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## **Screeners Survey**

### **Privacy Act Statement**

**5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(3)**

The information you provide to ICF International will be used by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Bureau) for recruitment to participate in a focus group or interview designed to understand the experiences of economically vulnerable consumers related to financial products and services.

If you choose to participate, the Bureau will use personally identifiable information (PII) you provide such as your name, email address, and telephone number to contact you to schedule a session and provide information regarding your participation in the study. The Bureau may use additional demographic information such as your age, gender, race, income, education, geographic location, household size, criminal history, and past consumer experiences to determine your eligibility to participate in the study.

Information collected will be treated in accordance with the System of Records Notice (SORN), CFPB.021 – CFPB Consumer Education and Engagement Records. Although the Bureau does not anticipate further disclosing the information provided, it may be disclosed as indicated in the Routine Uses described in the SORN. Direct identifying information will be kept private except as required by law.

This collection of information is authorized by Pub. L. No. 111-203, Title X, Sections 1013 and 1022, codified at 12 U.S.C. §§ 5493 and 5512.

Participation is voluntary. However, if you choose not to provide the requested information, you may not be eligible to participate in the focus group or interview.

**INTRO.** ICF, a research and consulting firm, is conducting a series of interviews on behalf of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The purpose of the interviews is to better understand people's experiences with different financial products and decisions.

Interviews will last between 60-90 minutes and will occur in March through May of 2022. All interviews will be conducted online using Microsoft Teams to allow for screensharing. Participants who complete an interview will receive a **\$100 Amazon gift code** in appreciation of their time.

To see if you qualify for one of the interviews, please respond to a series of questions about your background and availability.

## 1.1 Preliminaries

**P1.** Are you interested in participating?

1. Yes
2. No [TERMINATE]

**P2.** What is your current age?

1. Less than 18 years old [TERMINATE]
2. 18-24 years old
3. 25-34 years old
4. 35-44 years old
5. 45-54 years old
6. 55-64 years old
7. 65 years or older
8. Prefer not to say

**P3.** What is your zip code? [TEXT BOX]

**P4.** What is your current city or town? [TEXT BOX]

## 1.2 Demographics

**D1.** What is your gender?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non-binary
4. Another gender identity

**D2.** What type of community do you live in?

1. Rural area
2. Large city
3. Small city or town
4. Suburban area

**D3.** Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?

1. Yes
2. No

**D4.** Which of the following describe your race? (Select all that apply.)

1. American Indian or Alaska Native
2. Asian
3. Black or African American
4. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
5. White
6. Other [TEXT BOX]

**D5.** What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?

1. High school graduate or less
2. Some college
3. College graduate
4. Some graduate school
5. Graduate degree

**D6.** What was your total household income from all sources in 2020 before taxes?

1. Less than \$35,000
2. \$35,000 to less than \$60,000
3. \$60,000 to less than \$80,000
4. \$80,000 or more

**D7.** Including yourself, how many people normally live in your home? [Open text]

## 1.3 Past experiences

### 1.3.1 Credit Reports and Scores

**CRED1.** A credit report is a record of your payments and of amounts you owe. Have you ever seen your credit report?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know

**CRED2.** *If Yes to CRED1:* Have you ever noticed any errors in your credit report?

1. Yes
2. No

**CRED3.** *If Yes to CRED2:* Did you do anything to try to get those errors fixed?

1. Yes
2. No

**CRED4.** A credit score is a number that predicts how likely you are to pay back a loan on time. Have you ever seen your credit score?

1. Yes
2. No

### 1.3.2 Overdrafts

**OD1.** Do you have an active checking account with a bank or credit union?

1. Yes
2. No

**OD2.** *If Yes to OD1:* Have you been charged an overdraft fee in the past two years?

1. Yes
2. No

**OD3.** *If No to OD1:* Did you previously have a checking account with a bank or credit union?

1. Yes
2. No

**OD4.** *If yes to OD3:* Were you ever charged an overdraft fee on a previous account?

1. Yes
2. No

**OD5.** Have you ever applied for a bank account and been denied?

1. Yes
2. No

**OD6.** Have you ever had an account closed by your bank involuntarily?

1. Yes
2. No

**OD7.** *If yes to OD6:* Why was your account closed?

1. Too many overdrafts
2. Unpaid fees/negative balance
3. It wasn't used enough
4. Illegal or fraudulent activity
5. Other

### 1.3.3 Background Screening - Housing

**HOU1.** Have you applied for rental housing in the past 5 years?

1. Yes
2. No

**HOU2.** *If yes to HOU1:* Did the landlord or property manager conduct a background screening, which may have included your criminal, rental, and credit history?

3. Yes
4. No
5. I don't know

**HOU3.** *If yes to HOU1:* Have you ever been denied rental housing based on a screening of your criminal, past rental, or credit history?

1. Yes

2. No, but I have to pay a higher rent/higher security deposit or get a co-signer because of issues on my screening report
3. No

**HOU4.** *If yes to HOU3:* Why were you denied housing? (Select all that apply)

1. Previous eviction or eviction court proceeding (even if you weren't evicted)
2. Unpaid rent
3. Criminal record
4. Poor credit
5. Inaccurate information in the background screening
6. Unsure
7. Other [Explain]

**HOU5.** Have you ever been charged with a misdemeanor or felony crime?

- a. Yes
- b. No

**HOU6.** *If yes to HOU5:* Have you ever been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony crime?

- a. Yes
- b. No

### 1.3.4 Background Screening - Employment

**EMP1.** Have you applied for employment in the past 5 years?

1. Yes
2. No

**EMP2.** *If yes to EMP1:* Did you go through a background screening (where your credit history and criminal history is checked) as part of the job application process?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know

**EMP3.** *If yes to EMP1:* Have you ever been denied employment based on a background screening?

1. Yes
2. No

**EMP4.** *If yes to EMP3:* Why were you denied employment? (Select all that apply)

1. Criminal record
2. Immigration status
3. Poor credit
4. Error or inaccuracy in the background screening
5. Unsure
6. Other [Explain]

## 1.4 Contact Information

**Intro2.** If you are selected to participate, we will need your information to follow-up with further details. Please provide the following information to allow us to contact you for the interview. We will not share information that can be used to identify you with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

**NAME.** What is your name? [TEXT BOX]

**EMAIL.** Email address? [TEXT BOX]

**PHONE.** Best telephone number to reach you? [TEXT BOX]

**TIME.** What is your time zone?

- a. Eastern
- b. Central
- c. Mountain
- d. Pacific Alaska
- e. Hawaii-Aleutian

## Moderator Guides

### Guide 1: Protocol for In-Dept Interviews with Consumers

#### Introduction (5 minutes)

Hello, and thank you for participating in this interview today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I work for a company called ICF. My firm is working with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which is an agency of the Federal government whose role is to protect consumers. For this specific project, the CFPB is interested in learning more about consumers' experiences with \_\_\_\_\_ [overdraft programs / credit scores and reporting / background screening related to housing or employment / financial decision-making].

During today's session, which we expect will take about 45 minutes, we'll be talking about your own experiences with [insert topic]. We hope to use these interviews to get a better understanding of what consumers know about this topic, their experiences, and how people make decisions around that topic.

Before we begin, let's establish some quick ground rules for the session. First, if there are any questions that I ask that you'd prefer not to answer, that is okay. Second, in addition to me there are a few other people observing this interview, both from ICF and from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. They will be listening to what you have to say and taking notes. Does this all make sense, and do you have any questions about it? (*Pause for any questions*)

Please note the Privacy Notice for this session.

#### **Privacy Notice**

The responses you provide to ICF International (ICF) will be used by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Bureau) to understand economically vulnerable consumer's experiences related to financial products and services.

With your consent, the Bureau will capture audio and video recordings of your responses as you participate in the study. The recordings will only be shared within the ICF project team for transcription.

Your feedback will be kept private and will not be linked to a personal identifier. Only information that is aggregated or de-identified will be shared with the Bureau. Additionally, the Bureau may publish de-identified reports based on the results of this study. None of your identifying information will be included in the reports.

