

Focus Group Guidelines
October 30, 2006
Des Moines, IA
IA-3

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

Jim – 15 month old baby. From Chicago.

Alice – Married, banker.

Bernice – Divorced, work at workforce development.

Corrine – Married, 3 kids.

Dinah – Divorced, school.

Elyse – Two kids, bank.

Fay – Married.

Gwen – 6 kids. 1 grandson.

Holly – Married, 2 kids, stay at home mom.

Ivy – Single

Jane – Retired, bizstarts.

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**]
 - What things are going right?
 - What things are going in the wrong direction?
 - **Probe national direction vs. local direction**

Wrong.

I just think all the controversy you hear about bush, tapping phones, it's a lot of the stuff he's doing trying to change things that have been — changing a lot of things that are against people's rights.

It's like they're chiseling away our rights, in the name of patriotism.

We don't live in a communist country, but the rights we did have, it's not there. . .

I fee l our troops shouldn't be over there in the middle east fighting, and bush is keeping the wrong thing going for his benefit.

He's out of touch with the real world. Not aware of what's going on in the real world, pay check to pay check.

When Clinton was in office, it was a surplus.

He gave everybody those tax cuts — it's like they need to go to checkwriting school.

There's something wrong with our elderly not getting the drugs they need, but supporting the illegal immigrants.

Spanish. . .

My grandmother came to this country, she learned English.

We're a minority in our own Country.

I do know that a lot of them say that they were either coerced here or enticed here — then we don't treat them right after we get them here. Nowadays illegal immigrants can become legal. . .

We work so they can have nice cars, put tons of food on their table. . .

I was downsized, don't get benefits. . .

2. How about the economy? What's going on with the economy here in Iowa?

- **[PROBE]** Rising prices (especially gas and health care), 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?
- **[if not mentioned]** What about immigration?

We're paying for bush's oil.

I think when greenspan was in, he kept a good job preventing us from the peaks and valleys, and now the gentleman that's in is doing a good job — considering.

Based on what could have been, we're in good shape.

I think it's a travesty that we don't export more than we do. We don't export enough.

Healthcare?

When you have none, it's important.

People have to drop to the poverty level to get any help at all, that's ridiculous.

It's true. I'm there right now.

You have to stop trying and stop working. . .

But they do encourage that. They don't — If they get a job, they take away their benefits and they can't afford to get health insurance.

3. Let's talk specifically about the war in Iraq...

- **[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; war on terrorism

4. **[OLDER VOTERS AND SENIORS]** How about the new prescription drug program through Medicare? What are your impressions of that?

Going right?

Gas prices dropped.

Housing market's dropped.

Education is down, economy is down. . .

We still live in the best country in the world.

I had a spouse who served in Afghanistan. . . there's a fine line between supporting the troops and supporting bush. It's hard not to do both.

I feel I support our troops, I don't want them to die.

Be far we have more opportunities, we live better.

I just — I know a lot of other countries don't have the ability, even though we complain, they don't even have the doctors, let alone be able to pay for it.

Even the infrastructure. . . That type of thing.

III. Associations (20 minutes)

1. Jim Nussle

Living on his Washington laurels.
Sly.
Cutting education.
Doesn't seem to believe in small business.
Give money to put negative ads on.

2. Chet Culver

Who?
Pro-abortion, doesn't sit right with me.
He's — there's something about him. I don't trust him.
Gives me the heebie jeebies.
I don't trust any of them.
I was around when his dad was, I know he's a good iowa boy. A teacher.
Little green behind the ears.
But that's okay.
He's a family man.
I see him on, TV more of a —

3. Leonard Boswell [**Extensive**]

He the bald guy?
Lost a lot of weight.
Republicans show his fat pictures.
Done a lot of good things for us so far.
Been in along time. But my vote will go to him.
HE's for veterans, tends to stick up for them.
I can't think of a time when I didn't hear his name. Haven't really given him a lot of thought.
Fav unfav?
Like Harkin or Grassley, he's been there forever. People are just comfortable with them.
I don't know enough about him.

