

RPG Participant Focus Groups

Discussion Guide

Date of focus group: _____

Notetaker: _____

Site: _____

Start time: _____

Number of participants: _____

End time: _____

Moderator: _____

I. Study introduction and consent

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. My name is _____, and my colleague is _____. We are from a company called Mathematica. We do not work for the [RPG project]. We are here to learn about your experiences with [RPG project] and some of the programs they work with.

[MODERATOR: Check with participants about how they refer to the RPG project that they are involved with so that you use the correct name throughout the discussion.]

[If in person: The notetaker should hand out consent forms as people arrive and take their seats. At this point, double check that everyone has a copy of the consent form.]

[If virtual: The evaluation team will send a copy of the consent form prior to the focus group.]

The information I am about to share is included in the written consent form that we gave to you. You can follow along on that form while I talk. Please feel free to ask questions about the information.

You are being asked to take part in a focus group for a research study. The study is being conducted by Mathematica, an independent research firm, on behalf of the Children's Bureau, which is part of the Administration for Children and Families within the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Children's Bureau funds the Regional Partnership Grant program (RPG). The services you are enrolled in are part of RPG. Mathematica is doing focus groups with people who have received services through RPG projects to learn about their program experiences and hear their thoughts and opinions about the project.

The focus group is part of a larger study that Mathematica is doing for the Children's Bureau. This study will provide information on how RPG projects are working and how they have affected the families and children they aim to help. The focus group discussion will happen one time and will take about 1.5 hours. We will also ask you to fill out a brief questionnaire to describe yourself. We will use the information discussed in the focus group to write a summary of what we have learned.

The information is being collected for research purposes only. We will group your responses with the responses of everyone else we speak with when we report out information from these conversations. We will not connect your name to anything you say. We will keep your identity and what you say here private to the extent permitted by law. That means we will not share what you say here with others unless you

report a concern about immediate harm to you or someone else. If there is such a safety concern, we may help connect you with appropriate supports, such as your service provider from the RPG project or another source for immediate support (for example, a crisis hotline). In these situations, we will only share the safety concern, and not your responses to the study questions.

We will record the focus group discussion to capture the information for our reports. Only the Mathematica study team will listen to the recordings. The recordings will be destroyed after the study ends in September 2027.

You can choose not to participate in the discussion and there will be no consequences if you choose not to participate. You can also choose not to answer a question and you may leave the focus group at any time. Your responses will not affect any services or benefits you or your family members receive through any programs.

You will receive a \$50 gift card as a thanks for talking with us today. You will receive the gift card even if you do not answer all of the questions, or if you have to leave early.

Finally, please note that 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 is 0970-0527 and the expiration date is: XX/XX/XXXX.

Do you have any questions about the information we just discussed?

I am going to turn the recorder on now. **[MODERATOR: Turn recorder on, state your name, the date, and the site number]**

OBTAINING CONSENT: Do you agree to take part in today's discussion?

- If yes for all: Great, let's get started.
- If no for anyone: Anyone who does not want to participate is free to leave. Thank you for your time.

II. Agreeing on the terms of the discussion

We value the information you share with us. To ensure our conversation goes smoothly, I am asking that we all make the following commitments to each other.

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. We are interested in learning everyone's thoughts and opinions, and to learn from your experiences. Just say exactly what you think, whether it's positive or negative. This will be an informal discussion.
- It's really important for everyone to speak up and to give everyone a chance to talk. We want all of you to share your thoughts and to build on what others are saying, but please let one person talk at a time so we can understand what each person is saying. We may remind you of this as we are talking. And if some of you are shy or we really want to know what you think about a particular question, we may ask you what you think.
- We have many topics to cover during the discussion. I might change the subject or move us ahead from time to time. If I interrupt you, it's not personal. I just want to get to be sure we hear your views on everything on our list.
- There will be no formal break during the discussion. Please get up or use the restroom if you need to.

- We ask that you keep this discussion private, and do not share what is said here with anyone outside this room. Use first names only to identify yourself or others. That said, we cannot control what people say or do outside of this group so do not share anything you don't want others to hear.

Do you have any questions or suggestions before we get started?

We are now going to turn on the recorder. If you want to say anything that you do not want recorded, please let me know, and I will pause the recorder.

III. Discussion guide

A. Introductions

First, let's start by going around the room to get to know each other. Introduce yourselves by stating:

- Your first name (no last names please)
- What you like to do if you have free time

I'll begin. My name is _____ and I like to _____.

B. Enrollment in RPG

[MODERATOR: The questions below may be tailored based on key program implementation information shared by sites during their initial planning meetings for the site visit.]

Let's talk about how and when you became involved with [RPG project], and what the enrollment process was like for each of you.

1. How did you first hear about [RPG project]? (*Probe: When did you hear about it? Who told you about it? How did they tell you?*)
2. Why did you enroll? (*Probe: Were you mandated or was it a choice? Did someone encourage you or did you find the program on your own? What made the program appealing to you?*)
3. Overall, what did you think about the enrollment process (*Probe: What about it was easy? What about it was hard? Did you think it was adequately explained to you?*)
4. Thinking back to when you first enrolled, what did you expect or hope to get out of [RPG project]? (*Probe: What were you told about the [RPG project] and its services?*)

C. Service participation and interaction with partners

Now, let's talk about your participation in services at [RPG project]. We understand that not all of you have necessarily participated in the same activities, or the same number of activities. But we'd like to hear about everyone's experiences.

