



COMMAND CLIMATE ASSESSMENT FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

OCTOBER 2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

OCTOBER 2024

The Office of People Analytics (OPA) is grateful to numerous individuals for their assistance with the Command Climate Assessment (CCA) Focus Group and Interview Guide which is designed to provide support and direction for individuals conducting CCA discussions. Support from OCCWI and Senior Prevention Advisor Dr. Tharp as well as the Director of the Component Office of Human Research Protections for DHRA, Rhonda Allen, helped ensure this resource was in alignment with DoD policy and actionable for military units and organizations conducting CCAs. We appreciate the time and wisdom that these Subject Matter Experts provided to help create this resource. Thank you to the following individuals for their support.

Austin Lawhead,¹ PhD, Rachel Lipari,¹ PhD, Sela Harcey,¹ PhD, W. Xav Klauberg,¹ M.S., Rhonda Allen,² M.A.S., Rachel Clare,³ PhD, Andra Tharp,³ PhD, Andrew Moon,³ PhD, Nick Mararac,⁴ PhD, Becky Lane,⁴ PhD, Willie Cosner,⁴ Dwayne D. Beebe,⁴ Master Chief Petty Officer, USN(ret.), M.S., Rae Turner,⁴ Joshua Arbogast,⁴ Kieran Mitchell,⁴ Fernando Rodriguez,⁴ M.A., Sarah Culver⁴

¹ Office of People Analytics (OPA)

² Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA)

³ Office of Command Climate and Wellbeing Integration (OCCWI)

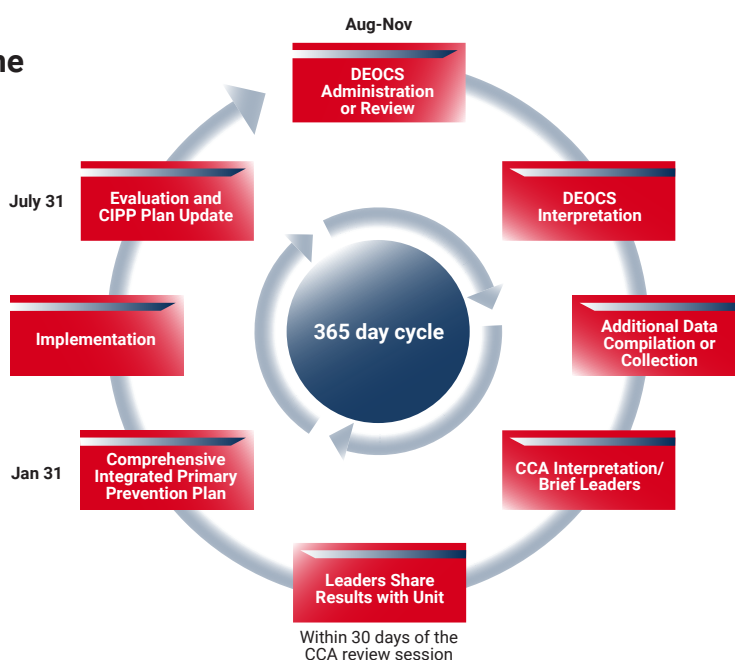
⁴ Fors Marsh

INTRODUCTION

A Command Climate Assessment (CCA) is a systematic procedure to collect data about a unit or organization within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and provides insight into the unit's/organization's well-being and how it functions to meet its mission. In support of mission requirements, the DoD Office of Force Resiliency (OFR) published the DoDI 6400.11, DoD Integrated Primary Prevention Policy for Prevention Workforce and Leaders. This regulation established the requirement for Command Climate Assessments (CCA) to be conducted annually. During a CCA, additional data compilation and collection is a valuable and required component per DoDI 6400.11, DoD Integrated Primary Prevention Policy for Prevention Workforce and Leaders.¹ See the CCA timeline below for an overview of the annual process.

Focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions are key components in additional data collection, as they can provide in-depth insight about topics that affect units/organizations and communities.² These activities help the command understand organizational climate nuances and complexities while allowing them to specifically target areas of interest. Refer to Appendix F for information on the related regulatory requirements and approvals associated with conducting additional CCA data collection and refer to the References section for associated resources. This resource offers comprehensive guidance for additional data collection in the form of conducting focus groups, interviews with individuals, and in-depth discussions. Additionally, this CCA Focus Group and Discussion Guide provides information on how to develop a moderator guide which is used to conduct the CCA discussions.

Command Climate Assessment Timeline



¹The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness is a designated Principal Staff Assistant (PSA) that reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and is delegated the responsibility and authority to implement and enact DoD policy in DoD Instruction. Under this authority, the DoD Office of Force Resiliency (OFR) is charged with strengthening and promoting the resiliency and readiness of the Total Force through the development of integrated personnel policies, oversight, and synchronization of activities in a multitude of areas, to include personnel risk reduction, suicide prevention, sexual assault prevention and response and other areas related to harmful behaviors that impact military members and DoD civilians.

²For more information on conducting interviews and focus groups, review the "How to Conduct a Command Climate Assessment and Administer the Defense Organizational Climate Survey" training on Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) website: (https://jkodirect.jten.mil/html/COI.xhtml?course_prefix=PREV&course_number=-004).

CCA focus group discussions are a assessment method aimed at understanding perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of unit/organization personnel. Focus groups involve four to 10 individuals participating in a group discussion that is led by a moderator.



CCA Focus Group and Discussion Guide

This resource provides:

- » An overview of CCA discussion sessions
- » Preparation information for conducting CCA discussions
- » A template script and sample guide for the moderator
- » Information on note-taking and analyzing CCA discussion data

This CCA Focus Group and Discussion Guide serves as a roadmap for the moderator and allows for the focus group to be replicated by other moderators for consistency across target audiences. This instruction provides steps for putting together your moderator guide to help document, plan, and conduct your focus groups.

Interviews or in-depth discussions can also be conducted using this guidance. Interviews are a CCA discussion that is only conducted with one individual and are a tool used to gather information from unit or organization members who may feel uncomfortable participating in a focus group, have more to say after participating



Moderator Guide

A moderator guide is an important element for conducting successful CCA focus groups.

