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**Qualitative Research on Barriers to Workplace Inclusion
for First Generation Professionals**

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Abstract

The Office of Civil Rights, under the U.S. Department of Commerce, oversees efforts to identify and eliminate barriers to workplace inclusion based on protected diversity characteristics, such as race and gender. In an interagency project between the Office of Civil Rights and the U.S. Census Bureau, the Census Bureau's Center for Behavioral Science Methods conducted focus groups and qualitative interviews to investigate potential barriers to workplace inclusion for First Generation Professionals (FGPs), or professional employees who are the first in their immediate families to hold a white-collar professional position. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether socio-economic status (SES) may also be a diversity characteristic for which there are barriers to inclusion for employees from low SES backgrounds. Five focus groups were conducted with a total of 29 FGPs (four groups with non-supervisory staff, one with supervisory staff). Thirteen people, all supervisory staff, participated in the qualitative interviews, and five were FGPs.

Overall, results found that the First Generation Professionals in this study had experiences and circumstances that reflect a lack of resources that are typically available to people with middle- and upper-SES backgrounds. This disparity can result in barriers to workplace inclusion and career advancement. These resources include (a) development programs and internships before college, (b) educational and professional networks, (c) disposable income for social events with coworkers, (c) orientation on how to navigate office culture and advance one's career, and (d) career mentors. However, they also identified several efforts they said would help to reduce these barriers, including orientations to workplace culture, networking skills training, and career advancement counseling. Results also indicated that First Generation Professionals from all career stages could benefit from efforts to reduce barriers, and most FGP participants described perceiving a stigma associated with being a First Generation Professional. Finally, despite the disparities and barriers associated with being an FGP, many participants also described positive aspects of FGP status.

Keywords: Professional Development, Equal Employment Opportunity, Socioeconomic Status, Diversity, Inclusion

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR), under the Department of Commerce (DoC), is charged with ensuring equal employment opportunity (EEO) for DoC employees. To help achieve this goal, the OCR works to find and eliminate barriers to workforce inclusion and career advancement based on protected diversity characteristics, including race/ethnicity, gender, disability, age, etc. The OCR recently began conducting research into whether low socioeconomic status (SES) is a characteristic for which there may be barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement. The OCR then requested that the Census Bureau's Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) assist in this effort by conducting the research presented in this report.

Another charge of the OCR is to develop, direct, and coordinate DoC programs, policies, and activities to ensure EEO. The purpose of the present study is to investigate whether barriers to workforce inclusion and career advancement exist for employees from low SES or working class backgrounds, and if so, for the results to inform the development of a program to help reduce or eliminate these barriers.

While limited, existing literature on the disadvantages of coming from a low SES background supports the theory that having a low SES background may be a barrier to workplace inclusion and career advancement (e.g., Ashley & Epton, 2013; Cook, Faulconbridge, & Muzio, 2012; Gorman, 2015; Sommerlad, 2012). Resources that promote workplace inclusion and advancement are less likely to be available to employees with low SES backgrounds than to employees with middle SES backgrounds and above. These resources include backgrounds of middle- to upper-SES wealth, education, and white-collar work. Backgrounds of wealth allow students opportunities to participate in development programs (e.g., unpaid internships), and travel for education or recreation without financial strain on the household. Backgrounds of education refer to cases where children have access to trusted adults, both within and outside of their families, who can orient the young adult on how to successfully gain admission to and graduate from college, with some such applicants even having access to legacy college admissions that give priority to children whose parents attended the same school. Backgrounds of white-collar work refer to cases where children grow up with family members or others in a social network who teach them the nuances of white-collar office culture, the importance of networking, and the importance of having career mentors. Employees who lack these backgrounds of wealth, education, and white-collar work are often the first members of their family to have a white-collar professional position, and are referred to throughout this report as First Generation Professionals (FGPs).

Very little research had been done on First Generation Professionals and barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement. However, there is an extensive body of literature on barriers to achievement and inclusion among First Generation College Students (FGCS). Similar to our construct of FGPs as first in their family to have a white-collar job, FGCSs are college students who are the first in their immediate families to attend a college or university. Research on FGCSs has found that FGCSs have lower retention rates and lower levels of engagement with students and faculty than their non-FGCS peers (Dennis, et al., 2005; Nunez et al., 1998; Soria and Stableton, 2012). These discrepancies could be due to several factors that FGCSs were found to experience more than their peers. These factors include financial hardship from coming from a low SES background and pressure to financially support family members (Terenzini, et al., 1996), struggles with attaining social capital¹ on campus (Prospero and Vohra-Gupta, 2007), and as found with women FGCSs, juggling multiple identities of gender role expectations with being students, family members, and parents (Leyva, 2011).

Another factor that could explain why FGCSs disproportionately experience challenges adjusting to college could be differences in values between low SES and middle-to-high SES households regarding money, networking, and education. Research by Payne (2005) found that middle- and upper-class households value both education and networking as necessities for success, while lower-class households tend to only value education. Because the typical college or university environment is attended predominately by students from middle- and upper-class households, FGCSs may start out at a disadvantage by perceiving networking as unimportant or a lower priority than other activities.

