

**COST Action TU1002 Accessibility Instruments for Planning Practice in Europe  
WG 3 Task: Guidelines for Focus Group session as part of accessibility workshop  
evaluation.**

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The guidelines are based on personal experience with laypersons participants, usually recruited in early research phases of safety, health or education issues that concerned parents, road user groups or teachers. The guidelines were adapted to the special situation of participants who are all professionals and instead of being recruited they have participated together in a day-long technical workshop.

**Structure of FG discussion**

Seating around a round or oval table.

**Welcome and short introduction;** something like:

We are here to exchange opinions and impressions about the workshop and the accessibility instrument you learned about and practiced today. We would like to do this in a format of a Focus Group, a procedure that many of you probably know about. It is simply a somewhat structured discussion among yourselves, so that everyone has a chance to express an opinion or react to what others say.

I will moderate the discussion in the group and [my partner] will help me to listen and record the session.

There are few ground rules we have to follow:

Each of you expresses a personal opinion or experience and there is absolutely no “wrong” opinion.

Participants will talk in turns, cued by the moderator and you can react in a free discussion as long as no one is interrupting / disrupting someone else’s talk and not dominating the discussion. I ask you to respect these rules and each other’s views, as well as to be active participants.

We expect the session to last about two hours.

**Introducing of participants**

If there were no personal self- introductions at the workshop, start by introducing yourself. This will be a model of relevant personal information.

academic- professional background,

current job description, responsibility, where, years of experience in that job,

prior familiarity with the particular accessibility instrument,

prior familiarity with other accessibility instruments,

prior experience with a project task similar to that in the workshop,

prior experience in an equalitarian group- work, team-work, on a planning /

evaluation task.

## List of topics for discussion

Opinions about the planning / evaluation task

Opinions about the accessibility instrument used

Opinions about the process of the workshop

Opinions about the applicability of the instrument to their professional work

Moderator and partner should have a list in big font (sheet of paper or cards) of topics and subtopics that need to be covered in the FG, to be monitored during the session. Topics covered are check-marked. The primary role of the assistant partner moderator is to record the session (depending on skill, directly to a computer, or a paper pad; audio recording as backup if participant agree). He should also keep track of the topics covered and alert the moderator to a topic suitable for discussion at a given point.

## General procedure of conducting the discussion session

*Start with an open general question* about the workshop. Whoever wants to talk will talk and, most likely, will address some of the topics in the (hidden) list the moderator has prepared in advance. Let other people participate, react to others.

As long as discussion is flowing, relevant, without any single person dominating it, let it be.

Encourage expression of subjective experiences, feelings; not every opinion must be backed up by hard proof.

Be sensitive to use of different terms for same concept by people from different backgrounds.

When spontaneous discussion dries out, or needs to be halted, moderator will take the lead and address directly each person who has not participated so far. She might say “Michel, what is your view on what was said here?” or she could move to the next phase of the discussion.

*In the second phase*, the moderator picks up a specific topic from the list, and informs the participants that each of them, in turn, will address the topic and express his or her opinion / impression / suggestion. No reaction or interruption is expected.

Moderator is to help the speaking person, if necessary, to express her view more clearly, by reframing what was said (did you mean that so and so?) or a direct prompting question to clarify (e.g. and why do you think it happens?) Generally, a yes/ no kind of answer will require a prompt by moderator to elicit a more detailed response.

After the round of opinions about a given topic was completed, moderator will ask for reactions, comments about all what was said about the topic.

It is useful to have participants discuss possible reasons for differences of opinions and experiences.

Depending on the flavour of the discussion and reactions (diversity of opinions, support, , disagreement, etc.), moderator might take a vote (‘how many of you think that so and so’ is preferable to asking ‘how many agree with Michel’) or request members to come up with a summary statement that represents fairly what the participants have expressed.

Each of the remaining topics that were not addressed so far needs to be presented to the participants in the manner of phase 2. It is not necessary to stick to a rigid order of topics; natural flow of discussion and natural associations are as important.

A useful method to intervene in the event of disrupted / off-track / discussion is to signal the last speaker to stop, and reframe what he said (e.g. 'so what you mean is so and so, you made it clear now') in such a way that immediate transition to another person or to another topic can be made.

Moderator generally refrains from expressing personal opinions, but may observe that she has had similar experience, as other participants.

*The last phase of the session* is a request to all participants to make two summary statements, one about the workshop and one about the FG session. They can say anything they want, for about one minutes for each experience.

Moderator should also make a summary statement about the session, generally complimenting and thanking participants.