

Appendix 2

Focus Group Questions Document

RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Moderator: Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. You were asked to participate because you are or were during the past three years a customer, potential customer, or unsuccessfully applied for technical or financial assistance. I want to make sure you understand that you are free to decline to answer any question and anything thing you say or do not say here today will not affect in any way your ability to receive financial or technical assistance or services from USDA. Your privacy concerning the information you provide during this focus group will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. We have a stenographer here today taking down what everyone says. But this information will not be attributed to an individual; rather, what is said will be attributed to the number in front of you. The essential purpose of this focus group is to find out what types of experiences and interactions people have had with Rural Development. During our discussion about Rural Development, when you respond to the questions please indicate what program you are referring to.

1. Let's Start with your first Contacts with Rural Development . . .

- We would like to know how people first become aware of USDA Rural Development ("RD").
- How did you learn about programs RD offers?
- Can you tell me where it was that you first had direct contact with an RD employee?
- When you contacted RD can you tell me the job title of the person you dealt with most often?

2. Let's talk about how well Rural Development communicates with customers and the public . . .

- If people have questions or issues relating to RD programs or services, who do they typically go to at RD for help?
- Are RD employees usually willing and able to tell people about program opportunities?
- How can communications by RD with customers and the public be improved?

3. Let's discuss Rural Development's efforts to reach out to the public and inform them about Rural Development Programs . . .

- In what ways have you heard about Rural Development and programs it offers?
- Are there any suggestions on how RD could better reach customers and potential customers to inform them about its programs?

4. Now Questions About the Application Process . . .

- How easy or difficult is the process to apply for a program or assistance?
- Do applicants receive help from RD with completing the application?
- Who at RD typically provides help?
- How helpful are the services received from RD staff during the application process?
 - Do the RD employees treat people courteously and professionally?
- Are decisions on applications made in a timely manner?
 - How long does it take to get the decision?
- Are there any costs associated with applying for programs or assistance that you found made it harder for you to apply?

5. Many of you have applied for certain RD programs and had your applications denied. We would like to hear from you about your experiences.

- Were you given the reasons why your application was denied?
- Do you believe that you were treated fairly even though your application was denied?
 - Why/why not?
- Were you made aware of and did you participate in the appeal process?
- Is the appeal process fair?
 - Why/why not?

6. Now We Want to Talk About Any Potential Barriers to Participation . . .

- Is there any reason why any of you, or your families or friends ever declined to participate in an RD program or service even though they were eligible for and could have benefited from the program or service?
 - What program/service was it?
 - Why did you/he/she decline to participate?

- Is there any reason why a customer or potential customer would be reluctant to participate in RD programs?
 - Same question for any specific program or service.
- Are there any policies or procedures that make it more difficult for customers or potential customers to participate in RD programs or services?
 - Which ones, and why?
- Is there any type of language barrier that makes it more difficult for people to participate in RD programs? Describe.

7. Let's Talk About Issues Related to Fairness/Discrimination . . .

- What is RD's reputation in the community for fairness?
 - Why?
- Do you believe you have been treated fairly and without discrimination by RD from the time you first contacted RD to today? Explain.

8. Let's talk about how easy or difficult it is to use the RD office.

- Is there any difficulty with going to a local RD office such as distance, location, or hours of operation? Explain.
- Are there any physical or other barriers at the office that make it difficult to obtain services there?

9. Turning to the RD Website . . .

- Has anyone looked at the RD state website? Was it helpful?
- How about the RD national website? Was it helpful?
- Can people find what they are looking for?
- What could be done to improve the website(s)?

10. Finally Let's Talk About Improvements That Can be made . . .

- What can RD do to make it easier for people/companies to participate in RD programs?
- How can RD improve its procedures and programs to better serve customers in a fair and non-discriminatory manner?
- How can RD improve its services to better serve you?
- Given your experiences with USDA, what changes, improvements, or actions would you take immediately to make USDA customers feel comfortable that they will be treated fairly and encourage them to take advantage of USDA services?