This collection of information is authorized by Pub. L. No. 111-203, Title X, Sections 1013 and 1022, codified at 12 U.S.C. §§ 5493 and 5512.

Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw participation at any time.

We would also like to record this session, but the recording will not be shared with any outside parties and will be used only for research purposes pertaining to this project. Are you comfortable with us recording this discussion? (*Get agreement before continuing.*)

[*Note to interviewer: Move to module that corresponds to the topic that will be covered:*]

Overdraft programs: Module 1

Credit Reports/scores: Module 2:

Housing Background Screening: Module 3

Employment Background Screening: Module 4

Financial Decision-Making: Module 5

## Module 1: Overdraft Programs

### General Understanding of Overdraft Programs

1. Do you have an account with a bank or credit union? How many, and are they with banks or credit unions?
  - a. Are your accounts checking or savings accounts?
  - b. Do you have a debit card for any of those accounts? If so, how often do you use your debit card, and what do you use it for?
2. [If participant does not have a bank account] Have you ever had an account with a bank or credit union in the past? *Note: If participant does not currently have a bank account, then when asking later questions (e.g., about experiences with overdrafts) clarify that you are asking about their past experience with accounts.*
  - a. If so, why do you no longer have one?
3. Have you ever tried to buy something for which you didn't have enough money in your account?
  - a. If so, what happened? Did the purchase go through? Were you charged a fee for that purchase? How much?
  - b. How did you try to make that purchase? With a debit card? A check?
  - c. Did you know that was going to happen, or were you surprised? Why? If you were charged a fee, did you know that you would be charged? If the purchase didn't go through, what happened? Were there any fees or penalties from the merchant?
  - d. Would you have wanted something different to happen when you tried to make that purchase? If so, what? *If purchase went through and participant was charged a fee, probe to see if they wished that the purchase had instead not gone through—and vice versa.*

### Overdraft Protection

4. Do you currently or did you in the past have overdraft protection on your bank account?
  - a. [If yes] What do you mean when you say that you have "overdraft protection"? How does that overdraft protection work?



**If needed, here is a definition of overdraft:** An overdraft occurs when you don't have enough money in your account to cover a transaction, but the bank pays the transaction anyway. You can overdraw your account through checks, ATM transactions, debit card purchases, automatic bill payments, and electronic or in-person withdrawals. Many banks and credit unions offer overdraft protection programs in which the bank or credit union generally pays the transaction and charges you a fee (in addition to requiring repayment of the overdraft amount). Overdrafts can also be covered through a transfer of funds from a linked account, credit card, or line of credit.

5. When you opened your account, did you know at that point whether or not you had overdraft protection?
  - a. Did you ask about overdraft protection when you opened your account?
  - b. Is overdraft protection something that you considered when choosing your account? Did you ask different banks or credit unions about their overdraft protection policies in order to choose between them?
6. Have you ever gotten advice from anyone about overdraft protection? If so, from you, and what did they tell you?
7. Did you sign up for overdraft protection, or was it given to you automatically?
  - a. If you signed up for it intentionally, what was the reason?
    - i. Did you talk to anyone before signing up for it, or look for information anywhere else about what the advantages and disadvantages might be? *Probe for conversations with friends or family, discussions with bank employees, or information from other sources.*
    - ii. Looking back, are you happy that you signed up for it?
  - b. If you did not sign up for overdraft protection intentionally, how did you find out that you had it?
    - i. When you found out you had it, how did you feel about it?
    - ii. Have you tried to remove overdraft protection from your account? Why or why not?
8. If you wanted to end your overdraft protection, do you think you could? If yes, how would you go about doing so?
  - a. Have you ever considered ending your overdraft protection? If so, why did you decide not to?
9. Have you ever been charged an overdraft fee? If so, how often would you say you are charged a fee?
  - a. When you overdraft your account, do you usually know that you are doing so—or does it happen by accident?
  - b. Are you usually expecting an overdraft fee when it is charged, or is it a surprise to you?
  - c. When you overdraft your account, what kind of purchases is it usually for? Does it tend to be for smaller or larger purchases?
    - i. Do you feel any differently about overdrafting your account when it is a small purchase vs. a big purchase? Is being able to overdraft more important to you for one of those types of purchases?
10. Did you use any strategies to avoid overdrafts? (e.g., balance alerts, check balance online, wait until day after paycheck to go grocery shopping). Is it difficult to know when you might overdraft?

11. When you have been charged fees, have you ever complained to the bank or credit union? If not, why not?
  - a. Have you ever asked your bank/credit union to waive a fee? Do you think you could do this, and do you think it would be successful?
  - b. Do the fees that you are charged impact your finances significantly? Have you ever had trouble paying them back?
  - c. Have you taken other financial steps to avoid these fees? (e.g. using other types of credit such as a payday loan or credit card, or going without a purchase)
12. Have you ever been charged multiple overdraft fees in a short time period? If so, please describe the situation when that happened.
13. If you were charged overdraft fees at one bank but did not pay them, do you think that might have an impact when you tried to open another account at another bank? Why or why not?
14. Do you think that there are any bank accounts that don't charge overdraft fees? Have you ever heard of any accounts like that?
15. Have you ever considered closing a bank account because of overdraft fees that you were charged?
  - a. *[If participant currently has an account]* If you did close your account, do you think you would open another one? Or would you just go without a bank account in order to avoid overdraft fees?

***[If participant no longer has a bank account]***

16. Do you like not having a bank account or do you wish you still had one? Why?
  - a. What other financial products, if any, do you use? *Probe to see if participant uses prepaid cards, check cashing facilities, payday loans, or other products.*
17. Have you ever tried to apply for a bank account after your previous one was closed? Were you able to open up that account?
  - a. If not, do you know what the issue was? Was it an issue of how you had used a bank account in the past, such as fees that weren't paid or too many bounced checks? Were overdrafts a factor?
  - b. Did the bank provide any guidance on potential alternatives to a bank account? (e.g. second chance, checkless checking, prepaid card)
  - c. What did you do after you were denied? Did you apply for accounts at other banks? If so, were you successful in opening those accounts?
  - d. When your earlier bank account was closed, did you make the decision to close it, or did the bank close it?
    - i. If you closed it, why did you close it?
    - ii. If the bank closed it, what did they tell you about why it was closed? Did they give you an opportunity to do anything to prevent it from being closed?

***[All participants]***

18. Have you ever heard of “second chance accounts” at banks and credit unions? If so, what do you think they are?
  - a. Have you ever heard of “Bank On” accounts? If so, what do you think they are?
19. Imagine that you knew that you might sometimes have to make purchases that overdraw your checking account but wanted to avoid being charged fees for doing so. Is there anything you could do?

### Conclusion/False Close

20. Is there anything else related to overdrafts or overdraft protection that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the interview.*

## Module 2: Credit Reports and Scores

### General Understanding of Credit Reports and Scores

1. What do you think of when I say “credit report”?
  - a. What is a “credit report”?
  - b. What information do you think would be in your credit report?
  - c. Who do you think uses your credit report, and what do you think do they use it for?
  - d. Who do you think is responsible for creating and maintaining your credit report?
  - e. Do you think you have only one credit report, or might you have more than one credit report? If multiple, why and what do you think the difference between those reports might be?
2. There is another term that people use, which is “credit score.” What is a “credit score”?
  - a. Do you think the terms “credit score” and “credit report” mean the same thing, or is there a difference? If they are different, how?
  - b. What kinds of things might make a credit score go down? What kinds of things might make a score go up?
  - c. In what types of situations might a credit score be used? (e.g. applying for a mortgage, opening a new credit account). Who typically uses a credit score?
  - d. Do you think you have only one credit score, or are there different credit scores that you might have? If you might have different scores, how might they be different?
3. How much impact do you think your credit report and scores have in your life? Why?
  - a. What effects could they have in your life?
4. How accurate do you think credit reports and scores typically are?
  - a. Do you think they could have mistakes in them? If so, how often do you think that happens?

