

Doing your Interviews and Focus Groups

Evaluation webinar handout

Introduction

- This handout relates to the 'doing your interviews and focus groups' webinar and covers the following:
 - Interviews and focus groups, including their strengths and weaknesses.
 - How to recruit participants for interviews and focus groups and;
 - ethical considerations

Interviews

- Interviews mainly consist of open-ended questions, meaning that those who are being interviewed can provide in-depth answers.
- The interview will often be based on a key topic area, and the interviewer can then probe for further information in response to what the interviewee has said.
- Interviews can vary in levels of structure. Some interviews consist of questions made up 'on the spot', which is known as an unstructured interview, whereas those based on a general guide are semi-structured.
- There are also a number of ways of interviewing, such as one-to-one, or in a small group, known as a focus group.

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Strengths of interviews

- Can be conducted either face-to-face or over the phone.
- If a respondent does not understand a question, the interviewer can re-phrase it.
- Generates richer data and has a higher response rate than questionnaires.

Weaknesses of interviews

- Questions need to be carefully phrased to avoid leading the interviewee. This can be difficult if you have to make them up on the spot!
- The data interviews produce can be difficult to analyse.
- Transcribing an interview is extremely time-consuming.

Focus Groups

- Focus groups are a group interview on a particular topic. They typically involve 4-12 people and are led by a facilitator.
- Focus groups tend to use a topic guide with a general structure of questions to be asked to a group to determine the attitudes and opinions of those within the group.

Strengths of focus groups

- Suitable for children as they are likely to feel more comfortable answering questions with other children.
- Quick and inexpensive to run.
- Hearing the comments of others can stimulate members of the group to express their opinions.

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Weaknesses of focus groups

- Some people might feel reluctant to engage if they believe there is an 'expert' in the group.
- Time consuming to analyse.
- Quite often, people do not turn up. This means you may have to recruit 2 or more extra members per focus group.

Who should I ask to take part?

- The number of people you ask to take part in your evaluation will depend on the size of the intervention. For smaller interventions, you are likely to ask the majority or all of those who took part to participate in the evaluation. However, for larger interventions, you will probably select a smaller group of those who attended to take part (a sample).
- The number of interviews or focus groups you should carry out will vary. As a rule of thumb, if you keep finding the same themes, you can stop.

How do I recruit people?

- In some cases, recruiting people to take part in an evaluation can be relatively simple. For example, if you are conducting a workshop, you can ask participants directly. However, for publicity campaigns, it can be more difficult to access your target audience.
- Once you have access to your audience, you will need to encourage them to take part in the evaluation. There are a number of tips you can follow:
 - Design an information sheet to explain what the participants should expect if they choose to take part in your evaluation.
 - Send a friendly reminder to those who don't get back to you.
 - Don't put people off if they have agreed to take part!
 - Be appreciative- by thanking participants for their time both before and after the evaluation.

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Ethics

- You will also need to consider ethics, and it is ideal to consider any possible ethical implications of your proposed methodology and research design while you are planning your evaluation.
- You will need to consider:
 - **Informed consent**- it is vital to get agreement from a person before you begin to collect data. You should encourage people to participate, but this must be their own decision and you should not make people feel like that they have to take part.
 - **Confidentiality**- where possible, all data about a person should be kept confidential and anonymous. Confidentiality means that you agree not to pass information about participants onto anyone outside of the research team.
 - **The right to withdraw**- respondents should be informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point without feeling pressurised not to, and they should be made aware that they are not required to give a reason as to why they no longer want to participate in your evaluation project.
 - **Ethical considerations for children and vulnerable groups**- if you plan to work with either of these groups, seek advice from an expert.
 - **The ethical implications of incentives**- incentives should not be so generous that they pressurise people to take part, and they should be independent rather than a benefit in kind.

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Summary

- This handout has covered:
 - An overview and the strengths and weaknesses of interviews and focus groups.
 - Tips for recruiting participants.
 - The ethics you will need to consider when collecting data.

Contact details

If you have any further questions about the evaluation process, please email: rneedham@rospa.com