

## **Instrument 1.**

### **In-depth discussion guide**

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## NextGen Project

### The Experiences, Needs, and Voices of Workers in Low-Income Households During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

#### In-depth Discussion Guide

##### Introductory Statement and Consent

Thank you so much for talking with me today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am with an organization called Mathematica. We are assisting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in learning more about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected workers like yourself. We are interested in hearing about your personal experiences during this challenging time. We are interested in hearing about ways in which the pandemic has affected your work life, how you have responded to any changes, and how your employer has communicated with and supported you in dealing with any changes. We would also like to hear about needs that came up for your family due to the pandemic and the kinds of help you may have received to meet those needs.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this information collection is 0970-0356 and the expiration date is 06/30/2021. Our conversation will take about 2 hours. During our conversation, anything you say will be private to the extent permitted by law. We also will not use your name or any other identifying information when we report the results of our study. We won't share what you say with any program you may be participating in or receiving assistance from and anything what you tell us will not affect any services or benefits that you or your family receives. You may also choose not to answer any question you do not want to answer and may end the interview at any time if you begin to feel uncomfortable or unable to complete it. The information you share will help employers and programs like [PROGRAM NAME] better support working families affected by the pandemic.

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN
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Through this information collection, ACF is gathering information to understand, from the perspective of participants, how programs designed to support low-wage workers have responded to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency (PHE) and whether and how they are meeting the needs of participants. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 2 hours per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This is a voluntary collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0356 and the expiration date is 6/30/2021. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Sheena McConnell; Mathematica, 1100 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002-4221.
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Please remember that we are interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. My hope is that you will feel comfortable talking with me, but, if at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so and we will move on. In appreciation for participating in the interview, we will give you a \$60 gift card.

**Are you comfortable beginning the interview at this time?**

I would like to record our conversation so that I don't miss anything. No one will hear the recording except for the researchers and the person who types it up. Is it okay with you if I record this conversation? If you want me to turn the recording off for any reason or at any time, just say so. ***[INTERVIEWER: PRESS RECORD IN WEBEX and ask, "Just to confirm, do you give your permission for me to begin the interview at this time?"]***

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### A. Participant background and living arrangements

***[Interviewer note: Begin with some easy, factual questions to warm up the participant. Encourage the participant to share a little bit of background about themselves. We want this to be very positive – not invasive. Allow them to share what they want – don't pressure them.]***

1. I would like to begin by spending some time getting to know you a little bit better and learning more about who you are and your background.
  - a. About how long have you lived in [locality]? Do you have friends or extended family in the area?
  - b. What kinds of things did you enjoy doing with your friends and family before COVID-19?
2. Tell me about your home and who you're living with right now.
  - Probe on ages and relationships
  - Probe on whether it is respondent's own place or that of family or friends
3. Has anything changed about your living arrangements or who is in the household due to COVID-19?
  - Probe on whether anyone moved in or out during the pandemic
  - Probe on whether respondent moved somewhere else during the pandemic

### B. Participant and household health

1. Let's talk next about your health and your family's health. Has COVID-19 affected your physical health in any way or the physical health of any family members?
  - Probe on experience with testing, illness (symptoms and duration), medical care, and recovery
2. Can you please tell me about any underlying health conditions that you or your family members may have that may make you or them more vulnerable to COVID? ***[Interviewer note: If the respondent isn't sure you can probe: Underlying health conditions may include chronic lung disease, asthma, heart conditions, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, and liver disease as well as being immunocompromised.]***
3. How concerned are you about exposure to the virus?
  - Probe on reasons why

- Probe on experiences with testing for COVID and/or antibodies [**Interviewer note: If the respondent is not familiar with antibody testing you can say: COVID antibody testing looks to see whether your immune system has responded to the infection.**]
4. Can you please tell me about any experiences you or your family members have had getting health care during the pandemic? I am interested in health care related and unrelated to COVID-19.
- Probe on experiences/challenges making appointments and visiting doctor's offices
  - Probe on experiences/challenges visiting a hospital if necessary
  - Probe on concerns about accessing healthcare
5. Has your level of stress or anxiety changed since the pandemic began? How so?
- Probe on changes in eating habits, sleeping, smoking, alcohol and other substance use
  - Probe on reasons for change
  - Probe on biggest sources of stress and anxiety [**Interviewer note: Probe in particular for whether stress/anxiety is around work or the pandemic in general.**]

### **C. Employment**

1. Now I'd like to hear about your work. Can you tell me about the job or jobs you had right before the COVID-19 pandemic hit?
- Probe on employer, industry, respondent's title and role/responsibilities
  - Probe on schedule/work hours
  - Probe on benefits like health insurance and sick leave as part of job
2. What kind of information, if any, did your employer communicate to the employees about COVID-19 and how business was going to operate during the pandemic?
- Probe on information about schedule, hours, and job duties
  - Probe on information about safety in the workplace
  - Probe on information regarding changes to policies around working from home, use of sick leave, accommodations, or any other working conditions
3. How, if at all, has your employment status changed since the beginning of the pandemic?
- Probe on whether currently working or not; whether hours or schedule have changed
  - Probe on whether working at the same employer or not
4. IF NOT WORKING CURRENTLY: Why are you no longer working and how do you feel about not working?