## Experience with Credit Reports

5. Have you ever seen your credit report before? If so, when? *If necessary, make sure that the participant understands that we are asking about a credit report and not a score.*
  - a. Describe the last time you saw your credit report. How did you get it, and why were you looking at it?
    - i. Do you remember what you thought when you saw it? Were you surprised by anything you saw in the report?
    - ii. Did you understand the information in the report? Was there anything that you found difficult to understand? Did you know that you have more than one credit report?
6. Have you ever tried to get your credit report? *If yes:*
  - a. For what purpose did you want to see your credit report?
  - b. How did you try to get it? Where do you go, and what did you do?
  - c. Were you successful in getting your credit report?
  - d. Did you find it easy or difficult to get your credit report? Did you encounter any challenges? Were there any companies that you thought made accessing your credit report difficult? If so, who?
  - e. Did you pay for your credit report, or did you get it for free?
    - i. When did you last try to get it, and how often do you try to get your credit report?
  - f. Has the pandemic prompted you to check your credit reports more or less often, or about the same?
7. [*If participant has not ever tried to get their credit report*] Have you ever considered trying to see your credit report? If not, do you think there would be any reason to do so? If yes:
  - a. If you have considered checking your credit report but not done it, what is the reason?
  - b. How would you go about checking your credit report if you wanted to? Who would you contact?
  - c. Do you think it would cost money to check your credit report? Do you think checking your credit reports lowers your credit scores?

## Disputing Errors in Credit Reports

8. Have you ever noticed an error in your credit report? *If yes:*
  - a. What was the error?
  - b. What did you do when you noticed the error? Did you tell anyone?
9. [*If participant has disputed an error*] Who did you contact, if anyone? Why did you decide that they were the right people to contact?
  - a. What did you ask them to do, and how did they respond?
  - b. How long did the process take?
  - c. Did the error eventually get fixed?
  - d. Overall, what would you say about this experience? Did it go smoothly, or did you find it challenging? Did the dispute go in your favor? If not do you accept the outcome, or do you remain dissatisfied? If you remain dissatisfied what might you do about it?

- e. Have you ever reported an error in your credit report to anyone else? *If so, ask probes above as appropriate. Specifically probe to see if they have ever reported errors to creditors and others that report data about accounts (e.g., credit card company or mortgage lender or other companies) AND/OR to credit reporting agencies.*
10. *[If participant has not disputed an error]* Imagine that you found an error in your credit report and you wanted to get it corrected. What would you do? Who would you contact, if anyone?
- a. What do you think would happen next?
  - b. If you weren't sure who to contact to get an error corrected in your credit report, what would you do to find out? What resources, websites, companies or agencies would you turn to?

### **Experience with Credit Scores**

11. Have you ever seen a credit score, such as a FICO score?
- a. [if yes] how did you see it? Was it when you applied for a loan, or was it available to see on your credit card statement or through your credit card company? Did you have to pay for the score?
  - b. Do you remember what the score you saw was (what number)? *[If no]* Do you have any sense of whether that score was probably low or high? What makes you think that?
  - c. Were you surprised by it or did it seem accurate to you? If you were surprised by it, did you do anything or tell anyone? What was their response? Did anything else happen?
  - d. If you've seen your score more than once, how frequently have you seen it?
12. Do you think your credit record (your report or credit scores) have changed a lot over the past three years? If so, how has it changed and why? *If appropriate, probe about any effect that the COVID pandemic might have had on their credit score and/or report.*

### **Experiences being Denied Credit**

13. Have you ever been denied when applying for some kind of credit, like a credit card, a loan, or line of credit? *If yes:*
- a. Were you told why you were denied? If yes, what was the reason? How were you told (written adverse notice, orally)? If not, why do you think you were denied?
  - b. Did you do anything or contact anyone in response to being denied? If so, did anything come out of what you did?
  - c. Were you surprised that you were denied? Why or why not?
  - d. How did being denied make you feel? Were you upset about it, and if so for how long?
  - e. Did you end up getting credit elsewhere?
  - f. Do you think the lender made the right decision in rejecting you?
    - a. Do you think the information about you that the lender used to make its decision was accurate? Is there any reason that it might have been outdated or incomplete, or inaccurate for any other reason?
    - b. Are there data that the lender did NOT have – for example, like rent, income, or phone payment information, or, say, Pay Later loans – that you believe might have helped get your loan application approved if they were available?

- c. If the lender had asked for that additional information, would you have been willing to share it? Why or why not?
14. Have you ever not applied for credit because you thought you would be denied? If so:
- a. What were you considering applying for, and for what purpose?
  - b. If you didn't apply for that credit, what did you end up doing instead? Did you get the money elsewhere, and if so from where?

### Experience with Credit Monitoring and Repair

15. Have you ever used any services that promised to monitor and protect your credit? *If so:*
- a. Who was providing those services? What were they doing for you?
  - b. Did you pay them? If so, how much?
  - c. What was your experience like—were you satisfied with what you received?
  - d. Have the companies you were working with ever tried to sell you something else as well? If so, what? Did you pay for it? If so, how satisfied were you with what you received?
16. Have you ever used any services that promised to repair your credit? *If so:*
- a. Who was providing those services?
  - b. What did they promise or tell you they could do? Remove negative things from your report? Improve your score?
  - c. What were they doing for you?
  - d. Did you pay them? If so, how much?
  - e. When did you pay them? Were you required to pay money before they completed their services?
  - f. What was your experience like—were you satisfied with what you received?
  - g. Have the companies you were working with ever tried to sell you something else as well? If so, what? Did you pay for it? If so, how satisfied were you with what you received?
  - h. Have you ever used any other services related to credit? *Probe for as many experiences as possible.*

### Conclusion/False Close

17. Is there anything else related to credit reporting, credit scores, or anything else that we talked about that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the interview.*

## Module 3: Impact of Background Screening - Housing

## Experience with Background Screening Process

1. Have you ever applied for an apartment or housing unit?
  - a. How many times in the past five years? When was the most recent time?
2. Has a landlord or property manager ever conducted a screening of your criminal, past rental, or credit history when you applied (a background screening)?
  - a. [If participant doesn't know] Has a landlord ever mentioned background screening to you when you were applying for a rental unit or apartment? If so, when?
  - b. [if participant says no or doesn't know whether they have been screened] Have you ever been turned away for an apartment you applied for? Do you recall what the reason was? Is it possible that the landlord conducted a background screening without informing you?
3. [If participant has experience with background screening] Was the unit you were applying for in an apartment building? If so, how large? Was it a standalone house? *Probe for a general description of the rental unit.*
  - a. Walk me through the process you went through to apply for that rental property. Did you apply in person or online?
  - b. Who did you talk to during the process? Did you talk to the person who actually owns the building, or someone who works for them?
  - c. At what point in the process did you learn that they would be doing a background screening? Was it a surprise to you, or something that you expected?
  - d. In your opinion, why do landlords conduct background screenings on tenants before approving them for a lease?
  - e. Did the landlord or housing unit ask you to pay any fees associated with the background screening? If so, approximately how much was the fee? Were there other fees associated with applying for the rental?
  - f. What information do you think was considered in the background screening?
  - g. Did your landlord ever reach out to you regarding the results of the screening and offer any details besides that you were approved or turned down for the apartment?
  - h. How long did the process take?
4. How has COVID-19 affected your housing situation?
  - a. Have you moved since March 2020? If so, why did you decide to move? Did you have any difficulty finding new housing? What was your moving experience like?
  - b. Have you had any difficulty affording your housing since March 2020?
  - c. [if participant is currently renting] As you may know, the government put some programs into place to help renters during the pandemic, including a temporary halt on evictions and programs to help people who are struggling to pay their rent. Do you think these programs have affected you at all?
    - i. Have you been in contact with your landlord at all about any of these programs?
    - ii. Have you discussed these programs with anyone else? If so who, and what was the discussion like?

5. *[If not yet clear from the discussion]* Were you approved or turned down for the housing property that conducted a background screening on you? Were you approved but required to pay a higher security deposit or higher rent or get a co-signer because of the screening?

