

INSTRUMENT 5: CHILD CARE PROVIDER FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

The CCEE Supply Building research team will use this protocol to guide focus groups with child care providers. This protocol is a guide, not a script. The guide is written to accommodate a variety of different scenarios and includes a bank of questions and probes from which the Facilitator can choose based on who is in the focus group. Facilitators will add probes to further explore the responses provided.

(Note: In the following section, the interviewer will not read words in parentheses)

(Who is doing the research and funding it) My name is [NAME], and this is my colleague, [NAME]. We both work at the Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization in Washington, DC. We have been engaged by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a research study to learn more about strategies state use to build the supply of and sustain child care and early education programs. We have invited you here today to participate in a 75-minute discussion about your experiences as a child care provider.

Before we start, let me review a few points.

(Voluntary) First, your participation in this group is entirely voluntary. You are free to leave at any time and skip any question you don't want to answer.

(Virtual data collection/Zoom meeting statement) Please make sure you are in a private place where others cannot hear the discussion to protect the privacy of others here. Also, we want you to understand that given the technical limitations of Zoom and similar internet platforms, we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of what might be said.

(Privacy) Our research team will keep the information you share with us private to the extent permitted by law. This means that when we write reports about what we hear during focus groups, all responses will be "anonymous"; nobody's name will appear. If we quote something you say, we will never use your name or other information in a way that someone could identify you. So, you can be as open as possible in sharing your thoughts with us. The only exception to the privacy rule is if you share that you intend to harm yourself or others, or that you or your children are being harmed or are at great risk of harm. Researchers may be required to take steps, including reporting to authorities, if there is an unsafe situation.

While the research team is bound by guidelines that require us to protect your privacy, we cannot ensure that participants of this focus group will protect your privacy. So, please keep that in mind when deciding whether to respond to a particular question and when deciding what you want to share. We will encourage you all to respect one another by keeping the information shared inside this group private. Please do not talk to others outside of this group about what you heard here today.

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 75 minutes per response, including the time for introductions and completing the focus group. This information collection is voluntary. 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 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: Urban Institute, 500 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC 20037.

(What we will do with the data) We will take all the information you share with us today and combine it with information other people share, and then we'll write a memo or report for our federal project officers at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, which is the research arm of the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We may also use the information to develop a public report or brief that summarizes what we learned across all the states we conduct case studies of. Again, we will never use your name in our reports or describe you in a way that someone could identify you and what you shared.

(Risks and benefits) There are minimal risks to participating in this group. If you share something personal and sensitive there is a risk of reputational harm if that information is shared beyond this group. However, you may benefit from sharing your personal experience and hearing from others, knowing this information will be shared with federal and state administrators who care about improving child care and early education. After completing the focus group, you will receive a \$50 gift card as a thank-you. We'll share more about that at the end.

(Recording) We're recording the session so we have a record of what you share for our data analysis. No one will have access to the recordings besides our research team, and your name will never be connected to the recording or notes. We will delete the recording once our analysis is complete. If you are not okay with being recorded, please let us know now so that you can be excused from the group.

At this time, I will ask for each of you to give your verbal consent to participate. You can unmute yourself and say, "Yes," to confirm that "yes" you understand the requirements and would like to participate. *[Confirm each person says "yes" and then proceed.]*

Additional Instructions

Okay, great. A few other things to keep in mind:

- If you'd like, you can rename yourself in Zoom so others can refer to you by the name you'd like to be called. You may simply use your initials, first name, or a different name if you prefer not to show your full name to the group. *[Review instructions on renaming in Zoom if needed.]*
- When you are not speaking, please keep yourself on mute by pushing the little mute button at the bottom of your screen.
- We ask you to please put your cell phones on "vibrate/silent" mode to not disrupt the conversation.
- We understand emergencies come up, so just excuse yourself if you need to take care of something. If you need to use the restroom, please do so at any time; you do not need to ask permission.
- We would like to encourage everyone to participate, because these groups work best when everyone contributes.
- You don't have to answer each and every question. But if some of you are shy or don't get a chance to speak, I may call on you to give you a turn, because I'd like to know what everyone here thinks.

- There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions I’ll be asking you today. Please feel free to share your views, even if they are different from what others have said. We want to hear your thoughts and opinions, whether they are positive or negative.
- We have many topics to cover, so I may have to interrupt from time to time and move us along to another topic. But don’t let me cut you off. If there’s something important you want to say, let me know before we change the subject.

Do you have any questions? Okay, great.

