

Focus Group Protocol – Individuals with Lived Experience Accessing Disaster Human Services

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Tailor the following interview guide by: (1) skipping sections or questions not relevant for the respondents; or (2) asking appropriate follow-up questions or probe into participant responses as needed to obtain additional information or clarification. If time is limited, the facilitator will prioritize the most important questions.

Before beginning the focus group, read the introduction to describe the purpose to respondents, answer any questions they have about the session, and ask for their consent to record the focus group.

Purpose

The mission of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is to promote the economic and social well-being of diverse communities across the United States. ACF's programs provide services to communities and individuals across the nation. Its programs include disaster human services, which support communities with shelter, food, water, clothing, family reunification, and other critical economic and social support areas. ACF firmly believes engaging the people most impacted by disaster is crucial because it prioritizes real-world perspectives and fosters empathy, inclusivity, cultural humility, and innovation.

The purpose of this focus group is to collect input and insights on disaster human services from those who have experience with these services in their communities. Engaging disaster survivors with lived experience to learn both about their experiences and hear their recommendations enriches ACF's understanding of their needs, contributes to more informed decision-making, and helps ACF ensure it keeps the well-being of those it serves at the center of ACF's work.

This learning will be used to inform the development of OHSEPR's Disaster Human Services Capabilities Framework, a key document in guiding the nation's human services in disasters. Focus groups with disaster survivors aligns the Framework with HHS, ACF, and White House policies to ensure government

programs reflect the needs of those with lived experience, especially vulnerable populations and those with a history of challenges in accessing care services.¹²³⁴

Desired Outcome

This activity will improve future human services disaster preparedness and response by establishing a common standard for disaster human services planning and provision by state, tribal, local, and territorial partners and local service providers. The capabilities framework will reflect the experiences of communities that have experienced disasters.

Method

The facilitator will conduct two 90-minute focus group sessions, each with a group of approximately 10 individuals who have received human services during emergencies. These sessions will be held using an online platform (e.g., Zoom or MS Teams). In addition to group discussion, participants will engage in the session through polling questions and chat function. Facilitators will follow the discussion questions below and adapt them based on the participants and direction of the discussion as advised in the Instructions for Facilitators section above.

Participation is voluntary. Responses will not be attributable to a specific individual. Categorical responses (e.g., polling question) will be aggregated. The input received through this session will be combined with other data sources to inform the Disaster Human Services Capabilities Framework. If quotes are used in the framework, they will be anonymized to protect the individual contributor.

Focus Group Discussion

Introduction [10 minutes]

Contractor Intro

My name is [co-facilitator's name], and this is [co-facilitator's name], and we are contractors for the Administration for Children and Families, specifically with the Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response, also called OHSEPR. We will be conducting this discussion session today. We would like to thank you for joining us and sharing your experiences and suggestions for improvement with us.

¹ Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/62e7a64c60e10c47484b763aa9868f99/lived-experience-brief.pdf>

² Engaging People with Lived Experience to Strengthen ACF Programs. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/policy-guidance/engaging-people-lived-experience-strengthen-acf-programs>

³ Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. January 2021.

⁴ Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government

For background, OHSEPR is an office within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. OHSEPR's mission is to lead, strengthen, and synchronize human services to prepare, respond, and recover from emergencies and crises.

Human services are economic and social programs that support Americans with shelter, food, water, clothing, case management, family reunification, childcare, early childhood development, cash assistance, refugee support, home energy assistance, and transportation. Human services may also include support related to domestic violence, human trafficking, child welfare, child custody, and runaway and homeless youth. Disaster human services specifically refers to the provision of human services to individuals in need before, during, and after a disaster such as a hurricane, flooding, or even a public health emergency like COVID-19.

Today, we would like to learn about your experiences accessing human services following a disaster—specifically, your experience accessing services from state, tribal, local, or territorial human services organizations during or following a disaster. This effort is to develop a guiding document to help local human services programs plan and act in future emergency responses, improving individual experiences and service provision. It is ACF's priority to incorporate the voices of those who receive these services and this is why we are eager to learn from you today.

