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## VA/NCA Focus Group Interviews College Students - Draft Interview Guideline

### Internal Notes about this draft guideline

- This guideline is based on a 90-minute focus group with a mix of undergraduate/graduate students. It may be necessary to make some changes to the language and probes depending on the final composition of the groups in terms of academic achievement.
- During **Section 5**, students will be provided with examples of either the kinds of projects that currently exist to educate students about veterans, or exemplar resources that may be developed. The content that will be used in this section will be determined in collaboration with CNY, American Directions, and NCA.
- **Section 6** of the guideline will provide students the opportunity to break into small groups (3 per group) and create projects and/or resources that could be included as part of the program. The moderator will use the notes and lists created throughout the focus group to structure this brainstorm session, and students will be provided materials to draft ideas (paper, markers etc.). It may be necessary to provide additional support for middle school students in order to focus the brainstorming.
- Additional scripts will be created for the transitions in **Section 5** and **Section 6** when the exemplar programs have been selected.
- The moderator will be familiar with and have a list of NCA National Cemeteries. If mentioned, these locations will receive additional focus and probes, but other location will not be excluded from the discussion.

## Section 1: Introduction (5 minutes)

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today. My name is [Moderator name], and I'll be leading this focus group. Focus groups are a type of research used to gather opinions on a specific topic. Today, we are going to talk about some ideas for incorporating veterans and veteran's memorials into...[your curriculum.... your school classes...your program etc.]

Before we get started, I want to mention a few things:

- There are no wrong answers. Our whole purpose for being here today is to hear what you think, so please speak up, especially if what you have to say is different than what someone else is saying. You may represent what a lot of other students think.
- You don't have to answer every question, but I do want to hear from everyone, so I might call on you at some point.
- I did not create anything you are going to see today. If you like them or if you don't like them, please be honest. Your responses won't affect me either way.
- Everything we talk about here is confidential. That means your individual responses will not be reported and your name will not be associated with anything you say in our reports.
- Also, we would like to audio record the focus group discussion, but that's just so we can go back and make sure we captured all of your thoughts correctly. If anyone's uncomfortable with being audio taped, we will not record the session. Any objections?

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Okay, great. First, I'm going to have everyone go around and tell me your name. You all might know each other already, but I want to get to know you, too. Just say your first name, something you like to do in your free time, and what your academic program is. I'll go first.

*[allow each participant to introduce themselves]*

[INTERNAL NOTE: We might need to take minute to define what we mean by veteran (living vs. historical), veteran cemetery, and other terms before the group.]

## Section 2: Ice Breaker/Warm Up (10 Minutes)

Well now that we know each, let's jump right in. I have a few general questions to start.

- What made you decide to pursue a degree (or MA, PhD etc.) in history?
- What do you love about history? What eras or topics interest you most?
  - *Probe for periods of history that may involve veterans.*
- What type of coursework excites you the most in your history courses?
- Tell me about one project, lesson, or activity you remember from any history class in your studies that is memorable for you. [*Consider the following probes as time allows*]
  - *What makes this memorable for you?*
  - *What did you learn from that project/lesson/activity?*
- What about volunteer work – Have you done any volunteer work that was especially memorable to you?
  - What made it memorable?
  - What did you learn from it?

## Section 3: Familiarity with Veterans and NCA (15 Minutes)

All right, so now I'd like to talk a little bit about veterans.

- First off, are any of you veterans? (If yes: "before we continue, thank you for your service.")
- Do you know any veterans? Who are the veterans that you know?
  - What kinds of conversations have you had with them about their service?
  - Is there anything interesting that you've read, seen, or heard about veteran's service?
- Where else have you learned or talked about veterans? [*probe for classes, films, museums, cemeteries, memorials*].
  - What kinds of conversations have you had? Who have you had those with?
  - What part of those conversations did you enjoy or did you find most interesting?
  - What kinds of things did you learn?
- What kinds of other things would you be interested in learning about veterans?
- Have you ever seen a sign for a National Cemetery?
  - Where was the site?
  - Did you visit the cemetery?

