



Guide

Designing and Conducting Focus Groups

January 2026

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method used in research and evaluation. They involve facilitating a focused discussion with a small group of participants, typically between three and eight people, on a specific topic. Rather like a group interview, a focus group enables you to hear from a range of people on the same topic in a single session.

This makes focus groups time-efficient while also offering a unique benefit: participants respond to and build on each other's comments, often generating richer insights than individual interviews alone. The group dynamic can spark new ideas, surface shared experiences, and reveal points of consensus or disagreement.

Focus groups can be conducted in-person, with participants and facilitators gathered in the same physical space, or virtually, using video conferencing technology. This guide covers both formats, with specific guidance on virtual considerations highlighted throughout.

1.2 Why use focus groups?

Focus groups are a valuable method when you want to:

- Collect in-depth qualitative data from multiple perspectives efficiently
- Understand how people discuss, debate, and make sense of a topic together
- Explore a range of views, experiences, or reactions to something
- Generate ideas or test concepts with a group
- Hear from participants who may feel more comfortable speaking in a group than one-on-one
- Observe group dynamics and how opinions are formed or influenced

Focus groups are particularly useful when group interaction will add value to your data collection. The conversation between participants often surfaces insights that would not emerge from individual interviews or surveys.

1.3 Is a focus group right for you?

Before committing to a focus group, consider whether this method is the best fit for your needs. Good data collection is guided by:

- A clear understanding of the purpose and audience for your findings
- Clearly defined objectives and scope for the data collection
- A good sense of who your participant population is
- A decision about whether you need data from a large sample or would benefit more from in-depth discussion with a smaller group

The following decision tool can help you determine whether a focus group is the right method:



Do you want to collect in-depth qualitative data from a small group?

YES → Continue to next question

NO → Consider a survey or other method

Would group discussion add value (e.g., participants building on each other's ideas)?

YES → Continue to next question

NO → Consider one-to-one interviews instead

Is the topic suitable for group discussion (not too sensitive or personal)?

YES → A focus group is likely suitable!

UNSURE → Consider carefully or use interviews for sensitive topics

If you answered YES to all three questions...

A focus group is a good choice for your data collection!

If a focus group is not the best method for your needs, consider alternatives such as one-to-one interviews (for sensitive topics or when individual depth is more important than group interaction), surveys (for larger samples or quantitative data), or case studies (for detailed exploration of specific instances).

1.4 Choosing between in-person and virtual

Once you have decided a focus group is appropriate, you need to consider whether to conduct it in-person or virtually. Both formats can produce high-quality data, but each has distinct advantages and considerations.

Consideration	In-person	Virtual
Geographic reach	Limited to those who can travel to the venue	Can include participants from anywhere
Cost	May include venue hire, catering, travel reimbursement	Generally lower cost (no venue or travel)
Session length	Typically 90 minutes; can be longer with breaks	Best kept to 60-75 minutes due to screen fatigue
Group size	Up to 8-9 participants	Best with 5-7 participants
 Rapport building	Easier to establish through physical presence	Requires more deliberate effort



Non-verbal cues	Easier to read body language	Limited to what is visible on camera
Technical issues	Minimal (AV equipment only)	Internet and platform issues can disrupt
Accessibility	Requires physical access to venue	Can be more accessible for some; requires tech access
Recording	Requires separate equipment	Built-in platform features

Choosing your format

There is no universally "better" format. The right choice depends on your participants, your topic, your resources, and practical constraints. Many researchers now use a mix of both formats across different focus groups within the same project.

1.5 Structure of this Guide

Once you have decided a focus group is appropriate, you need to consider whether to conduct it in-person or virtually. Both formats can produce high-quality data, but each has distinct advantages and considerations.

This guide walks you through the complete process of planning and conducting focus groups, whether in-person or virtual. Each section covers the core principles that apply to both formats, with specific virtual considerations highlighted in teal boxes like this:



Virtual considerations

Throughout this guide, look for boxes like this one for guidance specific to virtual focus groups.



