



A. Individual Interviews

➤ Provide a comfortable and safe environment

- Find a place where the respondent can feel relaxed, comfortable and safe to talk
- Don't start with the interview right away
- Establish a relaxed atmosphere through friendly greeting and by providing some explanations (incl. purpose of interview and what will happen with the information)
- Start with some general, topic unrelated questions to "break the ice"

➤ Listen and express interest in what the respondent tells you

- Make it a friendly conversation, with a relaxed format
- Not strictly a question-answer routine (our interviews are 'semi-structured' - ie use topic guides flexibly)
- Remain neutral, i.e. don't show approval or disapproval
- Use your body language to show your interest and attention to what the person is telling you. Think about whether you need more info, and probe for more if necessary

➤ Choose questions carefully

- No compound questions (where you ask several things at once!) which could confuse as to which the answer refers to:

Example of compound question: *is your disability affecting your opportunities to work and are people around you considerate?*

The answer may refer to the first or second question and/or the respondent may not be clear if people being *considerate* refers to the effect of disability on work or to disability in general

- Keep questions simple and clear so that there is no ambiguity

Example of ambiguous question: *How do you deal (live) with your disability?*

This is an ambiguous question and not clear: *dealing (living) with disability* in regard to what - Practical daily activities; psychological effect of a disability?
Deal (live) with how - In terms of "treating" the disability or other activities, or in terms of coping?

- No leading questions (which suggest a particular answer)

Example of a leading question: *Don't you think women should be more represented in leadership positions?*

These kind of questions direct you to a certain answer and might make it difficult for a respondent to express his/her own view.



➤ **Let the respondent lead**

- Make sure you don't lead the respondent: give the topic and then leave the respondent room to define the content and provide information that s/he thinks is important
- Don't interrupt unless you must (e.g. if the respondent goes too much off the topic)

➤ **Try to encourage the respondent to expand on answers**

- Use open ended questions and words such as “describe”, “tell me about”
- Do not move to a new topic until you are satisfied that the respondent's knowledge of the topic has been well explored
- Use probes to encourage more in-depth information
- Be careful not to ask “why” too often as it may imply that there is a factual answer and the respondent may try to give you the “right” one; it may feel intimidating/questioning or challenging;

➤ **Use probing techniques**

- Silent probing: don't fill silences too quickly- remain quiet and wait for the respondent to continue
- Echo probing: repeat the last thing the respondent has said and ask to continue, e.g. “I see, the school would not accept your child – then what happened?”
- Encouraging-noise-probe: using “uh-huh”, “I see”, “right aha” as affirmative noises to confirm you are listening and to encourage the respondent to continue.

➤ **Relate back to the respondent**

- Adapt your language to the respondent's, e.g. use his/her terms or words (unless they are inappropriate like “cripple” for disabled people),
- Be prepared to re-phrase or re-think questions if they are not clearly understood
- From time to time paraphrase what you have heard to ensure you have understood correctly and/or give the respondent the chance to correct, clarify or elaborate
- Appreciate the respondent's time and contribution



B. Focus Group Discussions/ Group Interviews

The principles for individual interviews are essentially the same for groups, for example providing a safe and comfortable, non-threatening environment, explaining ground rules such as confidentiality, respecting others' opinion, and general interviewing techniques as above.

However, there are some specific considerations for focus group discussions:

The composition of a FGD

- Small group, i.e. between 6 and 8 participants (more than 8 makes it hard for everyone to have a say, and hard for the facilitator to keep a record of who said what.
- Homogeneous groups are best. The participants should have things in common with and not be too different from each other in terms of status/position/ life experience. They will then be able to have an interesting discussion and although they might not always agree with each other i.e. a group of teacher or health personnel or a youth group or mothers of toddlers or residents of a care home, etc but not mixed up. Be careful with mixing people at different levels of seniority in one group or people of different genders or ages.

Record Keeping

- Ideally the discussion should be recorded using digital recording equipment (eg a smart phone) so that you can then store it on a computer later as a digital audio-file and also have handwritten notes taken by a note-taker during the group discussion
- The handwritten notes should include observations on non-verbal clues such as body language and facial expression, and group dynamics (who was very dominant or quiet, any interruptions etc)

Thinking about group discussion dynamics

- It is quite common for certain individuals in the group to dominate the discussion (one gender over another; seniors over regular staff). Make sure you give ample opportunity to all, especially more quiet respondents, e.g:
 - Address questions to individuals who are reluctant to talk (eg we haven't heard from you yet?)
 - Give nonverbal cues (look in another direction or stop taking notes when an individual talks for an extended period)
 - Intervene, politely summarize the point, then refocus the discussion (okay let's move on to another topic)



- If one idea is being adopted without general discussion or disagreement it is likely that group pressure has led to adopting of that dominant view. You should then probe for alternative views, e.g. ask something like “This is very interesting; now let’s look at other possibilities or views. Has anyone had a different experience?”
- Encourage participants to respond to each other’s contributions around the circle. A focus group discussion should not feel like a question-answer session between facilitator and individual respondents within a group. Rather, the facilitator provides the topic and participants lead the discussion and generate information through feedback and responses to individual contributions, listening to each other.



