

**FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
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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 family members to gather opinions, perspectives, and experiences with the VA Burial Program. We thank you for your participation in this 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 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 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 family members 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 more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Please introduce yourself by telling us your name or nickname and the branch of service you or your loved one served?

I. Awareness of Burial Benefits [*Subheadings are not read aloud*]

To begin, we would like to get an understanding of how you obtained information about VA burial benefits:

1. (4H): Did you receive or obtain information about VA burial benefits prior to your time of need? If so, what information did you obtain and how did you get it (i.e., source)?
(*Prompt if needed: Do you recall receiving information during or immediately after your or your loved one's time of military service?*)

2. (4H): In your opinion, what is (was) the best way for you to receive information about VA burial benefits?

(2a) What was the most useful information that you received?

II. Burial Choice:

3. (4F): Could you tell me the type of burial and the location where your loved one was buried? For example, was he/she buried in-ground in a casket? Or were his/her remains placed in a columbarium? Was he/she buried in a private cemetery or in a national or state veterans cemetery?

4. (4F): What factor(s) most strongly influenced choice for burial type and location? (Probes: religious beliefs, cost, family traditions, importance of military connection).

5. (4A) Can you estimate how far you live from the cemetery where your loved one is buried? How far is it? Was the distance to a cemetery a factor in your decision regarding burial? What do you consider an acceptable distance for burial of your loved one and for your visitation? How much time to travel to a cemetery is acceptable?

III. Presidential Memorial Certificate

Some of you mentioned the Presidential Memorial Certificate in today's session as a VA Burial benefit (Alternative lead in: Although this did not come up today, some of you may be familiar with the Presidential Memorial Certificate as a VA Burial benefit). This is a Burial benefit for the families and loved ones of deceased veterans. We would like to ask you some questions about that.

6. (4I): Did you know before today that you may request a Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) in memory of a veteran who has passed away?

7. (4I): Has anyone in the room received a PMC? (Make PMCs available as samples).

8. (4I): How did (or would) receiving a PMC that recognizes your veteran family member's service affect you and your family (*Prompt if needed: Is this a valuable VA benefit in your opinion?*) Are there other symbolic expressions of remembrance and gratitude that you would like to have offered (for example, availability of a larger area on the headstone or marker for a personal message or the availability of different headstone materials)? (*Prompt if additional examples are needed: Paperweight, medallion, bronze "V" or graphics on headstone*)

WRAP UP

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

Thank you very much for participating today.

