

Appendix F-1: E-mail and Phone Scripts for Arranging Client Interviews, Client Interview Consent Form, Protocol, and Construct Justification

E-mail script for arranging client interview

Dear [OVBD Client's name],

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has contracted Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal) to conduct a performance evaluation of the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) program. SBA is conducting a performance evaluation to improve the program going forward and assess its impact on the business goals of the people that VBOCs have assisted. [VBOC director's name] at [name of VBOC] has informed Optimal that you qualify and are interested in participating in an interview conducted by Optimal. The primary purpose of the interview is to collect information from you about your business goals and challenges, the processes used by a VBOC for assessing your needs and providing you with services, the services you received from a VBOC, your level of satisfaction with the services you received, your successes and challenges while accessing a VBOC, and how you think VBOC services have helped you achieve your business goals. This information is extremely important for evaluating the VBOC program.

As required by law, SBA (OVBD) has obtained approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to conduct this interview. The OMB control number is 3245-xxxx, Expiration date xx/ xx/ xxxx. You are in no way required to participate in the interview, but are encouraged to do so because SBA values your input. You may decline to answer any particular interview question and you may also discontinue the interview at any time if you wish to do so. The information you provide in the interview will not be attributed to you in any reports provided to SBA or to the public without your explicit permission. Optimal's reporting of the interview data will use phrases such as, "One person noted that..." or, "An SBA client explained that..." to ensure anonymity. Please find attached a consent form summarizing this information as well as the interview protocol. Prior to the interview, please sign the consent form and return it either in-person or via e-mail.

The interview will take place at [name of VBOC] and will last approximately 40 minutes. Optimal will be conducting a site visit of [name of VBOC site] on [dates]. During the site visit, Optimal will interview the director, staff, and a few clients, like you. Please let me know which days and times are most convenient for you. If you are not available on these days and would like to be interviewed by telephone, please let me know which days and times are most convenient for you.

Respectfully,

Allison Holmes, Ph.D.

Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal)

Phone Script for Arranging Client Interviews

Optimal Researcher: Hello. Can I speak with [OVBD Client’s name]?

My name is [name of Optimal researcher], and I am calling from Optimal Solutions Group. [VBOC director’s name] at [name of VBOC] has informed Optimal that you qualify and are interested in participating in an interview conducted by Optimal. Do you have a few minutes to speak right now?

[If client is not available, go to Section A.]

[If client is available, go to Section B.]

Section A

Optimal Researcher: When is a good time for me to call back?

Thank you and I look forward to speaking with you then.

Section B

Optimal Researcher: The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has contracted Optimal to conduct a performance evaluation of the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) program. SBA is conducting a performance evaluation to improve the program going forward and to assess its impact on the business goals of the people that VBOCs have assisted.

The primary purpose of the interview is to collect information from you about your business goals and challenges, the processes used by a VBOC for assessing your needs and providing you with services, the services you received from a VBOC, your level of satisfaction with the services you received, your successes and challenges while accessing a VBOC, and how you think VBOC services have helped you achieve your business goals. This information is extremely important for evaluating the VBOC program.

As required by law, SBA (OVBD) has obtained approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to conduct this interview. The OMB control number is 3245-xxxx, Expiration date xx/ xx/ xxxx. You are in no way required to participate in the interview, but are encouraged to do so because SBA values your input. You may decline to answer any particular interview question and you may also discontinue the interview at any time if you wish to do so. The information you provide in the interview will not be attributed to you in any reports provided to SBA or to the public without your explicit permission. Optimal’s reporting of the interview data will use phrases such as, “One person noted that...” or, “An SBA client explained that...” to ensure anonymity.

Optimal will be conducting a site visit of [name of VBOC site] on [dates]. During the site visit, Optimal will interview the director, staff, and a few clients. Each client interview will take place at [name of VBOC] and last approximately 40 minutes. Are you still interested in being interviewed by Optimal?

[If client would not like to be interviewed]

Optimal Researcher: Thank you very much for your time, and best of luck with achieving your business goals.

[If client would like to be interviewed]

Optimal Researcher: Which days and times are most convenient for you? If you are not available on these days and would like to be interviewed by telephone, please let me know which days and times are most convenient for you. Before the interview, you will need to read, sign, and return an interview consent form to Optimal either in-person or via e-mail. Can I e-mail you this form?

