



# Focus Group Discussions

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# Purpose

This session will

- ❖ Introduce a key information gathering methodology: focus group discussions
- ❖ It will explain the approach
- ❖ It will assess the pros and cons of FGD

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## When and why are Focus group discussions used?

They are widely used by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and researchers as a qualitative approach to gathering information for planning, monitoring, and evaluation purposes.

FGIs typically offer greater descriptive depth than what is provided through surveys and a broader base of perspectives than often is obtained through individual interviews.

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## Definition of an FGD

A focus group interview is a data collection technique in which a small group of people with common characteristics, usually between six and twelve individuals, is guided by a moderator to discuss specific topics in a structured way. The moderator raises issues identified in a discussion guide and uses probing questions to solicit opinions, ideas, and other information.

They differ from community interviews (more people and less common interests) and group informant interviews (small group, less organization and more improvisation).

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## Steps in conducting FGDs

- Step 1: Select the team: facilitator who speaks the language and moderates without bias, a note taker, and a technician for recording (when possible).
- Step 2: Select participants. Different methods can be used but the central condition is for them to have something in common (gender, age, profession, origins, etc. according to purpose of the intervention).
- Step 3: Select time and location. Participants should know when it will happen and feel safe to exchange ideas and opinions.
- Step 4: Prepare the discussion guide. Enough topics for everyone to participate but relevant to the information gathering objectives.

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## Steps in conducting FGDs (continued)

- Step 5: Conduct the interview by establishing a rapport, choose your words carefully when asking open-ended questions or proposing rich and relevant topics. Make sure you are familiar with interview techniques, and control the discussion allowing the greatest number to share their thoughts.
- Step 6: If possible record the sessions.
- Step 7: Analyze results. The team should assemble the interview notes (transcripts of each focus group interview), the summaries, and any other relevant data to analyze trends and patterns (recurrent themes).

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## The advantages of using FGDs

- They are inexpensive means of gathering information from a relatively large number of people, opening the door to shared opinions on activities, services, conditions, and experiences.
- They are interactive and informative as they enable participants to react with each other, sharing and reacting to each other's ideas.
- They are time and resource efficient. One FGI can collect rich, substantial data from multiple stakeholders in one or two hours. Though an individual interview allows the evaluation team to delve deeper into the situation of one individual, and surveys can capture data from statistically representative samples, FGIs offer an efficient option for obtaining detailed qualitative data from up to a dozen people in a short period of time, without the need for any special equipment.

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## The limitations of using FGDs

- They require advance planning which may not always be possible. The fact that FGDs require a group often implies greater coordination.
- It is difficult to generalize information gathered. The limited number does not allow for statistical tools to be effective.
- The method is vulnerable to moderator bias. Thoughtful design of the moderator's guide, accurate recording, systematic coding and involvement of more than one individual in the data analysis can help minimize, but not eliminate, the risk of bias.
- Limited confidentiality. Participants might be less likely to share very personal or sensitive information when they are speaking with a group. Any error in choice of participants may jeopardize the results because in small communities social relations and power structures are very dense.



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