

Focus Groups

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Focus Groups:

Community Members Who Elected Not to Apply

OMB Control Number (2035.NEW) and Expiration Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

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The [Redacted] intends on holding focus groups and key informant interviews as means of qualitative data collection. The following information are topics and issues to be addressed in each focus group with community members who chose not to decide to apply. Note: some questions may be omitted depending on timing or point of grant process when the focus group is completed.

Introduction

[share screen/share presentation if applicable]

Welcome and thank you so much for taking the time to join us today. I am *[representative role]* with the [Redacted] ([Redacted]).

You have been contacted as an individual who either attended an outreach event or has previously shown interest, but ultimately decided not to apply. We are holding this meeting to better learn about your decision not to apply, to hear your perspectives on the project.

We value your input as a community member and are excited to have you here. We are joined today by *[note-taker]* who will be taking notes to ensure we don't miss any of your insights.

1. Where did you hear about the [Redacted] grant opportunities? (online, outreach event, etc.)
2. What's your perspective on the [Redacted], and the EPA Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Grantmaking Program as a whole? (prompt: from the information you had, what was your understanding of this project?)
3. Making the decision not to apply:
 - a. At what point did our organization decide not to go through the application / grants process (prompt: during the application, you were selected but decided not to proceed through the award process, etc.).
 - b. What factors drove the decision not to apply?
 - c. One of the primary goals of the EPA EJ TCGM program is to alleviate the burden that many federal grant processes place on smaller organizations. As a regional grantmaker, the [Redacted] is designed to "carry" some of that burden, as well as

build up organizational capacity so organizations can consider federal grants in the future. As you learned more about the program and its processes, did you find that this grants process would still place a large burden on your organization?

d. If yes, please elaborate on what parts of the process you found burdensome.

e. If you could suggest one or two recommendations to make this process more accessible and less burdensome, what would you suggest? Please be as specific as possible.

4. Do you have any additional thoughts or insights that you feel should have been included in this conversation?

Focus Groups: Subgrant Applicants

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1. **Understanding the Mission:**

- ☐ What are your thoughts on the mission of the [Redacted]?
- ☐ How well do you think the program aligns with the needs of underrepresented communities?

2. **Application Process:**

- ☐ Describe your experience with the application process.
- ☐ What challenges did you face during the application process?

3. **Communication:**

- ☐ Discuss the effectiveness of the communication received from the grantmaker.
- ☐ What changes would improve the communication?

4. **Impact Assessment:**

- ☐ How do you perceive the impact of the grant on your community or project?
- ☐ What could the grantmaker do to increase its impact?

5. **Feedback and Improvements:**

- ☐ What feedback do you have on the overall operations of the grantmaker?
- ☐ Any specific suggestions for improvement?

Focus Groups: Subrecipients (a)

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1. Subgrantee Support and Capacity Building:

- Explore in detail the types of capacity support provided. Discuss any gaps in support and suggest improvements.

2. Language and Communication Needs:

- Discuss any language barriers encountered and the effectiveness of the grantmaker's communications. Suggest how these can be improved for inclusivity.

3. Adaptability and Operational Flexibility:

- Reflect on instances where adaptability was required from the grantmaker. Was the response adequate? How could this be improved?

4. Compliance and Reporting:

- Share experiences regarding the clarity and manageability of compliance and reporting requirements.
- Discuss any challenges faced and solutions that could be implemented.

5. Overall Support:

- Reflect on the support provided during the grant period.
- Suggestions for enhancing recipient support and communication.

6. Impact and Satisfaction:

- Evaluate the overall impact of the grant on your project and community.
- How satisfied are you with the outcomes of your project and the role of the grantmaker in achieving these outcomes?

Focus Groups: Subrecipients (b)

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Introduction

[share screen/share presentation if applicable]

Welcome and thank you so much for taking the time to join us today. I am *[representative role]* with the [Redacted] ([Redacted]).

