

Instrument 5 - Beneficiaries Discussion Guide

Communications Focus Groups for Remaking the Safety Net

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN: Through this information collection, ACF is gathering information to provide constituent research designed to understand target audiences with experience with economic and social safety net programming. The focus group and research will help identify experiences and perception of participants, and identify ways for the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) to produce communications messaging about safety net programming in a clear and resonant manner. The focus group will assist the program office in; (1) gathering feedback on safety net programming, (2) creating resonant communications messages, and (3) identifying trustworthy and relevant channels for communication with program service providers and beneficiaries. Public reporting for this collection of information is estimated to average 2 hours per respondent, including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This collection of information is not required to retain a benefit. 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 # for this collection is 0970-0531 and the expiration date is 7/31/2022. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Lizeth Hester, Program Specialist, Training and Technical Assistance - Office of Family Assistance, Lizeth.Hester@acf.hhs.gov (202) 205-8283.

INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

[MODERATOR INTRODUCES THEMSELVES AND BRIEFS PARTICIPANT AS TO PURPOSE AND MANNER OF ONLINE FOCUS GROUP. INFORM PARTICIPANTS THE DISCUSSION IS BEING RECORDED FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEVELOPING A REPORT AND OTHER RESEARCHERS ARE CURRENTLY OBSERVING THE GROUP. INFORM PARTICIPANTS THAT THE GROUP IS PART OF A PROJECT OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND THAT THEIR RESPONSES WILL IN NO WAY IMPACT THEIR ELIGIBILITY FOR PROGRAMS OR SERVICES. ALL INFORMATION DISCUSSED WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND NOT TIED BACK TO THEM INDIVIDUALLY. REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT INFORMATION DISCUSSED IN THE SESSION SHOULD NOT BE DISCUSSED WITH ANYONE AFTER THE FOCUS GROUP].

Thank you for joining me today. We are going to spend our time together talking about challenges people encounter day-to-day, and some of the goals they have for the future. As a part of our discussion we will also discuss some of the support systems in communities and society that help people achieve their goals. Our goal is to share some new ideas with you and get your feedback on them.

But first let's begin with a round of introductions. Tell me a little about who you are, who lives with you, and some of the things you do each week for work or fun.

MESSAGE MAP TESTING [35 MINUTES]

Thank you for sharing a bit about yourself with the group. It's nice to meet each of you!

Next, I want to share some concepts and ideas with you. They are strategies or points of view that could guide how organizations—either government or community-based—help people. I'm going to share a brief description of what I will be sharing with you now.

[READ RSN DESCRIPTOR]: *This project is about a new government effort called Remaking the Safety Net. The safety net is the large number of government programs designed to help people overcome challenges. Too often it does not help because the programs are not coordinated and are not built to help people achieve their goals. Remaking the Safety Net will rebuild this system so it can help people grow to the point where they do not need it anymore.*

1. Based on what I have shared, in your opinion, what is the “safety net?”
2. What does “remaking the safety net” mean to you?
3. Do these statements ring true to you? Why or why not?

Next, I am going to share some specific messages for “Remaking the Safety Net.” The first message I will share is the foundation or core of the strategy. It is a mission statement of sorts.

[SHOW MESSAGE MAP CORE STATEMENT ON SCREEN]

To strengthen society, we must strive to help people who are facing challenges. Remaking the Safety Net (RSN) starts with what individuals or families need to be successful, not simply with what government programs have to offer.

4. What does this statement mean to you?
5. What do you like/dislike/find confusing about this statement?
6. This statement says helping people who are facing challenges will strengthen society...
 - a) What impact do you think these ideas would have on people?
 - b) How would helping people when they face challenges make society stronger?

Now I would like to share some other parts of this new strategy with you. There are seven (7) parts of this concept. I will give you a few minutes to read through this list.

[SHOW REMAINING MESSAGE MAP COMPONENTS ON SCREEN ONE AT A TIME. AFTER SHOWING EACH NEW IDEA, ASK]:

7. What does this mean to you? What is this idea communicating?

(B18)

Right now the safety net starts with the services government programs provide. Once we remake the safety net, it will start with what the individual or family needs to overcome challenges.

(B24)

Every individual has the ability to make life work. But society has to help make success possible. Society has fallen down on its end of the bargain. We need to fix that.

(B47)

We must be willing to try new approaches. We will evaluate our work to determine if it actually helps people be successful and achieve independence.

