



Health Accord

for Newfoundland & Labrador

Focus Group Guide
June 2021

➤ A 10-year health transformation

Introduction

The Health Accord NL process involves a number of engagement opportunities for stakeholders, organizations, businesses, community groups and individuals throughout the province. This process is the reimagination of health and health care in our province and it is important that all voices are heard – all are encouraged to participate.

Since the inception of Health Accord NL (HANL) in November of 2020, general information about the challenges and opportunities facing our provincial health and social services sector is being gathered through public town hall forums, meetings, surveys, and various forms of submissions through the HANL website. As the work of the Task Force and committees has proceeded, engagement activities have also been designed to gather specific feedback on areas such as the vision, committee direction statements and implementation actions.

The information collected through all avenues is being reviewed, analyzed and fed back to the Task Force and committees, as appropriate, to inform their deliberations. All input is important, and information collection and analysis will continue throughout the plan development stage.

Focus Groups

Many organizations in the province are large, include a range of individuals/members with diverse roles and perspectives, and/or are geographically dispersed. Focus groups are often an effective tool to collect information for these types of organizations. Participants are able to share information and express their opinions in a group setting that is structured in a way that allows for the collection of significant amounts of information, often in a relatively short period of time.

The following is a general guide to assist in the planning and implementation of focus groups for the development of submissions to HANL. Please note that this is simply a guide and it should be modified, as appropriate, to suit the needs of the particular organization.

If you would like additional information or assistance in carrying out focus groups for HANL, please contact Tanya Noseworthy at Tanya.noseworthy@mun.ca.

1. Selecting Groups for the Session(s)

There are a number of factors that can be considered when deciding how best to select groups for the focus group process. The following are offered for consideration:

- Groups can be selected to focus on specific sub-populations within the organization – e.g., individuals with a similar role, similar age cohort/generation, those living in a similar geographic region, individuals who have similar interests, those more directly informed on a particular topic, those less informed on a particular topic, etc.
- Groups can be selected to generate broader, less homogenous, discussion – e.g., individuals with different roles, or groups that provide a cross-representation of geography, age, gender, etc.
- A single large focus group can also be conducted when a more generalized discussion is preferred.

Whatever the option chosen, participants should ideally be selected to ensure a comprehensive representation of all members of the organization.

2. Selecting the Time and Venue for Session(s)

Given current [public health restrictions](#), many meetings or group sessions are now being conducted virtually. Virtual meetings allow individuals to participate in group sessions without having to travel to attend, and they also generally provide more flexibility with respect to meeting times. In-person sessions are also possible when public health guidelines can be followed.

The following are noted for consideration when booking the time and venue for focus groups:

- The focus groups can be added to an already scheduled meeting, if time and resources permit.
- If scheduling a separate time for the focus group sessions, consideration should be given to the nature of the group and a time that will allow for maximum participation (e.g., end of the work day, beginning of the work day, lunch time, or an evening session).
- Decisions should also be made as to whether:
 - sessions can be conducted for various groups concurrently (e.g., facilitators and note-takers are available), or if they must be scheduled at different times,

- the senior leadership of the organization would like to attend all sessions, and
- there is a preference for any of the groups to meet in person, and where this can occur given public health considerations.

3. Determining the Format of Session(s)

The agenda for the session(s) can vary based on the size of the group involved, and the preferred structure for the discussion and collection of input. The following are points to consider when determining the format and agenda for a session:

- There should be time reserved at the beginning of the session for introductions, an overview of agenda, and an introductory presentation/information on context. Note that a member of the senior leadership team may also want to speak/welcome participants.
- In addition to the introductions, decisions will be required on:
 - the number of questions or discussion topics that will be covered in the session, and whether discussion will occur after each question or as a free discussion on all topics combined,
 - the amount of time required for discussion periods, e.g., five 20-minute periods,
 - any break times that will be included during the session, and
 - the time required for clue up and next steps.

Note that a sample agenda can be provided by HANL upon request.

4. Materials/Resources Required for Session(s)

Introductory materials required for the session(s) will be provided by HANL. This includes a brief presentation that provides:

- an overview of Health Accord NL, its purpose and timeline,
- an overview of the vision, direction statements and pathways that have been developed to date,
- the focus of the feedback stage currently underway by HANL,
- sample questions to guide the focus group process, and
- a link to the HANL website where participants can go after the session to complete a survey or provide additional feedback.

Note that although sample questions will be provided by HANL, organizations are free to add to or modify the questions to ensure optimal input from participants.

Individual organizations will need to provide the following:

- a meeting location/link to virtual meeting room,
- a facilitator to guide the session(s)
- a note-taker (note that virtual sessions can be recorded and notes prepared at a later point with the consent of participants)
- an email to participants with the meeting appointment, the agenda, and guidance on anything requested of participants prior to the session – e.g., consideration of general questions.

5. Preparing and Submitting the Input to HANL

Once focus group sessions have concluded, the submission for HANL can then be prepared. Organizations are free to determine the layout and format of the submission that best summarizes the information they wish to include. For example, information could be provided regionally, by professional group, by age cohort, or it can be structured based on the questions posed to participants. Organizations may choose to circulate the draft submission to their membership/employees, etc. for review prior to submission to HANL.

Once prepared, the information can be submitted online at <https://healthaccordnl.ca/get-involved/send-a-submission/>.

6. General Considerations/Advice

The following are general considerations or advice provided to organizations when holding focus group sessions:

- The length of the meeting should be carefully considered. If too long, it will be difficult for some to attend. However if the session is too short participants may not feel that they had the opportunity to provide their input. It may be beneficial to schedule multiple shorter sessions if the need arises. Sessions typically do not exceed 2–2.5 hours.
- It will be beneficial to have the invitation for the sessions sent out by the senior leadership of the organization encouraging participation.

- Those facilitating the session(s) should clearly communicate how information obtained during the focus group discussion will be used, including the fact that information will be collected and submitted in an aggregate form and names will not be recorded.
- During the sessions, it is common to have some participants that are more vocal than others, thus it will be important to encourage appropriate meeting etiquette and be prepared to step in if a particular participant appears to be dominating the discussion.
- Attention may also be required for quieter participants who are not likely to comment in a group setting without some additional encouragement.
- It is important to ensure that participants know that everyone has something to offer and that HANL is interested in all input, no matter how big or small, positive or negative it may be.
- One advantage of focus groups is depth and complexity of response, and the fact that group members can often stimulate new thoughts for each other, which might not have otherwise occurred. Care should be taken to encourage discussions and capture the information at this level.
- It may be beneficial to summarize the responses at the end of each discussion period or at the end of the session to ensure that there is agreement about the key points raised.
- It may be important to keep track of who participates in the planned sessions and there may be a need to reach out in another format if a good cross-representation of the organization is not represented at the session(s).



Health Accord
for Newfoundland & Labrador

www.healthaccordnl.ca
info@healthaccordnl.ca

 @HealthAccord_NL
 @HealthAccordNL
 @HealthAccordNL


▶ A 10-year health transformation