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DACOWITS 2023

Focus Group Protocol B: Physical Fitness and Body Composition Assessments

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 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

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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 your Service's physical fitness and body composition assessments. 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 or 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		
<p>Before we get started with our discussion about physical fitness standards, let's do some introductions.</p>		
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 	
Experience With Physical Fitness Assessments		
<p>Today we want to learn about your experiences with your Service's physical fitness assessment. The Department of Defense directs the Services to design a physical fitness assessment that measures a Service member's basic fitness level. Occupational assessments assess a Service member's ability to complete job-related tasks and may not be required for all jobs. For the rest of this discussion, we will focus solely on your Service's <i>physical fitness assessment</i>.</p> <p>Let's begin by talking about the requirements and frequency of these assessments.</p>		
2	How often does your Service require a physical fitness assessment?	
3	What are the current components of your Service's physical fitness assessment?	
4	In your opinion, does your Service's physical fitness assessment properly measure your fitness level? Why or why not?	
5	What happens when someone fails a physical fitness assessment?	
6	Are particular components of your Service's physical fitness assessment more challenging for women or men?	
7	How, if at all, does your performance on the physical fitness assessment affect your career progression—for example, promotion criteria, evaluation criteria, school assignments, or results that are recorded in your personal record?	
8	Does your Service's physical fitness assessment affect women's and men's career progression differently?	

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9	Does someone's performance on their physical fitness assessment affect the way leaders or others in their unit perceive them, either positively or negatively?	
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Question Number	Topic	Notes
Preparing for the Physical Fitness Assessment		
Now we want to talk about how you prepare for the physical fitness assessment. Preparation could include training, nutrition, and other ways you get yourself ready for a physical fitness assessment.		
10	When do you start thinking about your next physical fitness assessment? How far in advance?	
11	How do you prepare for your Service’s physical fitness assessment? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] Is your preparation consistent throughout the year, or do you prepare shortly before the assessment? Do you vary your training or eating habits to prepare?	
12	As far as you know, do women and men in your Service prepare for the physical fitness assessment similarly? If not, please describe any differences in preparation.	
13	What resources are available to help you prepare for the physical fitness assessment? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] Physical fitness program? Installation gym? Trainers? Nutritionists?	
14	Are there any additional resources you wish your Service provided you related to the physical fitness assessment or general health and nutrition?	
Body Composition Standards and Assessment		
Next we want to discuss your Service’s body composition standards. When we say body composition, we are referring to your Service’s height and weight standards used to measure body composition, such as body mass index, or BMI, sometimes referred to as body fat.		
15	How does your Service currently measure body composition and how frequently are you measured?	
16	Is your body composition measured publicly in front of leaders or others in your unit or privately in a one-on-one setting?	
17	What happens when someone fails their body composition assessment?	
18	In your opinion, are the current body composition standards and forms of measurement useful? Why or why not?	

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19	How, if at all, do you prepare for your Service's body composition assessment? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] Is your preparation consistent throughout the year, or do you prepare shortly before the assessment? Do you vary your training or eating habits to prepare?	
20	As far as you know, do women and men in your Service prepare for the body composition assessment similarly? If not, please describe any differences in preparation.	
21	In your opinion, are your Service's body composition standards more difficult to pass for women or men?	
22	How, if at all, does the body composition assessment affect your career progression—for example, promotion criteria, evaluation criteria, school assignments, or results that are recorded in your personal record?	
23	Does your Service's body composition assessment affect women's and men's career progression differently?	
24	What resources and support are available to help you meet your Service's body composition standards?	
25	What recommendations, if any, would you make to your Service about its body composition standards or the way in which body composition is measured?	
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.		
26	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	
27	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?	
28	Is there anything else you'd like to share or discuss related to servicewomen that we haven't talked about today?	

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(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 Services' current regulations and policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for participating.

Notes
