

Focus group guide for pre-release program
participants

Pathway Home Grant Program Evaluation

April 2022

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FOCUS GROUP GUIDE FOR PRE-RELEASE PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is _____, and I work for **Mathematica /Social Policy Research Associates/Council of State Governments**. Also with me is my colleague _____, who will be taking notes. I am visiting as part of an evaluation of the **[grantee-specific program name]** you are participating in and many other programs like it around the country. The U.S. Department of Labor is funding these programs and the evaluation. The goal of the evaluation is to learn about how these programs help people with justice involvement reenter the community and connect to training, education, and work. I have some questions for you today about your experience being in this program, and I want to hear about your suggestions for improving it.

Before we begin, let me explain how we will use the information you share with us. We will not share our notes or any recordings from this conversation with anyone outside the organizations conducting this evaluation. We will keep this discussion private, and no one outside of the study team will have access to our notes. We will not share any information you provide with staff in the **[name of organization]**, or any employers, and our reports will never identify you by name. Instead, we will combine information from this discussion with information from other discussion groups in other states. We will also be sure to keep your information private, to the extent allowed by law. As such, we will never use your name or other identifying information in our reports. Although we might include quotes, we will do so in a way that no one can tell who is being quoted. With that said, please feel free to be open and honest in your answers.

As you may have noticed, you have a consent form in front of you. I am going to read the form aloud and then ask you to sign the form if you agree to participate.

[Note: Read the form verbatim. Tell the group that if anyone has questions, they can raise their hand. Let people with questions know they can either ask their question in the group or ask a study member on the side. Answer questions accordingly. Ask participants to sign the form. As you collect the consent forms, check that they are complete. If not, confirm that they did not make a mistake. If someone does not want to complete the form, excuse the person from the focus group.]

If the facility allows for recording, ask if anyone in the group objects to our recording the session. If anyone objects, at any time, immediately stop recording. Continue with rest of script.

So, let's go over a few ground rules.

- First, there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions.
- The topics we are going to talk about could bring up sensitive issues. We want to remind you that being part of this discussion is up to you, and you may choose not to answer a question if you wish. We also ask that you not share what you hear today with anyone outside of the group.
- Finally, please stop me anytime you have a question or concern.

- We have scheduled one hour for this discussion. My colleague, [note-taker], is going to do [his/her/their] best to take notes as we talk. But we would also like to record the discussion to make sure we do not miss anything anyone says. Again, we will not share this recording with anyone outside the organizations conducting this evaluation. Does anyone have any objections to recording this conversation?
- Do you have any other questions before we get started?

[note-taker hits record]

Interview guide topic areas

A. Participant Background

- Name (or pseudonym)
- Length of involvement with program

B. Participant Recruitment and Enrollment

- How participants became aware of program
- Expectations for the program
- Experience with intake and enrollment

C. Participant Access to Pre-release Services

- Types of available services (employment, case management, supportive, etc.)
- Logistics and challenges of accessing pre-release program services
- Internet access and use of technology to access services
- Receipt of occupational training and certification
- Influence of COVID on access to services
- Receipt of similar services through the facility

D. Case Management and Other Services

- Usefulness of case management services in preparing for reentry
- Types of employment and supportive services that were offered to participants
- Relationships with case managers
- Perspective on services offered
- Connections to staff that will work with participants post-release

E. Reflections on Program Experience

- Benefits and challenges of program as a whole
- Recommendations for program improvement
- Expectations for engagement in program services after release
- Reflections on preparing for reentry and reentering the community