Focus Group/Interview Guide for Program Participants

> **Note to reviewers:** This instrument includes a universe of questions relevant to a broad range of strategies that will be tested in the Strengthening the Implementation of Marriage and Relationship Education (SIMR) project. The instrument will be tailored and shortened for each individual site and the strategy that it is testing.

Instructions for moderators

You will be conducting a focus group or interview. You may need to skip some questions in order to focus on the questions that are most relevant to the participants. Tailor this protocol based on the strategy that is the focus of rapid-cycle learning.

Before you begin the interview, read the verbal consent script to describe the study to respondents, and ask each participant to respond to the two requests for consent: (1) for participating in the focus group/interview and (2) for permission to record the focus group/interview. Do not start recording until after the participants consent. Do not record the focus group/interview if you do not have the participants' consent to so. If this happens, be prepared for the notetaker to take detailed notes.

CONSENT SCRIPT

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. The Administration for Children and Families, or ACF, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is interested in learning about your experiences and satisfaction with [PROGRAM NAME]. My name is [NAME 1], and I work for a company called [Mathematica/Public Strategies]. [NAME 2] is from [Mathematica/Public Strategies], and will be taking notes during today's focus group. Mathematica is an organization that is committed to improving public well-being and promoting a more equitable and just world. Mathematica, with our partners at Public Strategies, is conducting this study for ACF.

Our discussion [in this focus group] will help ACF understand what is working well and what is not working well in [PROGRAM NAME]. We want to hear what you think about enrolling in [PROGRAM NAME], your experiences receiving services, and what, if anything, has helped you or made it hard for you to participate.

We will analyze the information from today's discussion along with information from other discussions, and we will work with [PROGRAM NAME] to help them improve.

There are no known risks to joining today's discussion. If you participate in the [focus group/interview], you will receive a $35 gift card. Participation in the [focus group/interview] is voluntary, and you may leave the focus group/interview at any time or refuse to answer any specific questions, and you will still receive the $35 gift card. There is no penalty or consequences for deciding not to participate.

We would also like your permission to record the conversation, so we can accurately capture what you have to say. If you do not agree to the recording, you can still participate, and we will not record it, but we have someone who will take notes. Only the team that is working on the study will have access to them. We will destroy the recording and the transcription at the end of the study.

Do you have any questions about the study?

You should have received a form today that has all the information I just mentioned about this [focus group/interview]. If you think of questions about the study after we are done today, you can call the number that's provided on the form. If you didn't get a form, just let [PROGRAM] know and they'll give you one.

Before we can begin, I need to confirm your participation by asking you two questions:

- Do you agree to participate in the study? *Yes/No*
- *If yes:* Do you agree to the audio recording? *Yes/No*

A. Ground Rules

Now I just need to go over a few ground rules.

For focus groups:

- A focus group is just a guided discussion. As the facilitator, I have a set of questions that I'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation.
- This discussion will last [up to 75] minutes from here; we will not take a formal break.
- Please speak one at a time, in a voice as loud as mine, [*if focus group conducted in person*: and avoid side conversations] [*if focus group conducted virtually*: and mute your phone if you're not speaking so we don't get background noise. We also hope you will use the video feature so we can see you]. This will help me follow the discussion and it will also help us with the recording and notes.
- We really want to hear from everyone today, but you don't have to answer every question.
- There may be times in the discussion where you feel differently from others and we want to hear about that. Even though you may feel differently than others in this [virtual] room, you represent others who aren't participating today who may have similar feelings.
- We want to hear the good and the bad – there are no right or wrong answers here, and we respect differences of opinion.
- I have a lot of questions to cover, so I may need to interrupt you to keep the conversation moving. Please don't take it personally; it's simply to ensure we cover all our questions today.
- This session is confidential. We ask that you respect each other's privacy once we end the focus group– in other words, what happens in the focus group stays in the focus group!