- » A moderator guide is used by the moderator to lead the CCA discussion.
- » A moderator guide includes:
 - » CCA discussion ground rules
 - » CCA discussion introduction and conclusion
 - » CCA discussion questions and probes

in a focus group, or for groups that do not have enough individuals to conduct a focus group, such as leadership. Unit or organization leadership can also be interviewed to gather their perspectives on organizational climate topics. In-depth discussions are a similar tool that can be used when only two or three individuals are available for a CCA discussion, as focus groups require four to 10 individuals.

For the purposes of CCAs, we recommend focus groups and in-depth discussions be no longer than one hour in length. This means that it is important that your focus groups and in-depth discussions have a relatively narrow focus, consisting of no more than two main topics. The next section provides a starting point for determining your targeted topic(s).

GETTING STARTED

Key characteristics of a focus group “involve a *focus* on specific issues, with a predetermined *group* of people, participating in an interactive *discussion*” (Hennick, 2014). It is important that your focus group has:

1. A specific topic
2. A target audience
3. Prepared questions for discussion

These same components are also valuable during interviews and in-depth discussions.

Identifying a Specific Topic

Focus groups, interviews, or in-depth discussions can be conducted at any time at the request of unit/organization leadership when information or perspectives are necessary for a particular purpose or issue. It is likely that a command will conduct focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions after receiving the results of the DEOCS or during a change-of-command CCA to be in compliance with DoDI 6400.11. This CCA Focus Group and Discussion Guide will be oriented toward such CCA discussions where the purpose is to gain insight into specific factor rating alerts from the unit's/organization's DEOCS results.



Understanding Your DEOCS Results

The first step to building a moderator guide is to understand the important issues identified by your DEOCS results. First, we recommend reviewing your DEOCS results with particular attention to the factor rating alerts. Factor rating alerts appear for protective factors with very low favorable ratings and risk factors with very high unfavorable ratings relative to the previous year's DEOCS results for the entire DoD. Second, we recommend compiling written comments (i.e., open-ended question responses) related to any factor rating alerts. The written comments can provide initial insight into the underlying issues that unit/organization members may be experiencing that contribute to unfavorable results and can also guide topics for focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions. For example, a unit may receive a factor rating alert for *Cohesion* and *Work-Life Balance*. To help decide which topics to focus on for the focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions, the survey administrator or prevention staff should review the Comments Report to better understand the context of the factor rating alerts. For example, it may be the case that the unit was recently deployed, and *Work-Life Balance* declined, which is thoroughly noted in the comments. Thus, after returning from deployment, leadership can institute a policy to improve *Work-Life Balance* without necessarily having to concentrate on this issue during the CCA discussions.



The below DEOCS resources are designed to assist with results interpretation:

- » **For assistance with interpreting written comments, navigate to** <https://www.prevention.mil/Climate-Portal/Defense-Climate-Portal-Survey-Resource-Center/#deocsresultsinterpreting> and click on the "Guide to Interpreting Written Comments."
- » **For assistance with interpreting factor ratings, navigate to** <https://www.prevention.mil/Climate-Portal/Defense-Climate-Portal-Survey-Resource-Center/#deocsresult-sinterpreting> and click on the "Factor Rating Interpretation Guide."
- » **For more information on DEOCS data and results calculations, navigate to** <https://www.prevention.mil/Climate-Portal/Defense-Climate-Portal-Survey-Resource-Center/#deocsresultsinterpreting> and click on the "Data Overview."



This factor rating alert appears in DEOCS 5.1 reports for any protective factors with very low favorable ratings and any risk factors with very high unfavorable ratings relative to all other units/organizations that completed a DEOCS in the previous year.



COHESION

Your favorable rating for this factor is very low compared to all other units and organizations. See the “Resources” section at the end of the report for ways to raise it.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Your favorable rating for this factor is very low compared to all other units and organizations. See the “Resources” section at the end of the report for ways to raise it.

However, it may be the case after reviewing comments for *Cohesion* that leadership may decide to explore the causes for the factor rating alert. Similar to the example of *Work–Life Balance*, the comments for *Cohesion* can provide additional context, such as if there is a root cause of the low rating or what impact the low rating is having on unit/organization members. This analysis can be supplemented by reviewing the demographic breakdown of favorable and unfavorable responses for *Cohesion* and related factors in the report.

This information can help narrow the topics, determine the number of necessary focus groups, and assist with question development.

If a unit or organization has multiple factor rating alerts or topics they want to gather information on for focus groups, it is recommended that multiple focus groups be conducted. These focus groups should have tailored questions designed to gather information on a specific factor or topic of interest and the most relevant unit or organization members that can speak on the topic should be present. If the command receives factor rating alerts for closely related factors (e.g., *Cohesion and Connectedness*), a single set of questions designed to gather information on the related topics can be used during the focus group(s). Work with your CCA team and Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) personnel to determine which topics and factors to prioritize during focus groups. For guidance on how to construct questions for your focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions, please see the “Preparing Your Questions” section of this guide on page 10.

Selecting a Moderator and Supporting Personnel

When selecting personnel to support CCA discussions, consider the importance of selecting individuals who will take great care in creating a comfortable, confidential, and private environment where unit or organization members will be respected. Moderators should be prepared to have sensitive conversations and be ready to refer participants to the appropriate points of contact if they need to discuss their experiences or make official reports.

A moderator should be as independent or “third party” as possible, and at minimum, the moderator should not be within the participants’ chain of command. The moderator should be trained in active listening, avoid interrupting participants (unless it is intended to redirect the conversation and progress to the next topic), and should not influence the conversation with their own thoughts, opinions, or beliefs. Ideally, the moderator should also have no stake in the outcome of the discussion and be impartial to what is reported by the participants to facilitate the most honest conversation.

When selecting co-moderators and notetakers, avoid selecting personnel within the chain of command of potential participants. A co-moderator can help the moderator develop questions, facilitate the conversations, and observe the discussions to gather data. This individual should have the same characteristics as the moderator, if possible. Co-moderators and notetakers should allow the main moderator to conduct the focus group or in-depth discussion, only interjecting if they have a warranted follow-up question for the group. With the main moderator coordinating the discussion session, the co-moderator can focus on participant reactions and behaviors and be an overall observer of the session. The notetaker is tasked with recording detailed information on participants’ feedback to the questions for later interpretation.

