

# DACOWITS 2024

## Focus Group Protocol B: Key Influencers on Servicewomen's Career Paths

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### Session Information

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Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

### Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

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#### 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 key influences on Service members' career paths. 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](https://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
<b>Warmup/Introductions</b>		
Before we get started with our discussion about key influences on Service members' careers, let's do some introductions.		
1	<p><b>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to the next person.)</b></p> <p>Let's go around the room and have each of you tell us—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many years you've served in the military</li> <li>Your job in the military</li> <li>How long you've been with your current unit</li> </ul>	
<b>Overview of Key Influences</b>		
Thank you. Now, we will move to an open discussion format, so you do not need to respond in any particular order.		
In today's discussion, we're going to talk about factors that influence Service members' career paths in the military. When we say "career path in the military," we mean the time you've already served and any additional years of service you are planning for. Specifically, DACOWITS is interested in learning about the factors that influence or shape Service members' careers, including people, opportunities, events, circumstances, or other aspects, such as military culture or your personal or professional motivations.		
2	<p>In general, what factors do you think influence Service members' decisions about their career path in the military?</p> <p><b>[PROBE IF NEEDED:]</b> People, motivations for service or continuing to serve, events or circumstances, family, military culture, roles, opportunities, policies, benefits, and regulations</p>	
3	<p>Within the military, who would you say has had the biggest influence on your military career—peers, supervisors, leaders, mentors, role models, or others?</p> <p><b>[PROBE IF NEEDED:]</b> In what ways have these individuals influenced your career?</p>	
4	<p>Now, I want you to think about people in your life outside the military, such as family or friends. Who, if anyone, has had the biggest influence on your decisions about your career in the military?</p> <p><b>[PROBE IF NEEDED:]</b> In what ways have these individuals influenced decisions about your military career?</p>	
5	<p>What opportunities, events, or circumstances have most influenced your career path in the military? How so?</p>	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
6	What benefits, policies, or regulations, if any, have influenced or shaped your decisions about your career path in the military?	
7	We've discussed many factors that may shape a career in the military. What factors, if any, uniquely influence servicewomen's careers as compared with servicemen's careers?	

### Key Influences Across Service Members' Career Phases

Now, we'd like to continue our discussion by thinking about influences across a military career—from joining the military to retirement. We'll begin by talking about the period of time when you joined the military.

#### Joining the Military and MOS selection

8	Who, or what factors, were most influential in your decision to join the military?	
9	What factors were most influential in determining your current occupational specialty or career field?	
10	What factors might encourage or discourage women from entering previously closed career fields, such as combat roles or special operations?	

#### Early Career

	Now let's discuss your early career, or your first few years of military services.	
11	During your first few years of military service, did your initial impressions of the military influence your career decisions? How so? <b>[PROBES IF NEEDED:]</b> How did you feel about your ability to promote and advance?	
12	By a show of hands, how many of you had another Service member whom you considered to be a mentor within the first 4 years of your career? <b>[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT OUT LOUD THE NUMBER OF HANDS.]</b>	
13	For those who raised their hands, by another show of hands, how many of you had at least one mentor in the military who was the opposite gender [male/female]? <b>[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT OUT LOUD THE NUMBER OF HANDS.]</b>	
14	In the first few years of your military service, how, if at all, did mentors influence your career decisions?	
15	If you could go back and give yourself, or someone like you, advice about navigating the first few years of your military career—what would you say?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
<b>Midcareer</b>		
16	Now we want to talk about your mid-career influences. We consider your mid-career to be between 5 and 12 years of service.	
	When considering whether to stay in or leave the military during your midcareer, what people or factors are most influential?	
	[PROBES IF NEEDED:] How, if at all, is this different for women and men?	
17	Do you think personal or professional factors play a bigger role in someone's military career decisions during the midcareer point? Please describe.	
	[PROBES IF NEEDED:] How, if at all, is this different for women and men?	
18	Research has shown servicewomen leave the military at a higher rate than men at the midcareer point. What do you think are the main reasons women choose to leave at a higher rate during this time?	
19	What is the most important change the military could make to enable or encourage women to stay in the military beyond 10 years of service?	
<b>Late Career to Retirement</b>		
20	Finally, let's now discuss your experiences with or plans for your late career and retirement.	
	What factors have the biggest influence on Service members' career decisions after they've served at least 15 years or as they near retirement?	
21	Do you believe the factors that shape women's and men's military careers after 15 years of service are similar or different? How so?	
22	If you have decided to retire after your Service, what key influences led to that decision?	
<b>General Questions</b>		
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.		
23	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
24	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense related to women in the military, what would it be?	
25	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

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