

**FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL  
FUNERAL DIRECTORS  
VA BURIAL PROGRAM EVALUATION**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE FOCUS GROUP**

Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion. My name is (*Caliber Moderator's Name*) and my colleague is (*Caliber Team Member's Name*). We are from ICF Caliber, headquartered in Fairfax, VA. On behalf of VA, Caliber is conducting a study of the VA Burial Program. As part of the study we are conducting focus groups with funeral directors to gather opinions, perspectives, and experiences with the VA Burial Program. As those who have an interest in the success of the VA Burial Program, your input is essential to the study. Thank you for participating in the focus group.

## **WHY WE ARE HERE**

Some of you might be asking yourselves, "What is this study of the VA Burial Program all about?" It is the VA's intent to stay current with the benefits it provides veterans and their families, to plan for the future needs of veterans and their families, and to provide the best possible service to veterans and their families. The findings from this study will help them do that. Please note: This study is not part of any plan to reduce benefits, but will rather an effort to help VA plan for the future.

## **PROCESS**

In the past few weeks we have met with many experts and stakeholders to understand the current status of the VA Burial Program and to gather views about its direction for the future. Now we want to hear from funeral directors themselves. The information you provide to us today will be pooled with information we will gather from focus groups with other stakeholders across the U.S. as well as from a national survey of veterans to be administered later this year.

At the completion of our visits, we will be compiling a report that will communicate your views to VA leadership. Our report will not include specific information about the individuals with whom we speak; only group-level findings will be reported.

With that in mind, we invite you to participate in today's discussions about VA burial benefits. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share your point of view, even if it differs from what others say during our discussion.

## **GROUND RULES**

Before we begin, let me talk about the ground rules we would like you to observe.

- We are very interested in your individual opinions and experiences. Keep in mind that we're interested in all of your comments, positive and negative.
- You may be assured of confidentiality. We need to maintain your confidentiality, and we ask that each of you keep the points of view that are shared today confidential. What is shared in the group discussion should not leave the group. Please remember that the information gathered today will not be used to increase or decrease VA benefits, so please be careful not to jump to any conclusions from today's discussion.
- We would like to record notes from our discussions in this session. Your opinions are important to us and we don't want to miss any of your comments. Capturing your

opinions will allow us to prepare an accurate report. Again, the names of participants will not be included in any report. Unless there are any objections, my colleague will be typing notes into *(his/her)* laptop. [Pause and wait for any response.]

- Please speak loudly and clearly. Only one person should talk at a time. If several people are talking, we will not hear all of your comments. Also, let me emphasize the importance of respecting one another's views—all of your individual comments are important to us.
- Our session will take about an hour-and-a-half. We will not take a formal break. The rest rooms are located (*provide directions*). Feel free to leave the group if you wish to stretch or use the restrooms.

Please take a moment now to write down your name or nickname on the name tent in front of you, if you have not done so already. We will call you by this name during the session.

## **WARM-UP**

Let's begin by finding out some information about each other by going around the room one at a time. Please introduce yourself by telling us your name or nickname, the name of your funeral home, how long your funeral home has provided services to veterans and their families, and the one thing you like most about serving veterans and their families.

### **I. Awareness/Communication About VA Burial Benefits** [*Subheadings are not read aloud*]

To begin, we would like to get an understanding of the awareness veterans and their families have about VA burial benefits and how that information is communicated to them:

1. (4H): How much information do veteran family members have about VA burial benefits and their eligibility for receiving them when they first call or come to see you? When next of kin first call or come to see you, do they often have the burial location (national or state veterans cemetery or private cemetery) already selected or do they look to you for guidance?

2. (4H): When you tell families about VA burial benefits, do you give them any VA literature or suggest other sources for VA benefits information? If so, what resources do you refer them to most often?

3. (4H): How could the VA better communicate the availability of VA burial benefits to veterans and their families?

### **II. Symbolic Expressions of Remembrance**

We would like to ask you some questions about the options available to veterans and their families such as grave markers, headstones, and Presidential Memorial Certificates.

4. (4I): In the course of your conversations with family members, have you heard any requests for symbolic expressions of gratitude for a veteran's service, (e.g., a memorial plaque, a commemorative flag, or other symbol) other than what is currently offered? If so, what requests have you heard most often?

5. (4I): For headstones and markers for veteran's graves, have you heard requests from family members for additional features or options beyond the current "standard options"? (Have some visualization examples if possible.) If so, what requests have you heard most often?

6. (4A): In your experience, do you think distance to the cemetery is an important factor in the family's choice of burial location (national or state veterans cemetery or private cemetery)? If so, what is a reasonable distance and/or travel time for family members to drive for burial and visitation in a national or state veterans cemetery?

7. (4F) Based on your experiences, what is the most important factor to families in their selection of a burial location (national and state veterans cemetery or private cemetery) and type (e.g., in-ground in a casket, remains placed in a columbarium)?

#### **WRAP UP**

Is there anything we should have asked today about burial benefits but did not?

Thank you very much for participating today.

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Focus Group Location: \_\_\_\_\_

MSN: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

Note Taker: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Indicate totals:*

Funeral Homes: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience of firm with  
veterans' interments (in years) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participants only with no other personal identifier.