

## Concept paper: Focus Group

A small but demographically diverse and specific user group of people who gather for a discussion. In the group, a clearly defined topic is discussed in a (semi)structured way. The tool can be used in order to get more insight into the opinions and thoughts of a certain user group. With the help of a moderator, the discussion among participants may show their different viewpoints. In the context of urban development or other complex questions, focus groups with different user groups (like children, seniors, families etc.) can be realized in order to understand each group's perspectives on a topic.

| What methods/other tools/ techniques can be used while implementing the tool?  | Main aims while using the tool   |
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| Observation, negotiation, citizen forum.<br>Hand-raising, card polling, or a creative exercise at the beginning or end (e.g. letting the participants choose pictures associated with the given topic and tell what they think of it).   | To discuss the current situation, figure out reasons/solutions for problems, discuss the interventions to be implemented (e.g. new mobility services) and get feedback on them.  |
| How can the tool be used in each phase of the process (when developing age-friendlier and green mobility solutions)?   |  |
| As focus group is a very universal and flexible tool, it can be used in all phases of the process. However, it is best used in the <b>planning stage and development stages</b> to get a better understanding of the needs of target groups and potential solutions to problems. Additionally, it can be widely used in the <b>evaluation and feedback stages</b> when changes have been implemented as these help to develop a basic understanding about the target group's opinions that can then be validated quantitatively, e.g. through questionnaires or validate results of questionnaire. |  |
| What is the aim of engagement with this tool?  |  |
| Although focus groups can be used for all aims, the main aim is to <b>consult and collaborate</b> with target group as the tool allows for discussion on a concrete topic, which helps to gauge problems and solution. During discussions, it is also possible to share some <b>information</b> (can be background information about the current situation or planned developments) and <b>empower</b> participants if their input will be directly used in planning the new development.  |  |
| For how many people and how is the tool suitable (for one-time use)?   | How much effort is required from the participant and what influences that?   |
| A focus group must enable everyone to share their opinions and experiences, i.e. it is recommended to have <b>4-7 people in a group</b> . With less than 3 people, it is rather a (group) interview, not a focus group. The focus group can be repeated as many times a needed (e.g. with different user groups).  | <b>Some effort is required</b> as focus groups are held usually in a certain place, face-to-face. Therefore, participants need to be physically present and engaged in discussion. Usually, there is no need to study some materials beforehand in order to take part in focus groups. |

| Time needed to <u>prepare</u> using the tool and what influences the time needed?   | Time needed to <u>implement</u> the tool and what influences the time needed?  |
|---|--|
| <b>Some preparation required</b> - participants need to be invited, topics, questions, a guideline and materials for the discussion prepared, room rented, snacks and drinks delivered, etc.  | Depending on the size of the group and the schedule, a focus group may last <b>1.5-2.5 hrs</b> (recommended time is 1.5-2 hrs).  |
| Time needed to <u>summarize</u> using the tool and what influences the time needed?   | Price for the user of the tool and what influences the price   |
| As a focus group relies mostly on (moderated) discussion and is based on a questionnaire, only <b>some effort</b> is needed to summarize the discussion. However, if there is a need to take pictures, record audio/video and listen/watch it, it may be rather time consuming to go through the materials for compiling a summary.   | <b>Moderate cost</b> due to room rent, drinks and snacks, and moderator (sometimes it may be more efficient to have person from outside the organisation so that people are not afraid to give their opinions).    |
| SWOT on using the tool  |  |
| <b>STRENGTHS</b><br>Saves money and time (brings participants together instead of receiving feedback through other forms etc.), gives practical, detailed, qualitative information about their personal opinions.   | <b>WEAKNESSES</b><br>If one participant is too dominant, the others may start following their ideas; may lack balanced discussion; an inexperienced moderator may affect the discussion unfavorably.               |
| <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b><br>Get more practical information and advices for better output; disagreements that happen during the discussion liven up the debate and help different viewpoints to emerge; chance to discuss other connected topics as well.  | <b>THREATS</b><br>Participants may not have enough time to take part in the meetings; participants may be too shy or do not fit together and therefore there is rather a group interview not an active discussion. |
| How to use the tool?  |  |
| <b>How to prepare using the tool?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decide on the topic that shall be discussed</li> <li>Develop a guideline for the discussion</li> <li>Prepare materials you would like to discuss (paper material, videos, info-post design, etc.)</li> <li>Invite participants, secure venue</li> </ul> <b>How to implement the tool?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss with silver age people about the prepared material</li> <li>Take notes, pictures, videos and/or record the discussion</li> </ul> <b>How to follow-up using the tool?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hand out materials, make conclusions</li> <li>Summarize and analyse the results</li> <li>Inform participants about results</li> </ul> |  |

### Tips and hints for using the tool with people in silver age

- **Think of organizational issues** – such as that the venue should be easily accessible and located (think about your target group and potential participants), the session cannot be too long, drinks and snacks should be available in case of longer sessions. Make sure that the group will not be disturbed during the discussion.
- **Open questions are better** – as open questions leave more room for discussion, focus on these.
- **Draw conclusions during or at the end of the session** – this helps get valuable feedback and comments from the participants about the conclusion.
- **Encourage participants** – make sure that everyone has the opportunity to share their opinions/experiences without the fear of being dismissed or talked over.
- **Get creative** – consider using voting, post-its, questionnaires, etc. at the beginning or during the session so that the moderator gets quick input into how to start and guide the discussion.
- **Ensure you have a skilled moderator** – a skilled moderator does not offer their opinion or dominate the discussion, but rather guides it in a gentle and friendly manner, all the while ensuring that every participant can express their opinions.

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Focus groups (Institute of Baltic Studies)

