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| Tips for running a focus group |
| 2.11 – Sustainable transport in health care |
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# Introduction

Understanding why people travel the way they do and learning about their travel preferences, challenges and interests can help you develop travel plan actions that are most relevant to your workplace.

Focus groups are a common way to collect useful qualitative data on preferences and behaviours.

# Plan your session

* Be clear on your purpose and what you want to achieve. Are you exploring behaviours, issues and challenges? Do you also want to explore solutions?
* Write out your purpose and questions to guide discussion. Fit them to the time you have available.
* Decide whether you will run the focus group online or face-to-face. Consider the particular accessibility requirements for the format you choose.
* Decide if you are able to recruit enough people to have separate groups to explore different issues (such as one group for people who drive and one for people who use active modes, or one for administrative staff and one for clinical staff).

# Finding participants

* Offer incentives and promote them. Example incentives are a coffee voucher, morning tea or a prize draw.
* Pick times that suit the most people to ensure attendance.
* Seek senior management support to encourage people to attend.
* Assume some people will not show up and account for this. Aim for about 10 participants for each group.

# Running the focus group

* Explain the purpose and approach to your group.
* Seek consent to record the session so you can review and reflect on the discussion later.
* Set clear ground rules (such as respecting others’ comments, using the chat function in online forums).
* Introduce yourself and ask participants to introduce themselves.
* Use your questions to guide discussion.
* Seek input from all the group. Encourage others to speak if one or two dominate discussion.
* Encourage exploratory discussion and aim to build rapport.
* Be extra engaging – especially for online forums.
* It helps to have a co-facilitator or note-taker (for example, to manage multiple online chat responses).

# Analysing feedback

* Don’t just rely on your initial observations – these may be influenced by one or two more assertive participants.
* Review the recording of the discussion and ask your co-facilitator what they heard.

# Limitations – validate your findings

* **Small sample bias**: due to their small size, focus groups are at risk of not reflecting the sentiments of your whole workforce.
* **Observer bias**: participant comments may be influenced or changed by observer bias – they may tell you what they think you want to hear or may be influenced by social pressures from the group.
* Look for other ways to compare focus group findings, such as from staff surveys or discussions with your human resources area.

# Sample questions

These questions can help you structure a group discussion.

You will need to follow up with prompts or other exploratory questions based on what people say to clarify and understand what is influencing people’s perceptions or behaviours.

**Question: Let’s first talk about how each of you travel to work**:

* Why do you usually travel this way?
* What do you like about it?
* Is there anything you don’t like or find challenging?

**Question: Has anyone got to work a different way?**

* For example, if your car was in for a service? Tell me about that experience?
* Has anyone thought about getting to work a different way (such as public transport, carpooling, bike riding)? Why did you think about it? What stopped you?

**Question: Let’s explore a future world, where everything is in place to allow you to not use your car if you don’t want to.**

* How would you like to travel to work?
* What needs to change? What can your organisation do to help?

# Alternatives to focus groups

* **Travel survey**: comments from a travel survey may give you good insights into more pressing issues or suggestions for how to improve staff access and travel.
* **One-on-one conversations or conversations with small groups** in the tea room: look for opportunities to have short conversations with a variety of staff. Have one or two prompt questions to guide the brief chat.
* **Talk to people who are already using travel options that you are trying to encourage**: for example, find people who ride to work and discuss what works and what is a challenge.

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