

# Evaluation Planning Workbook

How to Use focus Groups and Other Evaluation Methods to  
Improve Court Based Self-Help Centers

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# Introduction

This workbook was originally designed to accompany workshops and trainings that presented an evaluation strategy for legal self-help centers, and other types of legal aid services, using focus groups and individual interviews. While other types of evaluation strategies were also discussed at the trainings, the materials presented here pertain most closely to focus groups, interviews, and other types of qualitative data collection strategies. Nonetheless, in many ways the workbook illustrates the basic steps to be taken in any well-designed research or evaluation effort.

**Section 1** is a workbook that guides the evaluator through the process of developing a research plan using focus groups to elicit information from self-represented litigants regarding their experience with services provided by a legal self-help center.

**Section 2** is a sample study plan that describes an actual study that was conducted in late 2005 using focus groups. The Plan includes an introduction to the purpose of the study, a description of the methodology and any human subject provisions, as well as the plan for analysis and reporting of the data. The appendices include a focus group guide and recruiter duties.

**Section 3** is *A Summary of Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Interviews and Data Collection*. These guidelines were created by staff at the Center for Families, Children & the Courts and are used as guiding principles for research staff at the Center. They are a condensed version of guidelines widely used by federally funded research projects, and most major research institutions.

**Section 4** is entitled *Litigant Interview Guidelines*. It is a paper written by Center staff about how to conduct one-on-one interviews for purposes of doing evaluation research.

**Section 5** includes two reports that were produced by legal self-help center staff. Both reports utilized focus groups as a data collecting technique, and provide examples of how that data can be used and reported.

In addition to the workbook itself, we have included a section from a publication by the American Statistical Association entitled *What Is a Survey?* The section is entitled *What Are Focus Groups?* and is intended as a general overview of the topic for non-researchers. The entire ASA publication is on-line and can be accessed for free at:

<http://www.whatisasurvey.info/>

As a compilation of source materials, the editors of this workbook are especially grateful to our secondary data source authors for graciously allowing us to reproduce these documents. Additional samples would be most welcome, and we encourage you to send your thoughts and suggestions to: [james.mensing@jud.ca.gov](mailto:james.mensing@jud.ca.gov)

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# Research Questions

## **Example A: Do customers who complete dissolution workshops find them helpful?**

*Examples of sub-questions:*

- 1. Are customers able to correctly and completely fill out forms during the workshops?*
- 2. Have customers unsuccessfully tried to fill out, and perhaps file, dissolution pleadings before?*
- 3. Do customers completing the workshop series have a basic, and better, understanding of the legal concepts used in marriage dissolutions?*
- 4. What are the two most helpful aspects of the workshop?*
- 5. What are the two least helpful (i.e., most in need of improvement) aspects of the workshops?*

## **Example B: What would customers seeking domestic violence restraining orders have done without the center?**

- 1. Have customers sought restraining orders before, and if so, what was the result?*
- 2. Are customers aware of any other services in their community that would assist them in obtaining restraining orders, and if so, what is the nature of those services?*
- 3. Do customers know of others who have sought, or need to seek, restraining orders, and if so, what have they done?*

## **Tips for developing research questions.**

- Think carefully about what you most need to know to make your center more effective.
- Consider the types of results you would most like to see as a result of the center's services. Even if you cannot get direct evidence about outcomes, clearly identifying them may help you recognize other things that may be happening that would indicate your desired outcome is or is not occurring. In other words, what sort of circumstantial proof might serve as a proxy for directly measuring outcomes?
- Involve others in brainstorming sessions to help identify the most important questions.
- Having identified an important question, carefully consider the most effective method of addressing it (e.g., focus group, individual interview, survey).
- Try to estimate how much data you might have to collect to adequately answer the research questions (e.g., how many focus groups or interviews you might have to conduct, how many case files you might have to look at).
- If the list of questions becomes long, try grouping them by topic and/or organizing some as follow-up questions.
- For focus groups and interviews, prepare more questions and probes (follow-up questions) than you expect to be able to cover. If you move more quickly through the questions than expected, this allows you to make use of the valuable time you have already put aside for the research (rather than simply ending the session early).
- Keep in mind that focus groups and interviews are best suited to getting an in-depth understanding about a relatively small number of issues. Surveys and reviews of administrative data such as court case files are best suited to getting a representative sample from a large population that addresses perhaps a greater number of issues, but in limited detail.



# Participants

## **Example A: Do customers who complete dissolution workshops find them helpful?**

1. *Customers who have recently completed dissolution workshops.*
2. *Court personnel who interact with litigants such as clerks and judges.*

## **Example B: What would customers seeking domestic violence restraining orders have done without the center?**

1. *Customers who have used the center to assist them in filing restraining orders.*
2. *Community advocates for victims of domestic violence.*

## **Tips for deciding who should participate in the focus groups.**

- Identify which customers are best qualified to answer the research questions and limit your recruiting accordingly.
- Make every attempt to have the group represent the population served. For example, if 75% of your customers are non-English speaking, you should have groups in the languages used by your customers.

## **How many participants/groups should you have?**

- The number of groups depends on how much variation exists in your customer population. For example, if you have a small staff serving a relatively homogenous population, you may only need one or two groups to adequately answer your questions. Conversely, if you have a large staff serving a diverse population, you will probably need to conduct more groups to be sure you have covered the different types of experiences different types of people might have. If faced with the latter situation and limited resources, you may want to initially limit your research to a particular sub-population of your customer base.
- In most cases, you will want to have your focus group participants share similar, relevant characteristics such as language.
- Be sure to select participants so that members will feel comfortable with other members of the group and not inhibited from speaking (for instance, do not form a group of landlords and tenants to discuss unlawful detainer issues).
- In general, plan to continue holding focus groups until new responses to the same question have been exhausted.
- Ideally, focus groups should consist of between six and ten participants. Recruiting should be conducted to ensure an adequate number of attendees for each group.



# Recruiting

## **Example A: Do customers who complete dissolution workshops find them helpful?**

1. *Have recruiter ask customers at the end the workshop or workshop series if they would be willing to participate in a focus group.*
2. *Have a recruiter call a list of workshop participants.*

## **Example B: What would customers seeking domestic violence restraining orders have done without the center?**

1. *Have a recruiter ask customers while they are at the center if they would be willing to participate in a focus group.*
2. *Enlist the assistance of a domestic violence advocacy group that regularly refers customers to the center to help recruit potential focus group participants.*

## **Tips for recruiting focus group participants.**

The success of a focus group often depends on the successful recruiting of participants. Successful recruitment, in turn, depends on using an appropriate method for recruiting. In general, the more resources allocated to recruitment and retention of those who volunteer, the more likely you will get a group of the people you want, in the numbers you want (usually six to ten per group).

*Obtaining a representative sample of your study population.* It is important to remember that focus groups and interviews are not designed to be a statistically representative sample of your study population. Nonetheless, steps can be taken to make your participants as representative as possible, thereby enhancing the credibility of your study. There are two ways of creating representativeness in your sample. The first would be to carefully choose individuals you think would be good representatives of your study population, and actively recruit them. Remember to write down your reasons for choosing those people so you can include them in your final report. The second method would be to randomly select a small sub-group (e.g. everyone who attended a workshop on a particular day), and try to recruit everyone from that group.

*Active recruitment of qualified participants is highly recommended.* Focusing recruiting efforts on a smaller number of prospective participants, on whom resources can be concentrated, is usually the key to successful recruiting. Providing more incentives per participant, and contacting participants personally in a way that allows you to explain your study and answer any questions they might have, tends to yield the best results. In addition, making provisions for follow-up contact such as reminder phone calls in which you actually talk to the participant (as opposed to just leaving a message), is often necessary to ensure adequate attendance. Even following these standards, only two-thirds to three-quarters of persons who have agreed to participate will actually show-up to the focus group. Therefore, if you want 10 participants, you should secure participation from at least 13 individuals (examples of recruiting instructions are provided at the end of the workbook).

*Safety and confidentiality.* Preserving the safety and confidentiality of respondents is paramount in any research study. Before any recruitment takes place, carry out a careful review of safety and confidentiality issues for respondents (see Tab 2, Summary of Ethical Guidelines). For



# Incentives

Example A: A focus group of self-help center customers.

1. *Catered dinner for all participants.*
2. *\$50 gift card to Target or similar store containing a wide range of products.*
3. *Community resource manual.*
4. *\$20 reimbursement for transportation and child care expenses.*

Example B: A focus group of court professionals.

1. *Hot lunch for all participants.*

NOTE: Cash or gift cards would not be appropriate for court employees.

## **Tips for providing incentives.**

Incentives can be provided for any type of research that requires the participation of human subjects. Most commonly, incentives are provided for focus groups and more lengthy individual interviews, but they can also be provided for filling out a survey or agreeing to be taped while engaging in an activity (such as attending a workshop). In general, the need for and type of incentives will be determined by whom you are studying and how much of their time your study takes.

Incentives serve two purposes: they help assure the representativeness of the group and recognize that the participants' time is valuable. Incentives take many forms, including the removal of barriers.

- *Gift bags, gift cards, or cash payments:* Gift cards to a local department store such as Target of between \$50 and \$75 are easily within an acceptable range of compensation for most customer groups. Less than \$50 would probably not be considered substantial by most people for a 1 1/2 to 2 hour group. More than \$100 may be considered by some researchers as tending towards being coercive. Gift bags containing groceries or toys for children might also be appreciated. Cash payments are acceptable, but logistically may be more trouble than they are worth. Check payments are generally discouraged since banks are often scarce in low income neighborhoods and check cashing businesses take a substantial amount in fees.
- *Convenience:* Incentives can make it possible for participants to attend focus groups by removing barriers to participation. Weekend and evening groups often result in increased attendance. Reimbursement for transportation and/or child care expenses may also be needed to make it possible for some people to attend the group.
- *Providing food:* Offering a meal and refreshments for a group that will take 1 1/2 to 2 hours is considerate and appropriate for any population.
- *Information.* Customers may well appreciate publications from your center. Court professionals, and perhaps customers, may appreciate feedback in the form of a report or presentation.

Any combination of these should be used to help insure your sample is representative of your study population and does not include only those with the resources to attend your focus group. Additionally, when individuals are contacted recruiters should inquire about what would help them to participate.



# Informed Consent

Example A: A focus group of self-help center customers.

1. *Develop script explaining the study and confidentiality assurances for the site recruiter and the telephone follow-up recruiter.*
2. *Read consent form to group and distribute written copies.*
3. *Obtain verbal consent of group participants.*

Example B: A focus group of court professionals.

1. *Send email explaining the study and confidentiality assurances.*
2. *Read consent form to group and distribute written copies.*
3. *Obtain verbal consent of group participants.*

## **Tips for obtaining informed consent.**

The basic principles of informed consent require that participants be fully informed as to the nature of the study and their participation in it, and that they voluntarily agree to participate. Depending on the research design and sensitivity of the data, written consent may be required or verbal consent may suffice. In general, for customer focus groups we recommend reading and distributing the informed consent document, and obtaining participant agreement verbally. This ensures that the group will remain anonymous because there is no written record of who participated. The same procedure should suffice for groups of court professionals. If you feel a need to document that consent was obtained, however, then each participant must sign a written form.

In all cases, participants must be informed of the following:

- The name and description of the study.
- Their rights as human subjects participating in a research study, including:
  - That they may refuse to participate with no adverse consequences to them.
  - That they can terminate their participation at any time, without any adverse consequences.
  - That they can continue to participate, but refuse to answer any particular question.
- How the data will be used.
- How they can get a copy of the final report.
- That their name will not be used in any reports about the study.
- That any quotes from them used in any reports will be edited so that they do not contain any personally identifiable information.
- That their participation will not affect their case in any way.
- Whom to contact if they want more information before or after their participation.
- Whom to contact if they feel they've been negatively affected by participation in the group.

In addition, participants should clearly and convincingly be encouraged to voice their concerns if they do not understand what is being asked of them, or if they have any questions. See the English and Spanish sample confidentiality agreement provided at the end of this workbook and in the *Summary of Ethical Guidelines*, Tab 2.



# Facilitator and Other Staff

Example A: A focus group of self-help center customers.

1. *An attorney from another office, not connected with the self-help center, will facilitate the focus groups.*
2. *A paralegal from another office, not connected with the self-help center, will serve as the note taker.*
3. *A student intern who has worked at the center will serve as the recruiter.*
4. *The office manager will arrange for space, food, and incentives.*

Example B: A focus group of court professionals.

1. *The program director of a neighboring self-help center will facilitate the focus groups.*
2. *A secretary from the same organization will serve as the note taker.*
3. *The director of the self-help center will serve as the recruiter.*
4. *The office manager will arrange for space, food, and incentives.*

## **Tips for staffing a focus group study.**

It is best to identify particular individuals who will perform each role in the planning phase of the study. Particularly if money is limited, it is important to be creative in the use of available resources rather than hiring outside consultants. For example, advocates skilled at initial client interviews and direct examination often make good facilitators and interviewers. Partnering with neighboring organizations can help ensure that the group facilitators remain neutral and unbiased.

*Facilitator:* While the facilitator does not have to be an expert, he or she should know the subject matter and have some training on what to expect from participants, such as cultural issues that may arise. In most cases an outside facilitator or trainer does not have to be hired because legal aid organizations have in-house staff with experience in asking questions who can use those skills to facilitate a focus group or interview an individual.

It is, however, imperative that the facilitator be objective. *A person with a stake in the outcome should not be the one facilitating the group or conducting an interview.* If there is no one on staff who is objective enough, then other options should be considered. Chief among these are peer evaluators – staff from a nearby organization with whom you could trade facilitation services. Such exchanges can work especially well because staff from similar programs have relevant knowledge and background without being personally tied to the outcomes.

*Note taker:* Each focus group should have a note taker in addition to the facilitator, even if a tape recorder is used. Note takers make a record of the discussion in case the taping equipment fails. They should also record relevant descriptions of interactions, individual affect, and the character of the environment that could not be gleaned from a tape recording. Finally, the note taker can also help the facilitator with any issues that arise during the group that would distract from the facilitator's duties.

*Recruiter:* Identify an individual or individuals who will be responsible for recruiting and retaining study participants. Perhaps as much as the facilitator, this person will determine



# Recording

Example A: A focus group of self-help center customers.

*Tape record.*

Example B: An individual interview with a court professional.

*Tape record.*

## **Tips on recording.**

While it is possible to record focus groups and interviews through detailed note taking, if at all possible they should be tape recorded. Although a note taker should also be present in the case of focus groups, any detailed analysis of the proceedings requires a transcript. In addition, direct quotes are hard to obtain using only written notes. Facilitators, interviewers, and note takers go into the group with preconceptions that will affect what they hear and record, making a tape recording the most objective record of the group or interview.

If taping is to be conducted, everyone in the group must consent to being taped. Accordingly, recruiters should screen participants for their willingness to be taped and exclude anyone who does not agree.

Tape recording requires adequate equipment if it is to provide a useful transcript. The tape recorder should be in good working condition, with spare batteries and/or access to an electrical outlet (if the latter, remember you may need an extension cord!) Bringing extra tapes is also advisable.

For individual interviews, collar mikes are preferable to setting the recorder on a table between the participants. For focus groups, an omni-directional mike is best for picking up all the participants. In either case, be aware that tape recorders respond differently than the human ear, so background noise that seems negligible to you may well drown out your participants.

It is highly advisable to test your equipment beforehand, under conditions similar to those under which you will be using it in order to work out any problems. It is also essential that you do a sound check immediately before the group starts in order to determine whether everything is working properly. While the group is going, the note taker should periodically look to see whether the recorder is still running, and be aware of when a tape may need to be turned over or changed.

Finally, have your tapes and their containers clearly labeled beforehand, or label them before you leave the session.



# Group Time and Location

Example A: A focus group of self-help center customers.

1. *A conference room in the center.*
2. *A conference room in a neighboring organization.*
3. *A private room in a local restaurant.*

Example B: A focus group of court professionals.

1. *A conference room in the self-help center.*
2. *A vacant courtroom.*

## **Tips on times and locations.**

The essential factor to consider in scheduling your group is the convenience of the participants. Focus groups with self-help center customers are likely to be held in the evenings or on weekends when customers are not working. Focus groups of court professionals may be held during the day if local court administration agrees, otherwise, evenings or weekends are best. In either case, it is important to inform the local court administrator, and the presiding judge, that you will be conducting research about their court.

The location of the group will depend on room availability and accessibility for the participants. Especially if a group is to be held in the evening or on the weekend, transportation and safety issues for the participants should be of paramount concern. Also be aware that even if a room is available, the outside doors of many buildings are locked after hours. If that is the case, either arrange to have the door unlocked, or better still, have someone attending the door to guide participants to the proper room.

Remember to pay attention to the acoustics of potential sites. Noisy rooms in restaurants or public buildings may hamper your ability to make a good recording – and may even interfere with your discussion.

Regardless of where the focus group is held, in all cases the space should be:

- *Safe.* Consider that some neighborhoods that are safe during the day are not in the evening.
- *Private.* If the group is scheduled to be conducted in a community center, consider visiting the center to ensure that it is in a relatively private and quiet environment.
- *Easily accessible.* If there is no public transportation in the vicinity, consider providing door to door transportation.



# Analysis

## Tips on qualitative data analysis.

After you have collected your data, you will need to analyze it and write a report about the process and your findings. A preliminary plan for this analysis should be in place before you begin data collection. This will help ensure that adequate time and resources are available to conduct the analysis and write-up. If possible, decide in the planning stage who will be responsible for the analysis and report writing.

If you have tape recorded your focus groups or interviews, a major decision to be made will be whether you transcribe the tapes in order to be able to code them, or whether you will code them by listening to them. While transcribing is more expensive in staff time or transcription costs, it is generally preferred for more detailed analyses.

The coding of any type of qualitative data for which you have constructed research questions ahead of time is very much like coding a deposition in which you are looking for evidence about particular points of law. In its simplest form, you match sections of the transcript or recording to the questions you have formulated. This can be done by hand (perhaps using colored markers), or in a word processing program. While more sophisticated qualitative data coding software is available, you could also use electronic deposition coding software if that is available to you.

At a minimum (even if you do not tape), an analysis should include:

- *Team debrief:* Immediately following the group the note taker and facilitator should discuss their impressions, themes, and any other relevant issues that came up during the group. These should be written down for later reference, along with the note taker's notes.
- *Transcribe notes:* The note taker should write-up the notes within two days of the group. The facilitator should read the notes and add or change items as appropriate within a day or two after that. If you delay this step, you will most likely find that your memory of events begins to fade and it becomes harder to elaborate on your notes.
- *Code notes for themes:* Staff should be assigned to review the notes for important themes, insights, and information relevant to the research questions. It is also helpful to note new research questions that may arise from the information you have collected.

In addition, if the group was taped, more extensive analysis can be performed:

- *Listen to the tape.* If you do not have the resources to transcribe, at least have someone listen to the tape one or more times to code for answers to your research questions, and perhaps write down particularly informative quotes.
- *Transcribe tape.* Transcribing generally takes some time, even if you have someone skilled in transcription, so allow for that time before you plan on having the transcript available for analysis. If money is available, most communities have professional transcribers for hire. In any case, having a written transcript makes coding and accurate quotations much easier than if you are only using the audio tape or working from notes.
- *Code the transcript or tape.* Systematically go through your records of the session and group the participants statements by major themes, answers to your research questions, interesting stories, and notable quotes.



# Timeline

*How much time do you have to effectively implement your research plan?*

Timeline for Focus Groups with Self Help Center Customers																											
Tasks	August				September				October				November				December										
Develop Focus Group Guide	█	█	█	█																							
Meet with staff/stakeholders to identify relevant questions	█	█																									
Relevant parties review questions			█																								
Arrange Topics and develop follow up questions		█	█																								
Develop introduction and project statement			█	█																							
Develop Informed Consent statement			█	█																							
Identify/Train Facilitators	█	█	█	█																							
Identify Participants			█	█																							
Arrange Logistics (space, etc)					█	█																					
Recruit Participants						█	█																				
Purchase Incentives							█	█																			
Conduct Focus Groups									█	█																	
Analyze Data										█	█	█															
Team Debrief										█	█																
Transcribe Notes										█	█																
Code Notes											█	█															
Transcribe Tapes											█	█	█	█													
Code Tapes													█	█	█	█											
Write-up Data													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█							
Review Write-up																	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█			
Report Data																								█			
Identify Lessons Learned for future projects																								█			
Update Focus Group Guide and Research Plan as new information presents itself and obstacles arise	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█			

Consider the items listed in the sample timeline provided above. A timeline worksheet is provided on the next page.

