

PEACE CORPS FOCUS GROUPS AMONG PARENTS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Note – all will sign an informed consent notice prior to starting the group.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Understand what motivates Millennials to join the Peace Corps.
- Explore the roles parents play when their children are evaluating whether to apply for the Peace Corps:
 - The Peace Corps brand/image, and attitudes and perceptions of it, in relation to their children's potential decision to serve.
 - Emotional motivators and logistical barriers/obstacles to their supporting their children serving in the Peace Corps.
 - What are the chief concerns – and how best to address them?
 - How do different kinds of themes/messages resonate with the parents relative to their perception of their children volunteering in the Peace Corps?

Four topics to listen for are:

- Safety
- Making a difference
- Financial concerns
- Distance from/difficulty contacting their child

LOBBY EXERCISE

(Note – Moderator will provide a paper-and-pencil task for respondents to complete as they arrive). Thank you for coming! We will be talking a lot about your own children today. But before I do that – I would love to know a little more about you!

Name (first name only)

We'll be talking a little bit about your children's schooling today, so for some context it might help to know a little more about your educational background. Can you please tell me a little bit about your own education? For example, what was your highest level of education, and at what institution did you finish your studies?

Please tell me a little bit about your first 3-5 years after you completed your education. What did you do once you left school? What were your first 2-3 jobs (paid or otherwise)?

If you think about those early experiences, what parts (if any) do you feel are also important for your children to experience?

What parts (if any) would you rather they avoid?

INTRODUCTIONS

10 MINS

- Moderator explains purpose & expectations. This is market research – I am interested in what you think and how you feel.

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- I am an independent market researcher. There really are no right answers to any of these questions. So please feel free to share just your thoughts and opinions – and don't worry about pleasing me or hurting my feelings! It's OK to disagree with someone else – in fact, if you dislike something or disagree with something that's said, I want to hear about it.
- I want to hear from you all (and need to hear all opinions) so one at a time!
- We are videotaping and audio recording these sessions. There are note takers in the back who are helping me with this research. Please know that information from this session will be kept confidential. For instance, your last names are not forwarded on in connection with this research – so let's use first names only today!
- So let's do some quick introductions. I would love to hear about you – your name, how you spend your time (including any major hobbies) and a little about who else is in your household (probe for teenaged and college aged children and what they are currently doing).

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

15 MINS

As you know, I had asked you to write down a few things before we started today. To begin the conversation, I am interested in learning more about your own experiences after you completed your education – would someone like to get the ball rolling?

What are some words you would use to describe the person you were back then? (Chart pad)

- What were your biggest dreams back then? (Listen for – make the world a better place)
- What experiences, professional or personal, did you have back then that made you the person you are today? (Probe on travel or career moves)

Now, what are some words you would use to describe your children at that same age? (Chart pad)

- What would you say are their biggest dreams? (Listen for – make the world a better place)
- Where do you see the most significant differences between you and your children?

More generally, what impact do you think your children's generation is going to have on society?

- What are the biggest challenges that will face this generation? How are you counseling your children based on the challenges that they will face?

Tell me a little about the kinds of opportunities that might be available to your children post-college. What are some of the things **they** will consider as they evaluate the different opportunities or paths they could take?

- What types of career decisions do they wrestle with?
- How do you think the opportunities available to your children compare to what was available to you right after college? Are there more opportunities? Fewer?
- What would you say are the main things that are shaping the prospects for this generation? (Listen for economy – technology – need for additional education...)
- Is there anything that you think they should be considering, but won't? Or that they are considering, but that really aren't that important?
- Have your children's post college goals changed in the last few years? How? Why?
- To what extent have barriers or constraints, impacted your children's goals, aspirations and decisions? What are some of those barriers or constraints? (Probe for student loans.)

Tell me a little bit about what **you** envision for your children in the years right after college.

- Do you have a very specific vision, or is it something more general?
 - What kinds of things do you think they might do?
 - What kinds of experiences are important for your children to have? Why? (probe on travel)
 - Is that different from what they envision? How?

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- How do you feel about the job opportunities that (will be/are) available for your children (after they graduate from college)?
 - Do you think they will be able to get the kind of job they want? What makes you say that?
 - If you don't think they will be able to get the kind of job they want, is there a backup plan? What might that entail?

Thinking about your children's future, please tell me about any conversations you might be having with your children about what they should do in order to make the most of their early post college years.

- Are you advising them? How
- How old were your children when these conversations started to have real significance? (Before graduation – after – not at all....?) What are some of the things you emphasize? Are there things you really want to help them focus on? Tell me about your reasons for that? Do you encourage them to seek information from other sources? What sources?
 - Who are some other people your children might talk to about their future?
- Have your children considered volunteer opportunities as an alternative to a job? Why/why not?

COMMUNITY SERVICE/VOLUNTEERISM

15 MINS

Let's explore the idea of volunteering a little bit. When you think about volunteerism and community service - what sort of things do you think of?

What (if any) is the value of volunteering and community service for you and your children?

