

Instrument 3:

Matrix and Starfish EHS/HS Staff Interview and Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this [interview/focus group]. This is an important part of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation (BIAS-NG) project. We want to learn about how we can make families' experience with Early Head Start/Head Start better. As part of the project, we worked with [program name] administrators to send out text messages to some caregivers over the last few months. The messages were intended to promote more consistent daily attendance. We want to hear your thoughts about working with [EHS/HS program name] and your ideas about how to improve the experience for individuals and families.

This interview/focus group is completely voluntary. Other program staff and families will not see these responses. The research team working with [program name] on the project will summarize all responses. In sharing what we learn from talking with you and others, we will never use your name or otherwise identify you.

[If a focus group] We ask that you not share anything that is said here outside of this group. However, we cannot guarantee that others will not do so. You can also share any comments with us privately.

Please read and sign the consent form. Then we can get started. I will record the conversation, so we don't miss anything you say. Only members of the research team will hear the recording, but you can also share any comments with us at the end, when we've turned the recorder off.

The [interview/focus group] will take about one hour of your time. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this collection is 0970-0502 and the expiration date is 8/31/2025. The information collected will be maintained and protected as outlined in the system of records notice (SORN) for this collection, OPRE Research and Evaluation Project Records, 09-80-0361.

Informed Consent: Participant Interviews and Focus Groups

You are invited to participate in [an interview/a focus group] for the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation (BIAS-NG) project.

What is the study about?

MDRC, a nonprofit social policy research organization, and its partner MEF Associates are conducting this project on behalf of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families. This project's goal is to improve communication with and engagement for individuals who participate in Early Head Start/Head Start services with [program name].

What will I need to do?

We are talking with caregivers and staff in [program name's] Early Head Start/Head Start and asking them to share their thoughts and experiences. This [interview/focus group] will take up to 1 hour and gives you an opportunity to share your perspective.

Does the [interview/focus group] involve any risk to me?

There are no major risks from participating. The main risk is feeling uncomfortable discussing your experiences. You can choose not to answer any of the questions. We have very strong security measures in place and will make every effort to protect your privacy. There is a small possibility of someone outside of the study staff hearing or seeing your responses [or someone in the focus group] repeating your answers.

Will the [interview/focus group] help me?

Participating in the [interview/focus group] will probably not help you directly, but sharing your thoughts and experiences may help improve the experiences of future individuals, families, and staff.

Do I have to [do the interview/participate in the focus group]?

This [interview/focus group] is completely voluntary. You do not have to [do the interview/participate in the focus group] if you do not want to. You can [stop the interview/leave the focus group] at any time. Your participation in the [interview/focus group] will have no effect on your employment with [program name]. We would like to record the [interview/focus group] so we can concentrate on what you are saying and to help with our notes. However, if you do not want us to record, we will not. If there is anything you would like to say without being recorded, you can ask to pause the recording at any time.

Will I receive anything for my time?

To express our appreciation for your participation, we will give you a \$40 honorarium for participating in the [interview/focus group].

Will you tell people what I say?

The study team will not share your answers with anyone, unless you say something about hurting yourself or others or if you describe someone else being hurt. [Focus group only: There is a possibility of someone in the focus group repeating your answers, but we are asking all participants to keep this conversation private.] Otherwise, only the study team will read the notes or listen to the recording and no one at [program name] will hear your answers. In public reports, we may use some specific quotes, but we won't include anyone's name or other identifying information. When the project is over, we will destroy our notes and recordings.

Questions:

If you have questions about the study or your privacy rights, you can call the project director, Caitlin Anzelone at MDRC at 212-340-8841.

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[For Written Consent] Statement

“I have read this form and agree to participate in the interview or focus group. I know that my participation is voluntary and that MDRC follows strict rules to protect my privacy. I know that I can refuse to answer any questions and that I can stop participating at any point.”

Name of Study Participant (Print)	Signature of Study Participant
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[For Verbal Consent]

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Do you feel comfortable with me recording our discussion?

Record response.

- If yes, proceed
- If no: “No problem. Thank you for your time today.”

Draft Staff Interview and Focus Group Guide

This protocol is semi-structured, so interviewers may ask follow-up or probing questions for clarity.

Introduction

1. What is your current position?
2. How long have you worked in this program?
3. Have you held previous positions at this or other early child development programs?

Staff Perspectives

[All staff]

1. Did any caregivers mention texts/emails they had received to you or other staff you know of since the BIAS-NG messages started?
2. About how many caregivers reached out in response to messages in the past week? Month?
 - a. What questions/comments did these caregivers ask? Specifically, did caregivers reach out to staff about [probe]:
 - i. About attendance challenges?
 - ii. Resources?
 - iii. Policy council?
 - iv. Connecting with other caregivers?
 - b. How did you respond to caregiver questions?
3. Thinking back on the past 2-3 months, do you have a story that you consider a particular success or failure from the BIAS-NG messages?
4. Do you think the new BIAS-NG messages were helpful to caregivers generally?
 - a. Why or why not?
5. How do you think the new BIAS-NG messages impacted attendance?
 - a. Why do you think the messages did or did not have an impact?

[For key staff involved in preparing & sending messages]

6. Describe your effort and hours involved in working with the BIAS-NG messages
 - a. Did you have a role in supporting the study, for example by sending the messages or responding to caregiver questions?
 - i. If Yes, Please describe your role.
 - ii. If Yes, Did you experience any challenges with successfully doing what was needed for your role? What types of challenges?

7. In your experience, what was the impact of the new BIAS-NG messages on staff?
8. Since the start of the BIAS-NG messages, have there been any other changes at Matrix or Starfish that may have impacted attendance?
9. Since the start of the BIAS-NG messages have there been any other changes at Matrix or Starfish that may have impacted caregiver and staff communication?

[All staff]

10. What do you think would increase child attendance at [program name]?
11. How do you think [program name] could better help families:
 - a. Understand why daily attendance at [program name] is important?
 - b. Learn about routines and planning to make attendance easier [e.g., nighttime, daytime]?
 - c. Understand and connect to resources [food, financial, health, transportation assistance, etc.]?
 - d. Connect with staff with questions/concerns?
 - e. Connect with other caregivers [in their child's class, policy council rep, carpool, etc.]?

[Share printed copy of select intervention messages]

12. How might you change or edit these messages to make them more helpful?
13. What other information would be helpful to send caregivers?