

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) Understanding the Value of Service

Currently Serving Focus Group Protocol

I. Project Overview

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) engages more than five million Americans as community volunteers (i.e., service participants) in service through its core programs such as Senior Corps and AmeriCorps. In CNCS's 2011-2015 strategic plan, the agency commits to strengthening the national service experience. In order to better understand participant experience with service under a CNCS program, CNCS has contracted with ICF International to gather specific information from participants on their service experience.

Prior to taking part in focus groups, potential respondents will be asked the following three pre-screening questions.

1. [Ask all] In order for ICF to contact you, could you please confirm your contact information:
Full Name; Phone; Gender: [F/M/Do not wish to identify]

[Ask of AmeriCorps only] Could you confirm:
Email; Birth Month/Year

[Ask of Senior Corps only] Please provide the following information:
Email; Birth Month/Year

[Ask all] Do you have a preferred means of contact, and is there any other information you would like to share with us?

2. [Ask AmeriCorps only. This will be used to identify individuals from disadvantaged circumstances.] Please mark YES if any of the following that previously applied or currently apply to you (but do NOT indicate which apply or applied to you):

- Yes
- No

I dropped out of or did not complete high school. I do not have a high school diploma or have not acquired a GED.

I was unemployed. Check this box if you were not in school and considered unemployed for any length of time. Do NOT check this box if you were unemployed while enrolled in school or took normal vacation breaks between years of high school or post-secondary education.

I was in foster care or I lived with a relative through a state-supervised kinship or guardianship program.

I have limited English proficiency because English is not my native language.

I was homeless for any length of time. Check this box if for a period of time you lacked a fixed, regular, adequate night-time residence, or if you lived in a shelter or place not designated as a regular sleeping accommodation.

I left home and remained away without parental or guardian permission for any length of time under the age of 18 years.

I attended a continuation or alternative high school.

I was enrolled in a program for students at risk of dropping out of high school.

I was convicted of an offense as a juvenile or adjudicated as a juvenile offender.

I was (or am) an individual with one or more physical, mental or learning disabilities.

I received free or reduced school meals at any time.

3. Which of the following best describes your military status?

- Currently serving in one of the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, U.S Joint Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard
- Currently a Veteran due to prior service in one of the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, U.S Joint Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard
- Never served in one of the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, U.S Joint Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard

To conduct this study, ICF will be gathering data via focus groups. Your insights will help to provide information that CNCS can use to inform future program practices and improve the service experience for participants. We know your time is valuable and greatly appreciate you being here today.

II. Confidentiality Statement

All data collected from the focus group today will be aggregated with data from other focus groups. Each comment reported will be non-attributable in that personal identifying information will be stripped from the individual comments before the comments are presented outside our ICF research team. All personal identifying information we collect today will be used for record keeping purposes and not to track specific responses. We also ask that each participant respect the confidentiality of other participants and not disclose any information shared today with anyone outside this room.

III. Ground Rules

Given the short timeframe we have to collect a large amount of data today, I ask that you follow some simple ground rules to help keep us all on track.

- Please do not interrupt one another. One person should speak at a time. This is important so we can capture each of your thoughts in our note-taking.
- Be respectful of others' opinions, there are no right or wrong answers since all answers are based on personal experience.
- Stay on topic. Please provide answers that are relevant to the question asked.

- Be understanding of the facilitator's role. At times, I may need to interrupt you to move to a new question or to allow another participant to speak. This will help keep us on track and ensure we cover all of the questions presented within the time allowed. If you have additional information you want to share but time does not permit us to discuss it, please feel free to email me.
- Any "rules" you would add?

Any questions before we get started? If not, then let's proceed.

[Note to Facilitator: When [serve/volunteer] appears in a question or probe, please use "serve" for AmeriCorps focus groups and "volunteer" for Senior Corps focus groups.]

IV. Protocol Questions**A. Recruitment Experiences**

1. Please briefly describe your recruitment experience. What were the most positive aspects of your recruitment and selection process? What about the most difficult aspects?

B. Decision Making to Enter Service

2. What were your primary reasons for deciding to [serve/volunteer]?

C. Participant Satisfaction

3. Please describe your level of satisfaction with each of the following facets of the CNCS [service/volunteer] experience. What CNCS components were satisfying or dissatisfying:
 - a. Type and/or amount of training received
 - b. Support and supervision
 - c. Stipend
 - d. Education award and/or loan forbearance *[Do not ask of Senior Corps]*
 - e. Work/tasks performed
 - f. Level of intensity in service
 - g. People with whom you interact (e.g., coworkers, clients)
 - h. Working in teams versus independently
 - i. Your overall experience

4. What could be improved that would allow you to have a more meaningful and satisfying [service/volunteer] experience?

D. Organizational Supports/Fit

5. To what extent do you feel supported by CNCS, your program, and the people you [serve/volunteer] with?

E. The Service Experience

6. Please describe the most memorable aspects of your service experience, both in terms of the rewarding and challenging parts.
7. In what ways are your skills sets being utilized through your [service/volunteering] experience?

F. Formative, Defining, or Redefining Experience

8. In what ways has your [service/volunteer] experience impacted you?
9. At what point in time in your [service/volunteering] so far have you experienced the greatest change?

G. Commitment to Service

10. To what extent do you feel committed to [service/volunteering]?

V. Debrief/Closing Statement

This closes our focus group today. Our next steps in the project include conducting additional focus groups, analyzing focus group data to identify common themes mentioned, and conducting a Web survey to assess prevalence of perceptions. The survey results will then be analyzed and presented in conjunction with the focus group data to help CNCS better understand the participant service experience and what helps participants gain from that experience. This project concludes in September 2012 so the full report will be submitted just prior. Should you think of additional comments to share with me regarding the questions asked today, please contact me (INSERT NAME) via phone (INSERT #) or email (INSERT EMAIL). Again, thank you for your time!