

Tool 3.7: Benefits and Challenges of Using Focus Groups

Focus Group Definition:

A focus group is a guided discussion, led by a well-prepared facilitator where the participants will answer a set of questions. Focus groups are generally recorded and the answers that the participants provide are used as qualitative data in a final report. Qualitative data are stories or in depth ideas about a topic, rather than numbers and statistics.

Focus Group Goals:

- To collect in depth ideas and explanations from a specific group of people;
- To have participants answer a specific set of questions to gather qualitative data;
- To collect clear recordings or notes of the focus groups that can be transcribed and then analyzed;
- To deepen the engagement of the participants in the research process and the organization's campaigns.

Benefits:

- Focus groups are used when you need more than just numbers or statistics to answer your research questions. They are used to gather more detailed information such as stories or in depth solutions to problems.
- They are also a good public education and organizing tool. They can help bring potential members into your organization and to allow people to see that they don't just have isolated problems.
- Focus groups are used when you want to talk to several people at once about experiences with the same issues. In group settings, participants often build off each other and can often come up with more creative ideas and solutions than they would have individually. On the other hand, interviews are used to gather in depth information from just one person.

Challenges:

- Sometimes people will not be as honest in a group of people as they would be one-on-one.
- People may think that the focus group is an opportunity to air their grievances about a particular issue or provide support or advice to one another rather than a time to answer specific questions.
- People may also think it is a time to debate an issue rather than allowing everyone to express their own ideas.
- If people come into your organization through a focus group, they may think that all meetings in your organization are research based rather than action based.