4. Jeff Lamberti [**Extensive**]

Get a little junk in the mail from him.
That gets pitched.
Why?
When you sit there and read, everthing they all send you. . . How much can they actually do? It's crap. It's how much money you have, it's how it gets done in politics.
I'm of the opinion it'd be difficult to represent those of the middle ground, because he's extremely wealthy.
He speaks very well. . . it's planned, polished. Uses good English. That makes me a little uneasy.
It's like he's trying to pull something over on me.
Like he sat down with a dictionary.
I have to defend him a little bit.
He keeps getting called the wrong name and doesn't do anything. . .

5. Congress

Waste of money.

Crooks.

Hope somebody would get there for me.

I think of all these little people sitting around a table, trying to figure out the best alternative. . .

Difference of opinion and priorities not the same as everybody else's. You hear a lot about tax cuts for wealthy, and pay raises for congress, not much trickling down.

What's trickling down ain't water.

Voting for their own pay raises? Who wouldn't.

They shouldn't have the right to vote for their own pay raise, but as long as they do, human nature says they'll give themselves a raise.

- Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual?

Mark Foley?

Catheter.

Pervert.

I think he's really lame using "I was molested" Own up to what you did.

How they've handled it?

I don't like they say the page system should be cut out. I was a page. That's not a solution. It's the perverts who have the problem. . . You have one, why take it out on what our future should be.

Aren't they supposed to be adults?

They allowed Clinton to get by with it. . .

She wasn't underage. . .

She was more predator than prey.

He knew what he was doing.

Yeah, but he made a mistake. . . I'm not married to him.

[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]

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

- What good things come to mind when you think of Bush? **[Discuss]**

He has the ability to make a decision.

Doesn't have that much longer in office.

I feel like he used to support the troops and their families. In the beginning.

Why change?

We've been over there too long. Making decisions for our husbands and wives and kids, making bad choices for them over there.

A certain charisma about him that makes — When I hear him speak, I do listen.

It's because he seems very human.

Seems to have a sense of humor.

Not listening to a politician.

He's openly admitted he's a Christian man and will stand up for christian values. Wavered on that a little. With the prayers in schools.

- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? [**Extensive**]

Just about everything.

I know his father will go in to the Capitol. . . making decisions for him. We went back to finish it.

I don't believe he's the common interest of American. Too tied to oil companies and big business.

He's always had a lot of oil money. Doesn't even comprehend what the little guy's going through.

I voted for him because at the time changing presidents in the middle of the war didn't seem a good thing to do. . . can't go back, but. . .

No clue what America needs anymore.

I don't like he won't admit when he's made a mistake.

Has power, but also has a lot of people controlling him.

Don't know who I distrust more, him or Cheney.

I don't think he has a clue monetarily about what he's putting us into with the deficit.

I don't think he makes his own decisions.

I don't get how he can be a history major.

IV. Election 2006 (10 minutes)

In less than two months, we will have elections for Congress, so let's talk about the upcoming elections now.

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

Change.

Change.

There has to be a lot of changes with the war, with health care. . . Every category. . .

They need to reevaluate this war. Get us off this tar baby. We're in there now, and have to stay until it's finished or until we find an exit. But we need to find that exit.

I think change is one thing. We need to do something with the illegal immigrants. Not tha that's my biggest. . . the deficit is a huge part too. The country needs to move forward somehow, from what it's been going through for the last 6 years.

Definitely change toward healthcare and helping the most needy of people. Lower class and even lower middle class, make sure they have healthcare and keep their families fed.

All the change in the world isn't going to happen overnight. It's going to take years and years and years. Knowing that they're all crooks. . . It's a matter of them telling the truth. Young people don't even want to vote since it won't make a difference. . .

Social security. . .

They need to pay teachers enough to make them stay teachers. They don't pay them enough to keep quality teachers.

With Bush, my brother lives in texas, two girls in schools. . .

Social change for the most part.

I want to see health care change, and education upgraded.

Couple things: the immigration problem, but more importantly who's getting into the country, terrorism. Second, social security.

Stem cells. . .

My father in law has parkinsons. . . It means a lot to me.

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

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

■ Stay focused on House race

I'm not hearing what they're going to do. . . Just cutting down the other guy.

I'm kinda on the fence, really haven't made up my mind, I agree with some of the things both of them talk about. The negative, it's hard to watch a good positive commercial and watch somebody slashing them down.

I've learne to not listen to the negative when they say who voted against this and that. . .

They can say what they'll do, but doesn't mean they're really going to do it.

They could use the money they spend to do the things they say they would.

