

**Focus Group Guide**  
**Military Families: Online**

**Time available: 90 min.**

**Current time: 90 min.**

**I. Standard Introductions (10 min.)**

A. Greet each respondent by name as they enter the online forum.

B. Standard Moderator Introduction and Ground Rules.

i. Thank you for attending. My name is [MODERATOR NAME], and I will be talking with you about how the absentee voting process works for people like you who are the spouses and dependents of service members. However, I want to make it clear that rather than talk about candidates and political issues, we're going to focus on the voting PROCESS and how it works for people like you. We're not interested in your political views and are actually going to try to avoid talking about that tonight and really just focus on the process.

C. Explanation of focus group

D. Explanation of moderator's role

E. Stress that participation is voluntary; refusal to participate carries no penalty

F. Request that respondents do not share this discussion with others after the session is over

G. No personally identifiable information will be used in reporting.

1. Due to limited time, keep comments short and to the point.

2. Don't worry about misspelling or typos

3. Icons, emoticons, and "chatspeak" are fine.

4. Comments will be used for research and will be viewed by research professionals and discussed with the client.

5. You may see comments from fellow moderators who are helping, and there are others who are viewing the group but not participating.

6. If you lose your internet connection for some reason, please try to enter the room again following the directions you used to get here. If you can't get back, either click the tech support button or call tech support at 888-XXX-XXXX for more help.

#### H. Self-Introductions

### II. Perceptions of the Voting Process (20 min.)

A. Today we are going to talk a bit about how voting and elections work for people like you who are American citizens stationed away from home with their families. Again, instead of focusing on candidates and political issues, we are going to talk about the process of voting and how the system works.

1. What are the steps of the voting process for you and people like you who are family members of service members stationed here?
2. **COUNT.** Write down your answer to the following question: Thinking about the election this past November, how easy or difficult was the process of voting? Give the process a rating on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means it was very difficult, and 1 means it was very easy. You can use any number in between. Once you have a number, type in your answer.

#### **DISCUSS** briefly.

- a. Type yes or no to the following question: Was this your first time voting absentee from abroad?
- b. Where did you initially go to get information about the voting process? Where did you start?
- c. Did you hear from anyone about the voting process?
3. What about registration? How do you register to vote here?
  - a. Have you ever used a Federal Post Card Application to register? Tell me about that process.
4. How do you usually get a ballot? **PROBE:** Online, by mail?
  - a. How long did it take from the time you requested a ballot to the time you actually received it?
  - b. Did you know what the deadline was for requesting a ballot? How did you find out?

- c. **[IF NEVER RECEIVED BALLOT]**: Tell me about that. Did you ever find out why you didn't receive it?
  - d. How did you receive or print the ballot? Tell me about that.
  - e. Is there anything that could make this process of requesting and receiving a ballot easier?
  - f. How easy or hard was it to fill out the ballot?
  - g. How did you actually send the ballot? PROBE: Mail? Fax? Email? [IF MAIL]: Where did you mail it?
  - h. How did you know what the deadline was for sending the ballot?
  - i. Have you ever used a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot? [POST form].
    - i. What is your reaction to this form?
    - ii. Does anything look confusing?
  - j. Did you receive any type of confirmation that the ballot was received?
  - k. How confident are you that your vote was counted?
5. For those of you who have voted absentee before, how was this election different from previous elections, if at all?
- a. Tell me about any other problems you've encountered in the past
6. Can you think of any other barriers to voting from where you are? What might hold people back?
7. If you could change one thing about the voting process, what would that be?

### III. Voting Values (5 min.)

- A. Where does voting fit in with everything else you do here? How high of a priority is it? **DISCUSS.**
  - 1. Has voting become more or less important to you since you've been living here?

B. Are people like you who are living here more ENCOURAGED to vote or DISCOURAGED to vote?

1. Who would encourage you?
2. Who would discourage you?

**IV. Voting Assistance/Resources (20 min.)**

A. When you have questions about the voting process, how do you go about getting information?

[IF ONLINE]: What website would you go to?

1. Whom would you ask? PROBE: Family member? Friends? Local Election Officials in your state? Voting Assistance Officers? Installation Voting Assistance Officers?
2. **COUNT:** Write down your answer to the following question: Do you know what a VAO is? Now type in your answer.

a. [IF KNOW VAO]: How did you find that out?

3. When you have a question about voting, are you generally able to get that question answered or not really?
4. Are there any resources out there for family members of military personnel?

