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DACOWITS 2023 Focus Group Protocol A: Recruitment and Retention

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees.

- ▶ I am **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER'S FIRST NAME]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT FIRST NAME(S)]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our research contractor, **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, is with a research organization hired to transcribe these sessions, and they are part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose.

- ▶ Again, DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. DACOWITS was established in 1951 and is one of the oldest Department of Defense Federal Advisory Committees. The Committee is composed of women and men, some of whom have prior military service. We have been appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies related to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of

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servicewomen in the Armed Forces.

- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS studies specific topics and prepares a report for the Secretary of Defense. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted more than 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration. As of 2022, approximately 97 percent have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department.

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- ▶ Each year, DACOWITS visits several military installations and talks to hundreds of Service members like you about their experiences in the military. Today, we will talk about joining the military, your recruitment process, marketing and advertising, and retention. We are meeting with groups of women and men, both officer and enlisted personnel. We would like to spend this time discussing these topics, but we will also set aside time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about related to women serving in the military.

3. Describe how the focus group session will work.

- ▶ A focus group is a guided, carefully planned discussion. As facilitators, we have a set of scripted questions that we'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation.
- ▶ The session will last approximately 90 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.
- ▶ Your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.
- ▶ Our job today is to listen and collect information about your experiences and perceptions. Our job is not to provide information. That means we will not correct any inaccuracies or misperceptions that may be shared by an individual or the group, so you should not assume everything you hear today from other participants is accurate.

4. Explain the ground rules.

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our research contractor can capture the discussion. Please do not engage in side bar conversations during the focus group.
- ▶ Try to avoid the use of acronyms. If we notice that you are using acronyms, we may ask you to stop and explain the acronym.
- ▶ We want to hear your opinions. There may be times in the discussion when you feel differently from other people, and we want to hear about that. Even though you may feel differently than people in this room, you represent others who aren't here today who may have similar feelings. Please be respectful of others' opinions that are shared today.
- ▶ We have a lot of questions to cover, so we may need to interrupt you to keep the conversation moving. Please don't take it personally; it's simply to ensure we cover all our questions today.
- ▶ Our team will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert us if we need to move on to the next question.

5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

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- ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary. If you would prefer to excuse yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.

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- ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. We do not record your names and no information will be reported in our findings that can identify you. All members of the DACOWITS team have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.
- ▶ Our notes and what we discuss today will not be shared with anyone in your chain of command or at this installation.
- ▶ It is important that each of you agree to respect and protect each other's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence. We also expect you not to share the identities of other participants with anyone outside this group.
- ▶ We are required to report some behaviors. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and with the appropriate authority.
- ▶ If you have questions following the focus group, we encourage you to speak with your installation's Equal Opportunity Advisor, your Command Managed Equal Opportunity Coordinator, or command representatives.
- ▶ In front of you are a few short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you stay for the group discussion, your participation will indicate your consent. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, you will not be able to participate in the group today.
 - The second is a short mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey enables us to compile demographic data on the participants we speak with during our site visits. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.
- ▶ Once we have completed the focus groups for this year's selected installations, our team will compile the results into a report that we will use to write our annual report to the Secretary of Defense [**SHOW COPY OF 2020 REPORT**]. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. At the conclusion of our focus group, you will receive a DACOWITS brochure containing information about the Committee.

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Question Number	Topic	Notes
Warmup/Introductions		
Before we get started with our discussion about why you joined the military, let's do some introductions.		
1	<p>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to next person.)</p> <p>Let's go around the room and have each of you tell us—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How many years you've served in the military ■ Your job in the military ■ How long you've been with your current unit 	
Joining the Military		
Let's begin by talking about your experiences before joining the military. We are interested in learning about the factors that encourage and discourage people from joining the military and whether these factors are similar or different for women and men.		
2	To begin, when did you first start to consider joining the military?	
3	<p>Thinking back to when you were considering joining, how did you learn what life might be like in the military?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Commercials? Movies? Parent or family serving? Social media? Talking with recruiters?</p>	
4	<p>By show of hands, how many of you would you recommend military service for a young woman today?</p> <p>[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]</p>	
5	What were some of the major factors that encouraged you to choose military service over other employment or educational opportunities?	
6	<p>Now I want you to think about factors that might encourage someone else to join the military.</p> <p>Do you think the factors that encourage women and men to join the military today are similar or different? How so?</p>	
7	What factors, if any, might discourage someone from joining the military?	
8	Are the factors that discourage women and men from joining the military similar or different? How so?	

