

Focus Group Moderator Guide (to be used by focus group moderator)

Thank you for joining us today. I'm _____ and I'm from Banyan Communications, a public health communications consulting firm. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is sponsoring this project. The purpose of this discussion is to hear your views and opinions on important health topics concerning water safety. Your insights are very important to us, and your time today is appreciated. We will have about 60 minutes for our discussion.

Before we begin, I want to review a few ground rules for our discussion.

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- 1-2 notetakers from Banyan and observers from CDC will be present to hear your opinions directly and take notes so that your opinions are accurately captured.
- We will also record and transcribe today's session. The recording will help us to summarize today's discussion and will not be used for anything else.
- The session recording will be destroyed after the project is completed.
- Your identity and anything you personally say here will remain secure and no one will contact you after this interview is over.
- If at any time you are uncomfortable with my questions, you can choose not to answer.
- Be sure to only use first names during the discussion. Please do not use your last name. Also, if you bring up a friend or other person you know as an example in our discussions, please do not use their last name either.

Some Zoom considerations:

- Please mute your mic if you aren't speaking.
- Please do not speak over each other and wait until someone is finished before speaking. However, if mistakes happen, no worries.
- Let's use the "raise your hand" feature, especially if you can't get into the conversation. It's the button on the reactions panel. Let's give that a test.
- Please use the chat! If someone is speaking and you really need to get your idea out there, put it in the chat. We will get to it.
- If you can, please leave your camera on. It's helpful to see your faces!
- If you need to go to the restroom during the discussion, please do so. No need to inform us. Simply

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turn off your camera and mic before you get up.

- Please turn your cell phone to vibrate or silent mode.
- Please do not answer your phone during this group unless it is an emergency.
- We ask that you please not drive or operate a vehicle while you are in this group as it is dangerous.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

If I have your consent to participate and record this session, we can begin [wait for consent of each participant]

FGD facilitator note: focus groups will be divided into different demographics (see table 1 in Supporting statement B for the list of different demographics). Certain questions will only be used for specific demographics. That is noted throughout this document.

Today, we're going to talk about water safety. You all were selected to participate in this focus group because you visit freshwater bodies, like lakes and rivers, in the summer months [with your children/ with your dogs]. Let's go around and have everyone introduce themselves—tell us the name you'd like us to call you. It's wonderful to meet you—let's get started.

Section A: Knowledge and awareness

1. What comes to mind when you hear “water safety”?
 - Probe: advisories that warn about the risks of drowning? (strong currents, deep water, etc.)
 - Probe: information about the quality of the water?

Next I'm going to show you some images and ask you some questions about them.

*[present one of the images of water with HABs - **see Attachment 13** - and ask the two questions below]*

2. How would you describe this water? *[refers to image being presented]*
 - Probe: Safe? dangerous?
 - Probe: What would you call what's in this water?
3. What would you do if you were at a lake and saw this water? *[refers to image being presented]*
 - Probe: Would you swim or go in this water?
 - Probe: Would you take a watercraft, like a boat or kayak, out into this water?
 - *[Parents]* Probe: Would you let your kids/teens swim or go in this water?
 - *[Dog owners]* Probe: Would you let your dog swim or go in this water?
 - *[Dog owners]* Probe: Would you let your dog drink this water?
4. What comes to mind when you hear “harmful algal bloom”?
 - Probe: Have you heard this term before?
 - Probe: Maybe you've heard something online or on social media, on TV or on the news?
 - *[If no or low response, provide definition of HAB, including other names for HABs (e.g., blue-green algae, toxic algae)]*
5. What are some ways you know of to determine if water is safe for you [and your children/your dogs]?
 - Probe: Look for signage near the water?
 - Probe: Check for water advisories online or elsewhere? Probe: See what the water looks or smells like?

Section B: Water recreation behaviors

6. What kinds of water bodies do you typically visit in the summer months?
 - Probe: lakes? reservoirs? rivers? oceans? bays? ponds?
 - Probe: Why?
7. What do you do there (at the water)?
 - Probe: Swim? Fish? Boat? Kayak? Water ski?
 - Probe: BBQ? Lay on the beach? Other activities that don't involve getting in the water?
8. Do you ever check for water advisories before visiting a body of water?
 - Probe: Why/why not
 - Probe: If yes, how and where do you find water advisory information?
 - Probe: What makes it difficult? Easy?
 - Probe: What would make this easier for you?
9. How often do you follow water advisories?
 - Probe: When do you follow them?
 - Probe: Why/why not?
 - Probe: What makes it difficult? Easy?
 - Probe: What would make this easier for you?
 - Probe: Do you trust the information in water advisories?

