

Appendix 5

CBO Participant Communications

DRAFT LETTER

**Community-Based Organizations (“CBO”) interviews for the US
Department of Agriculture**

Dear _____ [insert name of recipient]:

The law firm of Jackson Lewis LLP has been engaged to conduct an **independent** assessment of the effectiveness of the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) programs in reaching diverse populations in a non-discriminatory manner. As part of this independent assessment, interviews with CBOs will help Jackson Lewis obtain customer views, opinions, and experiences of how effectively USDA is equitably and fairly providing technical and financial assistance to all customers and potential customers through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, and Risk Management Agency (collectively “Agencies”), throughout rural America.

Your organization has been selected to participate in a telephonic interview because your members have been customers or potential USDA customers who have applied for technical or financial assistance, or individuals who have been dissuaded from applying for technical or financial services. The discussions will explore issues related to your members’ experiences with the USDA application process and followup, including the provision of funds, assistance, and services. Examples of topics include the following:

- Your members’ knowledge of the programs for which they may have been eligible;
- The process in applying for a particular program, including the time your members had to wait for a decision;
- Your members’ opinions of the fairness and equity of USDA business processes, including the timeliness of the review process;
- Barriers and successes of the application process, including accessibility, equity, fairness, and accountability; and
- Recommendations for USDA to improve the accessibility, fairness, and equity of programs in reaching minority, women, and other underserved populations.

The interview will take about 1-2 hours.

The opinions of your members are valued by USDA. If you decide to participate, we would like you to designate one person in your organization who is the most knowledgeable about your members’ experiences/interactions with the Agencies and any issues arising from them, for the interview. While participation in the telephonic interview is voluntary, we hope your organization will participate because your responses are critical to provide a complete picture of USDA’s programs. In addition, the person from your organization who is interviewed can decline to answer an interview question if he/she does not want to answer the question. Information your organization gives us during the interview will be confidential, and will not be disclosed without your organization’s permission to anyone other than those working on the project, except as otherwise required by

law. The information collected during the interviews will be aggregated for analysis and reporting. No individual CBO identifying information will be reported.

Your organization is free to decide if it wants to be part of the study. If your organization chooses not to take part, its choice will not influence the type or the quality of services your organization or your members may receive in the future from USDA. If your organization has any questions about the study, _____ can be reached by telephone at _____ or by email at _____@____.com.

A member of the Jackson Lewis Assessment Team will contact your organization soon to discuss your participation in the interview, who from your organization will be interviewed, and that person's contact information. We will need to know if the person you select to be interviewed is represented by counsel in a lawsuit against the USDA or one of its agencies. This is so we will not ask the person selected to do anything without his/her counsel's consent. Meanwhile, if your organization has questions, please call _____ at _____.

Thank you for considering participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Please see Public Burden Statement below

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 0503-xxxx. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 120 minutes or two hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

PHONE SCRIPT FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Hello, may I speak with **[insert CBO representative's name]**?

[When representative is confirmed:] My name is _____. I'm calling from Jackson Lewis LLP. We have been engaged to conduct an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) programs in reaching diverse populations in a non-discriminatory manner. You should have recently received a letter about interviews we will be conducting with Community-Based Organizations whose members are predominantly women, minorities, and/or socially disadvantage customers or potential customers of USDA, and/or individuals who have been dissuaded from applying for financial or technical programs. We would like your organization to participate in an interview. It will be about how fairly the USDA provides technical and financial assistance to its customers.

Did you receive a letter in the mail with details about the interviews?

A. ___ Yes.

→ Would your organization be interested in participating in an interview?

___ Yes. → That's great. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this independent assessment. The interview will take between one and two hours and will be conducted by telephone. It is tentatively scheduled to take place on ___ at ___ o'clock. As we mentioned in our letter we would like to interview the official or member of your organization who is the most knowledgeable about your members' experiences/interactions with the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, and Risk Management Agency. Could you please give me the name and contact information of the person who will be chosen to speak on behalf of your organization? Your organization's responses will be kept confidential, except as may be required by law, and your organization has the right to refuse to answer any questions. If your organization chooses not to participate, this will not affect your organization or your members in any way in your/their dealings with the USDA. We will be sending a reminder postcard and a follow-up reminder phone-call.

___ No. → Okay, may I ask you the reason why? **[Record reasons (refer to non-response answers)]**: _____. Thank you for your time.

B. ___ No.

→ Okay, let me tell you a little about the Community-Based Organization interviews. It will be about your members' experiences applying for particular programs, their opinions of the equity of the USDA business processes, and any barriers and successes of the application process. The interview will take between one and two hours and will be conducted by telephone. It is tentatively scheduled to take place on ___ at ___ o'clock. Your organization's responses will

be kept confidential, except as may be required by law, and your organization has the right to refuse to answer any questions. If your organization chooses not to participate, this will not affect your organization or your members in any way in their dealings with the USDA.

Would your organization be interested in participating in an interview?

 Yes. → That's great. We would like to interview the official or member of your organization who is the most knowledgeable about your members' experiences/interactions with the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, and Risk Management Agency. Could you please give me the name and contact information of the person who will be chosen to speak on behalf of your organization? Thank you for agreeing to have your organization participate in this study. We will be sending a reminder postcard and making a follow-up reminder phone-call.

 No. → Okay, may I ask you the reason why? **[Record reasons (refer to non-response answers)]**: _____.

Would you like us to resend the letter? Is your organization at this address **[insert address]**? I will re-mail the letter today and call back on **[insert date]**. Thank you for your time. **[End call]**.

Keep getting voicemail:

Hello, this is **(Name)** from Jackson Lewis. I am calling you again because I previously left a message regarding your organization's possible participation in an interview which is part of an independent assessment about USDA program financial and technical assistance and did not hear back from you. Hearing your organizations' members' views and opinions about their experiences is very important to us. My name again is **(Name)**. Please call me at XXX.XXX.XXXX.

Contacting a supplemental contact:

I'm trying to reach X, and X put down your name as an additional contact. Can you get the message to X that we are trying to get **[name of Community-Based Organization]** to participate in an interview that is part of an independent assessment about the USDA financial and technical assistance programs? Our number here is XXX.XXX.XXXX.

REMINDER!

[Insert Date]
Community-Based Organization Interview
For the
Jackson Lewis, LLP Independent Assessment of
United States Department of Agriculture
at
_____ **a.m/p.m**

You will be called at the following telephone number: _____

If that number is incorrect, please contact us at _____

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