

ATTACHMENT J.1

FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR GUIDE: CLIENTS  
ENGLISH

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## CLIENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

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Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today and completing the information form. I am [NAME], and this is my colleague [NAME]. We are from [organization] and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service has hired us to research the employment and training program targeting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants in [site].

The reason we invited all of you to join us today is because each of you were, or are currently, in an employment and training program through SNAP [name used by State]. We're here today to learn about your backgrounds and your experiences with that program. We are also interested in learning about some of the things that might make it hard for you to participate in this program or to find employment. This information will help us determine what works in these pilots and what could be improved, so your input is invaluable to us. We are holding these focus groups in several States around the country in order to better understand how the SNAP [name used by State] employment and training programs can meet the needs and goals of people like you.

- Before we start, I want to discuss the guidelines for today's discussion. Your participation today is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can leave at any time. At the end of the group discussion, you will receive \$50 MAX Discover® prepaid card.
- What you say in this room will be considered private. We will summarize what we talk about today and put it together with information that we will gather from other groups like this. Nothing you say will ever be linked to your name. Also, nothing you say will affect your eligibility for SNAP [name used by State] or any other programs. Please respect the privacy of others' comments.
- We want to hear different opinions, so if the rest of the group feels one way and you feel differently, please speak up. That information is really important to us because everyone here has probably had different experiences. There are no wrong answers.
- We have a lot to cover today, and might have to interrupt you to keep the conversation moving. Please don't take it personally; we have to make sure we get through all the questions we have for you in a short amount of time.
- The session will last about 90 minutes. We don't have a planned break, but please feel free to get up at any time to stretch, use the restroom, or help yourselves to something to eat or drink. Restrooms are located [describe location]. We ask that only one person be out of the room at a time for a bathroom break.
- I would like to record our conversation today, but that is so I do not have to take many notes and can give you my attention. If you have anything you would like to say off the record, just let me know and I can stop the recorder. Nothing you say will be shared with the SNAP agency and will not affect your benefits. Your participation is voluntary. Do you all agree to participate? Can we record the conversation?
- Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

- [Interviewer: Turn on the tape recorder.] Okay, I have now turned on the tape recorder. Can each of you confirm that you agreed to let me tape this conversation? [Interviewer: Get verbal consent to tape on the tape recording.]

#### A. Introductions

Let's start by getting to know one another a little bit. Please, one at a time, share your:

- First name
- Of all of the jobs you have had, what was your favorite job and why?

#### B. Employment and training participation

- Let's begin by talking about the last SNAP [name used by State] employment and training program in which you participated. Going around the table, I'd like each of you to tell me the name of the program and how long ago you participated or if you are currently participating in a program.

**[Moderator note:** Ensure SNAP employment and training programs are named. If not, provide clarification.]

- Now can someone describe for me what your program was like? For example, in what types of activities did you participate? What types of services did you receive? What types of training opportunities were offered? What did you learn through your employment and training program? Who would like to start?

##### **Probes:**

- Did you participate in activities that improved the skills you have? If yes, what types of skills?
- Did training include basic academic skills such as reading, writing, or math?
- Did training include general workplace skills such as good work habits?
- Did you learn skills for a particular kind of job such as a job in health care?
- Did you receive help in looking for a job? What type of help did you receive?

**[Moderator note:** Throughout this set of questions, you should check to see if other clients have had similar or different experiences.]

- Some of you have participated in [program] activities for some time. In what ways, if any, has participating in the program been difficult—financial or otherwise—for you?

##### **Probes:**

- For example, did you have to pay anything out of pocket to attend your training program, such as transportation costs?
- Were you offered any support services as part of the program (for example, transportation assistance, child care, clothing allowances, financial planning, and so on) to offset out-of-pocket costs?
- If support services were paid to you or vouchers were provided, about how much did you receive each week? For how long?

- Did you have to pay any tuition or program fees? Did you receive any help from the training program to pay these fees?
- Let's talk a little bit about working with staff at the provider [**case management**]. Do you or did you meet regularly with one or two particular staff members?

**Probes:**

- Which staff, and for what purpose? How frequently did you talk with these staff? In what format (in person, email, mail, or telephone)?
- Have you found staff members to be helpful? What kinds of assistance do or did they provide? Were there forms of assistance you needed that were not provided?
- For those of you who finished your training programs, did you get any type of certification or degree at the end? What type?
- Now I'd like to talk about how easy or difficult it was for you to participate in the activities you described. Where did you participate in these activities?

