

**Focus Group Guidelines**  
**August 2, 2006**  
**Danbury, CT**  
**CT- 05**

**I. Introduction** (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions
  
- Chris: Married, 3 kids. I work for IBM in computers. When I'm not with my kids I like to ski.
- Scott: 2 kids, works for beverage manufacturing company
- John. Married, 2 kids.
- Bob. Single
- John: Single, self employed, entertainment agency
- Kevin: 2 kids, works for candy company-
- Warren: Self employed as soccer coach. 2 young kids.
- Allen: married, no kids, engineer for local company
- John: Teacher. 2 kids, married.

**II. Direction of the Country** (20 minutes)

1. Thinking generally about the country, are things moving in the right direction or wrong direction? [**VERY EXTENSIVE – PROBE AND LISTEN**]
  - Wrong.
  - I say wrong
  - Seems wrong in the short term. In the long term they go back and forth.
  - I think the wrong way too.
  - I have to say the right way.
    - What things are going right?
    - Look at the war in Iraq. Did we have a right to go there? Yes. Was it right? I don't think so. Global warming? Many countries say we should do something about it, we say no. The economy is a toss up.
    - I don't have a lot of solid information in politics. But Washington is like a huge self serving machine that is going to keep on making decisions for all that money and power. And yeah...Democracy.
    - They are going to do what they want to regardless of what people say. It didn't matter, almost as if we didn't have a say. Did we elect you? Yeah, but I don't want to hear about you any more.
    - We reached a point where we don't know how to get out of Iraq. So I say wrong.

- I just thing that with everything that is going on. Do you have to interfere? If you are the lone superpower, do you have to? I would pause and think about how much we need to interfere in the Middle East. Maybe we are doing too much over there.
  - I don't necessary think the wrong direction. There is a lot going on right now. Certainly there are mistakes that have been made, but in generally the country is going down the right path. I'm better off now that I was in 2004 or before. Personally, I'm better off now than I was 4 years ago.
  - What we are doing in the war on terror, I think things are unfolding as they should. There has not been fair coverage of what we are doing in Iraq. We are trying to infest the region with the democracy virus. The Middle East is a failed civilization, and the way they lead with this is by blaming a civilization that succeeded. We need to succeed. I fully approve the way that we are going about this.
  - Short term, ultimately Iraq wasn't much of a major threat. I think Bush disrupted the region. We thought he was going to go one way, but he just disrupted the region.
  - You are forgetting that Cheney likes oil.
  - They thought it was going to be easier. Maybe the long term is important in terms of planting the seeds of democracy. But I worry about the short term. Does this administration know what they are doing? If not, they are playing with fire. There are a lot of unanswered questions. I don't feel confident about it. Seems almost a puzzled situation and I don't know what is going go be next.
  - I think right direction. Yeah, the cost of gas is high,...
  - We are the guys that stick for the little guy around the world. The news focus on the negative in stead of the positive. I have a brother in Afghanistan. They believe in what they are doing and somebody has the unfortunate job.
- What things are going in the wrong direction?
  - **Probe national direction vs. local direction**
2. How about the economy? What's going on with the economy here in Connecticut?
- Considering everything, and that oil and gas prices are up, the economy is doing amazingly well. It's hard to say it's... I mean...the administration came out a lot better of what they predicted. What was it? Was it the deficit?
  - I'm doing well.
  - Now we are changing from a manufacturing country to a service country. For me, being a manufacturer, it's a little scary. We are shipping to China, India...
  - I think the economy is doing well. The interest rates are going up, people are loosing their houses because of arm mortgages. We can't keep on peaking because then you crash. We are getting to a slow down point where people are more aware of what they have.
  - I think we are living comfortably, there is not a lot to complain about. But with all the spending...it's unbelievable what we put on the country's credit. We all say we are doing well, but I think the deficit is a problem if we don't think about it.

- If you think about where the market was 3 years ago. I think we gained in terms of market value. I think the market is a good judge of how the country is going as a whole.
  - **[PROBE]** Rising prices (especially gas), employment, any inflation fears
  - How did things get to this point?
  - What direction do you think the economy will go from here – will it continue to get worse, will it start to get better, or will it continue at the current level?
  
