

THIS INFORMATION FOR OVERVIEW ONLY AND NOT PART OF PROTOCOL

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Focus Groups

- NORC will conduct up to 36 focus groups with 10-12 participants per group.
 - o Up to 12 focus groups per MSA
 - 8 Staff /Faculty
 - 4 Alumni/Parents (USNA and USAFA only)
 - o 90 minutes
- Conducted in 2026, specific timing TBD with MSAs

Guiding Questions

- a. How do internal and external influencers serve as facilitators and/or barriers within the MSA social ecology to implementing CTTF activities?
- b. How can internal and external influencers be leveraged to support the goals of the CTTF activities?

Faculty/Staff Interview Guide Outline

- I. Perceived command climate changes related to harmful behaviors
 - a. Perceived reasons for changes or no changes
- II. Perceived changes for faculty/staff related to harmful behaviors
 - a. Perceived effective programs
- III. Opportunities
- IV. Perception of issues that undermine the CTTF actions
 - a. Challenges for faculty/staff
 - b. Challenges for cadet/midshipmen
- V. Changemakers at MSAs related to harmful behaviors
 - a. Types of changemakers
 - b. Role of faculty/staff as changemakers
- VI. Closing question

Alumni/Parent Interview Guide Outline

- I. Perceived command climate changes related to harmful behaviors

- a. Perceived reasons for changes or no changes
 - b. Perception of resources available for command climate change
- II. Facilitators
 - a. Perception of what is working well
 - b. Opportunities
- III. Perception of issues that undermine the CTTF actions
 - a. Policy and program challenges
 - b. Challenges engaging alumni and parents as supporters of command climate change
- IV. Changemakers at MSAs related to harmful behaviors
 - a. Types of changemakers
- V. Closing question

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PROTOCOL STARTS HERE

Focus Group Introduction

NORC will conduct up to 12 focus groups with faculty, staff, alumni, and parents of the military service academies. All focus groups will be conducted in English. We will conduct 90-minute in-person (faculty/staff) or online (parents/alumni) focus groups using Teams technology. We will recruit up to 12 participants to seat at least nine in each focus group.

INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. My name is [INTERVIEWER NAME], and I work for NORC at the University of Chicago, an objective nonprofit research organization that provides rigorous and reliable evaluation. Two of my colleagues, [NOTE TAKER 1] and [NOTE TAKER 2], are joining me to take notes on the discussion today.

In 2023, USMA, USNA, and USAFA were directed to develop Plans of Action and Milestones (or POAMs) related to the prevention of sexual assault and other harmful behaviors. Other harmful behaviors may include, but are not limited to, retaliation (peer-to-peer), suicide, domestic abuse, and racial harassment. Each POAM outlines action steps to respond to the immediate, intermediate, and long-term recommendations identified in the 2023 MSA On-site Installation Evaluation (OSIE) report. As a result of the OSIE, a central MSA Command Climate Transformation Task Force (CTTF) was established, and each MSA established an MSA-specific CTTF. The 2025 memo “Actions to Address and Prevent Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military” directs OFR OCCWI to evaluate the CTTF activities across the three MSAs.

As part of the CTTF, the DoD has contracted with NORC to support a cross-site evaluation of the MSAs to assess whether the implementation of the CTTF POAMs are achieving the stated goal of mitigating risk factors and increasing protective factors of harmful behaviors for all cadets and midshipmen that allow MSAs to develop leaders of characters that are mission ready. NORC is holding discussions with groups of people who directly or indirectly engage with the MSA environment, such as faculty and staff, parents and alumni, to understand how changes within the MSAs are occurring to inform future activities to continually improve the command climates at the MSAs.

SET UP

Before we get started, I would like to review some information about this focus group. Today's discussion is scheduled to run for 90 minutes. We appreciate your time and will keep this conversation within the allotted time. I'd like to share three points to set us up for success today:

First, to set the stage, we will be discussing the efforts to minimize harmful behaviors and promote protective factors at [MSA name]. We understand these may be sensitive topics and appreciate open and honest conversation. Your participation is voluntary for all points of discussion.

Second, everything shared during this focus group will be confidential, meaning your name and any other personally identifiable information you share today will not be associated with your comments or shared with anyone outside the NORC team. No names or other identifying information will be used in any reports. We ask that you help us with this by keeping the information disclosed today private and confidential.

