

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

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

- Paula: married, one son. Works part time for PDF
- Barbara: 17 year old son and 15 year old daughter
- Pam: Divorced mother. Doesn't have much time either
- Chris: Married, 32 years old, 2 children. Works full time.
- Marianne: 50 years, divorced mother, financial manager
- Sean: 2 children aged 14 and 11. Just finished school to become a teacher
- Nina: married, 16 year old daughter.
- Barbara: Married, 2 kids in college.
- Kim: Married for 22 years. Recent widow with 2 children. Has been teaching since 1978 and loves animals.

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 direction, doesn't like our involvement in the war, there is not enough concern for the environment.
 - I agree, gas prices make you think how things are going.
 - I am very concerned about the educational piece, as well as healthcare for the elderly and the cost of prescription drugs. An issue that has recently been spoken too, particularly in Connecticut.
 - I think we are right on track, but we tend to think that things are better than they actually are. I am concerned about education, the elderly, prescriptions and things like that.
 - I have a question. If you are not OK with what is going on in terms of defense. When you travel abroad most people can't stand the US and Bush. But why is it that we are still so strong?
 - My issues are more environmental, especially for our kids and the future generations. I'm more concerned about global warming.
 - Our society, our lack of respect for people. Family units have changed, it's not the same. There have been many changes and not necessary for the good.
 - What kind of changes?
 - Values aren't as credible as they used to be.

- Major changes. When we were young we didn't have to be watched constantly. My children are 9 and 10 and I'm scared to let them go out there. Schools have metal detectors to let children come in. So you worry on that end and then also worry about about baby boomers. I think we have a lot of things to worry about. But if you compare to other countries, I'd rather be here than anywhere else. Would I rather be in Russia? No, I want to be in the US.
 - The cost of gas will never go the way it was before, it is only going to go higher. Are we going in the right direction? I don't know
 - Two things I have in mind. The first is that I wouldn't like to live anywhere else. This is the best place to be. With that said, all the issues that are brought today show our generation is short sighted. When we had the gas crisis in the 70s people went to buy Hondas and Toyotas, but now they are driving SUVs again. What is the reason? I blame it on the credit cards, because as long as it is in the credit cards, people don't feel it.
 - What things are going right?
 - The basic goodness in all people. We all want the same things for the future and our family.
 - The education system is a positive thing. They are teaching kids to be much more open and flexible, teaching them how bad drugs are and bringing experts in different topics that we never heard when we were younger. The education is going well, maybe pushing kids more than we should, but we need to keep up with the rest of the world.
 - Today I heard a candidate talking about a more socialized system in the state and I was very excited about that.
 - 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?
- The gas that has doubled in a year has affected everything. It's affecting everything I buy in the supermarket. I don't understand how people can keep up, especially those with lower income. How about people that have to commute to work? They have to change jobs
 - I realized that out parking lot has now more open spaces because people are traveling and commuting in groups
 - In our economy many have been affected by lay offs, I am a nurse and that hasn't affected me. Many are struggling to make ends meet on one income, people are forced to move elsewhere, everything is going up. Our electric and gas costs. Major increases in the past year. I can take another shift to make ends meet. But do I want to do it again? No
 - It is just not affordable for a young kid to start it out here.
 - There are many people that can't move out and make ends meet on their own.

- It my town, it took 3 rounds for a budget to pass and they kept on cutting education. I have a number of cousins that are self employed, they are creating an underground economy because the less you make, the less the government is going to take.
 - **[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 we went a little short sighted. And I'm not an expert. A friend of mine is married to a Lebanese American, and we discussed about the media. We are different, and we were short sighted about going into that part of the world without understanding why they hate us so much, as opposed to going there and generating even more hatred. Now I pay more attention because there is a personal connection.
 - I'm kind of indifferent, but I think something had to be done about terrorism after 9/11. But I'm not sure if we are doing the right thing...
 - I was thinking we were doing the right thing, but now I see the casualties. Living through Vietnam, it brings lots of emotions. How is this going to go away? I don't know.
 - What do you think we should do?
 - I kind of put Iraq in a back burner, giving all the other things going on.
 - I have personal ties to friends, children over there. I also have a family member and a couple of friends who died in NYC. They don't know how many casualties were involved. I remember that morning speaking to my husband, talking about the other plane out there. I am sad for them, and I think we have to be for our security here in the US. I have done a lot of traveling in the US. After we were attacked with our own equipment, we had to do something. Why did it last so long? I can't speak to that.
 - I always think it is interesting because when we first went in it seemed it was just...But not that we are already there, how do we gracefully leave?
 - But when they interview people over there, they have the mindset that they are doing the right thing and have to finish their job.
 - **[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?
 - LONG SILENCE
 - I'll be brave to say I don't know who started this. I think the world should rally and put a cap to the violence. I'll be for that because of the ramifications. It's not just one country. Where does it stop? And where do we realize that the only alternative is a united world.
 - I don't think we'll ever have unity. Who was the first one to drop the bomb? There are consequences to every action, positive and negative.
 - There are consequences, but is hard to understand how. Men and women in the military have the feeling that that is their job and they have to do it. They have a different mindset. Would I like that job? Absolutely not. It amazes me when I hear them say that, but it makes me proud. I'm not

