

FOCUS GROUP GUIDELINES – PUBLIC

TOTAL TIMING AVAILABLE: 90 MINUTES

CURRENT TIMING: 100 MINUTES

I. STANDARD INTRODUCTIONS (10 minutes)

- A. Standard Moderator Introduction and Ground Rules.
- B. Self-Introductions (first name, family, hobbies)

II. GENERAL ATTITUDES ON COMMUNICATIONS (20 minutes)

- A. Let's talk a little about information and where you get your information. Where do you typically go for general information – whether it be current events, answers to questions you may have about a service, or something else?
 - 1. What kind of information do you usually use a website for?
 - a) Can you name a website or company you feel has a really strong website?
 - (1) What makes you think this?
 - 2. Do you ever use social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) to get information on current events? (Probe for each – what information do you get from there?)
 - a) What about social media sites of government agencies—do you use those for information?
 - b) Do you tend to trust a company's website more or less than their social media site? (Probe: what about for Government?)
 - c) What type of people or companies do you "like" on Facebook? Why?
 - (1) Do you like any government agencies? Which ones? If don't like any, why not?
 - d) What type of people or companies do you "follow" on Twitter? Why?
 - (1) Do you follow any government agencies? Which ones? If don't follow any, why not?
 - e) Can you name a company you feel has a really strong social media presence?
 - (1) What makes you think this?

B. **Write:** Now thinking specifically about government agencies. When you have a problem or a question about a service from a government agency, where do you turn for answers? Please write down what comes to mind.

1. Discuss.
2. What kind of correspondence do you normally get from government agencies?
 - a) Does the platform of these communications make a difference (i.e. do you expect different information in the mail or on television than you would on social media or online?)
 - b) How would you describe an effective communication from a government agency – what does something have to do to be “effective” in your view?

III. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (20 minutes)

A. **Write.** Write down what comes to mind when you think about Social Security.

1. Discuss.
2. Where do you typically get your information about Social Security? Where do you tend to hear about it?
3. Do you have any concerns about Social Security?
 - a) Where do you hear about concerns or problems around Social Security?
 - (1) Where would you go for more information to get answers about your concerns?
 - b) **(Probe if not mentioned:** If solvency/concerns with trust fund not being around) Do you have any concerns about the trust fund or the solvency of Social Security in the future?
 - (1) If I said that there are currently two trust funds and a proposal by the President has been made so that both funds are solvent through 2034 giving Congress enough time to fix the problems without jeopardizing Americans’ retirement security. What do you think about this? Does this address your concerns? What would you like to hear to address your concern?

- B. How many of you have heard of the Social Security Administration?
1. What have you heard about them?
 - a) Do you have a positive or negative view of them based on what you know? (Probe on both)
 - b) Where do you get your information on the agency?
 - (1) Have you heard anything directly from the agency? What have you heard from them?
 - c) Who do you hear talking about the agency?
 - d) If you wanted more information about the Social Security Administration, where would you go to get more information?
 - (1) If you were looking for accurate information on programs and benefits offered by the Social Security Administration, how confident are you in your ability to find that information?
 2. What services do you think they provide? (Probe: retirement, disability, survivors benefits)
 3. Has anyone ever used any of the agency's services? What has your experience been like?
 - a) Do you have any friends or family members who have used the agency's services? If so, what have they said?
 4. Have you ever contacted the agency – either the headquarters or a field office?
 - a) If yes: What was the reason you reached out to them?
 - (1) What was the experience like? Anything you would change?
 - b) If no: What do you think you would contact them about?

IV. EXPLORING COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES (20 minutes)

- A. Now we are going to take a look at some examples of correspondence the Social Security Administration has used in the past with members of the public. We are going to look at some press releases, websites, videos and posters. After each one, please rate each on a scale from 0-10 on how effective you find that piece and then rate on a scale from 0-10 how helpful you find the piece. Write down some words and phrases that come to mind to describe the example.

1. Before we begin, has anyone been to the Social Security Administration website? What was that experience like? What made you go there?
 - a) Does anyone follow them on social media? What made you follow them?

2. Have you heard, seen, or read anything about a “Someday” campaign?
 - a) (if needed): It was put out by the Social Security Administration encouraging people to sign up for an online account with the Agency.
 - b) If yes, probe where they have heard, seen, or read.
 - (1) What do you remember about the campaign?
 - c) We’re going to watch a YouTube video the Social Security Administration released as part of the “Someday” campaign. As you watch, please rate how effective you find the video clip to be.
 - (1) Someday Campaign PSA [**PICK ONE OR TWO**]:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LmmEy024TY> (60 sec)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eipe5MNxat8> (30 sec)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkWROz3omqg> (15 sec)
 - (a) Before we discuss your ratings, does anyone remember seeing something about this?
 - (b) Discuss ratings.
 - (c) What did you like about the video clip? What did you dislike?
 - (d) If this video came up while you were on YouTube, how likely would you be to follow thru and continue onto the SSA website?
 - (e) Has anyone signed up for the My Social Security account? What was that experience like? What made you set one up?
 - (i) Do you find this useful in keeping you informed about your benefits?
 - (ii) If haven’t set one up: Is there a reason why you haven’t set one up? Did you know you could?