If possible, for interviews, the moderator should conduct these sessions alone or

with one notetaker present. These sessions can be more sensitive in nature than focus groups, and the participant will feel more comfortable if they are able to report their experiences with only the moderator present.



Moderator Guide

A moderator should:

- ☐ Create a confidential, respectful environment
- ☐ Be impartial and avoid influencing CCA discussions
- ☐ Be outside of the participants’ chain of command
- ☐ Be a trained focus group facilitator

A co-moderator should:

- ☐ Be impartial and avoid influencing CCA discussions
- ☐ Be outside of the participants’ chain of command
- ☐ Assist the moderator during the CCA discussions
- ☐ Be a trained focus group facilitator

A notetaker should:

- ☐ Be impartial as they are recording observations
- ☐ Ensure they are not recording Personally Identifiable Information (PII)
- ☐ Be outside of the participants’ chain of command

Identifying the Target Audience

After you have identified your organizational climate areas to focus on, the next step is to identify the target audience. Ideally, focus groups should include four to 10 participants. Based on your identified topic, your target audience may be a specific demographic (e.g., only females and/or only junior enlisted) or the audience may be based on something you found was impacting the entire unit/organization. Taking known rankings, positions, and relationships into consideration during focus group creation is crucial to ensure individuals can be comfortable and candid during the focus group and are afforded maximum opportunity to participate. For example, a mental health provider or other subject matter expert (SME) at the command should not be in a focus group with personnel they serve. It is recommended that focus groups comprise members of similar ranks to ensure individuals are comfortable sharing their thoughts:



Recommended Groupings

Enlisted:	Officer:
E1–E3	O1–O3
E4–E5	O4–O5 and CWOs
E6	O6 and above
E7 and above	Unit Leaders (Interview)
Senior Enlisted (Interview)	Commander/Leader (Interview)

To encourage participation and ensure participant protection, have a plan to address the confidentiality and privacy of any individuals who participate in a focus group. Make sure anyone involved in the focus group or results analysis is aware of the importance of not revealing any information gathered from the sessions. Participants should understand that the moderator will do everything they can to protect the information they relay but that the moderator cannot control what information the other participants who are in the session will report to any individuals outside of the focus group. Notes and any recordings should also be handled with care and saved in a protected location. Ensure participants are aware of how recordings and notes will be handled and deleted when no longer needed for analysis. Lastly, ensure participants are aware that their participation is voluntary and that they can leave at any time during the discussion.

PREPARING YOUR QUESTIONS

After you have identified your target topic and your target audience, you can begin developing the questions for your focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions. To help facilitate preparing your questions, we recommend gathering all available information about your topic.

Gathering Resources

Let us return to our example of the focus group centered on understanding why a unit received a factor rating alert for *Cohesion*. We recommend reviewing the definition of the factor, the factor rating alert, the questions in the DEOCS regarding the factor, any discrepancies in how participants of different demographic backgrounds responded (e.g., males/females, Enlisted/Officer), any DEOCS written comments related to the factor, and the prescribed CCA discussion questions for the factor. The CCA discussion questions can be found on the [Factor Improvement Toolkit](#) page under each of the DEOCS factors.

Definition:

Cohesion assesses whether individuals in a workplace care about each other, share the same mission and goals, and work together effectively. Cohesive organizations are linked to improved readiness and retention and a lower likelihood of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and suicide.

DEOCS *Cohesion* Survey Items

- » People in my unit work well as a team.
- » People in my unit trust each other.



Recommended CCA discussion questions:

1. How effectively do members of your team work toward the organization's missions and goals?
2. When challenging situations arise, how do team members overcome them?
 - a. What worked well to overcome these situations, and what could be improved?
3. How do members share essential information necessary to complete tasks?
4. What strategies would you employ to build a cohesive environment within the organization?
5. How can communication be improved throughout the chain of command?
 - a. How can bottom-up communication be improved?
 - b. How can top-down communication be improved?
6. How can trust and respect be built within this organization?
7. How does leadership show appreciation for your contributions to this organization?
 - a. How do your peers show appreciation for the work that you do?
 - b. What else can be done to make team members feel appreciated?
8. What systems or practices are in place that help the team work well together?
 - a. How can these systems or practices be enhanced?

Developing Questions

Based on the gathered resources and results from the comments, recommended CCA discussion questions can be used as is or tailored to the needs of the unit/organization. For example, if individuals keep bringing up a specific instance, policy, or specific group of people, questions can be adapted to gather more information. It is important to keep questions open ended to ensure conversation can occur by avoiding yes/no questions. Other question formats to avoid include "double-barreled" questions that ask participants to respond to multiple questions with one response or asking leading or biased questions that may influence participants' responses. Additionally, questions that imply blame or indicate that certain individuals are at fault should be avoided.

Good Question Examples:

1. How effectively do members of your team work toward the unit's missions and goals?
2. What impact has the new commander had on Cohesion?
3. What steps should this unit take to improve Cohesion?

Bad Question Examples:

1. Do you think we have a cohesive unit? (Yes/no question).
2. How satisfied are you with Cohesion in your workgroup and Cohesion at the unit level? (Asking a double-barreled question).
3. With how great and cohesive the unit is, is there anything at all we can do to improve Cohesion? (A leading question).