1. Describe the services that you have received in the [RPG project]. (*Probe: Can one person get us started by talking about the services you have received?*)
 - a. What are the main types of activities that you have participated in? (*Examples: meet with your case manager, meet with a navigator or peer support, meet with a therapist, etc.*)
 - b. How regularly do you participate in these activities? (*Probe: Would you say you have attended daily, weekly, more or less often? How long have you been doing these activities?*)

- c. Does anyone receive different services in [RPG project] than what was just described?
2. Some people may also receive services from [Grantee Partner(s)/Other program(s)]. Have any of you received services from them?

[IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED ANY SERVICES FROM (GRANTEE PARTNER)]

- a. Describe the services.
- b. In what ways are the services you get from [Grantee Partner(s)/Other program(s)] different than what you get in [RPG project]? *(Probe: Do they help you with different things?)*
- c. How, if at all, do staff from [RPG project] coordinate with staff at [Grantee Partner] for your case? *(Probe: Do they communicate with each other about your case? Do they work together to coordinate your services? Do they seem separate or seamless?)*

[IF YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED SERVICES FROM (GRANTEE PARTNER)]

[MODERATOR: Remind participants that they do not need to specifically disclose where they receive services or why they receive those services]

- a. Describe any other services you get that you think are related to [RPG project].
- b. How are these different than what you get in [RPG project]?
- c. How, if at all, do staff from [RPG project] coordinate with staff at [Other Program] on behalf of you and/or your family? *(Probe: Do they communicate with each other about your case? Do they work together to coordinate your services? Do they seem separate or seamless?)*

D. Facilitators and challenges to participation

Now I want you to think about all of the services you receive from [Grantee] and [Grantee partner(s)/Other program(s)] as part of the [RPG project].

1. What, if anything, has made it difficult for you to participate in the services? *(Probe on the following: transportation, housing issues, child care, employment/education, types of services, timing of services, other)*
 - a. Have any RPG services been more difficult to participate in than others?
 - b. How, if at all, did staff help you overcome those difficulties?
 - c. What could have helped you overcome those difficulties?
2. When you think about other families who might participate in these services, what difficulties do you think they might face in participating?
3. What else could [RPG project] staff do to make it easier for you or other people to participate in the services?

E. Program services and participant outcomes

Let's keep thinking about the services you receive from the [RPG project] and [Grantee Partner(s)/Other Program(s)] (if applicable).

1. Earlier, I asked about what you hoped to get out of the services when you first enrolled. Thinking back on when you first joined the [RPG project] what specific goals did you set and to what extent have these services helped you achieve those goals? *(Probe: How did your interactions with staff match what you expected?)*
2. Specifically, have the services improved your outcomes for...

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- a. Your child welfare case?
 - b. Your substance use recovery or the substance use of a close family member?
 - c. Balancing your needs related to your child welfare case and substance use recovery?
 - d. Obtaining other services or resources you need? (*Probe: Finding work, financial stability, housing*)
3. What other supports or resources could the [RPG project] provide to help you improve your outcomes for:
 - a. Your child welfare case?
 - b. Your substance use recovery or the substance use of a close family member (if applicable)?
 - c. Balancing what you have to do for your child welfare case and your substance use recovery (if applicable).
 - d. Obtaining other services or resources that you need? (*Probe: Finding work, financial stability, housing*)
 4. What is one piece of advice you would give to other parents who are becoming involved with [RPG project] and [Grantee Partner(s)/Other Program(s)] to help them be successful in the [RPG project]?

F. Closing Questions

We covered a lot today and are done with the questions about your experiences with the [RPG project]. Does anyone have a final question or comment they'd like to share before we continue?

V. Wrap-up

That concludes our questions for today. Thank you again for sharing your experiences and taking time to answer our questions! Your insights will really help others learn from your experiences.

In appreciation for participating in this group, you will receive a \$50 gift card.

We would also like you to complete the questionnaire that we are handing out right now. **[If virtual: questionnaire will be sent at same time as consent form.]**

We have provided our contact information. Feel free to reach out by phone or email if you have any follow-up questions. Thanks again for your time today!

RPG Participant Study Focus Group Questionnaire

Site ID _____

Date _____

1. What is your sex? (SELECT ONE ONLY)

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. What is your age? (SELECT ONE ONLY)

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-35

☐ 36-45

☐ 46 or older

3. What is your race and/or ethnicity? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native

☐ Middle Eastern or North African

☐ Asian

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐ Black or African American

☐ Hispanic or Latino

☐ White

4. What is the primary language spoken in your home? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

☐ English

☐ Spanish

☐ Other (specify) _____

5. What is the highest education level you have completed? (SELECT ONE ONLY)

☐ Up to 8th grade

☐ Some vocational/technical education

☐ Associate's degree

☐ Some high school

☐ Vocational/technical diploma

☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ High school diploma/GED

☐ Some college

☐ Graduate-level schooling or degree

6. What is your employment status? (SELECT ONE ONLY)

☐ Full-time employment

☐ Self-employed

☐ Not employed and not looking for work, or unable to work

☐ Part-time employment

☐ Not employed but looking for work

7. What is your relationship status? (SELECT ONE ONLY)

☐ Never married

☐ Married

☐ Divorced/widowed/separated

8. How many children do you have (including biological, step, adoptive, and foster children)? _____

9. How many children younger than age 18 currently live in your home? _____

10. How would you describe your involvement with the child welfare system as a parent? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

☐ Currently involved with the child welfare system

☐ Previously involved with the child welfare system