

DACOWITS 2024

Focus Group Protocol A: Recruitment and Retention

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees.

- ▶ I am **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER'S FIRST NAME]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT FIRST NAME(S)]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our research contractor, **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, is with a research organization hired to transcribe these sessions, and they are part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose.

- ▶ Again, DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. DACOWITS was established in 1951 and is one of the oldest Federal Advisory Committees at the Department of Defense. The Committee is composed of women and men, some of whom have prior military service. We have been appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies related to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS studies specific topics and prepares a report for the Secretary of Defense. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted more than 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration. As of 2023, approximately 95 percent have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department.

- ▶ Each year, DACOWITS visits several military installations and talks to hundreds of Service members like you about their experiences in the military. Today, we will talk about joining the military, your recruitment process, retention, and challenges dual-military couples may face. We are meeting with groups of women and men, both officer and enlisted personnel. We would like to spend this time discussing these topics, but we will also set aside time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about related to women serving in the military.

3. Describe how the focus group session will work.

- ▶ A focus group is a guided, carefully planned discussion. As facilitators, we have a set of scripted questions that we'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation.
- ▶ The session will last approximately 90 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.
- ▶ Your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.
- ▶ Our job today is to listen and collect information about your experiences and perceptions. Our job is not to provide information. That means we will not correct any inaccuracies or misperceptions that may be shared by an individual or the group, so you should not assume everything you hear today from other participants is accurate.

4. Explain the ground rules.

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our research contractor can capture the discussion. Please do not engage in sidebar conversations during the focus group.
- ▶ Try to avoid the use of acronyms. If you use an unfamiliar acronym, we may ask you to stop and explain it.
- ▶ We want to hear your opinions. There may be times in the discussion when you feel differently from other people, and we want to hear about that. Even though you may feel differently than people in this room, you represent others who aren't here today who may have similar feelings. Please be respectful of others' opinions that are shared today.
- ▶ We have a lot of questions to cover, so we 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.
- ▶ Our team will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert us if we need to move on to the next question.

5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

- ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary. If you prefer to excuse yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.

- ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. We do not record your names, and no information will be reported in our findings that can identify you. All members of the DACOWITS team have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.
- ▶ Our notes and what we discuss today will not be shared with anyone in your chain of command or at this installation.
- ▶ It is important that each of you agrees to respect and protect one another's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence. We also expect you not to share the identities of other participants with anyone outside this group.
- ▶ We are required to report some behaviors. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and with the appropriate authority.
- ▶ If you have questions following the focus group, we encourage you to speak with your installation's Equal Opportunity Advisor, your Command Managed Equal Opportunity Coordinator, or command representatives.
- ▶ In front of you are a few short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you stay for the group discussion, your participation will indicate your consent. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, you will not be able to participate in the group today.
 - The second is a mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey enables us to compile demographic data on the participants we speak with. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.

[PAUSE until everyone is finished completing the mini-survey]

- ▶ Once we have completed the focus groups for this year's selected installations, our team will compile the results into a report that we will use to write our annual report to the Secretary of Defense **[SHOW COPY OF 2023 REPORT]**. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. At the conclusion of our focus group, you will receive a DACOWITS brochure containing information about the Committee.

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Warmup/Introductions		
Before we get started with our discussion about joining the military and retention factors, let's do some introductions.		
1	<p>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to the next person.)</p> <p>Let's go around the room and have each of you tell us—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many years you've served in the military Your job in the military How long you've been with your current unit 	
Joining the Military		
Thank you. Now, we will move to an open discussion format, so you do not need to respond in any particular order.		
Let's start off by talking about factors that might encourage or discourage women from joining the military. We're interested in learning about the factors that might influence women to join the military and whether these factors differ for men.		
2	By a show of hands, how many of you would recommend military service to a young man today? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]	
3	By a show of hands, how many of you would recommend military service to a young woman today? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]	
4	Are there any factors more likely to encourage women to join the military compared with men? If so, what are those factors?	
5	Do you think any factors are more likely to discourage women from joining the military compared with men? If so, what are those factors?	
6	What, if anything, did you know about the benefits offered by the [Service] before joining?	
7	In recent years, most Services have experienced significant challenges meeting their recruitment goals. What do you think are the biggest reasons your Service has had challenges recruiting people to join?	
8	What could your Service do to make young women more interested in joining the military?	
Recruiters and the Recruitment Process		
Now, let's talk about your experience with the recruitment process and Military Entrance Processing Stations, also referred to as MEPS. We are most interested in your experiences with your main recruiter or the person who was your primary point of contact during the		