B. Thinking about Voting Assistance Officers again, what kinds of thing do you think you could ask them about voting?

1. What have you heard about VAOs as far as how helpful or not too helpful they are?

C. **COUNT:** Write down your answer to the following question: Have you heard of FVAP? Now type in your answer.

**[POST DESCRIPTION IF NECESSARY]:** The Federal Voting Assistance Program works to ensure Service members, their eligible family members and overseas citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so — from anywhere in the world. Specifically, FVAP exists to:

- Assist uniformed services and overseas voters exercise their right to vote, so that they have an equal opportunity with the general population to have their vote counted.
  - Assist the States in complying with relevant federal laws, and advise them on ways to best comply.
  - Advocate on behalf of the uniformed services and overseas voters, identifying impediments to their ability to exercise their right to vote, and proposing methods to overcome those impediments.
- D. Have you ever visited the FVAP website to get information about the voting process? **POST:** Here's what it looks like.
1. How did you hear about the website?
  2. What was your general impression of the website?
  3. What would you change about the website?
- E. Are there any other websites or online resources you might use to get information? Tell me about that.
- F. What kind of additional information do you wish you had about the voting process?

**V. Voting Assistance/Resources: Examining Online and Print Resources (15 min.)**

Now I want you to look at some different resources about the voting process for overseas voters like you. For each one, give it a rating from 1 to 5 on how helpful it is for people like you by entering the number in the rating box. 5 means it's very helpful, and 1 means it's not helpful at all. You can write down your answer first, and then I'll let you know when to type it in. Using the highlighter buttons to the side of your screen, highlight anything you think is especially helpful in GREEN, and highlight anything that confuses you or is unclear in RED.

A. FVAP email

1. **COUNT:** Enter your rating in the rating box. [PAUSE]. Now type it in. **DISCUSS.**
2. Which parts of this email stand out as helpful?
3. Which parts of this email are unclear or confusing?

B. FVAP.gov Frequently Asked Questions

1. **COUNT:** Enter your rating in the rating box. [PAUSE]. Now type it in. **DISCUSS.**
2. Which parts of this webpage stand out as helpful?
3. Which parts of this webpage are unclear or confusing?
4. What information is missing from this webpage that you would want to know?
5. What would you change?

C. Now I'd like to spend a little time on a new resource that might be developed to help people like you vote.

Some people have suggested that a smart phone app could be useful to help people through the voting process. What do you think of that?

1. What would be some important features to include?
2. Could you imagine anything that might go wrong?

D. If you could design your own resource for the voting process, what else would you include that you haven't seen in these materials?

VI. **Communication/Vote Motivators (15 min.)**

**[PICK 2 OUT OF A-C, ALWAYS USE D]**

Now I want to read you some statements about absentee voting. For each one, give it a rating from 1 to 5 on how motivated it makes you feel. 5 means it makes you feel very motivated to vote, and 1 means it doesn't make you feel motivated at all. Using the highlighter buttons to the side of your screen, highlight anything you think is especially motivating or convincing in GREEN, and highlight anything that confuses you or that you don't like in RED.

- A. Voting is everyone's right, and it's one that our family members are fighting for as members of the Armed Forces. Even though we're stationed away from home, it's still important to remember that voting is a civic responsibility and is part of being American.

Everyone should take the time to participate in our great democracy and send their vote home.

1. COUNT: Enter your rating in the rating box. [PAUSE]. Now type it in.  
DISCUSS.

2. What stood out to you?

PROBE: What do you think of the line, “send their vote home” ?

3. What parts made you feel motivated?

4. What DIDN'T make you feel motivated?

B. In America, voting is one day that we are all equal, because every vote counts equally, no matter who you are. Your vote matters, and the Department of Defense is working hard to make sure that every vote cast by family members of U.S. military personnel gets counted. It is important to do your civic duty and let your voice be heard, even if you are far away from home.

1. COUNT: Enter your rating in the rating box. [PAUSE]. Now type it in.  
DISCUSS.

2. What stood out to you?

3. What parts made you feel motivated?

4. What DIDN'T make you feel motivated?

C. Sometimes there are rumors that overseas or military votes are not counted, or are only counted some of the time. But that simply isn't true. In fact, local election officials are REQUIRED to count every legal absentee ballot received, and some states even count the ballot if it's received after Election Day, but postmarked before. Your voice matters, and local election officials are working hard to ensure that your voice is heard.

1. COUNT: Enter your rating in the rating box. [PAUSE]. Now type it in.  
DISCUSS.

2. What stood out to you?

3. What parts made you feel motivated?

4. What DIDN'T make you feel motivated?

D. [PLACEHOLDER: Family-member specific message, to be developed after ethnographies]

1. COUNT: Enter your rating in the rating box. [PAUSE]. Now type it in.  
DISCUSS.

2. What stood out to you?

3. What parts made you feel motivated?

4. What DIDN'T make you feel motivated?

**VII. Wrap-Up (5 min.)**

A. If you could only do one thing to make the voting process easier or work better for people like you, what would that be?

DISCUSS.

B. Out of everything we talked about today, what stands out most?