

New and Emerging Burial Practices Study: Structured Interview Guide

Note: Specific guidance for the interviewer is denoted in italics throughout the instrument; specific interviewer language is bolded; and interviewer 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 interview. 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 and your loved ones are with the burial options the VA currently provides and to get your opinions on some new options that may be of interest to you. Your perspectives are critical to our study.

As I ask each question, please tell me any thoughts that come to mind and experiences you've had concerning the topic. Feel free to ask me for clarification or share any concerns you might have.

Thank you again for taking the time to discuss this with me. It can be a difficult topic, and I do appreciate your willingness to explore these issues with me.

1) Can you tell me a little more about your military service from (both, if applicable) your perspectives? (+0:05)

Follow up with a few questions to break the ice, such as: "How long were you in the service;" "Where were you stationed;" or "When did you get married?" The point is to build rapport and to better understand how the Veteran and the significant other are related and, for that matter, how they relate to one another.

2) We'd like to begin by asking you how much, if any, thought you've given to the arrangements for your own funerals. (+0:10)

This is essentially a second warm-up question to get them thinking in the right direction. 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. It could turn into a very long discussion as the Veteran might want to explore all of the thoughts he or she has had on the subject, however try to keep the Veteran to just the amount of thought he/she has given to the subject. Let the Veteran know there will be plenty of opportunity to discuss the details later in the session.

3) As a Veteran, you are entitled to certain benefits for your military 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.

(+0:15)

You should be listening for the following:

- 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 dialog with the Veteran, you may prompt him/her a little to begin the conversation, but be careful you don't put words in his/her mouth. 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) Let's talk about what you need and want from your burial arrangements. Do the benefits we just talked about meet your needs? (+0:20)

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.

Hand out material describing each of these methods to the Veteran and his/her family.

Discuss each of these in turn. Pay particular attention to the three main research questions: 1) would a Veteran 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 affect the dignity and sanctity of the national cemeteries?

- a) **Burial at sea (either casketed or cremated remains) (+0:25)**
- b) **Dispersal of ashes in the air from aircraft(+0:30)**
- c) **Biodegradable embalming materials, or no embalming (+0:35)**
- d) **Biodegradable casket or cloth shroud (+:40)**
- e) **Burial in a dedicated section of a cemetery that uses only natural and organic methods and materials (+0:45)**
- f) **Burial in a naturalistic setting (+0:50)**
- g) **Coral reef burial (+0:55)**

6) Do you know of any other burial practices that are not currently offered by the VA that you might consider? (+1:00)

7) Along with the burial methods and new ideas about cemeteries we've just discussed, the VA is also 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 he/she understands 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 (+1:05)**
- b) **Integrating technology in a gravestone, such as in the form of a DVD(+1:10)**

8) Do you know of any other memorialization methods that are not currently offered by the VA that you might consider? (+1:15)

9) Is there anything else you would like to share with us today? (+1:20)

10) Thank you very much 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?