

Instrument 2:
Matrix and Starfish EHS/HS Staff Interview and Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this [interview/focus group]. Your insights are a really important part of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation (BIAS-NG) project. The goal of the project is to explore ways that we can apply principles of the behavioral sciences—which uses ideas from psychology and economics—to improve your jobs and help better serve individuals and families.

We want to hear your thoughts about how your program operates, and any ideas you have that might help you do your job better or improve the experience of the program for families. This interview/focus group is completely voluntary. In sharing what we learn from talking with you and others, we will never use your name or otherwise identify you.

[If a focus group] We ask that you not share anything that is said here outside of this group. However, we cannot guarantee that others will not do so. You can also share any comments with us privately.

Please read and sign the consent form. Then we can get started. I will record the conversation so we don't miss anything you say. Only members of the research team will hear the recording, but you can also share any comments with us at the end, when we've turned the recorder off.

Your participation is voluntary. The [interview/focus group] will take about one hour of your time. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), 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 collection is 0970-0502 and the expiration date is 08/31/2022.

Informed Consent: Participant Interviews and Focus Groups

You are invited to participate in [an interview/a focus group] for the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation (BIAS-NG) project.

What is the study about?

MDRC, a nonprofit social policy research organization, and its partner MEF Associates are conducting this project on behalf of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families. This project's goal is to use behavioral science, which incorporates ideas from psychology and economics, to improve communication with and engagement for individuals who participate in Early Head Start/Head Start services with [program name].

What will I need to do?

We are talking with staff and parents in [program name's] Early Head Start/Head Start and asking them to share their thoughts and experiences. This [interview/focus group] will take up to 1 hour and gives you an opportunity to share your perspective.

Does the [interview/focus group] involve any risk to me?

There are no major risks from participating. The main risk is feeling uncomfortable discussing your experiences. You can choose not to answer any of the questions that make you uncomfortable. We have very strong security measures in place and will make every effort to protect your privacy. There is a small possibility of someone outside of the study staff hearing or seeing your responses [or someone in the focus group] repeating your answers.

Will the [interview/focus group] help me?

Although participating in the [interview/focus group] may not help you directly, sharing your thoughts and experiences may help improve the experiences of future staff and families.

Do I have to [do the interview/participate in the focus group]?

You do not have to [do the interview/participate in the focus group] if you do not want to. You can [stop the interview/leave the focus group] at any time.

We would like to record the [interview/focus group] so we can concentrate on what you are saying and to help with our notes. However, if you do not want us to record, we will not. If there is anything you would like to say without being recorded, you can ask to pause the recording at any time.

Will I receive anything for my time?

To express our appreciation for your participation, we will give you a \$25 gift card for participating in the [interview/focus group].

Will you tell people what I say?

The study team will not share your answers with anyone, unless you say something about hurting yourself or others or if you describe someone else being hurt. [Focus group only: There is a possibility of someone in the focus group repeating your answers, but we are asking all participants to keep this conversation private.] Otherwise, only the study team will read the notes or listen to the recording and no one at [program name] will hear your answers. We may use some specific quotes, but we won't include anyone's name. When the project is over, we will destroy our notes and recordings.

Questions:

If you have questions about the study, you can call the project director, Clinton Key at MDRC at 212-340-4489.

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[For Written Consent] Statement

“I have read this form and agree to participate in the interview or focus group. I know that my participation is voluntary and that MDRC follows strict rules to protect my privacy. I know that I can refuse to answer any questions and that I can stop participating at any point.”

Name of Study Participant (Print)

Signature of Study Participant

[For Verbal Consent]

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Do you feel comfortable with me recording our discussion?

Record response.

- If yes, proceed

- If no: “No problem. Thank you for your time today.”

Staff Interview/Focus Group Facilitation Guide

Introductions

1. What is your current position?
2. How long have you worked in this program?
3. Have you held previous positions at this or other early child development programs?

Organizational Questions

4. How would you describe the organizational structure of your program to an outsider like me?
5. What is expected of your role? What do you have to do?
6. How do you know if you’ve been successful in your role?
7. What helps you to be successful?
 - a. *Probe:* With parents? With coworkers? With supervisors?
8. What are the biggest challenges you face to being successful in your role?
9. What kinds of initial or on-going trainings or supports (e.g., coaching, mentoring, supervision) has been most helpful for you to be successful?