- 3. Let's talk specifically about the war in Iraq...
  - I think it was wrong to go there from day 1. But now we are there and need to finish the job. We can't just pull out. I don't know how long it's going to take, but we need to stay there. It is going to cost a lot of money. I think that money would have been better spent on us, the UN could have intervened.
  - I'm not a good fan of the war. We invited the Chinese to work in manufacturing jobs here, and they stole the technology and combined it with cheaper labor. We dug our own grave.
    - **[PROBE]** What are your feelings about our continued involvement over there?
      - **[EXPLORE]** Loss of American lives, cost, no plan or exit strategy, weaker at home
  
- 4. How about the growing violence in the Middle East?
  - They are on a civil war right now. It just looks so completely screwed up. It's an unwinnable thing that is either going to end badly or last for ever.
  - If you go back in history. There are 3 main factions in the same religious holy land. And basically not everyone can have that piece of property. It's going to have to be shared in order to work out.
  - I'm impressed! We are getting involved everywhere. I think that, ok, we'll watch. You guys do what you have to do. I don't think we should step in.
  - When they took our hostages for many days we didn't go there and bomb. So it makes me wonder. How right is Israel to do that?
    - What are the implications of this for the U.S. and the broader war on terror?
  
- 5. **[OLDER VOTERS AND SENIORS]** How about the new prescription drug program through Medicare? What are your impressions of that?

**III. Associations** (15 minutes)

1. Bill Clinton

- Disgrace
- Monica
- Wasted last 4 years
- Neutral
- Controversy
- Good ideas but couldn't get things done

2. Joe Lieberman

- he stands for something, not like Dodd
- Shroud
- I was watching the debate and I don't know. Neither one gives me a warm fuzzy feeling
- Unsure
- I don't agree with what he stands for, but he stands for something

3. Ned Lamont

- Phony
- Don't know enough, just the commercials
- I don't know enough

4. Nancy Johnson [**Extensive**]

- Seems to get things done
- She's never had any issues
- Comfort, you hear her name and you think everything will be good
- Solid, negative is not there. She does enough, does her job without getting involved in the mess. Low key
- Neutral
- She's got a nice presence.
- She's got a low profile. You don't hear anything bad about it, but she gets things done
- She's conservative. trustworthy conservative, my parents vote that way

5. Chris Murphy

- [BLANK]
- I get the feeling of young, without knowing much.
- I get the feeling of Irish
- Don't know him that well
- Business, I think I heard something in the paper.

6. Congress

- Good in principle
- Conflict
- Them and us. there is that side and this side
- Whose side are they at? Which side the scale has to go?

- In the past few years it got worse. They are not getting as much done.
  - Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual?

**[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]**

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

- What good things come to mind when you think of Bush? **[Discuss]**
- He's not going to back down on the war against terror that is my number one fear right now
- Principled
- I always get the impression he is very family oriented. He pulls a hard line stance.
- The way he addresses the public in his speeches lets you understand what he is saying
- His communication is very simple
- Those who know him say he is a good listener and has the capacity to sum up people. A lot of people under estimate him
  
- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? **[Extensive]**
- He doesn't focus on all the areas he needs to. Immigration is a problem but there are other problems such as education that he should focus on
- He is loyal to a fault. Rumsfeld is largely inept, but he is so loyal to those in his administration that he won't replace anyone
- The reliability. He is saying things in the right way. But is it true or not true? The weapons in Iraq weren't there
- He is bringing us more into the microscope. terrorist who have a problem with him now have a problem with us
- I agree, he speaks well in a language we can understand. In some cases he didn't use the right words, especially in diplomacy. He should use his words more carefully. Words do matter and we don't need more countries to hate us. He surrounds himself with intelligent people, but he won't go down in history as a great president. which is unfortunate because he is intelligent
- His environmental policies are bad. He is more for big business and oil companies than he is for the people.

**IV. Election 2006** (20 minutes)

In a little more than three months, we will have elections for Congress, so let's talk about the upcoming elections now.

1. Are you more or less motivated to vote for Congress this year than in previous years? Why?

- More, we are at war. The outcome of this war is going to have a tremendous effect on western civilization. there are high stakes
- More, I don't think the people in power now are taking the country in the right direction. but there are not many people getting into politics to get this changed
- I would do more research before I'm ready to vote. I voted since I was 18 and I'm going to keep on doing it

■ **Probe on whether voting can help affect change**

2. For you personally, what is this upcoming election about? What is the most important factor that will determine how you vote for Congress?