Section C: Risk norms, perceptions and concerns

10. Who do you think is most likely to get sick from harmful algal blooms? *[Define "harmful algal bloom" if not defined during discussion of question 4]*
 - Probe: Do you think some people are more likely than others to get sick?
 - Probe: Certain age groups?
 - Probe: People who have other health issues?
11. How likely do you think it is that you [or your children or dog(s)] will get sick from a harmful algal bloom?
 - Probe: Why do you think that you [or your children or dog(s)] are likely/unlikely to get sick?
12. Have you or anyone you know ever gotten sick from going in or near a water body that had a harmful algal bloom?
 - Probe: If yes, did anything change after that? and why?
13. What might cause you to change your mind about going in or near a lake, river, or other body of water?
 - Probe: What behaviors would you change? Why?

Section D: Terminology

*I am going to present several terms for you to look at and then ask a question.
[present terms on slide]*

14. Which of these terms do you prefer? And why? *[present terms on screen and read aloud]*

- Cyanobacteria
- Blue-green algae
- Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)
- Other (specify)

15. Which of these terms do you prefer? And why? *[present terms on screen and read aloud]*

- Harmful algal blooms
- Harmful cyanobacteria and algae
- Harmful algae
- Toxic algae
- Other (specify)

Section E: Message Testing

*[Interviewer will rotate materials to every participant out of the materials noted in **Attachment 9 Messages and Materials for Testing** and ask the series of questions below for each of the materials. Repeat a sequence of questions until 4 materials have been reviewed. If time permits additional messages will be rotated randomly through the focus groups to ensure messages are seen by various participants.]*

16. In your own words, what is the main idea that this message set is trying to get across?

17. How effective do you think the message set is in getting that message across?

- Probe: What made it effective?
- Probe: What made it ineffective?
- Probe: How could it be improved?

18. How new was this idea for you? Have you ever heard anything like this before?

19. How easy was it for you to understand these recommendations?

- Probe: What, if anything, makes the recommendations difficult to understand?
- Probe: Are there easier ways we could present this information?

20. What is confusing, unclear, or hard to understand about this message?

- Probe [if needed]: Are there any words or phrases that bother you or that you think should be phrased differently? How might you rephrase the message?

21. How likely are you to follow the recommendations?

- Probe: Why? Why not?
- Probe: What might make you more likely to?
- Probe: What might make you less likely to?

22. How could this information be improved?

23. Who do you think this message is trying to reach?

- Probe [if they say themselves]: What in the message suggested it was talking to you?
- Probe [if they say anyone but themselves]: Why don't you think this was meant for you?
- Probe [if they say anyone but themselves]: Why do you think this was meant for that audience?

Section F: Concept testing

Now I would like you to look at a few [INSERT MATERIALS] that discuss information related to harmful algal blooms.

[Interviewer will display a concept (from **Attachment 9**) and give participants a few minutes to view and/or read the concept and then ask the questions below. Repeat until all predetermined concepts for each participant have been reviewed.]

24. How would you sum up in a few words your first impression of this [INSERT MATERIAL]?
 - Probe: What do you like? Dislike?
 - Probe: What makes you say that?
25. Is there any information that you feel is missing or that you'd like to see here?
26. Is there anything confusing, unclear, or hard to understand?
 - Probe: If yes, what?
 - Probe (if needed): Are there any words or phrases that bother you, or that you think should be said differently?
27. Would you follow the recommendations?
 - Probe: Why? Why not?
28. What do you think about the length?
 - Probe (for webpage): What do you think about how long you have to scroll?
 - Probe (if needed): Is it too long/short?
29. How do you feel about the color choices and graphics?
 - Probe: What do you like/dislike about them?
30. [For posters/infographics] Where would you expect to see this?
 - Where would you prefer to see this information?
31. Who do you think this information is written for?
 - Probe [if they say themselves]: What in the message suggested it was directed toward someone like you?
 - Probe [if they say anyone but themselves]: Why don't you think this was meant for you?
 - Probe [if they say anyone but themselves]: Why do you think this was meant for that audience?
32. Is there anything you want to know about this topic that this does not tell you?

Section G. Closing

33. Before we close, I would like to know what topics have we not covered about harmful algal blooms that you might want to learn more about?

Okay, that's all the time we have for today. Do you have any final thoughts?

Excuse me for one moment so I can check with our notetakers to ensure no additional questions need to be asked.

Thank you for your participation. We value your time and appreciate your feedback on how to improve information and messages about harmful algal bloom safety. Have a good day/evening.