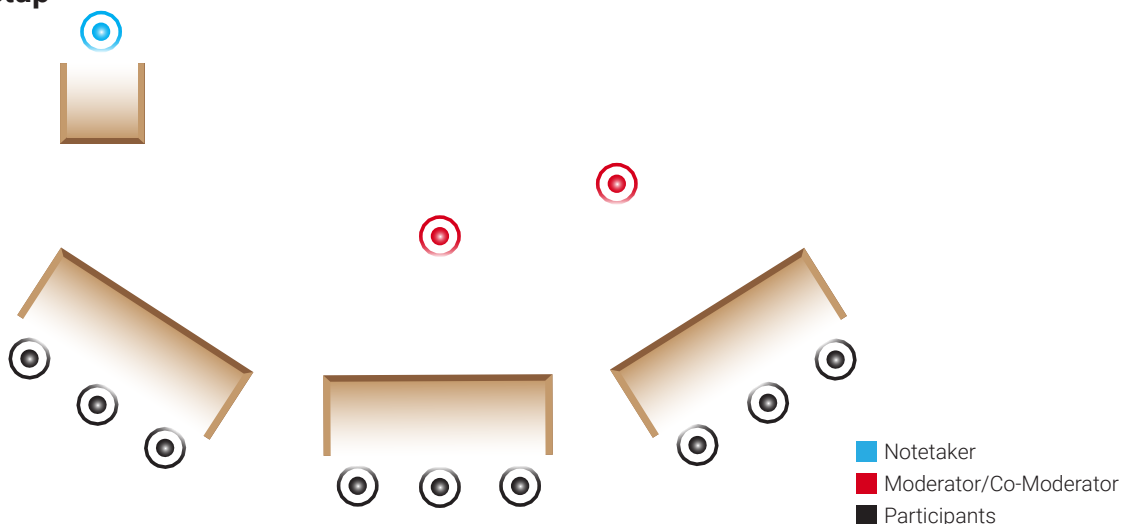
Choosing a Location

The location(s) for the focus groups should provide enough space for the individuals involved and be free from interruptions such as noise or other unit/organization members passing by. The focus groups should not be conducted in a shared public space to ensure privacy. The sessions should be conducted in a safe, neutral location that provides everyone with an adequate level of comfort. The room should be set up in a manner that allows focus

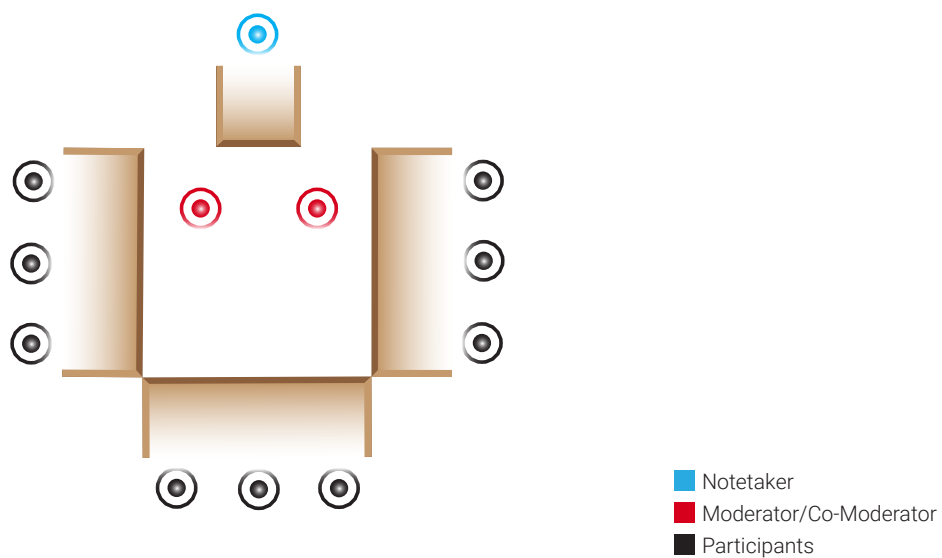
group participants to see and converse with each other. Reserving spaces to conduct your focus groups ahead of time will ensure that your focus groups are effectively and efficiently conducted.

Example focus group room setups are below with the notetaker in blue, moderator and co-moderator in red, and participants in black.

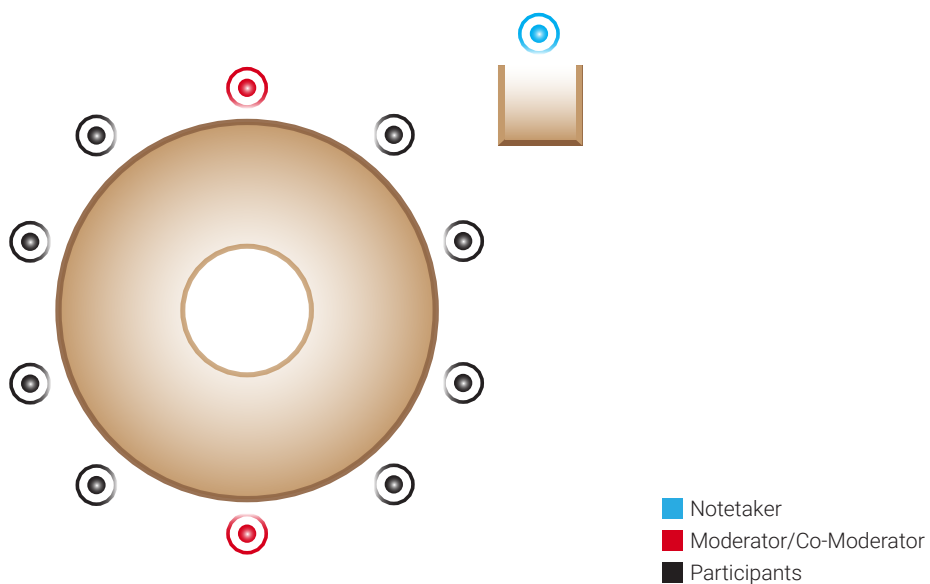
Focus Group Setup



Focus Group Square Setup



Focus Group Circle Setup



Interviews and in-depth discussions should occur in a private, safe setting where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts or experiences.

SETTING UP YOUR MODERATOR'S GUIDE

The moderator's guide is an important tool for facilitating successful focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions. The guide serves as a roadmap for the CCA discussion sessions and as an outline for the findings report, which can impact organizational climate improvements. Based on a recommended 60-minute focus group or in-depth discussion, we recommend constructing your moderator guide to include the following sections:

- » **Introduction—five minutes**
- » **Ground rules—five minutes**
- » **Self-introductions—five minutes**
- » **Moderator-guided discussion—40 minutes**
- » **Conclusion—five minutes**

It is important that, as you moderate the focus group, you keep the discussion moving forward. Keeping track of the pace of the discussion is helpful. We recommend setting up a timer to ensure that you keep the discussion moving forward and you answer most of your focus group questions. At times, you may have to interrupt a participant to either keep the discussion on topic or to keep the conversation moving forward—that is okay! It is also important to give everyone the opportunity to talk. If one individual seems to be sharing their thoughts more than others, it is acceptable to politely redirect the conversation and ask a participant who has not contributed as much to share their thoughts on the question.