Similar to college and university campuses, white-collar workplace environments also tend to be populated by middle- to upper-SES background employees (and thereby middle- to upper SES values). It follows that First Generation Professionals (who might also have been the first in their family to attend college) might experience similar challenges of adjustment to the workplace environment. Previous research has highlighted the importance of an employee's cultural fit in the workplace towards his or her performance (Chatman et al., 2014; Dokko, Wilk, & Rothbard, 2009). However, because the predominant culture in a white-collar workplace is defined by middle and upper class values, bias in terms of hiring and advancement can work against applicants from low SES backgrounds (Rivera, 2015).

One goal for any business or government agency is to create an efficient and inclusive workplace environment. Research has found that decisions are debated and resolved more efficiently in heterogeneous groups in comparison to homogenous groups (Phillips et al., 2003). This finding along with research on the importance of cultural fit imply that a balance of diversity and cultural fit can help create an optimal workplace environment. For addressing these issues through the lens of SES diversity, First Generation Professionals are an important population to study because their

¹ Social capital is the value of a relationship that provides support and assistance in a given social situation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

SES background may make them more likely to experience barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement.

1.2 Present Study and Research Questions

Building on research concerning FGCSs, the present study aimed to investigate whether First Generation Professionals also experience barriers to inclusion and advancement in the federal government workplace. Findings from this study may also help shed light on the issue of whether socioeconomic status is a characteristic for whom a subgroup (in this case, people from a low-SES backgrounds) experience a disproportionate amount of barriers. Because this study aims to gain foundational knowledge about these issues and about FGPs in general, we used qualitative methods in order to elicit rich and detailed data about the lived experience of FGPs from their own perspectives. Specifically, we conducted focus groups and qualitative interviews to address the following research questions:

1. What are the specific biases, policies, and/or practices that may impact FGPs' inclusion and/or career ascension in U.S. federal agencies?
2. At both individual and organizations levels, what strategies can address any potential barriers or biases towards FGPs?
3. Which groups of FGPs can benefit from an initiative for FGPs (e.g., those with more or less experience in federal service, or those who work at certain grade levels or in specific occupations)?
4. How can FGP research and initiatives be carried out without reinforcing stigmas and stereotypes about FGPs?

2. METHODS

This research was conducted in two phases. Although both phases addressed the same research questions, the two-phase design allowed us to tailor and specify questions and topics in Phase 2 data collection protocols based on findings from Phase 1. We discuss these adjustments in the Data Collection Protocols section below.

In Phase 1, which occurred during April and May, 2018, we conducted three focus groups (two with non-supervisory staff, and one with supervisory staff), and three individual qualitative interviews with supervisory staff. In Phase 2, which occurred during August 2018, we conducted two focus groups (with non-supervisory staff) and ten qualitative interviews (with supervisory staff). Qualitative interviews were conducted to collect data about supervisors' experiences with FGPs so that the supervisors could talk privately about any potential discrimination and other barriers to workplace inclusion. In addition, non-FGPs were interviewed because FGPs can be supervised by FGPs and non-FGPs throughout their careers.

Data collection occurred in the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., Austin, Texas, Portland, Oregon, Boston, Massachusetts, and Jeffersonville, Indiana. All data collection outside of the Washington, D.C Metropolitan area was from qualitative interviews conducted via conference call. Across both phases, 29 participants participated in the focus groups and 13 participants participated in the interviews. The research team for the focus groups and interviews consisted of four staff members in the U.S Census Bureau's Center for Behavioral Science Methods.

2.1 Participant Selection

The universe of participants included employees of 11 DoC agencies². For the focus groups, the effort targeted those who are the first people in their families to have a white-collar professional position. For the interviews, the effort included targeting both supervisors who were themselves FGPs and supervisors who were not FGPs. An important goal was to include perspectives from participants who are not FGPs, but who may have supervised or worked with FGPs. In addition to these characteristics, participants were recruited to represent diversity in terms of the following characteristics:

- Age
- Race and ethnicity
- Pay grade
- Position title
- DoC agency
- Education level
- Gender

In each phase, participants were recruited through a DoC broadcast email advertisement sent to all employees at 11 DoC agencies and via personal networks. Three focus groups were conducted at the U.S. Census Bureau headquarters, and two focus groups were conducted at DoC headquarters. Of all 13 interviews conducted, five interviews were conducted face-to-face at one of the DoC agency offices. The remaining interviews were conducted via conference call. All participants were asked to get permission from their supervisor before participating, and they were not given financial compensation for their participation.

Potential participants were screened for supervisory status and a large portion of potential participants that answered the advertisements were supervisors. While the original research design did not include a plan to conduct a focus group with only supervisory FGPs, we decided to conduct a supervisor-only FGP focus group because being a supervisor can be seen as a proxy for career advancement success. The dual perspectives of these respondents as both an FGP and as someone who has made hiring decisions allowed the research team to learn more about any workplace advancement issues that FGPs experience as they advance to the supervisory level. Furthermore,

² All DoC agencies were included except for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

because supervisory FGPs are now managing employees (with potentially some FGPs included) we hypothesized that they might have a particularly strong sensitivity to the needs that some FGPs may have and how those needs can be addressed.