Thank you very much for your willingness to be interviewed. We look forward to meeting you and conducting the interview. If you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to call or e-mail me. My phone number is [phone number], and my e-mail address is [e-mail address]. Goodbye.

Interview Consent Form for Clients

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)’s Office of Veterans Business Development (OVBD) has contracted Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal) to conduct a fair and independent performance evaluation of Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs). This evaluation comprises a landscape and location gap analysis of VBOCs, the development of performance metrics, an assessment of client attitudes about the impact of VBOC services, and the development of a framework that will allow for the implementation of impact evaluations.

As part of this analysis, the Optimal research team will be conducting individual interviews with several clients of the VBOCs. Your participation is completely voluntary. The estimated burden is 40 minutes. As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, SBA (OVBD) may not conduct this survey unless it has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). SBA has obtained that approval under OMB control #3245-xxxx, Expiration date xx/ xx/ xxxx.

The primary purpose of these interviews is to collect information from you (the client) about the processes used by VBOCs for assessing your needs and providing you with services, as well as how you used VBOC services to achieve your goals. Other topics covered during the interviews include information about your business or business idea, your business needs and goals, the services you received from a VBOC, your level of satisfaction with the services you received, and your successes and challenges while accessing a VBOC.

Confidentiality and Usage

This interview will be documented through written notes and an audio recording, which will be used in part to develop an internal SBA report and a publically available report for SBA at the completion of the project. Any quotations or information “on-the-record” will be attributed to the original source in reports. The research team will provide the option of going “off-the-record” if requested by the interviewee, in which case the information in reports submitted to SBA will not be attributed to a person. Optimal’s reporting of the interview data will use phrases such as, “One person noted that...” or, “An SBA client explained that...” to ensure anonymity.

Storage and Access

The interview notes and recordings will be stored on a secure server accessible only to the Optimal research team, and will not be provided to SBA or VBOC staff. The interview notes and recordings will be retained for no less than 3 years after the completion of the interviews.

Your signature on this form grants the Optimal research team permission to conduct the interview as described above for the above-referenced study. The research team will not use the information provided for any reason other than those stated in this consent form without your permission.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Client Interview Protocol

General Information about the Interview

Interview date and time: _____ Eastern Standard Time

Interview Questions

The interview questions below are provided for your review in preparation for [VBOC's] upcoming client interview. The questions are asked about you and the services you received at the VBOC. Please note that some of these questions may be skipped during the interview because they are not applicable to your experience, or that additional follow-up questions not listed here may be asked based on the information provided during the interview.

Notation:

- [F] indicates a follow-up question.

General client characteristics

- 1.) Are you a veteran?
 - [F-Yes] How many years have you been a veteran?
 - [F-Yes] How many years did you serve (including both active military, and Guard and Reserve time)?
 - [F-Yes] Do you identify as a veteran with a service-related disability?
- 2.) How far do you live from this VBOC?
- 3.) What is your current employment status?
- 4.) What is your current business status: currently in business, in the process of starting a business, or considering an idea for a new business?
 - [F] In what industry would you classify your business or business idea?
- 5.) Which best describes your current business stage:
 - a. You have an interest in starting a business.
 - b. You have an idea about a product or service to sell and who to sell it to (have identified a market for your product or service).
 - c. You have a business plan or tried to repair your credit in case you need financing.
 - d. You enacted a business plan (for example: you have invested your own or a family member's money into the business plan, or you have applied for financing).
 - e. You received funds from a financial institution, or sold a least one good or service to a non-family member.
 - f. You received revenue from the sale of goods or services for less than 3 years.
 - g. You had 20 percent growth in sales of a good or service in 2 years.
 - h. You generated revenue from the sale of a good or service for more than 3 years.

6.) Have you performed or achieved the following start-up activities:

- a. Developed a scalable product, service, or target market?
 - b. Opened a bank account for the start-up?
 - c. Established a phone book or internet listing?
 - d. Are devoted full-time to the start-up?
 - e. Hired an employee?
 - f. Purchased materials, supplies, inventory, or components?
 - g. Purchased or leased a capital asset?
 - h. Began to promote a good or service?
 - i. Received income from sales of goods or services?
 - j. Established supplier credit?
 - k. Have initial positive monthly cash flow?
 - l. Initiated a business plan?
 - m. Developed financial projections?
 - n. Sought external funding for the start-up?
 - o. Invested own money in the start-up?
 - p. Defined a market for a product or service?
 - q. Developed a model or prototype of a service or product?
 - r. Initiated a patent, copyright, or trademark protection?
 - s. Filed an initial federal tax return?
 - t. Paid an initial federal Social Security payment?
 - u. Paid an initial state unemployment insurance payment?
- [F] Which activities did the VBOC help you achieve?

