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Child Welfare Information Gateway's Focus Group Guide

Purpose

Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG) focus groups are designed to provide more in-depth information about the information needs of child welfare and related professionals and evaluate the usefulness of a specific product, tool, or topic so CWIG can better meet their needs and support their work in improving services and outcomes for children and families. Data from these focus groups will add more context and richness to other CWIG evaluation efforts and will inform

- Product Development regarding the content (topics, level of detail) of new and updated products to meet the information needs of these customer groups.
- Outreach about how to make these audiences aware of relevant CWIG products and services.
- Library Services about the types and formats of materials to acquire to meet the information needs of these customers.
- Website Services about the content, organization, and presentation of information to meet the needs of these customers around a specific topic, tool, or product.
- Management about staff development needs for CWIG staff to better serve these customers.

Focus groups will be comprised of 8-10 participants each, conducted virtually (e.g. telephone, webinar) or in-person. Beyond the introduction, each set of focus group questions below is designed for a segment of customers that represent an aspect of interest to CWIG: 1) users that have used CWIG products and services 2) users that are aware of CWIG products and services but do not use them and 3) users that are not aware of CWIG products and services.

Facilitator Guidelines

Introduce leaders of the focus group and roles of each in supporting the meeting. Then explain the following to participants:

- *We are conducting focus groups with professionals to better understand your experiences with <insert name of product, tool, topic> in order to determine what information would be most useful to those serving children and families and how we can better get that information to you. Your participation is voluntary and confidential. Any input gathered will not be attributed to you individually, but will be combined with others for a fuller picture of the issues. We are recording the session to be sure our notes are accurate, but again, we will not connect any names to any comments. Please let me know if there are any concerns about this process.*

- *This focus group involves having you answer a few questions to learn about your experiences with <insert name of product, tool, topic>, what you thought was particularly useful/helpful and how Information Gateway can make it more relevant to the work you do. There are no wrong answers—we want your honesty and we expect differences of opinion. And there are no bad questions so please feel free to speak up. The only limitation is to help us stay on time so we can cover all our questions.*
- *Let's do brief introductions—please give us your name and what you do.*
- *Have you heard of the Child Welfare Information Gateway? [SHOW OF HANDS]*

Briefly provide a foundation and parameters for what Information Gateway can do to help them improve their services and improve outcomes for the children and families they serve.

- Describe our mission to serve as the connection to the best information that protects children and strengthens families. Explain we are a service of the Children's Bureau, ACF, US. DHHS.
- Briefly describe our topical scope and gateway concept.
- Emphasize that Information Gateway provides information services (not direct services), and that our information is generally at the national or state level. We do not advocate for policies. Annually, Information Gateway receives over 4 million visitors to its website, processes over 100,000 print orders, responds to over 4,000 phone calls and emails, manages a library of over 60,000 items, writes or updates over 50 products each year and exhibits at more than 50 conferences.
- Mention that almost all services and products are free.

[Don't provide too much detail here; it may limit their thinking too much.]

We will use your input, along with input from other groups like this around the country, to make decisions about <insert name of product, tool, topic>, including what revisions needs to be made, what changes we need to make in our outreach and dissemination methods, as well as about what new products and services need to be developed to better support you in your work with children and families. Any questions before we begin?

(If focus group participants do not have experience with the tool under review, please spend some time (e.g. 10 minutes) showing them the tool on the website and how it works. Please encourage them to ask questions and make comments about what they see and do not see as you are showing them the tool)

Explain the notecards we are using so they won't be influenced by colleagues in the focus group and how the information on the notecards will be used to help generate discussion regarding the <insert name of product, tool, topic>. Then read the instructions to participants below and let them start.

- *Think about your previous experience with reading, using, or learning about <insert name of product, tool, topic>. If you don't have previous experience with this <product, tool, or topic>, think about what we just showed you and how it could be used in your work. Write your answers*

on the notecard. Then we'll discuss them and write some notes on the flipchart. We will collect your notecards at the end. (5 minutes writing; 15 minutes discussing)

Notecard says:

Think about your experience with reading/using/learning about <insert name of product, tool, topic>.

