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VA/NCA Focus Group Interviews Middle School & High School Students Draft Interview Guideline

Internal Notes about this draft guideline

- This guideline is based on a 60-minute focus group with middle school and high school students. It may be necessary to make some changes to the language and probes for the different age groups.
- 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.

Section 1: Introduction (5 minutes)

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with 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 helping students like you learn more about veterans and veteran's memorials.

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

- There are no wrong answers. We are here today 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 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. So, please be honest if you like them or if you don't like them. Your responses won't affect me either way.
- Everything we talk about here is confidential. That means we will not use your name in any of our reports.
- Also, we would like to audio record our discussion, so we can make sure we remember everything we've talked about today. 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 introduce himself or herself. You all might know each other already, but I want to get to know you, too. Just say your first name and then tell us your favorite thing to do in your free time. I'll go first.

Section 2: Warm Up (5 Minutes)

I'd like to learn what it's like to be a student here in your town today.

- What do you like about your school?
- Are you involved in extracurricular activities? Which ones? [*Probe for school initiatives, school clubs, after school programs*]

Section 3: Relevant Coursework (10 minutes)

Now I want to understand what your experience is like in the classroom.

- What are your favorite subjects? Why? [*Probe for history, social studies, civics, literature, etc.*]
 - What makes that class interesting?
- Are history [or social studies] courses available at your school? If so, what specific courses are offered?
 - Have you taken any of those courses? Why/Why not?
- What kind of history [or social studies] topics do you like to learn about? [*Probe for historical people, events, time periods, and places.*]

- What do you usually do in history [or social studies] class? Tell me about your projects.
 - What materials have you used in these classes?
 - How do you use the Internet to learn history?
 - What about computer software or mobile apps?
 - What kinds of homework assignments do you have to do?
- How do you feel about classes like history [and social studies]?
 - What's the best way to learn about history?
 - What makes it exciting?
 - What makes it boring?
 - Does it connect with where you live?
 - Did any of it happen around here?
 - Are there historic places near here?

Section 4: Veterans and Memorial Sites (20 minutes)

You've told me about some of the things you've learned about in history class. Let's think about veterans.

- When you hear the word "veteran," what thoughts come to mind?
- Have you talked about veterans at school or in your community?
 - Do you know any veterans?
 - Is there anyone in your family who is a veteran?
 - Have you ever heard of Veterans Affairs or VA?

[PROVIDE MODERN EXAMPLE/DESCRIPTION/DEFINITION OF VETERAN]

- Would you say you're curious about veterans? Why/why not?
- What do you know about veterans?
 - Have you learned about veterans in any of your classes or coursework? If so, what have you learned?
- What else would you like to know about veterans? Let's make a list of topics. [*Probe in service jobs, wars, training, cultures/geography, technology, gear, uniforms, medals, branches/ranks, politics, spies, skills/techniques, etc.*]
 - Which are the most important topics, why?
 - Are there topics you're not interested in? Why not?
- What do you think you can learn from studying veterans? [*Probe for sacrifice, accomplishments, patriotism, etc.*]
- Think about the different activities and projects you've done at school. What do you think would be the *best way* to learn about veterans? [*Probe for storytelling, dramatic performances, digital games, lesson plans, books informational/fictional, field trips, etc.*]

- Does your school require some kind of community service as a requirement for graduation?
- Do you do any other type of community service that is not required for graduation?
- What kinds of community service do you think people could do for veterans?
- What kinds of community service do you think people could do at a National Cemetery?
- Let's talk about field trips. Where could you go to learn about veterans?
 - What could you do there?

Let's talk about cemeteries.

- Have you ever visited a veterans' cemetery?
 - How did/would you feel about visiting a veterans' cemetery?
 - What did/would you like about visiting it?

[SHOW PHOTOS: CEMETERY/HEADSTONE/BATTLEFIELD/MONUMENT/MAP]

- What do you think happens at a veterans' cemetery?
 - *Probe events, holidays, visitors, awards etc.*
- What would make it interesting to visit a military cemetery?
- What would help you understand what you're seeing at a cemetery?
- What would you like to learn about [cemeteries]? Let's make a list.
 - *Probe for history, civics, social studies, science, math, etc.*
 - *Probe for disease outbreaks, domestic life, time period, physical artifacts, wars, understanding the cemetery's landscape, architecture, headstones, monuments, symbolism, history, biographies*
- Have you ever heard of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA)?

[Note: If needed, provide students with a brief description of the NCA and how it differs from other organizations/institutions.]

Section 5: Reception to Existing Program Content (15 minutes)

Now I will take you through programs that are designed to help students like you learn more about history/veterans. [PREP PROGRAM]. Let's explore this together. I'd like to hear all 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]. 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?

Section 6: Participatory Design Exercise (20 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!