For interviews:

- This will be an informal discussion. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. You can choose not to answer any question I ask or end the discussion at any time.
- Our conversation today will last about an hour. I have a lot of questions to cover, so I might change the subject or move ahead from time to time.
- *If interview is conducted virtually*: We encourage you to find a quiet, private place to participate in this discussion so that no one will overhear you.

Does anyone/Do you have any questions about the ground rules or about this discussion? (*Facilitator addresses any final questions and turns on recorder if all consented.*)

Now, before we get to the questions, I am going to read a statement.

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 and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-0531, Expiration date: 07/31/2022. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Robert Wood; RWood@Mathematica-mpr.com.

B. Introductions

1. *For focus groups only:* To start, let's go around the [table/virtual room] and have everyone share:

    a. Your first name

    b. How long you've been participating in [PROGRAM]

C. Recruitment and Enrollment

1. First, let's talk about how you heard about [PROGRAM NAME]. How did you come to learn about [PROGRAM NAME]?

    a. Do you think that's a good way for people to learn about [PROGRAM NAME]? Why/Why not?

2. What made you decide to enroll? What was it about what you heard that made you want to enroll?

    a. What did the recruiter tell you about the program?

    b. Did you have any hesitations or any concerns about enrolling? *If yes*: What concerns did you have? Is there anything that you know now about [PROGRAM NAME] that you wish you had known then that would've helped you feel better about enrolling?

3. Talk to me about how you enrolled in [PROGRAM NAME]. What was that process like?

    a. *If not already mentioned*: Did you need a computer/internet to enroll? Did you have any issues with using technology to enroll?

    b. Overall, would you say the enrollment process was easy or difficult? Why was it [easy/difficult]?

    c. Is there anything that would have made the enrollment process better/easier?

4. What difficulties, if any, did you have when trying to enroll? How did [PROGRAM NAME] help with those difficulties?

D. Program satisfaction

1. Now let's talk about your participation in [PROGRAM NAME]. What kinds of services/activities have you received/participated in?

    a. What did you think about that [workshop/class/ACTIVITY]? What did you like best about it? What did you like least?

        i. Was there any particular information that you got from the [workshop/class/ACTIVITY] that really spoke to you? If so, which one(s)? Why?

        ii. For those of you who have attended more than one [workshop/class/ACTIVITY], which one was your favorite, and why? What was your least favorite?

2. How was the material presented/How did you participate?

    a. *If online/virtual*: How did you feel about it being virtual?

    b. *If online/virtual:* What was your experience with the technology? On a scale of one to five, with five being very easy and one being very hard, how easy or difficult was the technology to access?

    c. What was your experience with the virtual content? How engaging was it? How did the virtual format influence whether or not you participated?

    d. How many of you have attended workshops in more than one format, for example, virtual and in-person? Which format did you like better? Why?

3. How easy was it to understand the material? Why do you feel that way?

4. *If in person*: How did you feel about the workshop environment? To what extent did the space or the atmosphere feel welcoming? What contributed to that feeling?

5. Thinking about the [workshops/classes/ACTIVITY] overall how would you rate your satisfaction with them on a scale of one to five, where five is very satisfied and one is very dissatisfied? Why?

6. Overall, what parts of the program made you want to continue coming to the workshop/activity? Were there any parts of the program that made you consider dropping out?

E. Program participation

1. For those that attended in-person workshops, did [PROGRAM NAME] provide childcare or another participation support, such as transportation, a meal, or an incentive? How did that affect your decision to attend/participate?

2. Did you receive any reminders from [PROGRAM NAME] to attend a [workshop/class/ACTIVITY]? How did you receive those reminders? Were they helpful? *If no*: How would you have preferred to receive the reminders?

3. Have you missed any [workshops/classes/ACTIVITY] that [PROGRAM NAME] offered and that you were expected to attend, but you did not attend/participate?

    a. *If yes*: Why did you not participate/attend?

    a. Is there anything [PROGRAM NAME] could have done to help you participate/attend?