Third, we also ask that each person let each other finish speaking before starting to talk so that everyone's thoughts can be heard.

If you have questions later, you may contact the project director, Dr. Elizabeth Mumford, at Mumford-Elizabeth@norc.org. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this project, please call the NORC Institutional Review Board Administrator at 866-309-0542.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Faculty & Staff

INTERVIEWER: OK! Let's start with each of your names, title at [INSERT MSA NAME], and how long you have worked at [INSERT MSA NAME].

INTERVIEWER: Now, I want to talk about changes you observed at [INSERT MSA NAME] around the prevention of harmful behaviors, which may include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment and sexual assault, (peer-to-peer) retaliation, suicide, domestic abuse, and racial harassment.

Organizational Environment

1. **How would you describe any changes to the climate or shifts over the years at [INSERT MSA NAME] regarding harmful behaviors?** We define climate as [INSERT MSA NAME]'s values, shared beliefs, and behaviors.
2. **[If changes are described] What makes these changes to the climate or shifts feasible at [INSERT MSA NAME]?**
 - a. *PROMPT:* Changes in climate can happen at multiple levels of an organization. Which levels of leadership have supported these changes?
 - i. *Could you provide an example of what they did to support change?*
 - b. *PROMPT:* How have faculty and staff supported these changes?
 - c. *PROMPT:* How have any student groups, such as clubs, sports teams, or programs supported these changes?
 - d. *PROMPT:* How did you adapt to the changes in climate at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

[If no changes described] You are not seeing any relevant shifts at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

 - a. *PROBE: What do you think may be limiting the progress or processes for change here at [INSERT MSA NAME]?*
 - b. *PROMPT:* Are there any unspoken expectations, language, or patterns of behavior that could limit the process of change? These may occur regularly or only on certain occasions.
 - c. *PROMPT:* What do you see as the role of academic leadership or faculty/staff in making change happen?

Changes for Faculty and Staff

INTERVIEWER: Now, let's think about [faculty/staff] at [INSERT MSA NAME].

3. **How have the roles or activities for [faculty/staff] to (a) prevent harmful behaviors and/or (b) develop [cadets/midshipmen] as leaders of character changed over the years?**
 - a. *PROBE:* To what extent do you think these changes are moving the command climate in the intended direction?

4. What type of prevention activities or programs, if any, do you think are effective?

- a. *PROBE*: Please describe any of your experiences or observations (e.g., USMA Intervention training, Deep Dives events, ACT Program)?
- a. *PROBE*: What specific information or skills did you learn from the prevention activities or program?
- b. *PROBE*: How did you apply this new information or skills?
 - i. Could you please give an example?
- c. *PROMPT*: What resources, if any, are available to help you, as faculty and staff, assist the cadets/midshipmen?
- d. *PROMPT*: What resources are available to assist [cadets/midshipmen]?

Opportunities

5. What aspects of the MSA do you think could be leveraged to reduce [cadets/midshipmen] involvement in or experience of harmful behaviors? As a reminder, harmful behaviors may include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment and sexual assault, (peer-to-peer) retaliation, suicide, domestic abuse, and racial harassment.

- a. *PROMPT*: Are there opportunities within prevention activities? By “prevention activities,” we mean the programs, practices, and/or policies that seek to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors related to minimizing harmful behaviors.
- b. *PROMPT*: Are there opportunities within support services or resources?
- c. *PROMPT*: Are there opportunities within reporting mechanisms?

Challenges to Implementing CTTF Activities

INTERVIEWER: [INSERT MSA NAME] has been working on implementing activities to create an environment free from harmful behaviors such as **[INSERT SPECIFIC EXAMPLES FROM [INSERT MSA NAME] 2025 PROGRESS REPORTS]**.

6. What challenges, directly or indirectly, impact your ability as [Faculty/Staff] to create an environment free of harmful behaviors?

- a. *PROMPT*: Can you walk me through a time when you felt unable or challenged in your ability to limit harmful behaviors?
 - i. *PROMPT*: Are there traditions or behaviors among leadership, faculty, staff, and cadets/midshipmen that could affect how you prevent harmful behaviors?
 - i. *PROMPT*: What might limit your abilities (e.g., time, resources, training, above or below your pay grade, outside defined role)?
- b. *PROBE*: Have these experiences impacted your work as faculty or staff?

