

# Workforce Development and Employment Interview Guide

A Resilient Communities Project–Metropolitan Council Guide



Resilient Communities Project

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Building community-university partnerships for sustainability

The project on which this report is based was completed in collaboration with the Metropolitan Council and City of Saint Paul as part of a 2020–2021 Resilient Communities Project (RCP) partnership. RCP is a program at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) that connects University faculty and students with Minnesota communities to address strategic projects that advance local resilience, equity, and sustainability. Funding for this report was provided by the Metropolitan Council.

The contents of this report represent the views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of RCP, CURA, the Regents of the University of Minnesota, the Metropolitan Council, or the City of Saint Paul.



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**Resilient Communities Project**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

*Building Community-University Partnerships for Resilience*



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## FOREWORD

This resource is adapted from a student project and report originally created for the City of St. Paul, Minnesota, as part of a partnership with the University of Minnesota's Resilient Communities Project (RCP), with financial support and technical assistance from the Metropolitan Council. The overall goal of the project was to assist the City with an initiative to connect the city's workforce with job-rich industrial sectors. Included here are an interview guide and consent form that have been adapted from those used during the project, for general use by other communities interested in this issue, as well as resources for conducting successful focus groups.

This resource was developed by University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs graduate students Yolanda Burckhardt, Melissa Duhn, Madeline Geitz, and Emma Wu in fall of 2020, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course, "Qualitative Methods for Policy Analysts." The project was completed under the supervision of course instructor Dipali Mukhopadhyay, in collaboration with the City of Saint Paul's Senior Planner Michael Richardson and Planning Director Luis Pereira.

The original student project report is archived in the University of Minnesota's Digital Conservancy at <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/220251>.



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

This interview guide was originally created as part of a qualitative research study to inform workforce development policy and programming in the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota. The purpose of the interviews was to capture jobseekers' perceptions of and experiences with existing workforce development programs in Saint Paul and Ramsey County, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the job-seeking process.

This resource is intended only as a general guide. Questions are divided into several sections by topic. After each primary question, additional probe questions are often provided. These are intended as *optional* follow-up questions, either to elicit more information from a hesitant interviewee or to dig deeper on an issue.

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

#### 1. Can you tell me a little bit about your personal background?

*Probes:*            *Did you grow up in Minnesota?*  
*Where did you go to school?*

#### 2. Do you live in [CITY NAME]?

*Probes:*            *What do you like most about the city/neighborhood you live in?*

### EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

#### 1. Can you tell me about about your employment background?

*Probes:*            *What was your first job?*  
*What was your favorite job?*  
*What was your most recent job?*  
*How did you find your most recent job?*  
*How did you get into this field?*



2. Do you currently have a job, whether part-time or full-time?

Probes:            *If so. . .            Why are you looking for another job?*  
*If not. . .            How is being unemployed impacting you and your family?*  
*How is being unemployed impacting your job search?*

## **JOB-SEEKING QUESTIONS**

1. Are any members of your family helping you with your job search in any way?  
*(e.g., reviewing resumes, practicing interviewing, networking/referrals to employers)*

2. What kinds of jobs are you currently looking for?

Probes:            *How available do those jobs seem to be right now?*  
*Do you feel like you have the necessary skills and training for the jobs you are applying for?*

3. Are there any barriers that limit the kinds of jobs you would consider?

Probes:            *For example. . .*

- *Do you have a dependable vehicle to get to work?*
- *Do you have children who need adult supervision or childcare during the day?*
- *Are you responsible for taking care of a sick or elderly family member?*

4. Besides income, what are you looking for in a job?



## WORKFORCE PROGRAM QUESTIONS

### 1. Have you ever participated in a workforce program?

*Probe: If so, can you tell me about your experience?  
(were job counselors helpful, how did you use the program, did you get the kind of assistance you were looking for, etc.)*

*If not, why not?*

### 2. What do you see as the goal of most workforce development programs?

*Probes: Do you think they are useful?*

### 3. Why do you think people use workforce programs?

*Probes: What do job-seekers really want from a workforce program?*

### 4. Are you getting assistance with job training or skill development in any other way?

## COVID-RELATED QUESTIONS

### 1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your job search?

### 2. What other resources, formal or informal, are you turning to in your job search because of the pandemic?



# PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

## Background and Purpose of the Study

This study is being undertaken by [CITY NAME]. We are interested in speaking with job seekers to better understand the job-seeking process, their knowledge and use of workforce development programs, and how COVID-19 is impacting the job-seeking process.

## Procedures

Interviews will last no longer than an hour, and will ask about your experiences seeking employment. We will ask about your employment experience and your interaction with workforce programs.

We welcome any additional input on the job seeking process you can provide outside of our questions. You are also free not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer.

