see:** For example, a preference for better coordination on outreach services; or for more convenient days for RI sessions, or more advance notice about supplementary immunization activities.
- **Triangulate the information with other data sources** – such as the key informant interviews, to draw a clear picture of the issues and potential solutions.
- **Use the group’s suggestions to shape the communication plan.**
- **Report the findings, and critically, what you will be doing with them to improve**

**immunization services, back to the group.**

