

COVID-19 Vaccines - Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Facilitation Guide

Focus group discussions (FGD) are an effective way to collect valuable information from communities about COVID-19 vaccines. FGDs can inform community education and vaccine roll-out efforts. This guide is intended for health departments, community-based organizations, and others interested in conducting FGDs. See the accompanying note taking guide and template for additional guidance.

The NRC-RIM would like to thank Dr. Ashli Owen-Smith from Georgia State University for collaboration on the questions outlined in this guide.

Materials and people needed:

- Video call platform
- Device or platform to record focus group discussion audio
- Facilitator
- Interpreter (if facilitator does not speak target language)
- Notetaker

Purpose

The interviewees representing community members will be asked to offer the perspective of their communities and will focus on knowledge, attitudes and practices. No personal identifying information will be shared in any reports or publications. The aims of this activity are to:

- Gather information about the knowledge, perceptions and beliefs held by participants and their communities regarding the COVID-19 vaccines;
- Gather information about factors related to hesitancy and acceptance of the COVID-19 vaccine within these communities, including myths and barriers; and
- Identify effective and appropriate sources and channels that these communities trust and prefer for information.



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Findings may be used to inform the creation and dissemination of vaccine messaging, and to identify gaps that need to be addressed and areas of opportunity to leverage. Depending on the organization, results from focus groups may also be used for publication/ external dissemination.

Sample Size and Characteristics

The goal for each focus group is 5 participants. Groups will be divided by both language and gender. Where appropriate to cultural considerations, they may also be separated by age. For example, there may be separate groups for 1) young women who speak the same language, 2) young men who speak the same language, 3) older women who speak the same language, 4) older men who speak the same language. Alternatively, offices may wish to hold some of their focus groups with a specific sub-group within the community the office feels is key to engage e.g., the elderly, essential workers, those of a specific religious background. Focus group sessions held with specific sub-groups do not need to be separated by gender or age unless this is deemed appropriate and plausible by offices. Ideally, recruited participants would be interested in participating in multiple focus group discussions over time.

Safeguarding Participant Information

Staff have an obligation to safeguard confidential and private information. Confidential and private information is any information that is personal and discrete in nature and related to focus group participants. This includes personally identifiable information. Personally-identifiable information is information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, either alone or when combined with other information. For example, a participant's full name, a participant's name and phone number, a participant's name and arrival date, etc. The following are steps to protect participant information: 1) Always be vigilant in keeping sensitive data secure and confidential; 2) Never share/discuss participants' sensitive data with others that are not permitted to view this information; 3) Never discuss participants' sensitive information in public or in an open space where others might overhear you; 4) Never leave your screen or open documents containing participant-related sensitive data unattended; 5) Delete documents and files being stored on your computer and/or other devices when asked to do so; 6) Never leave printouts of sensitive data – ensure they are always physically secured (e.g. in a locked drawer, cabinet, desk). In fact, you should refrain from printing out sensitive data all together. If you must print out information, shred printouts after the task is complete; 7) Report privacy incidents as soon as they occur.



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Conducting the Focus Group Discussion

It is essential that participants feel they are being listened to with empathy. Similarly, if a participant becomes upset or frustrated during the call, the facilitator should provide reassurance or ask the participant if they would like to leave the focus group discussion. Additionally, at the beginning of the focus group discussion, it is necessary to receive informed verbal consent from participants. Informed consent is “permission granted in the knowledge of possible risks and benefits of participation.” Informed consent ensures participants have the information they need to decide to or not to participate in the focus group discussion. To obtain informed verbal consent, the script below should be read by the facilitator to all participants at the start of the focus group discussion. If everyone agrees to participate in the focus group discussion, the facilitator should select “yes” to the informed consent question(s) below. If any individual does not agree to participate, thank them for their time and ask them to leave the call. Once they have left the call, check the “yes” option to the informed consent question(s) and proceed with the focus group discussion. If any individual agrees to participate at the start of the focus group discussion but decides to stop participating partway through, the facilitator should thank them for their time, then ask them if they agree to the office using the responses that they have provided so far. If they agree, thank them for their time and continue with the focus group discussion once they have left the call. If they do not agree, be sure to write the individual’s first name (do not write down their second name) in the “Notes” box below and note that they left the discussion early and would not like their responses used. Also make sure that the number entered into the “Number of participants” row in the table below does not include any individuals who do not agree to participate in the focus group discussion at the start of the session, nor any individuals who decide to withdraw partway through the focus group discussion and do not give permission for use of their responses before withdrawing.

Answering Questions About the Vaccine

During the focus group discussion, some participants may have questions about the COVID-19 vaccine. These should not be answered during the discussion. After the focus group discussion has ended and the notetaker has stopped the audio recording, someone may stay on the call to answer any questions that participants have. The facilitator should ask participants to hold any questions that they have about the vaccine until this time. Please also note that the time allocated to answering participants’ questions will be in addition to the 1 hour and 15 minutes (or 2 hours and 30 minutes if an interpreter is used) allocated to the focus group discussion.



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Focus group number:			
Number of participants:			
Focus group population (language group, gender, other):			
Office:			
Date of Activity: _ _	Day: _	Month: _	Year: _ _ _
Start Time:		End Time:	
Facilitator's name and email:			
Notetaker's name and email:			
Interpreter's name and email:			

Notes:



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Script

Introduction (10 minutes)

Facilitator [*READ*]:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. My name is _____. I will be asking the questions today and running the group. This is _____ who will be taking notes on what we discuss here today so we can make sure not to miss any of your thoughts. [If an interpreter is used:] This is _____ who is here to interpret for us today. The interpreter's job is to interpret everything we say to each other. If there is something you don't want me to know, please do not say it to the interpreter. Please pause after each sentence to allow the interpreter to accurately tell me what you have just said. The interpreter will not add to, change, or leave out anything that we say. If there is something you don't understand, please say so and the interpreter will repeat what I have said. _____ will be providing technological support for our call today, and will be able to help you with any technical issues.

