

Attachment 7: Post-Release Participant Focus
Group Protocol

Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP)
Evaluation

Site Visit Protocols

December 11, 2015

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PROTOCOL FOR POST-RELEASE PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP

Instructions to interviewers: Bullets below each question represent probes for important details; depending on how well you are doing on time, try to make sure respondents touch on each of these issues. Text in [] corresponds to sections of write-up template.

Part I. Setup and Consent Activities (15–25 minutes)

1. As participants enter the room, ask them their name and write it next to one of the IDs in your list of MPRIDs, as well as on a name tag. Hand them the consent and information forms that correspond to that ID as well as their name tag and ask them to take a seat.
2. When everyone has sat down, explain that, in order to participate in the focus group today, we need to document their consent to participate in our research study. Read the form, verbatim, out loud, and then ask them to sign the form if they agree to participate.
3. Ask them to then complete the participant information form, and let them know that information in the form will be kept private and separate from their name.
4. If anyone declines to fill out the form, write “DECLINE” at the top of the form and keep it separate from the unused forms. Collect all of the completed forms.
5. Cross out the IDs in your list that were not used.

Part II. Introduction (5 minutes)

Good afternoon. My name is _____, and this is my colleague _____ and we are from Mathematica Policy Research/Social Policy Research Associates. We are part of an independent research team that is studying the pre-employment services being provided in your county through the local jail as well as the American Job Centers (AJC) as part of the [Program Name] program. The study is on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this conversation. Your participation is very important to the study.

To help us better understand how your program is working, we would like to ask you some questions about your experiences. We are visiting 20 programs similar to yours across the country and holding similar discussions. This discussion will be kept strictly private, and no one outside of the research team will have access to our notes or the recording of the discussion. We will not share any information you provide with staff in the program, or any employers, and our reports will never identify you by name. Instead, we will combine information from this discussion with information from discussion groups in other states. The recording is just to help us remember what you say in your own words. [Placeholder –insert into text once we have received CoC approval: To further protect your privacy, the study team has obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health, which allows researchers to refuse to hand over identifying information in response to legal demands.]

I hope you will feel free to be open and frank in our discussion. I ask that none of you share what you hear today with others outside the group. It will also help us if you speak clearly and one at a time. I will try to be mindful of time and may need to keep the discussion moving to

make sure we cover all the topics. We have about one hour for our discussion. Do you have any questions before we begin recording?

Ok, we're going to turn on the audio recorder now.

Part III. Participant Background (5 minutes) [D1]

1. Let's begin by getting to know a bit about your background. Let's start to my right, and please tell me:
 - your first name,
 - in what facility did you start participating in [LEAP program]
 - how long it has been since you were released from jail, and
 - what work experience you have both before and after your incarceration.

Part IV. Pre-Release Service Receipt (10 minutes) [D1-D4]

First I'd like to focus on your experiences in the program while you were still incarcerated. Let's talk about how you got into the program, and the types of services you received through the program before being released from jail.

2. How did you find out about the program? What did you hear about the program before you started participating, and what did you expect to get out of it?
 - Did you hear about the program from a staff member, jail staff, another inmate, or a flyer?
 - Did you have any concerns about being in the program? If yes, what were they?
3. How long did you participate in the program while in jail?
4. Can you describe the types of services you received while you were in jail through the program?

If necessary (few responses), probe about services mentioned by staff as provided through the program. Potential probes:

- Case management and career counseling
- Career inventories or assessments to help you learn about a suitable career for your background and interests
- Information about the job market, such as high-demand occupations and their requirements
- Resume help
- Interviewing skills
- Assistance with looking for job openings
- Access to resources on job openings or guidance on job search strategies (online or in print)

- Assistance with getting an ID
 - Registration with an employment database
 - Job readiness or soft skills training
 - Remediation or GED preparation
 - Vocational training
 - Job placement
 - Therapy or supports, such as anger management, adjusting to life outside, etc.
5. How easy was it for you to participate in activities?
- How did you usually get to the program for activities?
 - Did you have any problems attending any classes or meeting with your case manager?
 - Did program activities overlap with any other services offered in the facility?
6. Which of these services do you feel were the most beneficial to you?
7. Did you find the program staff in the jail-AJC knowledgeable and helpful?

