



Guidelines for implementing focus groups

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1. Defining a focus group in REACH project

A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement or idea. In contrast to one-to-one meetings, a focus group provides the opportunity for a wider range of stakeholder to give their opinion on a topic, to learn from one another and brainstorm together. Thus, by engaging different stakeholders innovative ideas could be developed due to the sharing of expertise and experiences.

A focus group in case of REACH project will be a moderated group of stakeholders dealing or familiar with households with low incomes. This focus group should be consisted of representatives of energy poor households, social work experts, unions, associations, NGOs, local authorities, church representatives, project partners and any other relevant stakeholders who could provide feedback on the design, promotion and implementation of household visits in in the pilot areas.

2. Aims of the focus group

The aim of the focus group is to help project partners to:

- Involve fuel poor households;
- Make the promotional campaign for the visits appealing to households;
- Enable the consortium to determine promising and successful implementations;
- Form local partnerships;
- Raise awareness about energy poverty and people in risk

3. Who should participate in the focus group?

In order to implement successful household visits and empower vulnerable households, each partner should contact relevant stakeholders and invite them to participate in a focus group. An important aspect to consider when inviting stakeholders for a focus group is to decide which ones could be most useful for the implementation of the household visits, in order to provide you with useful feedback and to support the foreseen activities. The relevant groups and possible stakeholders could include:

- Representatives of vulnerable households;
- Social centers;

- Unions and associations of people with disabilities;
- Church representatives;
- Home care centers;
- Clubs of Retired People;
- Organizations working with low income households (Caritas, Red cross);
- Unemployed people organizations;
- Job centers
- Schools
- Wider stakeholders (local authorities, community groups, training providers).

Each project partner should also consider the local situation and the cultural circumstances:

- What kind of organizations are available in the region?
- Which ones are practically dealing with vulnerable people and low income households?
- Are there any other local organizations familiar with energy poverty?

4. How to attract focus group participants?

Attracting social actors to get involved in the project is a key point for its success. Each partner can organize one to one interviews, make a phone call or make a group meeting with targeted organizations in order to attract them to participate in the focus group, as well as support the project in general. During those meetings it is encouraging to use arguments that would help you to attract these stakeholders.

You can use the following advices when targeting social actors. Of course, the arguments each partner uses have to be relevant to the local situation, culture and circumstances

a) Provide information about the project ideas and goals

- International project, going to be implemented in 4 countries;
- Free audit of energy poor households;
- Reduction of energy and water use;
- Household will receive targeted advices and recommendations ;
- Fostering energy efficiency and rational use of energy.

b) Use arguments, for instance

- Through the actions they may get better publicity;
- Organizations may improve their image;
- The project might help them in their daily work;

- They might get new members;

c) Explain their participation's importance

- Explain that most of the vulnerable households are unlikely to trust a service they have not heard of and people they do not know;
- Households may need to overcome the possible frustration caused from the living conditions;
- Their participation provides visibility for the project and wider public acceptance;
- Their participation might result in new partnerships and initiatives;
- Overcoming household doubts and reservations is vital.

d) Closing the meeting

- Summarize the next steps;
- Thank them for their time.

5. Focus groups

Once members have accepted to participate in the focus group, each partner should set an adequate date, time and place for it. The focus group will serve as a platform for discussion among the participants and everyone could contribute with ideas, share concerns, provide suggestions for developing solutions in order to help project partners to structure the campaign, to target households and to implement the visits. Before the start of the focus group make sure you prepare a set of questions and topics you want to discuss.

POSSIBLE CONTENT OF THE FOCUS GROUP MEETING

a) Make an Introduction

- Thank participants for coming;
- Remind them the purpose of the Focus group meeting and the programme of the meeting.

b) Exchange information between the members of the focus group

- Ask every member of the focus group to introduce themselves and to provide information what are they dealing with;
- Thus members could be able to exchange additional information between their organizations in future.

c) Explain project goals

- Explain project goals once again;
- Explain the implementation of the household visit;
- Explain the role of the energy adviser;
- Give example of ACHIEVE project;
- Show a video example of implementing a household visit (Youtube, ACHIEVE project).

d) Make an open discussion

- Channels for identifying households suffering – or at risk – from energy poverty;
- If there are specific categories of households that should be targeted;
- How to win the confidence of target households;
- ;
- What criteria should be used to identify those most in need;
- How to communicate with energy poor households.

e) Getting feedback

- Participants fill in questionnaires.

f) Make notes

- Do not forget to make notes.

g) Closing the focus group seminar

- Summarize next steps;
- Thank the participants for coming.

Notes

- If you are providing lunch and /or other refreshments - you need to decide on when this best fits in with your programme.

6. Suggested time table of the activities

Month		Activity
1	May	<p>Develop ideas – what, when, where, how, who etc.?</p> <p>Develop ideas - how to attract stakeholders?</p> <p>Develop ideas - how to get the “most useful” people there?</p>
2	June	<p>Getting in touch with possible stakeholders.</p> <p>Setting meetings with possible stakeholders.</p> <p>Attracting stakeholders.</p>
3	July	<p>Keep in touch with attracted stakeholders and key people.</p> <p>Design the focus group seminar(s).</p> <p>Plan what information will you give participating stakeholders?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In advance? - On the day? - After the event? <p>What questions will you discuss and ask?</p> <p>How will you record it? Who will take minutes?</p> <p>How will you get feedback from them?</p>
4	Aug	<p>Work on the points noted in “July” above</p> <p>Keep in touch with key people.</p>
5	Sept	<p>Run focus group seminar(s)</p> <p>Documentation</p>
6	Sept – end of the project	<p>Run focus groups.</p> <p>Implement the visits.</p> <p>Documentation</p>

Partners



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www.focus.si



Society for sustainable energy development, Croatia

www.door.hr



Energy agency of Plovdiv, Bulgaria

www.eap-save.eu



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