

Appendix E – Cognitive Interview Protocol

Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Longitudinal Study Questionnaire

Introduction

Hello, my name is **INTERVIEWER NAME**. I work for Westat, a research company in Rockville, Maryland. Thank you for taking the time to be part of this study. I just want to confirm, are you in a private and quiet place for this interview? **(IF NOT, ASK RESPONDENT TO USE HEADPHONES, OR IF NEEDED, RESCHEDULE.)**

Westat is working with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to help make improvements to a draft survey about the Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) program. You do not have to be involved in that program to help us. As described in our email to you, we are asking for you to give us feedback on questions that will be asked in the survey. So, in addition to having you answer the survey questions, we are especially interested in hearing what you think about the questions themselves, as well as the answer choices.

Today, I am going to display some questions from the survey on your screen, one by one. I will ask you to read and answer each question. After you finish answering each question, I will ask you some follow-up questions to understand your reactions to each question and how you came up with your answers. I'm particularly interested in whether or not the questions are clear and easy to understand.

IF PARTICIPANT JOINS BY AUDIO ONLY, ASK THEM TO TURN ON THE CAMERA ON THEIR DEVICE: I would like to be able to see you during the interview. Would you be willing to turn on your camera?

Informed Consent

We enclosed a consent form in our email exchanges with you. Let me just summarize what is written on the form. This is a research project, and this interview is voluntary. That means you can skip any question and you can stop at any point. All your answers and everything you say will be kept secure to the extent permitted by law. This means that we will not share your name or information with anyone outside our research team. The interview will take about 60 minutes and you will receive a \$50 electronic Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation. It will be sent via email after this interview.

We would like your permission to audio and video record this interview because the recording makes sure we hear everything you say correctly and capture what is happening on your end. Only the people who work on this research project will be able to view the recording and see our notes. Your name will not be linked to any of your responses, though we may include quotes that you provide in our reports. The recordings and our notes will be destroyed after we finish the project.

IF OBSERVERS ARE IN MEETING: I also want you to know that a couple other people who work on this research project would like to observe this interview. They will stay on mute and their cameras will be off. Is that ok with you?

Are you willing to take part in this study? Are you willing to have the session recorded?

START RECORDING. The date and time is _____. Now that I am recording, I want to ask again, do you agree to be interviewed? Is it okay if I record this interview?

Before we start, do you have any questions?

Section 1: Current Status

1 – Are you currently participating in the VR&E program? *Mark only one.*

- Yes → Skip to Item 3
- No

What does “currently participating” mean to you in this context?

1a – Why are you no longer participating in the VR&E program? *Mark only one.*

- Successfully completed the program → Skip to Item 3
- Withdrew from the program without completing a rehabilitation plan
- VR&E requested to have my case closed → Skip to Item 3

What do each of these three answer categories mean to you?

2 – Why did you withdraw from the program? *Mark all that apply.*

- Medical problems
- Financial problems
- Family responsibilities
- Found a job prior to program completion
- Transportation difficulties
- Program did not meet my needs
- Program requirements were too difficult
- Lost interest
- To pursue another education benefit (Ch. 33, State Voc Rehab, etc.)
- Other (specify): _____

Are there any other response options you think should be added? Any that don't make sense here or you aren't sure what they mean?

Section 2: Benefits

3 – During the past 12 months, did you receive benefits from Social Security? *Mark only one.*

- Yes
- No

What, in your own words, is this question asking?

What are some examples of benefits from Social Security?

Section 3: Employment

4 – Are you currently working for pay or self-employment? *Mark only one.*

- Yes
- No → Skip to Item 6

What, in your own words, is this question asking?

5 – Were you working at this job when you exited the VR&E program? *Mark only one.*

- Yes
- No → Skip to Item 8
- I am still participating in the VR&E program → Skip to Item 8

What is “this job” in this question?

5a – Since exiting the program, have you received a promotion in your current job? *Mark only one.*

- Yes → Skip to Item 8
- No → Skip to Item 8

Please explain your answer.

