

Appendix B. Focus Group Guide and Informed Consent

INTRODUCTION

As you know, in the past few years there has been lots of discussion in the state of Alaska about Alaska state fiscal policy – in other words where does the state get its money and how does it spend it. One of the things that ISER does is provide citizens and policy makers with information about important issues in the state.

We have asked you here today to help us determine what kind of information is most useful to people when they form opinions about state fiscal policy. We have selected you because you are an involved citizen and have voted in state elections. We will take the information you give us and use it to design written materials and a slide presentation that will be available to all the citizens of Alaska.

ISER is a neutral research group and is not involved with any political organization. We will not use your name in any report or publication.

Amy will be taking notes but we will also be taping this session because we like to be able to go back and review the tape to make sure we didn't miss anything. These tapes are only available to our research team and will be erased at the end of this project.

As the moderator, I will be asking you questions and keeping the discussion on track. Occasionally I may have to interrupt to make sure that everyone has a chance to share his or her opinion and to get through the material – so I hope that is ok with you. Also, it becomes difficult for us to take notes if two people talk at once, so we ask that you listen to others.

We would like you to turn off any cell phones or beepers. This session will last until _____.

Are there any questions – if not let's begin by getting to know something about one another. I'm going to ask everyone to introduce yourself and tell us how you first came to Anchorage.

FOCUS GROUP TWO DISCUSSION GUIDE

For the first set of slides (approximately six) and for each set of topic slides thereafter (usually 2-3 slides/topic) ask the following:

1. Did these slides tell you what you wanted to know?
2. Was this new information?
3. Do you believe the information?
4. Is it useful to you in thinking about state fiscal policy?
5. What information is missing?

At the end of the slide presentation ask the following regarding the *slideshow as a whole*:

1. What more do you want to know?
2. Does anything we have discussed today affect your thinking about state fiscal policy? How?

HANDOUT

After the slide presentation and questions are complete pass out the handout and provide the following directions:

The handout we have past out is a list of topics concerning Alaska state finances. We would like you to let us know which of these topics interest you.

Please mark all of the topics that interest you with an “X” and rank the three most interesting topics, 1 = most interesting, 2 = second most interesting, etc.

Please mark all of the topics below that interest you with an "X". Please rank the three most interesting topics, 1 = most interesting, 2 = second most interesting, etc.

LIST OF ALASKA STATE FINANCE TOPICS

State Revenue and Spending

- 1. Where do current state revenues come from?.....
- 2. How does the state currently spend the money?.....
- 3. Where does the money go?.....
- 4. Has state spending increased over time?.....

Fiscal Gap

- 5. Does Alaska spend more than other states?.....
- 6. Why is there a budget deficit?.....
- 7. When will the state run out of money?.....
- 8. Doesn't the state have other funds it can use?.....
- 9. What will happen if we just cut the budget?.....

Possible Solutions

- 10. Will economic development solve the problem?.....
- 11. What about raising oil taxes?.....
- 12. What about user fees, gas, alcohol and other commodity taxes?.....
- 13. What will happen to my dividend if we used Permanent Fund earnings to
fund state government?
- 14. How much will I have to pay if we used sales or income taxes?.....
- 15. How much will non-residents and the federal government pay?.....
- 16. How will each alternative affect the state's economy?.....

**INFORMATION AND OPINION REGARDING ALASKA FISCAL POLICY
FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

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DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this research is to explore the types of state budget information that voters want and will use in forming their opinions on state fiscal policy. We will use our research findings to prepare a set of easy to understand, attractively formatted state budget facts. These will be available to all interested users, including policy makers or citizen groups who may wish to explain the budget to their constituents.

Focus groups each last about 90 minutes. During a focus group, between 7 and 10 people discuss specific questions designed to assess their opinions and understanding of the characteristics of urban and rural communities. Group participation is encouraged. The discussion is led by a moderator. Notes from the discussions are taken by an assistant moderator.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:

You have been asked to participate in the focus group because you are a voter who told us that information mattered to you. However, your participation in this study is voluntary. If you don't wish to participate in this study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you to which you are otherwise entitled. You are free to make your own choice about being in this study or not. You may quit at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The focus groups will be audio-taped using a cassette recorder. The tapes will be used to help better understand group comments. The tapes will be erased at the conclusion of the project. Comments made during the focus group should not be discussed outside the group.

BENEFITS:

You will be paid \$50 as a reimbursement for your time spent in the focus group.

RISKS:

There are no known risks to you.

CONTACT PEOPLE:

If you have any questions about this research, please contact *Sharman Haley, Principal Investigator and Assistant Professor at ISER, 907-786-7741; or Dr. Brian Saylor at the Office of Academic Affairs, University of Alaska Anchorage at 907-786-4833.*

SIGNATURE:

Your signature on this consent form indicates that you fully understand the above study, what is being asked of you in this study, and that you are signing this voluntarily. If you have any questions about this study or need to have this consent form translated, please feel free to ask us at any time.

Signature _____

Date _____