***[If the participant was approved for the housing property (i.e. "passed" the screening)]***

6. Were you ever told anything about the results of the background screening? If so, what?
7. What do you remember being told about the screening process when you applied?
  - a. Was this information in the application or did someone tell it to you?
  - b. Do you recall being told what was going to be included in the background screening?
8. Imagine that instead of being approved, you were denied and told that it was because something negative had come up in your background screening. What would you have done?
9. If you were denied because something negative came up on your screening report, do you think the landlord would be required to tell you what was in your report, or could they choose whether or not to tell you? Why?
  - a. If you wanted to find out why you were denied, what would you do?
10. Do you have any friends or relatives that have ever been turned down for housing based on a background screening?
  - a. Do you recall anything about their experience?
11. Is there anything else about your experience with the background screening process that you would like to share?  
*[Jump to conclusion]*

***[If the participant was denied for the housing property (i.e. "failed" the screening)]***

12. How did you find out that you had been denied? Who did you communicate with, and how (i.e., phone or email)?
  - a. What did they tell you about why you had been denied? Did they reference the background screening report?
  - b. Did you ask any questions, and if so, how did they answer?
  - c. Did they give you any documents explaining why you were denied? If so, could you describe what they gave you and what it said?
  - d. *Probe to see whether participant received:*
    - *The name and contact information for the company that produced the report*
    - *A copy of the report itself, or a description of the process they could use to get the report*
    - *A description of the process they could use to dispute information in their report and/or a description of their rights*
13. What did you do when you were told you were denied? Did you try to offer an explanation or additional information, or accept the decision and move on?



14. If you were told what information in your screening report caused you to be denied, was that information about you true? Was the information complete? For example, did it show an eviction was filed but did not show the outcome of the filing (e.g., it was not completed or dismissed)? Or, was there an arrest but it did not show what happened later?
  - a. If not, did you consider disputing that information somehow, or trying to get it corrected?
15. Did you ever try to get your screening report, if the landlord didn't give it to you?
  - a. [If yes] How did you try? Who did you contact? If not, did you ever consider trying to get your screening report?
  - b. [If no] Did you ever consider trying to get your screening report? Why or why not?
16. [if the applicant received a copy of the report] Did you notice any inaccuracies or outdated information (personal information, criminal history, eviction information, credit score, etc.) when you looked through the report?
  - a. [if so] Did you try to dispute anything the contents of the report or the landlord's decision?
    - How did you go about doing this? Who did you contact? How did you know who to contact?
    - What was the result?
    - How long did the process take?
17. What happened after you were turned down for housing?
  - a. Did you apply for a rental unit somewhere else?
    - i. Were you approved or turned down there? If so, what was the reason?
    - b. Do you feel like it's been challenging to find other housing opportunities? Have you had to make compromises about the neighborhood or type of home you live in as a result?
  - c. Has it impacted other areas of your life?
    - i. Finances? Job? Health?

*[\*IF\* the participant mentioned anything about a criminal record or how race has had an impact on the screening process, use this time to ask them to elaborate on how they think it has impacted their screening process and whether they think they have been treated unfairly because of it]*

### **Conclusion/False Close**

18. Is there anything else related to background screening or anything else that we talked about that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the interview.*

# Module 4: Impact of Background Screening - Employment

## Experience with Background Screening Process

1. Can you start by telling me about your current employment situation?
  - a. Are you currently employed?
  - b. How long have you been employed with this company?
  - c. Have you applied for a job in the last \_\_\_ years?
    - How many jobs have you applied for during this time? When was the most recent time you applied for a job?
2. Has an employer ever conducted a background screening (i.e., checked your credit and criminal history) on you when you applied?
  - a. *[If participant doesn't know]* Has an employer ever mentioned background screening to you when you were applying for a job? If so, when?
  - b. *[if participant says no or doesn't know whether they have been screened]* Have you ever applied for a job and been denied for a reason other than your skills or experience? Do you recall what the reason was? Is it possible that the employer conducted a background screening without informing you?
3. *[If participant has experience with background screening]* What was the job that you were applying for?
  - a. Walk me through the process you went through to apply for the job. Did you apply online or in person? Did you go through an interview process?
  - b. Who did you talk to during the application process? Was it a recruiter or someone from the HR department? Was it someone from the background screening company?
  - c. At what point in the process did you learn that they would be doing a background screening? Was it a surprise to you, or something that you expected?
  - d. In your opinion, why do employers conduct background screenings on people before offering them employment?
  - e. What information do you think was considered in the background screening?
  - f. Were you asked to pay any fees during the process?
  - g. Did your employer ever reach out to you regarding the results of the screening and offer any details besides that you were approved or denied for the job?
  - h. How long did the process take?
4. Were you asked to provide your criminal history on the job application? If so, do you remember what you were asked to provide?
  - a. Do you recall if you had to explain in more details if you were ever convicted of a crime?
  - b. Did they ask for all criminal history or just in the last 7 years?
5. How has COVID-19 affected your employment situation?
  - a. Have you lost a job since March 2020? If so, did you have any difficulty finding another job?

6. [if not clear at this point] Were you approved or denied for the employment opportunity that conducted a background screening on you?

***[If the participant was approved for employment (i.e. “passed” the screening)]***

7. Were you ever told anything about the results of the background screening? If so, what?
8. What do you remember being told about the screening process when you applied?
  - a. Was this information in the application or did someone tell it to you?
  - b. Do you recall being told what was going to be included in the background screening?
9. Imagine that instead of being approved for the job, you were denied and told that it was because something negative had come up in your background screening. What would you have done?
10. If you were denied because something negative came up on your screening report, do you think the employer would be required to tell you what was in your report, or could they choose whether or not to tell you? Why?
  - a. If you wanted to find out why you were denied, what would you do?
11. Do you have any friends or relatives that have ever been turned down for employment based on a background screening?
  - a. Do they tell you anything about their experience?
  - b. Do they know why they were turned down? If not, do they have any guesses as to why they might have been turned down?
12. Is there anything else about your experience with the background screening process that you would like to share?

*[Jump to conclusion]*

***[If the participant was denied employment (i.e. “failed” the screening)]***

13. How did you find out that you had been denied? Who did you communicate with, and how (i.e., phone or email)?
  - a. What did they tell you about why you had been denied? Did they reference the background screening report?
  - b. Did you ask any questions, and if so, how did they answer?
  - c. Did they give you any documents explaining why you were denied? If so, could you describe what they gave you and what it said?
  - d. If they did give you any documents, when did they give them to you? Had they already informed you of their decision not to hire you when they gave you the documents?
  - e. *Probe to see whether participant received the following BEFORE the adverse decision took place:*
    - *A free copy of the report that was used to make the decision*
    - *A description of the process they could use to dispute information in their report and/or a description of their rights*

14. *[If participant was denied because of a criminal history, or thinks that they might have been]*
- a. Was the criminal information that showed up in the report accurate?
  - b. Was the criminal information complete? Was there an arrest but no information on how it was resolved or inaccurate information?
  - c. How old was the criminal charge that showed up in the report?
  - d. Did you try to dispute the information in your report? If so, who did you contact? Did it get corrected?
  - e. Did the employer give a *specific* reason why you denied based on your criminal history? (company policy, workplace safety, company image, etc.)
  - f. How has having a criminal record impacted your search for employment?
15. *[If the participant received a copy of the report]* Did you notice any inaccuracies or outdated information (personal information, criminal history, credit score, etc.) when you looked through the report?
- a. *[If so]* Did you try to dispute anything the contents of the report or the employer's decision?
    - How did you go about doing this? Who did you contact? How did you know who to contact?
    - What was the result?
    - How long did the process take?
16. What happened after you were turned down for employment?
- a. Did you apply for a job somewhere else?
    - i. Were you approved or turned down there? If so, what was the reason?
  - b. Do you feel like it's been challenging to find other employment opportunities?

*[\*IF\* the participant mentioned anything about how race has had an impact on the screening process, use this time to ask them to elaborate on how they think it has impacted their screening process and whether they think they have been treated unfairly because of it]*

### **Conclusion/False Close**

17. Is there anything else related to background screening or anything else that we talked about that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the interview.*

## **Module 5: Financial Decision-Making**

### **Background Information**

I'd like to start by getting to know a little about you, your household, and your experience with finances.

