

Service User Involvement Partnership – Tip sheet No 7

1.0 Conducting Service User Focus Groups

- 1.1 A focus group is a useful method of obtaining a service user perspective on a specific issue such as introducing, changing or terminating a work practice for example.

2.0 Areas for Consideration

2.1 Venue

Ensure that the venue for your consultation is accessible and comfortable for all participants of the group. Consider if the venue is local as some participants may have children to drop off and pick up from school or have medication to collect.

2.2 Transport

Participants tend to be giving their time on a voluntary basis therefore ensure that they are not out of pocket for any expenses incurred in attending. Participants should be provided with as much information and support as possible on getting to and from the venue.

2.3 Catering

Water, tea and coffee should be provided as a minimum.

2.4 Participation

Aim to attract as wide a representative group as you can. Use posters to advertise and ensure front line staff have the time and opportunity to promote the focus group and its topic. Ensure that on the day, participants know what they are involved in. This includes why is the focus group being conducted, who is seeking the information, where the information gathered is going and how the outcomes will be fed back to participants.

2.5 Topic

Be clear about the aim of the focus group and use methods which lend themselves to discussion and encourage the widest participation. Ensure that the work is structured. For example it might not be as productive simply to ask "should we introduce group work" but have this as the title.

The task could be broken down into “what are the positive aspects”
“What are the negative aspects” “what would be your solutions” and
“what other points would you like to make”

Ask experienced group workers from within the organisation to facilitate and scribe, or for increased objectivity, try to resource facilitators from a partner agency for example.

2.6 Language

It is important that the information you are providing is appropriate for the participants. Consider the language used, the use of jargon or abbreviations and provide written information in plain English.

2.7 Feedback

It is essential that all participants are provided with feedback on their input including what information was gathered, what happened to the information and what response there has been. As stated, you should be clear with participants at the start of the focus group how and when they should expect to receive feedback.

2.7 Thank You

It is important to ensure that you acknowledge the input that your participants have given.
You may want to consider offering participants a token of thanks for their participation such as a gift voucher for a nominal amount. Sometimes this can act as an incentive to encourage people to participate.

2.8 Evidencing Service User Involvement

Examples of evidencing how service users have participated may depend on the overall recording structures of the agency. An example might be to include the names of participants in a file dedicated to Service user involvement. Another method might be to construct an evaluation document to record service users’ experiences of participation for inclusion in individual care plans.