2.2 Participant Characteristics

Barriers to workplace inclusion is a sensitive topic and the number of focus groups and interviews we conducted for this research was small. For this report, we took measures to protect participant identities. First, we aggregated the interview participants' demographic data with data from the focus group participants. Second, for all variables except sex, we collapsed participants' specific characteristics into broader categories for that characteristic (see below).

Overall, the group of participants represented a wide range of ages, but most participants were 31 years of age or older. Our group included 22 males and 20 females, and we had more non-White than White participants. Most participants had a master's degree or doctorate, a pay grade of GS12 or higher, and worked in science or administration/project management fields. All focus group participants were FGPs, and five of 13 interview participants were FGPs.

In addition, participants worked at several DoC agencies, including

- DoC Headquarters,
- the Census Bureau,
- the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA),
- the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST),
- the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), and
- the International Trade Administration (ITA).

See Table 1 for the remaining participant characteristics.

Table 1: Study Participant Characteristics

Focus Group and Interview Participants	N=42
Age	
18-30	7
31-50	22
51 and above	13
Sex	
Female	20
Male	22
Race/Ethnicity	
White, Non-Hispanic	18
Non-White (Black, Hispanics of any Race, Asian, and Multiracial)	24
Education	
Bachelor's Degree or less	11
Master's Degree or Doctorate	31
Pay Grade³	
GS 11 or lower	9
GS 12 or higher	33
Job Field	
Science	17
Administration/Program Management	20
Other	5

³ General Schedule (GS) pay scale or equivalent. The GS pay scale is the most common pay system for white-collar federal employees in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions.

2.3 Data Collection Protocols

Separate data collection protocols were written for the focus groups and qualitative interviews. However, both were designed to address the research questions. Furthermore, the two-phase design allowed us to make changes to Phase 2 data collection protocols based on findings from Phase 1. See Appendices A and B for the focus group moderator guides and qualitative interview protocols, respectively.

The focus group data collection protocols addressed several topics about the FGP experience. In Phase 1, the first topic was personal aspects of the FGP experience, such as thoughts and feelings about being the first person in their families to have white-collar professional job, and the challenges and advantages they have experienced as an FGP. The second topic was focus group participants' relationships to their coworkers and the agency they work for as an FGP. In this section, participants completed an activity where they wrote and discussed descriptions of their workplace culture. They then discussed the extent to which they felt that they fit in with the culture of their workplace. The third topic discussed was whether they felt that being an FGP has helped or hindered their career advancement. The final section discussed professional development as an FGP, and included an activity to brainstorm about what elements to include in a program about FGPs. This activity consisted of focus group participants ranking and discussing predetermined elements (like personal brand development) and elements suggested by participants.

Using data gathered from Phase 1, we made several revisions to the moderator guide for Phase 2. We (a) deleted questions that seemed repetitive, (b) deleted the activity about workplace culture to save time, (c) deleted the activity about what to include in a program about FGPs because we determined that what to include in an FGP program is outside of participants' expertise, and (d) moved the discussion of stigmas associated with being an FGP to earlier in the focus group and planned for it to use a longer period of time, to account for the not having discussed FGP stigmas as much as intended during Phase 1.

The qualitative interview protocols were designed to collect data about SES-related barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement from the perspective of a supervisor. The first topic was the participant's workplace culture, and what (if anything) the participant may do to encourage a particular culture in the workplace. The second topic was career advancement, specifically, the actions employees can take to advance their careers and the qualities the participant looks for when hiring a candidate. The third topic was the participant's experience working with FGPs⁴. The final topic was issues of professional development for FGPs they have worked with, and what components they believe would be beneficial to include in an initiative for FGPs.

⁴ In the Phase 1 interview protocol, if the participant reported not having worked with FGPs, "new professionals" were discussed as a proxy for FGPs.

For Phase 2, we made several revisions to improve the interview protocol. First, to account for the possibility that a supervisor was not aware of having supervised an FGP, we added a section of questions that asked about whether the participant had supervised employees who displayed behaviors that FGPs in Phase 1 said they exhibited when having challenges adjusting to the workplace. For example, one of the behaviors that many FGPs from Phase 1 discussed was difficulty navigating authority structures, like using proper etiquette to contact and get permissions from different level supervisors to complete project tasks. In Phase 2, we asked supervisors whether or not they had experience with an employee who seemed to have that issue. The behavioral questions allowed us to ask respondents about their experience supervising FGPs or with supervising employees that share challenges similar to those faced by FGPs. This data-driven approach allowed us to sidestep any potential socially desirable answers where interviewees might not want to admit to challenges with supervising a particular person or group. It also allowed us to ask about experiences supervising FGPs or with supervising employees that share similar challenges without the interviewee having to know the SES background of that employee.

Second, we deleted the general discussion of workplace culture because it allowed less time to discuss issues specific to FGPs. Third, we deleted the activity about developing a program for FGPs to save time, and instead decided to infer from the rest of the interview what components might be useful for an FGP program.

