

Focus Group Guidelines
October 6, 2004
Milwaukee, WI
Female, Non-College

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

II. Direction of Country and Campaign (25 minutes)

1. Thinking generally about the country, are things moving in the right direction or wrong direction? **[QUICK]**

Wrong.

Both.

Wrong

WHAT'S GOING MOSTLY WRONG?

Health care

Jobs.

Taxes.

War.

Haven't gotten a raise in 3 years, company's near bankruptcy.

Jobs don't pay what they should.

Yeah, people don't get paid enough, can't get foodstamps if you work.

Yeah, unemployment benefits are running out for a lot of people, unemployment is so high.

The unemployment figures also really don't include the working poor.

YOU MENTIONED THE WAR, WHAT'S GOING ON THERE?

Brother was supposed to get activated, thank god he didn't. Been in for twenty years and he wants to retire, it sucks.

Dcorps, Milwaukee, WI, Female, Non-College, Oct.6, 2004

Why are we there? Do we have a reason? Our only reason is that they interfered with our lives.

But there's no connection, they still haven't found in WMD.

Bush is trying to finish what his Dad started.

Kerry slammed Bush in the debate when he used his father against him, about being occupiers in a hostile land.

And people are starving here, were spending hundreds of millions over there, why does the U.S. have to bail everyone out?

But it's not new, we don't here about civilians dying, about our boys getting mutilated. We didn't do things the right way, if we did, our allies would be helping us.

War's over? We've lost more people since the war ended!

My brother was in the Gulf War, he was an MIA in the first Gulf War, I feel so bad, those that are going over there are just kids.

- What things are going right?

Yeah (pregnant woman), Bush said if I got killed, it would be two murders. I liked that.

ANYTHING ELSE?

Election's coming up.

LETs TALK ABOUT THAT.

Two kids fighting across the table at dinner, he said she said.

I wish they'd just list the positive things, what do you want to do? Everyone's done bad things.

Have you ever heard about a good politician.?

- What things are going in the wrong direction?
2. Thinking about this year's presidential campaign, what have you heard recently about the campaign and the candidates for president? **[PROBE]**

Dcorps, Milwaukee, WI, Female, Non-College, Oct.6, 2004

We are hated everywhere, we got booed at the Olympics. We've become the terrorists, this is how the world views us. I hear them talking about the issues and the war, but I would like to hear Ralph Nader, I know he did a lot of safety things, just somebody else.

WHAT ELSE?

Just slam each other.

Just having a hard time deciding who to vote for.

My husband said if Edwards was presidential nominee, he'd vote for him.

3. As you probably know, the two candidates for President held their first debate last week in Miami. How many of you watched the debate?

Kerry made a fool out of Bush.

I hear Bush looked angry and frustrated with that double-screen.

If you're the president you should know how to speak to people.

He's a horrible public speaker.

My 12 year old daughter thought it was cool that our President got elected and was dyslexic. That's why he stopped and had to think really hard.

OTHER IMPRESSIONS?

How can he run this country if he can't stop his daughters from drinking? Can't be a good president if you're not a good father.

If you were pro-war your still with him, if you were against him, you'd naturally stick to Kerry. Whomever you liked before is who you're going to stick with.

Yeah, the backers of both were unaffected.

I thought Bush side-stepped a lot of answers, and Kerry just kept saying things that Bush had done wrong.

- What were your impressions of the debate, or what have you heard about it? [**Extensive, probe for detail**]
- Based on what you've seen or heard, who won the debate? Why?

4. Thinking specifically about George W. Bush, what have you heard about him recently? Did Bush say or do anything in the debate that really stood out to you?

Going to try to take care of health care. My grandma has blue cross-Blue Shield, it keeps going up every three months, 800 every three months, all she has is social security.

Also young people, 200 bucks just to fill prescriptions.

My parents pay 1,000.

I think the war has overshadowed so many other issues, everything else just takes a backseat-the elderly, doctors' bills.

ARE EITHER CANDIDATES TALKING ABOUT THIS?

