

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

**DATE:** February 1, 2001

**RE:** Mental Health Recovery: What Helps and What Hinders  
Consent Procedures and Form for Focus Groups

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**In Advance**

Please send an advanced packet of information to the participants that you are recruiting. The packet should include such items as an introductory letter, the consent form, the focus group agenda and logistics.

**Day Of**

The focus group facilitators begin by introducing themselves and reviewing the purpose of the meeting. Materials being provided include a suggested opening script that can provide guidance. The first major task is completing the consent forms. The opening script provides guidance. The main points to keep in mind include reading the consent form, asking for questions, answering any questions and asking several questions about participation to insure understanding (e.g., What are the risks to you in participating in this project?). Collect the completed consent forms and information sheets. Use the first break to check to ensure that they are fully completed.

**Suggested Script and Steps**

“First we need to review the consent form. I will read aloud the form.”

[Note: Facilitators read form]

Ask if there are any questions, respond to the questions.

Ask specific questions about the consent form, e.g., “What are the risks to you in participating in this project?”

Explain that participants are free not to sign the form.

Ask if any one does not want to sign the form. [Note: if anyone chooses not to sing the form, thank them for coming and let them know that they are to leave at this time.]

Ask if anyone is unclear about the consent.

Ask participants to sign the consent.

Collect the consent.

Check the consents at first break to ensure all are completed.

## Sample Consent to Participate Form

You are invited to participate in a research project that is funded by the federal government and mental health officials within several states that will help us better understand how people getting mental health services grow, change and claim productive lives in their communities. We are asking you to be a participant in this study because of your experience with mental health services. You will be one of approximately 80-100 people participating in small groups across several different states. Once the opinions of people from across the country have been gathered and summarized, a report will be written and a group of national experts will turn the information into a questionnaire that will be used to gain opinions from other mental health consumers about the help they are receiving.

If you decide to participate, we will arrange a time and place to meet together in a group of about 12 to 15 people. In the group, everyone will be describing their experiences regarding topics such as resources, choices, independence, connecting with others, and hope. The group meeting will last about 2 and 1/2 hours, including short breaks. **In the group meetings, we will be audiotape recording and taking notes to make an accurate record of what is said including your comments.** There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that will be raised in the group; the important thing is for you to share your experience and opinions. For attending the meeting, you will receive \$20. We will also help arrange for your transportation to and from the meeting site if you need such assistance.

After the group meeting, we would like to stay in touch with you for two additional activities. We will want you to review our work identifying the major themes of the focus group to make sure that we have correctly captured your comments. We will also want your comments regarding the draft questionnaire items that we develop from this work. On each occasion, you will be paid \$20 for your effort.

Our notes and the information you provide us in this project will be kept confidential. Only the staff involved in this project will have access to the information we collect. This information will be kept in a locked place. No one else will see your responses. We will only report summarized results, so your identity will be unknown. We will not disclose any information that can be identified with you, nor connect your name to any information we present.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect any services you now receive or will receive from your local mental health center or any other mental health service provider. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time. We do not feel that there is any risk to you in participating. Talking about your experience both inside and outside the mental health system may make you feel somewhat uncomfortable. We want you to feel comfortable while participating, you can let us know if you are uncomfortable and you don't have to answer any question that feels uncomfortable, and you can leave the group if you need a break at any time. We think you will probably benefit by participating, because many people finds it helps them to talk about their experiences, and because the information you provide may help other people going through experiences similar to yours.

If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have any questions later, I will be happy to answer them. You can reach me at \_\_\_\_\_. [We will need the name, telephone number and address of the Principal Investigator and a local contact (the facilitator too). We need the statement that if they have any questions or concerns in the future whom to contact as well.]

Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. **Your signature also indicates that you have given permission to be audiotape recorded during the focus group.** You can keep a copy of this form.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

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Signature of Explainer

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Date