*How much time do I have from the planning stages to the reporting stages?*

Tasks	Month1			Month2			Month3			Month4			Month5		
Develop Focus Group Guide															
Meet with staff/stakeholders to identify relevant questions															
Relevant parties review questions															
Arrange Topics and develop follow up questions															
Develop introduction and project statement															
Develop Informed Consent statement															
Identify/Train Facilitators															
Identify Participants															
Arrange Logistics (space, etc)															
Recruit Participants															
Purchase Incentives															
Conduct Focus Groups															
Analyze Data															
Team Debrief															
Transcribe Notes															
Code Notes															
Transcribe Tapes															
Code Tapes															
Write-up Data															
Review Write-up															
Report Data															
Identify Lessons Learned for future projects															
Update Focus Group Guide and Research Plan as new information presents itself and obstacles arise															

Notes:

# Budget

*What is your budget, including any in-kind resources that will be relative to this project?*

Cost for Two Focus Groups with 10 Participants per Group			
Item	Cost	Subtotal	Notes
Project manager	See staff time		Center staff that will oversee project, develop materials, and write final report.
Facilitator	See staff time		Staff from other center will conduct our focus groups in trade
Notetaker	0	\$0.00	Intern has been assigned project for semester
Recruiter	0	\$0.00	Intern has been assigned project for semester
Space	0	\$0.00	Free space provided by CBO
Travel	0	\$0.00	Focus Group will take place across the street from court
Incentives			
75\$ Gift certificate for each participant	20@\$75	\$1,500.00	
Dinner for each Participant	20@\$10	\$200.00	
Supplies			
Tape recorder	0	\$0.00	Center owns tape recorder
Tapes	\$10	\$10.00	
Miscellaneous	\$20	\$10.00	
Analysis			
Transcribing notes	0	\$0.00	Intern and staff will transcribe own notes
Transcribing tapes	18@\$20	\$360.00	4 hours of focus groups: approximately 18 hours of transcribing
Coding notes	See staff time		
Staff time			
Project manager	40@\$30	\$1,200.00	
Coding transcript	40@\$30	\$1,200.00	
Facilitate other group & travel	8@\$30	\$240.00	
Transcribe notes for other group	3@\$30	\$90.00	
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$4,810.00</b>	

Focus groups are a relatively inexpensive way of collecting rich and useful data. The sample budget above shows how in-kind resources can help significantly lower costs. The more in-kind resources you have the lower your budget can be. If there is a free or inexpensive room available, volunteers or staff that are willing and able to participate, relationships with community based organizations, and peer partnerships, a possibly daunting budget becomes very manageable.

In thinking about resources consider the line items listed above. A budget worksheet is provided on the next page,

<b>Cost for Two Focus Groups with 10 Participants per Group</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Project manager			
Facilitator			
Notetaker			
Recruiter			
Space			
Travel			
Incentives			
\$__ Gift certificate for each participant			
Dinner for each Participant			
Supplies			
Tape recorder			
Tapes			
Miscellaneous			
Analysis			
Transcribing notes			
Transcribing tapes			
Coding notes			
Staff time			
Project manager			
Coding transcript			
Facilitate other group & travel			
Transcribe notes for other group			
<b>Total</b>			

# Record Keeping: Sample Spreadsheet

This list was compiled through intercepting parents as they were waiting for their hearing during the first week of September

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Will think about it	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	Called back on 9/4 and agreed to participate/Target Gift Certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Declined					Too busy
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Will think about it					Called back on 9/2 and agreed to participate/Safeway gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	No Answer	9/2/2005	No Answer	9/3/2005	No Answer	Replace name
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Declined					Cannot afford child care
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Declined					No transportation
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Will think about it	9/2/2005				Declined/no child care
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Safeway gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Agreed			Safeway gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	Called back on 9/4 and agreed to participate/Target Gift Certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Safeway gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Will think about it					
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Agreed			Best Buy gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Target gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Agreed			Vegitarian/Target gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Target gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Declined			Too busy
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Best Buy gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Target gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Will think about it					
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Agreed	9/3/2005		Best Buy gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Agreed					Safeway gift certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Declined					Too busy
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Agreed			Vegitarian/Best Buy
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	Called back on 9/5 and agreed to participate/Target Gift Certificate
Jane Doe	(212) 555-1212	9/1/2005	Machine/no mess	9/2/2005	Machine/no mess	9/3/2005	Left Voice Mail	Called back on 9/4 and Declined to participate/No transportation

## **Informed Consent: English Sample**

This focus group is being held to gather information about the client community that uses legal self help centers and the effectiveness and impact of some of their services. Your participation in the project is greatly appreciated. Listed below are some of the conditions of your participation in this focus group.

- You are free to leave at any time, without any negative consequences.
- Any incentives are yours whether you decide to leave immediately or at any time during this focus group.
- Your identity will be kept confidential.
- No personally identifying information will be used in any reports from the study, or other distribution or use of the data.
- Your participation in this study will in no way affect your case.
- The data gathered here will be used in a report to program funders and in the efforts to improve program performance for the community.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of the ensuing report, please contact:

[Enter facilitator contact info here]

OR

[Other contact person]

## Informed Consent: Spanish Sample

### **Consentimiento Informado**

Estamos teniendo este grupo del foco para conseguir información acerca de la comunidad del cliente que utiliza servicios legales de auto ayuda con voluntarios JusticeCorp y la eficacia y el impacto de algunos de sus servicios. Su participación en el proyecto se aprecia mucho. Lista abajo están algunas de las condiciones de su participación en este grupo del foco.

- Usted es libre salir en cualquier momento, sin consecuencias negativas.
- Los incentivos son suyos si usted decide salir inmediatamente o a cualquier tiempo durante este grupo del foco.
- Su identidad se mantendrá confidencial. Ninguna información personal de identificación se utilizará en cualquier informe del estudio.
- Su participación en este estudio no le afecta de ninguna manera a su caso.
- La información reunida aquí, será utilizada en un informe para ayudar en los esfuerzos de mejorar el desempeño del programa para la comunidad.

Si usted tiene preguntas o si desea una copia del informe, por favor contacte:

[Enter facilitator contact info here]

OR

[Other contact person]

# Focus Group Checklist

## Handouts (Minimum 15 each)

- Incentive checks/gift cards
- Business cards for each participant
- Informed Consent

## Supplies

- Focus Group Guide
- Informed consent sheets for distribution
- Caterer/pizza/restaurant number/snacks and drinks you bring yourself
- Pens
- Notepaper
- Tape recorder
- Check tape recorder
- Tapes
- Batteries for tape recorders
- Maps/Directions

## Other Relevant Items

- Travel Plans
- Schedule
- Phone numbers of key people at the office you may need to reach
- Travel plans
- Hotel reservations

Put anything else that you may need for each group on this list. Designate a briefcase or shoulder bag as your "Focus Group Kit." Include this list in your kit and make sure to check off items before you go to every group.

## Sample Plan Outline

**I. Introduction:** Explains what the study seeks to accomplish, why it needs to be conducted, how it relates to previous studies or experience, and lists the specific, current research questions.

**II. Methodology:** Explains who will be studied, what kinds of instruments will be used, and how the data will be collected.

**III. Human Subjects Protections:** Explains how any human participants will be told about the study and allowed to make an informed, voluntary decision about whether to participate.

**IV. Analysis and Reporting of Data:** Explains how the data will be analyzed, written about, and shared with others.

### Appendix A

**Focus Group Script:** Provides a sample group of focus group questions and follow-up probes, each keyed to a specific research question or questions.

### Appendix B

**Chart of Research and Focus Group Questions:** Illustrates how research questions are turned into focus group questions, and how specific focus group questions might provide answers to more than one research question.

### Appendix C

**Recruiter Duties:** Describes how a recruiter might go about getting focus group participants.

# Partnership Grantee Focus Groups

## Sample Study Plan

### 2007

## I. Introduction

### ***Purpose and background***

General Legal Services of California (GLSC) is collecting data about the effectiveness and impact of the services offered at its court based self-help center. The goals of this study are to provide information about whether the center is meeting the needs of its customers, and the effect of its services on the customers' legal problems. The study is being conducted to provide needed feedback to GLSC about how well the center is working, and to partially fulfill the requirements of its Equal Access Partnership Grant.

Research conducted to date has indicated that the overwhelming majority of self-help center customers are satisfied with the assistance they receive. Many also indicate that they feel they understand their legal situation better, and have some confidence that they know what steps to take next in order to resolve their legal problem. These data, however, are largely limited to responses given in short, written exit surveys that do not reveal any qualifications, ambiguities, or details of the customers' opinions. In addition, data on the reasons for those opinions has rarely been collected.

While it is helpful to know whether customers are generally satisfied, and whether they generally feel they have been helped, more information is needed in order to refine and expand self-help services. Specifically, if most people respond favorably to general statements about the center, it does not reveal whether they also think the service could be improved, or whether there may be specific complaints that do not rise to the level of a general or overall opinion. They also do not reveal what the service means to the customer, or give much information about how the service fits into their life or even their legal problem.

### ***Research questions***

In order to understand more fully the effectiveness and impact of self-help center services, several questions were developed as likely candidates to uncover the needed information:

1. What do customers find most helpful about the self-help center, and why?
2. What aspects of the center do customers think might be improved, and why?
3. Did the center help customers to better understand the court system, as well as their own case, and why or why not?
4. What would customers likely have done in the absence of the center?
5. What types of experiences have customers had in representing themselves in court without the center's assistance?
6. What impact has the center's assistance had on the customers' legal problems, and what effect has that had on their lives?

## **II. Methodology**

### ***Study location and participants***

Participants will be chosen from one of two major cities in the GLSC service area, each city representing a particular county with a distinct legal culture and client base. Accordingly, two focus groups will be conducted, one in Urban County and the other in Rural County. Each group will consist of six to ten people. The participants will primarily be English speaking, but arrangements will be made if any participant prefers to communicate in Spanish. No arrangements will be made for other language groups.

While an effort will be made to recruit participants with a variety of experiences and backgrounds, there will be no attempt to create a representative sample. All participants will have received service through one of GLSC's court-based self-help centers. Each participant will represent one or more of the following legal issues or groups:

### ***Instruments***

Data will be collected using a focus group script. The script consists of a series of preconstructed questions that have been designed to address the research questions described in section I, above. In addition to these fixed questions, several follow-up probes are suggested in the script. Depending on the responses, the facilitator may use additional questions to clarify answers or encourage discussion. A sample focus group script is attached as Appendix A. A chart showing the relationship between the research questions and the focus group questions is attached as Appendix B.

In addition to the focus group script, each participant will be asked to complete a short demographic survey, detailing the following information: Primary language, sex, race/ethnicity, age, income source, legal problem, marital status, number of adults in household, number of children in household, total number of people helped by service, disability status, site where helped, and citizenship status.

### ***Data collection process***

#### **Recruiting**

In most cases, recruiting will be done via phone contact. The duties of a recruiter are described in Appendix C. Self-help center customers will be selected from center records of those who have received document preparation assistance. Advocate recommendations may also be used, if needed, to identify potential participants.

#### **Incentives**

In compensation for their participation participants will be offered \$75.00 Target gift cards, dinner, and a local resource manual. Child care will be compensated at a fixed rate if needed. Participants will be responsible for their own transportation arrangements to and from the groups. GLSC will make arrangements for parking during each of the groups.

### **Facilitator and staff**

Fred Friendly and Carmen Santiago of Neighboring Legal Services will alternate as facilitator and note taker, in exchange for GLSC staff conducting focus groups for them.

### **Recording**

The focus group proceedings will be recorded by a note taker observing the group. In addition, the groups will be audio recorded, and later transcribed by GLSC staff.

### **Time and location**

The Urban County group will be conducted on Wednesday, July 26, 2006 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.. It will be held in a private dining area of a local restaurant, which will be available from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Participants will order dinner off the restaurant menu.

The Rural County group will be conducted on Thursday, August 10, 2006 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the GLSC offices in Ponderosa City. Dinner will be catered.

## **III. Human Subjects Protections**

All research will be conducted only with the informed consent of the participants. All participants will be free to leave the study at any time, without any negative consequences. Promised incentives will be given to participants who arrive for the groups, even if they decide to leave early. The identity of the participants will be kept confidential, and no personally identifying information will be used in any reports from the study, or other distribution or use of the data. GLSC staff will be responsible for informing participants at the time of recruiting of their rights as human subjects of social science research. Participants will also be informed of their rights orally and in writing at the beginning of each group.

## **IV. Analysis and Reporting of Data**

GLSC staff will read through each transcript two or more times, and code them with regard to addressing the six research questions described above. After coding the transcripts into categories, notes taken during the focus group will be reviewed, and demographic information about the participants will be compiled. GLSC staff will use these three sources of data to write a short report detailing the insights and findings gleaned from the focus groups. This report will be sent to the Legal Services Trust Fund in partial fulfillment of the Partnership Grant requirements, and otherwise used by GLSC to improve its services, provide examples to similar organizations, and support funding requests from other sources.

# Appendix A

## ***Focus Group Script***

As participants arrive, greet them, have them sit down and put their names on their place cards. Attend to any immediate needs of participants.

Order and receive dinner.

Review and distribute informed consent information.

Start group by going around the table and asking people to introduce themselves by their first name (they'll also have place cards in front of them to write their name on), and say briefly what legal problem they got help with, and how (*RQ's 1, 2*):

- Probe for how people found out about the help they eventually received (*RQ's 1, 2*).
- Probe for whether people think the way they found out about help was acceptable, and if not, what would have worked better for them (*RQ's 1, 2*).
- Probe for how common or usual they think their own experience was (*RQ's 1, 2*).
- Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems (*RQ's 1, 2, 4, 5*).

Ask people to describe any other times when they've had to go to court without the center's assistance (*RQ 5*):

- Probe for stories, whether personal or second-hand, about the problems described and how they were handled (*RQ's 1,2, 5*).
- Probe for whether people think the cited problems should be handled by the litigants themselves (*RQ's 1,2, 5*).

Ask whether people were satisfied with the assistance they received (*RQ's 1, 2, 6*):

- Probe for what would have made people satisfied if they were not (*RQ 6*).
- Probe for whether people would return for additional assistance, if it were available (*RQ 6*).
- Probe for whether participants would recommend the service to others, particularly family or friends who might be facing the same or a similar situation (*RQ 6*).
- Probe for whether people feel they adequately understood what they needed to do, and why or why not (*RQ 3*).

Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives (*RQ's 3, 6*):

- Probe for whether they understood how the court system worked regarding their particular case, whether they thought it was important for them to understand, and why (*RQ 6*).

- Probe for whether they felt they were better able to make a good decision about their situation, and why (*RQ 3*).

Ask what people might have done in the absence of the services (*RQ 4*).

- Probe for other types of assistance have people gotten with their problem (*RQ 4*).
- Probe for other kinds of experiences people have had with the legal system (*RQ 4*).
- Probe for whether people considered hiring an attorney to assist them (*RQ 4*)? Why/why not?
- Probe for whether their hypothesized result might be common in their communities (*RQ 4*).

## Appendix B

### ***Chart of Research Questions & Focus Group Questions Designed to Gather Data About Them***

Research Question	Focus Group Script
<p>1. What do customers find most helpful about the self-help center, and why?</p> <p>2. What aspects of the center do customers think might be improved, and why?</p>	<p>Start group by going around the table and asking people to introduce themselves by their first name (they'll also have place cards in front of them to write their name on), and say briefly what legal problem they got help with, and how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for how people found out about the help they eventually received.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the way they found out about help was acceptable, and if not, what would have worked better for them.</li> <li>• Probe for how common or usual they think their own experience was.</li> <li>• Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</li>   <li>• Probe for stories, whether personal or second-hand, about the problems described and how they were handled.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the cited problems should be handled by the litigants themselves.</li> </ul> <p>Ask whether people were satisfied with the assistance they received.</p>
<p>3. Did the center help customers to better understand the court system, as well as their own case, and why or why not?</p>	<p>Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for whether they felt they were better able to make a good decision about their situation, and why.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Focus Group Question
<p>4. What would customers likely have done in the absence of the center?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</li> </ul> <p>Ask what people might have done in the absence of the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for other types of assistance have people gotten with their problem.</li> <li>• Probe for other kinds of experiences people have had with the legal system.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people considered hiring an attorney to assist them? Why/why not?</li> <li>• Probe for whether their hypothesized result might be common in their communities.</li> </ul>
<p>5. What types of experiences have customers had in representing themselves in court without the center's assistance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</li> </ul> <p>Ask people to describe any other times when they've had to go to court without the center's assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for stories, whether personal or second-hand, about the problems described and how they were handled.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the cited problems should be handled by the litigants themselves.</li> </ul>
<p>6. What impact has the center's assistance had on the customers' legal problems, and what effect has that had on their lives?</p>	<p>Ask whether people were satisfied with the assistance they received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for what would have made people satisfied if they were not.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people would return for additional assistance, if it were available.</li> <li>• Probe for whether participants would recommend the service to others, particularly family or friends who might be facing the same or a similar situation.</li> </ul> <p>Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for whether they understood how the court system worked regarding their particular case, whether they thought it was important for them to understand, and why.</li> </ul>

## Appendix C

### ***Recruiter Duties***

**General recruiting guidelines.** The primary goal is to talk to as few people as possible, and get as many of those we talk to as possible to agree to participate. Ideally, we would like to be able to say something like “we talked to the first 17 people who came in one morning, and 12 of them agreed to participate,” rather than “we talked to 100 men and women over a two week period and 12 of the women agreed to participate.” In order to insure a group of 6 – 10 people, the recruiter should plan on obtaining about 15 firm commitments to attend.

Recruiters should keep track of how many people they approach, and any significant identifying characteristics the recruiter feels certain he or she can make. For example, in most cases sex can be readily determined if the recruiting is taking place in-person. Ethnicity and age, on the other hand, can be much more difficult to determine, especially if the recruiting is taking place over the phone. Identifying characteristics for everyone the recruiter approaches would be helpful to have, but only to the extent that they can be accurately recorded.

Recruiters doing phone contacts should be prepared to make at least 3 or 4 phone calls during different times of the day for each “live contact.” In general, it is better to keep calling back until you reach the participant, rather than leaving a message on a machine or with someone else who answers the phone. In the later case, it is better to ask when the participant would be available to talk. Once you do reach the participant, it would be best to ask them for a time of day that you are most likely to reach them for your follow-up call(s).

**Recruiting participants at the point of service.** This method of recruiting requires the recruiter to be present at the point of service. To the extent possible, the recruiting should be done during a specific period of time, or from a limited group of people. The object is to, for example, pick a Tuesday morning and try to get everyone who comes to the center that morning to participate. This will help to randomize the participants. It will also minimize the amount of time you have to spend recruiting.

For those who agree to participate, the recruiter should get 2 or 3 contact phone numbers, and a mailing address if possible. Those who agree to participate should be given a flyer, or have one mailed to them, that describes the study, basic human subjects protections, incentives, directions, and contact information. Depending on how much time is left before the group, one or two follow-up phone contacts (with one of them being a day or two before the group) should be made to confirm their intent to participate, and help them overcome any barriers to participation that they may be facing.

**Recruiting participants via phone after service.** This method of recruiting requires the recruiter to call potential participants from a list of people obtained from the records of the self-help center. In most cases, the recruiter should simply work through the list, trying to get as many people as possible from those who can actually be reached in-person to agree to participate. This will help to randomize the participants.

The recruiter should obtain 1 or 2 additional phone contact numbers, along with a mailing address, from those who agree to participate. A flyer describing the study, basic human subjects protections, incentives, directions, and contact information should then be mailed to those who agree to come. Depending on how much time is left before the group, one or two follow-up phone contacts (with one of them being a day or two before the group) should be made to confirm their intent to participate, and help them overcome any barriers to participation that they may be facing.

# A Summary of Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Interviews and Data Collection

This document summarizes procedures that you should follow when collecting information on individuals. These procedures apply to information collected through structured questionnaires, informal one-on-one interviews, focus groups, exit surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, needs assessments, telephone interviews, or review of non-public case files. These procedures apply equally to formal research studies and relatively informal research. The guidelines in this document draw on accepted social science research standards for protecting research subjects and they align with federal policy (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46) that governs protection of human subjects in federally funded research. Appendix I lists websites with additional information.

## *I. What is ethically sound data collection?*

Ethically sound data collection procedures apply to all participants in research. This includes individuals that you interview, ask to fill out a survey, or ask to participate in a focus group. Ethically sound data collection procedures are voluntary, informed, safe, and confidential. In ethically sound research:

- Individuals make a voluntary decision about whether to take part in the study.
- Individuals are informed of the purpose of the study, what their participation will involve, how their confidentiality will be protected and how the information they provide will be used and stored.
- The confidentiality of all participants, and all information and data collected from or about them, is protected.
- The safety of all participants is protected.

## *II. All participation must be voluntary*

All individuals must be given the opportunity to make a voluntary decision about whether to take part in a study. They should be informed, both verbally and in writing, that participation is strictly voluntary and that they can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time, without penalty. They should be informed that refusal to participate will not affect their case, in court-based research, or their access to services. Appendix II gives samples of written information on voluntary participation.

## *III. All individuals must be informed*

Participants in a study must be fully informed about the nature of the research in which they are participating. This is known as informed consent. Information should be provided verbally and in writing. To document that participants have given their informed consent to participate, you may wish to have them sign a consent form.

Describe the purpose of your study in writing and refer to it when speaking with individuals whom you are inviting to participate. Provide participants with a written copy of these materials. (See the following table for the points to cover). You may print information on fliers, consent forms, or other documents. The written materials do not need to be extensive – you should be able to include all necessary points on one page. Follow these guidelines for written materials:

- Print written materials on letterhead from your agency.
- Use terms prospective participants can understand. Adjust the language you use to a level appropriate for the population and avoid using legal or technical phrases.
- Interpretation and translated forms should be made available to individuals who are not comfortable being interviewed or filling out forms in English.
- Include a contact person and phone number for further questions.