I’m going to start the recording now.

[Start audio recording].

This focus group is an important part of our study. We are here to learn directly from you about your experiences. Over the next 75 minutes, we will ask you questions about your backgrounds, experiences with [STRATEGY], and successes and challenges you may have experienced.

Today we will be discussing [STRATEGY], which is [brief description of strategy that uses language tailored to the focus group participants and might be based on the language that we heard CCDF Administrators/Strategy Leads tend to use when doing outreach]. Are there any questions you would like to ask about what we mean by [STRATEGY], or is there another way you tend to think about this program?

Participant Background

To get started, please tell us a little bit about yourself, including your [use of/participation in/receipt of STRATEGY].

1. First, please tell us your first name, whether you are a center director or a family child care provider, and how long you have been working in early care and education.
2. Next, please tell us how you first learned about [STRATEGY] and when you first [applied and received grant or contract funding/began receiving technical assistance or support/experienced changes in subsidy payment or reimbursement policies]. Your best guess on the timing is fine.
3. Please raise your hand if you are you still receiving [funds/technical assistance or other supports/and so on from STRATEGY/participating in the subsidy system]. If you are not, please tell us when it ended.

Implementation Experiences

Next, I would like to learn about what you have received and your experiences with [STRATEGY].

4. From your perspective, what are the goals of [STRATEGY]? How is it supposed to help child care providers, families, children, or others in the community who might benefit?
5. What motivated you to [apply/get involved]?
 - a. [If STRATEGY relates to subsidy payment and reimbursement policies or contract-funded slots] Did you accept child care subsidies before this change took place? If not, what motivated you to start accepting them?
 - b. [If STRATEGY relates to start-up/expansion support] Have you attempted to start a new child care center or family child care or expand your existing child care center or family

child care previously? If so, what issues, if any, hindered start-up and expansion? How did you expect [STRATEGY] to help you overcome those issues?

- c. [If QRIS participation is required] Did you previously participate in QRIS? Why or why not? [If not previously participating] Did you have to incur additional costs to participate? If so, were these costs offset by the grant/contract?
 - d. [If minimum QRIS rating is required] Were you previously rated at [minimum rating or higher] or did you have to take additional efforts to achieve this rating?
 - e. [If strategy requires that providers serve a specific population] Were you already serving [population]? Did you have to take additional efforts to be able to serve [population]? If so: Please describe the additional efforts you took to be able to serve [population].
6. What was the process of applying for [STRATEGY] like? What worked well? What challenges did you experience?
- a. Did you require any help or assistance with the process? If so, what assistance was available to you? Was it helpful?
7. Now we are interested in learning about your overall experience [receiving/participating in/using STRATEGY/the subsidy policy or rate changes made by STRATEGY].
- [IF STRATEGY INCLUDES GRANT- OR CONTRACT-FUNDED SLOTS]:
- i. Is the rate you receive for grant- or contract-funded slots more or less than the subsidy rate you would otherwise receive?
 - ii. Do you receive consistent payments amounts for grant- or contract-funded slots month to month or do the payments vary month to month?
 - iii. Are the grant- or contract-funded slots reserved for any specific populations? If so, which ones?
 - iv. What happens when a grant- or contract-funded slot is vacant? Do you have a certain amount of time to fill the slot? If so, how long?
 1. [IF SLOTS ARE RESERVED FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS] Does the slot remain vacant until a child meeting that population can fill the slot, or can it be filled by another child who does not meet that population?
 - v. Has there been a change in the number of children whose families receive subsidies that are enrolled in your center/family child care since you began offering grant- or contract-funded slots? If so, how did it change? Did you increase the number of infants, toddlers, children with disabilities, or children living in under resourced areas?

[IF STRATEGY INCLUDES INCREASED PROVIDER PAYMENT RATES OR OTHER CHANGES TO PROVIDER PAYMENT POLICIES]:

- i. If you were accepting subsidies before this change took place, how did the subsidy payment change?
- ii. Do you receive consistent payments monthly or do payments vary month to month?

- iii. Has there been a change in the number of children whose families receive subsidies that are enrolled in your center/family child care since this change took place? If so, how did it change? Did you increase the number of infants, toddlers, children with disabilities, or children living in under resourced areas?

