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

Internal Notes about this draft guideline

- This guideline is based on a 90-minute focus group with middle school and high school teachers. It may be necessary to make some changes to the language and probes for the different age groups.
- It has yet to be determined which subject areas will be represented in the focus groups. 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 other teachers 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, what grade you teach, and how long you've been teaching. I'll go first.

[Allow each participant to introduce him/herself]

Section 2: Warm Up/Classroom Experience (15 minutes)

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

- What is your subject/area(s) of expertise?
- What are your favorite activities or projects to do with your students?
- What kinds of activities or projects are the most engaging for your students? Why?
- How do you like to collaborate with other teachers/classes/grades?
- What are some of the barriers or obstacles that you deal with in trying to teach your students?
- What kinds of things do you look for when you're evaluating whether to use a curriculum or supplemental activity? [*Probe for Common Core, time requirements, type of activities, types of materials.*]
 - How do you find new curriculum or ideas for activities for your classroom?
- What types of technology do you have available in your classroom?
 - How do you use technology to support students' learning?
 - What sort of technology use do students find most engaging?

Section 3: Familiarity with Veterans and NCA (15 minutes)

All right, now that you've all shared a little about your classroom and your students, 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 know any veterans? Who are the veterans that you know?
- 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?
 - Have you ever used any materials or activities with your students that teach about veterans?
 - Have any of you shared your own experiences with your students?
 - What kinds of things do you think your students would be interested in learning about veterans?
- How do students in your school learn about veterans or US service history?" (*Probe for part of the curriculum, field trips, assemblies, response to events, special visits.*)
- 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 visit it?
- Has anybody visited any kind of veteran's memorial or 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 want to learn or experience from visiting a veterans memorial or cemetery?
- Have any of your classes visited a veteran cemetery or memorial? If not your class, any classes in your school?
 - 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?

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.

- What do you think are potential benefits of learning about veterans, their experiences, and from their perspective? Do you think this is important? Why?
- Are there any units that you've taught in which you talked about veterans, cemeteries, or memorials?
 - What kinds of things did you do?
 - What were some of the things that worked?
 - What were some things that did not work?
 - Are there certain times of year that you talk about veterans and cemeteries/memorials?
 - Is there anything you would change about the activities you have done to make them better?
- What would veterans and US service educational content for students in your grade look like?
 - What would you want your students to learn?
 - What kinds of things would be engaging for students?
 - What would you need as a teacher to incorporate it into the classroom?
- How else could veterans or the perspective of veterans be included in your classes?
 - Are there particular units or topics that could include 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?
- What about veteran cemeteries and memorials specifically? How could these sites and the resources at these sites support your teaching?

- How 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 else could the school support student's learning about veterans and/or veteran's memorials? *Probe for field trips, after school, assemblies, visits, art projects?*
 - What kinds of materials would you need for these activities?
 - Are there any opportunities for content to be integrated across subjects?

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 classroom education. 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 teacher?
 - Are these resources relevant to the subjects/topics that you teach?
 - What is missing?
 - How would you incorporate these resources into your existing curriculum?
- 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?
- How much time would you be willing to spend using these resources?
- Are some resources best suited to in-school or out-of-school time?

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

teachers, and engaging for students. 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 teachers.

- Thinking about all of the ideas that we talked about today, what is the best way to get these materials to teachers? (*probe for online, workshops, paper curriculum, 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.*]
- Should the materials be available online? How would you access them?
- Do you think there would be interest in programs like this at the elementary level?

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!