<i><b>Information to Provide about the Study</b></i>	
<b>1. Introductory information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name the agency for which you work.</li> <li>• Provide the name of a contact person with a telephone number to call for questions either before or after participating in the study.</li> <li>• Outline the reason you wish to interview individuals.</li> <li>• Summarize whom you wish to include in your study (e.g., women with an open family law case).</li> </ul>
<b>2. Inform individuals that their participation is voluntary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite them to take part and tell them that participation is voluntary and that they can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time, without penalty. When interviewing individuals with active court cases, inform them that refusal to participate will not affect their court case.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Describe the interviews and what participants will need to do</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe what participants will do during the study or what data you will collect.</li> <li>• Provide the location of the interviews and the time commitment required.</li> <li>• If you are audiotaping the interviews or focus group, inform potential participants.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Address potential concerns and describe the benefits of participating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize that the information participants provide will not affect their court case or services.</li> <li>• Describe risks and benefits in a straightforward, truthful way. If you offer incentives, present this neutrally, not as the main reason to participate.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Outline who will have access to any information collected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell individuals that only persons involved in collecting and compiling the information collected will have access to it.</li> <li>• Describe how you will store the information and who will have access to it.</li> <li>• Let potential participants know if and how you will inform them of study results.</li> </ul>
<b>6. Provide information about confidentiality and how results will be used</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell individuals that you will keep the information that they provide confidential. (Include any limits on confidentiality – i.e., legal reporting requirements).</li> <li>• If you are conducting a focus group, ask all the participants not to reveal to anyone else who participated in the group or what they said during the discussion.</li> <li>• If any data that you collect in your study may be subject to discovery or subpoena, inform potential participants.</li> <li>• Tell them how the results of the study will be used or published, and that these published reports will keep participants' identities confidential.</li> </ul>

#### ***IV. Protect the confidentiality of individuals***

Set up careful interview and data collection procedures that will maintain the confidentiality of the individuals that you interview. If you tell participants that their responses will remain confidential, you must make every effort to fulfill that assurance. If information you collect is open to mandatory reporting requirements, discovery or subpoena, you must inform participants of this.

##### **Appropriate Settings for Interviews**

The location where you hold your interviews can affect your ability to maintain the confidentiality of individuals' participation and their responses to your questions.

- If you have participants complete a written survey, locate a private setting for them to do so.
- Never conduct oral interviews or focus groups in open areas where others could overhear. If possible, offer individuals the option of being interviewed in a private room.
- Do not leave completed surveys out where someone else could read them.

##### **Collecting Identifying Information**

Maintaining the confidentiality of the individuals who participate in your study should govern the procedures used to store all data and identifying information. In many studies, you do not need to collect identifying information about participants. However, this may be necessary in studies that involve re-interviewing participants over time or in studies that involve linking data about participants from multiple sources.

Records that identify participants in your study should always be kept in a secure location in locked file cabinets. If you are entering information from your surveys or interviews into a database, do not enter identifying information in the same database that you use to enter data collected from or about participants. Instead, assign each participant a numeric identification code. Any records linking the identification code to the name of the participants should be kept in a secure location, separate from the study databases.

##### **Reporting Information**

If you report any information that the individuals provide, take measures to protect their confidentiality and prevent negative repercussions.

- If any study participants have unique characteristics that could be used to identify them, do not report this information.
- Do not report verbatim responses if they could identify a participant.

#### ***V. Safety Issues and Minimizing Risk to Participants***

Participating in your interviews can present risks to individuals, including mental distress resulting from discussion of a sensitive topic and compromise of their physical safety.

## **Designing and Asking Questions**

Minimize the level of distress that the questions you ask during your interviews may cause:

- If participants do not wish to answer questions you ask, do not pressure them to do so.
- Consider the value of asking for information about a participant's experience with issues such as violent victimization.
- Consider the possibility of repercussions if information a participant provides is divulged.
- Do not give any information about the study or its purpose to anyone but the person who has agreed to be interviewed. Do not indicate to anyone else that a study participant is participating in the study.

## ***Research with Victims of Domestic Violence***

Study participation can compromise the physical safety of participants who have experienced domestic violence.

- If you plan to interview domestic violence victims in person, make sure you do so in a secure setting and that other individuals, particularly batterers, do not know that the victim is participating.
- Do not risk putting persons in danger by delaying them as they are leaving a courtroom, or interviewing them in a setting where they are vulnerable.
- If you interview victims of domestic violence by telephone, ensure that victims are able to participate in a private setting and that other individuals, particularly batterers, are not aware that they are participating and are not aware of their responses.
- A litigant who brings a support person to court (whether or not he or she is a victim of domestic violence) should be given the choice as to whether the support person accompanies him or her on the interview.

## ***VI. Other considerations***

**Informing the court.** In any study that involves collecting data in the courts, it is essential to contact the presiding judge, the court executive, and the trial court judges in writing to inform them of data collection plans and describe the study prior to conducting any data collection.

**Training staff.** Persons involved in the study, including interviewers, consultants, data specialists, and support staff, must be trained in informing individuals on voluntary participation and the nature of the study, and on ensuring confidentiality of information and the safety of participants.

## Appendix I Sources for More Information

Many websites contain tutorials about protection of human subjects. Some of them are listed below. The link to the federal policy on protection of human subjects is also provided.

American Association of Public Opinion Research Standards  
[www.aapor.org/ethics/](http://www.aapor.org/ethics/)

American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct 2002*  
[www.apa.org/ethics/](http://www.apa.org/ethics/)

Code of Federal Regulations: Title 45, Part 46  
[www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx\\_00/45cfr46\\_00.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_00/45cfr46_00.html)

National Institutes of Health Tutorial on Title 45, Part 46 – Protection of Human Subjects  
[ohsr.od.nih.gov/mpa/45cfr46.php3](http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/mpa/45cfr46.php3)

National Institutes of Health Office of Human Subjects' Research  
[ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines.php3](http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines.php3)

National Institutes of Health Computer-based Training: Human Participant Protection Education for Research Teams  
[cme.nci.nih.gov/](http://cme.nci.nih.gov/)

Chapter 3 of the Privacy Act of 1974 provides information about methods for handling, storing, and transporting confidential data.

National Center for Education Statistics Web site:  
[nces.ed.gov/statprog/rudman/chapter3.asp#3](http://nces.ed.gov/statprog/rudman/chapter3.asp#3).

**Appendix II**  
**Sample Adult Consent Form**

<< Insert Agency Name and Address/Print on Letterhead >>

<<Date>>

My name is <<interviewer name>> and I work as a <<interviewer role>> for the << agency name>>. <<Provide reason why agency is conducting the study>>. As part of that process, << agency name>> would like to find out from <<whom you wish to include in your study>> about <<describe the information you are collecting>>. I would like to invite you to participate in the <<interview/survey/etc.>>.

Your participation in the <<interview/survey/etc.>> is completely voluntary. It will not affect your case in any way. You may refuse to participate in the <<interview/survey/etc.>> or any part of the <<interview/survey/etc.>>. All the information you provide will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to the study. In reports, the information you give us will be combined with what we get from everyone who participates in these interviews.

If you take part in the <<interview/survey/etc.>>, you will be asked to do the following:  
<<interview activities>>.

The <<interview/survey/etc.>> will be held <<where and when>>. <<With your permission, interviews will be audiotaped (if applicable)>>.

By participating, you will have the opportunity to provide our agency with important information about your experience us improve services to <<families and children, other groups served>>. <<Participants will also receive \$X/a snack for participating (if you are offering incentives)>>.

If you have any questions about the study, you may write or call <<contact name and title>> at <<location and telephone number>>. Thank you for your participation!

By signing this form, you are indicating that you have read and understood the information provided about your participation in this <<interview/survey/etc.>>.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant name (please print)

**Sample Survey Cover Sheet**

<< Insert Agency Name and Address/Print on Letterhead >>

The << agency name>> is <<provide reason why agency is conducting the study>>.

As part of that program, our << agency>> would like to invite you to complete the attached survey to inform our understanding of <<describe the issue being studied>>. By participating, you will have the opportunity to provide our << agency>> with important information about <<describe the information you are collecting>> that will <<describe potential positive impact of the study or knowledge gained>>. All the information you provide will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to the study. In reports, the information you give us will be combined with what we get from everyone who participates in these interviews. Your participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. <<It will not affect your case in any way>>. You may refuse to participate in this survey and omit responses to any question.

If you have any questions about the study, you may write or call <<contact name and title>> at <<location and telephone number>>. Thank you for your participation!

## I. Deciding whether to conduct litigant interviews

### A. *What is an interview?*

#### 1. Definition

Interviews are one on one ‘conversations’ with study participants. They differ from surveys primarily in the types of questions asked and the amount of structure in the overall interaction. Specifically, surveys – whether presented on paper or verbally – consist of a set of predetermined questions that must be answered either yes/no, by multiple choice, or short answer. The major advantage is that the data is already structured by the form and content of the questions. This makes later analysis quicker. The major disadvantage of surveys is that you do not really know how the research subject is interpreting the question, or whether the predetermined response choices actually capture the participant’s experience (although this uncertainty can be reduced by adequate pilot testing, perhaps with follow-up interviewing).

Interviews, on the other hand, are well suited to capturing the totality of an individual’s experience and understanding (to the extent they are willing to share it with the interviewer). The questions themselves are often (but not necessarily) determined beforehand. They are more open ended and good ones pull for more in-depth, narrative responses. Interview protocols frequently include a set of main questions with suggested follow-up probes to clarify ambiguous answers. Interviews can also be completely open-ended with the interviewee being given a topic and asked to give his or her opinion, or recount past experiences for the interviewer.

The data (narrative text) from an interview is generally more time consuming and difficult to analyze than survey or administrative/census data – although advances in linguistic analysis software promise to reduce the amount of time needed to “code” interview data. The major advantage is that interviews allow much more in-depth research into a topic, as well as the opportunity to clarify questions and responses that may seem unclear.

#### 2. Objectives of interviews

Interviews are ideal for uncovering how people understand a situation or topic, the meanings they assign to experiences, and the structure of their cognitive processes. The objective of an interview is to get a full picture of the topic of interest, from the point of view of the interviewee. It also allows for clarification, and in some cases the co-construction, of understanding between the interviewer and interviewee. Used on their own, or prior to and/or following large scale data collection in the form of surveys and administrative data collection, interviews can add depth and context to those more quantitative data.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

## **3. Benefits and limitations**

The primary benefit of interview data is that it provides deeper, more complex information about the research questions. This increases the likelihood that the study will have external validity – that the data collected and conclusions reached will actually match the ‘real’ world. It can also help raise or answer important issues about which the researcher was unaware based on his or her own experience and understanding.

The primary limitations of interview data are that it is time consuming and labor intensive to collect and analyze. This tends to make interviews expensive to conduct and results in a more limited sample than can be achieved through surveys or administrative data analysis.

### ***B. What information do you hope to gather through interviews?***

#### **1. Is the information sought through interviews tied to the major research questions?**

Particularly because of the more open-ended nature of interviews, it is important to tie the interview questions and probes to the research questions. The interviewers should be well acquainted with the research topic, and experienced in interviewing the study population. This will help ensure that the interviewer is able to ask follow-up questions that enhance the initial answers. It is common, and indeed part of the justification for doing interviews, that the interviewee will run across understandings, information, or related topics not anticipated by the researchers, but highly relevant to the research questions. In order to adequately pursue these, the interviewer must be well versed in both the area of study and the study questions themselves. This will allow the interviewer to create follow-up questions that are relevant to the study. It should generally be considered a waste of resources for an interviewer to be uninformed about the study and simply reading predetermined questions to an interviewee and recording the answers.

#### **2. Are there other ways of getting the same information?**

After deciding what information is needed to inform your research questions, researchers should decide the best or most appropriate way of getting that information. Choice of methodology should not drive the research. Rather, the methodology should be derived from what kind of information is needed, which in turn is determined by the research questions – or more simply what the researcher wants to know.

This is not, however, a one-way linear process. Often time and money constraints will seriously limit what we are able to do. The researcher may also be faced with several ways to get similar information. In most cases, it is necessary for the researcher to ask what is the quickest and cheapest way of getting the needed information, or information substantially similar to that.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

If, in going through this process, the researcher concludes that a certain type of information, like interview data, is needed to adequately address the research questions – but that type of data is not feasible to collect, some important decisions need to be made. Often there are options for combining methodologies that can address concerns that the data be deep and meaningful, as well as affordable to collect. For example, interviews and focus groups can help craft better surveys if conducted beforehand. They can also help interpret survey results if conducted after such data collection. What is not good research practice is to have research questions that, for example, can only be addressed through in-depth interviews and attempt to address them through a survey. If you need an interview to answer your questions, but can only conduct a survey, you must go back and re-do your questions.

## ***C. Assessing the feasibility of conducting interviews***

### **1. Available resources**

Interviews are one of the more labor intensive forms of data collection, both in conducting them and analyzing them. This tends to make them expensive as compared to other forms of data collection, and necessitates careful and complete budgeting for their conduct, transcription, translation if necessary, and analysis.

### **2. Project timeline**

In constructing a project timeline for interview data collection, researchers should allow ample space for changes in scheduling. Recruiting and scheduling people for interviews often requires a fair degree of flexibility, tolerance for missed appointments in some cases, and being prepared to deal with equipment failures and venue changes. To the degree possible, project timelines should allow for these uncertainties. In addition, not all interviews are successfully completed. The researcher should also plan on collecting a few more than the target number to allow for some attrition.

In addition to collecting the interview data, it is not uncommon for researchers to underestimate the time and expense of transcribing, coding, and analyzing interview data. In constructing a timeline, it is important to account for these activities as they will necessarily amount to a significant portion of the project's budget.

### **3. Access to the study population**

Getting access to the study population can sometimes be an important issue in collecting interview data. Researchers should clearly identify anyone whose permission is needed before contacting study participants. In addition, parents and perhaps teachers will need to give their permission if the study concerns children. Community leaders or other community contacts may need to be enlisted if research about litigants is to be successful. Finally, in almost any case of research in or around courts, the presiding judge and court executive officer should be notified and their approval solicited.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

## 4. Likely response rate

As with other types of instruments, determining the likely response rate is important in figuring the cost and duration of a study. Since interviews involve one-on-one contact with the study participants, they offer unique opportunities for recruitment – and if done well, very high response rates. Researchers should not, however, assume that it will be easy to recruit participants, particularly if they come from communities unfamiliar to the researcher. In many cases it will be necessary to enlist the help of others more familiar with the study’s target population in order to ensure an adequate response rate.

## 5. Knowledge of the universe

In general, while it is essential for interviewers to be well training in interviewing techniques and well versed in the subject of the study, designers of interview studies generally need to know less about the possible responses than survey designers. While surveys are ideal for counting the amount of an already known phenomenon in a population, interviews are ideal for finding out about little known or unknown information. They are also well-suited to uncovering more complex phenomena like the structure of knowledge systems or the meanings individuals attach to experiences.

## II. Planning and design

### *A. Deciding on type of interview*

#### **1. Structured/Close-ended Interviews vs. Unstructured/Open-ended Interviews**

Although both structured and unstructured interviews have a set of relevant topics to be discussed, structured interviews include a set of predefined questions and follow-up questions. The decision of whether to use a structured interview or survey methodology will depend largely on the topic, the level of detail required, size of the population to be studied and budget constraints. Interviews will provide researchers the opportunity to extract more thorough responses because optional avenues of questioning can be explored through follow-up questions. However, the cost of interviews vs. surveys—in both time and financial factors—per respondent is considerable.

A structured approach can provide more reliable, quantifiable data than an open-ended or unstructured interview, and can be designed rigorously to avoid biases in the line of questioning. However, for structured interviews to be most successful, researchers must be considerably familiar with the topics being discussed and how they affect the population being interviewed. Prior to conducting structured interviews, researchers must develop an extensive and, if possible, exhaustive list of the likely answers along with follow-up questions that will be provided to interviewers.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

If information regarding the population to be examined is limited, your first approach might be an unstructured or open-ended interview. Unstructured interviews might include a few questions just to get the conversation flowing on the relevant topics, but is more of an exploratory expedition where respondents lead the interviewer in the right direction. Open-ended interviews permit the respondent to provide additional information, ask broad questions without a fixed set of answers, and explore paths of questioning which may occur to the interviewer spontaneously during the interview. An open-ended approach allows for an exploratory approach to uncover unexpected information, used especially when the exact issues of interest have not yet been identified.

Semi-structured interviews, where structured and open-ended approaches are combined can also be useful. For instance, an interview can begin with structured questions, and once the quantifiable data is covered, open up discussion with the interviewee into other areas. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework which allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication. They can be used both to give and receive information.

Unlike the survey framework, where detailed questions are formulating ahead of time, semi structured interviewing starts with more general questions or topics. Relevant topics are initially identified and the possible relationship between these topics and the issues such as availability, expense, effectiveness become the basis for more specific questions which do not need to be prepared in advance.

## Closed/Structured Interviews

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Provide more control against interviewer biases	More time to develop interview tool upfront
Higher inter-rater reliability	Must have considerable knowledge of population before beginning interviews
More easily quantifiable/analyzed	More training time required for interviewers
Specific questions can be answered	Less qualitative data
Large amount of data and topics can be covered during shorter interviews	Price of conducting interviews can limit number of respondents and generalizability
Can pave way for survey	

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

## Open/Unstructured Interviews

Pros	Cons
Little time to develop interview upfront	Provide little control against interviewer biases
Less training time required for interviewers	Lower inter-rater reliability
Can have limited knowledge of population before beginning interviews	Not easily quantifiable
Answers may not be quantifiable/very difficult to quantify	May not answer specific research questions
Are likely to uncover unexpected information	Price of conducting interviews can limit number of respondents and generalizability
Can pave way for structured interview or survey	

## 2. Face to face vs. phone

Because an interview, by definition, is a method of directly collecting data through questions posed by a researcher and answers provided by a respondent, the methods of administration are limited to face-to-face or telephone. Face-to-face interviews offer the richness of interaction between the researcher and respondent, but are not always feasible due to geographical dispersion, confidentiality, or other issues. Telephone interviews also allow interaction between the researcher and the respondent and can be much more economical than face-to-face interviews, but some studies have shown there to be bias towards higher income respondents in phone interviews (reference).

Ultimately, there are benefits and issues with each mode of administration and the project goals and resources should dictate the appropriate method. For example, if your target population is geographically dispersed, you have access to their telephone numbers (and permission to use them), a restrictive budget, and need for anonymity, telephone interviews will be your best method of collecting information. However, if you are dealing with a transient population, it may be very difficult to get accurate phone numbers and face-to-face interviews will be your only choice.

## 3. Pre-scheduled vs. intercept

Prescheduled interviews require the researcher to have a list or pool of possible participants that can be recruited. Participants can be recruited directly by the researcher or by a third party (such as a community based organization that works with the target population) that acts as an intermediary. Having an intermediary can be very helpful: they allow the participants to remain anonymous, they can provide access to populations that are difficult to reach, and they can raise response rates since the recruiting is done by someone the prospective participant may already have a relationship with. However, reliance on a third party requires the researcher give up a certain degree of control over recruitment method which can be particularly important if multiple sites or programs are being evaluated—so that recruitment method may influence participant responses.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

Additionally, making interview arrangements can be very time consuming and taxing on intermediaries, which can cause delays in the research timeline.

If researchers have access to a list they will be able to preschedule interviews for themselves either by calling or sending letters or postcards. Researchers should keep track of how many negative responses they receive since it is likely to reflect response bias. In general, pre-scheduled interviews can be very useful if preparations need to be made prior to the interview, such as assuring that the interviewer speak the same language as the participant or minor populations where consent is needed by the parent; or if the interview is particularly long and respondents will be expected to participate for more than 30 or 40 minutes. One of the major downsides to prescheduled interviews is “a bird in hand,” meaning, people are more likely to do an interview immediately if they say they are then come back and do it later; depending on the incentive, “no-shows” can be very expensive, wasting valuable time and resources.

It may not be possible to pre-schedule interviews. Intercept interviews (also called exit interviews), where participants are recruited at the point of service, are often used to gauge client satisfaction. Intercept interviews are especially helpful due to the immediacy of the clients’ experience. This data collection method benefits from the respondent’s ability to recount details of their experience, which is still fresh in their mind. Questions that are specifically good for intercept interviews include: the demographics of the population using a certain service, what services they received that day, what could have been done better and what was done particularly well.

Although recruiting for intercept interviews may seem less complicated than for prescheduled interviews, considerable preparations should be made prior to beginning the intercept interview process. For example, the organization and clients should be well prepared for researchers, a private space should be available for interviews, attorneys’ permission should be obtained if necessary, statements of confidentiality should be prepared, provisions should be made for sensitive populations, etc. Also, because intercept interviews are spontaneous and participants will be recruited on the spot, the shorter they are (about 15 minutes or less) the higher the response rate is likely to be.