During an interview, it is important to keep the individual talking about their

experiences and perspectives. Have more probing questions prepared to ensure that all relevant experiences are being reported. Interviews can range from 15 to 45 minutes depending on the amount of information that the moderator is attempting to gather and how much the participant is willing to share.

CCA Discussion Introduction

At the beginning of the focus group, interview, or in-depth discussion, the moderator should introduce themselves, their team, and the topic. This may include a co-moderator as well as a notetaker. It is likely that you and your team are members of the participants' unit or organization; however, not everyone may be familiar with your roles or the purpose of a focus group or in-depth discussion. To protect participants, it is recommended that only first names are used during the CCA discussion. It is important that your participants understand the purpose of the CCA discussion session and that their insights into the topic(s) are important. Last, the introduction is also a key opportunity to establish trust and build rapport with the participants and provide additional context for the focus group, interview, or in-depth discussion, if necessary.

At a minimum, your introduction should include the following components:

- » Who you and your team are and their roles during the discussion
- » The purpose of the focus group, interview, or in-depth discussion
- » Assurance of confidentiality from the moderator

Below is a sample focus group introduction:

“Good afternoon, I’m Steven. I’ll be moderating today’s focus group alongside my co-moderator, Katie. We work in the medical department. Also with us is Robert. Robert will be our notetaker to help ensure we capture all your thoughts accurately.

The purpose of this focus group is to understand Cohesion on our ship. It emerged in the recent DEOCS results as an area of improvement, and we want to make sure we’re doing all we can to mitigate the issue and create a workplace environment conducive to military readiness.

This discussion is confidential. What we talk about today will only be used to help leadership improve our work environment, and we will not associate any of your comments with you as an individual when reporting back to the command about our findings. However, there are other people in this room, so although we would ask that you all please do not share anything we talk about today outside this room or name any individuals, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. Additionally, we do have a mandatory reporter present so please keep that in mind during our discussion. I would also like to note that this conversation will be recorded for us to refer to later if needed. If you have specific complaints about an individual or have more you’d like to share, please use your chain of command or speak to me after this focus group, and we can set up time for a one-on-one interview.”

These discussions are also not a place for participants to make official reports. For discussions involving sexual assault or sexual harassment, include in the introduction that participants should not give any details that could be used

CCA Discussions and Official Investigations

It is important to note that CCA focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions are used to understand and identify issues related to organizational climate. It is not part of an official investigation and should not be used to evaluate a specific individual’s conduct.

to identify a specific incident (no PII of survivor or perpetrator). If needed, the moderator can provide resources to assist an individual with making an official report. Additionally, it is recommended to have a resource sheet for focus group participants that includes DoD and installation level contact information in case a participant is distressed during the CCA discussion or would like to speak with these individuals after the discussion. This sheet can include contact information for the Military Crisis Line, Equal Opportunity Advisor or Military Equal Opportunity Advisor, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office or Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Office, the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, and any other relevant points of contact.

In many focus groups, interviews, and in-depth discussions, personal information and problems are revealed. It is important that you use good judgement when working with this information. It may also be the case that individuals provide specific names. In these cases, do not include those names in the report, and remind the participants not to use personally identifiable information (PII; i.e., names, ranks/titles, locations). Last, keep the introduction concise and to the point. Aim for no more than five minutes.

Ground Rules

The next component of the moderator's guide is to establish ground rules. It is important that the participants understand these ground rules. We recommend reading the ground rules nearly verbatim for each focus group or in-depth discussion. The ground rules set up the discussion based on mutual respect. Below is an example of a set of ground rules. These ground rules can also be tailored to be relevant for interviews:

"Before we get started, I want to go over a few general rules for our discussion today:

- 1. First, we have invited you here because we want to hear your opinions, perspectives, and experiences. You all are the experts on the organizational climate here, so we need to hear from you.*
- 2. There are no wrong answers. We are not here to test you, nor are we here to judge your responses in any way.*
- 3. Today's conversation is confidential. We do have a mandatory reporter present so please keep that in mind during our discussion. Your individual responses will not be reported to our chain of command. We also ask that you refrain from discussing anything we talk about today outside of this room. Please understand that while we will do everything we can to protect your confidentiality, we cannot control if other participants discuss information about this focus group with outside individuals.*
- 4. For the purposes of today's discussion, we ask that each of you address each other by first name only.*



5. *Because this discussion is not a formal process for reporting anyone, please also refrain from providing any personal identifying information about yourself or anyone else, such as names or titles.*
6. *Your participation today is completely voluntary. But please know that your input is important for making our unit/organization better for everyone. If I ask a question that you would rather not answer, I can move to another participant in the group or can move on to the next question.*
7. *We are not here to come to a consensus. This means that if you do not have the same experience or opinion as the rest of the group—that is okay! And you are encouraged to still share what those experiences and opinions are. Keep in mind that you likely have similar experiences as others who are not in this focus group today and speaking up for your perspective is the only way we can capture what is really going on.*
8. *Please be respectful of others when they are speaking and please respect the opinions of others even if you disagree with them. Refrain from talking over anyone or interrupting someone's turn.*
9. *Last, I want to be respectful of your time. That said, I may interrupt you to keep the conversation on topic and moving forward.*

Before we start, does anyone have any questions?"

Your participants should understand the ground rules of the focus group, interview, or in-depth discussion before commencing further. Allow time for them to ask questions in case they have any concerns. Last, aim to keep your ground-rules discussion to no more than five minutes.

Self-introductions

Self-introductions provide an opportunity for each participant to not only introduce themselves, but to also find shared interests. If participants already know each other, there is no need for lengthy self-introductions. During interviews, allow the participants to introduce themselves before beginning. We recommend pairing the focus group or in-depth discussion introduction with an icebreaker question or prompt. Icebreakers are useful tools in social activities for overcoming initial discomfort or social tension in a group discussion. They also prepare participants for answering questions during the discussion and allow the moderator to build rapport and trust with each participant. Below is a sample script paired with an icebreaker prompt.

"Now that we've established our ground rules, let's introduce ourselves to the group. If you were stranded on deserted island, what one famous person would you bring and why?"

