

Focus Group Moderator Guide

Women Entrepreneurs, Self-Limiting Perceptions, and Segmentation Focus Groups

Focus Group Date and Time: _____

Focus Group Location: _____

Number of Focus Group Attendees: _____

0:00 Opening

[Introduce the moderator and the recorder]

Public Policy Associates is working with the National Women's Business Council to understand how women business owners plan for business growth and what resources women need to grow their businesses. The focus group today, along with others we are conducting in [location 1] and [location 2], will focus on your experiences and strategies for starting, owning, and growing your businesses. -

A focus group, in case you have not participated in one before, is a conversation among us on set topics. Here, we'll focus on business ownership and growth. I will ask the group a series of questions to get the conversation going. Your job is to be as candid as possible in discussing your ideas, questions, and concerns as a group. My job is to keep us moving from topic to topic so we cover everything in the allotted time. I will also make sure we hear from everyone; each of you is present because you have important perspectives that we need to hear. None of you are here to be an observer. We will be meeting for a total of two hours. Your participation is voluntary; if you have changed your mind about participating today, you are free to leave now.

The information you share in this group will not be attached to your names; all reports will use aggregated data. We will only use first names here. We are audio recording the conversation so we have another record of what was said for our analysis.

Before we get started, please mute your cell phones so we don't get interrupted.

Are there any questions?

0:05 Warm-Up

1. Let's get started by introducing ourselves. Please share your first name, how many people you employ, and, very briefly, the nature of the business that you own and your primary reason for becoming a business owner.

[MODERATOR: Make observations based on commonalities and differences from the pre-group participant profiles. Highlight: startup v. purchase, length of ownership range, range of revenue.]

[RECORDER: Complete seating chart with first names and last initial.]

Starting Your Business

0:20 Expectations

2. When you made the decision to become a business owner, what were your expectations and goals at that time for your business?

PROBE:

- *What kinds of growth expectations did they have regarding revenue, number of employees, number of locations, product/service offerings, etc.?*

3. How were these expectations influenced by your life situation at that time?

PROBE:

- *What specifically were the influences? Family situation, financial needs, employment status, range of opportunities in old job, other?*

0:30 Concerns

4. What were your concerns at the time you became a business owner? Was becoming a business owner more challenging than you expected it to be?

PROBES:

- *What challenges were experienced and how were hurdles overcome?*
- *Were the concerns and difficulties focused on industry, management, financing, production, employees, other?*
- *Did they use outside advisors to address these—financial in particular?*

0:40 Industry Experience

5. How much experience did you have in your present industry before starting your business?

PROBES:

- *Was experience through work experience in industry, supervisory/management experience, business partner's (if have) experience/knowledge, other?*
- *What was gained from experience, and what was missed from inexperience?*

Growth of Your Business

0:50 Expectations

6. What would be the ideal size of your business in five years? How do you decide whether (or when) to draw the line on your business's growth?

PROBES:

- *What was considered when deciding growth plan: market, management, financial, personal, other?*
- *How far ahead are they planning for growth?*

7. What steps have you already taken to prepare for growth?

PROBE:

- *Which steps have they taken: used outside advisors, undertaken studies, made technology upgrades, made financial requests, conducted organizational development, other?*

1:00 Motivations

8. You all have said business growth is a priority for you over the next three to five years. Why would you like to grow your business?

PROBES:

- *What are the financial motivations: replace lost income, stability for family, gain wealth, other?*
- *What are the personal motivations: challenge self, earn respect, have time flexibility, leave legacy, other?*

1:10 Risks

9. What risks will you be taking to make your growth goals happen? Why are these risks worth taking for you? What risks are not worth taking?

PROBES:

- *What risks specifically: time sacrifice, financial investment, possibility of failure, other?*
- *What approach was used to determine risk/return?*

1:20 Barriers and Resources

10. What do you see as barriers to expanding your business?

PROBES:

- *What were external barriers: business opportunities, market, financial situation, needing partners or mentors, other?*
- *What were internal barriers: support from family, time investment, not sure about managing a larger staff, other?*

11. What resources have you used or do you intend to seek in order to grow your business? Where do you find these resources? Have they met your needs?

PROBES:

- *What resources were sought: capital sources, training needs, market research, other?*
- *Have they used small business services like Small Business Development Centers, Women's Business Centers, SBTDC, a small business association, other?*
- *Have they used women's business organizations as a resource?*

1:35 Conclusion

That concludes our set of questions. Are there any other comments?

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in the discussion. Your input has been very valuable.

[RECORDER: Hold drawing and distribute incentives.]