We are holding this meeting to better learn about your experiences as a recipient of a [Redacted] grant. Specific questions to be addressed:

1. What are the current environmental justice issues in your community?
2. What are the biggest problems communities face in trying to address environmental justice issues?
4. How has the [Redacted] helped address environmental justice issues in your community?

We value your input as a community member and are excited to have you here. We are joined today by *[note-taker]* who will be taking notes to ensure we don't miss any of your insights.

Logistics

I want to start by sharing some logistics that will help our discussion today.

- *[Virtual Events]* **Closed captioning**- Click on the cc button on the zoom dashboard, then click show subtitles. If you don't want to see live captions, choose hide subtitles.
- *[Virtual Events]* **Unmuting**- Your microphones are currently muted, but you are free to unmute if you would like to speak. At least to get started, we ask you to use the hand raise feature in Zoom. That will help me ensure that only one person talks at a time and that everyone who wants to talk has an opportunity to do so. We expect that everyone will have many opportunities to share during today's listening.
- *[Virtual Events]* **Chat Box**- Please notice that there is a chat box on the bottom left hand of your screen. Please feel free to use it as needed. We will have a team member monitoring the comments.

- *[In-Person Events]* **Raise hands for responses-** We ask that you raise your hand as an indication for a response. This will ensure we don't miss anyone and that everyone can be clearly heard.
- *[In-Person Events]* **Use of microphone (if, necessary)-** We ask that you use the microphones placed around the room to ensure your information is captured in the recording device and for colleagues to hear your responses.
- *[Both]* **Recording-** One last piece of housekeeping before we get started, while we are taking notes during the session, we are also going to record the session. The recording will not be shared outside of the Center C team, and we will not link your name to any comments. This purely is for our own notes and analysis.

Do we have permission to record?

[If respondents answer no, say "Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. Please feel free to send any comments related to this topic to us via email or in the event chat."]

[For respondents who answer yes, begin recording and continue to the next section.]

*Note for Moderators: Questions for specific audiences are included in parentheses. Audience abbreviations: - **CBOs** = Community-based organizations, **LAs** = local city/county departments/agencies and non-governmental agencies, **SAs** = state government and non-governmental organizations/agencies*

Let's start by discussing environmental justice and energy justice challenges that are faced in your community.

1. What issues is your community facing right now related to environmental justice?
 - a. Where is this happening?
 - b. How long has [this issue/these issues] been going on?
2. How has the community been working on this [issue/issues]?
 - a. Who is involved in addressing [this issue/these issues] (e.g., community members, leaders, community-based organizations, government agencies)?
 - b. Have these efforts helped to improve [this issue/these issues]? If no, why not?
 - c. What barriers has the community faced in addressing [this issue/these issue(s)]?
3. Experience as a subgrantee with the [Redacted]?
 - a. How has this grant helped address [this issue/these issues]?
 - b. Have you been able to see any progress in your community? (prompt: what immediate changes, if any, occurred in your planning and implementation of environmental justice strategies?)
 - c. What aspects of the [Redacted] have you used and found valuable? What is it about it that you found particularly helpful? (Prompt: This could be the relationship with your grant manager, open office hours, resource toolkits on the website, etc.)
 - d. How did training / technical assistance impact your organization's capacity to address environmental justice issues?
 - e. Are there additional services or resources that the [Redacted] can provide that can help future recipients?

4. Do you have any additional thoughts or insights that you feel should have been included in the focus group conversation?

Community Engagement (ALL Attendees)

Note, these questions may not be asked at all focus groups.

We are interested in understanding the best way to provide outreach to communities and those who have environmental justice concerns and may want to apply for federal grants.

1. What is the best way to explain the [Redacted] program and the ways we can assist the community?
 - a. What communication channels are the best to reach communities to raise awareness of the [Redacted] grant opportunities?
 - b. Are there events or activities that have a larger reach than others? If so, what are some details to consider? (i.e., access, accessibility, space)
 - c. What successful approaches have been used in the past to engage those that may be interested in these topics but are not always engaged?
2. Can you speak to your experience working with the federal government?
 - a. What, if any, were challenges working with them?
 - b. How could the [Redacted] help in navigating complex processes that go along working with the federal government?