The above self-introduction and icebreaker should be a relatively unproblematic question that is easy for most participants to answer. If you're sitting at a table, we recommend starting off the icebreaker responding to the question yourself and then choosing an individual to begin

and directing the group to continue either in a clockwise or counterclockwise manner. Doing so ensures that each participant shares their introduction without having to direct or call on each individual. Aim to complete self-introductions in five minutes.

Moderator Guided Discussion

Your focus group discussion should start broad and become narrow in focus. The discussion should be centered on no more than two topics or factor rating alerts. If you try to include more than one topic, we recommend that you link the two topics and their respective questions together, ensuring they build on one another. For a one-hour focus group, your main discussion on the topic(s) of interest should comprise the bulk of the conversation, leaving approximately five minutes for the conclusion.

After you have determined the topic(s) based on your factor rating alert(s) and comments, we recommend creating subtopics. Subtopics add additional structure to your discussion and allow you to explore different dimensions of your topic(s) with your participants. We recommend breaking your topic(s) into at least two to three subtopics.



Asking Sensitive Questions

It is important to not make individuals feel uncomfortable during the focus groups. Asking probing questions about sensitive issues or topics can be a powerful tool to learn more about command climate. However, participants should not receive questions about sensitive incidents that they themselves have experienced in a group setting. For example, an individual who has experienced sexual assault should not be asked a sensitive question about sexual assault in the command in a focus group setting.



Recall the recommended questions above for *Cohesion* to brainstorm your subtopics:

1. How effectively do members of your team work toward the organization's missions and goals?
2. When challenging situations arise, how do team members overcome them?
 - a. What worked well to overcome these situations, and what could be improved?
3. How do members share essential information necessary to complete tasks?
4. What strategies would you employ to build a cohesive environment within the organization?
5. How can communication be improved throughout the chain of command?
 - a. How can bottom-up communication be improved?
 - b. How can top-down communication be improved?
6. How can trust and respect be built within this organization?
7. How does leadership show appreciation for your contributions to this organization?
 - a. How do your peers show appreciation for the work that you do?
 - b. What else can be done to make team members feel appreciated?
8. What systems or practices are in place that help the team work well together?
 - a. How can these systems or practices be enhanced?

For a focus group with three subtopics, each subtopic discussion should be about 15 minutes. Try to prepare at least two to three questions per subtopic that will help explore your topic. It's important to also orient your questions to your goal. If your goal is to understand what the underlying issue is, then use exploratory questions about the topic. If your goal is to understand what leadership can do to mitigate a certain issue, then set up your questions to explore opportunities for leadership intervention. Additionally, consider adding probing questions. These are additional questions that have greater specificity and often target the current speaker. A common probing question is, "What is an example?" Lastly, be prepared to ask non-scripted probing questions. For example, a participant may bring up a topic or issue that you had not initially thought about or planned for. If this topic is of interest, the moderator can ask an unscripted probing question to gather additional information. Below is an example of an appropriate number of questions and probes for a one-hour focus group.

Topic: Cohesion

Subtopic 1: Establishing a shared understanding of *Cohesion*

1. How would you define *Cohesion* based on your experiences or observations?
 - a. Probe: What does a cohesive workplace look like to you?
2. What are some reasons that we might be concerned with a low level of *Cohesion* at our command?

Subtopic 2: Understanding the effects of *Cohesion*

1. How do you think *Cohesion* affects the unit?
 - a. Probe: How has *Cohesion* or a lack of *Cohesion* impacted your ability to do your job?
2. How might someone feel in a workplace that isn't cohesive?

Subtopic 3: Improving *Cohesion*

1. What strategies would you employ to build a cohesive environment within this unit?
 - a. Probe: How can trust and respect be built within this unit?
2. What can leadership do to improve *Cohesion* within this unit?

Remember that focus groups are *discussions*. This means that it is okay to go off script! It's also okay to paraphrase questions so they are relevant to your participants. For example, the word "peers" in subtopic 3 of question 1, can be replaced with "other junior officers," "other junior enlisted," or "other colleagues." It may

also be the case that someone provides a response to a question that will be asked later in the focus group. In that case, you can either redirect the conversation to the current topic or you can refer to their response when you get to that particular topic. Be sure to validate their feedback in the moment if you are planning on asking questions on that topic later. For example, you can respond with "I hear what you're saying, and we are going to dive deeper into that topic in a few minutes. I will revisit your comment when we get to that section of the discussion."

Interviews and In-depth Discussions

Interviews and in-depth discussions provide individuals with the opportunity to report their sensitive experiences. They usually include one participant (an interview) but can include up to three (an in-depth discussion).

During focus groups, participants may have more to say or report. Inviting these individuals to take part in an interview provides a means to gather additional information while protecting the participant. Interviews can follow the same layout as focus groups. They involve creating a guide, preparing questions, setting ground rules, conducting the session, and analyzing the data.

During interviews, be prepared to direct an individual to make an official report, as the participant may view this session as a means to report illegal or illicit activities they have witnessed or experienced.

In-depth discussions or interviews may also take place with unit or organization leadership. If there are not enough

members of the leadership group to conduct focus groups or these individuals are too busy to join a focus group, individual interviews or in-depth discussions can be conducted to gather the perspective of leaders on the climate within the unit or organization.

Conclusion

It is important that your participants feel heard and that their contributions during the focus group, interview, or in-depth discussion will make a difference. Below is an example conclusion.

Thank you, everyone, for your contributions today. Today's discussion was recorded, and we will review our notes before putting together a report. This report will inform the unit's action items that are designed to improve the unit's climate. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me, and we can set up an additional time to talk. Again, thank you for your time today.

COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DISCUSSION DATA

If possible, we recommend using an audio recorder or other recording methods (e.g., Teams, Zoom) for each focus group or in-depth discussion. Doing so helps ensure the accuracy of the notetaker. If a recording device is not available, ensure the notetaker is adequately prepared by familiarizing them with the prepared questions and the notetaker worksheet (see Appendix C).

In addition to the information about the focus group or in-depth discussion, the notetaker worksheet is divided into sections

based on the subtopic. Each subtopic then has the prepared questions and space for the notetaker to provide the participant's responses. Because of the fluid nature of a focus group, the notetaker may have to add additional questions to the worksheet. Thus, we recommend the notetaker use a laptop or computer to input the discussion information into the worksheet.