C. Group facilitation eg. validation/feedback meeting

➤ Design and Plan

a. Choose and design the group process

- i. The number of participants - balance of small group and plenary activities
- have a mixture
- ii. The specific topics or questions to be discussed
- iii. Type of involvement people need to have, including skills needed (eg. does everyone need to be literate?)
- iv. Background and positions of participants
- v. How well they know the subject – and each other
- vi. The time, space and other resources you have available

Based on this information, you need to decide if you want to have an open discussion or a structured process and then choose the appropriate tools. Whichever process you choose, keep your focus on the outcome(s) you want (eg. a set of recommendations and actions) and the best ways to achieve the objectives of the event.

b. Design a realistic agenda

There are a number of factors to consider when designing the agenda which go hand in hand with designing the group process:

- i. In what order should the topics be presented?
- ii. How will participants get to know each other?
- iii. How will they gain a common understanding of the objectives?
- iv. If an event is to be broken into separate sessions, how much time should be allocated to each item?
- v. Will all participants be involved each session?
- vi. Or will some be in smaller, break-out groups?
- vii. How and when will break-out groups' feed back to the wider group?
- viii. When will you recap and summarize?
- ix. How will the outcomes of one session flow into the next?
- x. How will you achieve closure of the overall event?

c. Other considerations

- i. Information and material – what do participants need to know before the event; do you need to prepare hand-outs
- ii. Room arrangements – do you need space /separate rooms for break our groups; which setup would encourage most participation?
- iii. Supplies – pens, flipcharts, paper, stickers as well as snacks/coffee/tea/ water



➤ **Guide and control the event**

At the start of the meeting you need to ensure that participants are clear about the desired outcome(s), the agenda, ground rules and expectations for the event. Your role is to keep everyone progressing towards a successful outcome, while encouraging a lot of discussion.

a. To guide and control

i. **Set ground rules** that everyone agrees to regarding interaction between participants, respect for everyone's participation, contribution and opinions; etc

ii. **Set the scene** so that everyone knows what will happen (agenda, objectives, etc)

iii. **Get things flowing** by way of introduction, ice-breaking, starting off positively

iv. **Keep up momentum and energy** so that people keep focused and interested – know when to take a break

v. **Listen, engage and include** to have everyone involved and participating without losing your neutrality and objectivity

vi. **Monitor checkpoints and summarize** so that participants are reminded of and keep to the agenda, know how far they have come and what they have already achieved up to any given point

vii. **Intervene only if absolutely necessary**

b. To keep the event flowing and positive

i. Be aware of and close down any **side conversations** that might disrupt others and/or keep important info and exchanges from the rest of the group

ii. **Keep a close eye on timing** – balance need for participation with moving on and on track

iii. **Pay attention to group behavior**, verbal and non-verbal to effectively stop any potential conflict or disruptive processes

iv. **Intervene** immediately if there are obvious personal attacks and remind everyone of ground rules. But take necessary steps so stop attacks.

v. **Monitor** if everyone is participating and keep look-out for those who don't – assess reasons e.g. discomfort or shyness and think how to involve them sensitively



➤ Record and Action

It is important to keep a record of the meeting bringing the results together, sharing them and making sure they are actioned. Therefore it needs to be absolutely clear what will be recorded how and by whom.

- a. You are responsible for making sure the participants hear, see, and understand the information that is presented and offered. Make sure that you keep an accurate record of what's going on. If in doubt, record now and summarize later.
- b. Try to use words that the group chooses, and when in doubt, ask them to provide the words for you to record.
- c. Ensure all decisions and actions are recorded. You may want to use a scribe to do this, so that you can stay focused on the group and the process.
- d. As you record decisions and actions, check with the group that the information you're recording is a fair and accurate reflection of what's been discussed.
- e. Remind the group what has been discussed, and keep them focused and moving forward.
- f. If in doubt, ask for clarification before the discussion moves on.
- g. Make sure that responsibility for, and commitment to, action, is obtained and recorded when necessary.

After the event, follow up to ensure that outstanding actions and issues are progressed, and that the proceedings are brought to a successful conclusion.

➤ Principles and values of facilitation

Facilitators should demonstrate, verbally and non-verbally, their commitment to the following principles:

- **Listening:** facilitation means listening to what people are saying and tuning in to what they are not saying. This includes being aware of verbal and non-verbal means of communication.
- **Confidentiality:** to participate fully, people must be confident that everything of relevance can be discussed freely without inappropriate reporting outside the group. Group members will normally decide what level of detail can be reported to those not in the group.



- **Respect:** a facilitator must acknowledge and respect each individual and prevent other group members from undermining the basic respect that should be accorded to each individual in the group.
- **Equality:** each person is regarded as having an equal right to contribute, to influence, to determine the direction of the group as another. Equality also relates to respect, valuing of personal experience and participation.
- **The value of personal experience:** each member's contribution to a discussion/skill-sharing activity is equally valid and valuable.
- **Agreed goals:** members must share an agreed goal if they are to develop a belief in and sense of ownership of the group.
- **Group process:** facilitation requires giving attention to how the group operates. This includes attempting to resolve conflict or any other difficulty that might arise in the group.
- **Trust and safety:** to ensure maximum participation, the facilitator must encourage the development of trust and safety.
- **Inclusion and encouragement:** everyone in the group must be included and encouraged to participate, to share ideas, suggestions, solutions and take initiative.
- **The importance of a positive/beneficial experience:** facilitators must recognize that everyone is entitled to positive experience in the group. This means the facilitator meeting realistic individual needs and/or being aware of and challenging unrealistic expectations of the group or the facilitator.
- **Participation:** facilitation succeeds when there is a genuine belief in the value of responding to stated needs in relation to the work of the group. Consultation with group members on direction, pace, content and method with an openness to change is vital.

<http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/RoleofAFacilitator.htm>