I don't think they should have tv ads.

IT's real hard for them though, I know.

I don't like that the phone calls I'm getting are pre-recorded.

3. Let's talk about the Republicans and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Republicans?
- And what holds you back from voting for the Republicans?
- 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**

4. Now, let's talk about the Democrats and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Democrats?
- And what holds you back from voting for the Democrats?
- 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?

V. Ad Testing (55 minutes)

[Written Exercise – Handouts #3-#11]

As many of you have probably seen already, everyone’s favorite part of the campaign season – the television ads – have already begun here in Florida. 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>No</i>					<i>Likely</i>
<i>Boswell</i>					<i>Diff</i>					<i>Lamberti</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?

Lamberti contrast on taxes, spending, and balanced budget

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
		3	2	1	1			1	2	

Wants to keep our taxes down.
 Tax cuts for all Iowans. For change for Iowa families.
 Same, tax cuts.
Raise doubts about Boswell on taxes?
 No.
Believable?
 As much as any of them.

Boswells?
 I don’t mind paying taxes, tax increases. I want it straight across the board. The wealthy and business are the ones who get tax cuts.
No diff?
 Everybody wants to lower taxes — how much, who — those are the issues, and you can’t get that in the 30 sec.

Boswell negative on cut corp. taxes, oppose min wage, supported by oil/tobacco

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
	1	1	1		1		1	2	2	1

Liked that they gave the facts for each category.
 Lamberti doesn’t want to increase the minimum wage, but wants to increase his own. . .
 He sees the need to have more money for himself and fellow congressmen, but not the need for the congressman.
 How did boswell vote on those same things?

Made it sound like lamberti's just a rich crook. . . Grew up with a lot of money and still has it.

Believe it?

Yes and no. . .

Others?

I'm going to vote boswell, but I want them to talk about themselves. When there's negative ads, you see it so much. . . what's everyone else going to do.

I agree with her. The whole negative ad crap — and if you don't do them, you lose. I understand that. . .

They're very misleading — he can say all that and it's probably true.

The only thing I take away from this is negativism.

Lamberti negative on security, missing intel mtg, vote agst missile defense

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
	1	1	1	1	3				2	1

Lambertis?

Why wasn't he there?

Scary to think about somebody voting against doing things for our defense.

Worried about Boswell on security?

Yes. This ad, mostly. . .

Do we know all the facts, what else was on this bill?

Boswells?

You give me negative, I go the other way. . .

What else was on that bill, how much did it cost.

I know more about him than some, but I know he was advocating for that — He's had a severe illness. . . maybe it was that.

Boswell positive bio

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					1			1	5	2

Didn't say anything bad, talked about what was important to him.

Didn't mention lamberti once.

Most was about what he's done, not what he'll do.

Past issues.

This is what he's done, this is what he can do.

What resonated?

He's been in the military, so he knows what's going on. . . knows what it's like to fight a war, something our president is woefully lacking.

For me it was illegal immigration control.

He served our country, knows it from that side. He's keeping us safe.

NRCC negative on votes against immigration. . .

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
			1		4		2	1		2

I guess it made the one before it seem like a big lie. . . Just looking at the commercial, it would make me angry, make the first one seem like a lie.

Everyone else? No diffs?

We don't know all the issues, what he was up against. . .
 We never will. We don't have a way of knowing who's lying and who's not. . .
 Too nasty, doesn't tell the whole story. . .
 IT was the worst ad you've showed us.
 We do have a right to get this information.

CAP ad [EXTENSIVE] (30 sec)

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					2	1	1	1	4	5

- What does this ad mean to you?
- Do you associate these things with one party or the other?
- Would it make you more likely to vote?

I thought it was awesome. Great America. Change to democrats.
 IT was very positive, made you feel like an American. Different ethnic groups, made you feel like we, the people, are still in charge.
 I would say it makes me vote democrat. With a republican congress there won't be change. They need balance. Checks and balances.
 It was about the "We" can change. . . change would be from R to D.
 The whole thing, the first thing that came to mind was Boswell, he fit the commercial.
 He's a little older, wiser, more in touch with the middle class.
 Made me feel good.
 Good.
 Patriotic.
 It's our responsibility if we want change to vote for the right people to do it.
 It remind me of the Constitution.

Do you associate the things with one party or another?