4. Did you attend any makeup sessions?

    a. *If yes*: Who encouraged you to attend the make-up session or made sure you could receive the make-up content?

    b. What was the format of the makeup session? *Probe if needed*: For example, was it drop-in workshop, individual meeting with a program staff member, self-directed, in-person, or virtual?

    c. Who provided the makeup session?

    d. How do you think it compared to the main workshop? *Probe if needed*: knowledge gained, attention from program staff, opportunity to participate in engaging activities.

5. What else, if anything, has the program done to make it easy for you to participate? (e.g. flexible scheduling, removing participation barriers) What, if anything, has made it more challenging for you to participate?

F. Case management

Now let's talk about your individual meetings with your [case manager]. *Facilitator note*: *insert the appropriate title for the staff member responsible for case management in the focal program.*

1. How often do you meet with your [case manager]?

   a. Do you think that's too little, too much, or just about right? Why?

2. What is the typical way that you meet with your [case manager]—in person or virtually? By virtually we mean by video, phone, text, web, and so on – in other words, not in-person? Have you had both types of meetings? *Facilitator note: for focus groups, ask for a show of hands for each meeting mode.*

3. What do you normally discuss with your [case manager]?

4. What, if anything, has your [case manager] done to encourage you to participate in [program]?

5. Overall, how helpful have you found meetings with your [case manager]? What would make the meetings more helpful?

6. Is there anything else you would change about those meetings?

7. *For interviews (if respondent indicates both in-person and virtual meetings):* Earlier, you said that you met with your [case manager] both in person and virtually.

   a. Do you think the virtual meetings are worse, better, or the same as in-person? Why?

   b. How do you prefer to meet with your [case manager]? Why?

8. *For focus groups:* For those of you who said you met with your [case manager] both in person and virtually, I'd like to ask you to compare them.

   a. Do you think the virtual meetings are worse, better, or the same as in-person? Why?

   b. How do you prefer to meet with your [case manager]? Why?

G. Staff and peer relationships

1. *For interviews only:* Now, let's talk about your relationships with program staff. What program staff other than your [case manager] have you interacted with?

2. *Facilitator note: For interviews only, repeat for each role listed in question G.1.* How would you describe your relationship with [INSERT ROLE]?

   a. How often do you meet with this person one-on-one? In a group? For what reason?

   b. Do you feel like this person has made an effort to develop a personal connection with you? Why or why not?

   c. What, if anything, did this person do to make you want to participate in [program]?

3. *For focus groups only:* What opportunities have you had to build relationships with program staff other than your [case manager]?

   a. Could you give an example of something they did to build that relationship?

b. To what extent, if any, have your relationships with other staff played a part in your participation in [PROGRAM NAME]?

4. *For interviews and focus groups:* What opportunities have you had to build relationships with other participants?

   a. What, if anything, did [PROGRAM NAME] do to encourage those relationships?

   b. To what extent, if any, have these relationships with other participants played a part in your participation in [PROGRAM NAME]?

   c. What have you liked most about being able to build connections and relationships with other participants? Why? Is there anything that you have not liked?

   d. Do you think you will maintain your connection with other participants once the program is over? Why or why not?

5. *For interviews and focus groups:* To what extent have the relationships between other participants and with program staff made you feel comfortable, welcomed, or safe in [PROGRAM]? How long did it take you to become comfortable?

H. Overall Reflections and Wrap Up

1. Overall, thinking about why you enrolled in the first place, do you think you got what you have wanted out of the program? Why or why not?

2. During the time you participated in [PROGRAM], did you have any concerns or issues about the services you received? If so, did you raise them with anyone, and was something done about them?

   a. Were you satisfied with how your concerns were addressed?

3. We are almost done, but I just have a few more questions to make sure we didn't miss anything.

   a. Is there anything else about [PROGRAM NAME] that you really like that we haven't talked about today?

   b. Is there anything else about [PROGRAM NAME] that you wish you could change that we haven't talked about today?

Thank you for sharing your opinions and experiences with me today. This has been very helpful. Please contact me directly if there is anything you would like to discuss or if you have any concerns.