The notetaker should focus on the details of the individual's comments. Notes should not include generalizations and should highlight examples provided and include noteworthy quotes. Non-verbal communication (e.g., body language, nods in agreement or disagreement, visible irritation, laughter) can also be recorded, as it may indicate participants' feelings toward a certain topic. Notes should not include PII such as first names, last names, ranks, or titles. It may be helpful to assign each participant a letter or number when taking notes during the session. After the sessions, the notetaker(s) should clean the notes and ensure there is no PII included. If there is PII, this information should be removed from the notes.



Note-taking examples:

<p>Good Question Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Their direct supervisor is available to assist them and “always makes time” for them when they have a question. *other participants nodded in agreement*2. One participant noted that there is a lack of clear communication from the top down. “We hear very little from Commander Smith on our ongoing mission.”3. Three participants reported that morale is low because of recent policy changes while five participants reported these changes have improved morale.	<p>Bad Question Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reported that their direct supervisor does not do a good job.2. One participant noted that there is a lack of clear communication.3. Some participants reported that morale has improved while others disagreed.

Analysis

After the focus groups, interviews, or in-depth discussions are conducted, the moderator, co-moderator, and notetaker should meet and discuss the notes for accuracy. Next, the notetaker should summarize the responses for each question in the appropriate summary box. After each summary is complete, the notetaker should provide a summary for each subtopic that synthesizes the main points from each question.

Holistic qualitative analysis can then be conducted, summarizing and interpreting the findings from each focus group, interview, and in-depth discussion. As the analysis is occurring, it is important to keep an open mind and not focus on specific or “loud” comments (i.e., comments that illicit a strong response from leadership). Findings from the discussion sessions should remain protected from the desired outcomes or directional goals of leadership. Taking into consideration all the data and giving each comment and note equal weight is key to better understanding the climate challenges the unit or organization is facing. It is also important to note that different individuals may have differing or opposing perspectives on certain questions. Considering these individuals’ experiences and why they are reporting their experiences in such a way is valuable in understanding the context of different organizational climate challenges. Identifying key themes and quotes related to the original topics of interest will assist with results interpretation and analysis. Keep in mind that quotes should not be attributed to any one participant so as not to identify anyone who took part in the CCA discussions.

Once analysis is complete, it is time to work with the CCA team, the commander/leader, and the IPPW personnel to determine next steps in addressing the identified climate challenges.

APPENDIX A—GETTING STARTED WORKSHEET

Introduction:

- » Introduce yourself and your team.
- » Inform participants about the purpose of the focus group.
- » Communicate how responses will be protected and that responses are considered confidential.

Focus Group Ground Rules:

1. First, we have invited you here because we want to hear your opinions, perspectives, and experiences. You all are the experts on the organizational climate here, so we need to hear from you.
2. There are no wrong answers. We are not here to test you, nor are we here to judge your responses in any way.
3. Today's conversation is confidential. Your responses will not be reported to our chain of command. We also ask that you refrain from discussing anything we talk about today outside of this room. Please understand that while we will do everything we can to protect your privacy, we cannot control if other participants discuss information about this focus group with outside individuals.
4. For the purposes of today's discussion, we ask that each of you address each other by first name only.
5. Because this discussion is not a formal process for reporting anyone, please also refrain from providing any personal identifying information about yourself or anyone else, such as names or titles.
6. Your participation today is completely voluntary. But please know that your input is important for making our unit/

organization better for everyone. If I ask a question that you would rather not answer, I can move to another participant in the group or can move on to the next question.

7. We are not here to come to a consensus. This means that if you do not have the same experience or opinion as the rest of the group—that is okay! And you are encouraged to still share what those experiences and opinions are. Keep in mind that you likely have similar experiences as others who are not in this focus group today and speaking up for your perspective is the only way we can capture what is really going on.
8. Please be respectful of others when they are speaking and please respect the opinions of others even if you disagree with them. Refrain from talking over anyone or interrupting someone's turn.
9. Last, I want to be respectful of your time. That said, I may interrupt you to keep the conversation on topic and moving forward.

Self-Introductions and Icebreaker:

- » Provide the opportunity for participants to introduce themselves with their first name if they do not already know each other.
- » Ask an icebreaker question to the group to get the participants talking before moving on to the guided discussion.

APPENDIX B—TEMPLATE MODERATOR INTRODUCTION/CONCLUSION

Underlined sections of text are meant to be replaced with relevant information for the focus group.

Introduction:

Good (morning/afternoon), I'm (moderator First Name). I'll be moderating today's focus group alongside my co-moderator, (co-moderator First Name). (Co-moderator) and I work in the (department). Also with us is (notetaker First Name). (notetaker First Name) will be our notetaker to help make sure we capture all your thoughts accurately.

The purpose of this focus group is to understand (focus group topic(s)) on our (Installation/ Base/Ship/Location). It emerged in the recent *Defense Organizational Climate Survey* (DEOCS) results as an area of improvement, and we want to make sure we're doing all we can to mitigate the issue(s) and create a workplace environment conducive to military readiness.

This discussion is confidential. What we talk about today will only be used to help leadership improve our work environment, and we will not associate any of your comments with you as an individual when reporting back to the command about our findings. However, there are other people in this room and there is a mandatory reporter present, so although we would ask that you all please do not share anything we talk about today outside this room or name any individuals, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. I would also like to note that this conversation will be recorded for us to refer to later if needed. If you have specific complaints about an individual or have more you'd like to share, please use your chain of command or speak to me after this focus group, and we can set up time for a one-on-one interview.

Conclusion:

Thank you, everyone, for your contributions today. Today's discussion was recorded, and we will review our notes before putting together a report. This report will inform the unit's/ organization's action items that are designed to improve the unit's/organization's climate. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me, and we can set up an additional time to talk. Again, thank you for your time today.

APPENDIX C—SAMPLE MODERATOR’S CCA DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Topic: *Cohesion*

Subtopic 1: Establishing a shared understanding of *Cohesion*

1. How would you define *Cohesion* based on your experiences or observations?
 - a. Probe: What does a cohesive workplace look like to you?
2. What are some reasons that we might be concerned with a low level of *Cohesion* at our command?