sure I could say what they say: We are here to do our job and we'll stay as long as it takes. The war bothers me. I don't think it was bad for us to go there to protect our freedom and security.

- It bothers me that they didn't go after the ones who bombed the towers. But then again it may be all connected.
- But we went to Afghanistan first...Didn't we?
 - 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?

- I have a mom that just turned 80. Every time she gets a form, I get a phone call. Every time she gets a form that is supposed to be easy for seniors to fill in. It is very confusing. Why couldn't Medicare do it all? Why does there have to be a middle man?
- I think it is very confusing. Many people jumped to a plan that was the cheaper option, but at the end it is a lot more expensive. Seniors can't understand how to use an ATM machine, how are they going to understand these forms?
- My mom just got a bill for over \$300. Thank god she opened her mouth to the pharmacist and asked for a generic. I think the elderly, whatever they are told they do and don't typically question. Thank god my mom opened her mouth.
- Most pharmacists are filling with generic unless the dr. specifies otherwise.

III. Associations (15 minutes)

1. Bill Clinton

- LAUGHS
- Cheater, dishonest
- Lack of integrity
- Secretive
- Manipulative
- Liar
- Dishonest

2. Joe Lieberman

- Trying to move ahead
- Abandoned the state while focusing in his vice presidential nomination
- More for democrats, more for republicans. He has his own views, he says what he thinks.
- I don't like him, can't put a word.
- Generic

3. Ned Lamont

- Wealthy
- Familiar with his background
- Annoying cause he keeps calling my house
- Keep on hearing ads for him, but would like to hear more about him
- Wealth
- Sick and tired of ads with kids. Why do you put kids in the ads?
- I need unbiased information to make a decision. Don't know enough about him. I would prefer...I would just like to hear from another source about him.

4. Nancy Johnson [**Extensive**]

- My daughter did a commercial with her. She is great, she is lovely. I think she is good.
- I think she's done well for the area
- Integrity
- Stable
- Visible
- What has she done for the area?
- I get a good feeling from anyone talking about her office. She is there, she is visible.
- I did get a lot of phone calls bashing her.
- Who were they from?
- Pre recorded and annoying
- I think she is a visible person, but she focuses on the people. I heard her speak in many different places. She is a good speaker. When she speaks she looks at you. She is just a genuine person.

5. Chris Murphy

- I don't know anything about him.
- Me neither
- Young
- Not much

- Not much about him
- I heard somewhere that he was tired of negative ads from Johnson and wanted to stop them.

6. Congress

Old boys club.

- They have a little less clarity.
- They are supposed to be there for the people, but things somehow get overshadowed. Ineffectual.
- Favors, you scratch my back and I scratch yours. In congress often you have people who are very influential and they support you financially.
 - Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual?

I think it's kind of the way we expect it right now, so nobody says anything about it.

This is what happens.

[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 is trying to do something.
- I have a list: honest, Christian, integrity, good character
- He does the best for the country. He has a tough job, but he is a family man.
- I had somewhat the same things. He has zero tolerance for terrorism, so that was the only thing that was different from someone else. We look at the president as the person with the final power, but there are lots of things...
- He was committed to the military, he goes and visits the troops.
- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? **[Extensive]**
- Concerned about taxation, the economy, jobs, income, immigration.
- What do you mean about taxation?
- I guess what I mean by that is that everyone should be more knowledgeable, I feel I pay a lot of taxes and I shouldn't have to. Just going through what I have gone through, it's a slap in the face. I'm giving up all the stuff I so saved for.
- He is a little bit out of touch with the middle class. It's not him who makes the choices. This old boys thing is cute, but there is a connection to big business.
- I wonder if he practices what he preaches. His VP is well into corporations.
- He is too much for big business and oil. Although his stance on terrorism is good. Are we too long in this war? And does he have a plan of action that will allow us to bring troops over?
- He says there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but it seems that it is rolling into bigger and bigger problems.

