**MRS** Evidence Matters
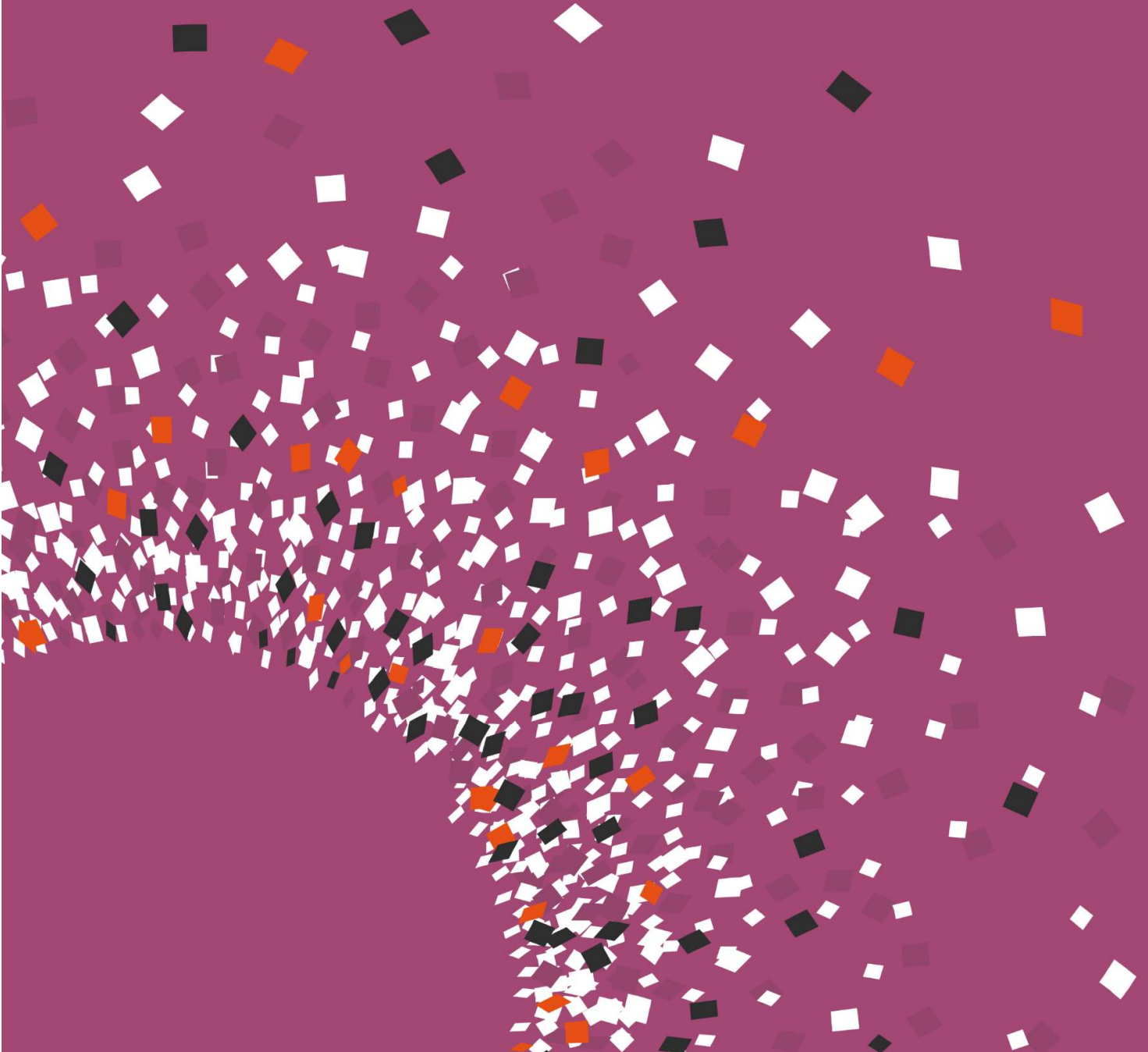
# DIVERSITY & INCLUSION BEST PRACTICE GUIDES: USE OF DIFFERENT METHODS

# Introduction and Purpose of the Guide

As we look to make our samples more diverse and inclusive, we need to consider issues around accessibility. The move to conducting research virtually, due to the pandemic, created opportunities that allowed for research samples to be more inclusive but restricted representativeness of those who didn't have access to the internet.  With the return to in person/face-to-face research we need to be mindful of the pros and cons of different methods in order to create the most representative research we can. The aim of this document is to offer guidance on how to approach research moving forward in order to retain this level of inclusivity

Representation is about more than just quotas, it's also about ensuring participants have the opportunity to respond – all stages of the project (from design to participant facing documents) need to consider this

# Initial Considerations

- Pros/cons of different methods in relation to the sample you are trying to reach

- Benefits of flexing the approach to be appropriate to the quotas

- Impact mixed methodologies could have – trade-off between cost, comparability & representativeness

- Objective(s) of the research and the suitability of virtual methods

# Research Design Considerations

– Participants with physical disabilities and/or mental health conditions may have different levels of comfort and shouldn't be forced to ask for accommodations

  – Not all disabilities are visible and if you aren't sampling based on disabilities then they may not be known
  – Offering virtual as standard (or an option) could help more than just those participants you expect it to be of benefit to

– Build accessibility into the design, rather than retrofitting

  – Consider any materials being shown, access to collateral, close captioning, pre-reads, screen readers (colour of text etc.)