Wrap-Up

We appreciate everyone taking the time to have this discussion with us today. This information is very informative and will assist as we move forward with efforts to support local communities in addressing environmental justice challenges in the community. Please be sure to be on the lookout for future discussions and opportunities.

[End recording]

Towards the end of the session, be sure to provide a quick summary for attendees on action items and next steps. Circulate the sign-up sheet and remind attendees to add follow-up information such as additional contact information, websites, organization names, etc.

Focus Groups: Subrecipients and Community Members

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The [Redacted] intends on holding focus groups and key informant interviews as means of qualitative data collection. The following information are topics and issues to be addressed in each focus group with subrecipients. Note: some questions may be omitted depending on timing or point of grant process when the focus group is completed.

Topics and issues to be discussed in each focus group:

1. Environmental justice and energy justice challenges faced in the community
 - a. Historic and current challenges and solutions that work
 - b. Future challenges and ways to address those challenges
 - c. Technical guidance and support needs to address those challenges
2. Satisfaction with the MAP EJ Grant Hub services (subrecipients)
 - a. Ease of accessing services and obtaining timely responses
 - b. Usefulness of resources and training materials
 - c. Communication with grant manager
 - d. Perspectives of progress
 - e. Areas of improvement of services, including additional resources or training materials to offer
3. Experience with federal grants
 - a. Community's experience with the federal government and federal grants
 - b. Barriers/Solutions to applying for federal grants
 - c. Barriers/Solutions to managing federal grants
 - d. What support would be helpful in building capacity for federal grants

Focus Groups: Partners

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Introduction

[share screen/share presentation if applicable]

Welcome and thank you so much for taking the time to join us today. I am *[representative role]* with the [Redacted] ([Redacted]).

We are holding this meeting to better learn about your experiences as a partner of the [Redacted]. We are hoping to hear your perspectives on the project and the progress in communities.

We value your input as a community member and are excited to have you here. We are joined today by *[note-taker]* who will be taking notes to ensure we don't miss any of your insights.

Logistics

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Let's start by discussing environmental justice and energy justice challenges that are faced in your community.

1. As a representative of an organization that works in the environmental justice field...
 - a. What issue(s) is your community facing right now related to environmental justice (prompt: this could include specific environmental justice topic areas, lack of funding, lack of resources, etc.)?
 - b. How long have [this issue/these issues] been going on?
 - c. What does the community need in order to successfully begin to address [this issue/these issues]?
2. Partnership and our participatory governance structure is a large part of the [Redacted] project design.
 - a. In your opinion, what is the value of having a network of partners in this field of work?
 - b. How has this partnership with the [Redacted] helped your organization? (prompt: build organizational capacity, opportunity to expand network of partners, better understanding of the federal grants process)
 - c. How well has the [Redacted] facilitated collaboration and coordination among partners?
 - d. How effective was the co-design of an equitable grantmaking and scoring processes?
 - e. Do you have any feedback as to how the [Redacted] can better engage the partners in the grants process?
3. Communication: what is the best way to explain the [Redacted] program and the ways we can assist the community?

- d. What communication channels are the best to reach communities to raise awareness of the [Redacted] grant opportunities?
- e. Are there events or activities that have a larger reach than others? If so, what are some details to consider? (i.e., access, accessibility, space)
- f. What successful approaches have been used in the past to engage those that may be interested in these topics but are not always engaged?

4. Impacts of the [Redacted] program.

- a. Have you seen any progress in your community / across [Redacted] in advancing the environmental justice efforts?
- b. From your perspective, to what extent has the [Redacted] been able to meet the needs of the communities across EPA [Redacted]?
- c. What needs still exist among communities?

5 . Do you have any additional thoughts or insights that you feel should have been included in the focus group conversation?