Program Questions

10. Do you remember how you first heard about Head Start and got involved?
11. What aspects of this program are you most excited about?
12. What do you consider this program’s goals?
13. What challenges does the program face in achieving its goals?

Parent Engagement Process

14. Broadly speaking, how would you define “successful” parent engagement with the program?
 - a. *Probes:* What does good or strong parental engagement look like? What does lack of engagement look like?
15. If I just enrolled my child in Early Head Start or Head Start, what are the most important things parents like me should do at first and by when?
 - a. Who should I contact?
 - b. How should I contact them (email, call, text, social media, etc.)?
 - c. How do you/does the program then communicate with me?
 - i. *Probes:* What type of information is shared? How (e.g., email, call, text, letter)? Do I hear from just one person or multiple people?
 - d. Do some parents start but then not complete the enrollment process? How come this happens, do you think?
16. After the initial enrollment steps, what are possible parent activities/opportunities for interaction with program staff?

- a. *Probe on specific events, such as:*
 - i. Individual parent meetings
 - ii. Group parent meetings (both orientation and ongoing meetings)
 - iii. Additional activities
 - b. What am I, as a parent, told about these activities and expectations about participation? How is this information communicated?
 - c. What happens at/during these activities?
 - d. Do you track attendance at these activities?
 - e. What have you observed in terms of participation?
17. If I'm a new parent to your program, can you walk me through how the family goal-setting process works?
- a. What sort of training have you received about how to approach goal-setting?
 - b. How do you measure parent progress? How often do you check in about goals and progress?
 - c. Can you tell me about a parent who successfully set and achieved goals? What made this parent successful?
 - d. Can you tell me about a family who was not as successful in setting and achieving goals?
 - e. What is challenging about setting goals?
 - f. What is challenging about tracking progress on parent goals?
18. How do you use the Parent Gauge tool? How does this tool fit into goal setting work?
- a. What works well about the tool?
 - b. What is challenging about this tool?
19. Across all the things we have just discussed or anything else that comes to mind, where do you see parents getting confused over what's expected of them? Where do you see parents not engaging?
- a. What barriers or reasons for not engaging do you see across families?
 - b. What happens when parents do not engage in services or follow-through with a particular plan or activity?
 - c. What steps have you taken to address these barriers (if appropriate)?
20. (If not already mentioned): When families are in need of other community-based services (like child care, public assistance, education, health care, mental health, substance use), how do staff help?
- a. How do staff make connections or referrals to other providers?
 - b. When do you consider referrals successful?
 - c. What about challenges to making these connections?

Child Attendance

21. How does the program track child attendance?
22. What do you do if a child misses class one day? Two days? For a week or more?
 - a. Can you tell me about a family who successfully improved their attendance? What made this family successful?
 - b. Can you tell me about a family who was not a good fit for the program?
23. What do you think contributes to children missing Head Start classes?
 - a. What do you know about the children and/or their families who are often absent?
 - b. Have you noticed any patterns in terms of children who are chronically absent?

- i. *Probe*: For example, do they tend to face particular barriers?
- c. What would you do to improve child attendance?

[Supervisors only]: Staff Management and Communication

- 24. How do you recruit staff?
 - a. What determines staff advancement?
 - b. What is turn-over like in staff?
 - c. What kind of training and re-training is available to staff?

COVID-19

- 25. Have there been any changes with how you engage with parents now versus before COVID-19?
 - a. Have any of those changes made your work more successful?
 - b. Have any of those changes made your work more challenging?
- 26. Have there been any changes with how you coordinate with your coworkers or supervisors now versus before COVID-19?
 - a. Have any of those changes made your work more successful?
 - b. Have any of those changes made your work more challenging?

Conclusion

- 27. What would you do to improve the services you offer parents?
- 28. Where do you see your program in 5 years?
 - a. What will be the biggest differences between now and then?
 - b. What role would you like to play to get there?

Thank you again for your participation. If there is anything you've said in the course of the conversation/focus group that you do not want to be anonymously quoted to the Administration for Children and Families or in our final report, please let us know so we can mark it as private. We will also be available if you have any comments you would like to make to us privately. Have a good day.