

Memo

Submitted To: LaShawn Clark, U.S. Department of State

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Re: LBC Focus Group Key Findings

A focus group was conducted in Tucson, AZ on October 27 to identify issues with the Land Border Crossing questionnaire. Key findings from the focus group are presented below.

About how many times have you crossed the border by land back into the United States within the past 12 months?

A number of problems were uncovered with this item.

- At least one participant included air travel as well as land travel to Canada and Mexico in responding.
- Participants thought of the question in terms of number of trips rather than times they crossed back into the U.S.
- Participants reported some difficulty remembering trips. Most talked about the average or approximate number of trips they take to Mexico each year and used that number to answer.

Recommendation:

Emphasis should be added to land crossing in the items or an introductory statement to clarify that we are only interested in land crossings for the next item.

How often did you cross the border by land back into the United States in the past 12 months?

Participants had difficulty translating actual trips into frequency of trips. In the entry survey they filled out just prior to the focus group, participants gave the following range of responses:

Actual crossings	Frequency of crossings
2	Few times a year
2	Once a year
6	Few times a year
4	2-3 times per month
1	Every few years
0	Every few years

This feedback, while not quantitative, shows the difficulty in assigning a frequency to the number of trips they take.

Recommendation:

At a minimum, we need to add a category to this question that says “do not regularly cross border by land”, or perhaps to add a question before this item to ask whether they travel regularly, or on an ad hoc basis. Only if they are a regular traveler, should they answer the frequency question.

In the next 12 months how often do you expect to be crossing the border by land into the U.S. from Canada or Mexico?

All participants reported vague plans for an upcoming trip. Many cited usual behavior as the basis for their answer (e.g, I usually go once every couple of years, so I answered once.)

Some felt it would be easier to answer about the past 2 years rather than the past 12 months because it would capture more experiences.

Recommendation:

It may be easier to ask participants for an actual number, rather than frequency for anticipated trips in the next 12 months. (Currently the question asks how often, rather than how many). Perhaps even making response categories, such as once, twice, three times, 4-6 times, 7-9 times, 10 or more times might be a better fit, since respondents cannot accurately project their behavior. If they plan to travel more than 3 times, then we could ask the “how often” question, but not if they only plan to go 1-3 times.

WHTI Awareness:

There were mixed opinions about what is required to cross by land back into the US. A few thought a passport was needed. Others said a driver’s license. Several commented that no identification is necessary but that travelers just need to answer questions about citizenship.

Most participants knew that a passport will be required to cross the border at some point in the future, but no participants knew when this would occur. They did not think the changes would affect their travel plans.

Recommendation:

Awareness of WHTI is very low. More should be done to educate the public about the change in requirements.

Passport Applications:

Many of the group members have a recently issued passport, thus having no need to apply for a new passport in the next several years. All seemed to know that passports are good for 10 years.

One participant was planning to apply for a passport for herself and her family. She is a regular traveler to Mexico and picked up the paperwork to obtain passports for herself and her children. Interestingly, she did not know when she would actually complete the applications. This is concerning because she has already started the application process but could not give a month of submittal.

Passport Card:

Awareness of the passport card was extremely low. Only two participants were aware of the card. Neither of these participants knew much about how or where it could be used. When the moderator described the card, participants were able to identify four clear advantages of the card over the book:

- Size- it is smaller and could be kept in a pocket or wallet
- Security- it is more secure than a book (perception that picture in book could be easily changed)

- Durability- it will hold up better than a book since it is not made of paper.
- Price – participants seemed to understand that it would be less expensive to apply for the card rather than the book. However, they did not know the price difference between the two options.

While participants found these features of the card interesting, when they learned of the land crossing only limitation, they questioned if the card was worth buying since the book could be used for all crossings and they would probably still need to purchase a book since they planned non-land crossings as well as land crossings.

They also wondered how long the card would be valid for and whether it would have their Social Security number printed on it, which would cause great concern.