Technology for Social Justice Field Scan: Focus Group Facilitation Guide

The Technology for Social Justice Field Scan (t4sj.co) is a participatory action research project intended to better understand the types of work currently being done with technology for social justice and in the public interest, as well as the pathways people take into this work. The goal is to identify people, groups, and networks who work in this space, including those who are not 'the usual suspects' in the civic technology world, and to learn from them: what their paths into the work have been; what they see as their greatest constraints; where they see barriers; and what they feel is most needed to grow and diversify the field. One of the methodological tools we are using is focus groups. This document, developed by the t4sj core team and partners, is our shared guide for how to run a focus group as part of our research process.

Goals of the Focus Group

The goal of this focus group is to gather diverse practitioners in the field to discuss, in a structured way, people's definitions of the field, pathways into the work, supports and barriers, and visions for the future.

Who to gather for the Focus Group

We want to attract **practitioners**: people who see themselves as practitioners doing tech related work of some kind within their organizations, groups, institutions, or movements, but don't *necessarily* see themselves as "technologists" (although they might!)

- We want gender parity (at least), and we want to create a trans & GNC friendly space, center POC, provide translation or interpretation if needed, childcare if needed, and include people at various ages & stages of life.
- Overall we are interested in a diversity of perspectives, including people working in: grassroots, nonprofit, cooperatives, tech policy, municipal, various levels of government, some private sector, and so on.
- Note that we may or may not want to invite funders to be present for one or more of the focus groups.
- Youth under 18 year of age need parental or guardian consent to participate.

All of that said, we also want to keep it open for each partner to conduct focus group with the folks you want to prioritize, based on balancing larger project goals with your current work. (Note: when you share recordings and key takeaways from your focus group back with the project, please include a few sentences about how you prioritized focus group participants).

Preparing for your Focus Group

Here are some key steps to take in preparation for your focus group:

- Group size for focus groups should be between 5-7 people; if you will have more people attending, arrange for as many facilitators as you need in order to have smaller group breakouts.
- Reserve a space that will be easily accessible, and if you will have breakouts, if at all possible find a space that allows breakouts to meet in separate rooms (for sound).
- Each facilitator should have a sound recording device that they know how to use (mobile phone is fine, but be sure to prep and test the app you will use for recording).
- Each facilitator please read the entire facilitation guide beforehand.
- Facilitation team meet beforehand to walk through the entire focus group.
- Write agenda and goals on butcher paper, project it, and/or share a printed copy with all participants.
- Make pens and paper available to all participants.
- Ground Rules: projected, posted on butcher paper, and/or printed.
- **Consent forms** sent to participants in advance; also have printed copies of these at event. For youth below 18, please seek parental or guardian consent first.
- **Demographic survey** sent to participants in advance, and also have link where participants can fill it out just before or after event.
- Double check the Materials list (below) to be sure you have gathered, printed, and prepared everything you need for your workshop!
- Arrange food and drinks, with attention to people's dietary needs, if possible.
- Organize translation, interpretation, if needed by any participants.
- Organize childcare, if needed.
- Organize transportation, if needed.
- Facilitators please arrive 30 minutes early for space setup and prep.

Checklists: Materials, Preparation, Closeout

Materials List	❏ Audio recorders (mobile phones); People to volunteer their mobile phones, make sure they are full charged, and on airplane mode; be sure each facilitator has tested the audio recording app they are going to use. ❏ Projector (optional, or write out the rules of the space and post) ❏ Pens/paper ❏ Name tags ❏ <u>Sign-in sheet</u> ❏ Facilitation Guide printout (one per facilitator) ❏ <u>Printed Terms Worksheet</u> (one per participant) ❏ <u>Printed Consent Forms</u> (one per participant) ❏ Index cards (one per participant) ❏ FOOD (optional but recommended! Enough for attendees).
Preparation in advance of workshop	❏ Each facilitator should have a sound recording device and know how to use it. ❏ Each facilitator has read the entire facilitation guide (for focus group leading tips, etc.) ❏ Facilitation team has met to walk through the focus group. ❏ Write agenda and goals on butcher paper (or project it). ❏ Pens and paper are available to all participants ❏ Ground Rules projected, printed, or butchered ❏ Consent forms sent to participants in advance, and also have printed at event ❏ <u>Demographic survey</u> sent to participants in advance, and also have link where participants can fill it out just before or after event ❏ Facilitators please arrive 30 minutes early for space setup
At Conclusion of workshop	❏ Notetaker notes collected and uploaded (Follow file-naming guidelines below) ❏ Audio recorders collected - all facilitators sound to be uploaded into partners' respective Dropbox folders and transcribed. ❏ Collect sign-in sheet, transcribe, and upload in partners' Dropbox folder ❏ Collect consent forms, scan, and upload them in Dropbox folder ❏ Ask folks to complete demographic survey if they have not yet done so

