

FOCUS GROUP GUIDELINES – ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

TOTAL TIMING AVAILABLE: 90 MINUTES

CURRENT TIMING: 85 MINUTES

I. STANDARD INTRODUCTIONS (15 minutes)

- A. Standard Moderator Introduction and Ground Rules.
- B. Self-Introductions (first name, family, hobbies)

II. GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS PARTNERSHIP WITH SSA (30 minutes)

- A. Let's talk a little about your relationship with the Social Security Administration in general. When you think about your professional relationship with Social Security Administration, what is the first thing that comes to mind? What words or phrases would you use to describe this relationship?
 - 1. What kind of information do you seek from the Social Security Administration?
 - a) Can you name a specific time when you needed information about Social Security for your constituents and sought that information directly from the Social Security Administration?
 - (1) How satisfied were you with the response you received?
 - (a) What could Social Security have done better?
 - (2) What can SSA do to improve its relationship with you?
 - (a) Do you have professional relationships with other government agencies that help you communicate effectively with your constituents around government services? What is that relationship like?
 - (b) Would you say that the relationship you have with those other government agencies better or worse than the relationship with SSA? (Probe: better and worse)
 - (i) What about that relationship is helpful? Are there specific materials provided to you that you like?
- B. Is there a key office within the SSA that you routinely reach out to for information? [If OEA is not mentioned, ask if they have ever worked with representatives from the Office of External Affairs]

1. Can you tell me what you know about the Office of External Affairs at the Social Security Administration and the services they provide? How frequently do you interact with OEA? (Probe: which services do you find most beneficial?)
 2. What do you like best about your work with the Office of External Affairs?
 - a) What are the biggest challenges, if any, you face in your communication with OEA?
 3. What areas in your relationship with OEA need improvements? What can OEA do to improve its relationship with you?
 4. When was the last time OEA reached out to you?
 - a) Was the information they provided useful?
 - b) Did you pass it along to your constituents? Why? Why not?
 5. What services does the OEA provide that you find beneficial?
 - a) What makes those services beneficial to you?
 - (1) How valuable are the materials provided to you by Social Security?
 - b) Has there ever been a time when the services provided were not helpful?
- C. When a constituent comes to you with a question or problem about a service from the Social Security Administration, where do you turn for answers?
1. What kind of correspondence do you normally receive from Social Security?
 - a) Does the platform of these communications make a difference (i.e. do you expect different information from briefings and meetings you are invited to compared to Dear Colleague letters and social media or online?)
- D. What was the last Social Security message you sent to your constituents?
1. How do you disseminate the informational materials Social Security shares with you? (for example: are they sent via email listservs, through meetings or briefings, through posters and infographics posted in public spaces, on social media platforms?)

- (1) If you know, what is the estimated reach achieved by each method of dissemination? (Probe: which way reaches the most people?)
- b) Would you say the material helps your communications to be effective and helpful?
 - (1) If not, what could Social Security be doing better?

III. EXPLORING COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES (35 minutes)

A. Now we are going to take a look at some examples of correspondence the Social Security Administration has used in the past with Advocacy Organizations. We are going to look at Dear Colleague letters, a fact sheet, and a tool kit created by the Social Security Administration for organizations like yours to use while disseminating information regarding Social Security. Please rate each one on how effective you find that piece using a scale that goes from 0-10, where 0 is not at all effective and 10 is very effective and then rate it on how helpful you find the piece using a scale that goes from 0-10, where 0 is not helpful at all and 10 is very helpful. Write down some words and phrases that come to mind to describe the example.

1. Before we begin, has anyone been to the Social Security Administration website? What was that experience like? What made you go there?
 - a) Does anyone follow them on social media? What made you follow them?
2. **Handout.** In this handout, there are two examples of a *Dear Colleague* letter that the Social Security Administration has recently sent to organizations like yours. Take a minute to read each over.

Write. How do you feel about Dear Colleague letter A/B? Would you share Dear Colleague letter A/B with your peers? Put a star next to the letter of the Dear Colleague letter that you would be most likely to share with your coworkers or constituents.

- a) **Dear Colleague Letter A [Email from Taylor, Diandra on SSDI]**
 - (1) Discuss ratings.
 - (2) What do you like about this? What do you dislike?
 - (3) What does this tell you about the Social Security Administration?
 - (4) How likely would you be to click on the hyperlinks embedded within this email?

- (a) How likely would you be to share or like a Facebook post? Why? Why not?
 - (b) How likely would you be to retweet the Twitter post? Why? Why not?
 - b) **Dear Colleague Letter B [Email from Taylor, Diandra re: Save the Date]**
 - (1) Discuss ratings.
 - (2) What do you like about this? What do you dislike?
 - (3) What does this tell you about the Social Security Administration?
 - (4) How likely would you be to pass this on to a co-worker? Why? Why not?
- 3. **Handout.** I'm going to pass around a recent fact sheet published by the Social Security Administration on the Agency's Disability Program. (<https://ssa.gov/disabilityfacts/materials/pdf/factsheet.pdf>) Take a minute or two to look it over, and rate how effective you think the correspondence is on a scale from 0-10 where 0 means not effective at all and 10 means very effective. Put a star next to the fact(s) you would most likely share with your constituents.
 - (1) Discuss ratings.
 - (2) What did you like about this? What did you dislike?
 - (3) Why did you think it was effective? Why not?
 - (4) Would you share this information with your constituents? Why? Why not?
- 4. **Handout.** Now we are going to look at a tool kit the Social Security Administration put out to organizations like yours about their my Social Security campaign. (https://ssa.gov/myaccount/materials/pdfs/National-my-Social-Security-Week-2015-Toolkit_508.pdf) Take a minute or two to look it over, and rate how effective you think the correspondence is on a scale from 0-10 where 0 means not effective at all and 10 means very effective.
 - a) Discuss ratings.
 - b) Have any of you received this particular tool kit?

- (a) **IF YES:** Did you use any of the resources provided or share it with colleagues?
 - (2) What did you like about the tool kit? What did you dislike?
 - c) Why did you think it was effective? Why not?
 - d) Would you use the social media and digital resources provided in this tool kit to spread the word amongst your constituents? Why? Why not?
5. How dependent are you on digital marketing?
- a) When was the last time you used digital marketing to push Social Security services to your constituents?
 - b) Do you find digital marketing to be an effective means of communication with your particular set of constituents?
 - (1) Why? Why not?
6. Are there things Social Security could change about their messaging products that would make you more likely to share them?
- a) What about how the products are disseminated – anything you would change that would make you more likely to share them?
 - b) What would be the best messaging product for you?
 - c) Is there a better way for the Social Security Administration to disseminate the products to you?
 - (1) What would make your more likely to share the materials?

IV. WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

- A. If you had one piece of advice to give to Social Security Administration on their communications, what would you say to them?