2 The process

Running an effective focus group involves three main phases: preparation, delivery, and follow-up. This section provides detailed guidance for each phase.

2.1 Preparation

Thorough preparation is the foundation of a successful focus group. There are six main areas to address:

- The time, place, and logistics
- Preparing information for participants and addressing ethical considerations
- Recruiting participants
- Preparing your questions and topic guide
- Planning how you will capture the discussion
- Ensuring everyone involved knows what will happen

2.1.1 Time, place, and logistics

Finding the right space (in-person)

For in-person focus groups, choose a private, quiet room that is large enough to comfortably seat all participants and team members. Consider the seating arrangement carefully:

- A horseshoe shape works well if you prefer not to use a table
- A circular or large square/rectangular table encourages equal participation
- Avoid long, thin rectangular tables that create distance between participants

You may need audio-visual equipment such as a projector for slides or speakers for audio. Book equipment in advance and conduct at least one technical rehearsal.

Virtual considerations

For virtual focus groups, select a video conferencing platform based on your needs and participants' likely familiarity. Common options include Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Webex.

When choosing a platform, consider ease of use, recording capabilities, screen sharing, virtual hand-raise features, chat functionality, breakout rooms, closed captioning, and whether participants need to download software.

Ensure you have a reliable internet connection (wired is more stable than Wi-Fi), good audio and lighting, a quiet private space, and a backup device in case of technical failure.



Deciding on time and date

Consider the best time for your target participants. While you may work standard business hours, your participants might prefer evenings or weekends, or may only be available during work hours. Ask around or conduct an informal poll to identify the most suitable time.

Session length

- In-person focus groups typically run for 90 minutes
- For sessions over 90 minutes, include a short break
- Virtual focus groups should be kept to 60-75 minutes due to screen fatigue

Group size

- A focus group should have at least three participants (fewer is essentially an interview)
- We recommend a maximum of eight or nine participants for in-person sessions
- For virtual sessions, five to seven participants works best to ensure everyone can contribute
- There should be fewer facilitators/team members than participants
- If you have more interested participants than you can accommodate, consider running multiple focus groups

2.1.2 Preparing information for participants

Once you have confirmed the time and place (or platform), prepare information for potential participants. Depending on your recruitment approach, you may need to create:

- Posters and flyers
- Phone call, email, or social media scripts
- Information sheets / Plain language statements (always necessary)
- Consent forms (always recommended)

Your information materials should clearly explain:

- Who you are and the organisation responsible for the project
- The purpose of the focus group
- Why participants are being invited and what makes them eligible
- What you will want to talk about
- What will happen during the session
- What will happen to the information they share
- Who they can contact for more information
- When and where the focus group will happen (or how to join)
- How to reserve a place and how to withdraw if they change their mind
- Any reimbursement offered (travel, gift vouchers, refreshments)



Virtual considerations

For virtual focus groups, also include: the platform being used and how to join (with the meeting link), any software that needs to be downloaded, technical requirements (internet, camera, microphone),



guidance on finding a quiet private space, what to do if they experience technical difficulties, how the session will be recorded, and a contact phone number in case they cannot connect.

2.1.3 Ethics

All research and evaluation involving people is governed by ethical principles. While you may or may not need formal ethics approval from a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), you must adhere to ethical standards at all times. If you are unsure whether you need HREC approval, ask your supervisor or the person responsible for the project.

The key ethical principles are:

- Ethical conduct: Uphold the ethical principles of your profession and relevant guidelines
- Truthfulness: Do not make statements that are false, incorrect, or misleading
- Confidentiality: Use information responsibly and respect confidentiality undertakings
- Voluntary participation: Ensure participants understand their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time without negative consequences

Additional considerations:

- Will you record the focus group? If yes, you need informed consent from all participants before recording
- How will participants be de-identified in your reporting? Remove names, place names, and any details that could identify someone
- Are any of your participants from smaller or identifiable communities? Take extra care to protect their identity

2.1.4 Consent processes

We recommend using consent forms as a process for obtaining informed consent. Participants must first read and understand a comprehensive plain language statement, then sign a consent form confirming they wish to participate.