Subtopic 2: Understanding the effects of *Cohesion*

1. How do you think *Cohesion* affects the unit?
 - a. Probe: How has *Cohesion* or a lack of *Cohesion* impacted your ability to do your job?
2. How might someone feel in a workplace that isn’t cohesive?

Subtopic 3: Improving *Cohesion*

1. What strategies would you employ to build a cohesive environment within this unit?
 - a. Probe: How can trust and respect be built within this unit?
2. What can leadership do to improve *Cohesion* within this unit?

APPENDIX D—TERMS GLOSSARY

CCA	A Command Climate Assessment (CCA) is an organizational development tool to help leaders build positive organizational climates by identifying areas for improvement and taking appropriate actions to address organizational challenges.
CCA Discussion	A CCA discussion is a focus group, interview, or in-depth discussion designed to gather qualitative information about specific organizational climate areas of interest.
CCA Team	A CCA team helps the survey administrator and commander with different tasks and phases of the CCA process such as interpreting DEOCS results.
DEOCS	The Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) is a CCA tool designed to gather data on different aspects of organizational climate.
Focus Group	A focus group is an assessment method aimed at understanding perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals. A focus group typically has four to 10 participants.
Interview	An interview is a one-on-one discussion aimed at understanding perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of an individual.
In-Depth Discussion	An in-depth discussion is an assessment method aimed at understanding perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals. An in-depth discussion typically has two to three participants.
IPPW	Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) personnel oversee the CCA process, provide expertise, and develop Comprehensive Integrated Primary Prevention (CIPP) Plans.
Survey Administrator	A survey administrator is the individual that registers the DEOCS and typically acts as a coordinator of the CCA process.
Moderator	The moderator is the leader of a CCA discussion.
Prevention Staff	This could include the equal opportunity advisor, command climate specialist, senior non-commissioned officer or senior enlisted leader, or the IPPW personnel.

APPENDIX E—NOTETAKER WORKSHEET

Focus Group Information

Rank/Title Grouping:

Time/Date:

Moderator(s):

Session #:

Unit/Organization:

Number of Participants:

Participant Demographics:

TOPIC 1: [TARGET TOPIC(S)]

Subtopic 1:

Question 1:

• Responses:

»
»
»
»

• Question 1 Summary:

Question 2:

• Responses:

»
»
»
»

• Question 2 Summary:

Subtopic 1 Summary:

Subtopic 2:

Question 1:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 1 Summary:

Question 2:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 2 Summary:

Subtopic 2 Summary:

Subtopic 3:

Question 1:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 1 Summary:

Question 2:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 2 Summary:

Subtopic 3 Summary:

Topic 1 Summary:

TOPIC 2: TARGET TOPIC(S)

Subtopic 1:

Question 1:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 1 Summary:

Question 2:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 2 Summary:

Subtopic 1 Summary:

Subtopic 2:

Question 1:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 1 Summary:

Question 2:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 2 Summary:

Subtopic 2 Summary:

Subtopic 3:

Question 1:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 1 Summary:

Question 2:

- Responses:

- »

- »

- »

- »

- Question 2 Summary:

Subtopic 3 Summary:

Topic 2 Summary:

APPENDIX F—INTERPRETATION OF REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)

The CCAs are official data collections to support the quantitative data collected from the mandated Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS), the official vehicle for assessing the climate and culture of units/organizations throughout the DoD.

The quantitative portion of the DEOCS has been reviewed by the Director, DHRA Component Office of Human Research Protection (COHRP), the oversight and compliance authority for DHRA/P&R activities that may include the regulatory definition of “human subjects research.” The DEOCS was determined to be Not Human Subjects Research, but instead was determined to meet the exclusion criteria per DoDI 3216.02, Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD Conducted and Supported Research.” Therefore, the DEOCS is not subject to the regulations that govern research with human subjects.

It is the opinion of the Director, DHRA COHRP that subsequent focus groups, interviews and in-depth discussions conducted with the intent to collect additional qualitative data with the sole focus of supporting the quantitative DEOCS results, is also not considered “research with human subjects,” per the definition provided in 32 CFR 219, “Protection of Human Subjects” and the exclusions, as authorized by 32 CFR 219, included in DoDI 3216.02.

Consultation with your institution’s/organization’s Human Research Protection Office (HRPP) is recommended, as each COHRP office of the respective services and the Defense Health Agency (DHA) may have established their own unique processes for review of CCAs.

Survey/Paperwork Reduction Act

The requirement for survey review per the DoDI 1100.13, DoD Surveys, and the review required by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in support of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 are applicable to activities that meet the definition of information collections, as defined in 5 CFR 1320, “Controlling Paperwork Burdens on the Public.”

The above referenced regulations are applicable to collections of information from Federal Agencies, instrumentalities, employees, or Service members which are to be used for general statistical purposes.

It is important to note that the intent of CCAs is not for general statistical purposes.

Additionally, collections of information from federal personnel also are not considered to be “information collection,” when participation is within the federal employees’ “scope of employment.” Providing input and feedback regarding the climate and culture in which the federal employee works is interpreted to be within the scope of employment, considering it is also conducted as an official activity during official time.

REFERENCES

Department of Defense. (2017, April 6). Department of Defense Human Resources Activity (DoDHRA) (DoD Directive 5100.87). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodd/510087p.pdf>

Department of Defense. (2017, March 31). DoD Surveys (DoD Instruction 1100.13). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/portals/54/documents/dd/issuances/dodi/110013p.pdf>

Hennink, M. (2014). Understanding Focus Group Discussions. Oxford University Press. 10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199856169.001.0001

Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2023, April 4). DoD Integrated Primary Prevention Policy for Prevention Workforce and Leaders (DoD Instruction 6400.11). https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/640011p.PDF?ver=_-WRNG-g78mHPx4gQwkeaQ%3D%3D

Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2020, September 11). DoD Policy on Integrated Primary Prevention of Self-Directed Harm and Prohibited Abuse of Harm (DoD Instruction 6400.09). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/640009p.pdf>

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. (2022, June 29). Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Conducted and -Supported Research (DoD Instruction 3216.02). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/portals/54/documents/dd/issuances/dodi/321602p.pdf>

Paper Work Reduction Act of 1995, S. 244, 104th Congress. (1995). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/244>