## ***B. Sample design***

### **1. Population size and attributes**

In all fields of science, it is impossible to study every person, place or thing which is why sampling is employed frequently. Sampling has many goals, but primarily it is important to ensure that the people you select for your study reflect that of the general population (or sub-population). Another goal of sampling is ensuring that the people that you select and who choose not to participate are not too different from the people you do select in the study. Many research organizations struggle with this phenomena and attempt to create incentives to address this issue. For example, many working families cannot dedicate the 15 minutes required for a random telephone survey due to work schedules,

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

lack of baby sitters, and basic distrust of divulging personal information. Many research organizations identify incentives that will cater to this population because their absence in studies impedes on the ability to rely on that data and to generalize. The same goes for court research; we need to ensure that study non-participants appear to be similar to study participants.

In order to make the determination of whether your sample population reflects the general population (or target population in the case of sub-populations), you need to develop a criteria that you will use to compare between the two groups. You will have to pick an attribute essential to your project, such as job functions (judges for example), or race/ethnicity, language spoken at home, pro per or attorney represented, etc.

Determining the size of the sample depends on a variety of issues:

- **The need for accuracy:** If your research questions require that you know an exact figure, your sampling strategy will have to be sufficiently rigorous for accuracy. Considering that there is limited court information throughout the state and that few research questions require precise figures, sophisticated sampling strategies are seldom employed.
- **Whether the instrument is designed primarily as open-ended or close-ended:** Close-ended questions limit the variance in a sample. In other words, close-ended questions limit the number of options and scores that can be yielded. If you have questions with a 5 point scale, theoretically it can take 5 people to get the full array of perspectives from the general population. On the other hand, open-ended questions have limitless options in the types of responses that can be obtained. It's impossible to determine how many people it would take to capture the full array of possibilities. This phenomena is further affected by not knowing much about the population to begin with, as is the case with most court research. Generally, for open-ended questions the sample size should be substantially bigger than what is required for close-ended questions.
- **How the data will be applied and generalized:** If the data that you plan to collect needs to be generalized to the entire state, your sampling design needs to reflect this via the amount of cases you select and the way in which you select them. However, if you are studying a phenomena that is specific to a court, rather than to the state as a whole, your sampling design needs to reflect this as well and should include less cases than those needing to be generalized at the state level and need to be selected only from that court. The latter is reflective of many court research projects.
- **How much the researcher knows about the target population:** The more you know about the target population, the more you can determine whether your sample population is representative. For example, let's say you wanted to determine whether your sample of Court Executive Officers (CEOs) appeared to be representative of all CEOs in California, knowing some background information on CEOs could help determine this. If before selecting your sample you knew that the average tenure for most CEOs was 7 years of court experience and that their average age was 47 years old, you could compare the averages of

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your sampled CEOs' attributes to those attributes of the general CEO population to determine how representative the sample was. If your sample yielded an average tenure of 12 years of court experience and an average age of 56 years old, this tells you that your sample is not truly reflective of the average CEO. You may need to add more people to your sample to get a better reflection of the average. Another example of needing to know more about the population in order to determine your sample size can be illustrated by court initiatives occurring in few courts. If you needed to know what litigants thought of Korean-language services in Court X and you knew that Court X served 15 Korean speaking clients a week, it would be easier to determine your sample size than not having that information altogether.

- **Resources available to the researcher:** As discussed in other sections of this document, litigant interviews can be costly. The number of study participants may be affected by the amount of funding and time allocated to the task. This factor significantly contributes to sampling decisions.

In sum, many factors contribute to the number of people that should be included in a survey. All of these weigh into that decision and researchers recommend that all of these are explored before a determination is made.

## 2. Response rate

Response rates affect the validity and basic design of any survey. When the response rate is too low, it may require that respondents are contacted more than once to increase their participation, thus contributing to and increasing the response rate. Interviewer administered surveys have higher expected response rates than mail, web and other self-administered surveys. It is theorized that the presence of an interviewer contributes to this phenomena since he/she can address potential respondents' hesitation, alleviate any reluctant respondents, convey salience about the project and people, in general, have a difficult time refusing participation directly toward another individual. Response rates are affected by the sampling frame (the list used to select people from). When the sampling frame contains more erroneous information or information that requires further screening, this affects the response rate calculation as well. How long the project is in the field affects the response rate as well. When the field period is small; this limits the amount of opportunities for converting people who refuse to participate and for ascertaining the number of people that don't meet the study criteria (thus being ineligible). When the field period is too long, this can affect costs and response rates as well. There are more opportunities for people to refuse to participate. All of these factors contribute to the calculation of response rates and need to be considered by the project team before commencing with any study. A listing of how response rates are calculated can be found at: [http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs\\_ver3.pdf](http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs_ver3.pdf)

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## ***C. Recruitment of participants***

### **1. Methods of recruiting**

When recruiting litigants, researchers may have to request permission from their attorney and/or the presiding judge in the county where participants are being recruited. Details about the project and how the information acquired from the participants will be used should be readily available to all parties. Once permission for recruiting litigants has been granted, researchers must get information about the study to the target population and get them interested in the study. Researchers should be trained in recruitment and interviewing practices and should be aware of issues regarding any sensitive populations they may come in contact with. Training recruiters/interviewers uniformly will add confidence that differences among participants are real and not due to differences between interviewers.

Depending on the research question and target population, any of the following methods can be used in recruiting litigants: court files, service provider files, referral through service provider, interception at the courthouse, or interception at the service provider.<sup>1</sup> If researchers are recruiting at the courthouse or the service provider, researchers should be familiar with the organizations' processes and both staff and participants should be aware of the project. If sensitive subjects are being discussed, a private space should be available for the interview and participants should be provided a statement of confidentiality as well as contact information for any future questions that may arise. If researchers are provided a list provided from case files or service providers, they should contact participants by telephone, through USPS mail, or email to request participation.

### **2. Incentives**

Most research using human subjects offer incentives to provide people with a reason to participate. Incentives are used to raise response rates, especially for individuals that would not usually participate in the research, thereby expanding the generalizability of the results. These incentives can take many forms such as cash, gift certificates, meals, transportation vouchers, etc. However, researchers must be careful not to cross the line between incentives and coercion. While incentives can be used as a way of compensating participants for their time, they should not be so significant as to place undue pressure on prospective participants. Note: the AOC does not directly provide incentives to research participants (should I say they can get around this by going through a contractor?)

### **3. Special considerations when working with vulnerable populations**

Litigants are generally vulnerable as group, but issues are compounded when they are minors, victims of domestic violence, refugees, immigrants, prisoners, delinquents, ethnic minorities, or dependents. These groups are in danger of being exploited and researchers

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<sup>1</sup> Research subjects can also be recruited through advertisements in news papers or magazines.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

must be aware of the concerns specific to each vulnerable population and adjust research protocols and guidelines accordingly (reference). Extra care must be taken when approaching these groups and in some cases, such as with minors, specific third party permission must be acquired before the interview can proceed. (How extensively should I go into this—I have a really good 25 page article)

## ***D. Instrument design***

### **1. Considerations for minimizing burden on respondent**

One of the biggest burdens on respondents is: time. A well constructed and thoroughly tested interview guide will ensure that the instrument efficiently and adequately meets project goals and objectives, while minimizing the response burden. Pre-testing and piloting answers questions such as: length of interview, willingness of respondents to participate in the survey, potential wording problems, miscommunications, sample deficiencies, topical deficiencies and delivery issues.

### **2. Planning for review of instruments**

The timeline should allow for the review of the interview guides as well as any information that will be provided to participants and stakeholders. Instrument and material review can take much more time than expected. Depending on the size of the project, the review process can take weeks or even months. Researchers should prepare a list of

## ***E. Data collection methods***

A variety of data collection methods for litigant surveys exist, such as face to face interviews, self-administered interviews, and telephone interviews. When considering which method is applicable to the project, the amount of information available about the litigants and resources should weigh heavily into the question. The sensitivity of the subject area, the safety of both the respondent and the interviewer, the way in which the litigant will be notified should also come into question when determining an appropriate data collection method.

## ***F. Analysis Plan***

As survey items are being designed, one should consider the way in which they will be analyzed. This practice is extremely useful at reducing the number of survey items in a given questionnaire as well. Analysis plans describe the variables and the proposed means of presenting them (whether univariate, bivariate or multivariate descriptions, analyzed via OLS regression, log linear, etc.) Analysis plans are effective for developing expectations; they can help identify potential sources of problems when response rates are low. For example, if you plan to conduct a multivariate analysis of a given dataset, an analysis plan can help set the expectation of what the minimum number of responses should be for any cell.

## **III. Preparation and implementation**

### ***A. Gaining buy-in***

Key stakeholders should be informed of the interviews, understand the purpose of the interviews, and be allowed to provide input into the process. The interview process should be explained and stakeholders should be allowed to review and comment on the data collection instruments. The cooperation and trust that are built through this communication can be essential to the ultimate success of the interviews. Without buy-in, there may be a misunderstanding of the research at best and roadblocks to the completion of the research at worst.

Stakeholders need to be assured that the data will be used for legitimate purposes (for example, that the research is not an audit in disguise or that the results will not be used punitively) and that there will be some constructive benefit to the interviews—thought not necessarily a direct benefit to them. In particular, stakeholders who work with vulnerable populations (children, domestic violence victims, immigrants, etc.) need to be assured that the risk/threat to their constituency will be minimal, relative to what stands to be gained from the research.

### ***B. Notification about interviews***

Closely related to buy-in is the need to inform affected parties that the interviews will be taking place. Not only the respondents, but those who courtrooms or programs will be affected by the interviewers, as well as anyone advocating for or representing respondents, should be made aware of the research. Notification prior to the interviews ensures that no one is caught off guard and can help to enhance cooperation and perhaps the ultimate success of the study.

#### **1. To the courts/programs**

Whether participants are being recruited or interviewed in the courthouse, offsite, or over the phone, the presiding judge, the court executive officer, and the trial court judges whose calendars will provide the pool of participants should be contacted in writing to inform them of the purpose and subjects of the study, who will be conducting the interviews and how they will be conducted, and when the interviews will take place. If the parties have not already seen the interview instrument, they should be supplied with it. The court executive officer should also be contacted by telephone. All of the court personnel contacted should be given the project manager's name and contact information in case they have additional questions.

Directors of the AOC regional offices should also be notified of the interviews so that they can respond to questions or concerns from their constituents.

#### **2. To litigants**

Prior to agreeing to an interview, litigants should be supplied with written information about the interview, including who is sponsoring or conducting the study, why it is being conducted, the voluntary nature of participation, and contact information if the litigant

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has further questions about the study. Participants should also be informed, where applicable, that the interviewers do not work for the court and will not be sharing their individual responses with the court. (Litigants may tend to see all people at court as court employees.) Litigants should be given ample time to review the information and make a thoughtful decision about participation.

If the design involves intercepting litigants as they leave the courtroom, it may also be useful to have the judge verbally notify litigants of the presence of researchers. However, it should be made clear to the judge to encourage but not to coerce participation. It may be helpful to supply the judge with a script, especially to ensure uniformity of recruitment if interviews are being conducted in multiple courtrooms.

### **3. To other stakeholders**

In some cases, it may be necessary to give notification to other interested parties such as parents of minor children, the party's attorney, or advocacy groups working with vulnerable populations. In particular, if the interview pertains to a litigant's case and has the possibility of raising evidence or discovery issues, it may be necessary to speak to the litigant through his or her lawyer. The same type of information should be provided to these parties as to those listed above.

## ***C. Informed consent, confidentiality, and other ethical issues***

### **1. Ethical guidelines**

The CFCC research unit has prepared a comprehensive document entitled "Guidelines for Conducting Interviews and Data Collection" which outlines the major ethical considerations in interviewing and the procedures that must be put into place to ensure protections of research subjects, including informed consent and confidentiality. This document—which covers multiple types of data collection, including interviews—should always be consulted when designing interviews, as it provides the most comprehensive guidelines for human subjects protections.

### **2. Special considerations for interviews vis à vis other methods**

Interviews, relative to other forms of data collection covered in the ethical guidelines, present some unique considerations around ethical issues.

Immediately after a hearing or other court-related event:

- Litigants may be very emotional and may not be in the proper frame of mind to meaningfully participate in an interview. Litigants who are crying or otherwise visibly upset, angry, etc. should not be approached.
- Due to the potential high level of emotions brought on by the event, the interview may present an opportunity for litigants to "unload." Very skilled interviewers

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- are needed to keep the interview on track without being insensitive to the litigants' situations.
- Litigants may be required/referred to do something related to their cases—such as getting help to prepare an order, filing documents with the clerk, or getting help from a facilitator—or may need to quickly return to work, pick up their children, etc. Litigants should be allowed to proceed with their business without interruption, even if this means the response rate is sacrificed.

## ***D. Safety and security considerations***

The courts are a public environment that the researcher cannot control. When interviews are conducted in the courthouse setting, there may be opportunities for batterers to come into contact with their partners, or for the opposing side to gain access to information that a party would like to keep confidential. Furthermore, cases often involve the exchange of intensely personal information. Issues such as these may pose risks to potential respondents as well as to those conducting the interviews.

### **1. Safety of respondents**

In the courthouse setting, litigants may be reluctant to participate in interviews if their physical safety could be compromised or if there's a chance for the interview to be overheard. Prior to agreeing to participate in an interview, litigants should always be offered the option of proceeding with the interview in some type of private space. Arrangements should be made with court administration to locate at least one or two private interview rooms, such as conference or meeting rooms. In some courthouses, however, space may be more limited and adequate space may even be lacking for attorneys to confer with their clients. If it is absolutely not possible to arrange for private interview rooms, litigants should be given the option of completing the interview by phone at a later date.

If the litigant has come to court with a support person (e.g., a domestic violence advocate), he or she should be given the option of bringing the support person to the interview.

Safety must also be considered when interviews are conducted by phone. In cases involving violence or other high levels of conflict between parties, a litigant may not feel comfortable being contacted in his or her home, where interested parties could conceivably monitor the conversation. For example, arrangements may need to be made to conduct the interview while the litigant is at work or some other more secure location. These issues should be explicitly discussed with potential respondents before they agree to participate. If a risk is determined to exist and cannot be addressed within the parameters of the study, the litigant should not participate.

### **2. Safety of interviewers**

Interviewer safety may also be compromised as a result of some of the factors described above. To the opposing side in the case, who may not be aware of the nature and purpose of the interview, the interviewer may be seen as an interference, if not a threat. To

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

enhance interviewer safety, interviewers should inform court staff and an immediate colleague of the time and location of the interviews, including expected end time, as well as carry a cell phone in case of emergency. It may also be desirable to notify court security that the interviews are taking place and to establish some method for contacting them in case of emergency.

## ***E. Interviewer training and technique***

Key to a successful interview is having well-trained interviewers who understand the purpose of the study and are properly equipped to work with the populations under study.

### **1. Choosing appropriate interviewers**

Interviewers, especially those involved in intercept interviews at the courthouse, must be skilled at encouraging participation without coercing litigants. They need to have an adequate understanding of the subject matter and the goals of the interview in order to probe and formulate meaningful follow-up questions when responses are unclear or off target. They should have the ability to stay within the bounds of the protocol, as well as knowledge of sources of bias and ways minimize it. Interviewers also need to conduct themselves in a way that shows sensitivity to the often difficult situations litigants find themselves in. When hiring or selecting interviewers, not only the extent of the experience but the nature of the experience should be considered. For example, it may be preferable to work with an interviewer with two years' experience with domestic violence, rather than one with ten years' experience in market research.

### **2. Training, monitoring, and debriefing**

Interviewer training should start with general information on the study and a review of the interview instrument. Interviewers should learn the background on and goals of the study, who is the sponsor of the research, the intent of each of the questions, and explanations of response options and skip patterns. Interviewers should also receive a careful explanation of possible sources of bias arising from the instrument itself or the interview process.

Interviewers should be given ample opportunity to practice conducting the interviews, in order to become familiar with the content and likely responses, as well as to learn how to deal with problems that may arise (e.g., reluctant respondents) and how to avoid influencing or biasing responses. It may make sense to start with mock interviews among the interviewers and their colleagues, then proceed to conducting interviews with the study population after any initial questions or issues have been resolved. During either piloting or the early stages of the study, the project manager should monitor a sample of interviews from each of the interviewers to ensure that they are adhering to procedures, are asking the questions properly, and are soliciting meaningful responses. Immediate feedback should be provided to interviewers where appropriate.

After the interview has been piloted and/or at some stage early in the study, interviewers should be brought together with the project manager to debrief on the interviews. Interviewers may discover that respondents are having a difficult time understanding

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

certain questions or that they are not getting the types of responses they had been expecting. As a result, revision of the interview instrument and/or further training may be necessary.

### **3. Establishing inter-rater reliability**

It is crucial to ensure not only that interviewers have a good understanding of the study and the instrument, but also that their understanding is consistent with that of other interviewers. Inter-rater reliability refers to the extent to which multiple interviewers would code the same interview the same way, and is essential to the meaningful analysis and interpretation of interview data. The project manager should provide an opportunity for multiple interviewers to code the same survey, and all coding should be reviewed. Where inconsistencies in coding are identified, the project manager should work the interviewers to understand the rationale for their coding and provide additional training or modify instruments as needed.

### **4. Special considerations when working with vulnerable populations**

The populations coming to the courts are dealing with a variety of issues, including violence, mental health, and substance abuse. Many litigants are in a time of extreme crisis in their lives. Interviews may cause troubling life issues to surface and in extreme cases may cause respondents to be re-traumatized. Interviewers should be prepared to respond to such issues by offering counseling information and referrals for services to respondents. The project manager should work with court or program staff to identify possible resources and referrals. Interviewers should also be prepared to suspend the interview if the situation becomes too emotional and the respondent is not in a good frame of mind to continue. If an interview is conducted while the respondent is in distress, the extent to which it yields useful information comes into question.

### **5. Multiple phases of training may be necessary**

The interview process should be monitored on an ongoing basis, from observing interviews to debriefing with interviewers to reviewing completed interviews. Even with extensive piloting, situations may arise that were unforeseen and course corrections may need to be made. If left unmonitored, the study may result in a best confusing and at worst unusable data. Project plans should be flexible enough to allow for multiple phases of training.

### ***F. Piloting/pre-testing***

In order to yield the most useful possible results from an interview, piloting or pre-testing is an indispensable step. Pre-testing help to ensure that the procedures for conducting the interviews run smoothly, that interviewers are comfortable with the instrument, and that respondents can understand the questions, and that the questions are eliciting the information they are designed to elicit.

# Litigant Interview Guidelines

## 1. Piloting procedures

Perhaps less obvious than the need to pilot the interview content is the need to pilot the interview procedures, including approaching subjects for participation and, if applicable, screening for eligibility for the study. Piloting can reveal whether a particular protocol for approaching subjects will result in a sufficient response rate, or whether screening procedures are truly capturing the target population in the study. In some cases, procedures may need to be adjusted (for example, changing the timing for approaching litigants, narrowing or broadening eligibility criteria), while in more extreme cases piloting can show that another research method may need to be employed to gather the information.

## 2. Piloting content

Even the most carefully designed question can flop out in the field. Maybe the question was vague. Maybe the respondent did not understand all the words. Maybe the response categories did not address certain common responses. Maybe the question did not fit with the respondent's situation. Maybe an open-ended question would have worked better than a closed-ended one. Maybe the respondent was forced to give a single response when more than one was appropriate. Maybe the respondent could not remember something he or she was asked about. Maybe it took longer than anticipated to administer the survey, and maybe respondents dropped out before the survey was complete. Maybe skip patterns were confusing to the interviewers. Maybe respondents were "turned off" by certain questions. For all of these reasons and more, it is essential to pilot the content of an instrument.

An important part of piloting, as referenced above, is to debrief with the interviewers. However, interviewers can only say what worked and what didn't from their own perspective. Therefore, piloting should also include a debrief with respondents. Even with as few as 15 respondents, common issues can surface. Respondents should be systematically asked whether they understood each question (and if not, the reason for the confusion), whether the response options were appropriate, etc. They may also be asked to paraphrase questions to assess whether the meaning they derive from the question is the same as that intended by the authors of the instrument.

For a relatively unstudied phenomenon such as the court system, one rarely has the advantage of borrowing questions from established instruments. Precedents are lacking about effective ways of answering certain questions, which makes piloting all the more important.

ASA Series

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# What Is a Survey?

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Section on Survey Research Methods  
American Statistical Association

ASA Series  
**What Is a Survey?**

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What Is a Survey?

How to Plan a Survey

How to Collect Survey Data

Judging the Quality of a Survey

How to Conduct Pretesting

What Are Focus Groups?

More About Mail Surveys

What Is a Margin of Error?

More About Nonresponse

*(in preparation)*

Designing a Questionnaire

*(in preparation)*

Surveys: Case Studies & Exercises

*(in preparation)*

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ASA Series  
**What Is a Survey?**

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# What Are Focus Groups?

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Section on Survey Research Methods  
American Statistical Association

## What Are Focus Groups?

**Q**ualitative data derived from focus groups are extremely valuable when vivid and rich descriptions are needed.

In fact, focus groups are an increasingly popular way to learn about opinions and attitudes. According to the late political consultant Lee Atwater, the conversations in focus groups "give you a sense of what makes people tick and a sense of what's going on with people's minds and lives that you simply can't get with survey data."

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*Focus groups are not polls but in-depth, qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people.*

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Focus groups are not polls but in-depth, qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people. brought together to discuss a host of topics ranging from pizza to safe sex.