6 – What is the main reason you are not currently working? *Mark only one.*

- Ill, or disabled and unable to work
- Retired
- Taking care of home or family
- Going to school
- Could not find work
- Doing something else
- Other (specify): _____

7 – During the past 12 months, did you work for pay or self-employment? *Mark only one.*

- Yes
- No → Skip to Item 10

8 – During the past 12 months, how many months did you work for pay or self-employment?
Enter the number of months you were employed.

Number of months worked: _____

How did you come up with your answer?

8a – During the past 12 months, how many hours per week did you work for pay or self-employment? *Enter the number of hours you typically worked per week.*

Number of hours worked per week: _____

How easy or difficult was this question to answer?

Does the number of hours change each week, or is always the same?

9 – During the past 12 months, how much did you earn from all work you did for pay or self-employment before taxes and other deductions? *Mark only one.*

- Yearly salary: \$ _____ . ____
- Hourly rate: \$ ____ . ____

How sure are you of your answer?

How did you come up with your answer?

10 – What was your gross income (before taxes and deductions) during the past 12 months? *Your gross income is the total amount, before taxes or other deductions, you received from all sources during the past 12 months. This includes earnings from a job, benefits received from government programs, retirement, pension, investing, or savings income that you receive payments from regularly.*

\$ _____ . ____

11 – What was your gross household income (before taxes and deductions) during the past 12 months? *Your household income is the combined before-tax income of people who share their income and live in the same home. Typically, this would be you and your spouse.*

\$ _____ . ____

12 – During the past 12 months, did you receive unemployment compensation? *Mark only one.*

- Yes
- No → Skip to Item 14

13 – How many weeks of unemployment did you receive? *Enter the number of weeks you received unemployment.*

Number of weeks: _____

How sure are you of your answer?

Section 4: Education

14 – During the past 12 months, have you been enrolled in an Institution of Higher Learning (IHL)? *An Institution of Higher Learning is defined as a college, university, or similar institution, including a technical or business school, offering postsecondary level academic instruction that leads to an associate or higher degree if the school is empowered by the appropriate State education authority under State law to grant an associate or higher degree.*

- Yes

- No

What, in your own words, is this question asking?

15 – During the past 12 months, have you used any VA educational benefits for pursuing education or training? *Mark only one.*

- Yes
- No → Skip to Item 16

[IF NO] What made you say no to this question? (PROBE on whether they weren't in education/training, were in but used non-VA benefits, were in but didn't use benefits)

15a – Which of the following VA educational benefits have you used during the past 12 months? *Mark all that apply.*

- Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Program (Formerly known as Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment)
- Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Montgomery GI Bill
- Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA)
- Yellow Ribbon Program
- Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP)
- Other (specify): _____

Is this the list of benefits you'd expect to see in this context? Why or why not?

16 – During the past 12 months, did you receive any of the following? *Mark all that apply.*

- High school diploma or GED certificate
- Associate's degree (e.g., AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)
- Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- Doctorate degree (e.g., PhD, EdD)
- Other Professional Degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- Did not complete a degree during the past 12 months

17 – During the past 12 months, how many academic credit hours did you complete? *Mark only one.*

- 1 to 10
- 11 to 20
- 21 to 30
- 31 to 40
- 41 or more
- Credits were not recorded
- Did not complete any credits during the past 12 months

How did you come up with your answer?

How easy or difficult was this question to answer?

18 – During the past 12 months, did you receive any professional or trade certificates or licenses? *A professional certification or license shows you are qualified to perform a specific job. Examples include an Information Security Certification, Commercial Driver's License (CDL), Nursing Certification, or an HVAC Certification.*

- Yes
- No → Skip to Item 20

Did you read the text in italics? If yes, how helpful was the text?

Do the examples make sense to you?

How would you rephrase this question in your own words?

19 – How many certificates or licenses did you receive, and what type were they?

Number of Certificate(s) or License(s) : _____
Types of Certificate(s) or License(s) : _____

How easy or difficult was this question to answer?

