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VA/NCA Focus Group Interviews College Professors Draft Interview Guideline

Internal Notes about this draft guideline

- This guideline is based on a 90-minute focus group with college professors
- The distribution of professors that teach undergraduate or graduate level courses, or the academic programs that will be included in the focus groups has not yet been determined. This decision will influence the language of particular questions and may require additional probes.
- The examples mentioned in **Section 5** may change depending on some the research objectives.
- Additional scripts will be created for the transitions in **Section 5** and **Section 6** when the exemplar programs have been selected.

Section 1: Introduction to Focus Groups (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 including veterans and veteran's memorials into your classroom teaching.

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 others 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 any of the things 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.

Okay, great. Before we get started, I'd like to quickly get to you know you all a little bit. Can everybody please tell us your first name and why you chose to study history? I'll go first.

[Allow each participant to introduce him/herself]

Section 2: Teaching and Research Experience (20 minutes)

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

- What courses do you teach?
- Tell me about your process for creating your courses?
 - How do you choose readings?
 - What sorts of projects do you assign for your students?
 - Where do you look for additional resources for your courses?
- What kinds of activities or projects are the most engaging for your students? Why?
- What types of technology do you have available in your classrooms?
 - How do you use technology to support student's learning?
 - What sort of technology use do students find most engaging?
- What is the focus of your own research or academic study?
 - What kinds of resources do you use to complete this research? [*Probe for organizations, academic libraries, site visits, archives, restoration projects, interviews, oral histories etc.*]
 - How do you locate the resources that you use for your research?

Section 3: Familiarity with Veterans and NCA (10 minutes)

All right, now that you've all shared a little about your courses and your research, I'd like to talk about veterans.

- First off, are any of you veterans? (If yes: "before we continue, thank you for your service.")
 - Do you ever talk about your service with other people? What, in general, do you share?
 - Have you ever shared your experience with your students?
- Do you know any veterans? Who are the veterans that you know?
 - What kinds of things have you talked to them about regarding their service?
- What do you think your students know about veterans?
 - Where do you think your students get information about veterans?
 - Have you ever talked to your students about veterans? What have you talked about?
 - What kinds of things do you think your students would be interested in learning about veterans?
- 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?
- Have you ever seen a sign for a VA/NCA National Cemetery or other NCA site?
 - Where was the site?
 - Did you attend?
- Has anybody visited any kind of veteran's memorial or cemetery? [*Probe for the nature of the visit, i.e. academic visit vs. personal visit*].
 - *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 want to learn or experience from visiting a veterans memorial or cemetery?

Section 4: Coursework & Veterans (15 Minutes)

All right, so we've talked a little about the kinds of projects and activities you like to teach as well as your experience visiting memorials. I'd like to spend some time talking about different ways that veterans or the perspective of veterans could be used in your classroom.

- How do your students learn about veterans in your courses?" (*Probe for part of the coursework, readings, site visits, and research projects*).
 - What kinds of things did you do?
 - What were some of the things that worked?
 - What where some things that did not work?
 - Is there anything you would change about the activities you have done to make them better?
- What do you think are potential benefits of learning about veterans, their experiences, and from their perspective? Do you think this is important? Why?
- How could veterans or the perspective of veterans be included in your courses?
 - Are there particular courses or topics that could easily include the perspective of veterans? (*Probe for periods of history, particular wars, subjects, periods of literature.*)
 - What kinds of projects or assignments could you imagine using with your students?
- Have any of your courses ever required visiting a veteran cemetery or memorial?
 - Which site(s)?
 - What was the purpose of the visit?
 - What kinds of things did you do with your class before or after your visit to support your students' learning?
- What about veteran cemeteries and memorials specifically? How could these sites and the resources at these sites support your teaching?
 - How could you use visits to these sites to support learning?
 - What kinds of materials would you want from these sites to use in your classrooms?
 - How could these sites, or resources at these sites, support your own or graduate student research?
 - What resources could these sites develop to support research projects?
- How else could the students learning about veterans and/or veteran's memorials be integrated into the study of history? [*Probe for research projects, site visits, interviews, guest speakers*]
 - What kinds of materials would you need for these activities?

Section 5: Examples of Resources (10 minutes)

I'm going to show you a list of a few ideas for resources and activities that might be developed as part of a program to include veterans, cemeteries, and memorial sites into educational programs. Let's take a look at this list.

Note: This list is not inclusive and is subject to change with the research objectives.

- *Virtual Tours*
 - *Interactive Maps of national cemeteries*
 - *Illustrated guide for analyzing veterans' tombstones*
 - *Guides for analyzing cemetery landscapes*
 - *Biographical profiles of individuals buried in national cemeteries*
 - *Projects using biographies from the national cemeteries*
 - *Activities for analyzing primary source documents*
 - *Activities for analyzing primary source illustrations*
 - *Ideas for volunteering in a national cemetery*
 - *Downloadable app guide to the national cemeteries*
 - *Framework for creating oral histories through interviewing veterans*
 - *Recorded Online talks by subject matter experts*
- Which resources are most appealing to you as a professor?
 - Which of these resources would be relevant to the courses you teach?
 - How would you incorporate these resources into your courses?
 - Which resources would best support research projects?
 - Which resources do you think would appeal to your students?
 - Which resources would do a better job of communicating information about veterans and cemeteries/memorials or educational content?
 - What is missing?
 - Should the materials be available online? How would you access them?

Section 6: Participatory Design Exercise (20 Minutes)

Now it's your turn to design your own program or project to help students learn more about veterans or memorial sites. We're looking to design something that is useful and relevant for professors, engaging for students, and that may support academic research. Let's break into three pairs and try to draft some projects or activities.

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

All right, now let's share what we came up with. (*Facilitate discussion about the different projects*).

Section 7: Distribution and Marketing (10 Minutes)

Thanks for sharing all of your ideas. We're almost at the end of our time together, and before we close I want to talk about getting these kinds of projects and materials to educators.

- Thinking about all of the ideas that we talked about today, what is the best way to get these materials to professors? (*probe for online, conferences, outreach*)
- Where might you hear about projects and materials like we've discussed?
- How would you find out about a program like this?
- [*Probe specifically about the resources that were created in the brainstorm*]
- Should these materials be available online? How would you access them?

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!