7.) If you are currently in business:

- [F] What percentage of your business is female-owned?
- [F] What percentage of your business is male-owned?
- [F] When was your business started?
- [F] Do you conduct business online?
- [F] Are you a home-based business?
- [F] Are you certified as a veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned small business?
- [F] Are you 8(a) certified through SBA?
- [F] How many employees do you have?
- [F] How many of your employees are veterans?
- [F] What is the legal entity of your business?

Business goals and challenges of client

- 1) What are your overall business goals?
- 2) What challenges are you facing that prevent you from achieving these goals?

Assistance from VBOC

- 1) How did you hear about SBA's VBOC program? How did you hear about this particular VBOC?
[F] Did you access the website of this VBOC before receiving services? For what purpose (for example, location, hours, services offered, etc.)?
- 2) Did you research other business-oriented service providers before visiting this VBOC?
[F] Are there other organizations or resources that are fulfilling your needs? If yes, what are the other organizations or resources?
[F] Why did you visit a VBOC instead of, or in addition to, visiting another business-oriented service provider?
- 3) What services did you receive from this VBOC?
[F] What service delivery mode (for example, in-person, online, phone, one-on-one, group) is most helpful for you?
[F] When did you start receiving service?
[F] Could you estimate how many hours of service you received?
[F] Where did you receive the services (for example, VBOC, resource partner location, alternative location)?
- 4) How did the staff at this VBOC assess your specific situation and needs before offering particular services to you?
[F] What kinds of questions did they ask you before providing services to you?
[F] Do you feel that the staff asked the right questions and provided the right services?
- 5) Did the staff at this VBOC tell you about other resources (for example, online resources, organizations in the community, etc.) that might assist you in achieving your business goals?
[F] If so, which ones?
- 6) Do you feel that the services that this VBOC provided will help or have helped you overcome your challenges and fulfill your business goals?
[F-Yes] How did this VBOC fulfill your needs?
[F] How have the services impacted your business' performance (for example, strategy, start a business, revenue, loan)?
[F] What needs are unfulfilled?

Client satisfaction

- 1) How satisfied are you with the service that you have received from this VBOC?
- 2) Would you consider using the resources at this VBOC or another in the future?

[F] Are there any barriers (for example, center hours, service topics, etc.) that would keep you from using a VBOC in the future?

- 3) Do you feel that the VBOC staff was knowledgeable and respectful of your military culture and background?
- 4) Do you believe that this VBOC has adequate resources to provide high quality advice and service to its clients?
- 5) What could have made your experience and the assistance you received better?
- 6) Overall, would you recommend the program to another veteran, a spouse, a dependent, or a non-military person?

Client Interview Construct Justification

Construct	Justification
General client characteristics	These questions were designed to contextualize the clients' answers. In this section, the interviewer will inquire about business status and start-up activities, and will skip questions depending on whether the client is in the pre-venture or the in-business stage. OVBD wants to know about client characteristics to see if VBOCs' capacity, services provided, and outreach efforts match to the types of clients being served.
Business goals and challenges of client	These questions are open-ended and allow for the clients to expand upon what businesses they want to start or how they plan for them to grow. These questions also allow clients to explain the challenges that keep them from achieving their goals and how VBOC services can or should assist clients in achieving their goals.
VBOC assistance	This section asks about how clients first learned about a VBOC or the VBOC program, how clients were assessed by VBOC staff, and the type of services that they received from a VBOC. Through these questions, OVBD can understand if VBOC services are matching the needs of clients, if there are problems with client assessment procedures, and if improvements are needed in VBOC outreach efforts.
Client satisfaction	These questions inquire about clients' satisfaction with the services that they received, and whether they plan to return to VBOC or if they would recommend that other people attend the VBOC. OVBD would like to collect information on these issues to know about client flow moving forward and the possible impact of VBOC services on client business goals.