Section 5: Medical

20 – During the past 12 months, how many visits have you made to a VA Medical facility for yourself? *Enter the number of visits you made for each type of visit. If you did not visit a facility during the past 12 months, enter zero.*

- Emergency visits: _____
- Routine and scheduled visits (checkups, screenings, etc): _____
- Treatment visits (PT, OT, Psychology, etc): _____

How did you come up with your answers?

Is the difference between each of these clear or unclear? Why do you say that?

What VA medical facilities were you thinking of?

21 – During the past 12 months, how many visits have you made to a Non-VA Medical facility for yourself? *Enter the number of visits you made for each type of visit. If you did not visit a facility during the past 12 months, enter zero.*

- Emergency visits: _____
- Routine and scheduled visits (checkups, screenings, etc): _____
- Treatment visits (PT, OT, Psychology, etc): _____

How did you come up with your answers?

What non-VA medical facilities were you thinking of?

Section 6: Household

22 – Do you own your principal residence? *Your principal residence is the home where you live for at least half of the year.*

- Yes
- No

What, in your own words, is this question asking?

23 – How many dependents do you currently have? *Dependents include spouses, children under 18, children between ages 18 and 23 who are attending school, children who are permanently incapable of self-support because of disabilities arising before age 18, and dependent parents. If you do not have any dependents, enter zero.*

Number of Dependents: _____

What, in your own words, is this question asking?

How easy or difficult was this question to answer?

Section 7: Overall Experience

24 – What is the primary reason you applied for the VR&E program? *Mark only one.*

- Get any job
- Get a better job
- Further my education so I could become employed
- Get a job that accommodated my disability
- Start my own business
- Get help to keep my current job
- Improve my job-seeking skills so I could become employed
- Career Counseling so I could best use my benefits to enter the right career
- Independent Living Services
- Other (specify): _____

Are there any other response options you think should be added? Any that don't make sense here or you aren't sure what they mean?

[IF THEY CORRECTLY FOLLOWED DIRECTIONS AND CHOSE JUST ONE] How easy or difficult is it to choose just one option? What made you choose that one option?

[IF THEY TREATED IT LIKE A MARK ALL THAT APPLY] If you had to choose just one, which would you choose and why?

There's an instruction here to mark only one – did you notice that?

25 – Thinking about your experience with the VR&E program, please rate your agreement with the following statements using the scale provided. *Mark one answer for each item.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The VR&E program assisted in my ability to become employable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. The VR&E program assisted in my ability to live more independently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What made you choose [response choice] in item a?

What made you choose [response choice] in item b?

26 – If you worked for pay or self-employment during the past 12 months, how much did professional or vocational counseling, job training, job search assistance, or other VR&E assistance contribute to your employment experience? *Mark one answer for each item.*

	A lot	Some	A little	None
a. Identifying and applying for jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Getting hired for a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Keeping your job over time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Feeling prepared to complete job tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did not work for pay or profit at any time during the past 12 months → Skip to Item 28

Can you rephrase the question in your own words?

Do all of these statements apply to your situation? If no, which ones don't apply?

What made you choose [response choice] in item a?

What made you choose [response choice] in item b?

What made you choose [response choice] in item c?

What made you choose [response choice] in item d?

27 – If you worked for pay or self-employment during the past 12 months, did your work generally match the training you received while you participated in the VR&E program? *Mark only one.*

Yes

- No
- Somewhat

What does it mean for your work to “generally match the training you received?”

Can you tell me about why you chose that [YES/NO/SOMEWHAT]?

28 – Thinking about ALL aspects of your experience with the VR&E program, please rate it overall, using a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is Unacceptable, 3 is Average, and 5 is Outstanding. *Mark only one.*

Unacceptable		Average		Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5

This question asks about ALL aspects – what does that mean to you?

Those are all the questions we have for you. Do you have any questions or comments for me that we haven’t already discussed?

End Statement

Thank you for completing this survey! Your feedback will help us make improvements to the survey. You can expect to receive the \$50 gift card via email shortly after we end our session.

STOP RECORDING.