Interviews will be anonymous; while we will keep records for the purpose of analyzing the information we hear, your responses will be stripped of any personally identifiable information, including your name, the names of any workforce or city staff you discuss, and the name of any past or current place of employment.

When the study is complete, results will be used by [CITY NAME] for the purpose of informing job-training and workforce development programs and initiatives.

## Confidentiality

The interview process is confidential. That means that we will not reveal to anyone your identity or the subject of the interview. We will record the interview for analysis purposes only. This audio recording and any transcription or notes will be stripped of your name and any other information that would let someone identify you from our notes. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. Any notes or recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study.

## Risk and Benefits of Participation

The risks of participation in this study are minimal. You may, at some point, feel uncomfortable talking about specific issues related to your job-seeking experience. Questions will be asked in an open-ended manner, and you are welcome to share as much or as little information as you wish. We will likely ask you some follow-up



questions to gain better understanding; however, you are in no way obligated to answer any particular question. We understand and respect the voluntary nature of your participation.

There are no direct benefits or financial compensation provided to you for your participation in this study, but we hope to make it an enjoyable experience.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

You are free to stop the interview at any time. You may also choose not to answer any questions or can change your mind and decide not to participate at any time. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about the study or the research team, please ask them before signing this document.

### **Who to Contact about the Study**

We welcome questions now and throughout the interview. If you have any questions or comments after the interview is complete, please contact us:

### **Statement of Consent**

By signing below, I certify that I am at least 18 years of age, and acknowledge that I have read and understand this document, and hereby consent to participate in an interview, under the terms and conditions outlined above.

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Print Name

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Daytime phone



## FOCUS GROUP RESOURCES

### Conducting Focus Groups

Focus group can be designed and conducted in several ways, based on the resources available. Although a city staff person could organize and facilitate the focus groups, the city may want to consider contracting with external facilitators, who may be viewed as more neutral and ensure that participants are comfortable talking about their personal experiences.

Focus groups can be conducted in person or virtually (using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or a similar platform). There are potential drawbacks and advantages to both formats in terms of accessibility, effectiveness, quality of relationship building, and quality of data captured.

### Recruiting Participants

Identifying and recruiting participants for your focus group will likely constitute a large portion of the time and effort needed to conduct a focus group using in-house staff and resources. Depending on your objectives, you may want to identify and invite specific participants, rather than widely publicizing the event and asking for participants to self-select. This process can demand a great deal of time and effort, but is also an excellent way to build long-term relationships with local business owners and leaders.

#### Avenues for Identifying Participants to Recruit

- **Existing Relationships:** Who in the community do you already have relationships with?
- **Nominations from Partners:** Reaching out to local business associations or chambers of commerce to explain what you're hoping to accomplish and ask for recommendations for participants can be an effective way to find participants.
- **Snowball Subject Recruitment:** Ask business owners whom you have successfully recruited who else you should talk to.
- **On-Site Recruiting (Convenience Sampling):** Go to places (local businesses, business association meetings, etc.) where your target audience is already spending time to find people who might want to participate in your focus group.



Resource: "[\*Participants in a Focus Group\*](#)" (Sage Publishing)



## Recording Input

Depending on the topic of the focus group, your approach to recording input may vary. Regardless of how you do so, be up-front and transparent with participants about how their comments will be recorded, whether or not their input will be anonymous, and how the input will subsequently be used, especially if it will be publicly available.

### Recording methods to consider:

- Audio/Video recording
  - *Pros:* Very good data for analysis—a word-for-word record of input, including nonverbal cues such as tone of voice and (with video) body language. Easy and cheap to do with an iPhone or iPad.
  - *Cons:* may discourage open and honest communication, especially where there is a lack of trust between business owners and the city. There are also privacy implications.
  
- Note taker
  - *Pros:* less intimidating than audio/video recording. May be easier to use for in-person meetings, depending on the setting.
  - *Cons:* Less data is captured as it is harder to capture statements fully and take note of nonverbal cues. It has the potential to bias results if the note taker interprets the input while recording it, or does not record every point. To avoid this, note takers should be instructed to record statements as close to word-for-word as possible. Where possible, using multiple note takers can also protect against interpretation bias. The note-taker should be someone other than the facilitator of the focus group.

## Data Analysis

Depending on the nature and structure of the questions posed, there may be both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze, but most likely the data will be heavily qualitative. Notes from the focus group should be independently coded for key themes by more than one person to reduce the risk of interpretation bias.



Resource: "[Analyzing Focus Group Data](#)" (Sage Publishing)



## Other Resources for Conducting Focus Groups



Dr. Richard Krueger, "[Moderating Focus Groups](#)" (video)



Dr. Richard Krueger, "[Focus Group Interviewing](#)" (website with many resources)





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