7. [Cadets/Midshipmen] are expected to act as leaders of character who prevent and protect their peers from harmful behaviors. What challenges – other than challenges to the important goal of intervening – do you believe [cadets/midshipmen] face in upholding an environment that supports this?

- a. *PROMPT:* To what extent are sufficient resources to support cadets/midshipmen in carrying out this expectation?
- b. *PROMPT:* What community-level factors may exist as challenges?
- c. *PROMPT:* What individual challenges might [cadet/midshipmen] face?

MSA Influencer

INTERVIEWER: I want to gauge your impressions of who may be key influencers of [cadets/midshipmen] well-being at [INSERT MSA name]. We define influencers as individuals within [INSERT MSA NAME] who affect or change how other people behave. Take some time to think about two or three people or groups at [INSERT MSA name] that make change happen.

8. What do you think makes these individuals influential at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

- a. *PROMPT:* What are some characteristics, such as personality, role, office, or reputation, which make them influential?
- b. *PROMPT:* Are there any groups such as sports teams, clubs, or companies/squadrons that are viewed as influential?

9. What actions or approaches have these influential people or groups taken to address harmful behaviors or set a command climate that promotes an environment free of harmful behaviors at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

10. In your opinion, how are you (as faculty or staff) viewed at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

- a. *PROMPT:* What role or impact have faculty or staff had in creating an environment free of harmful behaviors at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

Supporting CTTF

INTERVIEWER: We have one more question and now want to look forward to the future.

11. What do you think needs to continue, or change, to enhance and maintain an environment free of harmful behaviors at [INSERT MSA NAME] that supports [cadets'/midshipmen's] development as leaders of character, in other words, leaders with a strong warrior ethos?

- a. *PROMPT:* How do you hope to keep [INSERT MSA NAME] accountable for maintaining such an environment?

Closing

INTERVIEWER: Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this discussion with NORC. We appreciate you sharing your thoughts with us, and your input will help inform the MSAs on how to continue to improve the command climate at MSAs to support its work to develop leaders of character.

Before we end, do you have any additional thoughts about the questions you've seen or the content we've discussed?

[PAUSE TO ANSWER]

Do you have any questions for me?

[IF YES – ANSWER QUESTIONS AS APPROPRIATE]

[IF NO – READ THE FINAL PROMPT AND END THE INTERVIEW]

INTERVIEWER: Great, thank you for your time today. Have a great day!

[END FOCUS GROUP]

Parents & Alumni

INTERVIEWER: First, if each of you would share:

- Your name
- Class year and which MSA, if you are a graduate of a military academy AND/OR year of your child

INTERVIEWER: I would now like to shift to talk about [INSERT MSA NAME]'s command climate. DoD defines “climate” as the collection of shared attitudes and perceptions of people within an organization or unit. Within the military, it often reflects leadership efforts to build cohesion or trust among personnel. We want to ask a few questions about your understanding of the prevention of harmful behaviors, which may include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment and sexual assault, retaliation (peer-to-peer), suicide, domestic abuse, and racial harassment.

Organization Expectations and Changes

1. How would you describe changes, if any, in climate as they relate to harmful behaviors at your [INSERT MSA NAME]? By climate, I mean [INSERT MSA NAME]'s values, shared beliefs, and behaviors.

- a. If changes described:
 - i. *PROBE:* What do you perceive as the most significant changes at [INSERT MSA NAME] related to the prevention of harmful behaviors in the last year?
 - ii. To what extent do you think these changes in climate help [INSERT MSA NAME] create an environment wherein cadets and midshipmen are developing as leaders of character? In this context, we are focusing on leaders who can prevent and protect their peers from harmful behaviors.
 1. *PROMPT:* What traditions do these changes address?
 - iii. *[Alumni] PROMPT:* Why do you think these changes were able to occur?
- b. *[Alumni, if no changes described]* You are not seeing any relevant shifts at [INSERT MSA NAME]?
 - i. *PROBE:* What do you think may be limiting the progress or processes for change here at [INSERT MSA NAME]?
 - ii. *PROMPT:* What, if any, long-standing traditions or norms do you believe contribute to a climate of harmful behaviors at [INSERT MSA NAME]?

2. How well do you think the resources available at [INSERT MSA NAME] support a command climate that is free of harmful behaviors?