**Probes:**

- Was it easy or hard for you to get there? [Discuss the location and transportation concerns, child care, or other barriers.]
  - What hours were you required to participate in these activities? How convenient were these hours?
- C. Employment goals
- Sometimes people enroll in a SNAP employment and training program because they want to improve their chances of getting a job or a better job, whereas others might want to break into a new line of work. When you last enrolled in the SNAP employment and training program, what were your goals? How did you hope the program would help you?
    - How did you decide on this goal? Did you work with a case manager to identify this goal?
  - How did you end up participating in the activities you previously described?
    - What was the role of your case manager in determining the activities you participated in?
    - What were your expectations for these activities?

## D. Workforce preparedness

Let's talk a little bit more about what happened after your eligibility for SNAP [name used by State] employment and training program ended or you stopped participating in the program.

- What are you doing now?

**Probes:**

- What kinds of work or other activities are you in? Are you working full-time? Are you working part-time? If you are working, is your job permanent or part of your training program? Are you participating in a training program (that is, on-the-job training)?

- What type of work are you doing [note type of industry and occupation]?
- How many hours do you work each week? Would you like to work more hours than currently allotted?
- Does your job cover your living expenses, such as food, housing, bills, and so on? Do you need help from other programs or people to cover your expenses?
- What are some of the reasons you were able to get this job? Do you think you would have found or gotten this job without the SNAP employment and training program? Why or why not?
- At this job, do you use skills that you learned during your SNAP employment and training program? If yes, what are some examples of the skills you use?

#### E. Perceptions of employment and training program

- Now I'd like to talk a little more about how well the SNAP [name used by State] employment and training programs have met your needs. In your opinion, did the SNAP [name used by State] employment and training program help you develop the skills you need to get a job or a better job?
- What parts of the program have been best or most helpful for you? In what ways? [Probe on specific types of education and training versus case management versus support services.]
- What parts of the program could be improved to better help you find work or increase your income? In what ways?

#### **Probes:**

- What additional support services could have been provided to better help you participate in and complete the program?
- Among these services, which would have been the most important to receive?
- Do you feel your case manager or other staff provided enough support to help you meet your goals? If not, how could that have been improved?
- Did you get out of the program what you thought you would? Please explain.

#### **Probes:**

- For example, did you hope to learn certain skills but didn't?
- Do you have ideas about what education or training could help with this?
- Has anyone participated in any other job-preparation programs offered through other organizations or not run through your SNAP program?

#### **[If yes, ask:]**

- Can you tell me a little bit about that program? What activities did you participate in?
- How did it compare with the one you participated in through SNAP [name used by State]?
- Did it help you develop new skills? Find a job?

- Are there specific aspects of those programs you wish were offered in SNAP [name used by State] employment and training?

#### F. Barriers to employment

- [A few/Some/Most] of you have found work, others are still looking. Whether you have a job or are still looking, I'd like you to tell me about the things that make it difficult to find the jobs related to your training program. I'll list some of these challenges on the easel.
- **Go down each item on the list.**  
How many other folks have experienced [specify challenge]?
- Would additional support services (such as transportation assistance or child care) have been helpful? If so, what services are most important? How much additional assistance would have been helpful?
- Let's do this exercise again, but this time I want each of you to think about some of the challenges you've encountered in *keeping* a job. What are they?
- **Go down each item on the list.**  
How many other folks have experienced [specify challenge] in keeping a job?  
By a show of hands, how many of you experienced *more* than one of these challenges at the same time while working?
- **Have you had other significant challenges in finding or keeping a job that I didn't list?**
- Ok, let's talk a little bit more about **[the 2 or 3 challenges most often mentioned in the group]**. Why does [barrier] make it difficult to find or keep a job in this area?

#### Probes:

- What types of things might you have done to help deal with these barriers?
- Did the employment and training program staff help you with any of these issues? For example, did they connect you with other services in the community or offer funding for things such as child care and transportations costs? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How could it have been more helpful?

#### G. Final exercise

I just have one final question before I let you go.

- Thinking back over your experiences in the activities we discussed, how useful do you think the program was in building skills or getting you a job, whatever the goal was? Would you suggest others participate in the program if it's available to them?
  - **[If time remains, ask:]** Is there anything else about the program 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 SNAP [name used by State] employment and training. We appreciate your time.

**Public Burden Statement**

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-0604. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate to the Office of Policy Support, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1014, Alexandria, VA 22302