1. What is your role in your household when it comes to making decisions about money?
  - a. *Interviewer records:* Primary decision-maker regarding household finances; shares in making household financial decisions; is not typically involved in making household financial decisions.
2. How would you rate your ability to make good financial decisions? Please choose a number between one and ten, where one would be not capable at all and ten would be a financial wizard.
  - a. Follow-up: How did you arrive at that number?
  - b. *Interviewer takes notes on number given and skills and experiences the participant mentions as justification.*

### **Financial Decision-Making Strategies**

Next, I am going to ask you a few questions about the strategies people use to make financial plans and decisions. Many people use different strategies or tools to manage their finances.

1. Think about some of the people you know (family, friends, coworkers). Can you think of any specific strategies or tools that these people use to manage their finances?
2. What strategies do you use to manage how you earn and spend money every month?
  - *Note. If participant is not typically involved in household decision-making, the interviewer can ask if the participant knows or can guess what strategies the primary decision-maker uses, or to try and explain what kinds of financial matters are discussed in their household.*
  - a) Follow-up: What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of these strategies?
  - b) Follow-up: Where did you learn about these strategies (friends; family; books; tv; online)?
  - c) Follow-up: How did you decide to use these strategies over other options?
3. Do you think that any of these financial strategies (used by you or by other people) are more or less effective than others?
  - a. If so, which ones are particularly effective (ineffective), and why? How do you know that a strategy is effective?
4. What do you think *causes* people to start using plans or strategies for their finances, or to reevaluate how they are spending and saving money?
  1. What caused you or your household to use the plans and strategies you use?
  2. What kinds of things might cause you to change your financial plans and strategies?
  3. What kinds of things might cause other people to change their financial plans and strategies?

### **Analogies for Financial Costs and Benefits**

We are exploring new ways to describe some of the costs and benefits of financial products in terms that are familiar and easy to understand. One option we are exploring involves using *analogies* to turn complicated or unclear terms into more understandable and familiar ones.

For example, some types of loans charge high interest rates. A high interest rate on a loan might be described as “27% APR compounding annually,” which might mean that a borrower is paying an extra \$100 per month to

borrow money. An analogy for this cost that that might be easier to understand is “taking out this loan is like adding \$100 to your rent payment every month.”

1. How do you feel about this alternative description for the cost of a financial service like a loan?
2. More generally, how do you feel about the language and terms that financial products and services use to describe their costs and benefits? What do you find confusing, and what do you find helpful?
3. “Adding \$100 to your rent payment every month” is one example of trying to make costs easier to understand. Can you come up with any other ideas for how to make financial service costs easier to understand?
4. We would like you to talk about other situations where you consider different features of financial products, and how you weigh the costs and benefits of these features.

When shopping for something, people tend to consider many different *features* of a product or service. For example, when shopping for a car, people consider features like fuel efficiency, reliability, and luxury items like heated seats or satellite radio. We’d like you to come up with some features that people consider when shopping for *financial* products.

- a. Try and come up with three features of financial products or services.
    - i. What is the purpose of these features? What are they designed to do (e.g., make the product easy to understand; make the product more useful; sell more of the product)?
  - b. Next we’d like you to try to generate some analogies to explain some of these features. For example, one example of a feature of a loan might be the “interest rate.” An analogy for the interest rate on a credit card might be “keeping a balance on a credit card is like paying extra for groceries.”
    - i. Ask the consumers to generate analogies to describe any of the features they came up with.
      1. Remind the consumer that the goal of an analogy is to better understand these features, their purpose, and how they work.
      2. Take care not to provide substantive or evaluative feedback.
  - c. Thinking back to your analogies:
    - i. What do you think the strengths of these analogies are?
    - ii. What do you think the weaknesses are?
  - d. Now, choose your favorite analogy, and try to explain how it relates to a feature in these financial products.
    - i. How is the analogy similar to how a feature (or multiple features) works?
    - ii. How is the analogy different from how a feature (or multiple features) works?
5. Think of a time you tried to explain a financial decision you made to someone else. How did you describe your decision so that it made sense?

- a. Follow-up: If you would change how you explained it, how would you change your explanation?
6. For this next question, I would like to hear what first comes to mind when you think about various amounts of money. After I say an amount, what immediately comes to mind? Please be specific: this could be an object, service, bill, debt, person.
    - a. \$100
    - b. \$500
    - c. \$1,000
    - d. \$5,000
    - e. \$10,000

### Preferences for Financial Reasoning and Framing

For this next section, we are interested in learning more about what types of information you prefer when reasoning about money.

1. Some financial products describe costs and benefits using percentages (e.g., a 10% annual interest rate), while others describe costs and benefits using dollar amounts (e.g., \$100 per year). Which of these types of description do you prefer, and why?
2. Many products and services use monthly fees to describe how much something will cost (e.g., this service will cost \$10 per month for three years). Others use total amounts to describe these fees (e.g., this service will cost \$360 over three years, billed monthly). Which do you prefer, and why?
3. Imagine that you were selling a financial product or service that would cost \$150 per month for the next year, so \$1800 in total. Examples might include an insurance policy, a car loan, or a rental contract.
  - a. How would you describe the cost of this product to maximize sales?
  - b. How would you describe the cost of this product to maximize the customer's understanding and ability to make the best decision for themselves?
  - c. Imagine that you or someone in your household bought this product. What strategy, plan, or approach would you use to pay for it?
    - i. *Interviewer:* if the participant is struggling, you could provide some examples of strategies: paying the whole cost up front; paying the monthly payment at the start/end of each month; paying nothing until the full amount is due.

### Financial Reasoning Scenarios

*[Section 5 is lower priority and should only be completed if all other questions are answered and time remains. The interviewer can choose one of the three scenarios below. If time remains, the interviewer can choose a second of these three].*

For the remainder of our time, I'd like us to talk through one or more scenarios related to household finances. I am going to read some information about a household and I would like you to try and make sense of their

plans, strategies, and options. What advice would you give the people in these households? What steps would you recommend they take to improve their finances?

- **Scenario 1 (Windfall):** *Jim and Joan are a married couple in their 30s. Jim works full time, and Joan sells crafts online. Together they make \$48,000. They have \$26,000 in student loans at 7% APR. Two years ago, they took out a \$300,000 mortgage at a 3.65% interest rate. They have no credit card debt. Their car is due for an expensive out of warranty service that they expect will cost \$6,000. They receive an unexpected tax refund of \$4,000. How should they think about their debts and expenses when they decide to allocate this money? How should they allocate this money?*
- **Scenario 2 (Staying afloat):** *Lisa and Brad are a couple in their 40s. Brad was unemployed last year and now has a job that pays less than before--\$25,000 per year. Their total income is now \$43,000 per year. They owe \$500 in past due bills to their water company, \$2,000 in past due rent. Their car just broke down, and it will cost \$500 to repair. Brad needs the car to commute to work. They are considering a high cost short term loan to obtain the funds to repair the car. How should they think about their debts and expenses when weighing the decision to get this high cost short term loan? Should they obtain it?*
- **Scenario 3 (Priorities):** *Jamie is a single mother with a fourteen-year-old and an eight-year-old. She makes \$25,000 per year at her full-time job, which in her city is just enough money to pay for rent, bills, and food. Jamie wants to go back to school so that she can get a degree to make a better salary in the future, but this would require her to take out about \$20,000 in student loans. She also wants to save money: for her kids' education, to help with her mother's medical bills, and to build an emergency fund. How should she prioritize these goals and options? Should she take out a loan to go back to school?*

### **Conclusion/False Close**

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the interview.*



# Guide 2: Protocol for Focus Groups with Consumers

## Introduction (5 minutes)

Hello, and thank you for participating in this focus group today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I work for a company called ICF. My firm is working with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which is an agency of the Federal government whose role is to protect consumers. For this specific project, the CFPB is interested in learning more about consumers' experiences with \_\_\_\_\_ [overdraft programs / credit scores and reporting / background screening related to housing or employment / financial decision-making].