– For qualitative research consider if you can you offer further flexibility

  – Can you run a community/panel which allows people to complete tasks in their own time/at their own speed rather than within a group setting
  – Ensure suppliers have the technology to support virtual groups, such as closed captioning, and that they adjust approaches to allow participants extra time if needed

– It is important to remember that people are not homogenous – don't assume that one person represents an entire group or community

– There are compromises to all methods – clearly recognise the limitations and declare them as part of the research process

# Benefits of virtual interviews

Online methods can be beneficial for a number of different reasons, and for a number of different types of participants

Virtual qualitative interviews allow participants to be within their own space, and with their own tools which help them (such as screen readers)

For interviewees with accessibility needs two main factors are beneficial at every level – convenience and flexibility – these should be considered as standard within the research design

In relation to virtual interviewing some of the benefits are:

– No need to consider other types of accommodations (accessible bathrooms, accessible tube stations etc.) when participants are in their own homes

– Less impact on participants during interaction – comfort of the space (chairs etc.) vs. length of the session

– Less impact, post-interaction, from participating in the research (e.g. pain, exhaustion caused from travelling)

– Within group research, visible disabilities may impact how others interact with them within the session, minimising their ability to be fully involved or their chance or comfort of speaking out/disagreeing with the group

    – Engaging online can be easier, there can be less pressure and/or a reduced fear of failure/judgement for differing from the norm
    – Participants with verbal tics, physical illnesses or disabilities that would cause them to draw back from participation can mute themselves while remaining present and engaged in the research

There are also a number of benefits for those with other considerations:

– For those with hearing difficulties, online interviews can involve close captioning

– For carers or those with young children, online interviews require less time for transport to/from the interview which makes it easier to participate

– There are less costs for participants involved in online interviews (no travel, no childcare required) which may make it easier to get a representative group (less of the traditional white middle class)

– Reduced levels of distraction (e.g. from others in the room) can be a

positive for participants with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs – such as dyslexia and ADD)

- Participants who are naturally more introverted have a preference to think and consider answers rather than just speaking (like those who lean more towards extroversion), therefore online may be a more comfortable space for them

- Virtual qualitative research may also help reduce any difficulties in recruiting niche audiences (as there is no tie to location)

# Benefits of in person interviews

Alternatively for other participants online interviewing can lead to auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic difficulties

People with auditory impairments, for instance, may have difficulty hearing through their computer speakers

- They will have to look at transcripts, but the transcripts aren't always accurate/don't always work well
- Typing within online interviews can be a positive for deaf and hard of hearing participants, however the online experience can be taxing, and it's difficult to communicate

Online interviewing can also end up less inclusive:

- Requires access to internet and/or laptop/computer/tablet/phone
    - Figures show a difference for people with disabilities versus those without in regard to access to computers and smartphones – online interviewing is only inclusive if people have access to the tools in the first place
- Needs a quiet space to interact
- Impact of children at home – these need to be factored in as potential distractions
    - No need to get childcare is a positive from an expense point of view, but can have a negative impact on participation if no one else is at home to help out
- Staring at a screen is exhausting which can have an underlying effect upon participants' cognitive abilities and focus – especially for participants with SpLDs

Online interviewing can also be less appropriate for certain research objectives (e.g. shopping experiences) so this should be considered in relation to the specific piece you are conducting

# Role of the moderator

As researchers we're trained to speak and understand people that aren't like us – that's a core strength in our sector, a uniqueness, that lends us to be more inclusive. It's important for all researchers to manage their biases, especially when directly interacting with participants. This becomes even more pertinent as we make our samples and methodologies more inclusive

The role of the moderator is a crucial step in ensuring better inclusivity within our qualitative research:

- Consider how the moderator can be relevant to the participants they are speaking to, how they can tap into cultural nuances

- Use inclusive language to make participants feel more comfortable and able to give open and honest feedback on the research topic

    - Avoid general terms and use person-centred language
    - Don't make assumptions about the participants
    - Put the participants first, focus on them not their traits
    - Avoid 'othering'
    - Use universal phrases and avoid jargon and acronyms
    - If you aren't sure, ask
    - Acknowledge your mistakes and accept you won't get it right all of the time – be humble and open to learning from the participants

