

## Certification Focus Groups Protocol

*The moderator will introduce herself or himself, go over rules and logistics, reference the observation room, and explain the purpose of the group.*

### **Purpose**

Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. Shugoll Research has been asked by the National Center for Education Statistics and other federal statistical agencies to help them understand more about job education, skills, training, preparation and other similar qualifications people may have. You were invited here because you are local residents who all have or expressed an interest in getting these types of qualifications. I and the federal statistical agencies that are involved are pleased we are able to get your input on this important topic.

*Opener – the opening “question” is intended to be friendly, conversational, somewhat relevant to the topic, and easy so respondents feel relaxed and part of a positive discussion.*

Let's get started with some introductions. Tell us your name, what you do for a living, and if you are working in the field you thought you would when you were in high school.

*Overview questions – these questions are to get the respondent talking about their qualifications and how they are perceived in the industry. We start with a broad question and move onto more specific questions.*

*MODERATOR: We are interested in the language that participants use to talk about their qualifications (e.g. “certification” “certificate” “license” etc.) Listen carefully for the language and terms participants use. Once the language has been established, use that language throughout the session.*

For the next hour or so we are going to talk about your work, and education, training, skills, and qualifications that you or your colleagues might have.

To start, I'd like to hear what you think is the most important qualification people need to get a job like yours.

*MODERATOR: Probe on what a person's occupation is if it isn't clear from the intro and the discussion*

What kinds of training or preparation did you have to undertake to qualify for your job?

*MODERATOR: Only if necessary, probe with “training, qualifications, preparation, certifications, certificates, licenses”.*

Are these things required for your job?

Where or how did you get your [USE PARTICIPANT LANGUAGE]?  
Is where or how you got it important in your field?

How long did it take you to get these qualifications?

Are there other training, qualifications, preparation, etc. in your field that are good to have, but not required? Probe: Why are they good to have?

Do most of your colleagues have these qualifications?

When you applied or were recruited for your job, did your employer ask you if you had certain qualifications? Do you think having these improved your chances of getting the job? Does it increase your chances of promotion and marketability in general?

What other things are important in your field to help you advance?

**Language – the purpose of this set of questions is to get participants to present key information about the qualifications and to use the different terms and language they might use formally and informally.**

If you had to describe these types of industry qualifications or (USE PARTICIPANT LANGUAGE) to someone like me who doesn't know a lot about them or someone just starting out in your field, how would you describe them?

What about if you are talking about these qualifications to people who have been in your profession a while? Do you use different terms for it? Like an abbreviation or acronym or something like that?

Do you have some qualifications that are important to your employer, but that are not relevant to other employers? When talking to others, how would you distinguish these qualifications from those that are recognized by employers in general?

*Probe on commonality of use of terms that come up.*

**Resume activity – this is a concrete example intended to focus respondents on short, succinct descriptions of their qualifications/certifications which could provide insight into what is important to highlight in the short, succinct survey questions we are interested in designing.**

*MODERATOR -- list on flip chart:*

If you were reviewing or preparing a resume or job application form, under what section heading would you list or expect to see the kinds of qualifications we have been talking about?

What, specifically, would you look for or put in that section? *Probe: Use the specific language you would use or expect to see.*

Let's look at some of these, how would someone demonstrate on a resume or job application form that they had these qualifications and skills?

[Probe for grades, course hours, exam pass/fail]

**Certifications focus – this section asks some specific questions about properties of the qualification/certification.**

*MODERATOR: Again, pick a few from the resume list or from notes to get discussion going on these questions – get to as many of these questions as time allows for:*

Do you have to take an exam or pass a performance test in order to get these?

Do you have to renew them?

Do you have to take tests periodically to maintain them?

Can these qualifications be revoked or suspended?

What organizations award them?

Are these part of a licensing process?

**Check to see if there are any follow-up questions needed from observation room and END.**