During today's session, which we expect will take between 60-90 minutes, we'll be talking about each of your experiences with [insert topic]. We hope to use these interviews to get a better understanding of what consumers know about this topic, their experiences, and how people make decisions around that topic.

Before we begin, I wanted to provide some ground rules for our session. First, please know that participation in this focus group is voluntary and you are welcome to participate as much or as little as you want. And if there are any questions that I ask that you prefer not to answer, please let me know and I will skip them. Second, in addition to me there are a few other people observing this interview, both from ICF and from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. They will be listening to what you have to say and taking notes. Does this all make sense, and does anyone have any questions? (*Pause for any questions*)

We would also like to record this session, but the recording will not be shared with any outside parties and will be used only for research purposes pertaining to this project. Are you comfortable with us recording this discussion? (*Get agreement before continuing.*)

*[Note to interviewer: Move to module that corresponds to the topic that will be covered:]*

*Overdraft programs: Module 1*

*Credit Reports/scores: Module 2*

*Housing Background Screening: Module 3*

*Employment Background Screening: Module 4*

*Financial Decision-Making: Module 5*

## Module 1: Overdraft Programs

### General Understanding of Overdraft Programs

1. By a show of hands, who here has an account with a bank or credit union?
  - a. Are your accounts checking or savings accounts?
2. For those of you who do not have a bank account, have you ever had one in the past?

- a. If so, why do you no longer have one?
3. By a show of hands, has anyone ever tried to buy something for which you didn't have enough money in your account?
- a. What happened? Did the purchase go through?
  - b. Did you know that was going to happen, or were you surprised? Why? If you were charged a fee, did you know that you would be charged?
  - c. How did you try to make that purchase? With a debit card? A check?
  - d. Were you charged a fee?
  - e. Would you have wanted something different to happen when you tried to make that purchase? If so, what? *If purchase went through and participant was charged a fee, probe to see if they wished that the purchase had instead not gone through—and vice versa.*

### Overdraft Protection

4. By a show of hands, how many people have heard of “overdraft protection”?
- a. How many of you think you have overdraft protection on your current account? How many of you think you do not have overdraft protection? How many of you don't know?
  - b. [For participants who no longer have a bank account] When you had a bank account, did you have overdraft protection?
5. Can someone who has overdraft protection talk a little bit about what “overdraft protection” is and how it works?

***If needed, here is a definition of overdraft:*** *An overdraft occurs when you don't have enough money in your account to cover a transaction, but the bank pays the transaction anyway. You can overdraw your account through checks, ATM transactions, debit card purchases, automatic bill payments, and electronic or in-person withdrawals. Many banks and credit unions offer overdraft protection programs in which the bank or credit union generally pays the transaction and charges you a fee (in addition to requiring repayment of the overdraft amount). Overdrafts can also be covered through a transfer of funds from a linked account, credit card, or line of credit.*

6. When you opened your account, did you know at that point whether or not you had overdraft protection?
- a. Did you ask about overdraft protection when you opened your account?
  - b. Is overdraft protection something you considered when choosing your account? Did you ask different banks or credit unions about their overdraft protection policies in order to choose between them?
7. Did you sign up for overdraft protection, or was it given to you automatically?
- a. If you signed up for it intentionally, what was the reason?
    - i. Did you talk to anyone before signing up for it, or look for information anywhere else about what the advantages and disadvantages might be?
  - b. If you did not sign up for overdraft protection intentionally, how did you find out that you had it?

- i. When you found out you had it, how did you feel about it?
  - c. Have you ever considered ending your overdraft protection? Do you think you could?
- 8. Has anyone been charged with an overdraft fee? *Ask participants to raise hands.*
  - a. When you overdraft your account, do you usually know that you are doing so—or does it happen by accident?
  - b. Do the fees that you are charged impact your finances significantly? Have you ever had trouble paying them back?
  - c. When you overdraft your account, what kind of purchases is it usually for? Does it tend to be for smaller or larger purchases?
  - d. Have you experienced being charged multiple overdraft fees over a short period of time? Same day or a small number of days? What happened?
- 9. What strategies do you use to avoid overdrafts? (e.g., balance alerts, check balance online, wait until day after paycheck to go grocery shopping). Is it difficult to know when you might overdraft?
- 10. When you have been charged fees, have you ever complained to the bank or credit union? If not, why not?
  - a. Have you ever asked your bank/credit union to waive a fee? Do you think you could do this, and do you think it would be successful?
- 11. Do you think that there are any bank accounts that don't charge overdraft fees? Have you ever heard of any accounts like that?
- 12. Has anyone closed or considered closing your account because of overdraft fees that you were charged? *Ask participants to raise hands.*
  - a. [For participants who did close their account] Do you think you will open another one? Or would you just go without a bank account in order to avoid overdraft fees?
  - b. Have you taken other financial steps to avoid these fees? (e.g. using other types of credit such as a payday loan or credit card, or going without a purchase)

*[For participants who have had their bank account closed]*

- 13. Do you like not having a bank account or do you wish you still had one? Why?
- 14. Have you ever tried to apply for a bank account after your previous one was closed? Were you able to open up the account?
  - a. If not, do you know what the issue was? Were overdrafts a factor?
  - b. Did the bank provide any guidance on alternatives to a bank account? (e.g. second chance, checkless checking, prepaid)
  - c. What did you do after you were denied? Did you apply for accounts at other banks? If so, were you successful in opening those accounts?

***[All participants]***

15. Has anyone ever heard of “second chance accounts” at banks and credit unions? *Ask participants to raise hands.*
  - a. If so, what do you think a “second chance account” is?
16. Has anyone ever heard of “Bank On” accounts? *Ask participants to raise hands.*
17. If so, what do you think a “Bank On” account is? Imagine that you knew that you might sometimes have to make purchases that overdraw your checking account, but wanted to avoid being charged fees for doing so. Is there anything you could do?

### **Conclusion/False Close**

18. Is there anything else related to overdrafts or overdraft protection that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the focus group.*

## **Module 2: Credit Reports and Scores**

### **General Understanding of Credit Reports and Scores**

1. Today we will be discussing credit reports and credit scores. How many of you have heard of a “credit report” before? *Ask participants to raise hands.* What do you think of when I say “credit report”?
  - a. What is a “credit report”?
  - b. What information do you think would be in your credit report?
  - c. Who do you think uses a credit report, and what do you think do they use it for?
2. There is another term that people use, which is “credit score.” How many of you have heard of a “credit score” before? *Ask participants to raise hands.* What do you think of when I say “credit score”?
  - a. What kinds of things might make a credit score go down? What kinds of things might make it go up?
  - b. Who do you think uses a credit score, and what do they use it for?
  - c. Do you think there is a difference between a credit report and a credit score? If so, what is it?
3. What kinds of effects might a credit report and score have in your life? Why?
4. How accurate do you think credit reports and scores typically are?
  - a. Do you think they could have mistakes in them? If so, how often do you think that happens?

### **Experience with Credit Reports**

5. By a show of hands, how many people have ever seen a credit report? *If necessary, make sure that the participants understand that we are asking about a credit report and not a score.*

6. Could someone who has seen a report talk a little bit about when they saw their report, and how they got it?
  - a. Did you understand the information in the report? Was there anything that you found difficult to understand?
  - b. For those of you who have seen your report, did you get access to it for free, or did you pay for it?
7. *[For participants that have not seen their credit report]* Have you ever considered trying to see your credit report? If not, is there a reason why not?
  - a. If you ever wanted to check, where would you go to get your report?

### **Disputing Errors in Credit Reports**

8. For those who have checked your credit report before, has anyone ever noticed an error in your credit report?
9. *[If anyone has noticed an error]* What was the error? What did do when you found the error? Did you try to get it fixed?
  - a. *[For participants who tried to get it fixed]* How did you try to get it fixed? Who did you contact, and what was the process like? What was the result of the process—was the mistake fixed?
  - b. *[For participants who did not try to get it fixed]* Is there a reason why you did not try to fix the mistake?
10. For those of you who have not ever seen an error in your report, if you did notice an error what would you do? Would you try to get it fixed? If so, how would you try to do that?