At the start of both the focus groups and qualitative interviews, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, which was to learn about participants' experiences in order to improve the work experiences of DoC employees. Participants were also told that information they provided would be confidential and their anonymity would be preserved. The moderator or interviewer instructed participants to read and sign a consent form before the session began. The interviewer also asked participants for permission to tape record the interview. Intended to last 120 minutes, the focus groups ranged between 105 minutes and 123 minutes. The interviews were intended to last 60 minutes, and ranged between 19 minutes and 75 minutes.

3. RESULTS

The following describes results from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of qualitative research on barriers to workplace inclusion for FGPs. Unless otherwise described, results from both the focus groups and interviews are combined when addressing each research question.

In sum, findings from focus groups and interviews indicate that FGPs reported experiences and circumstances that can result in barriers to workplace inclusion. The set of circumstances they described reflected a lack of resources that are typically available to people with a middle- or upper-class background. However, the FGPs we spoke with also identified several ideas of ways to reduce these barriers, including orientations to workplace culture, networking skills training,

and career advancement counseling. Results also showed that FGPs of all years of experience felt that they could benefit from a program to reduce barriers. Finally, results showed while many participants perceived a stigma associated with being a First Generation Professional, many also recognized several positive qualities of being an FGP.

3.1 Research Question 1: What are the specific biases, policies, and/or practices that may impact FGPs' inclusion and/or career ascension?

When answering questions about what it was like to be the first in their families to be an FGP and whether they were conscious of becoming an FGP in the workplace, the major theme participants described was a lack of resources typically available to people with a middle- or upper-class upbringing. For example, participants described being aware of activities their colleagues participated in, but they did not, such as development programs and unpaid internships, travels abroad, and participation in expensive leisure activities. These critical resources were described as important for development into being a white-collar professional as an adult.

In addition, in response to questions about networking as an FGP, participants cited a lack of networking skills, and as a result, a lack of participation in school and professional networks. For the FGPs in this study, networks and networking skills were not emphasized in the household as something important for career success, because their households did not have backgrounds of white-collar professionals. One participant below describes how although he was able to eventually find a white-collar job, his path was not as linear or as fast as someone from a legacy of white-collar professionals:

“I think the way we came about our jobs was probably different than a lot of other people come about their jobs. One of the things I do is I evaluate applications for scholarships... and a lot of the applications, what I see are children going to very good schools, whose parents are professionals, and who know to apply to these scholarships and things. I didn't have a clue, right? And so they've got really, the, sort of the fast onramp, you know? They're probably coming under these Presidential internships, and then they'll go from GS-9 to GS-11 overnight. Before you know it, they'll be an SES-er. You know I just kind of bounced around and all of a sudden just found myself in a white-collar position. And it's very different, yeah - don't have the connections, the institutional knowledge of what it takes to get ahead in these types of institutions, because we have a tribal background right? It's all about family, it's all about community, not sort of the cosmopolitan thing that is government.”⁵

Another lack of resources cited was a lack of disposable income to participate in activities that many of their white-collar colleagues participated in, and this affected their sense of connection to their colleagues and sense of inclusion in the workplace. Participants described hearing colleagues

⁵ To protect the identities of study participants, we do not include any characteristics of individual participants whose comments are included in the report.

talk about experiences during their childhood, adolescence, and college years that their own households could not afford, including vacations, experiences traveling abroad for vacation or education, and playing expensive sports like golf. Such conversations left some FGPs in this study feeling as if they were too different from their more affluent colleagues to relate to them. The lack of disposable income in the present day for FGPs includes income to afford some of the name-brand clothes worn by many of their white-collar colleagues, as well as income to afford happy hours after work. Happy hours seemed to play an important role in many participants' work lives, as many of them said (in separate discussions about networking) that happy hours are important for bonding with coworkers and building the network that can help them move forward in their careers.

The final resource many participants discussed not having was in response to questions about adjusting to the culture of their workplace. It regarded not having mentorship or an orientation on how to navigate office culture and their career paths. Because they did not come from households with a background of white-collar professional workers to mentor and orient them to the white-collar professional workplace environment, participants often described being left to learn office culture and career path navigation on their own and while on the job. As a result, many participants described periods of adjustment to a white-collar professional work environment that initially felt foreign and uncomfortable.

One aspect of office culture navigation included properly navigating authority structures to get work done. Some FGP participants described not knowing proper communication protocols, like when or how to communicate with supervisors when completing tasks that need supervisor input or approval, or not initially knowing the etiquette that one should communicate with a first-level supervisor first before communicating with or making requests of a second-level supervisor. Although not linked to employees they knew were FGPs, many supervisors in the interviews also discussed employees who had difficulty navigating authority structures.

Also discussed by FGPs in response to questions about adjusting to workplace culture was the need to adjust one's communication style to a style some participants described as overly indirect and politically correct. These participants described needing time to make these adjustments, and said that such adjustments initially felt inauthentic to their own identities. However, in separate discussions by supervisors who answered questions about the importance of an employee's professionalism and soft skills, most of the supervisors said they valued an employee's interpersonal skills as much as technical skills. Thus, interpersonal skills deemed acceptable in the workplace environment appear necessary for FGPs fitting in with their coworkers and appearing competent to their supervisors.