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Moderator: Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. You were asked to participate because you are or were during the past three years a customer, potential customer, or unsuccessfully applied for technical or financial assistance. I want to make sure you understand that you are free to decline to answer any question and anything thing you say or do not say here today will not affect in any way your ability to receive financial or technical programs or services from USDA. Your privacy concerning the information you provide during this focus group will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. We have a stenographer here today taking down what everyone says. But this information will not be attributed to an individual; rather, what is said will be attributed to the number in front of you. The essential purpose of this focus group is to find out what types of experiences and interactions people have had with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

1. Let's Talk About Initial Contacts with Natural Resources Conservation Service . . .

- We would like to know how people first become aware of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS").
- How did you learn about programs NRCS offers?
- Can you tell me where it was that you first had direct contact with an NRCS employee?
- When you contacted NRCS can you tell me the job title of the person you dealt with most often?

2. Let's talk about how well Natural Resources Conservation Service communicates with customers and the public. . .

- If people have questions or issues relating to NRCS programs or services, who do they typically go to at NRCS for help?
- Are NRCS employees usually willing and able to tell people about program opportunities?

- How can communications by NRCS with customers and the public be improved?

3. Let's discuss Natural Resources Conservation Service's efforts to reach out to the public and inform them about Natural Resources and Conservation Service . . .

- In what ways have you heard about Natural Resources Conservation Service and programs it offers?
- Are there any suggestions on how NRCS could better reach customers and potential customers to inform them about its programs?

4. Now Questions About the Application Process . . .

- How easy or difficult is the process to apply for a program or assistance?
- Do applicants receive help from NRCS with completing the application?
- Who at NRCS typically provides help?
- How helpful are the services received from NRCS staff during the application process?
 - Do the NRCS employees treat people courteously and professionally?
- Are decisions on applications made in a timely manner?
 - How long does it take to get the decision?
- Are there any costs associated with applying for programs or assistance that you found made it harder for you to apply?

5. Many of you have applied for certain NRCS programs and had your applications denied. We would like to hear from you about your experiences.

- Were you given the reasons why your application was denied?
- Do you believe that you were treated fairly even though your application was denied?
 - Why/why not?
- Were you made aware of and did you participate in the appeal process?
- Is the appeal process fair?
 - Why/why not?

6. Now We Want to Talk About Any Potential Barriers to Participation . . .

- Is there any reason why any of you, or your families or friends ever declined to participate in an NRCS program or service even though they were eligible for and could have benefited from the program or service?

- o What program/service was it?
- o Why did you/he/she decline to participate?
- Is there any reason why a customer or potential customer would be reluctant to participate in NRCS programs?
 - o Same question for any specific program or service.
- Are there any policies or procedures that make it more difficult for customers or potential customers to participate in NRCS programs or services?
 - o Which ones, and why?
- Is there any type of language barrier that makes it more difficult for people to participate in NRCS programs? Describe.

7. Let's Talk About Issues Related to Fairness/Discrimination . . .

- What is NRCS's reputation in the community for fairness?
 - o Why?
- Do you believe you have been treated fairly and without discrimination by NRCS from the time you first contacted NRCS to today? Explain.

8. Let's talk about how easy or difficult it is to use the NRCS office.

- Is there any difficulty with going to a local NRCS office such as distance, location, or hours of operation? Explain.
- Are there any physical or other barriers at the office that make it difficult to obtain services there?

9. Turning to the NRCS Website . . .

- Has anyone looked at the NRCS state website? Was it helpful?
- How about the NRCS national website? Was it helpful?
- Can people find what they are looking for?
- What could be done to improve the website(s)?

10. Finally Let's Talk About Improvements That Can be made . . .

- What can NRCS do to make it easier for people/companies to participate in NRCS programs?
- How can NRCS improve its procedures and programs to better serve customers in a fair and non-discriminatory manner?
- How can NRCS improve its services to better serve you?
- Given your experiences with USDA, what changes, improvements, or actions would you take immediately to make USDA customers feel

comfortable that they will be treated fairly and encourage them to take advantage of USDA services?