	❏ Facilitation team meets to debrief, share key takeaways from conversation, possible improvements to focus group

Focus Group Guide: One Page Summary

(Two-hour focus group summary, using 12pm as example start time)

12:00	**People Arrive, Grab Food** (5 Min) As folks enter the space, invite them to grab food	[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]
12:05	**Welcome and Project Overview** (5 Min) Welcome attendees, introduce the session. Give a brief introduction about T4SJ field scan. Guide participants to pick up food and take their seats.	[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]
12:10	**Introduce the Participants** (5 min) If there are twenty people or less, have the room say their name, their pronouns, and their affiliations. If there are more more than twenty people, participants should introduce themselves in the smaller groups.	[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]
12:15	**Introduce the focus groups & ground rules** (5 min) Facilitators describe what we are about to do, introduce ground rules for the conversation, and ask if participants want to add to the ground rules.	[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]
12:20	**Focus Group Breakouts Discussion** (60 min) Assigned facilitators go to their group. Get volunteer note-taker and reporter. Facilitators introduce the focus group questions, keep the conversation moving, ensure participation, remind people to move up, move up. (3 questions, 20 minutes per question).	[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]
13:20	**Reconvene & Reportback** (10 min) Reconvene the small groups back into the room. Ask your reporter to briefly summarize key takeaways from your group.	[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]

13:30	**5 MINUTE BREAK** Because we are humans and need breaks!	
13:35	**Vision** (20 min) Introduce the magic techno-wand question about vision for the future.	**[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]**
13:55	**Wrap-up** (5 min) Thank participants; reminders about demographic survey; and ask that they follow the development of the project on the t4sj website.	**[Add Facilitator's Initials: ___]**
14:00	**END**	
Post	**Facilitators meet to debrief** (15-20 min)	

Full Focus Group Guide

People Arrive, Grab Food (5 min)

People come in and grab food and take their seat

Welcome and Project Overview (5 min)

Welcome	*Welcome workshop participants, open session*
Project intro	1. *Introduce facilitation team and the focus group*
	2. *Describe this project!* "The Technology for Social Justice Field Scan is a participatory action research project intended to better understand the types of work currently being done with technology for social justice (and more broadly, in the public interest), as well as the pathways people take into this work. The goal is to identify people, groups, and networks who work in this space, including those who are not 'the usual suspects' in the civic technology world, and to learn from them: what their paths into the work have been; what they see as their greatest constraints; where they see barriers; and what they feel is most needed to grow and diversify the field."
	3. *Introduce organizations:* RAD, OTI, Upturn, Media Mobilizing Project, Coworker.org, Hack the Hood, Mayfirst/People Link, Palante Tech Coop, Vulpine Blue, and the Engine Room.
	4. **Notify participants that we will be recording this session**

Introduce the Participants (5 min)

[Introduce the participants if there are 20 people or less; if more than 20, introductions should be in small groups.]

Introductions	*Ask participants to introduce themselves - their names, pronouns, and affiliations.*

Introduce the Focus Group and Ground Rules (5 min)

Focus group intro	*Tell participants what we are about to do; introduce the focus groups*
Ground rules	"We have some ground rules we'd like to use. Here they are:" ● Respect for Everyone ● Open Minds Only ● Oppression Exists-We Fight against It Here ● Move Up/Move Back ● This is a Place for Solidarity ● Be Aware of Time ● One Diva One Microphone ● Default to Trust "Are these OK for everyone? Should we clarify any of them, or add any additional rules?"