Wrap-Up

We appreciate everyone taking the time to have this discussion with us today. This information is very informative and will assist as we move forward with efforts to support local communities in addressing environmental justice challenges in the community. Please be sure to be on the lookout for future discussions and opportunities.

[End recording]

Towards the end of the session, be sure to provide a quick summary for attendees on action items and next steps. Circulate the sign-up sheet and remind attendees to add follow-up information such as additional contact information, websites, organization names, etc.

Focus Groups: Community Leadership Board

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Thank you for your feedback. It is invaluable to us as we strive to improve the [Redacted]. We look forward to discussing these points further in our upcoming focus group sessions.

Focus Group Questions

Discussion on Grantmaker Performance

1. Key Strengths and Weaknesses

- ☐ What specific aspects of the grantmaker program's performance have impressed you the most and why?
- ☐ What are the most significant areas where you believe the program needs improvement?

2. Suggestions for Improvement

- ☐ What are your specific suggestions for improving the areas you identified as needing improvement?
- ☐ Are there any new initiatives you think the program should consider implementing?

Discussion on Communications

3. Effectiveness of Communication

- ☐ How effective do you find the communication within the board and with external stakeholders?
- ☐ Can you provide examples of both effective and less effective communications you've experienced?

4. Enhancing Communication

- ☐ What communication tools or strategies do you suggest we adopt to improve our interactions?
- ☐ Are there any specific communication challenges you think need to be addressed immediately?

Discussion on Operations

5. Operational Efficiency

- In what ways do you find the program's operations efficient or inefficient?
- Are there specific operational processes that you think could be streamlined or enhanced?

6. Addressing Operational Challenges

- What operational challenges have you observed?
- What are your recommendations for addressing these challenges?

Open Forum

7. Additional Concerns and Ideas

- Are there any other concerns or ideas regarding the program that have not been covered in this focus group?
- What additional resources or support do you think the program needs to be more effective?

Discussion on Mission Alignment

8. Understanding and Communicating the Mission

- How well do you think the mission of the program is understood among board members and communicated to stakeholders?
- What can be done to improve the clarity and impact of our mission communication?

9. Evaluating Mission Alignment

- Discuss examples where the program has either aligned well or poorly with its mission.
- What aspects of the program do you believe reflect the mission most strongly?

10. Impact Assessment

- Discuss the impact of the program on targeted communities.
- Are there noticeable gaps in our outreach and support efforts?

11. Strategies for Enhanced Alignment

- What strategies would you suggest for enhancing the program's alignment with its mission?

How can we ensure that our activities are continually aligned with our mission objectives?

Focus Groups: Faculty Advisory Committee

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Focus Group Questions for Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC)

1. Role Clarity and Effectiveness

- How clear are you on the roles and responsibilities of the FAC? Are there aspects of your role that you feel need further clarification or adjustment?

2. Subgrant Proposal Review Process

- Can you describe your experience with the current process for reviewing subgrant proposals? What aspects do you find most effective, and where do you see opportunities for improvement?

3. Support for Subgrant Recipients

- How well do you feel the FAC is supporting subgrant recipients, especially in terms of compliance with research requirements and connecting them with university resources? What additional support could be provided?

4. Dissemination of Findings

- What strategies or methods have you found most effective for disseminating findings from the [Redacted] Grantmaker and subgrant projects? Are there new approaches or tools you think we should consider?

5. Collaboration and Communication

- How would you assess the current state of communication and collaboration within the FAC and between the FAC and subgrant recipients? What changes would enhance these interactions?

6. Challenges and Barriers

- What are the main challenges or barriers you've encountered in your FAC role? How have these issues affected your work, and what solutions or support might help address these challenges?

7. Future Improvements

- Looking ahead, what specific changes or improvements would you recommend for the FAC to increase its impact and effectiveness? Are there any new initiatives or practices you think we should explore?

Additional Notes:

- Encourage participants to provide specific examples and suggestions.
- Allow time for open discussion after each question to gather a range of perspectives.
- Consider recording the session (with permission) for accurate analysis of feedback.