For in-person focus groups:

- Provide printed information sheets and consent forms
- Allow time at the start of the session for participants to read and sign
- Ensure participants have the opportunity to ask questions before signing

Virtual considerations

For virtual focus groups, send consent forms electronically before the session and request signed forms be returned by email prior to the session.



Alternatively, verbally confirm consent at the start of the session and record this confirmation. Clearly explain that the session will be recorded before turning on recording, and give participants the opportunity to ask questions first.

2.1.5 Recruiting participants

Once your information materials are ready, begin recruiting participants by placing advertisements and distributing information where potential participants will see it.

- Establish a method for responding to enquiries, including a way to reserve a place
- Over-recruit by one or two participants to account for no-shows
- Have a plan for what to do if interest is very high (offer additional sessions) or very low (offer one-to-one interviews instead)



Virtual considerations

Be clear in your advertising that this is a virtual session. Consider time zones if recruiting from different locations. Screen for basic technical capability if this is a concern for your target population.

2.1.6 Accessibility considerations

Consider accessibility needs for all participants:

- For in-person sessions: ensure the venue is physically accessible, consider parking and public transport access, and ask participants about any specific requirements
- Provide materials in accessible formats if needed
- Allow extra time for participants who may need it
- Ask about accessibility needs during recruitment rather than making assumptions



Virtual considerations

Virtual focus groups can be more accessible for some participants (e.g., those with mobility limitations) but require different considerations.

Enable closed captions or live transcription where available. Share visual materials in advance for those using screen readers. Describe any visuals you share on screen. Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Consider providing a phone dial-in option for those with unreliable internet.



2.1.7 Designing your questions

Develop a run sheet or topic guide that contains your questions and a script for facilitators to follow. You do not need to follow the script word-for-word, but it helps ensure consistency, particularly when multiple facilitators are involved.

Tips for designing questions:

- Use open-ended questions that invite detailed responses, not just 'yes' or 'no'
- Each question should address only one thing (avoid double-barrelled questions)
- Ask exactly what you need to know and no more
- Avoid testing knowledge; there should be no 'correct' answer
- Do not use leading questions that assume a particular response
- Consider carefully how many questions you can realistically cover in the time available

Examples:

- **Open question:** "How would you describe your experience of using public transport today?"
- **Closed question:** "Did you enjoy travelling on public transport today?"
- **Leading question to avoid:** "How much did you like the workshop?" (assumes they liked it)

Planning your time

For in-person sessions, plan for approximately 15 minutes per question with 8 participants. For virtual sessions, plan for 10-12 minutes per question with 5-7 participants. Always have one or two backup questions ready in case discussion is shorter than expected.

2.1.8 Roles and responsibilities

A focus group can be delivered by one person, but having additional team members makes things easier. Consider who will:

- Set up the room or virtual meeting
- Meet and greet participants
- Facilitate the discussion (one or more co-facilitators)
- Manage recording equipment
- Take notes
- Distribute information and consent forms
- Thank participants and conclude the session



Virtual considerations

Having a co-facilitator is particularly valuable for virtual sessions. They can monitor the chat, watch for raised hands, troubleshoot technical issues, and take notes while you focus on facilitation.



Designate someone to be the primary contact if participants have trouble connecting.

2.1.9 Final preparation

On the day before or morning of your focus group, allow time for:

- A team briefing to confirm roles and run through the session
- Room setup or virtual meeting configuration
- Testing all equipment (audio-visual, recording devices, internet connection)
- Preparing any slides or materials to share
- Printing information sheets and consent forms (for in-person)
- Putting up signs to help participants find you (for in-person)

Around 30 minutes before the session, re-test equipment. Ten minutes before, ensure your team is in place and ready.