- Has anybody visited any kind of veterans' memorial or **military** cemetery?
  - *If yes:* What are some things that stand out about your experience visiting?
  - *If yes:* Is there anything that would change or add to the site to make the experience of visiting better?
  - *If no:* What would you expect to see there? What would you want to learn or experience from visiting a veterans memorial or cemetery?
  - More broadly, what would you want to learn or experience from a visit to any cemetery? What would make it more interesting for you?
- Have you ever heard of the VA National Cemetery Administration (NCA)?
  - *If yes:* what has been your experience with the NCA?
  - *If no:* what kinds of things do you imagine NCA is responsible for?

**[Note:** *If needed, provide students with a brief description of the difference between NCA cemeteries and those run by other organizations/institutions.]*

#### **Section 4: Coursework & Veterans (20 Minutes)**

Ok. It's been great to hear about some of your experiences with veteran's memorials and learning about veterans. I'd like to move the conversation towards your coursework.

- How do you like to learn about historical events?
  - What kind of books and materials do you enjoy reading?
  - What kind of projects/assignments help you to connect to the material?
  - From what perspective do you want to learn about history?
  - Are there other sources that you want to use, or perspectives you would want to hear?
  - What other types of resources have you used in your history classes to learn about historical events?
- What kinds of sites or institutions have you visited as part of your coursework? *[probe for museums, battlefield sites, memorials etc.]*
  - Did you attend these sites as a class or individually?
  - What did you learn from these visits?
  - How did these visits support your classroom learning?
  - What kinds of projects or activities were part of your visit?
  - What about your experiences did you enjoy?
  - What would you change about your experience visiting these sites to make it more enjoyable and to learn more?
  - *(If needed: what about in your history courses?)*
  - *If no field visits – how do you think historic sites could be incorporated into college history classes?*

- Has anybody visited any of the kinds of sites we've discussed as part of a research or public history / GIS project, thesis, or dissertation?
  - How did you use this site to support your research?
  - Was there anything about this experience that you would have changed to better support your research?
  - What other kinds of resources would have been helpful for your research?
  
- In what ways have veterans been part of your history courses?
  - What kinds of things were discussed? [*Probe for periods of time, wars, and particular coursework.*]
  - How did addressing veterans in your classes support your learning?
  - How have your professors encouraged you to learn about veterans?
  - How have the veterans' perspectives been integrated into the classroom? [*Probe for books, interviews, site visits*]
  - Were there any projects, assignments, or readings that were particularly enjoyable?
  
- How can veteran's memorials and cemeteries aid research projects, theses, or dissertations?
  - Have you used veterans' memorials and cemeteries in your research projects, theses or dissertations?
  
- Has anybody volunteered or interned at a veteran's memorial or military cemetery? What was your experience like?

### **Section 5: Reception to Existing Program Content (15 Minutes)**

Now I want to take a look at a few examples of programs and resources that already exist to teach about veterans. I'm going to walk you through a few programs and I'd like to hear your thoughts along the way. [NAVIGATE PROGRAM, RESPONDING TO STUDENT INTERESTS]

- Program 1
- Program 2

[ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS YOU EXPLORE EACH PROGRAM]

- Tell me what you see. What is your first impression?
  - Have you ever seen something like this before? Where?
  - Does this remind you of anything?
  - Who would use a program like this?
  
- You'll notice this program has a [virtual tour, interactive map, story, veteran profile, interactive maps]. What do you think about that feature?
  - What do you think it's for? What will it show you?

- Would you use it?
  - How would you use it?
- What can you learn from a program like this?
- Now that we have explored this program a bit, what do you like about this program?
  - What makes it interesting? Does it look easy to use? What could it teach you?
- What don't you like about this program?
  - What makes it boring? Does it look hard to use? What would you change?
- What is missing?
- Should the materials be available online? How would you access them?

### **Section 6: Participatory Design Exercise (25 Minutes)**

Now it's your turn to design your own program to help students like you learn more about veterans or memorial sites. First we'll split up into two groups.

- Today we talked about... [REVIEW VOCABULARY & CONTENT FEATURES]
- [PROVIDE ASSIGNMENT]
- [DISTRIBUTE MATERIALS]
- [ASSIST & OBSERVE GROUPS]

### **Closing**

It's time for us to wrap up. Does anyone have last thoughts or ideas that you haven't been able to share yet?

Thank you so much for joining us today. You were very helpful!