I think a little, I think Bush is the rich man's man, Kerry's the poor man's man. Look take some more of my money and use it for something productive, education, healthcare.

Yeah, don't use it for another war.

HAS HE DONE A GOOD JOB WITH TERRORISM?

Bin Laden, where is he? We went into Iraq for oil. VP has business interests there too. It was a smokescreen.

5. How about John Kerry? What have you heard about Kerry recently? Did he say or do anything in the debate that made an impression or stood out to you?

Jobs, healthcare (a lot of the group say this).

Sending jobs overseas because of tax breaks.

Don't pay much attention.

Yeah, I just turn off most of the commercials, I could hear my kids do that.

Yeah, my kids mute the commercials too, they're sick of it, that's our future.

My son wrote a report on the debate, I thought it was a great idea, you need to learn about politics.

ANYTHING ELSE?

Healthcare, but I don't know what he's saying.

Schools, teachers are against No Child Left Behind.

It's horrible they're cutting music and other programs, there's hardly anything left for them. We can't let it fall to the wayside.

Yeah, in Texas they teach to the test, not the curriculum

- **Probe on flip-flopper, weak on security/terrorism**

6. And what about last night's VP debate in Cleveland? How many of you watched last night's debate?

No, wish I would've.

WHAT DID YOU HEAR?

I heard Cheney was smooth.

Yeah, Cheney got Edwards on absenteeism.

Yeah, but Edwards held his own, he didn't look rattled.

ANYTHING ELSE?

- What were your impressions of the debate, or what have you heard about it?
- Based on what you've seen or heard, who won the debate? Why?

III. Associations (25 minutes)1. Bill Clinton [**Brief**]

Monica.

Cuban cigars.

Hillary.

2. Martha Stewart

Jail.

Overated products.

3. Bruce Springsteen

Lord!

The Boss!

Getting old!

Promoting Kerry, couldn't believe it, especially since he wouldn't let another Pres. use "Born in the USA"

4. Dick Cheney

Oil.

Old.

Trigger happy.

5. John Edwards

Good looking.

Family man.

Poor background, can relate better to us.

LAURA?

Not sure

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6. The Democratic Party

Working and middle class.

Kennedys.

When I see Kerry, I see JFK.

I see that with Edwards.

Yeah, but they were corrupt too.

Hope, they're there for the little guy, not just the oilmen.

Education

Elderly.

Immigration (negative comments against Iranians).

7. The Republican Party

Rich buzzards.

I voted for Bush, I have a big issue with pro-life, he is, Kerry isn't, but he doesn't seem to care much about life here in the U.S.

Dishonest.

8. Ralph Nader

Safety.

Car issues.

Environment, but forgets other things.

No, except he's off the tickets.

[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]

9. Now I'd like to talk specifically about George W. Bush.

- What are the best reasons to vote FOR George W. Bush? **[Discuss]**

Experience, he tried to do the job.

Yeah, he's already involved with everything, he started it, so he should finish it.

1,000 child tax credit.

Pro-life and tax credits.

Don't know any.

Don't know any either, just bits and pieces.

I think he handled 9/11 well, didn't rush in, looked at it a little bit.

YOU GUYS TALK ABOUT EXPERIENCE, IS THAT A REASON TO VOTE FOR HIM?

Not a good enough reason for me.

Dcorps, Milwaukee, WI, Female, Non-College, Oct.6, 2004

My mom says that they're just the figurehead, there are others that make the real decisions.

- What are the best reasons to vote AGAINST Bush? **[Extensive]**
Healthcare, taxes, not enough well-paying jobs.

Tax cuts for rich.

Limiting the tax child credit to 16.

Don't trust him.

Yeah, he's blown it, experience can work both ways.

Not enough for the elderly, where's all the money going.

What happened since Clinton left?

What's the difference, five years from now they'll be back in power, a vicious cycle.

Bin Laden, he use to be our buddy. If we want a bad guy, we know where to find them and get them to do our dirty work, then they turn on us.