- a. Was the information/tool easy to understand and user-friendly? How so? If it was difficult to use, how so?
- b. How do you feel about the way the information is displayed on the website or page? What do you like about it? What do you dislike?
- c. How did you or would you use the information/tool? How was it or would it be helpful?
- d. How did you learn about this tool or resource (e.g., from a conference, your supervisor, etc.)? Where would you usually go to find this type of information, tool or topic?

When participants have responded to all questions on the notecard, go through each question individually and ask participants to share what they've written. As they are talking, write their answers on a flipchart. If participants don't speak up, feel free to call on someone and go around the room. During the conversation about each of the questions/responses on the notecard, you can probe for detail using the specific questions below. If participants create lists without conversations, you can use the questions below to extend the conversation. So as people are providing their thoughts, use the questions below to get them to expand upon their thoughts. Be very clear and focus the conversation on the product/tool of interest to get as much detail as possible.

Questions

When participants have responded to all questions on the notecard, go through each question individually and ask participants to share what they've written. As they are talking, write their answers on a flipchart. If participants don't speak up, feel free to call on someone and go around the room. During the conversation about each of the questions/responses on the notecard, you can probe for detail using the specific questions below. Focus groups questions below are organized for segments of customer groups of interest to researchers. Questions in **bold font** are key questions that should be prioritized if time becomes an issue. Italicized questions are to be used as optional probes to encourage respondents to expand upon their responses. If participants create lists without conversations, you can use the questions below to extend the conversation. So as people are providing their thoughts, use the questions below to get them to expand upon their thoughts. Be very clear and focus the conversation on the product/tool of interest to get as much detail as possible.

Customers that have used CWIG products and services

We would like to better understand your experiences with the messages that are sent to customers as part of outreach efforts for **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**. Please take 5 minutes to review the following messages related to the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**. (*Facilitator: direct participant's attention to copies of messages*).

1. To what extent do the outreach messages grab your attention? What don't you like about the messages?

- *Optional probe: Do they keep you reading?*
- *Optional probe: Do they motivate you to open links?*
- *Optional probe: Do they help you to think about how you might use the information or resource for a specific task or project you are working on?*
- *Optional probe: Is there anything distracting about the messages?*

2. To what extent are outreach messages clear about what the purpose is and what you should do?

- *Optional probe: Are the messages clear about the benefits to you*
- *Optional probe: Are the messages clear about how you can access information and resources?*
- *Optional probe: Are the messages tailored to your needs for information and resources?*

Facilitator: We would like to better understand your experiences with **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**.

3. Which information and resources have you used? How have you used these information and resources?

- *Optional probe: How have these information and resources informed your attitudes? Have they informed how you think about your work? About [Insert prevention, foster care, or adoption]?*
- *Optional probe: How have these information and resources increased your knowledge and skills? Informed your agency's policies or programs?*
- *Optional probe: To what extent do you engage in discussions with colleagues, clients, and/or others about these information and resources?*
- *Optional probe: What are your agency's processes or protocols for using information and resources to create other resources (e.g. training) that can be used at a system level to inform practice, policy, or program improvement?*

4. To what degree do you trust the information and resources?

- *Optional probe: How have your thoughts about how reliable and credible the information and resources are changed (if any) since you first started using **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**?*
- *Optional probe: What factors increase your trust in the information and resources? What factors decrease this trust? Anything about the website? About the information? How the information is presented? Source of the information?*
- *Optional probe: What would increase or maintain your trust in the information and resources provided?*

5. When you think about how you use these information and resources, to what extent are they provided in a format that is conducive for how you want to use them?

- *Optional probe: In what format(s) do you prefer to get your information and resources? Do you prefer pdfs, apps, links to webpages, etc.?*
- *Optional probe: Do the formats you prefer vary for how you want to use the information or resource? If so, how?*
- *Optional probe: To what extent would it be useful for you to get the SAME information or resource in multiple formats (e.g. getting the same information about talking to older youth about adoption in a pdf, app, webinar, or podcast)? How would you use the information and resources in these different formats?*

Facilitator: We would like to better understand your experiences with the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**. To refresh your memory, we are going to show you a few pages of the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]** and then ask you a few questions.

6. What are your overall impressions about the [Insert Name of Product/Service]? What do you like about it? How would you improve it?