### **Experience with Credit Scores**

11. I am not going to ask anyone to reveal their credit scores to the group, but by a show of hands, who thinks that they know what their credit score is, or a general range of what it is?
  - a. *[For those that indicate yes]* How do you know your score? Where did you see it, and how?
  - b. *[For those that indicate no]* Have you ever checked your credit score in the past? Do you have any sense of whether your score is probably low or high? What makes you think that?
12. Has anyone ever seen their credit score on a credit card statement?

### **Experience with Credit Monitoring and Repair**

13. Has anyone ever used any services that promised to monitor and protect your credit?
  - a. *[For participants that indicate yes]* What company did you work with? What service did they provide for you?
    - i. Did you have to pay for these services?
    - ii. Were you satisfied with the services that you got? Were the services that you received what was promised to you? Why or why not?

14. Has anyone ever used any services that promised to repair your credit?
  - a. *[For participants that indicate yes]* What was your experience with these services?
    - i. Did you have to pay? When did you pay?
    - ii. What was the service they offered to you? Or, what did they promise they would do? What did they actually do?
    - iii. Were you satisfied with the services you received from them?

### **Conclusion/False Close**

15. Is there anything else related to credit reporting, credit scores, or anything else that we talked about that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the focus group.*

## **Module 3: Impact of Background Screening - Housing**

### **Introduction**

To get started, I would like to ask everyone to introduce themselves by their first name, and if you could share your current living situation (e.g., apartment, house, etc.).

### **Experience with Background Screening Process**

1. By a show of hands, how many of you have had a landlord conduct a background screening (meaning a check of your credit history and criminal history) on you when you applied for a housing unit?
  - a. *[For participants who say they have been screened]* At what point in the process did you learn that they would be doing a background screening? Was it a surprise to you, or something that you expected?
    - i. Did the landlord or housing unit ask you to pay any fees associated with the background screening?
    - ii. What information do you think was considered in the background screening?
2. For those of you who have been screened, did you suffer any negative impacts because of your screening? If so, what?
  - a. Did you end up being approved for the apartment? Did you have to pay a higher security deposit or rent, or get a co-signer, because of what was in the background screening report?

### **[For participants who have been turned down for a housing unit/had negative impacts from screening]**

3. When did you learn about the negative information in your screening report? How long did the whole process take?

- a. What did the landlord tell you about your screening?
  - b. Did you ask any questions, and if so, how did they answer?
  - c. If you were turned down for the rental housing, did they give you any documents explaining why? If so, could you describe what they gave you and what it said?
  - d. *Probe to see whether any participants who were turned down for housing because of a background screening report received:*
    - *The name and contact information for the company that produced the report*
    - *A copy of the report itself, or a description of the process they could use to get the report*
    - *A description of the process they could use to dispute information in their report and/or a description of their rights*
4. For those of you who have been turned down for housing, did you ever try to get your screening report?
    - a. [If yes] How did you try? Who did you contact? If not, did you ever consider trying to get your screening report?
    - b. [If no] Did you ever consider trying to get your screening report? Why or why not?
  5. For those who saw your screening report, did you notice any inaccuracies or outdated information (such as personal information, criminal history, credit score, etc.) when you looked through the report?
    - a. [If so] Did you try to get it fixed? How? What was the result?
  6. *[For everyone]* What happened after you after your negative experience with background screening?
    - a. Did you apply for a rental unit somewhere else?
      - i. Were you approved or turned down there? If so, what was the reason?
    - a. Do you feel like it's been challenging to find other housing opportunities?
      - i. Has it impacted other areas of your life, such as your finances, job, or health?

*[Jump to Conclusion/False Close]*

**[For participants who have not been turned down for housing/have not had negative impacts from background screening]**

7. Were you ever told anything about the results of the background screening? If so, what?
8. What do you remember being told about the screening process when you applied?
  - a. Was this information in the application or did someone tell it to you?
  - b. Do you recall being told what was going to be included in the background screening?
9. Imagine that instead of being approved, you were turned down and told that it was because something negative had come up in your background screening. What would you have done?
10. Do you have any friends or relatives that have ever been turned down for housing based on a background screening?
  - a. Do you recall anything about their experience?

## Effects of COVID-19 on Housing

11. How has COVID-19 affected your housing situation?
  - a. Have you moved since March 2020? If so, why did you decide to move? Did you have any difficulty finding new housing? What was your moving experience like?
  - b. As you may know, the government put some programs into place to help renters during the pandemic, including a temporary halt on evictions and programs to help people who are struggling to pay their rent. Do you think these programs have affected you at all?

## Conclusion/False Close

12. Is there anything else related to background screening or anything else that we talked about that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the focus group.*

# Module 4: Impact of Background Screening - Employment

## Introduction

To get started, I would like to ask everyone to introduce themselves by their first name, and if you could share your work situation--are you currently employed, looking for work, retired, or have some other employment situation?

## Experience with Background Screening Process

1. How many of you have applied for a job in the last five years? *Ask participants to raise hands.*
2. By a show of hands, how many of you have had an employer conduct a background screening on you when you applied for a job?
  - a. *[For participants who say they have been screened]* At what point in the process did you learn that they would be doing a background screening? Was it a surprise to you, or something that you expected?
    - i. Did the employer ask you to pay any fees associated with the background screening?
    - ii. What information do you think was considered in the background screening?
    - iii. For those of you who have been screened, did your employer ever reach out to you regarding the results of the screening and offer any details besides that you were approved or turned down for the job?
    - iv. How long did the process take?



3. Were you asked to provide your criminal history on the job application? If so, do you remember what you were asked to provide?
  - a. Do you recall if you had to explain in more details if you were ever convicted of a crime?
4. For those of you who have been screened, did you suffer any negative impacts because of your screening? If so, what?
  - a. Did you end up being approved for the employment opportunity?

**[For participants who have been turned down for a job/had negative impacts from screening]**

5. When did you learn about the negative information in your screening report? How long did the whole process take?
  - a. What did the employer tell you about your screening?
  - b. Did you ask any questions, and if so, how did they answer?
  - c. If you were turned down for the employment opportunity, did they give you any documents explaining why? If so, could you describe what they gave you and what it said?
  - d. *Probe to see whether any participants who were turned down for employment because of a background screening report received:*
    - a. *A free copy of the report that was used to make the decision*
    - b. *A description of the process they could use to dispute information in their report and/or a description of their rights*
6. For those of you who have been turned down for employment, did you ever try to get your screening report?
  - a. [If yes] How did you try? Who did you contact? If not, did you ever consider trying to get your screening report?
  - b. [If no] Did you ever consider trying to get your screening report? Why or why not?
7. For those who saw your screening report, did you notice any inaccuracies or outdated information (such as personal information, criminal history, credit score, etc.) when you looked through the report?
  - a. [If so] Did you try to get it fixed? How? What was the result?
8. What happened after you had this negative experience with the background screening?
  - a. If you were turned down for a job, did you apply for a job somewhere else?
    - i. Were you approved or turned down there? If so, what was the reason?
  - b. Do you feel like it's been challenging to find other employment opportunities?

**[For those who have not been turned down for a job/have not had negative impacts from background screening]**

9. Were you ever told anything about the results of the background screening? If so, what?
10. What do you remember being told about the screening process when you applied?
  - a. Was this information in the application or did someone tell it to you?

- b. Do you recall being told what was going to be included in the background screening?
- 11. Imagine that instead of being approved, you were turned down and told that it was because something negative had come up in your background screening. What would you have done?
- 12. Do you have any friends or relatives that have ever been turned down for employment based on a background screening?
  - a. Do you recall anything about their experience?

### **Effects of COVID-19 on Employment**

- 13. How has COVID-19 affected your employment situation?
  - a. Have you changed jobs since March 2020? If so, did you have any difficulty finding another job?

### **Conclusion/False Close**

- 14. Is there anything else related to background screening or anything else that we talked about that you would like to share today?