Unlike the one-way flow of information in a one-on-one interview, focus groups generate data through the give and take of group discussion. Listening as people share and compare their different points of view provides a wealth of information — not just about what they think, but why they think the way they do.

This pamphlet, **What Are Focus Groups?** is the sixth in the ASA series *What Is a Survey?* It looks at an important companion to surveys — the focus group. Broad coverage is given to how and when focus groups are used, what their results mean, and their advantages and disadvantages.

The *What is a Survey?* series is written primarily for the general public. Its overall goal is to improve survey literacy among individuals who participate in surveys or use survey results. The series is designed to promote a better understanding of what is involved in carrying out sample surveys — especially those aspects that have to be taken into account in evaluating the data and results of surveys.

## Who Uses Focus Groups?

- **Political pollsters** use focus groups to ask potential voters about their views of political candidates or issues.
- **Organizational researchers** use focus groups to learn how employees and managers feel about the issues confronting them in the workplace.
- **Marketing firms** use focus groups to determine how customers respond to new products.
- **Public agencies** find focus groups an important tool in improving customer service.
- **Survey designers** use focus groups to pretest their ideas and to interpret the quantitative information obtained from interviewing.

## How Are People in Focus Groups Selected?

Unlike surveys in which a representative sample of the population is selected to study,

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**The composition of a focus group is usually based on the homogeneity or similarity of the group members.**

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a planned sample is chosen for focus groups.

The composition of a focus group is usually based on the homogeneity or similarity of the group members. Bringing people with common interests or experiences together

makes it easier for them to carry on a productive discussion.

Often a research project will use different groups to get differing views. *For example*, an organization is planning a major restructuring. It would be desirable to have three separate focus groups — union members, nonunion employees, and managers. Each of these groups would represent a potentially different

perspective on the changes facing the organization. Imagine the potential problems in bringing together union members and management. Neither would feel free to speak spontaneously and,

depending on the anxiety level, the discussion might possibly spiral out of control.

Demographic characteristics are another way to determine focus group composition:

- A political candidate might consider holding separate focus groups with both men and women or younger and older voters.
- A company testing a new product might conduct focus groups in different geographical regions.
- Organizational decisionmakers might find it useful to have separate focus groups for those who favor and those who oppose a particular issue.

**One caution**—remember that with a focus group, it is not possible to compare the results from different groups in a strict quantitative sense, because they lack representativeness. Each group may be characterized as augmenting the information of the others — in an effort to look for as many different explanations or interpretations as possible.

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***One caution — with a focus group it is not possible to compare the results from different groups in a strict quantitative sense . . .***

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***Demographic characteristics are another way to determine focus group composition.***

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## Who Conducts Focus Groups?

Generally, focus groups are conducted by trained “moderators,” who are skilled in maintaining good group dynamics. Depending on the purpose of the focus group, the moderator may also be an expert in a given topic area. The moderator’s basic job is to keep the group “focused.” He or she has the goal of helping the group generate a lively and pro-

ductive discussion of the topic at hand.

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***The moderator’s job is to keep the group “focused” and to generate a lively and productive discussion.***

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It is imperative that a moderator understand the underlying objectives of the study.

Much of the data quality in focus groups depends on how effectively the moderator asks the questions and how

well this person keeps the discussion targeted on the research objectives. Making this work requires the ability to tailor one’s moderating style to different types of groups. Going back to the previous example, there may need to be differences in both the questions and the approach to moderating for the three groups of union members, nonunion members, and managers.

## What Types of Questions Should Be Asked in a Focus Group?

Questions should be open-ended so that there are many possible replies. Short-answer questions, such as those that can be answered “Yes” or “No,” should be avoided. It is also important to avoid leading questions that suggest the moderator’s opinion or the answer that he or she hopes to receive. Questions also should be



- clearly formulated and easily understood
- neutral so that the formulation does not influence the answer
- carefully sequenced with easier, general questions preceding more difficult ones
- ordered so that less intimate topics precede the more personal questions.

Focus-group questions are not a form of group interviewing (*i.e., scooping up 10 interviews at one time*).

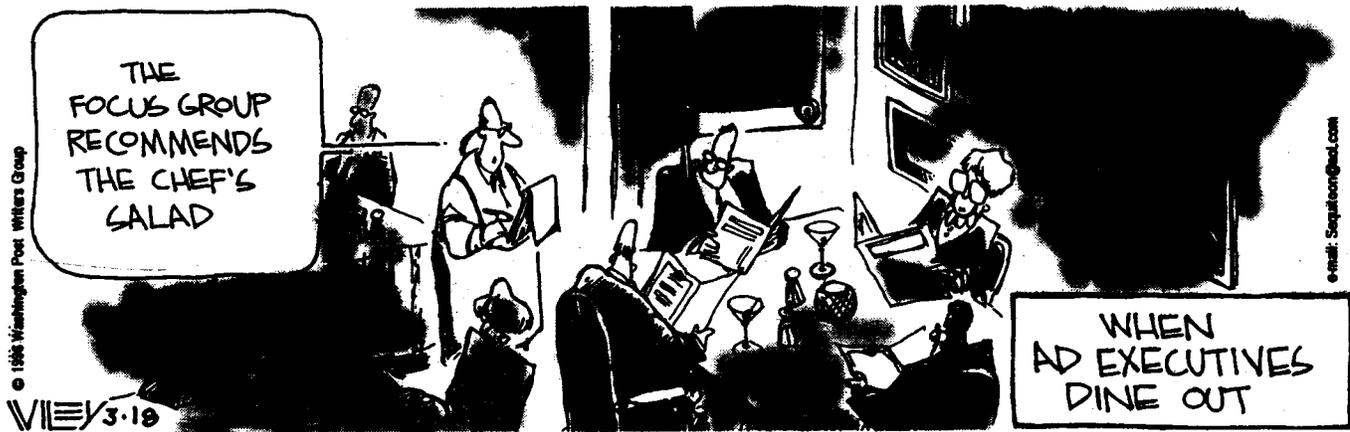
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***“Serial Interviewing” is not being done either — in which the moderator asks a question and just passes from person to person getting an answer. Ideally, the moderator places the question (or issue or topic) before the group. They then discuss it among themselves — talking to each other, asking each other questions about what they hear, and generally reacting to each other. It is a totally different dynamic from an interview.***

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group. They then discuss it among themselves — talking to each other, asking each other questions about what they hear, and generally reacting to each other. It is a totally different dynamic from an interview.



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### What Is the Ideal Size of a Focus Group?

The ideal size for a focus group is generally between 6 and 12 people. This size group encourages participants to contribute their ideas.

Too-small groups are easily dominated by one or two members, or they may fall flat if too few people have anything to contribute. (Another problem is that the session may lapse

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*The ideal size for a focus group is between 6 and 12 people.*

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into serial interviewing and lack energy.)

Too large a group lacks cohesion and may break up into side conversations, or people may become frustrated if they have to wait their turn to respond or to get involved.

If people are brought together because they have common experiences to discuss, you run the risk of not getting much new

information when there too few people in the group. You bring numerous people together in the hope that they will bounce ideas off each other so that a "bigger, more expansive" answer or explanation emerges. However, there is a point of diminishing returns where too many participants add nothing new.

### What Is a Typical Focus Group Like?

Prior to the focus group, participants are usually recruited by telephone. Care needs to be taken to ensure that people who know each other are not recruited into the same sessions. People are generally more open and less guarded with people they don't know and don't have to worry about ever seeing again. Absolutely never put people together who are in some chain of command (e.g., supervisors with employees, teachers with students, etc.).

When being recruited, potential participants receive a brief description of what the group will be about, as well as assurances that

**Participation in a focus group is voluntary and confidential.**

their participation is entirely voluntary and that their confidentiality will be protected. Focus-group participants are often paid \$25 to \$50 for reimbursement of their time

and travel expenses. In addition, a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere is often created by providing light refreshments or even a meal.

At the focus group itself, the moderator begins with an introduction that should include the following

- explaining the purposes of the focus group
- laying down some basic ground rules to encourage everyone to participate in the discussion
- reassuring the participants about the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation
- introducing the moderator and any comoderators and explaining how and why these group members were invited to participate (*e.g., what they may have in common*)
- stating the purpose of notetaking and recording.

The moderator typically begins the discussion with an ice-breaker giving participants the chance to introduce themselves to the group. Once introductions are complete, the moderator guides the discussion, using an outline of questions, to explore various aspects of the

**The moderator guides the discussion, using an outline of questions to explore various aspects of the research topic.**

research topic. As the group responds to each question, the moderator can probe for more information and ask follow-up questions to elicit more discussion.

Focus-group sessions are frequently scheduled to last two hours, with the discussion taking 90 minutes. Once all of the questions have been asked, the moderator may conclude by giving a summary of the major points in the discussion and asking the group for feedback.

Or, the moderator may have each participant think back over what was discussed and then have each one choose what he or she felt was the most important point. Another good way of concluding is to ask participants if there are any questions about a particular topic that were not asked but should have been.

**How Do You Keep Track of What Is Said During a Focus Group?**

The most popular techniques for capturing data from focus groups includes the following

- **Video recording:** This technique captures both verbal and nonverbal information. One drawback is that it can be intrusive and can inhibit some participants.
- **Audio recording:** With this method you can obtain verbal information verbatim. A possible disadvantage is that nonverbal information and observational data are lost.
- **Manual notetaking:** This procedure involves hand writing the discussion verbatim. It is not recommended, however, given the speed limitations of writing by hand. With this method, you run the risk of severely altering the analysis by selectively recording things that were said loudly or repeatedly and missing the more subtle information that emerged from the discussion.
- **Multiple methods of recording:** Notetaking, in conjunction with audio or video recording,

definitely can be worthwhile. To take notes there should be a co-moderator, either in the room or — better — behind one-way glass. There is no way on earth a single moderator can follow the discussion and take notes. It is just not physically possible, considering all the other jobs moderators have to do.

### How Do Focus Groups Compare to Surveys?

There are advantages and disadvantages to using any technique. Focus groups are no different in this respect.

The method of choice is constrained by your budget, your time, and availability of resources.

Focus groups and surveys have very different strengths. Focus groups excel at providing in-depth qualitative insights gleaned from a relatively small number of people. Surveys provide quantitative data that can be generalized to larger populations. Surveys measure things — frequencies of behavior, differences in attitudes, intensity of feelings, and so forth. Focus groups do not measure. They collect a breadth or range of information so that a “story” can be told.

The best information can often be gathered by using the focus groups and surveys together. Surveys can provide precise quantitative information; focus groups can provide qualitative data that penetrates more deeply.

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*While surveys provide quantitative information, focus groups can provide qualitative data that penetrates more deeply.*

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### Advantages of Focus Groups

Among the advantages of focus groups are the following

- A wide range of information can be gathered in a relatively short time span.
- The moderator can explore related but unanticipated topics as they arise in the discussion.
- Focus groups do not require complex sampling techniques.

### Disadvantages of Focus Groups

There is also a set of accompanying disadvantages:

- The sample is neither randomly selected nor representative of a target population, so the results cannot be generalized or treated statistically.
- The quality of the data is influenced by the skills and motivation of the moderator.
- Focus groups lend themselves to a different kind of analysis than would be carried out with survey results. In surveys, the emphasis is on counting and measuring versus coding/classifying/sorting, in a focus group.

A focus-group analysis is truly qualitative. You use the actual words and behaviors of the participants to answer your questions, rather than counting response options.

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*Focus group analysis allows researchers to use the actual words and behaviors of the participants rather than counting response options.*

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## Where Can I Get More Information?

In addition to the pamphlets in this series, ASA also makes other brochures available upon request:

- ***Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice***

- ***Surveys and Privacy***, produced by the ASA Committee on Privacy and Confidentiality

For the above brochures or other pamphlets in the *What Is a Survey?* series, contact:

Section on Survey Research Methods

**American Statistical Association**

1429 Duke Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-3415 USA

(703) 684-1221/fax: (703) 684-2037

E-mail: [asainfo@amstat.org](mailto:asainfo@amstat.org)

or see the Section's web site at

<http://www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/html>

Besides the ASA, there are many other associations that are concerned with the proper collection and use of survey data—

- **The American Association for Public**

**Opinion Research** (AAPOR) offers a number of publications—perhaps the most relevant of these is the one entitled *Best Practices for Survey and Public Opinion Research Survey Practices AAPOR Condemns*. To obtain copies, call (313) 764-1555 or E-mail their web site at <http://www.aapor@umich.edu>.

- **The National Council on Public Polls**

publishes another useful pamphlet, *Twenty Questions a Journalist Should Ask About Poll Results*. To obtain a copy, call (800) 239-0909.

- **The Research Industry Coalition, Inc.**,

publishes a brochure, *Integrity and Good Practice in Marketing and Opinion Research*. To obtain a copy, call (516) 928-6803.

- **The Council of American Survey Research**

**Organizations** publishes a pamphlet, *Surveys and You*. To obtain a copy, call (516) 928-6954, or E-mail their web site at <http://www.casro.org>.

This pamphlet was drafted initially by survey sampling students at the George Washington University. Professor David Morgan and Linda Stinson, among others, helped carry it through to completion.

For suggestions about this pamphlet or potential future topics in the *What Is a Survey?* series, contact Fritz Scheuren, overall series editor and coordinator, at Ernst and Young, Washington, D.C. at [fritz.scheuren@ey.com](mailto:fritz.scheuren@ey.com).

This pamphlet, *What Are Focus Groups?*, was prepared under the general direction of Charles Proctor, 1997-98 Publications Officer, ASA Section on Survey Research Methods. Financial support for its printing was contributed in large part by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

# Legal Services & Self-Help Center

## Focus Groups Report

June, 2006

### **Purpose and Overview**

This study seeks to provide information about whether a Legal Aid organization and two court-based self-help centers are meeting the needs of their customers, and the effect of those services on the customers' legal problems. This report is based on pilot customer focus groups held to help answer these questions, and to determine the feasibility of using focus groups to provide this type of data.

Research conducted to date has indicated that the overwhelming majority of self-help center customers are satisfied with the assistance they receive. Many also indicate that they feel they understand their legal situation better, and have some confidence that they know what steps to take next in order to resolve their legal problem. These data, however, are largely limited to responses given in short, written exit surveys that do not reveal any qualifications, ambiguities, or details of the customers' opinions. In addition, data on the reasons for those opinions has rarely been collected.

While it is helpful to know whether customers are generally satisfied, and whether they generally feel they have been helped, more information is needed in order to refine and expand self-help services. Specifically, if most people respond favorably to general statements about the center, it does not reveal whether they also think the service could be improved, or whether there may be specific complaints that do not rise to the level of a general or overall opinion. They also do not reveal what the service means to the customer, or give much information about how the service fits into their life or even their legal problem.

### **Research Design and Questions**

In order to understand more fully the effectiveness and impact of self-help center services, several questions were developed as likely candidates to uncover the needed information:

1. What do customers find most helpful about the self-help center, and why?
2. What aspects of the center do customers think might be improved, and why?
3. Did the center help customers to better understand the court system, as well as their own case, and why or why not?
4. What would customers likely have done in the absence of the center?
5. What types of experiences have customers had in representing themselves in court without the center's assistance?
6. What impact has the center's assistance had on the customers' legal problems, and what effect has that had on their lives?

### **Methodology**

The Legal Aid organization and the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts (the Center) jointly designed the study. Legal Aid made the logistical arrangements described below, including recruiting participants and providing incentives. The Center was responsible for facilitating and taping the groups. Analysis, written reports, and other uses of the data were left up to each organization, although they shared insights and work products.

This paper reports the partial results<sup>1</sup> of two focus groups held in two major cities of adjoining counties in the Legal Aid service area. The focus groups were held on a weeknight from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in both cases. One group consisted of eight people and the other had six participants. In addition, a facilitator and notetaker were present, along with two representatives from the legal aid organization who were not direct service providers (and therefore not previously known to the participants) as observers who were learning how to do focus groups. Both groups were tape recorded with the knowledge and consent of the participants.

One group was held at a local restaurant and the other in the conference room of the Legal Aid organization. Participants were given \$75 gift cards to a major department store, along with a community resource manual, and reimbursement for any child care expenses. Both groups were conducted in English, although one group had a primarily Spanish speaking couple participating. In that case, the notetaker (who is bi-lingual), translated for them before, during, and after the group.

All research was conducted with the informed consent of the participants. Participants were informed about the nature of the study and their rights as human subjects in social science research both orally and in writing. Participants consented verbally. All participants were told they were free to leave the study at any time, without any negative consequences. The identity of the participants is confidential, and no personally identifying information is used in this report.

## **Results**

The results reported below are combined from two focus groups, held in two different cities in two different counties. Women accounted for about three quarters of the participants overall, and participants ranged in age from the mid-30's to over 70. Similarly, most of the participants were White, with two African-Americans and several Latinos. Among the Latino participants, two in one group and one in the other group primarily spoke Spanish. While they said they were able to follow much of the discussion, their participation in English was very limited. A bi-lingual facilitator held additional conversations with them before and after the sessions.

### ***Types of cases represented***

The types of cases represented were fairly typical of legal aid caseloads. Most of the people across both groups were there because of divorce actions, including those involving domestic violence restraining orders and child custody disputes. Several landlord-tenant disputes were also represented, both evictions and disputes over occupancy restrictions. At least two public benefits cases were represented, one a single mother struggling with federal disability benefits and state assistance for families with children, and the second a grandmother trying to get disability benefits for her grandson (for whom she had custody). Another grandmother raising her grandchildren was trying to maintain her federal housing benefit, which was in danger of being taken away because the children were living with her. Finally, one couple was fighting with a bank that had repossessed their vehicle and was trying to collect on a debt.

### ***Source of referral/information***

Most of the participants were referred to legal aid or the self-help center by coming to the courthouse. Others were referred by friends or local community based organizations. The local law library and District Attorneys office were also mentioned as the source of at least one referral each. Even though the group was a mixture of self-help center customers and legal aid clients, most of the members reported going to court or a hearing without an attorney.

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<sup>1</sup> Questions in addition to those presented here were asked of the participants. In general those additional questions referred to community legal needs, and the types of cases the Legal Aid organization should be handling.

## ***Logistical Issues***

On the logistical side, getting through all the paperwork, and getting the paperwork completed properly, was the biggest issue for most people. It seems safe to say that few people found the filing and paperwork requirements intuitive, or even easily understood in most cases – even with explanations. Most reported needing a great deal of help, and were grateful and relieved if someone else was able to clearly explain what they needed to do. Furthermore, if the process was long, people seemed to need help throughout the process, not just at the beginning.

For the most part, the services provided clearly helped participant's get through what they usually experienced as a maze of paperwork and bureaucracy. Usually Legal Aid, and particularly the self-help centers, were seen as key factors in helping customers get their problems resolved. In other cases, however, the first visits to the Legal Aid and self-help offices were not as positive:

And by the way, before I got happy about this office, I wasn't totally delighted because the young ladies at the front um, were protecting the back office. As I understand now because there are so many of us that need the services, and I'm understanding that funds are not always available, so there has to be a proper screening process. Um, so um, just like this gentleman here, rather than being run around like you were, mine was a little different. I actually went from here and was sent to legal aid, who sent me back to here and that went on several times and I was hearing the same scenario at both facilities. You know, we would stand in the line at legal aid, they would tell us to come here and it was.... I believe that because I had a serious case, because I was concerned, because I stuck with it, because I was basically respectful, that finally I was called from beyond just the reception area and helped.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but there was no indication that people saw any intrinsic worth in completing the paperwork properly. There was, instead, explicit recognition of the negative consequences of not having the paperwork properly completed – most commonly that the forms were returned to the litigants for correction, thereby preventing them from moving forward with their cases.

The practical impact of this information is that procedures and filing requirements could be examined for whether they might be simplified (provided no substantive standard such as the due process requirement of notice and an opportunity to be heard is violated), and such changes would likely be readily acceptable to litigants.

## ***Research Questions Addressed***

### **Most helpful services**

In response to the question of what types of services are or would be most helpful, several suggestions came up repeatedly. Perhaps chief among these was the need for services in languages other than English. As one mother seeking a divorce put it, "English is not my first language but I do speak English very well and I understand it and everything. I cannot imagine someone that does not speak the language."

Transportation problems were mentioned several times as something that interfered with a person's ability to get help – whether access to courts or other public benefits or assistance. Sometimes the problems revolved around the distances to be traveled and the lack of public transportation. Other times they focused on having to come back to the courthouse multiple times to deal with unresolved issues in cases.

Another common suggestion was the need for more legal assistance of any sort. Participants readily sensed that staff were overworked and simply having more people available to help would benefit everyone:

- P1: I do know that if your office is so over packed with cases when I do call and I'm stressed-- I get apologies all the time saying, "We're so sorry but yours is not an emergency case and we're doing what we can," but I realized they're just overwhelmed.
- P2: Yeah, you need more attorneys.
- P3: Maybe the cases—too many people –
- P4: A whole bunch more judges.

### **Whether services helped people to better understand the court system**

One thing participants learned about the court system is that you need to read everything you are given: "I've learned every paper you're given, you better read it. If you don't read it's a waste for them to print it [and] ...you really can't ask a question." Reading notices and papers not only lets you know what is going on, it can help you get what you are looking for: "if you don't fill out that paper right, you're pretty messed up. You're not going to get what you're entitled to; you're not going to--you know, you've got to know what to put on the papers."