Focus group participants gave many examples of times they had to adjust their communication style in the workplace. Below are two FGPs (one for each quote) who described how they had to orient themselves to the nuances of the workplace environment that has its own terminology and communication style that emphasized indirectness and political correctness:

“I had to read the book ‘48 Laws of Power’ so I can understand, and I didn’t get that from family. I got that from a coworker. He said work is a game. You play or they play you. What side are you going to be on?... It’s not about checkers and how fast you get there, it’s about chess and, like your strategy, because in that moment, that meeting, you may be upset with a coworker, and you could go off and make a scene, but that’s the most immature way to deal with a problem. And I to that point, if I had an issue, I’d be blunt. And when I observed him, I was like, yeah, that’s how people work here. They’re not very upfront with if they like you or don’t, and I never experienced that.”

“There’s a ‘CC’ [carbon copy] and ‘BCC’ [blind carbon copy] culture as I like to call it, and kind of like the offline conversation culture. Like I didn’t know what an ‘offline conversation’ was for the first two months I was here. I was embarrassed but I had to ask someone what the hell an offline conversation is. And I noticed it’s a lot of those nuances. So how it’s actually presented to you how something works, versus how something actually works, they’re completely differently things. Like someone who’s had professional parents, they might have been able to tell you that.”

A major theme participants discussed throughout the focus groups and interviews was the importance of a mentor to help the FGP adjust to workplace culture and navigate their careers. Discussed most often when answering questions about mentorship, many participants said that having a mentor would have helped them more quickly develop interpersonal skills, learn workplace terminology, and learn the steps and strategies that can result in promotions and greater amounts of responsibility. Furthermore, many supervisors in the interviews talked about how they were able to serve as mentors and help some of their employees develop skills and advance in their careers.

While lack of certain resources was a dominant theme throughout both phases of focus groups, another theme was the resilience of FGPs. When answering questions about the advantages of being an FGP, participants described needing to have a certain amount of grit and determination to achieve the amount of success they have in their careers. They talked about the work ethic instilled in them from their working class parents and how the lack of resources that could have stalled their success also molded them to be hard workers. Several supervisors who worked with FGPs supported this notion, and said many of their FGP employees were especially motivated because they wanted to prove themselves as able despite coming from an underprivileged background.

One focus group participant described how his FGP experience affects his expectations: *“I’m required to work towards things and don’t expect things to be handed to me. Others expect that they will get the job or not have to put in the hours for whatever.”* Another participant echoed the sentiment, saying: *“We had to survive to get here. Even as a White guy. It was all fight.”* Having the drive to work hard to succeed was repeatedly brought up as an advantage of being a FGP.

3.2 Research Question 2: At both individual and organizational levels, what strategies can address any potential barriers or biases towards FGPs?

Participants discussed several areas of development that could be addressed in a training or extended orientation program for First Generation Professionals. These efforts would address effects of not having the resources (i.e., including financial resources, orientations to the white-collar workplace environment, and mentorships) that promote white-collar workplace inclusion and career advancement.

In-depth recommendations for training program design are out of scope for this report. However, we do recommend that some needs are foundational and should be addressed first before the other needs. In any case, when answering questions about the best way to create and brand a program for FGPs, several FGP focus group participants emphasized that any effort to address potential barriers or biases towards FGPs should have support from supervisors of FGPs and senior level staff. They said that supervisory support would allow the FGP to participate in the training or development program (assuming that participation requires supervisor approval), and support from senior level staff would give the effort the political and financial backing for it to be sustainable.

The areas of development identified by participants that we think should be addressed for an FGP program first prior to other areas (a) an advanced orientation to workplace culture, (b) networking skills development (including how to seek mentorship), (c) etiquette for social events, and (d) supervisor training on how to engage and supervise FGPs.

Specific training about workplace culture would help the FGP learn about the terminology, communication style, and office organization structure in the workplace. Networking skills would help the FGP gain the communication and relationship-building skills necessary to create a network that helps the FGP serve and be served by colleagues in their career field. One element of this networking skills development should be the skills to seek out and establish a mentor/mentee relationship. Some study participants had negative experiences with formal mentorship programs because they were matched with mentors who did not have the same career interests as the mentee, or who did not appear to be invested enough in the mentee. Thus, to avoid these situations and the administrative cost of managing a formal mentorship program, we recommend that FGPs instead learn how to seek out mentors that have similar career interests and who want to be invested in their success.

Etiquette training for social events with colleagues could help the FGP learn behaviors considered appropriate in the workplace, as well as learn the implications of poor etiquette for the FGP's career, even though some of these events may not actually occur in the workplace. One FGP supervisor discussed during an interview the importance of avoiding too much alcohol and eating foods that can be messy (e.g., "a cheeseburger"). Furthermore, some FGP participants in the focus groups discussed how people should be cautioned to be careful about what they say in a social setting because those statements could be passed on to the person's supervisor or a person who

was the subject of the discussion. The final foundational area of development is supervisor training on how to engage and supervise FGPs. Such training could help supervisors identify challenges that some FGPs may experience, such as underdeveloped networking skills or being unfamiliar with office terminology, as issues that can be improved upon with adequate consultation by supervisors.