- Tell me more about any benefits you see for both yourself, or for any larger community or purpose.
 - Probe on how they might define that "larger purpose." Who and what does it include? (Listen for global vs. local themes)
- How important (if at all) is the notion of giving back to a community? Where do you see the role for that? (Listen for a generational role – home or overseas, etc.)
- How would your children answer this question?

Do you personally participate in any volunteering/community service currently? Why or why not?

- If you do volunteer somewhere, with which organizations?
- What drove the interest in pursuing something like that?

Whether you volunteer right now or not, what qualities or characteristics would you look for in an organization with which you personally might volunteer?

- If you were considering an organization where your children might volunteer, how (if at all) would those qualities and characteristics be different? How would they be the same?
- What sort of volunteerism might you encourage your child to pursue? Are there any types that you would discourage them from pursuing? What makes you say that?
- How would the benefits and concerns of volunteering change if the volunteer opportunity were a full time commitment, say for a year or more (vs. only a week or two)?
- When you think of long term volunteer opportunities (as in a year or more), what organizations come to mind?
- Regardless of how long the opportunity was for, how would the benefits and concerns of your child volunteering change if the volunteer opportunity was overseas? (Listen for safety and security – How important is the ability to communicate regularly with your child?)

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- o What (if any) benefits do you see in your children volunteering overseas?
- o What (if any) concerns would you have about sending your children overseas?
- When you think of overseas volunteer opportunities, what organizations come to mind?
- If your child proposed the idea of volunteering full-time overseas, would you encourage them to pursue it? Why or why not?
 - o What if it was for a good cause?
 - o What if they felt it could advance their career?

THE PEACE CORPS: BASICS

5 MINS

Now, to get more specific, I'd like to talk with you about an organization called the Peace Corps. When talking about the Peace Corps, please remember that there are no right or wrong answers; we're just interested in understanding what you knew about them when you came in the room today.

So, what do you know about the Peace Corps? What does the Peace Corps make you think of?

- Tell me some words that come to mind when you think of the Peace Corps....?
- How easy or difficult is it to get into the Peace Corps? What makes you say that?
- What kinds of projects do Peace Corps volunteers work on? Where do they do their work?
- What are you basing your knowledge about the Peace Corps on? For example, is it some sort of recent exposure or experience, or perhaps something you heard about when you were a student yourself?
 - o If a friend of yours said their child was joining the Peace Corps, what would you think?
 - o If you had heard about them when you were younger, did you ever consider joining the Peace Corps? Why or why not?
 - o How (if at all) has your perception of the Peace Corps changed since you were your children's age?

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

5 MINS

Tell me about other organizations you may know about that may offer similar sorts of experiences to Peace Corps for your children?

Probe AmeriCorps with:

- What are the Peace Corps' strengths relative to this organization?
- What are the Peace Corps' weaknesses relative to this organization?
- Which organization do you think your children would be most interested in? Why?
- If your child were to volunteer with one of those organizations (AmeriCorps or Peace Corps) which would you prefer for them to choose? What makes you say that?
- Which do you think they would actually choose? (What makes you say that?)

Probe Teach for America with:

- What are the Peace Corps' strengths relative to this organization?
- What are the Peace Corps' weaknesses relative to this organization?
- Which organization do you think your children would be most interested in? Why?
- If your child were to volunteer with one of those organizations (Teach for America or Peace Corps) which would you prefer for them to choose? What makes you say that?
- Which do you think they would actually choose? (What makes you say that?)

THE PEACE CORPS: DEEP DIVE

20 MINS

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Now, coming back to the Peace Corps specifically, please describe what you think a typical Peace Corps volunteer is like....?

- How old are they? Where do they come from?
- Where do they live (probe for socio-economic status)
- What traits do they have?
- Where did they go to college?
- What did they study?

Now, please describe a typical Peace Corps assignment. Where is the new volunteer going? What are they doing? Who are they with?

Does your child fit the description of a typical Peace Corps volunteer? Which part of the description?

How do you think future employers evaluate a Peace Corps experience on the resume?

- What are the types of careers that might value a Peace Corps experience the most? (Probe for international versus domestic careers)
- What (if any) practical career experience do you think the Peace Corps provides?
- What (if any) leadership skill development do you think the Peace Corps provides?
- What (if any) other transferrable skills do you think the Peace Corps provides?
- Which (if any) of these things might contribute to Peace Corps volunteers' ability to launch a successful career?

Did you know that the Peace Corps is part of the federal government?

- Does that change the way you view the Peace Corps? How?
- Does that bring any benefits?
- Is there a downside to the Peace Corps' connection with the federal government?

If your child were interested in joining the Peace Corps, how would you react?

- Would you encourage them to pursue it? Why/why not? (Listen for the ability to communicate regularly with the child. A concern? Why/why not?) (Listen for working in isolation or with a group of other Americans and volunteers in a collaborative environment. What implications does that have on their attitude towards Peace Corps?) (Listen for concerns about safety, but ask them to table those thoughts until we circle back to those ideas later in the session.)
- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the Peace Corps for your child, if he or she were to join?
- What things most impact your willingness to support your child joining the Peace Corps?