More specifically, people at least learned what needed to be done in their particular case:

Really to be honest with you, I can't say a bad thing about anything. ...they were very good. I took the class on the first packet of papers, you know, I took the class and I fill it out and I made lots of mistakes. So I got an extra packet and I went home and—I did—I got on the typewriter, not on the computer. But then I turned them in and then I got the extra packet and that's when I seen a ... [person at the self-help center] and she was so good, you know. She, you know, helped me, asked me the questions. .... She filed it for me and everything and there were some mistakes, you know, so she called me up, "Well we need this ... Well why don't I just send it out to you. You sign it and send it back to me," and that's how we did it. And it went great, and then all of a sudden I didn't hear for about four or five months and then I get my divorce papers final. So I don't have anything bad to say.

### **What the customers or clients would have done in the absence of these services.**

Many people mentioned that there were few resources available to help with court matters, and more generally that it can be hard to find any kind of social service or legal resources. In response to an inquiry about what people do in such circumstances, one person explained that, at least for seniors:

First they go into despair. Well, a lot of them are very depressed and some of them commit suicide. We have suicide all the time in [our town], you read about it in the paper. They can't afford an attorney so if they're not really familiar with agencies like public agencies, it's just a big struggle. And I see a lot of elderly people that are good friends of mine that retired with me, and they are just lost now. You know, they're lost. Their income went [and] took a big dive and they don't really know where to go.

Others, perhaps taking a longer view, noted that years ago there were even fewer services, and people were left to fend for themselves even more than they are today. Referring to the fact that she had gone through the system before, one participant explained:

Well I've been there, done that. I've been married three times. This is my third marriage and I raised five kids.

....

And there wasn't anything like this then. You know, going back years my kids—I've got a son 50 years old, and going back there was nothing. There was no welfare there was no daycare, there was absolutely nothing for a single mom. You know and I look at all of the opportunities now that there are because I have a daughter with four kids and she's single and you know there's a lot of things out there for them now. Not in your situation [referring to domestic violence victim] I don't know how I would handle that. I was always bigger than my husbands so it was okay.

### **Satisfaction with the services given by legal aid or self-help center**

The participants often said they were satisfied, at least initially, with the assistance they got. In addition, they expressed a great deal of gratitude towards those who helped them, and generally praised the legal aid and self-help center staff much more highly than those working for other social service organizations or the government.

Emergencies seemed to be dealt with in a timely manner, and in many cases some progress was made toward a favorable solution. As the emergency nature of a case died down, however, and the matter became more routine (e.g. divorce without domestic violence, but an important property dispute) or the conflict more intransigent (multiple appeals and losses in attempts to gain public benefits, or unsuccessful attempts to settle a consumer dispute) the participants reported less satisfaction. One mother who had successfully stopped an eviction arising out of her divorce proceeding now stated: "I'm getting anxious, I want to get this over with. I need to move on with my life. I want to get a divorce and I need to be able to—I'm afraid that too much time will go by and they're going to slip that house out from under me and that's the only security [I have]."

Staff treatment of the participants seemed to be uniformly empathetic, respectful, and helpful to the extent that it could be, i.e., participants generally reported that staff seemed to be doing all they could, but perhaps their case was just not winnable, or within a priority area. Nonetheless, the positive way in which participants were treated by program and center staff was illustrated by a domestic violence victim seeking a divorce:

You know I've talked to a number of people—like people at the court that have rolled their eyes at me and given me looks, and even friends that have found out and said, you know you shouldn't have stayed, you should not have stayed and everything. But the day that I went to [legal aid] and I sat down and I started to tell her my story and I broke down and she ... just made me feel like, so much better—just the way she treated me, and the respect, and you know I was treated very nicely, very nicely.

There were a few complaints that service attentiveness seemed to decline as the cases got older, and in some cases, preparations may have been insufficient or rushed to the point that important evidence may have been left out or ignored:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to remember that these observations are the impressions participants left with, not necessarily the objective fact. For instance, a lawyer may not make certain information available to the court because it has no legal relevance, even though the client may feel it is very relevant and important to their case. Nonetheless, it should be of interest that at least some of these participants felt important information was left out, or their cases were somehow being neglected.

Mine didn't resolve to my satisfaction and the only thing the judge seemed to pay any attention to was a page and a half narrative that I wrote the night before we went to the hearing. Because I don't think that [legal aid] did adequate paperwork and research and preparation. [The advocate] never asked me if [my son] had an IEP [Individual Educational Plan – a requirement for students with certain learning disabilities] in place, and he has had for years.

Independent of whether they achieved the result they were looking for, participants reported positive feelings towards those who helped, or tried to help, them: "I'm in limbo. Yeah, I'm doomed already, so... I talked to [legal aid advocate]. He's so nice, he goes, 'I just can't do anything', but he was very nice about it." Others expressed appreciation for the help they were given: "I had a very good experience and I do I know that it could've happened another way ... because I didn't have the money to pay for it. I qualified for a waiver which made it possible."

In answer to a direct question about whether they had been treated with respect while dealing with their legal problems, the participants seemed to take a fairly dim view of how they had been treated:

P1: From [legal aid], but not the courts.

P2: Respect would be a stretch.

P3: Courts are awful.

P2: Maybe disdain.

....

P4: I mean the whole system is a nightmare [referring to social services as well as the courts]. You're trying to deal with paperwork but all these people are like against you. They're not going to facilitate anything for you.

P1: You see signs that say, "Don't ask me a question because I don't have the answers." It's like—

P5: so what's the point?

These sentiments were explained in a little more detail by a mother seeking a divorce after having endured domestic violence:

When I went to do mine ... there was a woman that ... when I tried to explain to her what my circumstances were, she literally turned to me and said "You let that happen to your daughter?" [referring to domestic violence] And you know [it] did happen a week prior to this and I couldn't believe that she actually made that statement to me ... that was very upsetting.

Being vulnerable and in need of assistance was perhaps the underlying circumstance that people felt resulted in their being treated with a lack of respect:

P1: There seems to be a special attitude against people who are seeking help of any kind. It puts you in a difficult position entirely. And being a little old lady doesn't give you special consideration. I dare say I'm the oldest one at this table.

....

P2: Me being the youngest and in a wheelchair hasn't got me any favors either.

....

We have these needs. We're tired of people pointing the finger at us because we're in need. They're looking at us like we're a beggar out there.... We need help, we don't need people looking down their noses at us.

In other cases, however, participants reported better experiences, even if the situation was still stressful:

It was a very intimidating situation to walk in [general agreement] a courtroom and be prepared. You know, his sister walked in with an attorney ... her whole family's behind her, I was standing there by myself and I feel myself start to lose control and I went to open my mouth and, it's like there's a big bailiff telling me, "ma'am..." (laughing)—you know you don't realize what I'm going through, Bud. But I loved the judge because at the end she said "No, no you know she chooses her words wisely, you know. She's upset but..." So the judge was good. But it's very scary.

Overall, it appears that even those participants with cases that did not resolve successfully were at least grateful to Legal Aid for trying. One older woman explained that in the process of trying to prevent the eviction of a houseguest/tenant who was helping her, the man died: "His boss found him dead the next morning ... this office fought so hard for us. ... But it was too late ... I buried him July 5th, and it's been difficult for me. I still miss him a lot, but I thank this office for caring and doing the best they could do."

### **Impact of the services on customer's lives and cases**

In the area of marriage dissolution, many of the participants told stories of frustration and delay in getting their paperwork filed. This seemed to result in months or even years going by with little action on their cases. It is important to keep in mind that these are people who consider themselves to be actively seeking a divorce. In other cases, people did not even know where to get started, such as the woman who explained that she "had lived 42 years with an abusive husband and didn't know how to get out of it. ...he always looked at me and said, 'well if you can pay of it you can get a divorce.' Well, you can't pay for it on \$400 some odd dollars a month." The same woman went on to explain that "[I was] getting a divorce after 42 years of marriage. My husbands' been gone for four years, I just did not know what to do and I walked in here they gave me all the information, typed it all up and I filed it. ... and because everything was done so well I have had no problem."

### **Conclusion**

Overall, these two focus groups indicate that people are genuinely grateful for the assistance given to them by self-help centers and Legal Aid. What is more, the assistance seems to have been significant in that it allowed them to initiate or conclude serious legal matters that they had made little progress with using other resources.

Two qualifications stand out from this general endorsement of these services, however. The first is that the process itself appears to these litigants, particularly in the area of family law, to be unnecessarily complicated, and court personnel perhaps unreasonably unhelpful in explaining the process.

The second qualification is that services are insufficient to meet the need, and this puts a strain on the assistance providers that makes them less accessible, and perhaps less helpful, to the customers. This was at least the general explanation most participants gave as to why they sometimes had to wait for help, the help was perhaps less complete and thorough than it might have been, and assistance tended to trail off once an emergency of short-term problem was addressed. Put another way, once an initial triage was performed and such assistance as possible was rendered, attention to the case might lag.

## Appendix A

### **Focus Group Script**

As participants arrive, greet them, have them sit down and put their names on their place cards. Attend to any immediate needs of participants.

Order and receive dinner.

Review and distribute informed consent information.

Start group by going around the table and asking people to introduce themselves by their first name (they'll also have place cards in front of them to write their name on), and say briefly what legal problem they got help with, and how (e.g., self-help center, limited or brief assistance, full legal representation):

- If people were not represented by a lawyer, probe for why.
- Probe for how people found out about the help they eventually received.
- Probe for whether people think the way they found out about help was acceptable, and if not, what would have worked better for them.
- Probe for how common or usual they think their own experience was.

Ask whether this type of problem was common in their community, or how common it is.

*Suggestion:* If people don't volunteer, perhaps call on individuals for their opinion. If needed, probe by asking whether they know of other people who have had similar issues, and whether they were able to get legal help, and what kind. The object here is to get people to offer an opinion about the frequency of these issues in their community. If necessary, run through the list of the legal issues above that people might have.

*Note:* As people describe specific issues and situations, the facilitator should be alert for, and probe about, underlying causes that might indicate additional legal needs. E.g., Problems with evictions might be manifestations of deeper issues of lack of affordable housing, lack of living wage jobs and/or wage and hour or discrimination problems, or problems obtaining public benefits. Problems with bankruptcies might have as a deeper cause predatory lending practices.

- Probe for stories, whether personal or second-hand, about the problems described and how they were handled.
- Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.
- Probe for whether people think the cited problems could be handled by the litigants themselves, and what kind of help they might need to do so.

As people describe legal problems, have notetaker write them on a flip chart. When people start to run out of suggestions, ask whether there are any important issues that we've missed. Once this is done, try having people rank the issues in order of importance. Attempt to arrive at a group consensus.

Ask whether there are any common legal problems in their community that shouldn't be addressed, and why.

*NOTE: The portion above should be completed in about one hour.*

Getting back to the participants' individual problems, were people satisfied with the assistance they received? Why or why not?

- Probe for what would have made people satisfied if they were not.
- Probe for whether people would return for additional assistance, if it were available.
- Probe for whether participants would recommend the service to others, particularly family or friends who might be facing the same or a similar situation.
- For those who handled legal issues themselves, with help, did they feel they adequately understood what they needed to do, and why or why not.

Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives.

- Probe for whether they understood how the court system worked regarding their particular case, whether they thought it was important for them to understand, and why.
- Probe for whether they felt they were better able to make a good decision about their situation, and why.

Ask what people might have done in the absence of the services.

- Probe for other types of assistance have people gotten with their problem.
- Probe for other kinds of experiences people have had with the legal system.
- Probe for whether people considered hiring an attorney to assist them? Why/why not?
- Probe for whether their hypothesized result might be common in their communities.

Appendix B

**Chart of Research Questions & Matching Focus Group Questions**

Research Question	Focus Group Question
1. How do people know about ICLS? 2. How do people know about FLAP?	Introductory statements and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for how people found out about the help they eventually received.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the way they found out about help was acceptable, and if not, what would have worked better for them.</li> </ul>
3. What are the legal needs of the client community? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What needs are currently being addressed?</li> <li>Are those needs being addressed fully or partially?</li> <li>What needs should be addressed, but are not now being addressed?</li> <li>What additional needs would it be good, but perhaps less essential, to address?</li> <li>Are there any needs that really shouldn't be addressed?</li> </ol>	Introductory statements and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for how common or usual they think their own experience was.</li> </ul> Ask whether this type of problem was common in their community, or how common it is. <p><i>Suggestion:</i> If people don't volunteer, perhaps call on individuals for their opinion. If needed, probe by asking whether they know of other people who have had similar issues, and whether they were able to get legal help, and what kind.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for stories, whether personal or second-hand, about the problems described and how they were handled.</li> <li>• Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the cited problems could be handled by the litigants themselves, and what kind of help they might need to do so.</li> </ul>
4. What are the larger social issues underlying the legal needs of the client community?	<p><i>Note:</i> As people describe specific issues and situations, the facilitator should be alert for, and probe about, underlying causes that might indicate additional legal needs.</p> <p>Ask what people might have done in the absence of the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for whether their hypothesized result might be common in their communities.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Focus Group Question
<p>5. Why are litigants representing themselves in court?</p>	<p>Introductory statements and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If people were not represented by a lawyer, probe for why.</li> <li>• Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the cited problems could be handled by the litigants themselves, and what kind of help they might need to do so.</li> </ul>
<p>6. What types of services are or would be most helpful?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people think the cited problems could be handled by the litigants themselves, and what kind of help they might need to do so.</li> </ul> <p>Ask whether there are any common legal problems in their community that shouldn't be addressed, and why.</p>
<p>7. The extent to which the services helped customers to better understand the court system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For those who handled legal issues themselves, with help, did they feel they adequately understood what they needed to do? Why or why not?</li> </ul> <p>Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for whether they understood how the court system worked regarding their particular case.</li> </ul>
<p>8. The extent to which the services helped customers to better understand their specific legal matter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For those who handled legal issues themselves, with help, did they feel they adequately understood what they needed to do? Why or why not?</li> </ul> <p>Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for whether they felt they were better able to make a good decision about their situation, and why.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Focus Group Question
<p>9. How the services impacted the customers' decisions and actions.</p>	<p>Ask how the services received made a difference to customers or clients, how they impacted their legal situation and lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for whether they understood how the court system worked regarding their particular case, whether they thought it was important for them to understand, and why.</li> </ul>
<p>10. What the customers would have done in the absence of these services.</p>	<p>Probe for how people usually deal with common legal problems.</p> <p>Ask what people might have done in the absence of the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for other types of assistance have people gotten with their problem.</li> <li>• Probe for other kinds of experiences people have had with the legal system.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people considered hiring an attorney to assist them? Why/why not?</li> <li>• Probe for whether their hypothesized result might be common in their communities.</li> </ul>
<p>11. Whether the customers or clients satisfied, overall, with the assistance they received</p>	<p>Getting back to the participants' individual problems, were people satisfied with the assistance they received? Why or why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for what would have made people satisfied if they were not.</li> <li>• Probe for whether people would return for additional assistance, if it were available.</li> <li>• Probe for whether participants would recommend the service to others, particularly family or friends who might be facing the same or a similar situation.</li> </ul>

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# DASH FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

March 29, 2007





# **DASH FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

March 29, 2007

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County ("NLS") proposed the Domestic Abuse Self-Help Project ("DASH" or "the Project") in order to expand its services to help meet the overwhelming needs of litigants in domestic violence cases by converting its long-standing attorney-client representation model to a self-help model. The Project was met with strong objections by the domestic violence community and the legal services community, who questioned our commitment to domestic violence victims and who felt that the safety and confidentiality of domestic violence victims required a direct-representation model.

After completing the conversion of the clinics as of May 2006, NLS continues to believe that, while both models can provide adequate legal assistance, a self-help model has at least two distinct advantages over the attorney-client model, resulting in assistance being delivered to more litigants: (1) as no attorney-client relationship is formed, DASH can assist both sides in a domestic violence case without conflict issues; and (2) DASH can provide a more efficient use of resources by allowing the litigants to be assisted in a workshop setting, if appropriate.

As required by the Partnership Grant, NLS created and submitted an evaluation plan. The goal of the evaluation process laid out in the plan was to determine and improve the efficiency and efficacy of DASH in meeting its project goals, using the various data collection methods set forth below. The project goals are to: (1) assist litigants with presenting their case in court; (2) educate

litigants about the rights and remedies available in a domestic violence context; (3) ease the burden on the court system by preparing court forms properly; (4) provide information and connection with other community resources, such as shelters, counseling and legal representation; (5) assist litigants in achieving a fairer result in their case; and (6) use DASH resources, including staff and volunteers, efficiently. The data collection methods, discussed in detail below, are: (A) evaluation surveys; (B) court file review; (C) focus group; (D) partner survey; and (E) in-court monitoring.

## **II. EVALUATION METHODS AND FINDINGS**

### **A. Clinic Evaluation Surveys**

DASH developed this survey to determine whether DASH is meeting the needs of DV litigants who were seeking information about and/or assistance with a petition for a restraining order [Exhibit A: DASH Clinic Evaluation Survey]. We chose a survey form to collect this information because it is quick and easy to use for litigants who are coming to the clinic in crisis, rushing to get to court and who are unlikely to have time or attention to spend with an exit interview. We chose to have the survey form distributed and collected at the clinic because we were concerned that later mailing of the survey might compromise a litigant's confidentiality or safety.

The DASH Clinic Evaluation Survey form is included in the intake packet given to all litigants receiving services in the DASH clinic or Respondents' workshop. The staff and volunteer working with a litigant encourages them to fill out the survey form and collects it at the conclusion of services along with other

paperwork prepared by the litigant. The survey form is also available in the clinic for litigants to fill out and return at another time. This survey is offered in English and Spanish.

Unfortunately, we see that most litigants did not have time or interest in submitting an evaluation survey. DASH has assisted approximately 2,100 people since its conversion to a self-help center in May, 2006. Between May and December 2006, only 221 people submitted evaluation forms. Despite the low response rate, the surveys provided some helpful information, presented below:

- 98% of the litigants responding described the DASH services to be good (15) or very good. (202)
- 97% of responses felt DASH helped them describe their legal problem to the court. (214)
- 93% of the litigants who filled out the clinic evaluation survey felt they had also received some other some benefit from DASH (note that the survey allowed litigants to check more than one category):
  - 76% were prepared to handle their legal problem (156)
  - 56% understood the court process better (115)
  - 57% understood their legal problem better (116)
  - 57% had a clear idea of what to do next with their legal problem (117)
  - 45% knew more about other kinds of available services (91)

The Clinic Evaluation Form also included a large space giving litigants the space to write comments regarding their experience with DASH. Many responses included positive comments or expressed thanks to the volunteer who assisted them. But responses also included criticisms or suggestions for improvement. Common suggestions for improvement were: (1) keep the clinic open longer; (2) provide more staff and/or more computers; or (3) make the forms easier to prepare. These suggestions were often made by litigants who

felt they had to wait too long for DASH services. Although the average wait time for DASH services described by those who responded to the survey was 21 minutes, some litigants expressed that they had to wait 2 hours or more to receive services or that they needed to make a return trip because when they first arrived at DASH, it was either closed or full for the day.

Conclusions and proposed improvements: Although only about 10% (221) of the litigants who used DASH services completed a survey, there is still valuable information to glean from the Clinic Evaluation Survey. The survey results are especially useful when analyzed alongside the results of other evaluation tools. While the responders clearly thought that DASH adequately provided a valuable service, it appears that at least two changes should be made: (1) DASH should develop more informational handouts in order to give litigants a clearer explanation of the restraining order process; and (2) DASH should expand its availability, either through recruiting more volunteers, extending its hours of operation, or both.

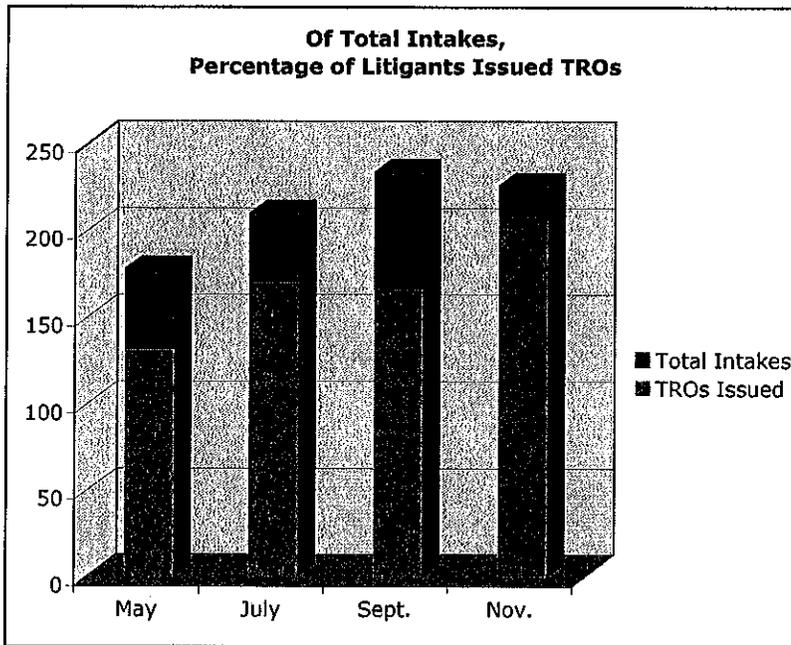
With regard to maximizing the benefit of this evaluation tool in the 2007 grant year, DASH proposes that we continue to keep the evaluations available to all litigants as we did in 2006, while at the same time choosing a few specific time periods, possibly a week or two, when we assign a volunteer in each clinic, Respondents' workshop or hearing-preparation workshop to specifically request evaluations from every litigant who uses DASH services.

