

Using Zoom to Conduct Virtual Focus Groups and Provide Simultaneous Interpretation with Cross-Lingual Participants

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This handout is intended to provide further detail and resources corresponding to the presentation. Please reach out to Juan Carlos Piña at juancarlos_pina@spra.com with any questions about this material.

ABOUT LANGUAGE JUSTICE

Language justice is a term used to describe the process of creating access and sustaining inclusive multilingual spaces so that everyone's voice can be heard. It is the belief that everyone has the right to communicate in the language in which they feel most comfortable. Ensuring that these principles are implemented effectively requires a sound understanding of what the direct needs of individuals are and responding with a set of methods, including, but not limited to, written translation, oral interpretation, sign language, hearing aids, and written captions, among others.

To learn more about how to adopt a language justice approach in your work, you can visit [The Praxis Project](#) website to read about the resources they've developed, including their [Language Justice Toolkit](#).

Language Justice Guiding Principles

Adopting a language justice approach is not a linear process. Instead, it can be defined through a series of guiding principles that encourage a commitment to self-awareness and advocacy. This theoretical perspective is captured by recognizing the following:

- **Language justice is social justice:** Language justice is grounded in the desire to create spaces where all community members, regardless of which language they choose to speak, can participate in the exchange of ideas.
- **There is no dominant language:** The understanding that every language holds equal value.
- **Language justice is a tool to empower action:** Cross-lingual dialogues are necessary to transform thinking, share ideas, and produce a collective understanding of needs for social action and social change.
- **Language justice is rooted in history of resistance:** In the past, the voices of historically underrepresented communities have been suppressed, so creating opportunities for the equal sharing of ideas affirms the fundamental rights of individuals to fully participate in all aspects of society.
- **Language justice is the balancing of power differentials:** Creating inclusive multilingual spaces can disrupt the status quo of power and privilege by giving other individuals the opportunity for their ideas to shape the discourse that affects people's futures.
- **Language justice is the process of organizing and advocating:** The effective adoption and implementation of programs or policies need to be responsive to individuals' needs regardless of language ability, so it is imperative that the procedures are based on a set of diverse experiences, perspectives, and wisdom.

CONDUCTING VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUPS WITH SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION

Facilitating a focus group with these language needs requires intentional preparation, logistics planning, and facilitation. The description below provides a guide on how to conduct a virtual focus group with simultaneous interpretation.

Materials

When simultaneous interpretation is incorporated into a virtual focus group, additional materials and planning steps are needed to ensure a smooth process.

- **Creating a facilitator's guide.** This guide maps out the timing for each section of the focus group and notes the moments/activities when multiple languages will be spoken in the same conversation and when a single language will be spoken (e.g., monolingual breakout groups). This facilitator's guide clarifies when simultaneous interpretation will be needed and for how long, so that all interpreters and facilitators know what to expect throughout the focus group.
- **Providing and translating handouts.** With multiple languages present in the same conversation, it's useful to provide materials in advance to help participants anticipate and follow the flow of the focus group. For example, focus group

questions, activity materials/prompts, or icebreaker/introduction activity instructions can be translated, printed, and mailed/mailed to participants so they have reference materials in case anything is lost during the conversation.

Logistics and Prep

In the week leading up to the virtual focus group, the facilitation team will need to walk through all the technical logistics and facilitation preparation needed for the simultaneous interpretation.

- **Preparing interpreters.** In addition to providing handouts to participants, handouts and the facilitator's guide will also be shared with the interpreters. While briefing interpreters on the documents, facilitators should clarify and note if/when interpreters are expected to facilitate any monolingual breakout groups. Furthermore, this is a time for interpreters to check their interpretation of any commonly used words or phrases that may not directly translate to the interpreted language.
- **Preparing participants.** Facilitators/interpreters may consider calling participants who need interpretation in advance to reiterate the purpose of the focus group and walk through how the interpretation will work in the focus group setting. This can be a time for participants to ask any questions and for facilitators to communicate the value of having the participant's voice heard in the upcoming focus group.
- **Rehearsing.** We recommend assigning and going over specific roles for the facilitation team (e.g. facilitator, interpreter, note-taker, tech support) and doing at least one dry run where there are enough people to play the different roles. We also found it helpful to establish hand gestures, so the interpreter can communicate if they need a pause or for speakers to slow down.
- **Day-of logistics.** To set up the virtual focus group, we sent out a multi-lingual invitation with an online meeting platform link (Zoom) and a conference line number. On the day of the focus group, everyone logged onto the online meeting room. Participants who needed translation called the conference line, muted themselves on Zoom, and turned the volume of the Zoom room off or down low. When participants in the "non-majority" language wanted to speak, the interpreter would unmute themselves on Zoom and translate for the participant.

Facilitation Tips

While facilitating, there are a few practices and strategies to keep in mind to help seamlessly navigate the simultaneous interpretation context throughout the virtual focus group.

- Use hand gestures to signal about speed
- Have the facilitator call on participants during introductions (and if needed, during discussions) to aid cohesion
- Use breakout rooms to create monolingual spaces, but share out from breakout rooms with all languages present
- Practice/have a plan for screen sharing materials and notes in relevant languages

LESSONS LEARNED

Overall, facilitating a virtual focus group with simultaneous interpretation can yield incredibly rich findings and camaraderie among participants. From our experience, we lift the following overarching lessons learned for facilitating a successful virtual focus group with simultaneous interpretation.

- **Have a plan for screen sharing that includes all languages present in the focus group.** Facilitators should have a plan to display materials (e.g. slide deck, handouts, and resources) in all languages. Furthermore, if the focus group includes any live note-taking projected back to participants, have a plan for how the note-takers can take and share notes in all languages (e.g., a shared Google document).
- **Build in extra time for planning and transitions during the focus group.** Providing simultaneous interpretation requires a substantial amount of organization and coordination. Build in enough time in the planning period to translate materials, practice the logistics, and prepare people involved. Also, with the many moving pieces of the focus group, it is a good idea to build in extra time in the agenda for transitioning from one activity to another.
- **Encourage participants to slow down when they are speaking.** To ensure that people's stories are accurately interpreted, it is important for everyone to slow down and pause so that all information is clearly communicated between both monolingual groups. As such, it is invaluable for the facilitator to appropriately interject and remind people to slow down and encourage them to respond to the interpreter's hand gestures. And remember, it is okay to trust the silence while people gather their thoughts.