CONCEPTS

25 MINS

Now, coming back to the Peace Corps, I have some ideas I would like to share with you. These are different ways to think about the Peace Corps and the opportunity that Peace Corps offers to your children. I've love to get your impressions about these. **CONCEPTS LISTED IN APPENDIX.**

Moderator to show participants each of the concepts one at a time, and ask the questions for each after showing it.

What are your thoughts about this?

What is the main message or theme this concept is trying to get across?

Any words in particular you are reacting to? What makes you say that?

Anything you like about this concept? Anything you don't like as much?

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What does this concept tell you?

How close is this message to how you already viewed the Peace Corps? (What makes you say that?)

Just based on this concept –

Is there anything here that would motivate you to **discuss Peace Corps** with your child?

Would you **support** your child joining the Peace Corps based on this concept? Why/why not?

Would this concept motivate you to **encourage or allow** your child to join the Peace Corps? Why or why not?

Comparing Concepts (Moderator: Show all concepts)

I'd like you to jot down on this piece of paper which of these concepts would be most likely to motivate you to encourage your child to apply for a Peace Corps position? (Moderator to check the back room for questions)

In comparing the concepts to one another, which do you like best? Why/why not?

Which are the most persuasive? Why?

Which are the most informative? Why?

Which would you rate as the most accurate? Why?

Do any make you more or less willing to encourage your child to join the Peace Corps? Why/why not?

Across all the concepts, which words resonate with you most? Which words make you the most interested in the Peace Corps?

Which words make you most willing to encourage your children to join the Peace Corps?

In looking at all the concepts, can you think of specific words or phrases not included that would make you more supportive of the Peace Corps or your child joining?

PHRASES

10 MINS

Next, let's take a look at six different phrases. Each phrase might describe a part of the Peace Corps experience. I'd like you to answer some questions about each phrase.

Repeat for Phrases 1-6 [See Appendix for phrases]

How important is the idea in this phrase to your child? How about to a typical Peace Corps volunteer?

How would a Peace Corps volunteer experience the idea in this phrase? What day to day activities would affect this?

Do you think ALL volunteers experience this, or MOST, SOME, a FEW or NONE of them?

Is this an emotional appeal or a practical appeal? Why?

If your child were to volunteer, does this phrase capture what you would like them get out of the Peace Corps? Why or why not?

Comparing the 6 Phrases

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Which one phrase BEST captures the Peace Corps experience? Why?

Which one phrase is WORST at capturing the Peace Corps experience? Why?

At the end of the day, given all the options they might have – going straight on to a job, going to Graduate School, or volunteering full time with another organization—which would you prefer for your child to choose? Please write down your choice on the paper in front of you, and write a few sentences outlining the rationale for your choice.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

15 MINS

Now, (as I'd mentioned earlier), we'd like to come back around and get your feedback on one specific topic, and it is Safety.

Do you have any concerns about safety and security for your child when it comes to volunteering for the Peace Corps overseas?

Does concern about safety and security affect whether you would encourage your child to volunteer for the Peace Corps?

How concerned would you say you are? What are the things that you might be the most concerned about? Why is that?

Have you heard anything specific about the safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers in the past? If so, what?

What kinds of things would be most useful for you to know about when it comes to how the Peace Corps approaches the safety and security of its volunteers? (Probe on the backing of the United States Government).

Because the Peace Corps is part of the federal government, does that make it more safe or less safe than other overseas volunteer organizations? Why is that?

Thank and dismiss.

APPENDIX

Concepts:

- A) What will you do next? You have your college degree but maybe you're not sure of your career path or how to get work experience in your area of interest. Consider volunteering abroad with the Peace Corps. You'll learn valuable leadership and language skills with the hands-on training to set you apart from the competition.
- B) Want to be a part of a global family? When you join the Peace Corps, you become part of a network that is working to make the world a better place, one community at a time. You represent the United States while assisting your host country in areas such as education, health, and business development. When you return, you become part of a vibrant, active Peace Corps alumni base.
- C) Are you worried about a tough job market? Develop skills that will jumpstart your career by volunteering with the Peace Corps. Get training before and while on-the-job to build your resume. The Peace Corps is an investment in your future.
- D) Ready to discover your world? When you serve in the Peace Corps, you'll experience the excitement of living abroad and learning about new cultures. Learn a new language and take on new challenges that test your ingenuity and resourcefulness. It's a life-defining experience.
- E) How can you help make a difference that matters? Work abroad and use your talents, skills and enthusiasm to make an impact. Change lives and work at the grass-roots level to help make a difference globally. As a Peace Corps Volunteer you can develop innovative solutions to everyday problems that produce results with a lasting effect even after you leave.

Phrases:

- Become part of a global community of volunteers.
- Develop valuable career skills that set you apart.
- Make a lasting impact on your community.
- Take on the toughest job you'll ever love.
- Seek out new adventures.
- Challenge myself through a life-defining experience.