FARM SERVICE AGENCY FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

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FARM SERVICE AGENCY AND RMA FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Moderator: Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. You were asked to participate because you are or were during the past three years a customer, potential customer, or unsuccessfully applied for technical or financial assistance. I want to make sure understand that you are free to decline to answer any question and anything thing you say or do not say here today will not affect in any way your ability to receive financial or technical programs or services from USDA. Your privacy concerning the information you provide during this focus group will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. We have a stenographer here today taking down what everyone says. But this information will not be attributed to an individual; rather, what is said will be attributed to the number in front of you. The essential purpose of this focus group is to find out what types of experiences and interactions people have had with the Farm Service Agency and the Risk Management Agency. During our discussion about the Farm Service Agency, when you respond to the questions please indicate whether you are speaking about loan programs or other assistance.

- 1. Let's Start with your first Contacts with the Farm Service Agency . . .**
 - We would like to know how people first become aware of USDA Farm Service Agency ("FSA").
 - How did you learn about programs FSA offers?
 - Can you tell me where it was that you first had direct contact with an FSA employee?
 - When you contacted FSA can you tell me the job title of the person you dealt with most often?

- 2. Let's discuss the Farm Service Agency's efforts to reach out to the public and inform them about Farm Service Agency Programs . . .**
 - In what ways have you heard about FSA and programs it offers?

- Are there any suggestions on how FSA could better reach customers and potential customers to inform them about its programs?

3. Now Questions About the Application Process . . .

- How easy or difficult is the process to apply for a program or assistance?
- Do applicants receive help from FSA with completing the application?
- Who at FSA typically provides help?
- How helpful are the services received from FSA staff during the application process?
 - Do the FSA employees treat people courteously and professionally?
- Are decisions on applications made in a timely manner?
 - How long does it take to get the decision?
- Are there any costs associated with applying for programs or assistance that you found made it harder for you to apply?

4. Many of you have applied for certain FSA programs and had your applications denied. We would like to hear from you about your experiences.

- Were you given the reasons why your application was denied?
- Do you believe that you were treated fairly even though your application was denied?
 - Why/why not?
- Were you made aware of and did you participate in the appeal process?
- Is the appeal process fair?
 - Why/why not?

5. Now We Want to Talk About Any Potential Barriers to Participation . . .

- Is there any reason why any of you, or your families or friends ever declined to participate in an FSA program or service even though they were eligible for and could have benefited from the program or service?
 - What program/service was it?
 - Why did you/he/she decline to participate?
- Is there any reason why a customer or potential customer would be reluctant to participate in FSA programs?
 - Same question for any specific program or service.
- Are there any policies or procedures that make it more difficult for customers or potential customers to participate in FSA programs or services?
 - Which ones, and why?

- Is there any type of language barrier that makes it more difficult for people to participate in FSA programs? Describe.

6. Let's Talk About Issues Related to Fairness/Discrimination . . .

- What is FSA's reputation in the community for fairness?
 - Why?
- Do you believe you have been treated fairly and without discrimination by FSA from the time you first contacted FSA to today? Explain.

7. Let's talk about how easy or difficult it is to use the FSA office.

- Is there any difficulty with going to a local FSA office such as distance, location, or hours of operation? Explain.
- Are there any physical or other barriers at the office that make it difficult to obtain services there?

8. Turning to the FSA Website . . .

- Has anyone looked at the FSA state website? Was it helpful?
- How about the FSA national website? Was it helpful?
- Can people find what they are looking for?
- What could be done to improve the website(s)?

9. We Need Your Views on County Committees . . .

- Does the County Committee fairly represent farmers' and ranchers' interests without discrimination?
 - Why/why not?
- Have anyone ever served on a County Committee?
 - If so, what were your experiences in terms of fairly and non-discriminatorily assisting farmers and ranchers?
- Would you serve (again) on a County Committee? Why/why not?

10. Let's Talk About Improvements That Can be made . . .

- What can FSA do to make it easier for people/companies to participate in FSA programs?
- How can FSA improve its procedures and programs to better serve customers in a fair and non-discriminatory manner?
- How can FSA improve its services to better serve you?
- Given your experiences with USDA, what changes, improvements, or actions would you take immediately to make USDA customers feel comfortable that they will be treated fairly and encourage them to take advantage of USDA services?

11. A Question About RMA . . .

- How can RMA improve its procedures and programs to more fairly deliver crop insurance services in a non-discriminatory manner?

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