Focus Group Breakout Discussion (60 min)

Breakout	*Breakout into groups of 5-6, each with a facilitator. Figure out beforehand how you want to organize the breakouts (random, by interest, by neighborhood, etc).*
Group Introductions	*If introductions were not done in the full group, ask each person to share their name, pronouns, their organization and what they work on, why they decided to attend this focus group.*
Note taker	*Before you start the discussion, have the group select a note taker*
Reporter	*Request that a volunteer prepare to report back the key parts of the discussion to the larger group.*
Start recording!	Don't forget to start recording. Make sure that all speakers speak into the mic. If you're using a phone, suggest you ask participants to pass the phone around and only speak if they have the phone.

Focus Group Questions:

1. **Definitions (20min):**

(Instructions for facilitator: Hand out the terms worksheet to each participant, share pens/pencils).

Facilitator says: "As we have been studying this field at the intersection of technology and social justice, we've noticed that people use different terms/phrases to describe this space. We want to talk about definitions and framings. We have made a worksheet of the terms we have come across."
   a. Looking at the worksheet, circle the phrase/terms you identify with.
   b. What terms are missing? Add them.
   c. Which terms do you think do not belong in this space? Cross them off.
   d. Discuss!
      i. (What are the politics of these different terms and framings?) *use this question if there is time*
      ii. (What does the phrase 'public interest technology' mean to you'?) *use this question if there is time*

2. **Pathways, Support, & Barriers (20min):**

(Instructions for Facilitator: give participants one index card each. Ask them to complete the madlibs below).

Facilitator says: **"**Thinking about the work you do, complete the following: "I was doing _____x, now I do _____Y, and someday I hope to do _____Z." Fill in the blanks, then share with the group. All good if you don't know what you want to do next, feel free to share what comes to mind (no pressure :))."

   a. Share back your madlibs. After each person shares:

   b. Discuss the **support** you received, or would need, to get from x to y to z, for example, mentorship, fellowships, or recognition.

   c. Discuss the **barriers** along the way, for example, individual, institutional, or structural.

3. **Good & Bad Micro Stories (20min)**

(Instructions for Facilitator: give participants one index card each. Ask them to write one story

on the front side and another on the back of the index card, using the prompt below. Then: discuss!)

Facilitator says: "Please share a brief and concrete story (in just a couple sentences that fit on an index card) of a tech project that was deployed with good intentions, that ended up *harming the community it was meant to serve*. On the flip side of the card, please share a story of a tech project that was *effective and produced a desired outcome.*
        a. Note: yes, it can be the same project on both sides of the card :)
        b. If needed: do you see any similarities among things that worked/didn't work/our stories?

Reconvene & Reportbacks from small groups (10 min)

If you had breakouts, everyone reconvenes in one large group. Reporters provide quick reportbacks (divide 10 minutes by the number of breakout groups).

5 MINUTE BREAK (5 min)

Vision (20 min)

★	*Facilitator holds up the recording device and says:* "Imagine this is a magic techno-wand!"
	
	"If you had this magic techno-wand [YES!], what would you change? It could be something about the way technology is developed, used, or exists. It could be about who gets to do tech work, who controls tech decisions, who gets access to funding, or really any aspect of the conversation we've had today."
	
	Pass the wand around the room, each person state:
	   - "If I had a magic techno-wand I would change _____
	
	Follow-up questions
	   ● What needs to happen to make your magic real?
	   ● Why is this particular change important for you?
	   ● What's the biggest threat to your vision?

Wrap-up (5 min)

| Wrap-up | *Thank everyone for their time!* *Remind participants about the purpose of the overall study, what will be done with the results. Facilitator share how participants can continue to find out how the project is going.* *Remind participants to take the demographic survey, if they have not already.* |

END

Debrief (15-20 min)

Facilitators meet to debrief. Take notes on key takeaways! Confirm responsibilities for uploading recordings and notes.

After the Focus Group

- Ask folks to complete demographic survey if they have not yet done so
- Facilitation team meets to debrief, share key takeaways from conversation, and take general notes about possible improvements to focus group and the participants
- Audio recorders collected - all facilitators sound to be in partners' respective Dropbox folder for transcription
- Notetaker notes collected and uploaded in Dropbox folder
- Collect sign-in sheet, transcribe, and upload them in Dropbox folder
- Collect consent forms, scan and upload them in Dropbox folder