

New and Emerging Burial Practices Study: Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Note: Specific guidance for the moderator is denoted in italics throughout the instrument; specific moderator language is bolded; and moderator actions are in blue, bolded italics. Times noted in parentheses next to each question represent where you should be after completing that question.

DATE ADMINISTERED: _____

TIME: _____

Hello, my name is _____.

The following introduction is generic and can be used if you have had no contact with the participants prior to official start of the group. Feel free to modify it as appropriate to fit the individual circumstances.

I work for Booz Allen Hamilton, a U.S. based consulting firm. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has asked us to conduct a study of how satisfied you are with the burial options the agency currently provides and to get your opinions on some new options that may be of interest to you. As a Veteran, your perspective is critical to our study.

As I ask each question, I encourage each of you to join the discussion and share your feelings with the rest of the group. Feel free to ask me for clarification or share any concerns you might have.

At this time, do you have any questions? Thank you again for your time.

1) First, let's get started by introducing ourselves. Let's go around the room and each of you tell the group your name, what branch of the services you were in, and what you most enjoyed about your time in the military. (+0:10)

Ensure all members of the group participate and be careful to not let one or two dominate with overly-long "war stories."

2) We'd like to begin by discussing how much, if any, thought you've given to the arrangements for your own funeral. (+0:17)

This is essentially a second warm-up question to get participants thinking in the right direction. It could turn into a very long discussion as the participants will want to explore all of the thoughts they've had on the subject, but try to keep them to just the amount of thought they've given to the subject. Let them know there will be plenty of opportunity to discuss the details later in the session. Interjecting something like "Until I started this project, I hadn't thought about it at all," or something similar from your perspective may help facilitate the discussion.

3) As Veterans, you are entitled to certain benefits for your national service, including VA-provided burial benefits. The VA would like to know how good of a job the agency is doing

communicating those benefits to the Veterans. Please tell me what you know about them.

(+0:32)

This should result in an open conversation with the Veterans. The interviewer should be listening for certain things, including:

- a) Burial at a national or State Veterans Cemetery*
- b) Headstone and burial markers provided by VA at private ceremonies*
- c) Presidential Memorial Certificate for the family*
- d) Cash plot allowance (partial payment for burial costs at a private or state cemetery)*
- e) Cash burial allowance (partial reimbursement of an eligible Veteran's burial and funeral costs)*
- f) U.S. Flag for burial*

If there is not much of a dialog among the group members, you may provide an example or two to begin the conversation. Be careful to avoid putting words in their mouths.

*After you gauge their level of prior knowledge, **hand out the brochure which explains their benefits** and review it as necessary to ensure they have the appropriate level of understanding.*

4) Based on what we've just discussed and the materials I've provided you, we'd like to know if you are satisfied with the burial benefits you currently have. (+0:42)

You should be listening for the following:

- a) Location: accessible for visits, nearness to previously buried loved ones, etc.*
- b) Cost*
- c) Options: burial, columbarium, etc.*
- d) Restrictions on rituals (if they know of any)*
- e) Other*

5) Now I'd like to talk about other burial options that you may have heard about or even experienced firsthand during passing of friends or loved ones. There are new types of cemeteries and new types of burials that have become available and we'd like to know your opinions of them.

Distribute the hand out describing each of these methods to the group.

Discuss each of these in turn. Pay particular attention to the three main research questions: 1) would Veterans choose one of the practices for themselves; 2) would it be an appropriate way for any Veteran to be buried; and 3) would the practice reduce the dignity and sanctity of the national cemeteries?

- a) Burial at sea (either casketed or cremated remains) (+0:56)**

- b) Dispersal of ashes in the air from aircraft(+1:03)**
- c) Biodegradable embalming materials, or no embalming (+1:10)**
- d) Biodegradable casket or cloth shroud (+1:17)**
- e) Burial in a dedicated section of a cemetery that uses only natural and organic methods and materials (+1:24)**
- f) Burial in a naturalistic setting (+1:31)**
- g) Coral reef burial (+1:38)**

6) Are you aware of any other burial options you and your loved ones might consider that we did not talk about? (+1:42)

7) Along with the burial methods and new ideas about cemeteries we've just discussed, the VA is studying other ways people are memorialized. Traditionally, the VA has provided headstones, but there may be other methods you would prefer. Please tell me what you think about each of the following.

You should probe for the Veteran's understanding of memorialization. Please ensure they understand this concept. Depending on their background, you may have to describe various methods that illustrate the concept of memorialization.

Discuss each of these in turn. Pay particular attention to the three main research questions: 1) would a Veteran choose one of the methods for themselves; 2) would it be an appropriate way for any Veteran to be memorialized; and 3) would this memorialization affect the dignity and sanctity of the national cemeteries?

- a) Scan-capable chips in gravestones (+1:48)**
- b) Integrating technology in a gravestone, such as in the form of a DVD(+1:54)**

8) Do you know of any other memorialization methods that are not currently offered by the VA that you might consider? (+1:59)

9) Is there anything else you would like to share with us today? (+2:04)

10) Thank you all for your time and sharing your thoughts on some very personal choices. Feedback from you and other Veterans will be a big part of making improvements to the VA's services. Do you have any questions for me?