

US Mint Alternative Metals Focus Group Discussion Guide

Intro: Thanks for coming here this evening. We're here to talk about money. Specifically, what you think about coins – how you use them, how they're made, and why they matter. Please remember that we're just asking for your opinions and impressions. There are no wrong answers.

Coin Use – 10 minutes

How many people here are currently carrying any coins? Did you get the coins as change, or did you pick them (at home, work, or someplace else) and put them in your wallet, purse, or pocket, so that you would have them if you need them? What mix (denomination) of coins are you currently carrying? Is that typical?

In what situations do you use coins? (**Potential probes:** buying gas? Groceries? Snacks or drinks/coffee? At vending machines? For laundry? For public transit? Highway tolls? Pay phones? Parking meters?)

When you get coins as change, what do you typically do? Is that affected by the type of coin?

How often would you say you use cash? What about coins specifically? What about nickels? What about pennies?

How important for you are pennies? What about nickels? Dimes? Quarters? (**for each:** Why?)

In which circumstances do you use coins less than you did five years ago?

How do you think your use of cash and coins for spending will change over the next five years?

Do you ever save coins for a collection? Which ones? Why?

Coin costs – 5 minutes

How much do you think it costs the government to make one penny?

What about one nickel?

The dime?

The quarter?

Does it bother you that pennies and nickels cost more to make than they are worth? Why?/Why not?

What do you think should be done about these costs?

Coin changes – 10 minutes

How would it affect you if the government stopped producing the penny? **(Probe on types of transactions affected)**

What would you think if stores started rounding the price of your purchases if you used cash? For instance, if your coffee cost \$1.48, they would charge \$1.50. If it cost \$1.46, they would charge you \$1.45.

What about the nickel? How would it affect you if the government stopped producing that? **(Probe on type of transactions affected)** Would that change your use of vending machines at all?

How would you feel about stores rounding prices to the nearest ten cents? So if you bought a cup of coffee for \$1.45, you would pay \$1.50, but if you bought it for \$1.44, you would pay \$1.40?

What would you think if stores always rounded prices down?

What would you do with your pennies if the government stopped producing them?

What about with your nickels, if the government stopped producing those?

Coin Appearance – 15 minutes

Rather than stop making the nickel, another way to save money would be to change what is made of, so that it would be cheaper to make. Do you think that approach is preferable?

How would you feel about seeing nickels that were made of the same metals as pennies are made of today?

(Show them brown nickels). Now I have some examples that we'll be looking at. Don't worry about the image on it – when the Mint makes test coins, they put Martha Washington on them so they can't be mistaken for real coins. Now I'm going to have to collect these when we're done, so please make sure to keep them on the table.

What do you think? What would you think of dimes or quarters that were made like this?

What if the nickel still looked silver, but the metal mix was different, so that it was lighter, or had a different feel?

(Show examples of nickels manufactured using alternative metals for the purpose of R&D :)

What do you think of this coin? Does it seem different from current nickels? How so? **(Probe on weight, relief/feel of the image, sound when dropped, anything else they say; one objective is to understand how they actually describe the differences)** How much do you think it would cost to produce a nickel like this?

(probe first time on how they think about savings – when we talk about savings, is it the cost of producing one coin, or one-year cost, or cost over ten years – how do different terms affect what you think about the amount saved?)

(Once they have seen all the versions)

How much do differences from current coins matter?

Was there anything about any of those coins that you particularly liked? What about disliked?

Effects on production costs and industry – 10 minutes

Do you think there are any downsides to changing the metals used to make coins? (**Probe:** what about for businesses that use coins)

What types of businesses do you think might be affected by these changes?

How do you think they might deal with the changes? Do you think it would be very difficult?

How much do you think the overall costs to businesses would be?

Do you think it would affect you if there were changes to the metal content in nickels?

What about if the metals in the dime or quarter changed? Do you think the effects of those changes for businesses would be greater? Why?

What about the effects for you?

Policy Preferences – 10 minutes

So now that we've talked about the savings that might come from these changes and what it might cost for businesses to deal with these changes, what do you think the Mint should do?

How do you think that the decision to change how the nickel is produced should be made?

(probe on balancing government savings with industry compliance costs – how much does the government need to save in order for it to be worth making businesses spend a certain amount on adapting to changes)

Well, that's mostly what I wanted to talk about. Is there anything else you think we should discuss about coins and the changes being considered?