Our team put together questions to guide today's discussion. There may be sensitive information discussed here today. Nothing shared today will be attributed to an individual and all answers will be kept private. We will combine your input with others to improve human services for communities experiencing disasters.

No one is required to share their private or personal experiences; however, you are welcome to share personal examples as you feel comfortable. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may pass on any question or stop participating in the discussion. We are interested in hearing both your experiences and your suggestions for improvement.

We would like to record this conversation to assist in notetaking. The recording will only be viewed and heard by our immediate team for the development of the resource mentioned. The files will be deleted once all notes have been taken. Do we have your consent for the session to be recorded?

Do you have any questions for our team before we begin?

PRA Statement

"OHSEPR is collecting this information to identify areas of improvement and support for disaster human services preparedness and response efforts. This discussion will last approximately 90 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. All information will be kept private. A Federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and no individual or entity is required to respond to, nor shall an individual or entity be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB Control Number. The OMB # is 0970-0630 and the expiration date is 3/31/2027.

Names and Location [15 minutes]

To get us started ...

1. Can each person on the call share their first name and share where you are located today?

Questions [55 minutes]

Next, we will be diving into some potentially difficult questions. We want you to feel as comfortable and supported as we can in sharing in this brave space. We hope to learn more about your experience finding help after a disaster and accessing human services, such as food, shelter, child support, cash assistance, etc., and how to improve that process.

First, we'll focus on the time before the disaster.

1. What kind of disaster did you experience and where did that experience occur?
2. Were you aware that the disaster was coming to your community (e.g., you heard about a hurricane on the news)?
 - o If so, did you prepare in any way?
3. Did you use any resources to help you prepare such as a government website with information about what to do or where to get help?

Now we'll focus on after the disaster.

4. How long after the disaster did you begin to look for help?
5. What type of help did you need after the disaster?
6. When did you discover that human services were available?
 - o How long did it take you to access services?
 - o If there was a delay, what could've been done better?
7. Do you know if core human services such as food and shelter were available to your community when needed?
 - o How soon after the disaster did anyone reach out to you to provide assistance, or did you have to find assistance on your own?
8. Who were you in contact with when seeking out assistance?
 - o What types of organizations did you interact with when seeking assistance? (government, community-based or faith-based organizations, etc.)
9. How did you receive information about how to access help (e.g., text messages, social media, radio, website, TV, friend/neighbor, etc.)?
 - o Did you receive updates during the emergency about available assistance?
 - o Do you remember who the source of these communications was?
10. What or who was your most trusted source of information about where to get help?
11. What was the process like to receive assistance?
 - o Did you have to go to different locations and organizations to receive different types of support (food, shelter, or cash assistance)? If so, how was the experience? Did you have transportation to these locations?
 - o Did you have to provide the same information multiple times to different people?

12. Were the staff you interacted with able to direct you to available services or provide additional resources?
13. When the initial disaster was over, did you continue to receive human services support?
 - o Were the types of services you received different from those you received during the emergency?
14. Reflecting on your experience, what would you say the human services organizations did well during the emergency?
 - o What do you wish they had done differently?
 - o What is one thing that could have been done to make your disaster recovery experience better?

Wrap Up [10 minutes]

Before we wrap up, the team would like to give you the opportunity to share any final thoughts.

1. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us today regarding your experience with disaster human services?

Thank you for your time and input! Our team really appreciates your feedback today and your part in shaping this impactful work. Your experiences, feedback, and suggestions will directly inform our work in creating this guiding resource for state, tribal, local, and territorial human services programs and providers.

After this call, you will receive an email from us with our contact information. Feel free to contact us if you think of anything else.

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN: The purpose of this information collection is to identify areas of improvement and support for disaster human services preparedness and response efforts. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 90 minutes per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This is a voluntary collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0630 and the expiration date is 3/31/2027. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Bridget Miller at Bridget.Miller@acf.hhs.gov.