

Focus Group Moderator Guide SSA Ticket to Work Program

Background (Do Not Read Aloud)

The goal of the Ticket to Work program is to assist Social Security beneficiaries who are between the ages of 18 through 64 and who have a disability, to join or re-join the workforce. The program promotes increased self-sufficiency and greater financial independence by providing access to employment support and services to help beneficiaries reach their work goals. The Beneficiary Access and Support Services (BASS) contract supports the program by developing and implementing a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy, using online and social media, targeted communications and marketing materials.

Focus Group Kick Off

The moderator will begin the session by introducing himself and any other individuals – such as note takers – who might be in the room, as well as their connection to Social Security TTW BASS. He will inform focus group participants of the topic of conversation: Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work program. At this point, the moderator will communicate the expectations for the conversation, emphasizing that all points of view are welcome and sharing of opinions is encouraged. The moderator will also present the guidelines for the conversation, including informing participants that the session will be recorded and encouraging civil, respectful discussion. Each focus group will run approximately 90-120 minutes.

(Read Aloud)

INTRODUCTION:

Hello. My name is _____ and I’m the moderator for today’s 2-hour group discussion. _____ will be taking notes.

The purpose of this focus group is to discuss the impact of messages and themes designed to build awareness of the Ticket to Work program benefits. The messages and stories are intended to generate interest in the program and persuade the intended audience to respond to the call-to-action. At the conclusion of the focus group sessions, we hope Social Security will have a better sense of which messages and themes are most likely to persuade people that the program is a good one for them, and that they should participate. Social Security will also gain a sense of which messages do not encourage people to participate, or perhaps even inspire a negative response from potential participants.

Feel free to make any negative or positive comments about any of the things we will be discussing today. This is a free flowing discussion and there are no right or wrong answers.

Before we get started, here are some ground rules and points of information:

DISCLOSURES:

1. **CONFIDENTIALITY.** Everything that you say here will be kept strictly confidential. Nothing said in this group will ever be associated with any individual by name. We would also ask that you similarly maintain the confidentiality of what is said in the group.

2. **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION.** Your participation in this group is entirely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw from the group at any time, and nothing you say or do during this session will affect your Social Security benefit. The consent forms provide more detailed information regarding confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. If you haven't already done so, please sign the consent form and pass it to _____.

3. **VIDEOTAPING.** This session is being taped so that we can write an accurate report of what is said here. You will not be identified by name. This is part of our organization's quality assurance since we want to make sure that we collect all opinions, insights, and comments accurately and do not misrepresent anything that is discussed.

4. **THANKS.** Thank you for arranging your schedule today to be here for this session. We really appreciate you giving us your time and your opinions.

GROUND RULES:

1. Please turn off your cell phones and any other electronic devices such as PDA's, laptops, I-pads etc.
2. Please talk one at a time in a voice as loud as mine.
3. Please avoid side conversations with your neighbors.
4. We need to hear from everyone in the course of the discussion, but you don't have to answer every question.
5. Feel free to respond directly to someone who has made a point.
6. You don't have to address your comments to me to get them on the table. You should feel free to present them to the group as a whole.

SELF-INTROS: Please introduce yourself to the group and tell us:

- Your first name
- How long you have.....
- How long you have.....

Use an icebreaker here.

Topics of Discussion:

“What do you already know about the Ticket to Work program and Social Security Work Incentives?”

The moderator will ask the group whether they currently have any awareness of the Ticket to Work program, and then later probe into their awareness and understanding of work incentives.

If any focus group participants are familiar with the program, the moderator will continue to ask questions about their awareness of the program, including:

- What they know about the program
- How did they learn about the program
- What they believe the purpose of the program to be

Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviors

After establishing participants' levels of awareness of the SSA Ticket to Work program, the moderator will move discussion toward attitudes, beliefs and behaviors with respect to four separate themes relating to the Ticket to Work program. The moderator will focus discussion on how the focus group participants view and respond to each theme, as well as to what degree that theme resonates with each of them.

Basic questions on each theme should include variations on the questions below.

Do participants find [Statement or Theme X] to be accurate, persuasive, motivating or speak to them personally?

- o Is there a particular part of this message that speaks to you? If so, why?
- o What is it about this idea that you find persuasive?
- o Is there anything in this statement you disagree with, or find off-putting or makes you feel less inclined to consider the Ticket to Work program? If so, why?
- o Do you feel this statement is a true one? Does it apply to your situation and experiences?

Testing Themes

Theme 1: *The Ticket Program can help you achieve financial independence.*

- o Message #1A: Many beneficiaries find that their monthly Social Security benefit is not enough to support themselves and their families. With the right opportunities and supports, however, many Social Security recipients can earn a higher standard of living by going to work and leaving benefits.

Moderator:

Do you agree with the first statement? What do you think about the second part of the statement? Is that something that interests you?

Do you find the prospect of working and leaving the benefit rolls to be motivating? Does it speak to you personally?

Is there a particular part of this message that speaks to you? If so, why?

What is it about this idea that you find persuasive?

Is there anything in this statement you disagree with, or find off-putting or makes you feel less inclined to consider the Ticket to Work program? If so, why?

- o **Message #1B:** There are risks associated with becoming employed and working your way off benefits. Social Security's Ticket to Work program has tools and people in place to help you understand and manage those risks.