- Probe on whether laid off, furloughed, or quit and if quit, why
5. IF NOT WORKING CURRENTLY: What plans do you have, if any, for finding a new job?
    - Probe on industries/jobs of interest
    - Probe on strategies for finding a new job
    - Probe on concerns about being able to find a new job
    - Probe on need for internet to conduct job search or to look for resources/programs for support during the pandemic, and ability to access the internet when needed
  6. IF STILL WORKING: How, if at all, have your duties, schedule/hours, pay, or benefits changed?
  7. IF STILL WORKING: How do you feel about working during a pandemic?
    - Probe on extent to which participant feels safe at current job
    - Probe on employers' provision of personal protective equipment
    - Probe on other safety measures and supports employer has put in place
  8. IF STILL WORKING: How, if at all, has your transportation to your job or any child-care arrangements you had changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - Probe on ways of getting to and from work and experiences getting to and from work
    - Probe on implications of school and day care closures
    - Probe on changes in caregiving responsibilities due to the health of household members
    - Probe on impacts of changes in caregiving responsibilities on ability to work

#### **D. Financial Circumstances**

1. Next I'd like to talk a bit about your financial situation. Can you tell me what some of your typical major expenses were before the COVID-19 pandemic and what they are now?
  - Probe on changes in food expenditures
  - Probe on any rent/mortgage leniency respondent may have received
  - Probe on changes in expenses related to child care and transportation
  - Probe on changes in debt
2. In what ways, if any, has your ability to cover your major expenses changed during the pandemic?
  - Probe on existence of savings and whether and how respondent has used savings
3. What kinds of strategies has your family used to get by and have those changed since the pandemic?
  - Probe on cutting back on food, limiting use of utilities, putting off paying certain bills, talking to landlord about skipping a rent payment, using a pay day lender

### **E. Sources of support**

1. Can you tell me a bit about the program that referred you for this interview, [PROGRAM NAME]—like, how long you have been involved with the program and what type of support it provides?
  - Probe on whether respondent is still in/active in the program and if not, why not
2. In what ways, if any, has [PROGRAM NAME] changed the types of support it provided during the pandemic?
3. How satisfied have you been with [PROGRAM NAME] both before and during the pandemic?
  - Probe on reasons why
4. What other supports, if any, would have been helpful for [PROGRAM NAME] to provide during the pandemic?
5. Next I'd like to hear about any government programs you may use—like Unemployment Compensation or [NAME FOR SNAP IN STATE]. I'm interested in hearing about programs you used before or since the pandemic and what your experience with them has been, like how easy it was to get support from the program and how useful that support was.

***[Interviewer note: probe on the following as potentially relevant to the respondent's situation—e.g., if children/children with disabilities present in household]***

- Unemployment Compensation
  - TANF or [NAME OF STATE TANF PROGRAM]
  - SNAP or [NAME FOR SNAP IN STATE]
  - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
  - National School Lunch Program
  - Medicaid or [NAME OF STATE MEDICAID PROGRAM]
  - Head Start
  - Child support
  - WIC
9. Can you please tell me about any other types of supports you may have received before and since the pandemic and what your experiences have been with those? Examples may be food banks or food pantries, assistance from a church or faith-based organization, or any other kind of community organization.
  10. Have you received any financial support through either a stimulus check or other COVID-19 related government assistance?
    - Probe on experiences accessing funds



- Probe on how much respondent received
- Probe on how far those funds went toward helping the family meet their needs
- Probe on satisfaction with amount of funds

11. What kind of support, if any, have you received from family and friends or other sources?

- Probe on financial support, in-kind support with things like food and child care, and emotional support
- Probe on changes in such support since pandemic began
- Probe on how helpful the support has been

#### **F. Overall challenges and coping mechanisms**

1. I have just a few more questions before we wrap up. What have been the greatest challenges about working/not working during the pandemic?
2. How have you addressed these challenges?
3. Other than what we have talked about already, what other kinds of support would you have liked to receive during the pandemic that you have not?
4. Is there anything you are proud of accomplishing during the pandemic?
5. What about yourself do you think has helped you cope with the pandemic?
6. Is there anything you want to share about ways you have helped others cope during the pandemic?
7. Finally, what have you learned from this experience? What tips would you share with other people coping with the pandemic?

#### **G. Participant demographic information**

Before we close, I'd like to ask just a few more background questions about you to help us describe who we talked to during these discussions. If you don't feel comfortable, you don't have to answer them, but it would be helpful for us to know. So, if you don't mind sharing, could you please tell me:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your zip code?
3. Do you currently describe yourself as male, female, transgender, or none of these?
4. Do you identify as Hispanic, Latino/a, or of Spanish origin?

5. What is your race (e.g., American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African America, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White)?

## **H. Conclusion**

1. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me before we end? Is there anything that you think I've missed that I should know?
2. In appreciation for participating in the interview, we will send you a \$60 gift card. Can you tell me the email address where we should send your gift card? If you don't have email or will not be able to access a gift card via email, we can mail you a Walmart gift card.
  - [IF THE RESPONDENT OFFERS AN EMAIL ADDRESS] Would you prefer a gift card to Walmart, Target, or Amazon?
  - [IF THE RESPONDENT DOES NOT OFFER AN EMAIL ADDRESS] To what address should we mail the card?

Ok—you should receive your gift card [in the next day or so FOR EMAIL/within a week or two FOR HARD COPY]. Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate all that you have shared.