



**U.S. Election Assistance Commission**  
**Focus Group**  
**Free or Reduced Ballot Project**  
**Discussion Guide for Voters with Low Income**

**Introduction (5 minutes):**

Moderator intro: My name is .....

Project intro: The Election Center and IFES (formerly the International Foundation for Election Systems) are jointly working on a project funded by the Election Assistance Commission to identify the challenges that people like you face when participating in elections. Our discussion today will help us better understand the needs and challenges of people like you.

Ground rules for today's discussion:

- All points are valid and needed.
- It is okay to disagree—do not be disagreeable.
- Be specific and talk about your own experiences.
- Allow everyone to speak. Speak briefly and often, but please, no speeches.
- One person speaks at a time – please don't interrupt.
- Your contributions are anonymous and will not be connected to your name.
- There are observers in the room, but they won't be participating.
- This discussion will be videotaped, but this videotape will only be used for analysis as we write a report on these focus groups. You will not be individually identified in any of the reporting for this project.

**Experiences voting—challenges and remedies (20 minute)**

I'd like each of you to think back to the last federal election that you voted in. By federal election I mean voting for the President, the U.S. Senate, or the U.S. House of Representatives. What sticks out in your mind about the experience voting—not who you voted for but the process of voting itself?

- Probe: How did you vote: in-person at the polls or by mail?
- Probe: Was the process easy or hard?
- Probe: Did you encounter any particular difficulties?
- Probe: How did election officials respond?
- Probe: How did you resolve the situation?

And have any of you have been in the situation where you wanted to vote but for some reason you just weren't able to?

- Probe: Can you talk a little bit about the circumstances that kept you from being able to vote?
- Probe: What sorts of things do you think could have been done to make it easier for you to be able to participate in elections?

**Voting by mail and free or reduced postage (20 minutes)**

As you may be aware, there has been a lot of discussion in the last year or so about the pluses and minuses of voting by mail. Some states have what is called "no-excuse absentee voting" that allows anyone who wants to, to be able to vote by mail-in absentee ballot. On the other hand, some states require people to provide a reason why they can't make it to the polls on Election Day.

What is your overall opinion of absentee voting by mail?

- Probe: Do you think everyone should have the opportunity to vote by mail or should this be limited to those with a valid excuse? For example, being sick, disabled or out of town on Election Day?

Who here has voted by mail?

- Probe: If you weren't able to vote by mail would you still have been able to vote at the polls?

Can you tell me about your experience the last time you mailed in an absentee ballot?

- Probe: Would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program have made things easier for you or would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program make no substantial impact in your ability to get your vote in?

Do you think that finding ways to make it easier for people to vote by mail-in absentee ballot increase voter turn out among people like you?

- Probe: What sorts of things could be done to make this easier?
- Probe: What would be a good way of letting people like you know about such a program/changes so that they could take advantage of these changes?
- What kind of impact do you think a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program would make on the ability of people like you to vote?

Would you have any concerns about voting by mail?

- Probe: Would you be concerned about the security of your ballot once you drop it in the mail box?
- Probe: Would you have concerns about whether the ballot reaching its destination in time?

### **Concerns about voting (15 minutes)**

Still thinking about the elections process and voting, do any of you have personal concerns about voting that you would like to express?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

And do any of you have other more general concerns about election process or voting that you'd like to discuss?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

# Post Discussion Comment Sheet

## Voters with Low Income

Please take a few minutes to complete this form. Your answers to these questions as well as your viewpoints expressed in today's discussions will be kept confidential—your opinions will not be identified with your name.

By answering these questions, you help us understand the types of people who took part in today's discussion, and your opinions and feelings provide us with important information about this discussion that will help us in the future.

- 1) Name: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2)  Male  Female
  
- 3) What is your race/ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 4) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 5) What is the highest level of education you received?
  - High School or less
  - Some College
  - College Graduate
  - Post Graduate
  
- 6) What is your employment status?
  - Full-time
  - Part-time
  - Unemployed
  - Homemaker
  - Retired
  - Student
  
- 7) How many people, including yourself, are there in your household?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 8) In 2005, what was your total income from all sources before taxes?
  - Under \$30,000
  - \$30,000 to \$49,999
  - \$50,000 to \$74,999
  - \$75,000 +

9) Are you currently registered to vote?

Yes

No

10) How often do you vote?

Always

Sometimes

Rarely

11) What is the year and type of the last federal election (presidential or congressional) that you voted in? \_\_\_\_\_

12) Are there any feelings or opinions that you didn't share during the discussion that we should know? Please describe in as much detail as possible.

13) Any comments about the discussion itself and/or the moderator?

\*This information collection is required for the EAC to meet its statutory requirements under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 (42 U.S.C. 15301). Respondent's obligation to reply to this information collection is voluntary; respondents include the 50 States, and the District of Columbia. This information will be made publicly available on the EAC website at [www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov). According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is OMB Control No. pending (expires: to be determined). The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 1.25 hours per response. Comments regarding this burden estimate should be sent to the Program Manager – 2007 Study of the Feasibility and Advisability of Establishing a Program of Free Return Postage for Absentee Ballots, U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 1225 New York Ave, NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005.