(B68)

Employment is key to making progress and overcoming challenges. As an individual strives to make enough money to live on, government can provide help as he or she works to take care of his or herself, his or her family.

(B53)

We have made a mistake trying to create a one-size-fits-all safety net. Government must help each community develop and implement its own vision for helping people succeed.

(B72)

We will provide support, while helping an individual or family develop the skills and abilities they need to overcome challenges—we will provide what is needed as a person works to achieve independence.

(B39)

Government can bring all parts of society together to build a safety net that creates real partnerships with individuals and families.

Ok, great! After reading through these ideas tell me...

8. What stands out to you most?
9. Think about your goals for the future. Would programs built around these ideas help or hinder your goals? Why?
10. Are there any ideas presented that ring true? That you agree with? Are there any you do not agree with or seem unrealistic?
 - a) [B18 PROBE:] What does it mean to “start with what the individual or family needs to overcome challenges”?
 - b) [B24 PROBE:] Do you believe society is, in part, responsible for helping people succeed? Why or why not? Do you think this might change how government or community-based organizations work with their clients?
 - c) [B39 PROBE:] What would make you feel you could be in a partnership with a government program?

[If respondent has no answer, probe on possible partnership with community-based organizations].

Now that you have had a few minutes to review these statements I want you to do an activity with me. Ideally, you will need a sheet of paper and pen or a place to write things down; you could also use the notes function on your phone or MS Word on your computer, whatever works best for you.

11. First, take a few minutes to review the statements again...

- a) First, write down a few phrases or ideas from these statements you really like. If there are no phrases or ideas you like, do not write down anything at all.
- b) Next, is there anything you dislike? Write down any phrases or ideas you dislike.
- c) Finally, is there anything you find confusing or need more information to understand it better? Write down these phrases or ideas.

Thank you for writing down all those phrases and ideas for me...

12. What did you like/dislike/find confusing? Why?

“DESIGN A SAFETY NET” CREATIVE EXERCISE (20 MINUTES)

So far, I have shared some messaging for a new strategy to “Remake the Safety Net.” Of course, these are just ideas—a starting point so to speak. These ideas may not reflect exactly what you expect or need from a restructured system.

Now, I would like you to take a few minutes to think about how you or people you know interact with government and community programs that make up the safety net. You are in charge of “Remaking the Safety Net.” It can be anything you want or need it to be.

So, what would a remade safety net look like to you? For the next few minutes, I want you to think about what remaking the safety net would look like to you. To help you describe this new safety net, I am going to provide you with a few prompts that will help you form and write out your ideas.

Remember, this is not a time to hold back. I want to know exactly what government or community programs could do to support and partner with you or people you know.

Please answer the following questions to describe how you might remake the safety net on your own terms:

13. You are in charge—what is the biggest change you would make to government or community programs so that they do a better job for people they work with?
14. What is the goal of this new safety net?
15. Think of yourself as a consumer of this new safety net. What services would you include in this new safety net? Would any of these services work together?
16. What would the safety net change or do differently than it does today?

[GO AROUND GROUP TO SHARE IDEAS]

Thank you for sharing these ideas. They are very useful and may help further shape the ideas behind this new approach to the safety net.

SAFETY NET STRATEGY AND IDEATION RECAP (5 MINUTES)

Let’s wrap up our discussion...

17. Based on all that we have discussed today, what is your opinion of the “Remaking the Safety Net” strategy and the ideas included in it?
18. What would you have to understand or learn about the “Remaking the Safety Net” strategy to make you support it? What would be a convincing message?
19. Who would you also expect to see supporting this new strategy?
 - a) Which businesses, organizations, or institutions come to mind? Why?

20. Where would you envision learning about a strategy like “Remaking the Safety Net”? Where do you turn for credible information?
- a) [PROBE FOR RESOURCES. THIS COULD INCLUDE GOVERNMENT/COMMUNITY/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS. THIS COULD ALSO INCLUDE MAGAZINES, RADIO PROGRAMS, TELEVISION SHOWS/CONTENT, NOTABLE PERSONALITIES, OR VALUED COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO ARE CONSIDERED CREDIBLE]
 - b) Why are these places you turn to for information? What makes them trustworthy?
21. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today about existing government support programs or the remaking of the safety net strategy?

CLOSING

[THANK PARTICIPANTS, EXIT INSTRUCTIONS] [END FILMING/RECORDING].