3. **Handout.** In this handout, there are two examples of a poster that you could share on social media, like Facebook. Take a minute to read each over.

Write. How do you feel about poster/image A/B? Would you share poster/image A/B on social media with your family and friends? Put a star next to the letter of the infographic that you would be most likely to share with your family and friends.

a) Prepare For Your Someday Poster (road)

- (1) Discuss ratings.
- (2) What do you like about this? What do you dislike?
- (3) What does this tell you about the Social Security Administration?
- (4) Would this encourage you to visit the SSA website and sign up for a mySocialSecurity account? Why? Why not?

b) Prepare For Your Someday Poster (people with fish)

- (1) Discuss ratings.
- (2) What do you like about this? What do you dislike?
- (3) What does this tell you about the Social Security Administration?
- (4) Would this encourage you to visit the SSA website and sign up for a mySocialSecurity account? Why? Why not?

4. **Handout.** I'm going to pass around a fact sheet on how to create an online account with mySocialSecurity. Take a minute or two to look it over, and rate how effective you think the correspondence is on a scale from 0-10 where 0 means not effective at all and 10 means very effective.

- a) Discuss ratings.
- b) What did you like about this? What did you dislike?
- c) Why did you think it was effective? Why not?
- d) Would this encourage you to visit the SSA website and sign up for a mySocialSecurity account? Why? Why not?

V. EXPLORING COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES - ONLINE (25 minutes)

Laptop. You each have a laptop in front of you that we will be using for the remainder of our time here. We will be looking at various webpages the Social Security Administration has used in connection to various campaigns and programs.

- A. Go to the Social Security Administration's website. **NOTE:** If anyone has any problems getting there, walk them through the process of finding the website. <https://www.ssa.gov/>
1. Without doing any navigation, please just take a look at the home page. What are the first things you notice? What grabs your attention?
 2. What are your initial impressions about this website? Do you like it? Is it easy to understand? Easy to navigate?
 3. Do you think you could easily find answers to your questions about Social Security – like where the nearest Social Security office is, basic information for when you are getting ready to retire, how to apply for benefits online?
 - a) Do you see where you could go if you wanted to read or listen to a publication, read news articles, watch a video on YouTube, set up a personal my Social Security account?
 4. What would you change? Is there anything missing that you would expect?
- B. Now let's go to a specific webpage on the Social Security Administration's website – myAccount. **NOTE:** If anyone has any problems getting there, walk them through the process of finding the website. <https://ssa.gov/myaccount/>
1. What are your initial impressions about this website? Do you like it? Is it easy to understand?
 2. What would you change? Is there anything missing that you would expect?
- C. Now let's look at some press releases from the Social Security Administration Take a couple of minutes to click on a few of the releases -- [**Law Does Not Provide for a Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment for 2016** – October 15, 2015 and **Social Security Announces New Online Service for Replacement Medicare Cards** – June 1, 2015] and rate how effective you think the correspondence is on a scale from 0-10 where 0 means not effective at all and 10 means very effective. <https://ssa.gov/news/press/releases/>
1. Discuss ratings.
 2. Do you remember hearing about this?

- a) Where did you hear about it – television, newspaper, radio, social media?
 3. Do you think it provides useful information?
 4. What does this tell you about the Social Security Administration?
- D. We are going to look at various social media sites the SSA has set up as resources for the public to learn about their services.
1. Let's look at the Social Security Administration's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/socialsecurity>. Take a minute to look around.
 - a) Any initial impressions?
 - b) What do you like about this page? Dislike?
 - c) Would you refer your friends and family to this page? Why? Why not?
 - d) What do you think is helpful? What would you change?
 2. Let's look at the Social Security Administration's Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/socialsecurity>. Take a minute to look around.
 - a) Any initial impressions?
 - b) What do you like about this page? Dislike?
 - c) Would you refer your friends and family to this page? Why? Why not?
 - d) What do you think is helpful? What would you change?
 3. What would make you follow Social Security on either Facebook or Twitter?

VI. WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

- A. After everything that we have talked about tonight, what stands out most about our discussion?
- B. Did anything surprise you about our discussion? Did you change your mind about anything tonight?