No.
 The only thing that resonated there was "we can change our course" — that spoke to party.

Without the change piece?

It was a very empowering ad. I felt like it was a democratic ad. The changing the course, the teacher in the classroom, the flag. . .
 You see a commercial like that it makes you feel warm, and Boswell's like a teddy-bear grandpa.

Did it tell you enough

It was pretty generic, but it's still filled me with those feelings.
 Made me sway more towards boswell.
 Appeals to people who haven't made up their mind.
 Generic is good. . . No slams to anybody.
 A little can be too much. They kept it simple.
 Appeal to young people.

Words at end?

That was nice.
It's time to vote Democrat.

Grab your attention?

Might not hit mute.
Not turn the channel.
IT's a lot nicer than the negatives.

No diffs?

Didn't really think either way — made me feel more empowered and American, to make up my own mind.

I vote for the person not the party, so it didn't sway me either way.

Would it make you more likely to vote?

I hope so. Some of the younger people.

Put that ad on their ipods, cell phone video or something.

September Fund – talking to Bush

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					1	1		2	2	2

Big change.

Bush isn't lisening. Republicans are in there now and aren't doing anything. So I'd vote for democrats.

I'd've given it a five if they hadn't show a picture of him.

Can we send him that ad?

I like the humor.

It was cute.

The questions they were asking the bush are the one's I've been asking.

Would like bush to answer.

I just couldn't take it very seriously.

But it was funny and so true.

It was just basically another slam against one party. It didn't. . . sway me either way.

Were they expressing what you wanted?

To me it wasn't they were slamming him. . . they were asking the questions everyone else is thinking.

A lot of people want those answers and they're just getting the rhetoric.

Those are the issues from the republican party, and that's their track record. If you want change. . .

September Fund – Democratic agenda

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
							1	3	3	3

America does need a positive change. I voted for bush, if I could do it again, I'd never have voted for him.

The issues they spoke about are the key issues for me.

It was the change thing.

Believable?

Yeah. And for once it was positive.

They mentioned bush once in the very beginning. . .

It was slight though.

I think you'll think I'm a bitch. It'd be great if it weren't easier said than done. . . but for them to say. . . but can they pull it off? I don't think it can happen overnight.

What would make it believable?

I don't think there's a commercial that can make it believable.

None of it will happen overnight.

Which works best of the three?

The patriotic one.

The first one.

It made you feel good, it made you feel like america's struggling to be what we're supposed to be.

It makes you feel like our country is one of the most wonderful to live in.

I guess the first one moved me the most, but the second one asked a lot of the same questions I've been asking.

VoteVets ad

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					1			1	3	5

Spouse of a veteran. That's it for me. Yeah. He's going to be retiring after 20 years. That's it.

This was the first one that made me angry. At the end of that one, I was livid. . . How dare he vote an increase in his salary and cut their benefits.

Regardless of waist down. . .

This makes me mad.

That congressman should be embarrassed.

They did what they were supposed to do.

None of the others invoked this kind of reaction in me.

Did you feel this one was negative?

They used a veteran, it was factual.

You don't know, but showing him in a wheelchair. . .

Exploitative?

Probably. . . But it doesn't bother me.

My first thought was how could he do this to him, so I went Democrat. I can pick it apart and analyze. . .

If he fought for his country, he should have health care.

The reason I only went three instead of five was who's to say a lot of democrats didn't vote against. . .

But when they put "this against that" it's tearing at all your feelings.

It was for specific person. . . not just a party.

CAP 60 Second.

[no rating]

I liked the other better. More flag waving than this.

Don't think the cuts to the moonwalk were necessary.

I liked this one more, it went more. . . things young people may have forgotten about.

I think it's about the same.

Same feeling afterwards?

Yeah.

Yeah.

I guess I didn't. Maybe more overkill.

I felt the music was faster on the first one.

It was cut faster.

I liked this one, it showed change — MLK. It made you think back to things we have done, accomplished, change.

We can do it. We can make the change.

Both good.

For all ads:

- **Show of hands, then discuss each one**
- **Explore takeaways**
- **Which of these ads addresses what is important in the election?**

- *Probe on takeaways: do Republican tax and immigration attacks hold you back from the Democrat? Are you concerned about Democratic Congress?*

VI. Final Ballot (5 minutes)

[Written exercise – Handout #11]

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]**