His times up, he blew it.

Agreed.

Yeah, the overtime bill they passed (lots of anger over it).

ANYTHING ELSE, MOST OF THE COMPLAINTS SOUND DOMESTIC?

That's were you should start.

Yeah, send our boys home.

Yeah, the jobs is very important.

- Who does Bush care about?
Himself.

The Rich.

The Upperclass.

Things have gotten worse for me.

Dcorps, Milwaukee, WI, Female, Non-College, Oct.6, 2004

The tax cuts just go for the rich, and we get less and less.

The trickle-down is ridiculous.

And even if it does work, it's minimal.

Yeah, the job-creation argument just doesn't work.

Yeah, 220,000 people getting laid off, it's not helping at all.

[Written Exercise – Handouts #3 and #4]

10. Now let's talk about John Kerry.

- What are the best reasons to vote FOR John Kerry? **[Discuss]**

He'll keep the jobs here.

Change.

Focus on other issues besides war.

Have a plan to get out of war.

More in tune with working class.

Change in health care, get rid of No Child left Behind and rich tax cuts.

A vote Kerry is one less than Bush.

Seems more down to earth, like us.

His wife scares me (laughter).

Eliminating the overseas tax cuts.

Hopefully, pharmaceutical help, the elderly need help, it's sad, they can't afford it. We have to tell pharmaceutical companies to stop sending promotion junk, give us free samples for the elderly (woman works at an office with 9 doctors).

Yeah, but if they work on commission, they're going to go for the expensive stuff.

CAN'T KERRY ACCOMPLISH ALL OF IT?

It's a crap-shoot.

I think they need to hire a panel of women, we'll help him on domestic issues (Kerry).

Yeah, we (women) run the house.

- What are the best reasons to vote AGAINST Kerry? **[Extensive]**
His wife, a rich, foreign bitch that I think will make him neglect the domestic scene.

No experience as President, maybe worse than Bush, we won't know.

But usually Democrats pull us out of trouble.

Not pro-life.

He can't just change everything overnight.

It's a question of trust.

WHY DON'T YOU TRUST HIM?

He's a politician.

Wishy-washy, votes only when circumstance is favorable.

But he was consistent, although it sounds flip-flop. He approved war as a last resort, after inspectors, Bush didn't follow through. I've changed my mind, and I want people to understand that we need change if something isn't working. We all learn and our opinions will hopefully change.

It's like child-rearing, rules and criteria constantly get changed the longer you do it.

Yeah, Bush didn't let inspectors finish.

He wouldn't be so trigger-happy if his girls were in the service.

I had two friends who died in 9/11, but I feel enough is enough, let it drop, let it heal.

YOU'VE HAD FOUR YEARS OF BUSH AND YOU KNOW WHO HE IS, WHAT ABOUT KERRY, WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

Can he do the job right? I first voted only four years ago, now I think, was that right?

You never know, four years from now it could be a big mistake. It's easy to bash Bush for all the things he's done, but we don't know much about Kerry.

Four years ago, they did a comparison on a local news station, they just gave you the facts of candidates and that was really helpful (a lot of people agree that's a good idea).

Yeah, so much talk and people giving their personal opinions, it clouds the issues.

- What questions do you still have about Kerry?
- Who does Kerry care about?

Working class.

I can only pray.

Edwards has that background.

IV. News Clips (15 minutes)

Next, I would like to show you some pieces of video from last night's newscasts to see some of the issues that are being discussed in this campaign. We'll watch each one all the way through, then we'll discuss.

- **News Clip #1**

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS CLIP?

Confusing, did he or didn't he say it. Did people force him to cover up for what he said, or did they take it out of context (Bremer).

What really happened?

Just causes more questions.

I go with my gut, we didn't have enough troops over there>

Yeah Edwards brought that up.

DID WE PLAN ENOUGH FOR THE WAR?

No, everything was televised, they tell too much.

Yeah, there's sensationalism is everything?

It's sad, they don't know what they hell they're doing?