Moderator:

How do you feel about these potential risks? What do you think those risks are and how can they be managed? Would you use the tools and people at the Ticket to Work program to better understand and manage those risks?

Theme 2: *Support is available every step of the way.*

- o **Message #2A:** The Ticket to Work Program – and Work Incentives are free, and participation is voluntary.

Moderator:

Did you know this about the TTWP? Does this make you more or less interested in the program?

- o **Message #2B:** Your desire to work should not be clouded by fear. Using the free tools and supports offered by Social Security, you can make informed decisions confidently.

Moderator:

Do you find this statement persuading? Does it make you more or less likely to explore the program?

- o **Message #2C:** Work Incentives are one kind of tool that Social Security offers. They are special rules that make it easier to start working while safeguarding your cash and health care benefits until you earn enough to make it on your own, without cash benefits. And you will have access to experts who understand work incentives and will explain how they can help you.

Moderator:

What do you already know about Social Security's work incentives?

Do you find this statement informative, or reassuring?

What is it about this idea that you find persuasive in considering participating in TTW?

Is there anything in this statement that makes you feel more inclined/less inclined to consider the Ticket to Work program? If so, why?

- o **Message #2D:** Social Security has assigned experts to help you make decisions about entering or re-entering the workforce. You could consider these experts, to be your “employment team”, because they can help you decide which work incentives will work best for you and what services will help you to reach your employment goal.

Moderator:

Does this information motivate you to participate in the program? Why or why not?

Is there anything in this statement that makes you feel less inclined to consider the Ticket to Work program? If so, why?

What do you think about this idea of having an employment team? Would it be useful or not?

Would you be interested in utilizing this sort of team and these services? Why or why not?

What would you expect this employment team to do for you?

Theme #3: *Work can change your life for the better.* Subsidiary messages would include how work can have a beneficial effect on health and personal satisfaction.

- o **Message #3A:** Many people with disabilities who work report:
 - Increased self-esteem, motivation and confidence that comes from relying on oneself instead of relying on Social Security benefits
 - Decreased feeling of isolation
 - Improved health, especially because you can continue to receive health care benefits while working
 - That work helps you grow as a human being

Moderator:

Do you find this information to be persuasive, motivating or speak to you personally?

Do you feel this statement is a true one? Would it be true for you?

Is there a particular part of this message that speaks to you? If so, why?

What is it about this idea that you find persuasive?

Is there anything in this statement you disagree with, or find off-putting or makes you feel less inclined to consider the Ticket to Work program? If so, why?

- o **Message #3B:** Finding work and earning your way off benefits isn't for everyone, but it might be right for you.

Moderator:

What is your reaction to this statement?

How would you determine if finding work and earning your way off benefits was for you?

If it's not for you, what sort of person do you think this program is for?

Theme #4: *Work engages you in the community*. This theme emphasizes the intangibles, such as meeting new people, making new friends, and becoming a more active and engaged member of our society.

Moderator:

Do you find this idea of community engagement to be persuasive/motivating? Does it speak to you?

To what extent is this message meaningful to you?

Is there a particular part of this message that speaks to you? If so, why?

What is it about this idea that you find persuasive?

Is there anything in this statement you disagree with, or find off-putting or makes you feel less inclined to consider the Ticket to Work program? If so, why?

Do you feel this statement is a true one?

Do you think it would apply to your situation and experiences? If not, what sort of person would it apply to?

Taglines: Social Security has identified five possible 'taglines' to use in its materials to persuade eligible recipients to consider the Ticket to Work program. These taglines are basically a slogan for the program. The moderator will present each of these five taglines, using prompts such as those listed below to initiate a conversation on whether any of the focus group participants find the taglines speak to them.

What does this tagline mean to you?

What are your first thoughts when you hear this tagline?

Do you think this tagline relates to the Ticket to Work program? If not, why not?

Tagline 1: *Success Works*

Tagline 2: *Helping You Today So You Can Succeed Tomorrow*

Tagline 3: *Good Jobs, Good Careers, and Better Self-Supporting Futures*

Tagline 4: *Choose Fulfillment. Choose Earnings. Choose Work.*

Tagline 5: *Choose Work*

Visual Material: At this point, the moderator will present and discuss the materials we have available.

We'd like to share some materials with you to get your opinions. The first is a short video featuring a young woman who has used the Ticket to Work program. [show Megan Riggs]

After the short video is shown, prompt the participants to discuss their reaction to the video. What did they think of it? Did they identify with it? Did it make sense to them?

Ticket to Work Employment Theme Preferences: We've talked to you today about the Ticket to Work employment team concept. If Social Security were to create materials that illustrate this employment team, which of the following themes do you like, not like or you neither like nor dislike [show concept boards and ask the group to voice their opinion and put in rank order].

WRAP UP

Read Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement – This Ticket to Work Program focus group, cleared under OMB No. 0960-0788, meets the requirements of 44 U.S.C. § 3507, as amended by section 2 of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. Participation in this activity is voluntary. We estimated that it would take approximately 2 hours to complete. If you would like to comment on our time estimate, please send your comments to: SSA, 6401 Security Blvd., Baltimore, MD 21235-6401.

We've covered a lot of ground in the last two hours. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Thank you very much for your participation. Your feedback has been very valuable and we may wish to hear additional input from you in the future. If we can contact you, we would appreciate you providing your email and/or phone number. Would you be interested in doing so?