///

## **B. Court Records Review**

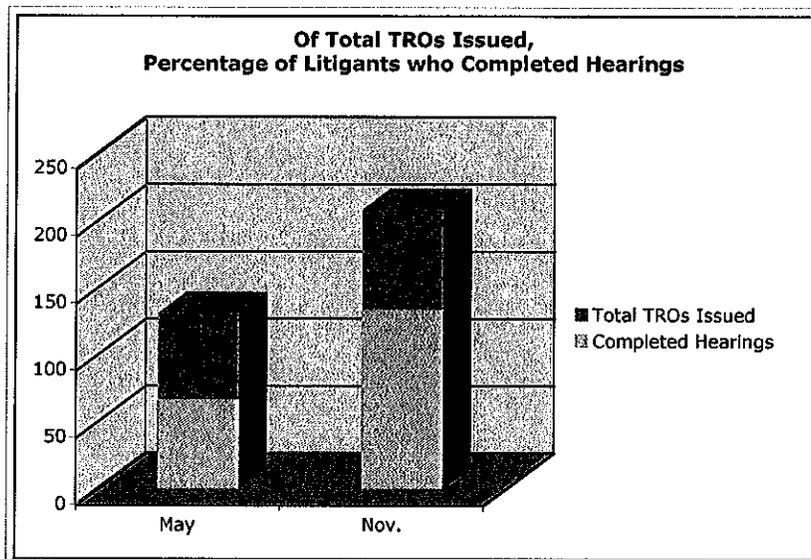
One way to measure the effectiveness of DASH assistance is to determine the success in court of litigants who have used DASH services. To obtain this information, DASH set out to review court records in order to learn how many people who used DASH services actually received their temporary restraining orders (the "TRO review") and ultimately, how many litigants attended their hearings for their permanent restraining orders and received restraining orders after hearing (the "ROAH review"). We looked at cases filed by DASH litigants from alternating months (e.g., May, July, September and November). To do this, a DASH volunteer obtained the case number, if any, for each litigant who sought DASH assistance in a given month. With that case number, the volunteer then accessed court information on-line to learn whether a request for a temporary restraining order had been filed by the litigant. Then, as resources allowed, DASH followed-up to see whether or not the litigant attended the restraining order hearing as well as whether a restraining order after hearing was issued. Volunteers recorded information on the DASH Post-clinic Data form [Exhibit B: DASH Case File Review Form]. DASH volunteers were able to complete the TRO review for every other month that DASH has been in operation. We were able to complete the more detailed ROAH review in May and November.

After completing this records review, DASH has collected the following data, which are displayed in the following bar graphs:



The bars in this graph represent the number of litigants who received services at a DASH clinic in the months of May, July, September and November. The blue portions of the bars represent the number of those people who also received restraining orders on or within a few days of their visit to DASH. In May 2006, 74% of litigants who had assistance from DASH received temporary restraining orders. In July, 81% received those orders. In September, 71% received orders and in November, 92% received temporary restraining orders.

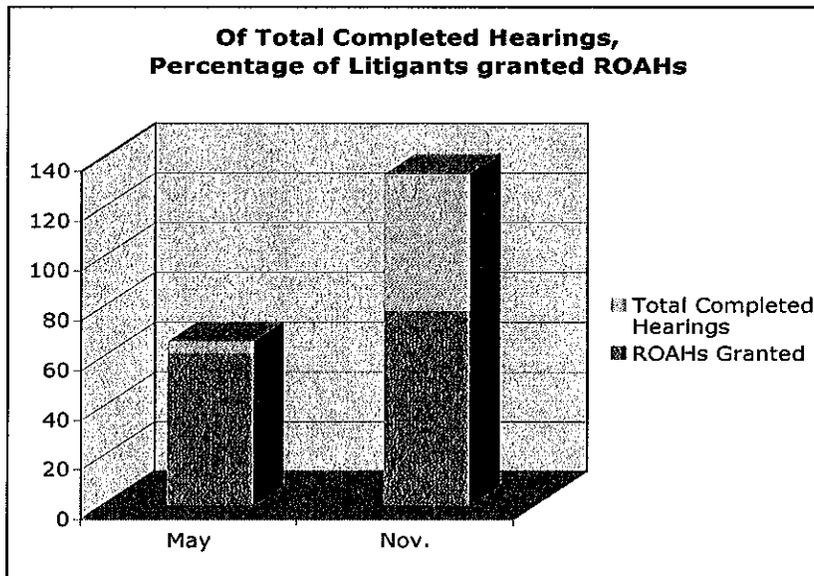
Some litigants who go to DASH for assistance never ask for restraining orders. Instead they are seeking information about the process and/or they decide that a restraining order is not appropriate for their situation. However, most litigants do decide to ask for a temporary restraining order. DASH believes, based on anecdotal evidence, that only rarely are litigants who ask for temporary restraining orders with DASH assistance denied a temporary restraining order.



The bars in this graph represent the total number of DASH litigants who received temporary restraining orders issued in the months of May and November (the blue portion of the previous graph). The yellow portion of the bars shows the number of those cases in which a restraining order after hearing was issued on the initial hearing date, usually 21-days after the issuance of the temporary restraining order. In May, 50% of litigants who received temporary restraining orders completed their hearing at or near the first return date. In November, the number increased to 64%.

There are many possible reasons why a hearing may not go forward, or be completed, on the initial date. Restraining order hearings are often continued for reasons including: (1) the respondent appeared and requested a continuance; (2) the court did not have an interpreter available on the hearing date; (3) the parties were unable to complete conciliation court before the time of the hearing, possibly because no interpreter was available; and (4) another case, such as a dependency court or criminal case, is pending.

Moreover, many litigants who receive their temporary restraining orders do not return for their hearings. Based upon anecdotal evidence and focus group discussions, DASH believes that litigants do not return for their hearing for a variety of reasons, including: (1) because of the dynamics of domestic violence, victims often return to the abusers out of fear, love or other pressures and do not pursue the restraining order case; (2) litigants are often confused about court procedures and arrive late or miss hearings; and (3) litigants have difficulty serving the restraining order paperwork on respondents and then are confused about whether they should attend their restraining order hearing; and (4) litigant sometimes flee the jurisdiction in order to escape the abuser. However, many litigants do follow through with the process.



The bars in this graph represent those restraining order cases that went to hearing on or near the initial hearing date (the yellow portion of the previous graph). The green portion of the bars represents the number of restraining

orders after hearing that were issued at those hearings. In May, 2006, 92% of litigants who had their restraining order hearings received permanent orders. In November, 59% of litigants who had their restraining order hearings received permanent orders.

There is not enough data, anecdotal or otherwise, to have much analysis of the data collected in this graph. What is clear, however, is that although a lot more DASH litigants completed hearings in November than in May, only nine (9) more orders after hearing were granted in November. DASH believes that one possible explanation for this difference is that some courts may be repeatedly continuing hearings and/or re-issuing orders rather than issuing a Restraining Order After Hearing.

Conclusions and proposed improvements: DASH believes that a court records review can be a very effective form of evaluation as well as an extremely powerful tool for analyzing issues concerning the judicial process, which can in turn give DASH even more helpful information to relay to litigants. Some possible ways to improve data collection in 2007 include: (1) rather than review the court index, which can be inaccurate or at least inconsistent between the courts, DASH will review the actual court files in order to obtain more detailed information about the cases; (2) DASH will review all domestic violence cases filed in a certain courthouse or a certain time period, in order to determine whether DASH litigants fare differently than non-DASH litigants; (3) in order to obtain a clear "snap-shot" of what is happening in the courthouse with DASH litigants, more in-depth file reviews will be done for shorter periods of time in

specific courts throughout the year, rather than in all DASH courthouses six times per year; and (4) DASH will review cases filed from a certain time period and monitor them for an extended time, even throughout the entire year. We believe that more in-depth file review, for much shorter periods of time, will strike an efficient balance between evaluating our services in a meaningful way, while at the same time not monopolizing valuable volunteer time and allowing volunteers to be in the clinics and workshops assisting litigants.

### **C. Focus Group**

Through the use of a focus group we hoped to learn information from DASH-assisted litigants who had gone through the process of the restraining order hearing, a difficult process for a domestic violence litigant who is likely to be facing her abuser for the first time since taking the step of leaving the relationship. Because of the extremely difficult nature of domestic violence cases, we anticipated difficulties in recruiting litigants to attend the focus group.

In order to recruit litigants, we chose to contact people who met the following two criteria: (1) used DASH services in the month of August, 2006; and (2) checked the box on the intake form giving permission for us to contact them at the phone number they provided. Our goal was to gather information from litigants who would be more able to provide detailed and informed suggestions for improvement. Therefore, we chose to contact August litigants for our December focus group. These August litigants would have had enough time to complete their restraining order hearing by December, even if it had been continued. Moreover, they would have completed the court process recently

enough for them to have clear recollections of their experiences with DASH and with their hearing.

We called 160 people, both English and Spanish speakers, and offered them lunch, child care and a \$50 gift card. We scheduled the focus group in the Self-Help Legal Access Center in the Van Nuys Courthouse, so that the litigants could be assured of a safe location with relatively easy public access, on-site security and free parking.

Although the litigants we were contacting marked the form In August saying it was safe to call them, the needs and safety plans of domestic violence victims change regularly. We were concerned about calling a litigant whose safety circumstances may have changed, possibly jeopardizing their security. To minimize this risk, we made phone calls from a “blocked” phone number that did not reveal the name or number of the caller. Also, we did not leave messages on machines or with other people, even though this severely limited the amount of people we could contact. Once a litigant had agreed to attend the focus group session, we called back twice to confirm their attendance, once two days before the session. Of the 160 people on our initial call list, we obtained 20 confirmations, much more than we expected given the subject matter. [Exhibit C: Sample Call List].

Half of the 20 confirmed participants attended the focus group. The group was divided evenly between English and Spanish speakers and facilitated and recorded by a fully bi-lingual staff who translated between English and Spanish. The facilitators and note-takers were NLS employees, none of whom worked with

DASH during the relevant time period. The facilitator discussed each question on the focus group question list with the group.

The focus group questions [Exhibit D: Focus Group Questions] were designed to initiate comments and discussion among the participants with regards to: (1) accessibility of DASH services; (2) adequacy of DASH staff and materials; (3) success at explaining the restraining order process; (4) the litigants' experiences at the restraining order hearings; and (5) suggested changes or improvements in DASH services.

Overall, the focus group members were satisfied with the services they received from DASH. All the members agreed that, without DASH assistance, they would not have been able to prepare the forms they needed to request a restraining order. The consensus was that, at the time of coming to court for a restraining order, they were "scared and confused and [wouldn't] know where to start" and "overwhelmed" without DASH services. Moreover, every member would recommend DASH to others who need assistance with their domestic violence case. Other positive comments included:

- All Spanish-speaking participants were all able to receive assistance quickly from DASH in their native language.
- All the focus group participants described the DASH services favorably. They said the staff "made us feel comfortable" and described the staff as "respectful," and "compassionate." They found the staff to be helpful and clear when explaining the legal process, although the process itself could be confusing.
- Participants who received individual assistance were happy not to have gone to a workshop when initiating the restraining order process, as they needed their privacy when discussing their situation and preparing the forms.

- Many members felt they made successful connections with social services for victims of domestic violence, like shelters or counseling.

However, the focus group process also provided important insights into the difficulties endured by domestic violence victims when seeking protection through the judicial system:

- Focus group members revealed that it can often take more than one trip to court in order to obtain assistance with a restraining order, as they can receive wrong information about the hours of the clinic, or the days the clinics are open. Some litigants were unable to receive help on their first visit to the clinic, because they arrived after the clinic had already taken the maximum number of litigants for that day. Other members expressed difficulty accessing DASH in Burbank and Lancaster, where the clinic was not open every day.
- The members commented that the process took a long time and that they had to wait to be helped at the clinic. While some members were seen "right away" at the clinic, others had to wait for an hour or more. One person said that the whole court process took 5 hours.
- Several members suggested that it would be helpful to have more information about the difficulties which can be involved in serving a restraining order and to have more information on what to do if a restrained person cannot be found.
- Most participants were able to return to court for their hearing on the permanent restraining order and all who returned had the documents they needed for their hearings. However participants generally felt that they did not know what to expect would happen when they attended their hearing.
- Two participants were against respondents who were represented by counsel. In those cases, the members expressed that they felt intimidated by the presence of an attorney and they did not get the custody and property orders they requested.
- Some members stated that while they received the orders they requested, the responding party violates the order without consequence.
- The members agreed that the best way to improve the services of the clinic is to have more of it--through more staff and longer hours. Members also suggested more information about the hearing itself. Other participants suggested more services pertaining to the post-restraining

order legal process, such as information on enforcement, difficult service issues and renewals.

Conclusions and proposed improvements: The results of the focus group were consistent with the results of the clinic evaluation survey, with the added benefit of providing more detailed, personal accounts of the domestic violence litigants' experience, especially the post-TRO experience. The participants stated very clearly that they could not have prepared their restraining order paperwork without DASH assistance. However, it is also clear that DASH can use the information received from the focus group to improve its services in very specific ways: (1) a DASH hearing preparation workshop (which was not in place at the time of this focus group) will address the issues of litigants feeling unprepared for their hearings and needing more information about enforcement and service of process; (2) DASH clinics can provide more information addressing enforcement problems and problems with difficult service of process; and (3) DASH should attempt to expand its availability, either through recruiting more volunteers, extending its hours of operation, or both, in order to serve the large population of domestic violence litigants and the courts which handle their cases. In 2007 DASH also intends to conduct focus groups with DASH-assisted Respondents, and/or with litigants who have attended the hearing preparation workshops.

#### **D. Court/Clerk Surveys**

The DASH management team meets with bench officers and court personnel throughout the year, either individually or in group settings to discuss DASH and general issues related to services provided to self-represented

litigants. During those meetings, bench officers and other court personnel often provide comments and suggestions regarding DASH. In addition, in order to obtain quantifiable data from our court partners, DASH created two survey forms which were distributed to all bench officers and court clerks who worked with domestic violence cases in DASH locations. [Exhibit E: Bench and Clerk Survey]

DASH chose a survey form as an efficient and impartial method to obtain information from busy court personnel. Both survey forms contained many Yes/No questions, but also contained open-ended questions and spaces for comments, so that the people responding to the survey were not restricted in their answers. The questions were designed to elicit opinions about the possible benefits of the DASH project to domestic violence litigants and to the court as well.

The surveys were distributed to bench officers via email as well as hand-delivered to each courtroom. The court clerk surveys were hand delivered to each courtroom clerk, as well as distributed by the supervisor of the clerks in each courthouse. The following week, DASH staff visited each courtroom and clerk's office to collect any completed surveys. From the approximately 17 court clerks working with domestic violence cases, DASH received 14 surveys. From the nine (9) bench officers regularly assigned to domestic violence restraining order cases in DASH locations, DASH received six (6) surveys.

The first section of the survey asked the same Yes/No questions of both the bench officers and clerks and gave the following results:

- 100% responded that DASH litigants have better prepared paperwork than other domestic violence litigants (20).

- 95% said that, in general, the paperwork of DASH-assisted litigants is prepared properly (19). Comments included, “DASH paperwork is excellent quality.”
- 90% of survey respondents stated that it takes less time to process restraining order paperwork prepared by DASH. Responders commented, “much less,” “absolutely” and “definitely.”
- 70% said that DASH litigants seem to have a better understanding of the court process than other pro per litigants (14). 45% responded that DASH litigants are generally less confused about legal procedures than pro per litigants (9). DASH fared even less well with the specific issue of service of process. Only 30% said that DASH litigants understand service of process better than other pro per litigants (6).
- 100% of the survey responders reported that they refer litigants to DASH for assistance. This question received the most comments, such as “all the time,” “always/daily/several times per day” and “this is a valuable resource for me to have.”

The second section of both the bench and clerk surveys contained more open-ended questions, allowing court personnel to express how DASH may benefit the public, low-income litigants and the court and to provide suggestions on how to improve the services provided by DASH. The responses provided the following insights:

- The most important benefit to the public provided by DASH is information and assistance in understanding the court process. Comments included: “assistance and information” “education” “demystifying the court process” “helping litigants, who are generally very distressed, feel less overwhelmed and confused by the court system” “pro per litigants are more at ease with the court system when they know someone is available to help them” “frees up court time” and “helps break the cycle of domestic violence”
- The most important benefit to low-income litigants, according to court personnel, is that DASH is “easily accessible” “free” and gives low-income litigants “a way to handle their case just like someone who could afford a lawyer.”
- Bench officers felt the biggest benefit to the court provided by DASH is “readable paperwork” and an “organized/complete factual statement.”

Court clerks repeatedly stated that “complete paperwork” and “time saving” were the biggest benefits.

- The suggestions for how to improve DASH mirrored the responses given in the clinic evaluation survey and the focus group, simply longer hours and more staff.

Conclusions and proposed improvements: In 2007 DASH will continue to meet individually with bench officers and court personnel. Moreover, DASH hopes to set regular meetings with the bench and other court personnel in each courthouse it serves. However, we found that the court personnel survey forms were an efficient and effective method for obtaining information and comments from both bench officers and clerks. While we were unable to obtain responses from all bench officers, we believe it is likely that some bench officers would be unable to meet individually with DASH staff had we attempted to use individual interviews. The information obtained from the responses also generally was consistent with the litigant survey and the focus groups: generally, DASH effectively provides a valuable service to the public, litigants and court, however at least two improvements can be made: (1) DASH can improve and expand its information about the post-TRO court process and difficult service of process issues; and (2) DASH should expand its services by offering more staff and longer hours.

#### **E. In-court Observation Program**

DASH proposed an in-court observation program as a possible means of evaluation if the Project had sufficient volunteer resources to staff such a program. DASH believed this type of evaluation could be a valuable tool to determine whether DASH litigants were adequately prepared to represent

themselves in their hearings. DASH proposed to use, as resources allowed, trained student and community volunteers to observe court sessions and record facts and impressions about the individual hearings, using a specific form [Exhibit F: Court Watch Form]. Unfortunately, during the last grant year DASH had resources which were too limited to collect enough data to use as an evaluation. We learned that this type of program requires many volunteers who: (1) are well-trained to understand and consistently make notes about the court proceedings: and (2) have a lot of time to devote to sitting in court. Given our limited volunteer base, DASH chose to use its volunteers in the clinics providing assistance to litigants.

In the 2007 grant year, DASH may attempt this type of evaluation on a very limited basis, taking a "snap-shot" of the litigants' performance in court. For example, in the summer, when DASH has more volunteers, we could possibly conduct an in court observation program which observes all restraining order hearings in one courthouse for one week. From the limited in-court observation DASH was able to accomplish, we learned that this tool, using the prepared form as we had drafted it, is possibly more effective at collecting information regarding judicial responses to different issues that arise in a domestic violence case than the preparedness of the litigants. DASH will likely revise the in-court observation form in order to focus on the litigants.

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### **III. PARTNERSHIP GRANT “HIGH PRIORITY QUESTIONS”**

#### **1. Which legal problems were most amenable to self-help assistance?**

DASH sees only domestic violence cases. Therefore, the question posed to DASH is: were domestic violence cases amenable to self-help assistance? We can only answer whether, based on the evaluations performed: (1) bench officers felt that domestic violence cases were amenable to self-help; and (2) litigants felt that self-help assistance alone was enough help for them to present their case to the court.

Bench officers were unanimous in their feeling that domestic violence cases are amenable to self-help assistance. Overall, litigants who responded to the survey were also very satisfied with free self-help assistance. As discussed in more detail above, 97% of responders felt that DASH helped them describe their legal problem to the court and 93% felt they had also received other some benefit (e.g., they knew better how to handle their legal problem) from DASH assistance.

Based upon the bench officers' and litigants' over-all approval of the assistance received from DASH expressed in the focus group and the clinic evaluation surveys, we believe litigants are satisfied with self-help assistance in domestic violence cases. The information collected through the 2006 grant year supports the idea that restraining order cases can be amenable to self-help assistance, although as one bench officer wrote, it “would be better if litigants had attorneys.”

#### **2. Are there problem types where self-help assistance is not effective?**

DASH posed this question to the bench officers who hear domestic violence cases in its survey. Most bench officers did not mention any specific issues or types of domestic violence cases which were not amenable to self-help assistance. However, a few bench officers felt that some issues were not well-served by self-help assistance, such as issues of standing, jurisdiction, abduction and child custody.

**3. Were pro pers more prepared after using the project's services?**

76% of litigants who responded to the clinic evaluation survey felt more prepared to handle their legal problem after receiving DASH services. 70% of court personnel responding to the survey stated that DASH litigants have a better understanding of the court process than other pro per litigants. All of the focus group participants who attended their restraining order hearings had all the documents they needed, however many felt that they did not really know what to expect from the hearing process.