Virtual considerations

Conduct a technical rehearsal before the actual focus group. Test equipment, internet connection, and platform features including screen sharing, recording, and hand-raise functions.

Consider offering participants an optional tech check session beforehand, particularly if they may be less familiar with video conferencing.

Join the meeting 15-20 minutes early on the day. Enable the waiting room if available to control when participants enter.

2.2 Delivery

This section covers facilitating the focus group itself, from welcoming participants to wrapping up the session.

2.2.1 Welcoming participants

As participants arrive:

- Greet each person warmly and make them feel welcome
- For in-person sessions, show them where to sit and offer refreshments if available
- For virtual sessions, ask them to check their audio and video are working



- Make small talk to help people settle and feel comfortable
- Wait a few minutes past the start time for latecomers, but no more than five minutes

2.2.2 Opening the session

Once participants have arrived, work through the following:

- Ensure every participant has read the plain language statement and had the opportunity to ask questions
- Circulate consent forms and ask participants to read, sign, and date them
- Introduce yourself and any team members
- Briefly explain the purpose of the focus group and what will happen
- Establish ground rules for the discussion
- Confirm you are about to start recording (if applicable) and begin recording

Ground rules should include:

- Only one person speaks at a time
- You want to hear from everyone
- There are no right or wrong answers
- You may need to move the conversation along if time is limited
- Everything shared is confidential to the group



Virtual considerations

For virtual sessions, also explain: how to use the hand-raise feature to indicate they want to speak, that you may call on people directly to ensure everyone contributes, how you will use the chat function, and that participants should mute themselves when not speaking to reduce background noise.

Ask participants to keep their cameras on if possible, but acknowledge this is optional.

Example script: "Please use the 'raise hand' button if you'd like to speak and I'll bring you in. I might also call on people directly to make sure we hear different perspectives. Please keep yourself muted when you're not speaking. Feel free to use the chat for quick additions."

2.2.3 Facilitating the discussion

Once the session is underway:

- Follow your run sheet, posing questions to the group
- Listen actively and show genuine interest in what participants say
- Use neutral responses like "I understand" or "Thank you" rather than "I agree"
- Ask probing questions to explore responses more deeply
- Ensure all participants have the opportunity to contribute
- Keep an eye on time and be prepared to move on if needed



Probing questions can help you explore responses more deeply:

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What do you mean by...?"
- "Why do you think that is?"
- "Does anyone else have a similar or different experience?"

2.2.4 Managing participation

One of the key skills in facilitation is ensuring all voices are heard while managing those who may dominate the conversation.

Dealing with dominant participants:

- After each question, invite a different person to speak first
- Go around the group so everyone answers each question
- Politely interject if needed: "Thank you, [Name]. I'd like to hear what others think about this."
- Use body language (in person) to indicate you are moving on

Encouraging quieter participants:

- Create openings: "I'd love to hear from some people who haven't spoken yet"
- Invite them directly but gently: "[Name], what's your experience with this?"
- Acknowledge that it is fine if someone prefers to listen

Virtual considerations

Managing participation requires more deliberate effort in virtual settings because visual cues are harder to read.

Using hand raises: Explain the feature at the start. Monitor the participant panel for raised hands. Acknowledge raised hands promptly: "I can see [Name] has their hand up – I'll come to you next." Lower hands after participants have spoken.

Calling on participants: Use names when inviting people to speak. Be prepared to call on people more often than you would in person. Watch for visual cues that someone wants to speak (leaning forward, unmuting).

Balance structure with natural flow: Start with more structured turn-taking and relax as the group finds its rhythm.

2.2.5 Using visual materials

You may want to share slides, images, or other materials during the focus group to prompt discussion.

For in-person sessions:

- Use a projector or large screen so all participants can see
- Provide printed copies if participants need to refer to materials



- Test equipment beforehand



Virtual considerations

Close unnecessary applications and notifications before sharing. Share only the specific window you need, not your entire screen. Use large, clear fonts. Describe what you are showing for accessibility. Stop sharing when finished to return to the view of participants.

