



Tool 3.25: Sample Focus Group Guide

Right to the City Focus Group Guide

(2 hours and 40 minutes)

I. Welcome & Overview (10 minutes)

Hello everyone. Thank you for coming out today. My name is _____. I work with the organization _____, which is part of the Right to the City alliance. You're here today so that the Right to the City alliance, can hear from you about your experiences living in public housing and what suggestions you have for making improvements to public housing.

Have any of you heard of Right to the City before today? *[Pause, if yes then...]*

- What have you heard?
- What do you know?

For those of you who didn't know, Right to the City is a national alliance of organizations working to combat gentrification and displacement of people from their homes and communities. The same type of focus group is being held with public housing residents in 8 different cities around the country including Miami, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Chicago, Washington D.C, and New Orleans.

We'll be writing up a report based on what we find out from you today and the other focus groups we're holding around the country. We'll be using the report to influence elected officials and other people who have power to make changes to the public housing system. We will also use the report to increase public housing residents voice and power in the discussions about your home and community.

Participating in this focus group will not affect your living status at your development or your place on the waiting list and we are not working for the public housing authority. We will NOT use your name in the report unless you want us to and we will ask you to sign a form to give consent that you want to participate in this focus group and share your experiences with the resident participation system in public housing.

II. Ground Rules (5 minutes)

We want you to feel free to speak openly.

I will be facilitating the discussion with some questions. The goal of this discussion is to hear everyone's point of view about public housing, no matter how different everyone's opinions may be. I will be recording the discussion so that we can capture what you say to use for our report. I am going to ask that you say your first name before you speak so that we can tell when different people are speaking.



We want to emphasize that we will not use your name unless you want us to. Please take this time now to sign the consent form to participate in this group (hand out consent form). If you do not feel comfortable now that you know more about this, feel free to leave at this time

I would also like to emphasize that everyone here has the right to their own opinions, and that all opinions are welcome. There are no specific answers that we are looking for, only your experiences and opinions.

I would like to hear from everyone in the group, and would like for everyone to feel comfortable in speaking. I ask that you all respect each other and this discussion, no matter what you may hear. We are not here to judge anyone.

III. Introductions and Opening Questions (20 mins.)

Let's start with a round of introductions. We'll go around the table and everyone should state:

- Your First Name

If you currently live or formerly have lived in public housing...

- Which public housing development do (or did) you live in?
- How long have you lived in public housing or how long have you been displaced if you no longer live there?

If you are currently on the waiting list for public housing...

- How long have you been on the waiting list?
- ✓ What are two concerns that come to mind when you think about public housing and your neighborhood or community?

IV. Overall Experience and Issues in Public Housing (The Need) (20 minutes)

We are going to start by hearing from you about some of the overall issues and concerns you have about public housing.

If you currently live in public housing....

- ✓ What do you feel is the best thing about living in public housing?
- ✓ How would your life or the lives of your family be different if you could not live in public housing?

If you are on the waiting list for public housing...

- ✓ What do you think will be the best thing about living in public housing?
- ✓ How do you feel that your life would be different if you DID live in public housing?



V. Accessibility (15 minutes)

Next we are going to discuss the process for getting into public housing, the waitlists, and some of the barriers that exist that make it difficult for people to live in public housing.

- ✓ What do you think are the barriers to living in public housing (i.e. application fees, background checks, immigration status, credit checks, good standing/bad standing)
- ✓ How do these barriers affect you and your community?
- ✓ Have you ever been or are you currently on the public housing waitlist? Please describe your experience, where you lived while you were on the waitlist and if and how you finally got into public housing?

VI. Affordability (15 minutes)

Next we are going to discuss some of the challenges we have living in today's economy. We all know that there is a recession going on and that living in our city is expensive. We also know that housing is one of the biggest expenses we have.

- ✓ How do you feel about the amount of money you have to pay for rent and how does this impact your life or your family?
- ✓ If you didn't have to pay rent, what are some of the ways you would spend the extra money?
- ✓ What are some things that could be done (by government or someone else) to help you and your family meet your basic needs?

VII. Demolition (15 minutes)

Next we are going to talk about some of the solutions that the government has come up with to make improvements to public housing and hear your point of view on these policies and programs. One thing the government has done, in some cities, is to tear down public housing that is "distressed" or has had a lot of problems. Sometimes, the government will replace the public housing, other times they will not.

- ✓ If your public housing was demolished, please explain what happened to you and your family? Where did you go? Did you get new housing? What kind of housing?
- ✓ How do you feel about the government tearing down public housing? Do you think this is good or bad and why?
- ✓ Do you think there is enough public housing in your city? Why or why not? How much would be enough?

VIII. Perceptions of Public Housing (15 minutes)

Next we are going to discuss how you feel about the way that public housing is portrayed in the media and how mainstream society views public housing.

- ✓ How do you feel about the way that public housing is talked about or written about in the news? (**Facilitator Note:** encourage people to think about the article we read in the community workshop)



- ✓ What do you think that people should know about public housing that they do not get from reading or watching the news?

IX. Budgeting Priorities (15 min)

Next we are going to talk about how public housing authorities spend their budgets. In the community workshop we talked about the top three things that one housing authority spends its budget on (put this data on butcher paper for participants to see).

- ✓ If you were in charge of the budget for the public housing system in your city, how would you spend the money and why? (**Facilitator Note:** encourage participants to think about how the housing authority spends their budget, look at % on butcher paper.)
- ✓ How should the money that is spent by the housing authority be monitored? Should residents have a role in this monitoring and why?

X. Our Policy Solutions (20 minutes)

Finally, you are going to be in the shoes of elected officials and policy makers. We want you to talk about some of the ideas you have on how to improve public housing.

- ✓ What are some ways you suggest the government should make improvements to public housing? (**Facilitator Note:** encourage people to think about the community workshop where we envisioned the ideal public housing, what apartments would look like, green space, etc.)
- ✓ What are some ways you suggest that the government reduce the number of people on the waiting lists and the amount of time people must be on the waiting list?
- ✓ What kind of community services do you think would be helpful in your community?
- ✓ Who do you think should be able to decide public housing policies? Why?

XI. Summary and Wrap Up and Thanks (10 minutes)

(Give 2-3 minute summary of discussion thus far)

- Did I correctly describe what was said?

The purpose of this discussion group was to get your input about what is working and what is not working in the public housing system in your city. We will then write up a report, which we hope to have finished by the summer or fall of this year. We will then use the white paper to meet with government officials and other people that have the power to make changes to public and subsidized housing policy. INSERT INFO ABOUT RTTC HUD CAMPAIGN If you are interested in becoming involved in the Right to the City campaign to improve public housing, come talk to me after the focus group.

- Is there anything that we missed or that you came here wanting to say about public housing that you didn't get to say?

Thanks.

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this Focus Group. We've learned a lot from you.