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?
 - Same motivation. I've never missed a voting day. I will go regardless. I think it is my duty as citizen
 - I feel more motivated this year only because my son is turning 18 and we have discussed...
 - I've always voted and I'll continue to vote.
 - If I didn't vote, I will be less motivated because of the scheme of things.
 - **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?
 - I'm hoping that it focuses more on geographic things close to home. The congressional vote. You have to take hold of what's happening right around you. Connecticut needs some changes, Connecticut needs help.
 - See if Murphy who is opposing Johnson is a good alternative. Maybe getting somebody new could help get some of the changes going
 - This county is over taxed. My parents can't afford to live there because of the taxes.
 - Transportation, we have no options here.
 - And there are no options north to south.
 - But at the same time, there are more people commuting with each other. There are some resources, but people think they can't live without having the car all day. I took the bus from Danbury to xx. It was worth it, but did more people take it. No.
 - We are spoilt.
 - It just seems that there are too many people.
 - **Probe on personal traits, but push through to issues as well**
 - Is Iraq an issue in this election?
 - Yes, it is an issue, but my vote in this election is about local issues.
 - I agree.

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?
 - I'm hearing more negative talk about the opposite person rather than what they stand for.
 - It gives you a very negative taste in your mouth. Even if the candidate is not supporting that, it makes you wonder about their ethics on other issues.
 - I know Chris is talking about drugs and costs. And I know Johnson focuses more on family. I don't know what other issues Chris is doing. I think we need to ignore the ads, you need to go online or do some reading on your own.

- They should just stick to what they stand for and then let people decide.
 - **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 want to maintain the status quo because of where things are right now. But nobody is saying much about gas prices, healthcare. There is noise, but nobody is saying much. I think I was brainwashed by my dad who was a democrats. He used to see Republicans as wealthy big shots that don't care for the little people.
 - You have to read, sort all that out, all the sub groups they are going to target, and then make up your mind
- 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?
- They are using everything they can. The economy being wrong. Absolutely everything we talked about democrats can use because things aren't going great in Connecticut. Education.
 - Jobs, put CT back in the map.
 - 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?
 - There is always that flip flop and we get the residual wave of that. They will limit involvement in Iraq. In stead of fighting, we will have police. Education is always a topic. Are we doing enough? A friend who is a teacher says NCLB is the worse possible policy for kids.
 - Democrats are notorious for being more socially pro active. I think we have immigration as a hot issue. And we will start to see more action. The president is trying to see the amnesty thing, but there is not much happening. If the democrats get more active, things might start happening
 - **Probe if there's any sense of sending Bush a message**
 - What are the consequences if Republicans remain in power?
 - Not much change. Quickly I think things will be prolonged.
 - In an election you elect someone else if you aren't happy with what they are doing. If you keep on electing the same people they are going to think you are happy with what they are doing.

- **Probe on Iraq, Social Security, gas prices, health care, any other concerns that have been raised**

V. 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>					
5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5

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

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

- Did he really do all those things? I don’t want him in there, I want Johnson in there.
- Taxes, taxes that is his answer to it all.
- I had the concern about taxes, but also thought Murphy was about reducing taxes. I was concerned about integrity of ads in terms of taxation. I think there is something about that, and it is not being clearly opinionated.

Murphy Remote control Response

Murphy remote control Response		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	2
Murphy	3	1
Murphy	2	2
Murphy	1	0
	0	2
Johnson	1	0
Johnson	2	0
Johnson	3	1
Johnson	4	1
Johnson	5	0

- She's been in congress for too long, and it is time for change.
- Has she really accomplished anything?
- He wasn't nasty about it. Give me a chance to tell you what he wants.
- He spent time saying that the ad was misleading, but didn't explain what was wrong. You are bombarded, and just forget what he said initially.
- Which one convinces you more in the issue of taxes?
- I still want to know more about it.
- I don't know what to expect. He didn't say much about him. There was no communication on what he stands for.
- He didn't say anything about taxes or about him at all. He just said stay tuned.
- Why were they misleading?
- He just said she's been there too long. That's all.