Facilitators/Opportunities

INTERVIEWER: [INSERT MSA NAME] has been working on implementing activities to create an environment free of harmful behaviors, such as **[INSERT SPECIFIC EXAMPLES FROM [INSERT MSA NAME] 2025 PROGRESS REPORTS]**.

3. **What is your impression of how [Insert MSA NAME] implements policies or programs that support an environment free of harmful behaviors that support the development of leaders of character?**
- a. *PROMPT:* Are there opportunities within prevention activities? By “prevention activities,” we mean as programs, practices, and policies that seek to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors related to harmful behaviors.
 - b. *PROMPT:* Are there opportunities within support services or resources?
 - c. *PROMPT:* Are there opportunities within reporting mechanisms?
4. **[ALUMNI], based on your sense of alumni interaction with [cadets/midshipmen], please share what you think might be opportunities for the broader alumni community to support an environment that is free of harmful behaviors for [cadets/midshipmen] to develop as leaders of character.**

[PARENTS], please share what you think might be opportunities for parents to support an environment free of harmful behaviors for [cadets/midshipmen] to develop as leaders of character.

- a. *PROMPT:* How can [alumni/parents] be engaged in command climate-related efforts to support an environment free of harmful behaviors for [cadet/midshipman] at [INSERT MSA NAME]?
 - i. *PROMPT:* What could limit their engagement?
 - ii. *PROMPT:* What could be done to support their engagement?
- b. *PROBE:* What do you think would need to happen to turn these opportunities into actions?

Challenges

5. **Still thinking about the end goal of supporting [cadets/midshipmen] to fully realize their potential as leaders of character, what challenges do you think [INSERT MSA NAME] may face in implementing policies or protocols to create an environment free of harmful behaviors?**

MSA Influencers

INTERVIEWER: I want to gauge your perspectives regarding the influencers at [INSERT MSA NAME]. We define influencers as individuals or groups within [INSERT MSA NAME] who affect or change how other people behave. Please think about two or three people or groups that you think make change happen.

6. **What makes these individuals or groups influential at [INSERT MSA NAME]?**
- a. *PROMPT:* What are some characteristics? Such as personality, role, office, or reputation, which make them influential.
 - b. *PROMPT:* Are there any groups such as athletic teams, clubs, or companies/squadrons that are viewed as influential?

Supporting CTF

INTERVIEWER: We have one more question. Looking towards the future:

7. What do you think [INSERT MSA NAME] should keep doing, or change, to achieve and sustain an environment free of harmful behaviors while supporting [cadets'/midshipmen's] development as leaders of characters with a strong warrior ethos?

- a. *PROMPT:* Can you describe any policies or programs that help sustain an environment free of harmful behaviors?
- b. *PROMPT:* How would you hope to keep [INSERT MSA NAME] accountable for creating such an environment?

Closing

INTERVIEWER: Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this discussion with NORC. We appreciate you sharing your thoughts with us, and your input will inform the MSAs on how to continue improving the climate at MSAs to support its work in developing leaders of character.

Before we end, do you have any additional thoughts about the questions you've seen or the content we've discussed?

[PAUSE TO ANSWER]

Do you have any questions for me?

[IF YES – ANSWER QUESTIONS AS APPROPRIATE]

[IF NO – READ THE FINAL PROMPT AND END THE INTERVIEW]

INTERVIEWER: Great, thank you for your time today. Have a great day!

[END FOCUS GROUP]

Resources for Harmful Behaviors at the MSA

Get immediate help in a crisis:

- For mental health-related crisis, call 988.
- For emergencies, call 911.
- [Disaster Distress Helpline](#): call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) (Formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline): call 988 or use [Lifeline Chat](#)
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): call 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522
- [National Child Abuse Hotline](#): call 1-800-4AChild (1-800-422-4453) or text 1-800-422-4453.
- [The Eldercare Locator](#): call 1-800-677-1116 or use [TTY Instructions](#)
- [Veteran's Crisis Line](#): Call 988 then press 1, use [Chat Online](#), or text: 838255.
- DoD Safe Helpline: 877-995-5247

Find a health care provider or treatment for substance use disorder and mental health:

- [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#): call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or TTY 1-800-487-4889
- [Treatment Services Locator Website](#)

To be added MSA-Specific Resources