- Could be a change. I have a brother in Afghanistan and he'll be there until next April. I don't know if change is good.
- I always felt very motivated to vote. The machine is so big, that people making decisions is all behind doors. No matter who you vote for, it's too big of a machine to really affect what happens. I don't know that anything can change because it is going to keep on going the same way. Washington decides. I feel powerless in this election.
- I think it's not good to have only one party in the government. The Republicans have the presidency, the house and the senate. It's too much power and should be mixed up.
- It would be good to have education, social agenda for the needy, infrastructure, etc. but we are so focused on the problems that are already down the road. We have to stay, we have to finish. But that is taking up so much of the conversation that where are the other issues. They only come up on elections.
- The things that really affect me here at home in the meantime is what I really worry about.

■ **Probe on personal traits, but push through to issues as well**

3. So what are you hearing so far in this election? Have you heard anything from the candidates here in Connecticut, the candidates that you will be choosing from?

- Attacks. They are really focusing on sound bites that they can put on the voters minds to knock down their opponent.
- Not much
- Just Lieberman-Lamont
- Lamont is coming through a lot and I keep on hear about volunteers. He is using the inner city background to get to people.

- **Allow Lieberman/Lamont discussion, but move discussion from Senate to House**
4. What are the Republicans talking about? Why do they say you should vote for a Republican for Congress?
- They find topics to mobilize their base. Flag burning, gay marriage, etc. they use whatever inflames the mid west. That's what they are talking about
  - If the country is off balance and at stake, it is better for Republicans. As we come closer to the election we are going to hear more terrorist alerts
    - Is this a compelling reason to vote Republican? Is it believable?
    - As you know, the Republicans now have control of the White House, as well as both the House and the Senate. If Republicans maintain control of Congress, will anything change in Washington?
5. What are the Democrats talking about? Why do they say you should vote for a Democrat for Congress?
- I vote for the person and it doesn't matter what party they are.
  - I think parties should put on blinders and forget what they are running against. And just say the issued they are standing for. The personal stuff gets in the way. It speaks about the character of the candidate, but ultimately it is about the issues.
    - Is this a compelling reason to vote Democratic? Is it believable?
    - If Democrats take back control of the House and/or the Senate, how will things be different in this country? What, if anything, will change in Washington?
      - **Probe if there's any sense of sending Bush a message**
    - What are the consequences if Republicans remain in power?
      - **Probe on Iraq, Social Security, gas prices, health care, any other concerns that have been raised**
  - We are going to win the war, but at what cost? Because the deficit is going to keep on growing and growing and growing. Again, that is only because of the war situation.
  - The war in terror could affect our election. If Republicans are going to keep on fighting.
  - It's going to be harder if the war continues.

▪ **Ad Testing** (35 minutes)

**[Written Exercise – Handouts #3-#8]**

As many of you have probably seen already, everyone’s favorite part of the campaign season – the television ads – have already begun here in Connecticut. I’d like to show you some of these ads, and for each one, I’d like you to do two things:

First, rate how this ad makes you feel about your choice in this election on this scale (explain scale, shown below).

<i>More</i>										<i>More</i>
<i>Likely</i>										<i>Likely</i>
<i>Murphy</i>					<i>No</i>					<i>Johnson</i>
					<i>Diff</i>					
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

Then below that, in just a few words or phrases, tell me **in your own words** what this ad says to you – that is, if you were watching television at home and saw this ad, what would you take away from it?

**Johnson Tax Attack**

<b>Johnson Tax Attack</b>		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	0
Murphy	2	0
Murphy	1	0
	0	1
Johnson	1	3
Johnson	2	2
Johnson	3	2
Johnson	4	0
Johnson	5	1

- She definitely cut taxes.
- Very factual.
- The message overall was that Murphy equals high taxes. I mean, income, every tax
- I want to know what she did. Why did she focus on him? I’m sure she has some negatives too.
- All attacks are aggravating. How you can spin taxes? But I assume that there is a whole lot of things that go into a bill. So he might have voted to raise taxes to give people

wheelchairs. The strong attack makes me less likely to believe it. Where did the money of the taxes go to. Maybe for education?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Murphy Tax Response – cut taxes**

<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Murphy Tax Response – cut taxes</b>		
Murphy	5	2
Murphy	4	
Murphy	3	1
Murphy	2	1
Murphy	1	2
	0	2
Johnson	1	1
Johnson	2	
Johnson	3	
Johnson	4	
Johnson	5	

- He is probably spinning things his way, but he talks about what he does and his stance on issues rather than quoting a lot of things. I thought it was a better message
- He spoke out for himself. But ohnson didn't speak.
- It was a great come back from the Nancy Johnson attack. Apparently not everything she said was true
- I don't think he gave as much facts as her.
- He called her a liar
- She lost touch
- Saying that she has been there for so long in Washington is attacking her
- Would be good to get an independent speaker

