

How to Conduct a Focus Group

A focus group is a method to gain deeper insight and understanding of personal opinions and experiences. Focus Groups can be used to tease out the barriers and challenges faced and understand why people feel the way they do. Without this insight we often plan and decide what we *think* the target group needs and wants, rather than what they actually need and want.

Whilst surveys will give a broad overview of needs and wants, a focus group will allow for more in depth understanding and work out the finer details of what is needed.

How to plan a focus group.

1. Define your goals

Write down your aims before you recruit any participants. Establish the questions you are trying to understand.

- To understand the barriers and challenges experienced by female coaches
- To understand how and when coaches feel supported
- To establish what actions, need to be taken to develop and retain female coaches

2. Define your target audience

Decide how you will select participants for your focus group. You should ensure that your participants selected will give a fair representation of your coaching base. Ensure you get a spread of age group, demographic, gender of athletes trained and level of coach. You may conduct a focus group with those who are no longer coaching. You may run more than one focus group and split focus groups by region or coaching level, junior coaches, senior coaches, former coaches etc.

3. Decide your venue

Focus groups can be in person or online. If in person, ensure your location is quiet and a relaxed environment where people feel comfortable to share opinions and thoughts.

You may need to host the focus group online. Whilst this will cut down on travel time for participants and enable a spread of geographical locations, this is harder to facilitate and sometimes more effort is needed by the facilitator to get the participants to engage and contribute.

4. Design your questions

Aim for questions that don't elicit a simple "yes" or "no" response. Instead, use open-ended questions that allow participants to elaborate on their answers.

Some questions you can use focus groups to answer

- Outline your coaching environment. Who do you coach, how many hours do you coach, do you coach on your own or with a coaching team?
- What do you enjoy about your coaching?
- What barriers or challenges do you face in your coaching environment?
- Do you feel respected and supported by your club, organisation or national federation?
- Do barriers to progression in coaching exist? Some examples or prompts - professional activity, income, education, family life vs coaching.

- What strategies would you propose to your club, school, association, federation to address the under-representation of women in coaching in their particular context?
- What actions can their governing bodies and themselves implement to address this.

5. Recruit your participants

Try to keep focus groups small so that everyone gets a chance to respond. For example, if you have one hour and want to ask five-six questions, try not to exceed 10 participants so there is time for discussion around each question.

6. Running your focus group

You will need a facilitator or moderator. It's also a good idea to have an assistant present to take notes and potentially record (subject to prior approval) the focus group discussion for later review.

Start the session by thanking everyone for coming. Then briefly explain the purpose of the event you're organising and how the information will be used.

Here are some key things to remember when moderating the focus group:

- Paraphrase long or ambiguous comments from participants to make sure you've understood them correctly.
- Stick to your moderating role: Avoid becoming a participant in the actual discussion.
- Make sure you're not asking leading questions or affecting people's responses with your tone or body language.
- Set (and enforce) some rules for the discussion to avoid people interrupting each other.

Once the session has finished, thank them for coming. Perhaps provide contact details for if they wish to follow up with any further feedback or thoughts in the days after the session

7. Analysis the Results

Review your notes and recording. If you have a recording you may wish to transcribe the conversation to enable you to pull out and focus on the important points.

List the points made and categorise them by themes, for example – barriers, support, suggested actions.

Develop a summary report including the findings and conclusion. Share with key stakeholders, including the participants themselves. Use the insight from the focus groups to develop your club or organisations Action Plan for women in coaching.

You may wish to share the summary report, and later the Action Plan, with the participants so they understand how their contribution is leading to action.

References

EventBrite, 2021. *How to Run a Focus Group and Gain Maximum Attendee Insights*. Published: March 2021.