Part V. Post-Release Employment Services Receipt (15 minutes) [E1, E2]

Now I'd like to hear about the types of employment services you have received and your experience in the program since being released from jail.

8. Are you working with the same case manager as in the correctional facility?
- If so...
 - How and when did they arrange for you to meet with them after release?
 - How long after your release did you meet with them?
 - Did you try to find work on your own first?
 - If not...
 - Did you meet with program staff from the community before your release to discuss how to contact them?
 - Did they provide you with an appointment or contact information for the job center in the community?
 - How long after being released did you visit the job center?
 - Did you try to find work on your own first?

9. What types of employment-related services have you received through the program since being released?

If necessary (few responses), probe about services mentioned by staff as provided through the program. Potential probes:

- Orientation to program services or the AJC
- Case management and career counseling
- Career inventories or assessments to help you learn about a suitable career for your background and interests
- Information about the job market, such as high-demand occupations and their requirements
- Job search skills, including resume help, interviewing skills, and help looking for a job or placement
- Job readiness or soft skills training
- Access to a resource room with computers, newspapers, other resources
- Assistance with getting an ID
- Registration with an employment database
- Remediation or GED preparation
- Financial literacy
- Vocational training
- Work experience/internships
- On-the-job training
- Retention services
- Therapy or supports, such as anger management, adjusting to life outside, etc.

Part VI. Receipt of Other Support Services (10 minutes) [E3]

10. What other types of services have you been able to access through the program?
- Have you received help with finding housing?
 - Have you received help with child care or child custody/child support?
 - Have you received help with accessing other financial assistance or benefits such as food stamps?
 - Have you received transportation assistance?
 - Any other services (for example, parenting education or couples therapy)?
11. Do you know of other programs in the community that help people find jobs?
- Have you sought services from any of these programs? If so, what are they and who provides them?

Part VII. Quality of Post-Release Services (15 minutes) [H2]

Let's talk about your satisfaction with the services that you received from the program after being released.

12. How easy or difficult was it for you to link with the program in the community after your release?
 - Do you feel that your experience in the program while in jail made it easier for you to connect to services when you returned to the community?
13. Was it easy for you to participate in the services provided by the community-AJC?
 - For example, was the timing or location of classes convenient?
 - Did you have any problems getting access to resource rooms or meeting with staff?
 - Were all the staff equally accessible (for example, case manager, workshop facilitators, job developers, program coordinators)?
14. Did the services you received through the community-AJC meet your expectations?
15. Did you find the staff in the community-AJC knowledgeable and helpful?
16. Have any of you found a job since you were released?
 - If yes,
 - What kind of job—industry, full-time versus part-time; how did you find the job?
 - How important was the program in helping you find that job?
 - Are you still employed? Has the program provided any services to help you stay at your job, such as transportation assistance, work clothes, or on-the-job training?
 - If no,
 - Why not—still in training or education, still receiving services, employers won't hire because of criminal history, lack of transportation, lack of jobs in your field, lack of qualifications, competitive job market.
 - Are you still seeking help from the program to find a job?

Part VIII. Overall Impressions (5 minutes) [H2]

We have about 5 minutes left, and I'd like you to think about the [Program Name] program as a whole, including both the services provided in jail and those provided to you after release.

17. What do you think has been the most helpful or strongest aspect of the program, **both inside the jail and outside**? (that is, case management vs. job readiness vs. vocational training vs. other supports)
18. What was the most challenging aspect of participating in the program?

19. What do you think could be improved about the program to better serve individuals in your situation, **both inside the jail and outside**?
- Did you hope to learn certain skills that aren't being taught?
 - Are there other services you wish had been provided?
20. Would you recommend this program to others?

[If time remains, ask:] Is there anything else about the program or your experience you would like to share that didn't come up already in the discussion?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas with us today. This discussion has been very helpful in learning more about the [Program Name] program and participant experiences. Please make sure that you see one of us before you leave to receive your \$25 gift card. We appreciate your time.

Before participants leave: Provide each participant with a gift card and ask them to print and sign their name on the payment receipt record.