Study participants also identified areas of development we think should be addressed after the previously mentioned areas are addressed. These include: (a) career counseling and strategies for career advancement, (b) resume writing, (c) interviewing skills, and (d) how to negotiate for salaries, raises, and promotions. These areas of development would be most beneficial when the FGP has had time to adjust to his or her workplace environment and has already practiced networking and seeking mentorship. Through this type of development, the FGP can begin to learn or further develop skills needed to advance in their careers. Many participants discussed not having a roadmap for how to advance in their field, and felt like they struggled to figure it out on their own. Resume writing and job interview training that is specific to the federal hiring process would help FGPs better perform during this process, and could help increase employee retention. Finally, training on how to negotiate for salaries, raises, and promotions could help FGPs recognize their own worth and empower FGPs to ask for salaries, raises, and promotions they believe are aligned with their experience level and skillset. One participant discussed not knowing that she could negotiate her starting salary at her current position, and was later disappointed that she had not done so.

In addition to possible training topics for FGPs, participants suggested two other ideas to reduce workplace barriers for FGPs. One idea is to have panel discussions at diversity and inclusion meetings on FGP issues, preferably with high-ranking (i.e., GS 15 or greater) FGPs as panelists. Having high-ranking panelists would serve as examples that FGPs can identify with and be inspired by. Furthermore, such panels could raise awareness of FGP-specific issues.

The second idea raised by FGP participants was to promote a culture of career advancement for FGPs. Some focus group participants discussed feeling like they had not been promoted because a supervisor wanted to keep them in their current position so as not to start over with a new employee. Participants also suggested that the DoC offer more leadership training to early and mid-career professionals, particularly those with pay grade GS12 and below. Many participants said they wanted to advance their careers by participating in leadership programs, but could not because the leadership programs they found were for employees at pay grade GS13 or greater. One participant described how the lack of leadership programs for pay grades G12 and below hindered her career advancement:

“Commerce has good programs, like leadership development-type programs, but they’re geared to a much higher-level person. I think there’s a pool of people, like in the lower- or mid-grade,

that there's really no leadership training opportunities or mentorship. You have to be a 13, 14, 15, really, to start, doing the leadership stuff, and like that doesn't make any sense, there's a whole pool of people in the middle that have to wait until they get up to that to take advantage of leadership opportunities, and I think that's an injustice really... The middle group is kind of lost. You're kind of really on your own, for that whole time."

Although not specific to FGPs, experiences of being held back from promotion to benefit the supervisor, and not having access to leadership programs for pay grades GS12 or below, can compound the previously mentioned challenges specific to FGPs.

3.3 Research Question 3: Which groups of FGPs can benefit from an initiative for FGPs?

Discussions with study participants indicated their view that all FGPs can benefit from an initiative for FGPs, due to identified areas of development that apply to FGPs who are early-career (e.g., orientation to the white-collar workplace environment) and mid- to late career (e.g., career counseling). When we talked to FGPs who were further on in their careers, they discussed a need to give back to other FGPs who are just starting their careers and need orientation and mentorship-style guidance through the early years of their careers. One participant discussed efforts to give back because such help was not available to this FGP early in the FGP's career:

"Not having someone to be able to go back and ask, how do you do X, Y, and Z, not specifically in your career...but just in "Okay, I have eyes to go up the ladder and be an SES..." Reach back, because you don't have anyone, you're the only one in your family. As part of the community service I do, whenever someone is looking to get into the federal government, I'll always show them the best route, because we didn't have that starting out."

Although study participants indicated that all FGPs would benefit from an initiative, different messages may need to be communicated to FGPs based on career stage. Study participants discussed early experiences of adjustment that they did not know at the time was a result of being an FGP. Thus for early career FGPs, advertisements and related communications about an initiative may need to include points about what is beneficial to learn (e.g., networking skills, nuances of the employee's specific workplace culture, etc.) and why it is important. On the other hand, many mid-career focus group participants felt that they no longer needed introductory level training of this sort because they advanced as far as they did without career development training. Thus, communications to mid- to late-career FGPs may need to include points about the benefit of additional training and growth despite already achieving levels of success or longevity in the workplace.

3.4 Research Question 4: How can FGP research and initiatives be done without reinforcing stigmas and stereotypes about FGPs?

When answering this question during the focus group, most FGP participants believed there was a stigma associated with being an FGP. The majority opinion was that some FGPs feel stigmatized because they have a low-SES background. In one example, an FGP described how the stigma can present itself even in the use of a phrase meant to compliment FGPs:

“What was the phrase? It was about how to get more first generation college-educated people into professional jobs like this... How many diamonds in the rough are there, I think was the phrase. It just felt really weird, like how much amongst the crap can we pluck that’s not so bad...And this person meant it like it’s a compliment, like oh my gosh, we’re missing all these people who might be out there amongst the riff raff. It was weird. He meant it like a compliment, but wasn’t conscious about how it came off.”