Managing the virtual chat

The chat can be a valuable additional channel for participation, but needs to be managed carefully. Decide in advance how you will use chat and communicate this to participants. Chat can be useful for participants to add brief comments without interrupting, and gives quieter participants another way to contribute.

If you have a co-facilitator, designate them to monitor chat. Periodically acknowledge chat contributions: "I see [Name] has made a good point in the chat..."

Save the chat transcript at the end as part of your data.

Caution: Monitoring chat while facilitating alone can be challenging. Consider asking participants to save substantive comments for verbal discussion.

Managing technical difficulties

Technical issues are almost inevitable in virtual focus groups. Stay calm and acknowledge the issue. If a participant drops out, continue with others and follow up individually later. Have phone numbers ready to call participants who cannot reconnect. If your own connection fails, have a co-facilitator ready to take over. Build a few extra minutes into your schedule for minor disruptions.

Common quick fixes: "Try turning your camera off and on", "Try leaving and rejoining", "I'll call you on your phone so you can continue participating."

Sensitive disclosures

Occasionally a participant may share something sensitive or become distressed. Handle this with care:

- Acknowledge what they have shared with empathy
- Check if they are comfortable continuing
- Do not press for more detail than they wish to share
- Be prepared to offer a break or private follow-up if needed
- Have information about relevant support services available

Conflict or disagreement

Disagreement can be productive, but manage it carefully:

- Acknowledge different perspectives: "It's clear there are different views on this"
- Redirect to the broader group: "Does anyone else have thoughts on this?"
- Remind participants of the ground rules if needed



- Move the conversation along if it becomes unproductive

2.2.6 Facilitation tips

Here are three tips to aid in your facilitation of focus groups:

- **Tip 1: Be comfortable with silence.** Pause after asking a question to give participants time to think. Silence can feel awkward, but jumping in too quickly can shut down thoughtful responses.
- **Tip 2: Use participants' names.** Using names helps build rapport, keeps people engaged, and clarifies who is speaking. This is especially important in virtual settings.
- **Tip 3: Stay neutral.** Your role is to facilitate, not to share your own views. Avoid nodding enthusiastically at some responses and not others. Use neutral prompts like "Tell me more" rather than "That's a great point."

Virtual considerations

Be more explicit than you would in person. Name who you are passing to, acknowledge contributions clearly, and signpost transitions between topics.

Build in slightly longer pauses. Internet delays mean responses take a moment longer.

Watch for visual cues in the small video windows: leaning forward, opening mouth to speak, unmuting. Invite people in: "[Name], it looks like you might have something to add?"

Manage energy and attention. Keep your own energy up – it's harder to engage participants when the facilitator seems flat.

2.2.7 Wrapping up

As you approach the end of the session:

- Give a time warning: "We have about five minutes left"
- Ask if anyone has final comments
- Summarise key themes briefly if appropriate
- Thank participants warmly for their time and contributions
- Remind them what will happen next (how findings will be used, when they might hear from you)
- Stop the recording
- Allow participants to leave at their own pace; some may want to ask individual questions.

2.3 Follow-up

After the focus group, there are several important tasks to complete.



2.3.1 Immediately after the session

- Secure all data: recordings, notes, consent forms, chat transcripts (virtual)
- Make notes while things are fresh: observations on group dynamics, notable moments, anything that affected the discussion
- Debrief with your co-facilitator or note-taker
- Follow up with any participants who experienced issues (e.g., technical difficulties, left early)

2.3.2 Storing and managing data

You will have several types of data files to manage:

- Audio and/or video recordings
- Notes taken during the session
- Consent forms
- Chat transcripts (virtual)
- Any materials shared during the session

Ensure all files are:

- Stored in a secure, password-protected location
- Accessible only to authorised team members
- Named clearly and consistently
- Backed up.

