



U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board Office of Policy and Evaluation

Background Information for MSPB Discussion Group Participants

What is MSPB?

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is an independent Federal agency that is charged with adjudicating employee appeals and conducting studies of the merit systems in the Federal Government. MSPB's Office of Policy and Evaluation conducts these studies using a variety of methods, including discussion groups, to obtain employees perceptions for particular studies.

What is a discussion group?

A discussion group is a conversation designed to yield insight into a selected topic or issue. A discussion group usually consists of 6-10 participants and is facilitated by 1 or 2 moderators.

How does a discussion group work?

The moderators pose questions, guide the discussion, and take notes to help capture the participants' ideas and views. The idea is to have an open and constructive discussion around the topic(s) of interest. Differences of opinion are normal and need not be resolved. We ask that participants treat each other respectfully, agree to maintain the confidentiality of the discussion, and allow other participants a full opportunity to share their views and experiences.

Is the discussion confidential?

Yes. While your agency or other groups may assist in setting up the discussion groups, they will not be part of the discussion group. In addition, comments from discussion groups will be reported in aggregate form to help ensure confidentiality of the participants' views.

While we will take notes or audio-record during the discussion to help us more accurately recall your comments, we do not distribute those records, nor do we share the results of the discussion groups in a way that can identify an individual participant. Also, we request that participants consider the comments made in the discussion to be confidential and not share details of the discussion group discussion outside the group.

On occasion, we may wish to quote anonymously a participant whose remarks provide special insight into an issue. However, we will not attribute comments to participants by name or other identifying information.

How does MSPB select participants?

We have selected participants to represent the perspectives of a variety of employees-based on geographic location, agency, and characteristics of employees, such as race, sex, occupation, and grade. Some participants have volunteered or been nominated by their agencies, while we have identified other employees based on their characteristics as reported in the Civilian Personnel Data File (CPDF). All the participants in our discussion groups are current Federal employees.

Am I required to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. However, we appreciate your participation as we believe that these discussion groups provide a unique opportunity for employees to share information with us.

Can I participate in an MSPB discussion group during working hours?

Yes. However, you should ensure (1) that your supervisor agrees to your participation and (2) that you follow normal procedures for scheduling time away from your office or work site. Please be sure to include time for travel to and from the discussion group site.

How will my comments be used?

Your comments –

- Will provide a cross-section of insights and concerns related to the issues of the study;
- May help us identify issues for further research; and
- Can “bring to life” the issues and concerns that we address in our written reports.