**MoveOn Red Handed Attack**

<b>MoveOn Red Handed attack</b>		
Murphy	5	1
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	2
Murphy	2	1
Murphy	1	2
	0	2
Johnson	1	
Johnson	2	

Johnson	3	1
Johnson	4	
Johnson	5	

- Portraying Nancy Johnson as a political insider, I believe that. We don't know who Murphy is, but he is saying don't vote for Nancy Johnson, vote for...I don't like the Washington insider thing
- It didn't seem very trustworthy
- It's such a cliché with the red hand. Too cheesy, over the top.

**Chamber add**

Chamber ad		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	0
Murphy	2	0
Murphy	1	0
	0	1
Johnson	1	0
Johnson	2	4
Johnson	3	3
Johnson	4	1
Johnson	5	0

- I think it's positive about healthcare. I pay a lot for healthcare, almost as a mortgage. So it's something we would benefit from
- Healthcare is an issue for me. I would consider giving it a higher rate if I knew more about it.
- Anybody heard about the Medicare part D law?
- Overly complex.
- Terrible for seniors to figure it out.
- Have you heard anything about Nancy Johnson's role with this law? No.

**DCCC Stay The Course**

DCCC Stay The Course		
Murphy	5	
Murphy	4	1
Murphy	3	2
Murphy	2	1
Murphy	1	
	0	1
Johnson	1	
Johnson	2	1

Johnson	3	1
Johnson	4	
Johnson	5	2

- Because of the focus on Iraq, it resonates with me. Great beginning, but what are Democrats going to do? Is the message vote for us because we are not them?
- He got a different spin on the video. It's so scripted that the guy is a phony.
- It's shallow
- All you have to do is withdraw from Iraq and the Minimum wage is going to raise. (cynical)
- It sort of comes across that Bush is so involved with the war, and the administration is so geared toward getting that one thing right. It reminds me of the Clinton administration where they couldn't get anything right
- Well, your country is at war. I worked minimal wage jobs in my life and I said to myself, I've got to get out of this - and I did
- Realistically, they are all in bed together. so it really doesn't matter if it's Democrats or Republicans. They are all doing the same thing, so this doesn't make me sway either way
- They missed the mark getting one part of the message right. if we stay the course, this is what is happening domestically.

**Murphy Remote control Response**

<b>Murphy Remote control Response</b>		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	2
Murphy	3	2
Murphy	2	0
Murphy	1	1
	0	2
Johnson	1	1
Johnson	2	0
Johnson	3	0
Johnson	4	1
Johnson	5	0

- Looks like a fresh kid that is not part of the machine. It left you hanging there because there is more information coming. I'm looking forward for more information coming
- It's personal. He puts the attack in the back. That shows he is not afraid.
- At least he was speaking at his residency. I was expecting a dog to be there.
- Which of the two responses did you like best?
- I didn't like this one as much because he didn't say what he was going to do. Vote for me because I'm not Johnson? What are you going to do?

- I liked this one better because he is talking more as a human being. He is probably going to come out and defend what he needs to defend.
- If you didn't see the Johnson attack before, he is putting it right there in the background.
- He looks like a new kid, but I won't vote for him because I want someone with more tenure
- After seeing the back and forth? What do you take away?
- He might have a choice on running against Johnson, because he puts a doubt in your mind about her. Who did she make friends with over the years?
- Now I'm more likely to give Murphy a fair chance, but I was probably more pro Johnson before. The reason is that I can identify with him more.
- We've been given the opportunity to compare these ads. we didn't know who Murphy was, but now we have doubts about her corporate links
- She gave more specifics than him.
- I liked it, I want to vote for Murphy because he is young and change is good
- The incumbent doesn't come out. Murphy is making more of an attempt to get there and speak to people. It just bothers me when you have these incumbents that just sit there ...

**For all ads:**

- **Show of hands, then discuss each one**
- **Explore paired ads, which is more effective**

**VI. Election Debate (15 minutes)**

Now I'd like to talk in more detail about a couple of specific issues and the role they will play in your decision making in this election.

**TAX AND SPEND**

1. You remember the first ad we watched tonight, raising questions about Democratic candidate Chris Murphy on the issue of taxes. Let's watch it again, just as a reminder.

