

## Community Member Focus Group Discussion Guide

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The discussion guide below was drafted by the Washington, DC, Upward Mobility Project team for their community-based organization partners to use when facilitating community member focus group discussions. The guide includes many best practices for other places doing community engagement to replicate, including a description of the project, language to achieve the participant's consent and share information about confidentiality, information about what potential risks or benefits the participant could experience from participating in this research effort, details about where the notes from the discussion will be shared and who has access to them, and the question bank.

### I. Project Overview

The DC Upward Mobility Project is an interagency project to boost upward mobility outcomes for residents of color and align the District's programs, policies, and investments together to enhance their impacts. Through its participation in this project, the DC government is receiving technical assistance from the Urban Institute to develop and deliver a Mobility Action Plan in June 2022. The District is focusing on three priority areas for this project: housing, financial well-being, and workforce and adult education.

Our organization [insert facilitating organization name] is partnering with the DC government on this project and is working to ensure residents are engaged in the process and can share their experiences. We will facilitate today's conversation. Today, we are focusing on [insert domain of focus: housing, financial well-being, and workforce and education] programs. We will ask you questions about how you and the communities you are a part of think about topics such as prosperity from poverty and how the DC government can best support more residents to achieve prosperity through its programs, policies, and investments.

### II. Voluntary Participation & Confidentiality

Your participation in today's activity is completely voluntary and confidential. We will take notes to remember what you share, but we will not identify you by name in our notes. When our session is over, our team will summarize the information you and your fellow participants share without revealing any of your names or identities. We will keep everything that you say confidential—no one at our organization or the District will identify you by name in anything we write.

Choosing to participate or not participate will not impact your involvement in any programming or services you may be a part of in the District. Also, you can choose to leave today's activity at any point if you do not wish to continue, and you will still receive compensation for showing up today.

[If DC Government Staff are present] We are partnering with the District government for this project on upward mobility. Staff members from the District government are in attendance today to observe this activity as a part of their project support role. Staff will not share any of your personal information in relation to what you share here today.

We cannot guarantee that what you say will not be repeated by others in this discussion group, but we strongly urge each of you to respect the privacy of others in the group and not repeat anything you hear in this discussion outside the group.

[If engagement is virtual] We ask that each of you also try to give each other as much privacy as possible by minimizing how much other people around you might be able to hear or see of the conversation—maybe by going into a room with a closed door, using headphones, or otherwise finding a private space. Further, we have asked you all to log in to our virtual room today to ensure that only permitted attendees are allowed in the virtual discussion.

### **III. Risks and Benefits**

It is important that we explain any risks or benefits related to this focus group. Participating in this focus group has limited potential risks. These risks include: (1) someone could find out you participated in this focus group and (2) someone could find out what you said. However, we will not tell anyone outside our small team who participated. We will not include your name in our notes or in any report. We will not record these sessions by video or sound. Our summary of what is said here will describe people's experiences in general and will not identify you personally. When we use quotes in our reports, we will not include any details that could identify you, including your name.

The benefits of participating in this focus group include the opportunity to provide feedback on an important topic—how to increase prosperity in the District and in your community—and to possibly improve the programming and services for people who are experiencing poverty. You may also benefit from increased awareness and connections to District government and community organizations and programs. We will also provide you with [list the specific compensation provided by the facilitating organization] as a recognition for your contributions and expertise today.

### **IV. Data Security for Data Collected**

Answers from the pre-focus group surveys will be used solely for the purposes of ensuring demographic representation in the focus groups, and we will not use this information in connection with comments made in the focus group. We will take written notes today to make sure we are capturing what you share, and we will anonymize and summarize them before sharing out with any other partner agencies or Urban Institute staff and including them in any internal or public reports. Data will be summarized to highlight key findings and important metrics such as the number of people who participated in the focus group and the key demographics of the participants in the group. The DC government will store these notes in a private online drive that only project team members can access and delete them by no later than June 2022 when the project is completed.

You can choose to provide personal contact information, such as emails or phone numbers, to learn about relevant resources or connect further with our organization, but that is entirely optional. Your contact information will be kept separate from any notes or materials from today's focus group.

### **V. Consent**

Do you have any questions or concerns about what we plan to do today?

Do you consent to participate in our discussion today?

## VI. Focus Group Question Bank

[Note: Facilitator will select questions from the question bank below to form their focus groups. The questions below are all of the possible questions the facilitator could cover, and this list is comprehensive to allow the facilitator to have some flexibility in the questions they focus on. Questions tagged as “*Required*” must be asked.]

### *Questions about Self and Community*

- Tell us about yourself.
- What roles do you play in your community? [Facilitator will need to provide some context here and examples -- “I am a volunteer at my church. I am a teacher at a local school. I am active in my community garden program.”]
- Tell us about your community.
- How long have you lived in your community?
- What are some of the assets (or strengths) within your community that have been supportive to you or that you value?
- What are aspects of the community you would like to see strengthened or changed?
- What do you think it would take to strengthen your community?
- *Required:* If there was one change you would want to see in your community, what would that change be?

### *Upward Mobility Questions*

This project is focused on helping more residents achieve prosperity, and the next few questions will focus on how you and your community thinks about prosperity.

- *Required:* What does it mean to you to achieve prosperity? [Alternative question: What does it mean to you to help people out of poverty in DC?]
- Are there aspects of who you are that informs how you see prosperity?
- Are there barriers that make it harder for people in your community from achieving that prosperity?
- What has helped people in your community overcome barriers or challenges to upward mobility from poverty?

### *Program-Specific Questions*

Now we are going to discuss different [insert domain: housing, financial well-being, or workforce and education] District programs. When we talk about programs, we mean the many different programs that the District government may have, not just the programs that [name of facilitating organization] delivers or administers on behalf of the District government.

- *Required:* Are there programs that have helped you or people in your community achieve stability or upward mobility? What are those programs? [Prompts: are there [insert domain: housing, financial well-being, or workforce and education] programs that have you or people in your community achieve stability or upward mobility?
- What part of the [insert domain: housing, financial well-being, or workforce and education] program did you like the most?
- What part of the [insert domain: housing, financial well-being, or workforce and education] program did you like the least?
- What are aspects of these [insert domain: housing, financial well-being, or workforce and education] programs you would like to see strengthened or changed?
- What are your ideas on how to improve these programs? [Prompts could include the following: Are there approaches you would recommend? For example, more training for staff, increased evaluation of those programs to make sure they are reaching their goals.]
- *Required:* Are there programs or services you would like to see in your community? [Alternative: Are there gaps in existing programs or services that you would like to see addressed in your community?]
- *Required:* If you needed to find resources in your community to help yourself or a family member address a challenge, where would you start? [Alternative: Where have you gone to obtain information about resources in your community in the past?]
- What type of [insert domain: housing, financial well-being, or workforce and education] programs do you want to learn more about?

### *Wrap Up*

In our final minutes, is there anything else you would like us or the District government to know about your community or your thoughts on what it will take for everyone in your community to thrive?

We would like to share the findings from this focus group and the other focus groups that are being conducted as part of this project with you when we are finished. How would you like to be updated on the findings of this project? [Prompt: through email, paper mail, etc.]

[Facilitator will then collect contact information for participants who would like to share their information to stay updates or receive information about District programs. Facilitators will note again that this contact information will be separate from the notes taken from the focus group.]