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9	Was there anyone in your life who encouraged or discouraged you from joining the military? If so, who?	
10	What could your Service do to make young women more inclined to join the military?	

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<p>Recruiters and the Recruitment Process</p>		
<p>Now let’s talk about your experience with recruiters and the recruitment process. We are most interested in your experiences with your main recruiter or the person who was your primary point of contact during the period when you joined your Service. We’re interested in hearing how frequently you engaged with your recruiter and what you liked and disliked about your experience in the recruitment process.</p>		
<p>[FOR OFFICER GROUPS:] We understand that as officers, you may not have gone through a traditional recruitment process. For example, you may have commissioned through the Military Service Academies, ROTC, or be prior enlisted. Today, we’re most interested in hearing about your experiences with the primary point of contact you interacted with prior to becoming an officer in your Service.</p>		
11	By a show of hands, how many of you had a female recruiter as your main recruiter? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]	
12	How did you engage or communicate with your recruiter during the recruitment process? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] In person? Online? Over the phone? Text message? At events?	
13	What, if anything, did you like about your experience being recruited into the military?	
14	What, if anything, did you dislike about your experience being recruited into the military?	
15	What barriers, if any, may hinder women during the recruitment process?	
16	What recommendations, if any, would you make to your Service to improve the recruitment of women?	

Marketing and Advertisement

Next let’s talk about your Service’s current or recent advertising campaigns. We are interested in hearing your perspectives on how recent advertising campaigns compare with the advertising campaigns you saw before joining the military and whether recent campaigns align with the mission and values of your Service.

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17	<p>By a show of hands, how many of you have recently seen recruitment commercials or advertisements for your Service? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]</p> <p>For those who raised your hand, where did you see the commercials or advertisements—for example, TV, video games, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, other forms of media, or magazines?</p>	
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Question Number	Topic	Notes
18	How do your Service’s recent recruitment commercials or advertisements compare with those you saw when you were deciding to join the military?	
19	How do you think recent commercials and advertisements portray the mission and values of your Service?	
20	Do you feel that your Service’s recent recruitment commercials or advertisements appeal to both women and men considering military service? If so, how? If not, why?	

Retention

Now let’s shift to talk about the reasons Service members decide to stay in or leave the military. We are interested in what influences someone’s decision to stay in or leave the military and whether these factors are similar or different for male and female Service members.

21	Thinking back to when you were joining the military, by a show of hands, how many of you planned to stay in beyond your <i>initial</i> service obligation? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]	
22	Now by another show of hands, how many of you plan to stay in the military beyond your <i>current</i> service obligation? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]	
23	What factors might encourage you or someone like you to stay in the military beyond their current service obligation? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] For example, geographic stability, expanded access to child care, professional development opportunities, pay, family leave policies, reproductive healthcare, or educational benefits.	
24	Do you think the factors that encourage women and men to stay in the military are similar or different? How so?	
25	What factors might influence you or someone like you to leave the military after their service obligations? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] For example, lack of geographic stability, access to child care, professional development opportunities, pay, family leave policies, reproductive health benefits, and educational benefits.	

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26	Do you think the factors that discourage women and men from staying in the military are similar or different? How so?	
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Question Number	Topic	Notes
27	What is the number one thing your Service could do, if anything, to retain you or someone like you?	
28	What recommendations would you make to your Service, if any, to improve the retention of servicewomen?	

General Questions

We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Please note, we may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

29	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	
30	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?	
31	Is there anything else you'd like to share or discuss related to servicewomen that we haven't talked about today?	

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters. We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else. As a reminder, you should not assume everything you heard today from other participants or the group is accurate, and we ask you to defer to your Service's current regulations and policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for participating.

