



[Date]

Dear [Respondent Name]:

You are invited to participate in the Beyond Benefits Study, a national study paid for by the Social Security Administration (SSA). This study will collect information about the service, medical and employment needs of working-age adults who get disability payments now or stopped receiving disability payments due to medical improvement. By participating in this study, you will help SSA understand the policies and programs that may help people who stop receiving disability payments.

SSA hired Westat, a national research company, to conduct the study. Westat is inviting you to participate in a focus group with service providers like you who work with those who have exited or are likely to exit SSA disability programs due to medical improvement. The focus group will be virtual (video conference using Microsoft Teams) at a time convenient to the participants during [TIME FRAME]; it should last 90 minutes or less. We will ask questions about the challenges and facilitators of service provision to those exiting disability programs, as well as about your experiences in this field broadly. You will have the opportunity to share your thoughts about how services for those exiting disability programs could be improved. We will mail you a **\$40 Visa gift card** to offset any costs such as childcare that you may have incurred as a result of your participation.

Participation in this study is voluntary. As described in the Study Consent, we will safeguard the information you provide and will use it for limited purposes, consistent with applicable Federal law, regulations, and directives. Your name or other identifying information will not be included in any published reports.

If you are interested in participating in this focus group, please respond to this letter by calling **1-855-516-3665** and study staff will reach out to you to begin the process of scheduling the focus group. For questions about your rights and welfare as a research participant, call the Westat Human Subjects Protections office at 1-888-920-7631. Leave a message **only** with your first name, the name of the research study (Beyond Benefits Study) and a phone number beginning with the area code.

I hope you will agree to participate in this very important focus group.

Sincerely,

[INSERT SIGNATURE OF SSA SIGNATORY]

## BEYOND BENEFITS STUDY SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

### Consent to Participate in a Focus Group

#### What is the purpose of the study?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is conducting the Beyond Benefits Study to collect information about the service, medical and employment needs of working-age adults who currently receive disability-related payments or stopped receiving disability-related payments from SSA due to medical improvement. SSA hired Westat, a national research company, to carry out the Beyond Benefits Study. The purpose of the research is to help SSA identify ways to help people who may be leaving or have left disability benefit programs. Some people who leave SSA disability programs return to work, so we are also very interested in your thoughts about what services and supports help—or don't help—when people focus on their employment goals.

#### What are we asking of you?

We seek your consent for your voluntary participation in a focus group lasting 90 minutes, or less with a few other service providers on your experience providing services to this population. We will schedule it at a time that works for you and the other participants and conduct it via Microsoft Teams video conference<sup>1</sup>. We will ask for your permission to send text message reminders about the study. Depending on your texting plan, you may incur a charge for these texts. If you agree, you will be able to opt-out of receiving these reminders at any time by replying “STOP” to the text or by calling the Help Desk at Westat.<sup>2</sup> A member of the research team will facilitate the focus group and ask questions about your experience providing employment services to this population, funding challenges, and challenges and facilitators for improving vocational outcomes for these groups.

We ask for your permission to record the focus group, so we accurately capture what you tell us. If at any point you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will need to drop off from the focus group. The recording will be used to develop the report and will be destroyed once the study is completed.

#### What benefits will you get for participating?

You will not benefit directly from participation. By participating in this study, you will contribute to SSA's understanding of policies and programs that might be helpful to people who leave disability programs. After completing the focus group, we will mail you a **\$40 Visa gift card**.

#### What is the study doing to minimize your risks?

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<sup>1</sup> **Privacy Notice:** Microsoft Teams is a nongovernment application that may have different privacy policies from those of the Social Security Administration (SSA). This application is not under SSA's control and may not follow SSA's privacy, security, or accessibility policies located on their official website at <https://www.ssa.gov/privacy>. Once you access this application, you are subject to Microsoft's policies. As such, by using this application, you may be providing non-government third parties access to your personally identifiable information (PII). Westat is taking precautions to protect your privacy and PII, such as by using secure equipment in a private location. To minimize any risk of access by unauthorized third parties, we recommend that you use a reliable, secured, and private internet connection and ensure no one enters the room with you during the meeting. General information about SSA programs may be found at <http://www.ssa.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> Each text message sent by the study will also include these opt-out instructions.

There is a small risk of disclosure of your personal information. The participants in the focus group may recognize each other. There is also the chance that some focus group members might share what they hear in the focus group with others outside the group. The researcher leading the focus group will instruct all participants that everything discussed in the focus group should be kept private.

### **How will we protect your privacy?**

We will summarize the information from these focus groups to SSA. We may use anonymous quotes from you or other participants in these summaries but no names or other personal information will be linked to those quotes or any responses. We will follow Federal law and regulations to protect your privacy. SSA and Westat will protect your personal information collected during the study, consistent with applicable Federal law, regulations, and directives. The information we collect is used for research in limited ways. For example, we use your thoughts and comments about employment support needed, combined with thoughts and comments about employment support from other people interviewed, to help understand employment support needs. Your name or other identifying information will not be included in any published reports.

**Privacy Act Statement Collection and Use of Personal Information.** Section 1110(a) of the Social Security Act, as amended, allows us to collect this information, which we will use to help the Social Security Administration (SSA) identify ways to help people who may be leaving or have left disability programs. Providing us this information is voluntary; not providing all or part of the information will not affect your SSA benefit. As law permits, we may use and share the information you submit, including with other Federal agencies, contractors, student volunteers, and others, as outlined in the routine uses within System of Records Notice (SORN) 60-0218, available at [www.ssa.gov/privacy](http://www.ssa.gov/privacy). The information you submit may also be used in computer matching programs to establish or verify eligibility for Federal benefit programs and to recoup debts under these programs.

### **Who you can contact if you have questions?**

For questions about the study, call the study's toll-free number at **1-855-516-3665**. For questions about your rights and welfare as a research participant, call the Westat Human Subjects Protections office at 1-888-920-7631. Leave a message **only** with your first name, the name of the research study (Beyond Benefits Study) and a phone number beginning with the area code; please do not leave any other personal information in the message.