

## AHS Focus Groups Moderator's Guide (120 minutes)

### 1. Ground rules and introduction (30 minutes)

- a. Hello everyone, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I work for the Census Bureau. Thank you for coming out tonight!
- b. We are going to talk about your experience with surveys. I will be the moderator for the focus group today. We will spend this time participating in a group discussion. There are no right or wrong answers..
- c. This session is being both video and audio recorded. We will not use your name in any of our reports.
- d. GUIDELINES: In order for this group to work well, here are some guidelines.
  - 1) Please speak one at a time.
  - 2) Speak in a voice as loud as mine so all can hear.
  - 3) Avoid side conversations with your neighbors, but you can piggy back on other people's comments in the group.
  - 4) I want to hear from everyone; however, you do not have to answer every question. Aim for "equal air time" so no one talks too much or too little. Occasionally I may need to cut someone off to ensure that everyone is heard or to ensure we cover all topics.
  - 5) If you disagree with someone else's comment, that's ok. But please be respectful. Similarly, say what you believe whether or not anyone agrees with you.
  - 6) The restroom is located \_\_\_\_\_ and snacks are located \_\_\_\_\_. At any time, you can excuse yourself to go to the restroom or to get snacks. However, I ask that only one person be up or out at a time so the conversation can continue.
  - 7) I cannot answer questions until the end of the group.
  - 8) Please set your phones on silent or turn them off.
- e. Please introduce yourselves using your first name and tell us about one activity that you enjoy doing. [GO AROUND TABLE, FINISH WITH SELF].
- f. Now we are going to turn the conversation to surveys you have taken.

### 2. General surveys/saliency and opinions on Census (10 minutes)

- a. Tell me about surveys have you taken.
  - i. [ASK AS MANY AS NEEDED TO GET CONVERSATION GOING. IF RESPONDENTS ARE TALKATIVE, NO NEED TO ASK ALL PROBES]:
    1. Who were they for? Why did you take them?
    2. Were they online? (On paper? On the phone? In-person?)
- b. How do you prefer to be contacted for surveys? (By email? Mail? Phone? In-person?) What if it was for an online survey? Tell me more about that.
- c. How important is the sponsor of the survey? (What if it is for the government? For a school or university? For a market research firm?)

- i. Thinking more about surveys for the government, how much does it matter what government agency is sponsoring the survey?
- ii. Tell me what you think about the Census Bureau.
- iii. Have you heard of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD? What do you think about it?

**3. AHS Contact Material Review (60 minutes)**

- a. Has anyone heard of the American Housing Survey, or the AHS?
  - i. [IF YES:] Great. I'd like to ask you to hold onto your comments about your experience with the AHS until later on in the group.
  - ii. [IF NO: CONTINUE.]
- b. Now we are going to pretend that you have been asked to participate in the AHS and you received an envelope in the mail. You may have questions about what the AHS is or what these materials mean. I want you to ask me these questions, but I will not answer them until the end of the group. I want you to pretend like you pulled this envelope out of your mailbox, without me there. [NOTE: HAND OUT MATERIALS ONE AT A TIME. MAKE SURE YOU COLLECT ALL MATERIALS AT THE END OF THE GROUP.]
- c. **Envelope (5 minutes)**
  - i. [HAND OUT ENVELOPE]. Take a minute to look over this envelope. [WAIT 30 SECS]
    - 1. Tell me what you'd think if you received this envelope in your mailbox.
    - 2. Do you know who this envelope is from?
    - 3. Would you open it?
- d. **Letter (20 minutes)**
  - i. [HAND OUT LETTER]. Inside the envelope you will see a letter. Let's stay on the front side of this letter for now. Please take a minute to read over this letter. Please underline anything you like in this letter, and circle anything that you don't like or find confusing. [WAIT 1-2 MINS].
  - ii. Tell me what you think about this letter.
    - 1. What is it asking you to do?
    - 2. What do you think is the purpose of the survey? Why is the survey important?
      - a. [IF MORE THAN ONE REASON IS MENTIONED FOR IMPORTANCE:] Which reason do you think is the most important?
    - 3. How would responding to this survey help you personally?
    - 4. Do you think you would complete this survey? Why or why not?
    - 5. When would you complete it? (If needed: Would you wait until you received a reminder?)
    - 6. Would you rather do this survey in another mode (paper or phone)?
    - 7. Did you notice the text at the bottom of the letter?
      - a. [IF NO: ASK RESPONDENTS TO LOOK]
      - b. What do you think about this text?
    - 8. Did you notice who the letter is addressed to?
      - a. [IF NO: ASK RESPONDENTS TO LOOK]
      - b. What do you think about this text?
- e. **FAQs (20 minutes)**

- i. Now I'd like to turn your attention to the back of the letter, where there is a list of frequently asked questions. Please take a minute to read over these FAQs. Please underline anything you like in this letter, and circle anything that you don't like or find confusing. [WAIT 1-2 MINS].
  1. Tell me what you think about these FAQs.
  2. Do these FAQs clear up any questions you had about the letter?
    - a. [IF NEEDED:] What do you think the purpose of the survey is now that you have read these FAQs? Why is the survey important?
  3. How do you feel about responding to this survey now?
  4. Please give me a thumbs up if these FAQs would make you more likely to respond, a thumbs down if it would make you less likely to respond, or a thumb to the side if it wouldn't make you more or less likely to respond. [COUNT FOR RECORDING].

**f. Checklist (15 minutes)**

- i. [HAND OUT CHECKLIST]. Along with the letter and FAQs, you would find this sheet of paper inside of the envelope. Please take a minute to read over this sheet. Please underline anything you like, and circle anything that you don't like or find confusing.
  1. Tell me what you think about this checklist.
  2. What do you think this is asking you to do? Why?
  3. Would you use the checklist before answering the survey? When would you do it?
  4. Where would you go to find the information on the checklist? What documents would you try to find? What would you do if you could not find them?
  5. How would it help you answer the survey? (If needed: Would you look at the checklist and documents while answering the survey?)

**4. AHS (20 minutes)**

- a. Thank you for your comments. Now I'm going to give you a little bit more background on the AHS.
- b. The AHS (American Housing Survey) is an important survey conducted by the US Census Bureau for HUD. It provides measures of housing in the US, including information on quality, cost, and availability as well as information on the homes and the people who live in them. The information is used by HUD to prepare an annual report for the President and Congress and is used by policymakers, private industry, and researchers, for example. The sample is made up of addresses. The survey asks questions about the housing unit, household members and neighborhood. Answering the survey should take 45 minutes, on average.
- c. Now that you know a little bit more about the AHS, how do you think we can improve the materials we showed you? [MAKE SURE GET RESPONSES FOR EACH, FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON LETTER AND CHECKLIST]
  - i. What we could make clearer?
  - ii. I want you to think a little more about what would convince you to respond to the AHS. Is there anything that I just mentioned that would be better at convincing you to respond than what is in the materials we showed you?

- iii. Now, thinking about the checklist specifically, what if instead of a checklist there was a worksheet with questions where you filled in dollar amounts? Would that be better or worse than a checklist?
- d. The AHS is a longitudinal survey, which means that people living at the address selected for the sample are asked to complete the survey again every couple of years. How would you want to be contacted by the AHS for later rounds of the survey?

**5. Conclusion**

- a. Thank you very much for spending your time with me this [afternoon/evening].
- b. We would like to ask you to help us with one more thing before we end. We are going to pass around a worksheet that will ask you to rank statements in terms of importance and interest. When you finish this, we will now come around and bring you your \$75 incentives for participating.
- c. If you have any additional questions, we will answer them as we come around the room.