[IF STRATEGY INCLUDES START-UP OR EXPANSION SUPPORTS]:

- i. What supports did you receive?
- ii. How did you use funds from [STRATEGY]?
- iii. How are/were funds disbursed? Was this a one-time award or do you receive ongoing payments? What has the way funds are/were disbursed, and the frequency meant for your child care center or family child care?
(Probe on whether funding process and frequency impact ability to operate day-to-day, meet any of the strategy requirements, start or expand your facility, achieve quality or licensing standards set by STRATEGY).
- iv. Did you receive technical assistance, training, or coaching in addition to funds? If so, what did you receive?
- v. Were any supports offered that you chose not to access? If so, why didn't you access them?
- vi. Are there other supports you think would have been useful? If so, what are they and why would they be useful?

[IF STRATEGY INCLUDES QUALITY OR LICENSING SUPPORTS]:

- i. What supports did you receive?
- ii. How did you use funds from [STRATEGY]?
- iii. How are/were funds disbursed? Was this a one-time award or do you receive ongoing payments? What has the way funds are/were disbursed, and the frequency meant for your child care center or family child care?
(Probe on whether funding process and frequency impact ability to operate day-to-day, meet any of the strategy requirements, start or expand your facility, achieve quality or licensing standards set by STRATEGY).
- iv. Did you receive technical assistance, training, or coaching in addition to funds? If so, what did you receive?
- v. Were any supports offered that you chose not to access? If so, why didn't you access them?
- vi. Are there other supports you think would have been useful? If so, what are they and why would they be useful?

[IF STRATEGY INCLUDES STABILIZATION GRANTS]:

- i. How did you use funds from [STRATEGY]?
- ii. How are/were funds disbursed? Was this a one-time award or do you receive ongoing payments? What has the way funds are/were disbursed, and the frequency meant for your child care center or family child care?
(Probe on whether funding process and frequency impact ability to operate day-

to-day, meet any of the strategy requirements, start or expand your facility, achieve quality or licensing standards set by STRATEGY).

(Ask question of one or two providers and probe on whether other focus group participants had similar or different experiences).

8. Have you had to submit reports or data about [STRATEGY] to [CCDF LEAD AGENCY] or any other organizations (such as an intermediary or a research organization)?
 - a. If so, what kind of information do you have to report? How frequently? How easy is it for you to prepare and submit this information? What issues, if any, have you experienced with this process?
9. Aside from this focus group, has [CCDF LEAD AGENCY] or any other organizations (such as an intermediary or a research organization) asked for your feedback about [STRATEGY]?
 - a. If so, how did they ask for your feedback (for example, in a survey, interview, focus group or listening session)?

Implementation Successes and Challenges

My last set of questions is about what has been going well and what challenges you have faced.

10. What has been most successful?
 - a. Has [STRATEGY] benefited your child care center or family child care? If so, how?
(Probe on whether the grant has helped provider increase slots overall and slots for priority populations (i.e., infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children living in under resourced areas) specifically, expand or improve facility/home, support staff with increased compensation or benefits or professional development, increased staff retention, improved quality of the environment, and so on).
 - i. [IF STRATEGY INCLUDES GRANT- OR CONTRACT-FUNDED SLOTS]: Has [STRATEGY] helped stabilize your child care center's/family child care's revenue stream?
 - b. Has it benefited the children you care for and their families? If so, how?
11. What challenges have you or the families you serve faced because of [STRATEGY]?
 - a. What were they?
(Probe on any challenges related to timing, application process, reporting requirements or other data collection, and so on).
 - b. How were you able to communicate them to [CCDF Lead Agency]? How have you seen things change with [STRATEGY] because of these challenges?
12. What improvements or changes to [STRATEGY] would you recommend, if any?
13. [If STRATEGY has ended or provider is no longer receiving STRATEGY]: Has the end of [STRATEGY] affected your child care center or family child care? If so, how?
 - a. [If STRATEGY included a grant or financial assistance] Have you had to make any changes to your child care center or family child care since funding ended? If so, what changes have you made? Why?
 - b. Has it affected children and families and their access to high quality child care and early education? If so, how?

14. What advice would you give another state agency or community organization interested in implementing [STRATEGY]? What advice would you give another child care provider interested in [applying for/participating in/accessing STRATEGY]? Would you recommend it? Why or why not?

Wrap Up

Thank you so much, everyone.

As a thank-you, we will send a Visa e-gift card to the email address you provided when you signed up to participate in this study. Please check your email inboxes and junk folders for a message with the e-gift card. You can use this gift card for any online purchases. You should receive it within the next two weeks. If you don't receive it or have any questions, please contact us at [email address]. I will put this email address in the Chat box for you.

Thank you again!