Be clear about how long you will retain data, particularly video recordings where participants are identifiable. Follow your ethical commitments and data protection requirements.

2.3.3 Transcription

Depending on your needs, you may transcribe your recordings in full or create detailed summaries. Options include:

- Transcribing internally
- Outsourcing to a professional transcription service (ensure they meet confidentiality requirements)
- Using automated transcription tools (review for accuracy, especially for names and technical terms)

Virtual considerations

Many video conferencing platforms offer automated transcription. This can save time but should be reviewed for errors. Speaker identification may be inaccurate, and technical terms or names may be transcribed incorrectly.

2.3.4 De-identification

Before analysis or sharing, de-identify your data:

- Remove or replace participant names with pseudonyms



- Remove identifying details (specific places, organisations, roles)
- Consider whether any combination of details could identify someone
- Store the key linking pseudonyms to real identities separately and securely

2.3.5 Consolidating your data

If you conducted multiple focus groups or have multiple data sources, consolidate them systematically:

- Combine verbal discussion data with chat contributions (virtual)
- Integrate facilitator notes and observations
- Note any context that might affect interpretation
- Create a summary document for each focus group before beginning analysis

2.3.6 Analysis

In most cases, thematic analysis is the most appropriate method for analysing focus group data. The key steps are:

1. **Familiarisation.** Read and reread your transcripts and notes, making note of initial observations and patterns.
2. **Identifying emerging themes.** Note patterns or topics that recur across the data. Begin making a list of candidate themes. Highlight passages and connect them with themes.
3. **Discussing and refining themes.** If working in a team, discuss the themes together. Merge related themes under higher-level categories. For example, 'running out of time' and 'running out of money' might merge under 'limited resources'.
4. **Testing and finalising themes.** Go back to the data to test whether your themes hold up. Refine until you have a strong set of three to five themes clearly evidenced in the data.
5. **Selecting illustrative quotes.** Identify the best passages that illustrate each theme.
6. **Writing up.** Tell the story of your themes: how they fit together, what they mean, and what you have learned. Use quotes to illustrate but go beyond description to interpretation.

For more guidance on analysing qualitative data check out our Qualitative Data Analysis Guide at:

<https://www.fpconsulting.com.au/resources.html>.

2.3.7 Closing the loop with participants

Closing the loop means ensuring the participant's experience finishes satisfactorily without unanswered questions. This is an important mark of respect for their time and contribution.

- Thank participants again (by email or letter)
- Share findings when available, as you promised
- Keep participants informed about how their contributions are being used
- Provide contact details for any follow-up questions
- Consider inviting them to be involved in future activities if appropriate

Determine what closing the loop looks like for your project and make sure someone is responsible for following through.



3 Templates

The following templates are starting points to help you plan and conduct your focus groups. Adapt them as needed for your specific context.

3.1 Run sheet

In-person version (90 minutes, up to 8 participants)

Time	Topic	Resources/Prompts	Person
30 min before	Set up room, test AV equipment, print materials, put up signs	Information sheets, consent forms, recording equipment	
10 min before	Team in place; meet-and-greet ready to guide participants		
0:00 – 0:05	Welcome; distribute information sheets and consent forms to read and sign	Consent forms	
0:05 – 0:10	Introductions; explain purpose and ground rules; start recording	Switch on recording	
0:10 – 0:25	Question 1: [Insert question]		
0:25 – 0:40	Question 2: [Insert question]		
0:40 – 0:55	Question 3: [Insert question]		
0:55 – 1:10	Question 4: [Insert question]		
1:10 – 1:25	Question 5: [Insert question]		
1:25 – 1:30	Final comments; thank participants; explain next steps; stop recording		
After	Team debrief; secure all data		

Virtual version (60-minutes, up to 6 participants)

15 min before: Join meeting, test equipment, set up screen share, enable waiting room

5 min before: Admit participants, greet by name, check audio/video

0:00–0:05: Welcome, confirm consent, explain virtual ground rules (muting, hand raises, chat), start recording

0:05–0:15: Question 1

0:15–0:25: Question 2



0:25–0:35: Question 3

0:35–0:45: Question 4

0:45–0:55: Question 5

0:55–1:00: Final comments, thank participants, explain next steps, stop recording

After: Save recording and chat, debrief, make notes

Adjusting your run sheet

The number of questions and timing can be adjusted. For sessions over 90 minutes (in-person) or 60 minutes (virtual), build in a short break. Have 1-2 backup questions ready.

