

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
**CONTENT DELIVERY IN-PERSON FOCUS GROUP**  
**01/20-21/15 [EXACT DATE TBD]**  
**FINAL VERSION 11 26 14**

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- My name is Dave Glantz and I work for Market Connections, a market research firm in the Washington, DC area.
- I will be your moderator for tonight’s focus group discussion. We’ll be here for 90 minutes, on behalf of the Department of Education’s office of Federal Student Aid (also known as FSA), to talk about your impressions of different types of student aid-related information and the way it is communicated to you.
- As I mentioned, what we are doing today is called a “focus group.”

As a **participant**, I’d like you to...

- Participate — I need to hear from everyone
- Speak up (but only one talks at a time)
- Please avoid side conversations
- Address your comments to the group
- Remember that you’re here for who you are, so say what you believe and not what you think others might say
- If you don’t agree with what somebody says, tell us what you think – there are no wrong answers.
  - What you don’t know is just as important as what you do know.

As the **moderator**, I can be impartial because I have no vested interest in whether you agree or disagree with the things we’ll be talking about. I try to ensure...

- We get through this discussion guide: there are lots of questions and ideas I’d like to talk to you about, so I have to keep things on track.
- We are audio and videotaping, which is standard practice to help with the accuracy of my report. I also have some colleagues behind the glass, who are involved in this project, and who are interested in hearing your views firsthand.
- Most importantly, everything we discuss is considered private and for internal research purposes only. Our report will not identify individuals by name.
- Do you have any questions?

**0:05**

## II. WARM-UP, SOURCES, INTEREST IN AND IMPRESSIONS OF FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

Start by: 0:05  
Finish by: 0:55

elapsed time: 0:50

I would first like to go around the table and have everyone introduce themselves. Please tell me...

- Your first name (or what you like to be called)
  - **BORROWERS IN REPAYMENT:** your course of study/degree
  - **POTENTIAL ADULT COLLEGE STUDENTS:** your intended course of study
  - **HS SENIORS:** your intended course of study
  - **PARENTS OF HS SENIORS:** Your child's (a senior in high school) intended course of study

### Sources and Methods of Gathering Financial Aid Information

- **[SHOW OF HANDS]** Who has ever searched for information about funding for college, whether for yourself or for others?
- When you look at any material for college funding, including financial aid or loan issues or advice, what types of information are you looking for? (**PROBE:** contact/help links or phone numbers; procedures/forms, and step-by step instructions for filling out forms; key checklists, milestones/dates for applications; explanations of borrowing options; other (specify))
- The Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid provides information to students and borrowers on funding for college or career school, as well as information on federal student loan repayment. If you had the full attention of someone from this office right now, what would you want to ask them?
  - **PROBE:** What would you want to know or have clarified?
- **[FLIPCHART]** Where have you looked for information about funding for college? (**PROBE:** online (search engines; websites; social media sites – specify); colleges; financial institutions (specify banks, lenders); government sources (specify); family or friends; guidance or financial aid counselor; other (specify))
- **[FLIPCHART]** How would you like to receive information about college funding or financial aid? (**PROBE:** print publications; online/electronic publications; website content; videos; infographics; talks by counselors; texts; social media; messages or alerts on your smartphone or tablet; e-mail; other (specify))

**0:30**



- Let's look at the flipchart. Which of these formats are you most likely to pay attention to?
- In general, are you more likely to prefer online or more traditional sources?
  - Again in general, what devices do you like to use when getting information online? (**PROBE** smartphone, tablet, laptop/PC)
  - Does the format you would pay most attention to depend on the type of subject matter or content it covers, or are there formats you prefer regardless of the type of content or message?
    - What makes you say that?
    - **TIME PERMITTING**: Does your preferred format change if the content is very simple? Very complex? What makes you say that?
  - Suppose you receive information and it suggests places to go for more information or advice. How likely are you to take some sort of action?
    - To what degree does your likelihood to take action depend on the format in which you receive the information – for example whether you see this information on a website or in a print publication?
    - To what degree does your likelihood to take action depend on the information itself and what it's asking you to do?
- To what extent does the timing of the message matter to you?
- Can you give me an example of a type of message you might receive regarding college funding, and when you would ideally like to receive it? (IF THEY NEED AN EXAMPLE TO GET STARTED: filling out the FAFSA; or learning about types of federal student aid, or repayment options)

0:55

### III. PUBLICATION EVALUATION

Start by: 0:55

Finish by: 1:30

elapsed time: 0:35

For the remainder of our discussion I want to turn specifically to printed information. I'm going to hand out some pieces of printed material, and will give you a few minutes to look at each of them, and compare them. Then I'd like you to jot down what you said to yourself when looking at both of them.

After that, I'd like you to rate each of the pieces in terms of the amount of content it contains, the tone of the writing, the terminology used, and your likelihood to either take action or recommend it to others. And finally at the bottom of the page to check the one you prefer overall. As you assess and compare these publications, think not about how others might rate them, but how you personally would rate them.

### **[ROTATE PAIRINGS]**

**PAIRING 1:** "Do You Need Money For College?" and "Funding Your Education"

**PAIRING 2:** "Direct Loan Basics For Students" and "Your Federal Student Loans: Be A Responsible Borrower."

### **[ASK FOR EACH PAIRING, AS TIME PERMITS]**

- When comparing the two publications side by side, what were your first impressions?
- Given the subject matter, what do you think about the amount of detail contained in [1<sup>st</sup>, PUBLICATION] [REPEAT FOR 2<sup>nd</sup> PUBLICATION]?
- Also given the subject matter, and perhaps factoring in your level of knowledge and personal interests in the topic, what do you think of the tone of the content in the [1<sup>st</sup>, PUBLICATION] [REPEAT FOR 2<sup>nd</sup> PUBLICATION]?
- How about the style? To what extent is the design appealing to you in the [1<sup>st</sup>, PUBLICATION] [REPEAT FOR 2<sup>nd</sup> PUBLICATION]?
- How likely would you be to take some sort of action or recommend the [1<sup>st</sup>, PUBLICATION] [REPEAT FOR 2<sup>nd</sup> PUBLICATION]?
- Overall, which one did you prefer?
  - What makes you say that?

### **[HAND OUT SECOND PAIR OF PUBLICATIONS AND PROBE AS TIME PERMITS]**

#### Wrap-up

Those are all the questions I have for you. Thanks for coming!

**LEAVE ALL FORMS ON THE TABLE. INCENTIVES AT FRONT.**

**1:30**