**4. Were forms more adequately prepared?**

100% of court/clerk survey responders stated that DASH litigants have better-prepared paperwork than other domestic violence litigants. 95% said that, in general, the paperwork of DASH-assisted litigants is adequately prepared. One bench officer stated, "DASH paperwork is excellent quality."

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**5. Were cases less time consuming for bench officers and clerks after self-help assistance?**

90% of court/clerk survey responders stated that it takes less time to process restraining order paperwork prepared by DASH. Responders commented, "much less," "absolutely" and "definitely."

**6. Where were litigants referred for representation?**

If a litigant asks for information regarding how to obtain an attorney, litigants are given referrals to two sources: (1) local legal services organizations, including Neighborhood Legal Services, Break the Cycle, Harriet Buhai Center, Levitt & Quinn and LAFLA; and (2) bar association legal referral services, such as San Fernando Valley Legal Services and the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

**7. Was the referral due to the complexity of the subject matter, due to personal reasons (such as skill or language barrier) or other reasons?**

Referrals to attorneys were made to litigants when litigants requested information about how they might find an attorney to represent them in their restraining order hearing or other case, such as divorce or paternity.

**8. To what extent did pro per litigants have reasonable expectations before they received pro per assistance and did expectations change as a result of the assistance?**

Often litigants did not have reasonable expectations upon first coming to DASH. For example, litigants often expect that they can obtain a restraining order without preparing paperwork and/or some judicial review of forms.

Litigants sometimes expect that they can obtain a restraining order quickly before they have to be at work at 9:00 am. Often litigants are surprised to learn that they must return to court and/or face the abuser in order to obtain a long-term restraining order. These expectations are changed as a result of DASH assistance, as DASH staff and volunteers explain the steps of the restraining order process to the litigants.

**9. Were pro pers satisfied with the assistance they received from the project?**

As discussed above, 98% of clinic evaluation survey responders described DASH services as good or very good. All of the focus group participants stated that they would not have been able to prepare their forms without DASH assistance. Also, they were generally satisfied with the services and said they “wouldn’t know where to start” without DASH services. However, as discussed in detail above, each evaluation tool revealed ways in which DASH could continue to improve its services.

**10. Were pro pers satisfied with their opportunity to make their case?**

As discussed in more detail above, 97% of clinic evaluation survey responders felt that DASH helped them describe their legal problem to the court in their TRO application. Focus group participants were also satisfied with the process of stating their case in the restraining order application. Moreover, DASH court file review shows that a large majority of litigants who use DASH services receive temporary restraining orders.

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**11. Were outcomes changed as a result of self-help assistance?**

Based on the information obtained from the focus group, that none of the participants would have been able to prepare their request for a temporary restraining order without DASH assistance, DASH may be able to conclude that outcomes were changed as a result of DASH assistance.

**12. How did representation of opposing parties affect the effectiveness of self-help assistance?**

Based upon comments made in the focus group, DASH believes that when a respondent is represented by an attorney in court, this can negatively impact the effectiveness of the self-help assistance given in the clinics. In domestic violence cases when the balance of power between the parties is extremely unequal to begin with, with the respondent having legal representation at the hearing has a tendency to intimidate a petitioner/victim even more, effectively vitiating any self-help preparation.

**13. On average, did self-represented litigants achieve results more consistent with the law and facts in their case after receiving self-help assistance?**

Some bench officers responding to the survey stated that DASH forms contained Based upon statements made by bench officers in response to the survey that forms prepared by DASH had more organized and complete factual statements. Almost all of the clinic survey responders stated that "DASH helped them describe their legal problem to the court." Because DASH was able to

assist litigants in getting the facts of their cases before the court, DASH believes it has helped self-represented litigants achieve results more consistent with the facts of their case.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Despite the fact that NLS has been operating court-based domestic violence clinics for over 10 years, they had never conducted an evaluation of their services until the creation of DASH. Overall, the evaluation process has given DASH a very valuable source of information to use when making decisions on how to change, improve and/or expand its services. As discussed in each section above, DASH will be expanding its services in the 2007 grant year based upon this information.

# **APPENDIX OF EXHIBITS**

## Restraining Order Clinic Evaluation

So that we can learn from you, please answer these questions and  
Return this form to the box in the Clinic. Thank you for your help.

1. What type of help did you receive at the Clinic today?

- A person helped me fill out the forms for a Temporary Restraining Order.
- A person helped me fill out the forms for \_\_\_\_\_.
- I received written handouts about how to prepare legal forms
- I went to a workshop called "How to Prepare for a Restraining Order Hearing."
- I went to a workshop called "Information for Respondents."
- I received information about shelters, counseling, low-cost legal assistance or other services.

2. How long did you wait before someone was able to help you? About \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

3. Were the staff respectful, polite and helpful?  Yes  No

4. How would you rate the over-all quality of service?  Very Good  Good  Okay  Bad

5. Do you feel the Clinic helped you describe your legal problem to the Court?  Yes  No

6. After getting help at the restraining order clinic:

- I feel more prepared to handle my legal problem
- I understand the court process better
- I understand my legal problem better
- I have a clear idea of what to do next to solve my legal problem
- I know more about other kinds of available services than I did before

7. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for how we can improve our services? If so, please write them on the back of this form.

8. May our staff contact you to talk with you about any of your answers to these questions?  
If your answer to #8 is "Yes," please give us your information below

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Continue on the Back of Form →**



## Evaluación de Clínica para Orden de Restricción

Para poder saber mas sobre usted, favor de contestar las siguientes preguntas y Devuelva esta forma a la caja en la Clínica. Gracias por su ayuda.

1. ¿Qué tipo de ayuda recibió usted en la Clínica hoy?
  - Una persona me ayudó a llenar las formas para una Orden de Restricción Temporal.
  - Una persona me ayudó a llenar las formas para \_\_\_\_\_
  - Recibí folletos escritos sobre como preparar formas legales
  - Fui a un taller llamado "Como Prepararme para una Audiencia de Orden de Restricción."
  - Fui a un taller llamado "Información para Demandados."
  - Recibí la información sobre refugios, orientación, ayuda legal económica u otros servicios.
  
2. ¿Cuánto esperó usted antes de que alguien pudiera de ayudarle? Como \_\_\_\_\_ minutos
  
3. ¿El personal fue respetuoso, cortés y amable?  Sí  No
  
4. ¿Usted como calificaría la calidad total del servicio?  Muy Bueno  Bueno  Okay  Mal
  
5. ¿Siente usted que la Clínica le ayudó a describir su problema legal a la corte?  Sí  No
  
6. Después de conseguir ayuda en la clínica de interdicto:
  - Me siento más preparado para manejar mi problema legal
  - Entiendo mejor el proceso de la corte
  - Entiendo mejor mi problema legal
  - Tengo una idea clara de como proseguir para solucionar mi problema legal
  - Ahora sé más sobre otras clases de servicios disponibles que anteriormente
  
7. ¿Tiene usted algún otro comentario o sugerencias para cómo podemos mejorar nuestros servicios?  
De ser así, por favor escríbalos al reverso de esta forma.
  
8. ¿Puede nuestro personal ponerse en contacto con usted para hablarle sobre sus respuestas a estas preguntas?  
Si su respuesta a \*8 fue "Sí", por favor dénos su información enseguida

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Por favor continúe al reverso de la Forma →**



DASH Case File/Court Index Review Form

1. Case Number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Date of Request \_\_\_\_\_

with children

without children

a. Was TRO granted?

Yes

No

3. Was Proof of Service Filed?

Yes

No

Date \_\_\_\_\_

4. Was there a hearing?

Yes

No

a. Date of hearing

\_\_\_\_\_

b. If NO,  
why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. Department of hearing

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Was a Permanent Order Granted?

Yes

No

If YES, for how long?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Are there any future hearings?

Yes

No

a. If YES, what is the date?

\_\_\_\_\_

For what reason?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Who attended hearing?

Petitioner only

Respondent only

Both

None

8. Was either party rep'd by counsel?

Yes

No

a. If YES, which party?

Petitioner only

Respondent only

Both

9. Was a Custody Order Issued?

Yes

No

10. Was a Child Support Order Issued?

Yes

No

# FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT CALL LIST

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Brenda [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	Client said yes. W/d like Target card	11/22/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
June [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2007	Client not available	11/22/2006	Client said yes. W/d like Am/Ex. Ok to leave msg	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client	
Aleroush [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	Number disconnected					
Crystal M. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	Busy signal	11/17/2006	Phone has busy signal			
Eugenia M. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	Wrong Number			
Angelica P. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No. Very busy	
Alfred T. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Out of Town			
Hugo [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Sean C. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	Client w/d like us to call back	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	Yes. Any card will be fine	
Karla [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/15/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	At work. Yes. Target card			
Debby [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Yes. Am/Ex gift card	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
Maria I. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Yes. Am/Ex gift card	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
Mihaeala [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Yes. Am/Ex gift card	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
Cecilia J. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Yes. Target gift card	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
Cindy M. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Yes. Am/Ex gift card	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			

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# FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT CALL LIST

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Brigette [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Yes. Any card	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
Jovita [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	Will Check sched and call back			
Isai S. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer					
Sara [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2007	Phone will not take blocked #'s					
Crystal A. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Phone will not take blocked #'s					
Emmanuel R. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	Number's Not in service					
Maria L. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer			
Trina L. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	Wrong Number			
Gra Nesha [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2007	No Answer	11/27/2006	Phone out of order	
Shirley J. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	Wrong Number	
Hulkam [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	Phone not accepting calls	
Mario J. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No. Out of town					
Belinda M. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No. Cannot take time off work					
Annie [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No. She hung up when I identified myself					
Senida A. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No. Has to work			

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# FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT CALL LIST

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Monica L.	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No, has to work			
Lisa J.	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No has to work	
Elizabeth o.	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Gloria	[REDACTED]	11/17/2007	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Anne M.	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Tanisha L.	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Nanci C.	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Elizabeth	[REDACTED]	11/17/2006	No Answer	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Chloe	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Yes, Am/EX	11/29/2006	Confirmed w/ Client			
Jacqueline M.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	Yes, Any Gift Card	
Monica M.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Maybe, Call next week	11/29/2006	No Answer			
Nancy	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Maybe Call next week	11/29/2006	No Answer			
Brenda J.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Yes, Target	11/29/2006	No Answer			
Marilyn	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Rita	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	

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# FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT CALL LIST

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Rachel E.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No answer	
Donna	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No has to work	
Dionely B.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Leslie	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Maribel	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	Spoke w/ "father" who seemed upset when I didn't leave a msg.			
Joanna L.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Tannaz	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Cristina	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Guadalupe	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No answer	
Cynthia L.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No answer	
Alicia I.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No answer	
Mary A.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No answer	
Guadalupe C.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No answer	
Bruce	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Allan	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	

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# FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT CALL LIST

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Donald K.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	Wife answered. Wanted info, left no msg			
Adrianna L.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Elena P.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No Answer	11/29/2006	No Answer	
Cecile A.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No. Not Interested			
Carmen	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Answer	11/27/2006	No. Has to work			
Quinton	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No Cannot take time off.					
Alma	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	No disabled					
Madeleine F.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Maybe. Call back next week	11/29/2006	No. has been sick			
Andres	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Spoke w/ older woman-clt not home	11/27/2006	Number out of service			
Esmeralda	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Phone out of service					
Ashlee m.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Phone does not take incoming calls					
Justina	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Javier A.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
William R.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Thomas P.	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					

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# FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT CALL LIST

Name	Phone Number	Call #1	Notes	Call #2	Notes	Call #3	Notes	Additional Notes
Eddy [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Phone will not take unidentified calls					
Delia L. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Phone will not take unidentified calls					
Maria A. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Patricia B. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Michelle R. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Maria L. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Heather M. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Number not in service					
Joan [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Phone will not take unidentified calls					
Lilyann [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not Available					
Sosie [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not Available					
Mara [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not Available					
Sonia [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not Available					
Gigine C. [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not Available					
Jose [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not Available					
Magdalena [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/22/2006	Not home, spoke with daughter					

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## **Domestic Abuse Self-Help [DASH] FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

December 6, 2006

### **I. Access to Clinic**

1. How did you find out about the Clinic?
2. Why did you come to Clinic?
3. Was the Clinic easy/hard to find?
  - a. If hard – why?
4. Was the day and time that the Clinic operates good/bad for you?
  - a. If bad, why?
5. Did Clinic staff speak your language?
  - a. Did the staff speak your language or did you need an interpreter?
    - i. If you used an interpreter, how did that work for you?
6. Was the Clinic able to assist you on your first visit?
  - a. If not, why?
7. Did you come to the clinic with someone? Who?
8. Did you have all the paperwork you needed when you came to the Clinic?

## **II. Clinic Operations**

1. Did Clinic staff treat you with respect?
  - a. If not, how were you treated?
2. Were you comfortable in the clinic setting?
  - a. If no, what would have made you more comfortable?
3. Was staff clear when explaining the restraining order process?
  - a. If no, please comment
4. Did staff give you written materials?
  - a. If yes, were the materials helpful?
  - b. If no, please comment
5. Was staff helpful in filling out your forms?
  - a. If no, please comment
6. Did you have to wait a long time to be seen? If so, did staff explain why?
7. Did staff have all of the necessary paperwork on hand for your problem?
8. In your opinion, did Clinic staff work efficiently in addressing your issues?
  - a. If no, please comment.
9. If you needed help with other issues, did the clinic staff refer you to an agency that could help you?
  - a. If no, please comment.

### **III. Grasp of Issues and Procedures**

1. Did you understand the restraining order process before you came to the Clinic?
2. Did you understand the process better after you came to the Clinic?
3. Could you have completed the legal forms without the Clinic's help?
4. When you left the clinic:
  - a. Did you understand the court process?
    - i. If no, please explain.
  - b. Did you understand how to get to the clerk and and the court?
    - i. If no, please explain.
  - c. Did you understand about conciliation?
    - i. If no, please explain.
  - d. Did you understand about asking for child/spousal support?
    - i. If no, please explain.
  - e. Did you know you had to come back to court for your permanent order?
    - i. If no, please explain.
5. Did you understand how long it would take to get your TRO?
  - a. Your permanent order?
6. Questions about Service of Process
  - a. Did the clinic staff explain service of process to you?
  - b. Did you understand it?
  - c. What could the clinic have done to make this more clear?
  - d. Did you bring your POS to court for your hearing?
  - e. Did you use the sheriff for service?
    - i. If not, how was service completed?
7. Did you understand what was going to happen in court?
8. Were all of your questions answered by Clinic staff?

#### **IV. Permanent Order Hearing**

1. Did you have problems finding the Court?
2. Did you bring everything you needed to the Court?
3. Did you feel that you were prepared for your hearing?
4. Did the other side have a lawyer?
5. Did you settle with the other side?
6. Did you go to conciliation?
  - a. Were you able to speak with the conciliator alone?
  - b. Were you happy with the outcome of conciliation?
7. Was an interpreter provided to you? Do you think the interpreter was accurate and clear?
8. Did the Judge give you an opportunity to speak and present your case?
9. Were you treated with respect by the Judge and court staff?
10. Did you feel the process was fair?
11. If you went to hearing:
  - a. Did you get all the orders you asked for?
    - i. Child custody
    - ii. Child support
    - iii. Spousal support

## **V. Final Questions**

1. How would you improve or change the Clinic?
2. Do you feel you would have been assisted just as well in a workshop setting?
3. What other help would you have liked in preparing for court?
4. Would you recommend to clinic to others who need DV assistance?
  - a. If yes, why?
  - b. If no, why?
5. Do you have any other comments or concerns?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!**



8. Do you feel that, in general, legal problems associated with domestic violence are amenable to effective self-help assistance?

Y N N/A

Comments:

9. Are there certain domestic violence-related legal problems which are not amenable to effective self-help assistance?

Y N N/A

Comments:

10. What do you think is the most important benefit to the public provided by DASH?

11. What do you think is the most important benefit to low income litigants provided by DASH?

12. What do you think is the most important benefit to the court provided by DASH?

13. What can be changed or added to make DASH better?



8. What do you think is the most important benefit to the public provided by DASH?

9. What do you think is the most important benefit to low income litigants provided by DASH?

10. What do you think is the most important benefit to the court provided by DASH?

11. What can be changed or added to make DASH better?

Thank you for your time and thoughts! If you would like us to contact you directly, please write your name and extension on this form.

**DASH COURT WATCH: RESTRAINING ORDER HEARINGS**

**COURT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **OBSERVER'S NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**JUDGE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**KEY:** U = Unknown, NA = Not Applicable

	<u>CASE NUMBERS</u>		
	<u>#1</u>	<u>#2</u>	<u>#3</u>
<b>1. RELATIONSHIP OF PARTIES</b>			
<b>2. PETITIONER/victim: male (M) or female (F)</b>	M/F	M/F	M/F
<b>a. Attire; F=Formal (suit), C=Casual (dress pants &amp; shirt), or V=Very Casual (t-shirt &amp; jeans)</b>	F/C/V	F/C/V	F/C/V
<b>3. RESPONDENT/batterer: male (M) or female (F)</b>	M/F	M/F	M/F
<b>a. Attire; F=Formal (suit), C=Casual (dress pants &amp; shirt), or V=Very Casual (t-shirt &amp; jeans)</b>	F/C/V	F/C/V	F/C/V
<b>4. Did the judge explain process to parties?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>5. Was PETITIONER present? (If NO, skip #6-17)</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>a. Did Petitioner have an attorney?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>b. If yes, was the attorney present?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>6. Did Petitioner show up on time?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>a. Did Petitioner come forward when case called?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>b. Did Petitioner bring a support person to the hearing?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>7. Did Petitioner bring proper Proof of Service?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>8. Did judge/clerk mention missing or incomplete documents?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>9. Did judge mention need for evidence or witness?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>10. Did Petitioner bring documents, evidence, etc.?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>a. If yes, did the judge look at?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>11. Was Petitioner able to answer the judge's questions?</b>	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat
<b>12. Did the judge listen attentively to Petitioner?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>13. Was the Petitioner cross-examined?</b>	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N

14.	Did Petitioner need clarification of legal terms?	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat
	a. If yes, did judge clarify terms?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
15.	Did judge allow Petitioner to speak directly to Respondent?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
16.	Was Petitioner respectful to judge and court personnel?	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat
17.	Please describe judge's demeanor toward the Petitioner: (Circle one or add your own in the space below)	Good-natured Professional Firm Condescending Harsh	Good-natured Professional Firm Condescending Harsh	Good-natured Professional Firm Condescending Harsh
18.	Was RESPONDENT present? (If NO, skip #19-29)	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
	a. Did Respondent have an attorney?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
	b. If yes, was the attorney present?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
19.	Did Respondent show up on time?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
	a. Did Respondent come forward when case called?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
	b. Did Respondent bring a support person to the hearing?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
20.	Did judge/clerk mention missing or incomplete documents?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
21.	Did judge mention need for evidence or witness?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
22.	Did Respondent bring documents, evidence, etc.?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
	a. If yes, did the judge look at?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
23.	Was Respondent able to answer the judge's questions?	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat
24.	Did the judge listen attentively to Respondent?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
25.	Was the Respondent cross-examined?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
26.	Did Respondent need clarification of legal terms?	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat
	a. If yes, did judge clarify terms?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
27.	Did judge allow Respondent to speak directly to Petitioner?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
28.	Was Respondent respectful to judge and court personnel?	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat	Y/N/ Somewhat
29.	Please describe judge's demeanor toward the Respondent: (Circle one or add your own in the space below)	Good-natured Professional Firm Condescending Harsh	Good-natured Professional Firm Condescending Harsh	Good-natured Professional Firm Condescending Harsh

30. Was an order issued? If yes, for what time period?	Y/N _____	Y/N _____	Y/N _____
31. Did the judge issue mutual protective orders?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
32. Did the judge ask about weapons to be confiscated?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
33. Did the judge order that weapons be confiscated?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
34. If requested, did the judge grant a Move-Out Order?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
35. If requested, did the judge grant custody of children to Petitioner?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
a. Was visitation granted, if so then what type? (S=Standard, P=Supervised, N=None)	Y/N S/P/N	Y/N S/P/N	Y/N S/P/N
36. If requested, did the judge order Child Support?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
37. If requested, did the judge order Spousal Support?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
38. If requested, did the judge order Respondent to attend a Batterer Intervention Program?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
39. If requested, did judge grant Other Orders or Monetary Awards?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
a. If granted, what was the other order?	_____	_____	_____
40. If requested, did the judge vacate the restraining order?	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA	Y/N or NA
41. Did the parties need an interpreter? If yes, which party?	Y/N P/R	Y/N P/R	Y/N P/R
a. Did party bring own interpreter?	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
b. If no, how long was the wait or an interpreter?	_____	_____	_____
c. What was the language interpretation?	_____	_____	_____
42. If the matter was continued, what was the reason? (Circle one or add your own in the space below)	*No proof of service	*Judge ran out of time	
	*Matter set for long case calendar	*At the request of the parties	
	*Need additional information	*Parties need to go to family court services	
	*Paperwork problems		

**Case #1: Type of relief ordered:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments on any aspect of the case:**

**Case #2: Type of relief ordered:**

**Comments on any aspect of the case:**

**Case #3: Type of relief ordered:**

**Comments on any aspect of the case:**

# APPENDIX OF REPORTS