**[Written Exercise – Handout #9]**

2. You remember the first ad we watched tonight, raising questions about Democratic candidate Chris Murphy on the issue of taxes. We saw Chris Murphy's response to this ad, plus another response from Murphy. But now I'd like to look at what some other Democrats are saying about this. So flip to Handout #9 now. I'll read this message out loud, you follow along with me and then rate it, just as you did the ads we watched earlier.

*Democrats say, Americans are struggling to keep up with the skyrocketing costs of gas, health care, and education. President Bush and Nancy Johnson's economic policies have produced record deficits while giving away billions in tax cuts to their corporate backers and shifting the tax burden even further onto the middle class. We should repeal tax giveaways to companies that send jobs overseas and millionaires who don't need relief, and instead pass fiscally responsible middle class tax cuts: making college tuition tax deductible, tax credits for first-time homebuyers, and tax breaks for caregiving expenses on behalf of an aging parent.*

**■ Show of hands, then discuss**

Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	3
Murphy	3	2
Murphy	2	2
Murphy	1	0
	0	1
Johnson	1	0
Johnson	2	0
Johnson	3	3
Johnson	4	0
Johnson	5	0

- I count 5 facts that make sense to me.

- The tax credits for first time home buyers are important to me. The whole healthcare issue goes on. There are so many people in the country that don't have a healthcare plan. But I don't think we have a bad president
- A lot of these problems would go away if we didn't have a huge deficit. Granted, there is a lot of money that is going overseas for the war.
- I liked every single specific because it told me what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. But marrying Johnson to Bush will hurt the ad. I would leave Bush out
- It's crap. Repealing some of these...there are so many things that are inter connected. It's so complex that sending jobs overseas is never that simple. It's so much more complicated.
- They want to cut taxes and spend in healthcare and education. But where is the money going to come from? We are going to have even more deficits
- These guys are trying to do the best things for everyone.
- I think it's geared toward one specific age group. It's targeting my age group. Tax deductible for parents with young children right now that they are starting to think about college.

**SECURITY**

**[Written Exercise – Handout #10]**

3. Now I want to talk about one other issue and see what candidates from both parties have to say. Again, I'll read them out loud, you rate them, and then we'll discuss. Let's start with the Republican candidate.

*The Republican candidate says, we are making significant progress in Iraq. After holding three successful elections, there is now an Iraqi government with a new constitution, and a quarter of a million Iraqi troops are trained and equipped. But there is still more to do, and the United States can't afford to bail out on Iraq before we complete the mission. If we follow my opponent's advice to cut and run, al Qaeda will have a new terrorist haven in Iraq and the whole world will see that America doesn't have the stomach to fight the war on terror.*

**■ Show of hands, then discuss**

Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	0
Murphy	2	0
Murphy	1	0
	0	1
Johnson	1	2
Johnson	2	2

Johnson	3	0
Johnson	4	3
Johnson	5	1

- It mentions successes in Iraq that you don't normally hear.
- I agree with it because of the democracy, everything with AlQaeda.
- It all makes sense. There is some truth for the first part and it also mentions what they are planning to do in the next stages.
- I agree we can't pull out. But as soon as they say that if you don't vote for me the world will blow up doesn't appeal to me. They won't get my vote based on fear

**[Written exercise – Handout #11]**

4. Now, let's hear from a Democratic candidate.

*The Democratic candidate says, we need to chart a new course in Iraq. Our military has done its job in Iraq, and it is now time for Iraqis to take control of their own future. But my opponent and President Bush offer no plan to end the war and are sending even more troops to an urban war zone in Baghdad. With over 2,500 Americans dead and 3 billion dollars a week going to a war that has no end in sight, we need a change in policy. We won't withdraw precipitously or allow terrorist elements to seize control, but we must begin a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces before the end of 2006.*

**■ Show of hands, then discuss**

Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	1
Murphy	2	0
Murphy	1	0
	0	0
Johnson	1	1
Johnson	2	2
Johnson	3	4
Johnson	4	0
Johnson	5	1

- Why didn't you like it?
- Every time I hear about cut and run, I don't think we are doing the right thing, leaving everything just the way things are now...leaving and trying a new course is starting a new course over here
- Who is going to provide security in Iraq? People get killed, drop out, they are having trouble recruiting personnel for security

- If we set an arbitrary date, the terrorists are going to hang on until that day. they are never going to quit.

**VII. Final Ballot** (5 minutes)

**[Written exercise – Handout #12]**

1. Finally, I want you to choose, if the election were held today, which one you would vote for – based on everything we've discussed tonight. Circle which candidate you would choose, then briefly write why in the space below. **[Written only]**