This stigma also came from a sense of being explicitly or implicitly questioned by coworkers about whether they deserved their jobs, with the assumption being that people from low SES backgrounds cannot be qualified for the job. One focus group participant describes this sentiment in the following way:

“It instantly brings to mind, people, like, “How did you get here, and do you deserve to be here?” kind of thoughts and lines of thinking. I mean it’s stigmatized a lot of the ways- the way that we dress, the way that we talk, the way that we do our work. I think we’ve all identified [with this]. We carry ourselves differently, talk to our peers differently, we do work differently. And all of that stands out, and, in a strange way. Because on the one hand, people do recognize, at least in my case... it’s appreciated, the people that need to care about that, that can recognize that in a positive way, are noticing. But at the same time, it’s almost like some kind of anomaly, like “How are you doing that?” As if we’re just defying the odds by being.”

Representing the minority opinion, a few focus group participants said there is no stigma because FGP status is not a characteristic that is easily visible like race or gender. In any case, it is important to note this topic may be difficult to fully address in a study where participants self-select into the study. It is possible that some FGPs who think there is a stigma would not agree to participate in a study about FGPs to begin with.

Study participants also gave advice on how to present an FGP program so that it would not be stigmatizing. One idea was to appreciate the strengths that an FGP brings to an initiative made for them. In addition to their intelligence and skillsets, some participants described FGPs as people who, through overcoming the challenges of coming from a low-SES household, have developed a grit that propelled them to their current levels of advancement. One participant describes this additional determination to succeed as a result of not taking success for granted:

“...We don’t have the same sense... of entitlement that other people have, and it tends to make us... work differently. We tend to do a lot more research and background work because we don’t assume we’re going to be able to walk into a room and be accepted. So we tend to do our homework a little bit more.”

Some participants suggested that the FGPs’ strengths be acknowledged by presenting the program as a way to add tools to their skillsets that would help them perform even better than they already are. Another suggestion was to target marketing of such a program to FGP-related workplace affinity groups. This targeted marketing would help raise awareness about the program with especially relevant audiences.

Finally, we asked focus group participants whether the term “First Generation Professional” was an appropriate way to describe people who are the first in their families to have a white-collar professional position. Views on this issue were mixed. While some participants had no issues with the term, some participants opposed the term because it could be confused with “First Generation Immigrants,” or they said the term was limiting because issues that apply to FGPs could also apply to Second Generation Professionals. Some participants suggested the term “New Professionals” instead, but views were mixed on this term as well, as other participants said this term could sound like it is limited to early career professionals.

4. DISCUSSION

In sum, the purpose of this study was to conduct focus groups and qualitative interviews to investigate barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement for First Generation Professionals, or people who are the first in their families to have a white-collar professional position. Five focus groups and 13 qualitative interviews were conducted, with a total of 42 participants across both methods.

In the focus groups and interviews, FGPs described barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement, including a lack of established networks, limited finances for vacationing, traveling, and playing expensive sports, and barriers to participating in development programs before entering the workplace. Participants described these situations as ones that would have been beneficial for preparing for the white-collar workplace environment. After entering the workplace, barriers for FGPs include a lack of professional networks and networking skills, orientation to workplace culture, mentorship, and counseling on career advancement. However, participants also identified solutions that can potentially be packaged into an initiative for FGPs. Possible solutions recommended by participants include orientation to professional workplace culture, networking skills development (including methods for developing mentor relationships), and counseling on career advancement.

Results from this exploratory research may be used as part of foundational knowledge towards identifying potential barriers to workplace inclusion and advancement for FGPs, as well as implementing solutions to mitigate or eliminate these barriers. To build on this knowledge, additional research should be conducted, including further research with FGPs, especially outside of the Washington, DC area, and more research with supervisors who are aware of having supervised FGPs. Also beneficial would be an evaluation of existing training/orientation/mentorship programs and employee awareness of them. New FGP-specific programs could be designed and evaluated as well. A growing body of FGP-specific research and programs can be a foundation for work conducted in agencies outside of the DoC, and eventually outside of the public sector and into the private sector.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the Office of Civil Rights in the DoC, we thank Tinisha Agamonte and Stacy Carter for their critical input on the development of this study and their overall leadership efforts to bring attention to low SES as a potential barrier to workplace inclusion and advancement. For the past several years, the OCR raised concern about whether barriers that many FGCSs experience in college may continue in similar ways for those who become FGPs. Before requesting the present study, the OCR reviewed academic literature and gathered anecdotal information from a number of FGPs and EEO professionals. These efforts helped inform the initial stages of this study. The OCR plans to continue raising awareness of potential barriers to workplace inclusion for FGPs, including through media publications, professional conferences that concentrate on diversity and inclusion topics, and further inquiry into solutions that may improve inclusion for FGPs.

Finally, from the Center of Behavioral Science Methods at the Census Bureau, we thank Alfred Tuttle for his input at the initial stages of this study.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A – Focus Group Moderator Guides

Phase 1 Moderator Guide

First Generation Professionals Research – Phase 1

Focus Group Moderator Guide

Date: ____ / ____ / ____ Start time: ____ AM / PM End time: ____ AM / PM

Location: _____ Moderator: _____

[THE ASSISTANT HANDS THE CONSENT FORM OUT TO ALL PARTICIPANTS AS THEY ENTERED THE ROOM].