MoveOn Red Handed Attack

MoveOn Red Handed attack		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	2
Murphy	2	2
Murphy	1	0
	0	3
Johnson	1	0
Johnson	2	1
Johnson	3	1
Johnson	4	0

Johnson	5	0
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- I know something about moveon.org, and I find a third party commenting more credible than either party commenting about each other. They are trying to uncover things in stead of favoring whoever is giving the pay checks
- My thought was, oh my god, another corrupt politician in CT
- I'd like to be more attentive to the issues they are talking about and investigate
- Isn't moveon a Soros organization and has an agenda too? It's kind of like a layered agenda.

Johnson Response to MoveOn

Johnson Response to MoveOn		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	0
Murphy	3	0
Murphy	2	0
Murphy	1	1
	0	3
Johnson	1	0
Johnson	2	2
Johnson	3	2
Johnson	4	1
Johnson	5	0

- It said to me that all Democrats and Republicans focused on Nancy taking money from a particularly person. I don't think she is bad, it's just that she's been in the position for a long time.
- I was totally turned off by the thing of it. It was all over the place, slow and fast music. It threw me off.
- If you hadn't seen the previous ad, how would you know who is on who's side?

DCCC Stay The Course

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

Johnson	3	1
Johnson	4	0
Johnson	5	0

- It was very effective. The same phrase, the same statement, and the we look at that result. It was very convincing.
- It pinpointed all my concerns and all the things I would like to see changed.
- That ad would convince an 18 year old that may be thinking 'I could be drafted'. I thought it might sway for a particular candidate. If I was apolitical, it would affect me
- Stay the course didn't do much for me personally because it is out of context and I'm sure there was more into every single topic.
- He just said stay the course, just that one phrase. I just got tired.
- Wasn't very promising. We are going to stay the same, nothing is going to change.
- I normally lean republican, and this will make me change the way I vote. Because I don't like the way things are going.

Johnson Tax Attack (again)

2nd Murphy Tax Response – cut taxes

2nd Murphy Tax Response – cut taxes		
Murphy	5	0
Murphy	4	1
Murphy	3	4
Murphy	2	2
Murphy	1	0
	0	2
Johnson	1	0
Johnson	2	0
Johnson	3	0
Johnson	4	0
Johnson	5	0

- Taxes and sounded compassionate
- Sounded sincere. And if we want changes, maybe we need to change the person who brings changes
- I'm not sure who I believe at this point, because Nancy must have gotten those facts from somewhere.
- We need change.
- Did he defend his record on this?

- He said he voted to cut taxes, but she said he increased them. I believe they are probably both correct, he probably voted both ways.
- He is a sincere and honest man. He would grab a female vote. Not to generalize, but it is the kind of thing we want to hear.
- Youthful good-looking, front porch with flowers, women tend to be very visual this way.
- You still have to wonder who is right. You will always have that doubt. One year he voted for taxes and another year against.
- Negativity will put a shadow.
- It's a wash.
- It leaves me wanting to investigate further. The ad that you see closer to the election is how they are going to see you .

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

What did you like?

- I relate to everything there. We have aging parents, we are middle class, we have kids in college

- I'd like to see a couple of words changed, from we should to we will
- The first sentence is pretty powerful. Those are the things that mean something to me. It's a strong statement.
- I believe there is not equal proportion on how people are taxed.
- It's not just their fault. There are other people making these decisions in politics.
- I like the last part of the paragraph, college tuition tax deductible...these are the people that need the breaks the most and that is where we should be focused on.

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

- Some of the things are valid. The cut and run implies defeat and that is not what this country is for. Al Qaeda will have a terrorist haven, and I agree with that. The towers will never leave my mind.
- I feel the same way. I'm a visual kind of person. We never want to back down.
- If someone proposes withdrawal, do you see this as cut and run?
- If someone says we should leave Iraq, do you think this is cut and run?
- Yes, I don't like the choice of words. You are leaving.
- I don't know how much more there is to do. I feel it is manipulated.
- Don't like the last line. I want to believe we are doing the right thing.

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

- I don't feel this particular vote is going to affect as much nationally as locally. I am not thinking of it at a national level. I think it is more of a local thing for me.
- If we were voting for the president it would be a little different.
- I gave it a 0, but if I were looking from the local level it would be different.

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]**