3.2 Plain Language Statement / Information Sheet

The below steps out the range of points that are typically included on formal documentation when inviting people to participate in focus groups. This information can be provided in different ways and formats – think of it like a checklist or way of confirming if you’ve provided enough detail for them to provide informed consent.

What is this focus group about?

This focus group is being carried out as part of [insert project name]. [Insert brief description of the project].

The project is being managed by [insert organisation]. If you have any questions about the project or this focus group, or wish to make a complaint, you can contact [insert name and contact details].

The focus group will be facilitated by [insert name] and their contact details are [insert details].

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited because [insert selection criteria].

How long will the focus group take?

The focus group will run for [insert duration]. During this time, we would like to talk to you and other participants about [insert topics].

Where will it take place? / How will I join?

[For in-person]: The focus group will be held at [insert venue and address].

[For virtual]: The focus group will be conducted online via [platform]. You will need a device with a camera and microphone and a reliable internet connection. A link to join will be sent to you by email. If



you need to download any software, please do this before the session. If you have trouble connecting, contact [name] on [phone number].

Will I be reimbursed for my time?

[Insert details about reimbursement, e.g., travel vouchers, gift vouchers, refreshments].

What are my rights as a participant?

Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time before or during the focus group with no negative consequences. You can also ask for your comments not to be used at any time until [insert date].

What is said in this focus group is confidential. We will be recording using [digital voice recorder / video / notes]. You will not be named in our reporting, and we will not share your identity with anyone outside the focus group. However, we cannot guarantee complete anonymity as other participants will be present.

What happens next?

The findings will be published [when / where / in what format]. We will share these with you [insert how].

Who can I contact for more information?

Contact [insert name and contact details].

3.3 Consent form

It is important that you are treated fairly as a participant and that you are fully informed about what will happen during and after the focus group. Please read the Plain Language Statement before completing this form. Please tick Yes only if you feel you have received sufficient information. If you have not, please ask the facilitator.

Statement	Yes	No
I have been informed of the purpose of the focus group. I understand it is part of [insert project name] and will inform [insert details].	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been informed of the contact details of the person I can go to for more information or to make a complaint.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time. I can also ask for my comments not to be used until [insert date].	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[For virtual] I understand that this focus group will be conducted online via video conferencing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[If recording] I consent to the focus group being recorded using [audio / video].	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



[For virtual] I understand that I should participate from a private space and am responsible for my own privacy during the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I am willing to give my informed consent to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3.4 Technical Checklist (Virtual Focus Groups)

Below are a range of things to check prior to undertaking a virtual focus group.

Before the session	Done
Meeting link created and sent to participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recording settings configured	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waiting room enabled	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet connection tested (wired preferred)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio tested (microphone and speakers)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video tested (camera positioned at eye level)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lighting checked (light on face, not behind)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Background checked (tidy or virtual background set)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Materials prepared for screen share	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run sheet and questions accessible	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant contact phone numbers accessible	<input type="checkbox"/>
Backup device ready with meeting link	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-facilitator briefed on their role	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notifications and other applications closed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chat ready with any links to share	<input type="checkbox"/>

You are ready!

With this guide and the templates provided, you have everything you need to plan and conduct effective focus groups, whether in-person or virtual. Remember that your skills will develop with practice – each focus group you facilitate will build your confidence and expertise.

Most importantly, enjoy the process!

