

DoD Civilian Careers Brand Positioning: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Project Objective: Conduct focus groups with college students and recent graduates to test brand positioning statements.

NOTES TO REVIEWER:

This discussion guide is not a script and, therefore, will not be read verbatim. The moderator will use these questions as a roadmap and will probe as needed to maintain the natural flow of the conversation. *Secondary question probes are italicized.* These are suggestions for the interviewer to follow, and will be used or modified as deemed relevant and necessary in the natural flow of discussion.

Moderator instructions are highlighted in yellow. Materials are highlighted in blue.

Session Overview: Total Time: 70 minutes

SECTION A: Introduction and Icebreaker (5 minutes)

The moderator will explain the purpose of the focus group, present the ground rules, and allow participants to ask any questions.

SECTION B: Key Message Testing (35 minutes)

The purpose of this section is to examine reactions to the four key messages.

SECTION C: Comparison of Key Messages (15 minutes)

The purpose of this section is to compare the key messages to gain an understanding of which message is most effective.

SECTION D: Potential Applications of Key Messages (10 minutes)

The purpose of this section is to gain an understanding of how college students and recent graduates perceive key messages through an activity where they are asked to create a recruitment flier.

SECTION E: Conclusion (5 minutes)

Moderator ensures that all questions are answered and all comments have been heard.

Section A. Introduction and Icebreaker (5 min)

Thank you for coming to talk to us today, your time is greatly appreciated. My name is _____, and I work for Fors Marsh Group, which is an independent company that conducts hundreds of focus groups like this each year. Focus groups are a type of research used to gather opinions on a specific topic. I'm here to listen to you and what you have to tell me, and it doesn't matter to me how you answer my questions, I'm interested in hearing your thoughts. Today, I am going to share with you various branding ideas for Department of Defense Civilian Careers. I am conducting this focus group on behalf of the Department of Defense.

We will have about 70 minutes for our discussion. Before we get started, I want to go over a few things:

- There are no wrong answers. Our whole purpose for being here 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 folks think.
- What we talk about here is confidential. This means that your individual responses will not be reported and your name will not be associated with anything you say in our reports.
- Likewise, we want to respect the privacy of everyone in this room and, therefore, ask that you please not share any of our discussions with others.
- Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to stop participating in this group at any time.
- 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. Please speak one at a time and clearly, so I may hear you.
- You might have already noticed the glass behind me. There are people from my team who are observing and taking notes, so I can focus on our discussion. Even though other people are observing, please speak openly about your opinions and experiences. We want to learn from you, so it is important that you share your honest opinions.

- We are also audio-recording this session. I will be speaking with people across the country for this project, and it will be impossible for me to remember everything. The audio files will be transcribed, but any information that could identify you will be removed from the transcripts. At the end of our discussion, I have to write a report and will refer to the recordings and transcripts when writing the report.
- We're also streaming this session so some of my team can listen in but not video recording. Is everyone okay with that?
- Please turn your cellphone off or switch to silent mode.
- If you need to go to the restroom during the discussion, please feel free to do so. It is **[GIVE DIRECTIONS]**.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Okay, great. First, I'm going to have everyone introduce themselves. Please tell us your name and something you like to do in your free time. I'll go first.

[Introductions and Icebreaker] It's wonderful to meet everyone—let's get started.

Section B. Key Message Testing (35 min)

[MATERIALS: Key Message Worksheets]

[A total of four key messages will be tested, with the order of messages randomly assigned by group to minimize order effects]

How many of you have heard the term "civilian careers" before?

Can any of you define what the term "civilian careers" means?

I bring up civilian careers because today we're going to be talking about the messages you might see about from the DoD about their civilian career opportunities. To ensure that we are all on the same page, I'm going to read a statement that exemplifies the way the DoD describes civilian careers:

"The Department of Defense (DoD) offers a multitude of job opportunities for non-military individuals (known as civilians) interested in playing an

important role of providing support to our Armed Forces (Military). DoD hires civilians in nearly every type of job available in the private sector. Opportunities exist for scholarships, internships, short-term and long-term positions, as well as entry level to senior executive-level positions. “

I’m going to share a few messages that might be developed into branding and marketing materials related to civilian careers for college students and recent graduates. Please keep in mind that the messages I show you today have not been fully developed—they still need a lot of work. Your feedback will help determine which messages we should move forward with, so try not to get caught up in small details since these aren’t final.

