### Name of the tool

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<th>Focus group discussion</th>
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### Aim of the tool

To give information on how groups of people think or feel about a particular topic and give greater insight into why certain opinions are held. To help improve the planning and design of new programmes and provide a means of evaluating existing programmes.

### When to use it?

This tool is useful at the beginning of an intervention, but can also be used for evaluation purposes.

### How difficult is it to use it?

Easy – **moderate** – for experienced users/facilitators

### Tool for thought or tool for action?

Tool for thought

### Benefits

This tool provides valuable information to explore and clarify a project’s goals and process. It also provides useful information from the viewpoint of participants (and stakeholders) and their experiences of taking part in a project.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates an accepting environment that puts participants at ease allowing them to thoughtfully answer questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers. Surveys are good for collecting information about people’s attributes and attitudes, but if you need to understand things at a deeper level, use a focus group.

### Issues to be aware of

Since the idea of focus groups is to take advantage of group interactions, it is important to use the information at the group level, not the individual level. Focus groups are not a valid way to find out how much progress an individual client or participant has made toward his or her own goals. Also, as focus groups are usually made up of a small number of people who voluntarily participate, you cannot assume that their views and perceptions represent those of other groups that might have slightly different characteristics. Focus groups are not “random samples”.

The discussion takes place in an unnatural setting and can stray from the desired topic due to group dynamics. Discussions are hard to replicate.

### Description of the tool

Holding a focus group discussion is a good way to learn about people’s interests, perspectives, opinions and knowledge about different topics. Knowing the perspectives, attitudes and desires of your target audience is essential to developing relevant video content, support services and dissemination approaches.

A focus group is where a group of people (around 4 to 12) are asked questions about their experiences and opinions on particular topics.

Focus groups use a facilitator and a semi-structured interview process to prompt discussion among a group of people. The group can be representative of the target audience, or subsets of the target audience, if you are looking to identify how different groups have experienced a certain intervention. Focus groups can be used in a self-contained manner to explore new initiatives or to understand participants’ own perspectives on a project.
The ORID method is a focus group process that facilitates structured discussion in small groups (up to 12 people).

ORID stands for:
- Observation
- Insights
- Reflection
- Decision

The ORID process provides valuable qualitative information on the strengths and weaknesses of a project based on the viewpoint of the participants (or other stakeholders). As such, the process can provide valuable learning to improve further phases of a programme, or to design a new programme or vision for future initiatives.

The process facilitates discussion of the following questions:
- “What is your most significant observation about the programme?”
- “What do you remember?”
- “What did you hear or see?”
- “Was this exciting or surprising?”
- “Did this engage your interest or empower you to become more sustainable?”
- “Did you like this or not?”
- “Did this frustrate you?”
- “Why did this aspect work or not work?”
- “What does this mean for the programme?”
- “What are the implications?”
- “What are the options?”
- “What changes are needed?”
- “How would you prioritize changes?”
- “What would you say about the programme to someone who was not there?”
- “Having experienced and reflected on this programme, what are your next steps?”

Steps involved in using the tool

Requirements for a focus group discussion:
- A facilitator to lead the discussion, prompt questions, and ensure everyone has a say
- A notetaker, or digital voice recorder (or you could film the session)—remember that you must seek the approval of all participants prior to recording the session
- A flip chart or whiteboard to write down the “observations”
- Set up chairs in a U-shape with the flip chart or whiteboard at the front
- About 2 hours and some refreshments
- A projector and computer are optional, but can be useful to show the flow of the process and remind participants of the prompt questions for each part of the discussion.
Steps involved in using the tool (continued)

A good way to start a focus group session is to provide a general welcome and then use an icebreaker to get everyone speaking. For example, you can get people to have a quick chat in pairs, and find out a couple of things about each other, such as something sustainable that they have recently done, or their favourite food, or holiday destination etc. Then, one half of the pair will introduce the other person, by saying their name, what they have recently done, their favourite food (or whatever you choose). Everyone then takes a turn at introducing the person next to them.

The facilitator should then provide a brief introduction to the ORID process, highlighting that it is a structured discussion which may seem awkward, but that it provides a way to work through issues following the natural process of the mind. It is also worth the facilitator explaining that the ORID process provides valuable information from the participant’s perspective, and that the learning will be valued by the Council (or organisation) as a means to improve the project. After all, there is nothing worse than thinking your input is not valued!

The facilitator should then proceed to set a few rules, such as listening to other people, respecting everyone’s opinion, and not having one person dominate the conversation. Once this has been completed, the facilitator can proceed through the ORID process, as outlined below:

- Conceptualisation
- Interview
- Analysis and reporting

(Krueger, 1988)

Sources and further readings

- [http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/](http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/)