Maybe they're not communicating well or enough with each other, they're men, so of course they'll never admit that.

Yeah, and while it goes on, men are still dying.

Boys.

I wish it was like Vietnam, let's see the dead soldiers and civilians.

Yeah, I think it would get more people upset, even if it caused more people to vote.

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- **News Clip #2**

1. What do you think about what you just watched?

(They all laugh and snicker when Edward slams Cheney on unemployment and jobs lost).

(They all laugh again at the very end).

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Tax cuts didn't help me much, and I have seven kids, I would rather that money be used to strengthen community.

When Cheney talked about education, and then Edwards reminds him about jobs, I laughed, because I agreed with him.

Yeah, he avoided the question.

If the jobs are not leaving, then why is it all the products are coming from Asia?

WHO DO YOU AGREE WITH?

I like the two Johns.

I didn't see last night, but I was impressed with Edwards.

Yeah, he stayed on task, he was all over him.

Yeah, "you data is old," lets just focus on the last year.

Yeah, people have new jobs? Making five dollars an hour.

WHAT ABOUT ALL THE POSITIVES CHENEY SAID?

Medicare reform still sucks, prescriptions still going up.

Yeah, the benefits don't help with higher costs.

Yeah, my father has to take 12 pills a day, how can he afford it.

Yeah, my mom get 996 dollars, but her pills cost 1,700. Should she just live off of here pills?

Bush and Cheney are lying.

2. What do you think of Bush/Kerry after seeing this?
3. Which candidate do you agree with more when it comes to [issue of clip]?

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V. Ad Testing (25 minutes)

Now we are going to watch a number of the television ads that are being shown on TV right now. We're going to watch the whole reel of them at one time, then I'll have you answer a few questions about what you saw and what stood out.

- Bush – Global Test
- Kerry – Lost, Desperate
- Progress for America – Finish It
- Swift Boat Veterans for Truth-Friends
- DNC IE – Big Hike
- Kerry – Stand Health care
- Bush – Peace & Security
- Kerry-Defend America
- Swift Boat Veterans for Truth - POW Wives
- Kerry – I Believe
- Bush - Windsurfing
- Kerry – Middle Class Plan
- ?? – War on Terror Agenda
- DNC IE – No One
- Bush – Practical vs. Big Government
- Bush - Searching
- Kerry – Ingenuity
- Kerry – Stem Cell Research

[Written Exercise – Handout #5]

Before we discuss these ads, please answer the following three questions for me:

1. What stood out to you in the ads you just saw?

I'm sick of those ads.

Bush, hardly ever showed him speaking.

Kerry gave more plans.

Lot of negativity.

More Kerry bashing, Bush didn't tell us what was important, just focused on terrorism and war. It was very negative, we need to address domestic and foreign issues.

Flip-flopping when wind-sailing, that stood out.

But they took it out of context.

Dcorps, Milwaukee, WI, Female, Non-College, Oct.6, 2004

Maybe he had a stand, then learned more, and then changed his mind. People need to be open-minded and have the guts to change their minds if they're wrong.

Yeah, they just used little snippets.

Yeah, some of those clips go back 20 to 25 years. Look out our own lives, would we be consistent.

Yeah, how many did drugs when we were young, and now we think it's stupid,

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT VIETNAM WAR ADS?

He was actually in the war, my husband was in the war, it does effect you, was Bush there?

Horrible things happen and war, and I'm sure we did horrible things?

Yeah, my brother didn't want to have kids after he was there.

Yeah, my husband works with the VA, and some of the guys say "Yeah, we killed women and children."

Yeah a relative has agent orange and it got passed to his kids, he's on a lot of medication. What were we fighting for again?

SOMEBODY SAID KERRY HAD MORE OF A PLAN?

I'm not sure, but at least he's saying we need to address these issues.

He talks about creating jobs and not depending on foreign oil.

Yeah, you can't convince Bush he's wrong.

Yeah, I don't get much from the Ads, but I like Kerry in debates.