Online research may help encourage the moderator to be more considerate and inclusive

**Please refer to the Diversity & Inclusion Best Practice Guides: Use of Language.**

**Below are some examples, considerations, and possible adaptions to consider for your sample:**

| Characteristic | Considerations | Adaptions |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Learning difficulties** | Data collection online provides the time and space to work<br><br>With online research, participants can read questions, terms and conditions and other pre-requisite content as many times as they need<br><br>IT systems and software can assist persons who have dyslexia or visual processing difficulties in manipulating digital text (changing their font style or size) which may help participants in processing the information effectively | Panels/online communities can help provide more time for tasks to be completed – rather than a traditional group or interview where an answer is expected immediately<br><br>If you're involving collateral, can you provide it in advance so participants can review |
| **Physical disabilities** | The most obvious benefit for participants with accessibility requirements is that they are able to stay in their comfort zone<br><br><br>There are integrated technologies for | Double check to be sure that a data collection site is accessible. If the data collection site is inaccessible, be prepared to find an alternate location. Be sure to contact the participant in advance<br><br>When scheduling data collection, be aware that |

| | interviewees who cannot type, such as voice-to-text and voice-activated programs | participants may need to make transportation arrangements. When supplying directions, consider accessible traveling routes, accessible parking spaces, and physical obstacles, such as stairs, curbs or steep hills that may hinder or delay a person using a wheelchair, cane, or crutches |
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| | | Be aware that some wheelchair users may choose to transfer themselves out of their wheelchairs (into an office chair, for example) for the duration of the interview |
| | | Remember that a wheelchair is part of a person's body space. Don't lean against it |
| | | Find a location where you can sit down and be at eye level with each other |
| | | Allow persons using canes or crutches to keep them within easy reach |
| | | Allow guide dogs to accompany the interviewee. Do not pet or otherwise distract the dog |
| | | Consider things you can do to help (e.g. pay for a taxi, help find a parking spot, let them bring their carer, ask them if they want to use sign language) |
| | | Don't exclude participants because it is difficult, or |

| | | because the viewing facilities (or recruiters) say it's not possible |
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| **Visual impairments** | It may be easier for visually-impaired interviewees to access digital equipment to attend a session rather than traveling to offices

The adaptive technologies like braille keyboards or voice-to-text software and audio recordings are things they may already possess | Always identify yourself and others who may be with you

Describe the interview setting (for example, say, "There is a table in front of you and a seat to your right.")

When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat. A verbal cue is helpful as well. Use specifics such as "left ten feet" or "right two yards" when directing a person with a visual impairment

If the person has not offered his or her hand, offer yours and say, "May I shake your hand?"

The interviewee may be unable to "read body language". Let the person know when you need to move locations or end the conversation

Provide a well-lit area for the interview. Avoid sharp contrasts of light and darkness – interviewee's visual acuity may change under different light conditions

Help in filling out forms. Most persons with visual impairments can fill out forms and sign their names |

| | | if the appropriate spaces are indicated to them |
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| **Hearing impairments** | Interviewees with hearing impairment can use technology to make their life easier<br><br>Through online processes, participants can view videos with subtitles, which they may not experience in meeting rooms<br><br>Using text as the primary mode of communication with presenters/moderators/interviewers and other fellow participants as this can be an easier way of interacting through forums and emails | Ask participants to choose a place to sit where they are likely to be most comfortable<br><br>Speak directly to participants being interviewed. If they read lips, speak at a normal rate while facing the person and be sure to keep your hands away from your mouth. Do not exaggerate your lip movements but speak expressively because the person will rely on your facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact. Maintain eye contact<br><br>If participants are using interpreters, do not address the interpreters. It is commonplace for interpreters to be seated beside interviewers, across from participants. Interpreters only facilitate communication. They should not be consulted or regarded as a reference for opinions. Also, keep in mind that just because participants use sign language interpreters during data collection does not mean that they will require an interpreter at all times<br><br><br>Do not shout. A deaf person cannot hear you and if the |

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| | | interviewee is using an assistive listening device, you may actually hurt their ears

If an interpreter is not present and if participants are reading lips and something is not clear, it is ok to write notes back and forth |
| **Speech related difficulties** | Online interviewing may be a more comfortable space as there are clearer divides between participants

The ability to type responses, rather than speak, may be preferred by participants

If managed properly the likelihood of participants being talked over can be reduced by online methods (e.g., others can be muted) | Phrase questions so that they can be answered with short responses

Give your total attention to each participant. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if necessary. Ensuring you involve them if others aren't giving them space

Do not complete the participant's thoughts for them. Be patient and wait for the entire response

Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand, and the participant's reactions will clue you in and guide you to understanding

Speak with a normal tone of voice. Most speech-impaired persons can hear and understand without difficulty |