Like I mentioned, I’m going to be showing you some “big” ideas or key messages about civilian careers with the Department of Defense (DoD).

[Hand out/show each message in randomized order + probe]

I’m going to read this out loud to you and feel free to follow along on your hand out. We’ll do the same again with the other messages. Later, we will compare the messages together.

[Walk through sheet; allow time for participants to fill out sheet] Take a moment to answer the questions on your worksheet.

Okay, let’s jump in. Remember, there are no wrong answers, and I have no stake in the outcome of this testing. Love it or hate it, it’s all the same to me.

Probes for All Messages	
Initial Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your initial thoughts about this message? • Does this message grab your attention? - <i>Why/why not?</i> • How does it make you feel? • What did you like about this? • What did you dislike about this?
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think this message is trying to say?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What is this message telling you to do?</i> - <i>Does this message speak to you?</i> • <i>Is there anything confusing or unclear about the message?</i>
<p>Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Do you believe what this message is trying to say?</i> - <i>Why/why not?</i> - <i>What, if anything, would you change or add to make it more believable?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Do you feel this message is made for someone like you?</i> - <i>How relatable is this message?</i> • <i>Does this message make you want to do something?</i> - <i>Why/why not?</i> - <i>What does this message make you want to do?</i> - <i>What, if anything, would you change or add to make this message more persuasive/motivating?</i> - <i>Does this message make you want to learn more?</i>

Great; I have just a few more questions about this message.

<p>Message Specific Probes</p>	
<p>At DoD, there's always room to grow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What does "there's always room to grow" mean in terms of careers/job searching?</i> • <i>When you read this message, what imagery, if any, comes to mind? What do you see representing this message?</i>

<p>A job at DoD is an investment in your future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “investment” look like in a career? • When you read this message, what imagery, if any, comes to mind? What do you see representing this message?
<p>At DoD, opportunities are endless.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “opportunities are endless” mean for career advancement? • When you read this message, what imagery, if any, comes to mind? What do you see representing this message?
<p>You don’t have to be in the Armed Services to serve your country: work for DoD.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “service to your country” look like in a career? • When you read this message, what imagery, if any, comes to mind? What do you see representing this message?

Section D. Comparison of Key Messages (15 min)

[MATERIALS: Message handouts, Message Ranking Worksheet]

Now think about all the messages I shared with you. I’d like to get your thoughts about all the messages you saw today. [Refer participants to message handouts]

[Walk through ranking sheet; allow time for participants to fill out sheet]

Please take a couple minutes to fill out this worksheet about which message is your favorite.

Thinking about everything you’ve seen today and the discussions we’ve had...

- Which message was your favorite?
 - Why?

- Which message seems made for someone like you?
 - *Why?*
- Which message is going to stick with you tomorrow?
 - *Why?*
- Which message are you most likely to tell someone else about?
 - *Why?*
- Which message makes you want to learn more about civilian careers?
 - *What would you want to learn more about?*

Section E. Potential Applications of Key Messages (10 min)

Thanks for sharing your thoughts about the messages that you saw today. We're now going to switch roles a little bit. We've heard your thoughts on the draft messages you saw; now we're going to give you the chance to make up your own recruitment flier to go along with one of these messages—let's use the message, the majority of you chose as the one that makes you want to learn more about civilian careers: **[share message]**.

Using the blank paper in front of you, create your flier. To get you started, think about what imagery or content would go on the flier; what the look and feel of it would be? What would be the big headline? Use words, drawing, bullets points or anything that comes to mind

Who would like to walk us through their flier?

[Probe as applicable]

- What is the main message of your flier?
- Tell me more about the imagery you would choose.
- How would you want someone to feel after seeing this flier?
- How is this flier similar to other career fliers you have seen? Different?
- What is the most important thing for DoD civilian careers to communicate in its messaging, such as fliers?

Section F. Conclusion (5 minutes)

[TIME PERMITTING] If you don't mind, I am going to step out for just a moment to see if my team has any additional follow-up questions for you. [Ask any additional questions.]

This has been a very helpful session. Thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to be with me and to share your perspectives and experiences. Before we wrap up, is there anything else that you would like to share or that we might have missed?

Ok, thank you again for your time. You are free to go. Please leave behind your worksheets and writing utensils. Have a wonderful evening!