Focus group guide: customers

### Introduction and consent

* Introduce self and NatCen/WPI Economics
  + Independent research organisations
* Explain purpose of the study and overview of methodology
  + NatCen and WPI Economics are carrying out research on businesses like [name of community business]. NatCen is visiting 12 community businesses to find out what has helped to make the business a success as well as to understand whether and how the business has overcome any challenges. The aim of the research is to support the growth of community businesses across England.
  + The research is for Power to Change. They are an independent organisation in receipt of Big Lottery Fund funding who support community businesses across England.
* Describe key topics during interview and duration:
  + In each community business we will speak to staff, volunteers and customers to better understand their views and experiences. We are interested in finding out what you think works well and less well about [name of community business] and what difference, if any, you think [name of community business] has made to its customers and the wider community.
  + Taking part in the discussion is of course completely voluntary. If you agree to take part, you are free to skip questions and can bring the discussion to an end at any time. The discussion will last no more than 1.5 hours.
  + Please respect one another’s views. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested to hear all views and experiences. It is okay to have different opinions. We also ask that you not discuss other participants’ responses outside of the discussion
* Confidentiality and anonymity
  + The research team would like to audio record the discussion so that we don’t miss anything. The audio recording will be kept securely and only named members of staff at NatCen and WPI Economics will be able to access the information.
  + A written version of the interview will be produced (a transcript). With your permission the written version of the transcript will be securely stored in the UK Data Archive, and shared with Power to Change, to help with future research. We will try to remove information that could be used to identify you such as names and places. Explain that the participant does not have to make a decision about this now. It will be discussed in more detail at the end of the interview.
  + Reports will be written based on the views and experiences of those who have taken part in this research. This will include a short report focused on [name of community business]. This report will showcase the community business and highlight the factors which have helped to make it successful. Explain to the participant whether [name of community business] has opted to be named in the case study report or to take part anonymously. Explain that staff in the community business will see the report before it is published.
  + Explain that the research team will also produce published reports that present the findings of the research at aggregate level. These reports will not attribute findings to named community businesses.
  + Explain that the names of participants **will not appear** in research reports. However, it is possible that some views may be identifiable due to the size of the sector/some businesses opting to be named in case study reports. Explain that the participant will have the opportunity to review their contribution at the end of the discussion and remove information if required.
* Check whether participant has any questions and **seek written consent**

**Section 1: Introduction [5 minutes]**

* Ask each person in the group to introduce themselves:
  + Name
  + Where they live
  + How the participant is involved in the community business e.g. shareholder, customer etc.
  + What they like best about the community business

**Section 2: Route into the community business [20 minutes]**

* Explore **route** to becoming involved in/using community business
  + How and when they first heard about community business
  + How they became involved in community business (what happened, who involved)
  + Why they initially used/ became involved in community business e.g.
    - *Nature and/or affordability of goods/services*
    - *Geography*
    - *Social purpose of community business*
    - *Uniqueness/any points of difference from other businesses in local area*
  + Anything that made it easier/more difficult to become involved/use community business and reasons for this
  + Suggestions for improvement
* Explore **early expectations** for the community business
  + What they thought about community business when they first heard about it
  + What they thought it would be like [their expectations]
    - What they expected to like most/least about community business
* Explore **awareness and understanding** of community business
  + Understanding of aims/purpose and key customer groups e.g.
    - *Delivering goods/services*
    - *Providing broader social and economic value*
    - *Accountability to local community*
  + Views on adequacy of information they’ve received on community business and any suggestions for improvement

**Section 3: Views and experiences of the community business [45 minutes]**

* Explore **how participants uses/is involved with** the community business
  + How long they have been using community business for
  + Which services/goods they use and reasons for this
  + *Pubs/transport*: how frequently they use community business
* Explore **views and experience of the community business** over time
  + Inception/set-up
  + Trading
* For **each stage**, explore
  + Views and experiences of different aspects of community business e.g. *service provision, leadership and staffing, community involvement*
    - **Service provision**
      * Nature and quality of products & services/is there a need for product/services
      * Affordability/value for money
      * Quality of customer service
      * Ease/difficulty of accessing goods/services
      * What works well/less well
      * Suggestions for improvement
    - **Leadership and workforce/staffing** 
      * Desirable qualities/attributes in leaders/workforce
      * Extent to which leaders/workforce reflect these qualities
      * What works well/less well about leadership, running and staffing of the community business
      * Suggestions for improvement
    - **Community involvement** 
      * Nature/format/frequency/quality of communication between business and local community
      * Extent to which participants/the community has a say in the running of the community business
        + Nature of involvement and timing
        + Whether and why community involvement in business is considered important
      * What works well/less well
      * Suggestions for improvement
  + Whether and how initial expectations have been met and reasons for this

**Optional exercise**

Ask participants to write down the key things they think are working well/less well about the community business. The researcher should then group the post-it notes into themes and discuss each theme with the group.

**Section 4: Perceived effects of the community business [15 minutes]**

* Explore what difference, if any, the community business has made to participants
  + Nature of impact
    - Social
    - Economic
  + Enablers and barriers to success
* Explore what difference, if any, it would make to participants if community business did not exist
* Explore what difference, if any, the business has madeto wider community
  + Nature of impact
    - Social
    - Economic
    - Environmental
  + Enablers and barriers to success
* Explore what difference, if any, it would make to the wider community if business did not exist
* Check whether anything else to add

**Section 5: Thanks and close [5 minutes]**

* Thank participants for their valuable contribution to the research.
* Check each participant is comfortable with their contribution in lights of limits to anonymity.
* Explore whether participants are willing to have an anonymised version of the transcript of the focus group stored in the UK Data Archive and shared with Power to Change. [Please go through the ‘data sharing’ information sheer with participants]
  + With your permission the written version of your interview/group discussion will be shared with Power to Change for them to use in their work to support people who are involved in setting up and running community businesses. We will also ask if the transcript can be given to the UK Data Archive so it can be used for future research.
  + Your personal details (such as your name, address, phone number) will not be shared outside the research team.
  + The researchers will try to delete information from the transcript that could identify you. However, it is possible that your views may be identifiable due to the small size of the study and as some community businesses have chosen to be named as a case study.
  + You do not have to agree to share the transcript, it is up to you.