George doesn't say anything, tell us what the hell you're going to do?

Yeah, it didn't speak at all, he doesn't look at the camera? He "just approves this message."

WHAT ELSE STOOD OUT?

John Kerry wants a strong middle class.

Yeah, he seems more sincere. I don't want to be anti-Bush, but who knows.

WHAT SHOULD BUSH BE TALKING ABOUT?

Talk about other issues besides the war-schools, healthcare, kids.

And actually get a plan, explain you policy.

Yeah, I only hear ideas from Kerry, what the plan is.

Yeah, jobs, healthcare, and education, but what needs to be the top priorities, you have to pay for clothes and medicines for your kids.

WHAT ABOUT KERRY?

The same thing, more detail, you want more jobs, but how?

Yeah, he says he'll eliminate overseas tax, that's a big deal.

2. What did they say about George W. Bush?
3. What did they say about John Kerry?
 - **[GO AROUND ROOM, DISCUSS EXTENSIVELY]**
 - **Probe:** Vietnam, other attacks on Kerry – do they still have traction?
 - Earlier, many of you said you wanted to know more about Kerry and his plan for the country. Did these ads tell you anything about Kerry and his plan? What did they tell you? What's missing?
4. Over the final month of this campaign, what issues do you want to hear George Bush address? What questions do you still have about Bush?
5. And how about Kerry? What issues do you want to hear Kerry address? What questions do you still have about Kerry?

VI. Election Day Exercise (15 minutes)

Now I want you to use your imagination for a minute. I want you to imagine that today is November 2nd, Election Day, and you're at your polling place about to cast your vote, and you're planning to vote for John Kerry.

1. You go into the voting booth, and you hesitate. What's holding you back from casting your vote for Kerry?

Lack of trust.

It's a 50-50 toss up.

Yeah, is he going to follow through, he slammed our allies, will they support us now.

Yeah, but we're creatures of habit, we need a change, the idiot and charge hasn't done anything.

I'm afraid he'll do something shocking, open us up to more terrorism, we could get hit again.

2. Then you decide to do it, and you vote for Kerry. What finally made your decision for you?

Someone new.

Change.

Bush has been pushing over the edge for three years.

IS THAT IT?

No better jobs, healthcare, education, help for elderly, we want change and reform, that's what we're hoping and praying for.

Yeah, all I hear from Bush is just terrorism.

Yeah, it's not just change, but change for the better, if Bush was doing his job, then we wouldn't be discussing this.

Yeah, everything I hear about Bush besides terrorism, I think he's insane. I think he needs to walk around a middleclass neighborhood and see reality.

Dcorps, Milwaukee, WI, Female, Non-College, Oct.6, 2004

3. Now go back to the beginning, you're at your polling place about to cast your vote, and you're planning to vote for Bush. But again, you hesitate. What's holding you back?

Can't even look at your straightforward, if he can't look you in the eye, that's a bad sign.

I don't think he's been honest, he just does what he wants without getting advise.

Just riding daddy's coat-tails.

I'm pro-life, and Kerry is pro-choice, and I hear he wants minor's to get abortion without parental consent, that's a big issue, and I don't agree with it. But I know Bush is an elitist, and he only sees those around him.

4. Then you decide to do it, and you vote for Bush. What finally made you vote for Bush?

My husband has a gun at my back.

Experience.

Know where he stands, know what to expect.

But that's not always good.

Could we do worse than him?

Do I really have to vote for him? (laughter) Honestly, there is no reason I can think of, wait, if he admitted there was no WMD and brought our boys home.

But I like that he at least inquired into whether or not there was WMD, then they came back and slapped him.

Why can't we question him about WMD? Why didn't you know this? Do you regret it?

VII. Debate Question (5 minutes)**[Written Exercise – Handout #6]**

There will be two more debates between Bush and Gore, including the final one in St. Louis, where the candidates will take questions from the audience. I'd like you to imagine that you have been picked as an audience member who will get to ask a question. Please write down the one or two questions that you would most like to ask the two candidates.