We are talking to you today because we'd like to understand how your community feels about the COVID-19 vaccines, what information you have heard, and what information you would like to have in the future. When we say "community," we mean your friends and family members and others you know who speak the same language as you and who are also [say name of community here]. We are going to ask you all questions and then have a discussion where we hope to hear from everyone on the call. There are no right or wrong answers. The things we learn from you will be important to making sure you, your friends, family and others in your community get the information they need on the COVID-19 vaccine. This discussion will take approximately _____ [one hour and 15 minutes without an interpreter, two and a half hours with an interpreter].

This discussion is voluntary, meaning that you are answering these questions because you want to, not because you have to. If you prefer to not answer a question, that is okay. You can also leave the discussion at any time. This will not impact services that you receive from us.

We may share the aggregate data, or the general information that we learn, publicly so that others may learn from this discussion. This may include publishing the results externally. If you agree to participate in this discussion, we will be using your demographic information in our analysis and reports, including your gender, age, country of origin, ethnicity, language and length of time in the US. This will help us to identify trends and differences in



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responses. No names or personally identifiable information will be shared in reports or publications.

We are also asking everyone here to please keep what others share private so that everyone can talk openly and honestly. Also, we want you to ask questions or let us know if you don't understand something, or if something that we said is bothering you in any way.

We are recording this discussion so we can take notes and not miss anything that was said. The recording will also be transcribed by a translation company after the session. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside of the translation company or our team, and it will be deleted after the notetaker confirms their notes are correct and the translation company has transcribed it. However, we will be keeping the transcript of the recording and the notes taken by the notetaker. Notes and transcripts will also be translated into English by our translators. Your personally identifiable information will not be included anywhere in the transcript or notes. Notes and transcripts will be shared with the translators and our team.

I will have my camera on for the discussion, and I invite you to have your camera on or off, whichever is most comfortable for you. Thank you so much for being here and being willing to do this! Your thoughts and ideas are really helpful in fighting the pandemic.

Before we begin, do you feel comfortable participating in this discussion and answering my questions? Do you have any questions before we start?

I want to highlight three key points again.

- Your name and personally identifiable information will not be shared in any reports.
- Your participation in this interview is voluntary.
- You can stop answering questions or leave at any time. This will not impact the services you receive from us.

Do you understand, and do you agree to continue?

Informed consent was obtained from participants: Yes No

Informed consent was obtained from parent/caregiver for participant(s) younger than 18 years: Yes No N/A



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Focus Group Discussion Questions (1 hour)

I would first like to take two minutes to meet each other. Please share your name, and your favorite food. For example, my name is _____. My favorite food is _____. [Prompt participants to share.]

We will now begin recording (ensure Note Taker starts recording).

I want to ask you to think about your community – friends and family members and others you know who speak the same language as you and who are also [say name of community here].

1. Overall, how do you and people in your community feel about the COVID-19 vaccine? (15 minutes)
 - a. Probe: When it's available to you, do you think that people in your community will get the vaccine? Why or why not?
 - b. Probe: What do you or your community see as the benefits of getting vaccinated against COVID-19?
 - c. Probe: What do you or your community see as the downsides of getting vaccinated against COVID-19?
 - d. Probe: Does your community feel it is safe?
2. What information have you and people within your community heard about the COVID-19 vaccine? (15 minutes)
 - a. Probe: What kind of stories have you heard about the COVID vaccine?
 - b. Probe: Is it halal? (Adapt for other communities).
 - c. Probe: What does it contain and how does it work?
 - d. Probe: What is your understanding of the side effects?
 - e. Probe: When can you get the vaccine? Do you have an idea of how it will be provided?
 - f. Probe: What happens once you receive the vaccine? Do you still have to wear a mask or keep distance?
3. What would prevent you and members of your community from getting the vaccine? (10 minutes)
 - a. Probe: What concerns do you/ your community have about the vaccine?
 - b. Probe: What barriers could keep you from getting the vaccine? (e.g., access, childcare, transportation, etc.)
4. For people in your community who might be hesitant about getting the vaccine, what would encourage them to get it? (10 minutes)
 - a. Probe: What would make [your community] feel safe about getting a COVID-vaccine?



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- b. Probe: What information do people in your community wish they had about the vaccine?
- 5. What would you recommend as the best way to communicate information about COVID-19 vaccines to your community? (10 minutes)
 - a. Probe: Who would be the best person to share information about the vaccine or help teach people about a COVID vaccine? Healthcare provider, family, friends, religious leaders?
 - b. Probe: What are the best ways to reach people in your community? (e.g., face-to-face, WhatsApp, Facebook, email, mail, phone/text, YouTube?)
 - c. Probe: Where do you and people in your community get information about COVID-19 vaccines?
 - d. Probe: Does your community prefer information to be written or spoken?

Closing Script (5 minutes)

This concludes the questions. Thank you again for participating in this discussion today. We know that your time and ideas are valuable, and we would like to give each of you a ___ gift card to thank you. You will receive this gift card via email or text message, and I will follow up with you by next week to confirm that I have your correct information. If you have any questions following this discussion, you can contact me at _____. Thank you.



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