

Pre-Occupancy Focus Group Protocol

Developed by the VERiS Research Centre

Supplementary Resource to the Culture of Sustainability Engagement Guide for Organizations

About this document

On the following pages you will find a sample pre-occupancy focus group protocol, that can be used/adapted as needed to host potential focus groups with members of your organization, or otherwise. This protocol was originally used as part of a broader culture of sustainability (COS) research study with organizational members prior to their move into the evol1 green building in Waterloo, Canada. That research helped to inform parts of the COS Engagement Guide for Organizations, released by the VERiS Research Centre (link here), of which this protocol is being provided to practitioners as a supplementary resource.

This is designed as a ‘pre-occupancy’ protocol, assessing organizational members’ experiences and understanding of COS prior to moving into a new building space that may presumably influence organizational COS development still further (particularly as evol1 is a high-performing green building). The protocol can be readily adapted to guiding the hosting of other pre-occupancy focus groups as well – for instance, if your organization is in the midst of moving spaces – and may be further adaptable to other contexts where you wish to explore organizational members’ understandings of organizational COS.

Some the components of this protocol may be more useful to you than others; hence, feel free to borrow from and/or adapt the protocol as is useful to better supporting and informing your own organizational COS efforts.



Culture of Sustainability Engagement Guide for Organizations © 2024 Supplementary material

To access the full Engagement Guide, visit: <https://veris.wlu.ca/assets/documents/cos-engagement-guide.pdf>

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Sample Pre-Occupancy Focus Group Protocol

(developed first as part of a *COS research study at evolv1*, see above)

Employees and/or Managers:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. As you know, our purpose in conducting this research is to learn about [PURPOSE OF RESEARCH; example: *to learn about evolv1 and how the building's future inhabitants, including you, experience the transition from their current workplace into evolv1*]. We are interested in hearing your insights regarding your current workplace as well as your expectations for the new one. As current employees of [ORGANIZATION] about to move into [BUILDING/WORKSPACE] your insights are of great importance. This focus group provides us with an opportunity to gather qualitative data and go into more depth, which will provide an important supplement to the recent survey. We are looking forward to learning from you during this meeting.

This focus group will be recorded in order to transcribe it to text. Feel free to ask me any questions that might arise during the interview. We can also pause the recording if you would like to clarify anything off the record. This conversation is not meant to be stressful. There are no right or wrong answers. If you want me to repeat or reword any questions just let me know. You can also elect not to answer any of the questions.

Because this is a focus group, rather than a one-on-one interview, it is vital that we respect each other's contributions, both during and after the session. I have created this agreement that I'll ask everyone to sign showing that you agree to six principles. *[Pass around the sheet]*

These principles are:

1. Only one person speaks at a time
2. We must all protect each other's privacy and confidentiality - What is shared in the room stays in the room
3. There are no right or wrong answers to questions, just ideas, experiences, and opinions, which are all valuable and must be treated with respect
4. If you disagree with someone you are welcome to share your thoughts with the group in a respectful manner
5. It is important to hear all sides of an issue - both the positive and negative
6. It is important to hear all sides of an issue - from men and women, Canadians and non-Canadians, younger and older, etc.

Do you have any questions or comments before I start recording?

[Wait for response and respond to any questions]

I'm going to turn on the recorder now.

[Turn on recorder]

Please clearly state your name before responding to the questions. This will allow us to link your answers throughout the focus group. In the transcript, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. If you like, you can pick your own pseudonym.

1. First topic: Current building context

I would like to start our conversation by asking you about your experience of your current physical work environment. In a few words, how would you describe the work environment in your current office building?

Prompts:

- a. Impact on productivity*
- b. Impact on wellbeing*
- c. Meeting needs to a physical space*
- d. Supporting interactions among employees from same organization*
- e. Interaction with employees of other organizations*
- f. What could be improved*
- g. Expectation for the new space*

2. Second topic: Current sustainability practices

As you know, we are trying to understand how the new building/workspace and its environmental features may affect the people in the building. For that purpose, I have a question about environmental values and practices within your organization.

How would you describe the current culture within your organization related to environmental sustainability? That is, how is it valued, what are the current practices, and are there any obvious visual clues that sustainability is something that is a part of this organization? We are not trying to judge or evaluate your organization. Our goal is to study potential change over time as you move into the new building/workspace.

Prompts:

- a. Values*
- b. Leadership actions and decisions*
- c. Practices*
- d. Signs and language*
- e. Building features & resources (e.g., bus pass)*
- f. Policies and regulations*
- g. Who is the driver of environmental practices*
- h. Any planned changes?*
- i. Barriers*
- j. Potential supports*
- k. Expectations for the new building and how it will support sustainability*

3. Third Topic: Current sense of community and interaction with other employees

We are also interested how the building is having an impact on people's sense of community and their interaction with other people.

- a.** How would you describe the current sense of community among the employees of your organization/company?

Prompts:

- i. How is that supported by the leadership/management?*
 - ii. What about members of marginalized communities (e.g., racialized, recent immigrants, people disabilities, transgender individuals)?*
 - iii. General interactions among employees*
- b.** What about interactions with employees from other organizations in the same office building?
 - c.** What, if any changes would you like to see in this regard?
 - i. Expectations for new building*

4. Fourth topic: Meaningful engagement

Another issue we are interested in is community engagement as well as engagement in other things people may perceive as meaningful.

How would you described the current situations in your organization in regard to being involved in something meaningful?

Prompts

- a. What are those opportunities?*
- b. What are people involved in?*
- c. Desire for more opportunities?*
- d. Barriers*
- e. Things that do or could support engagement*
- f. Expectations for the new building*

5. Fifth topic: Expectations

We have already touched upon some aspects of what you think things will be like in the new building/workspace.

Are there any other expectations that you and others in your organizations have for the new building/workspace that we have not yet touched upon?

Prompts:

- a. Familiarity with the new building/workspace*
- b. What do people talk about in regard to the move?*
- c. What are they/you excited about?*
- d. What are their/your worries?*

6. Sixth topic: Past successful and failed change efforts

Part of our goal is to support your organization in creating a positive culture within the new building. This may require some change efforts and creative innovation. Thus, it is useful to understand what works well and what not so well in fostering change within your organization. *[Re-emphasize confidentiality]*

- a.** What, if any, failed or almost failed change efforts have you experienced? What are the lessons learned from that?
- b.** What, if any, successful change efforts have you experienced? What were the success factors in these cases?

7. Seventh topic: Ideas and insights for engagement

The new building/workspace will have a director of culture and sustainability. This person's job is to foster a positive culture of sustainability in the building and engage the citizens of the building, including you. This may include opportunities to learn more about the building or sustainability in general, participate in potlucks, have green drinks, participate in a community garden, etc. Thus, for our

last topic, I would like to explore with you some ideas or insights you may have what would work well in engaging employees and managers from your organization.

- a. What are things that would work well?
- b. What are things that will likely not work?
- c. What are things that would especially be useful for the transition and first few months in the building?

8. Thinking about what we've talked about so far, have I missed anything important? Is there anything else that would be good for me to know to see the full picture in regard to the current situation in your organization and building and your expectations for the new one?

9. Are there any reflections on this focus group experience you'd like to share that I should keep in mind for other focus groups?

Thanks again for meeting with me. I'll turn off the recorder now.

[Turn off the recorder]