Question Number	Topic	Notes
<p>period when you joined your Service. We're interested in how well your recruiter prepared you for life in the military and what you liked or did not like about your experience with MEPS.</p> <p>[FOR OFFICER GROUPS:] We understand that, as officers, you may not have gone through a traditional recruitment process. For example, you may have commissioned through the Military Service Academies; ROTC; or be prior enlisted. Today, we're most interested in hearing about your experiences with the primary point of contact you interacted with before becoming an officer in your Service.</p>		
9	By a show of hands, how many of you had a female recruiter as your main recruiter? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS OUT LOUD.]	
10	Do you feel that your recruiter provided you with accurate information about life in the military? Why or why not?	
11	How well do you think your recruiter prepared you for MEPS?	
12	What, if anything, did you like about your experience with MEPS?	
13	What, if anything, did you dislike about your experience with MEPS?	
14	Some Service members may require a medical waiver to join the military. Are there any medical conditions that currently require a waiver that you think should be eliminated?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] ADHD, conduct and other behavioral disorders, cartilage surgery, or recurrent tendon disorders, such as tendonitis	
15	What recommendations, if any, would you make to your Service to improve the recruitment process or MEPS?	

Dual-Military Couples and Retention

Next, let's discuss dual-military couples and retention. By a "dual-military couple," we mean a relationship in which one Active Duty Service member is married to another Active Duty, Guard or Reserve Service member. The Committee is interested in learning about how the challenges dual-military couples face during their service affect their decisions to stay in or leave the military. Although some of you may not be part of a dual-military couple, some of the challenges these couples face may affect your units or someone you know.

16	What unique challenges do dual-military couples face during their service?	
17	Do you think women and men in dual-military couples face similar or different challenges? How so?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
18	What factors may encourage one or both members of a dual-military couple to stay in the military beyond their service obligations?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Do you think these factors are different for women and men, and, if so, how?	
19	What factors may lead one or both members of a dual-military couple to leave the military after their service obligations?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Do you think these factors are different for women and men, and, if so, how?	
20	What else could the [Service] do, if anything, to improve retention of both members of dual-military couples?	

Co-Location Policies

Now, let's discuss your Service's co-location policies. The Committee is specifically interested in your understanding of and experience with your Service's co-location policies. By "co-location policy," we mean the rules some Services establish to support dual-military couples and/or nonmarried Service member parents by stationing them within a certain proximity of each other.

21	By a show of hands, have you or someone you know had experience with your Service's co-location process? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT OUT LOUD THE NUMBER OF HANDS.]	
22	What do people like about your Service's co-location policies?	
23	What do people dislike about your Service's co-location policies?	

Geographic Stability

Now, let's discuss geographic stability. By "geographic stability," we mean accommodations or policies established by your Service to support Service members who want to stay in one location for an extended period. Your Service may refer to this as stabilization. The Committee is specifically interested in your understanding of and experience with geographic stability in your Service.

24	To begin, please raise your hand if you or someone you know has had experience requesting geographic stability. [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT OUT LOUD THE NUMBER OF HANDS.]	
25	Next, please raise your hand if geographic stability would encourage you to remain in the military after your current service obligation. [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT OUT LOUD THE NUMBER OF HANDS.] If so, why or why not?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
26	As far as you are aware, what policies does the [Service] have regarding geographic stability?	
27	What factors, if any, affect someone's use of the [Service]'s geographic stability accommodations?	

Retention

Now we would like to discuss factors we haven't already addressed that may encourage or discourage Service members from staying in the military. We are interested in what influences someone's decision to stay in or leave the military and whether these factors are similar or different for women and men.

28	What factors might discourage servicewomen from staying in the military beyond their current service obligation?	
29	Are the factors that discourage women from staying in the military similar or different from the factors that might discourage men? Why?	
30	What recommendations, if any, do you have for your Service to improve the retention of servicewomen?	

General Questions

We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Please note, we may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

31	What do you feel is the biggest challenge for women serving in the military today?	
32	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense related to women in the military, what would it be?	
33	Is there anything else you'd like to share or discuss related to servicewomen that we haven't talked about today?	

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters. We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else. As a reminder, you should not assume everything you heard today from other participants or the group is accurate, and we ask you to defer to your Service's current regulations and policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for participating.

Notes

[illegible]

[illegible]