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the focus group.*

## **Module 5: Financial Decision-Making**

### **Background Information**

- 3. Let's start by getting to know each other.
  - a. Please introduce yourself with your first name only- last names will not be recorded if you inadvertently say your last name.
  - b. What is your role in your household when it comes to making decisions about money?
    - i. *Interviewer records:* Primary decision-maker regarding household finances; shares in making household financial decisions; is not typically involved in making household financial decisions.
  - c. How would you rate your ability to make good financial decisions? Please choose a number between one and ten, where one would be not capable at all and ten would be a financial wizard.

### **Financial Decision-Making Strategies**

Next, I am going to ask you a few questions about the strategies people use to make financial plans and decisions. Many people use different strategies or tools to manage their finances.

1. Think about some of the people you know (family, friends, coworkers). Can you think of any specific strategies or tools that these people use to manage their finances?
2. What strategies do you use to manage how you earn and spend money every month?
  - Note. If participant is not typically involved in household decision-making, the moderator can ask if the participant knows or can guess what strategies the primary decision-maker uses, or to try and explain what kinds of financial matters are discussed in their household.
  - What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of these strategies?
3. Have you learned any particularly effective strategies for thinking or making decisions about money from your family or friends? How do you know it was effective?
4. What do you think *causes* people to start using plans or strategies for their finances, or to reevaluate how they are spending and saving money?
  - a) What caused you or your household to use the plans and strategies you use?
  - b) What kinds of things might cause you to change your financial plans and strategies?
  - c) What kinds of things might cause other people to change their financial plans and strategies?

### **Analogies for Financial Costs and Benefits**

We are exploring new ways to describe some of the costs and benefits of financial products in terms that are familiar and easy to understand. One option we are exploring involves using *analogies* to turn complicated or unclear terms into more understandable and familiar ones.

For example, some types of loans charge high interest rates. A high interest rate on a loan might be described as “27% APR compounding annually,” which might mean that a borrower is paying an extra \$100 per month to borrow money. An analogy for this cost that that might be easier to understand is “taking out this loan is like adding \$100 to your rent payment every month.”

7. How do you feel about this alternative description for the cost of a financial service like a loan?
8. More generally, how do you feel about the language and terms that financial products and services use to describe their costs and benefits? What do you find confusing, and what do you find helpful? Can you think of any examples of times when you found something confusing about a financial product or service?”
9. “Adding \$100 to your rent payment every month” is one example of trying to make costs easier to understand. Can you come up with any other ideas for how to make financial service costs easier to understand?
10. We would like you to talk about other situations where you consider different features of financial products, and how you weigh the costs and benefits of these features.

When shopping for something, people tend to consider many different *features* of a product or service. For example, when shopping for a car, people consider features like fuel efficiency, reliability, and luxury items like heated seats or satellite radio. We'd like you to come up with some features that people consider when shopping for *financial* products.

- a. Try and come up with three features of financial products or services.
    - i. What is the purpose of these features? What are they designed to do (e.g., make the product easy to understand; make the product more useful; sell more of the product)?
  - b. Next we'd like you to try to generate some analogies to explain some of these features. For example, one example of a feature of a loan might be the "interest rate." An analogy for the interest rate on a credit card might be "keeping a balance on a credit card is like paying extra for groceries."
    - i. Ask the consumers to generate analogies to describe any of the features they came up with.
      1. Remind the consumer that the goal of an analogy is to better understand these features, their purpose, and how they work.
      2. Take care not to provide substantive or evaluative feedback.
  - c. Thinking back to your analogies:
    - i. What do you think the strengths of these analogies are?
    - ii. What do you think the weaknesses are?
  - d. Now, choose your favorite analogy, and try to explain how it relates to a feature in these financial products.
    - i. How is the analogy similar to how a feature (or multiple features) works?
    - ii. How is the analogy different from how a feature (or multiple features) works?
11. Think of a time you tried to explain a financial decision you made to someone else. How did you describe your decision so that it made sense?
- a. (optional for follow up) If you would change how you explained it, how would you change your explanation?

### Financial Reasoning Scenarios

1. Now we'd like to ask you to take a look at some scenarios related to household finances. We have three scenarios that we are going to work through together; I would like you to discuss the plans, strategies, and options available to these hypothetical people. What advice would you give the people in these households? What steps would you recommend they take to improve their finances?

**Scenario 1 (Windfall):** Jim and Joan are a married couple in their 30s. Jim works full time, and Joan sells crafts online. Together they make \$48,000. They have \$26,000 in student loans at 7% APR. Two years ago, they took out a \$300,000 mortgage at a 3.65% interest rate. They have no credit card debt.

Their car is due for an expensive out of warranty service that they expect will cost \$6,000. They receive an unexpected tax refund of \$4,000. How should they think about their debts and expenses when they decide to allocate this money? How should they allocate this money?

**Scenario 2 (Staying afloat):** Lisa and Brad are a couple in their 40s. Brad was unemployed last year and now has a job that pays less than before--\$25,000 per year. Their total income is now \$43,000 per year. They owe \$500 in past due bills to their water company, \$2,000 in past due rent. Their car just broke down, and it will cost \$500 to repair. Brad needs the car to commute to work. They are considering a high cost short term loan to obtain the funds to repair the car. How should they think about their debts and expenses when weighing the decision to get this high cost short term loan? Should they obtain it?

**(Moderator chooses one of the following to do)**

**Scenario 3 (Priorities):** Jamie is a single mother with a fourteen-year-old and an eight-year-old. She makes \$25,000 per year at her full-time job, which in her city is just enough money to pay for rent, bills, and food. Jamie wants to go back to school so that she can get a degree to make a better salary in the future, but this would require her to take out about \$20,000 in student loans. She also wants to save money: for her kids' education, to help with her mother's medical bills, and to build an emergency fund. How should she prioritize these goals and options? Should she take out a loan to go back to school?

**Scenario 4:** Randy and Doris are a married couple in their 30s with one child who in elementary school. Both work full-time. Together they make \$64,000. They have \$26,000 in student loans at 7% APR. Two years ago, they took out a \$300,000 mortgage at a 3.65% interest rate. They have no credit card debt. They owe \$6,500 on a car. They currently make more money than they spend and want to pay down their debt.

**Scenario 5:** Jeannette is a divorced woman in her 50s who earns \$55,000 per year. She has \$90,000 saved for retirement. She also took out a mortgage on her condominium to pay for graduate school; the mortgage is \$145,000. She has \$4,000 in credit card debt and \$10,000 in medical bills on a payment plan.

**Scenario 6:** Jimmy is a single man in his early 30s who earns \$28,000 per year. He has \$8,000 in student loans. He has \$5,000 in credit card debt on three different cards. He owns his car outright (no car loan) and rents his apartment (no mortgage).

**Probes:**

How did you talk about this scenario? Did you all agree immediately on how the consumers ought to make sense of their situation and what they should do, or did you work through different ideas? If so, how did you decide on a course of action?

## Preferences for Financial Reasoning

*Interviewer note:* Section 5 is low priority and can be used as backup questions or to fill extra time.

For this next section, we are interested in learning more about what types of information you prefer when reasoning about money. (We should make this section optional)

4. Some financial products describe costs and benefits using percentages (e.g., a 10% interest rate), while others describe costs and benefits using dollar amounts (e.g., \$100 per year). Which of these types of description do you prefer, and why?
5. Many products and services use monthly fees to describe how much something will cost (e.g., this service will cost \$10 per month for three years). Others use total amounts to describe these fees (e.g., this service will cost \$360 over three years). Which do you prefer, and why?
6. Say you were going to describe a product that would cost \$150 a month for the next year, so \$1800 in total. How would you describe the cost to another person?
  - a. Please describe how you would sell that product.
  - b. Imagine a close family member bought this product. Please talk about how you would describe this product to maximize their understanding of it- both so that they could understand the true cost of the product, pay for the product most effectively, and utilize it to its true extent.
  - c. Imagine you bought this product; please describe how you would strategize paying for it.

## Conclusion/False Close

*At this point the interviewer will excuse him or herself from the interview in order to ask observers if there are any follow-up questions that should be asked. He or she will then return to the interview, ask any follow-up questions, and conclude the focus group.*