- *Optional probe: Do you like how the [Insert Name of Product/Service] is organized? How it looks and feels to you?*
- *Optional probe: Do you find it easy to find what you need?*
- *Optional probe: If you came to the website to find something specific, were you able to find it?*

Customers that are aware of the product or service but do NOT use it

1. How do you find out about [Insert Name of Product/Service]?

- *Optional probe: Do they keep you reading?*
- *Optional probe: Do they motivate you to open links?*
- *Optional probe: Do they help you to think about how you might use the information or resource for a specific task or project you are working on?*
- *Optional probe: Is there anything distracting about the messages?*

2. How familiar are you with the [Insert Name of Product/Service]? What are your overall impressions about the [Insert Name of Product/Service]? What do you like about it? How would you improve it?

- *Optional probe: Do you like how the [Insert Name of Product/Service] is organized? How it looks and feels to you?*
- *Optional probe: Do you find it easy to find what you need?*
- *Optional probe: Have you ever come to the [Insert Name of Product/Service] to find something specific, and weren't you able to find it?*

- *Optional probe: What's missing on this [Insert Name of Product/Service]? Can you find this information from other sources? (e.g. websites, publications, etc.)*

3. How familiar are you with the information and resources on the [Insert Name of Product/Service]?

- *Optional probe: Which ones are you most familiar with?*
- *Optional probe: Are you aware of the outreach/promotion tools that are available on the website? If so, what made you decide to not use these?*
- *Optional probe: What factors have contributed to you NOT using these information and resources?*
- *Optional probe: What (if anything) would motivate you to use these information and resources?*
- *Optional probe: What could the website provide that would be useful to you? In what format (s) would you prefer this information or resource?*
- *Optional probe: Do you use information or resources provided by other sources? (e.g. organizations, websites, colleagues) to promote [Insert Name of Product/Service]? If so, why do you use those instead of CWIG information and resources?*

Customers that are NOT aware of the product or service

1. What types of adoption related information and resources are you interested in? What topics are you interested in?

2. Where do you currently go to find these adoption related information and resources?

- *Optional probe: What websites do you visit?*
- *Optional probe: What organizations do you look for?*
- *Optional probe: How did you decide on these websites or organizations? What factors increase your trust in the information and resources? What factors decrease this trust? Anything about the website? About the information? How the information is presented? Source of the information?*
- *Optional probe: Do you get your information from colleagues and/or other agency staff? How do you prioritize what you read from these sources?*

3. In what format (s) do you prefer to get your information and resources? Do you prefer pdfs, apps, links to webpages, etc.?

- *Optional probe: Do the formats you prefer vary for how you want to use the information or resource? If so, how?*
- *Optional probe: To what extent would it be useful for you to get the SAME information or resource in multiple formats (e.g. getting the same information about talking to older youth*

about adoption in a pdf, app, webinar, or podcast)? How would you use the information and resources in these different formats?

4. How do you typically use information and resources?

- *Optional probe: How have these information and resources informed your attitudes? Have they informed how you think about your work?*
- *Optional probe: How have these information and resources increased your knowledge and skills? Informed your agency's policies or programs?*
- *Optional probe: To what extent do you engage in discussions with colleagues, clients, and/or others about these information and resources?*
- *Optional probe: What are your agency's processes or protocols for using information and resources to create other resources (e.g. training) that can be used at a system level to inform practice, policy, or program improvement?*

Facilitator instructions: We would like to get your impressions about the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**. We are going to show you a few pages of the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]** and then ask you a few questions.

5. What are your overall impressions about the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**? What do you like about it? How would you improve it?

- *Optional probe: Do you like how the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]** is organized? How it looks and feels to you?*
- *Optional probe: What information or resources look interesting to you? Look relevant or useful for your work?*
- *Optional probe: What would you use? Not use? Why or why not?*
- *Optional probe: How would you use the information or resources?*
- *Optional probe: What's missing on this **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**?*
- *Optional probe: Can you find this information from other sources (e.g. websites, publications, etc.)? Do you use this information from other sources? If so, why do you prefer these over the ones offered on the **[Insert Name of Product/Service]**?*

Closing

We're done! Thank you very much for your time. Your input and comments are very helpful. Do you have any questions for us?

[Pass out a packet containing an Information Gateway flier and selected products, and encourage them to contact us. Mention the contact us information on the materials, and on the website, including live online chat.]

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