

REO Adult/Young Adult Focus Group Guide

[note: the setup should take about 10 minutes]

Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is [redacted] and I work for **Mathematica /Social Policy Research Associates**. I am visiting as part of an evaluation of the program you are participating in and many other programs like it around the country. These programs and the evaluation are being funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The goal of the evaluation is to learn about how these programs help justice-involved individuals reenter the community and connect to training, education, and work. I have some questions for you today about being in this program and I want to hear about your suggestions for improving it.

Before we begin, let me explain how we will use the information you share with us. We will not share our notes or any recordings from this conversation with anyone outside the two organizations conducting this evaluation. That means we will never discuss our conversation with the people or organizations that provide services to you, such as [name of organization]. We will also be sure to keep your information private. As such, we will never use your name or other identifying information in our reports. While we may include quotes, we will do so in a way that no one can tell who is being quoted. With that said, please feel free to be open and honest in your answers. The one exception is that we do have to report your name to authorities if you say that you might hurt yourself or another person.

As you may have noticed, you have a consent form in front of you. I am going to read the form aloud and then ask you to sign the form if you agree to participate.

[Note: Read the form. Ask if anyone has questions and answer questions accordingly. Ask participants to sign the form. As you collect the consent forms, check that they are complete. If not, confirm that they did not make a mistake. If someone does not want to complete the form, excuse the individual from the focus group.]

So let's go over a few ground rules.

- First, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. We are interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions.
- The topics we are going to talk about could bring up sensitive issues. Feel free answer only those questions you want to answer.
- Please respect one another. We ask that none of you share what you hear with others outside the group.
- Please speak clearly and one at a time so that we can understand everything.
- Finally, please stop me anytime you have a question or concern.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

We have scheduled one hour for this discussion. My colleague, [note-taker], is going to do [his/her] best to take notes as we talk. But, we would also like to record the discussion to make sure we do not miss anything anyone says. Does anyone have any objections to recording this conversation?

[Note: If anyone objects, at any time, immediately cease recording.]

[Note: Make sure that each participant has received the incentive, signed the attendance sheet]

Participant Background (5 minutes)

[Note: Please record the number of participants]

We want to start the discussion by asking you to introduce yourself. So, can you share your first name, why you joined this program and what you hope to get out of it?

Context (10 minutes)

I'd now like to hear about your sense of how having previous involvement in the criminal justice system influences daily life.

1. What would you say are the most pressing needs facing justice-involved individuals in your community? (For example, skills training, help finding jobs, help getting legal records expunged)
2. What do you feel are the biggest barriers to finding and keeping a job?

Services (15 minutes)

Next, I'd like to hear more about your involvement in [this program].

3. What do or did you like most about the program and why? *[Note to facilitator: identify some common services provided by the grantee as a starting point.]*

[Note: Create a list, either on a board of some sort or in your notebook. Encourage participants to add to it.]

4. What do you like least about the program and how could the program improve?

[Note: If people are hesitant, it may be helpful to remind them that their responses won't be shared with anyone outside of the research team. Consider creating a list and encouraging participants to add to it.]

5. Do you feel like you're able to get the services you need through the program?

a. *Probe:* If so, which services have been most helpful?

b. *Probe:* If not, what services have you needed that you were unable to get?

Probe if necessary: For example, have you needed additional training or education or additional supportive services like child care or transportation?

Service Quality and Outcomes (10 minutes)

I'd now like to ask you about how helpful you think the program will be to you in the future.

6. Thinking about all of the services and supports you have received through the program, which do you think will be most useful to you in the future? Why?
7. Do you think the education and training you have received in this program will help you get a job or develop your career in the future? Why or why not?

Wrap Up (5 minutes)

8. Would you recommend this program to others? Why or why not?
9. Have you found a job since participating in the program?
 - a. *Probe:* Did the program help you find your job?
 - b. *Probe:* What type and with what employer?
10. Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you think we should be aware of?

Thank you so much for participating in this discussion. This has been really useful. Your views are very important to help us understand how the program is going.