[THE ASSISTANT AND MODERATOR USE THIS EXPLANATION WITH EACH PARTICIPANT AS THEY ENTER THE ROOM]. **The consent form explains everything we will do and it asks for your permission to audio and video record our conversation. It also explains that we will keep everything you say confidential, meaning that we will group what everyone says and the results will not identify you personally. We will only use it for research purposes to improve the Department of Commerce. Do you have any questions before you sign it?** [COLLECT SIGNED FORMS FROM EACH PARTICIPANT].

[THE ASSISTANT HELPS SET UP THE NAME PYRAMIDS FOR EACH PARTICIPANT AS THEY ENTER THE ROOM]. **Please write down your name and set up a pyramid.** [SHOW THE MODERATOR'S PYRAMID AS AN EXAMPLE].

INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

GREETING:

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. The purpose of our group is to talk about your experiences being the first person in your family to have a white-collar professional job. We are interested in learning about your experiences as part of an effort to improve the work experiences of Department of Commerce employees.

I understand everyone has read the consent form. Let me know if somebody has not signed the consent form yet.

SELF-DISCLOSURE:

My name is [MODERATOR NAME] and I will guide today's conversation. I'm a researcher at [AGENCY]. My job is to do research by going out and talking to wide varieties of people and groups. By asking questions and listening, I can help the decision makers hear the voices of people like you and apply that information to help make improvements at the Department of Commerce.

IF APPLICABLE:

- [POINT TO THE ASSISTANT] **This is [ASSISTANT NAME]. (S)he is my colleague from [AGENCY] and will also help me with today's conversation.**
- **We are in a room with [RECORDING EQUIPMENT]. Observers, including project team members, sponsors, and stakeholders may observe and listen from the back room. The observers and I are sworn to protect your confidentiality. Only those working on this project and those who have been sworn to protect your confidentiality may view or listen to the recordings of this group.**

Let me mention a few basic rules.

- **First, I will ask a lot of questions. There are no wrong answers to my questions; we just want your honest opinions. We don't need to have everyone agree. In fact, if you have a view different from others it is especially important for us to hear it because you may be the only person who is representing a different point of view here today.**
- **Be respectful of other's people comments. It is fine to disagree with each other's comments. But please do not interrupt, and wait for your turn and cordially explain to the group your point of view. We are interested in listening to everybody's opinion in a respectful manner.**
- **Only one person speaks at a time and we'd like everyone to get a turn. Please do not have a side conversation with the person sitting next to you or speak while somebody else is talking. Please speak up and let us know what you are thinking. If you are the type of person who always participates, please give a chance to others to talk.**
- **Due to limited time, I must move the discussion along and may sometimes have to interrupt in order to do so. Please do not be offended.**
- **Please keep what everyone says here private. During the group conversation, we use first names only. We keep what you say entirely confidential and I ask that each of you treat as confidential what others say around the table. Your names will not be used in any reports.**

- **Please turn off your phone and put it away in your bag or pocket before we begin.**
[IF IN THE CENSUS BUREAU OR BUILDING WITH SIMILAR RULES]
- **As far as rules for this building, visitors have to be accompanied by an [AGENCY] employee at all times while inside the building. If you need to leave the room, please let me know. Unfortunately, we have limited time so there are no scheduled bathroom breaks during the focus group conversation. Of course, if you really need to go to the restroom, quietly let me know so we do not interrupt the conversation and either my colleague or I can show you where the bathroom is and we will wait for you outside.**

ICEBREAKER:

Let's go around the room and have each one of you tell us briefly:

- **Your first name or nickname**
- **What you like to do in your free time**

I'll go first. My name is...

Please feel free to jump in and introduce yourself. We do not necessarily need to follow an exact order around the table.

[SINCE THIS IS A "POPCORN" STYLE OF INTRODUCTIONS, MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO].

[ENCOURAGE EACH PERSON TO SPEAK AND PROBE FOR AGREEMENT AND DIFFERENCE IN OPINION].

Before we begin, are there any questions?

PART A: PERSONAL ASPECTS OF THE FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
(15 MINUTES)

What is it like to be the first in your family to have a white-collar professional job?

At work, are you conscious of being the first in your family to have a white-collar professional job?

In what ways?

To make our conversation easier, we are going to call people who are the first in their families to have white-collar professional jobs "First Generation Professionals." And to dig further into what we've already talked about, tell me about the challenges or advantages you have faced as a first-generation professional.

[IF FEW OR NO CHALLENGES ARE MENTIONED] **What are the challenges?**

[IF FEW OR NO ADVANTAGES ARE MENTIONED] **What are the advantages?**

[ASK THIS PROBE IN PART A IF NEEDED] **What inspired you to participate in this focus group?**

PART B: RELATIONSHIPS TO COWORKERS AND THE AGENCY AS A
FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONAL (25 MINUTES)

[INTERVENTION: DESCRIBING YOUR WORK CULTURE]. **In front of you are sheets of paper. On those sheets of paper please write down the words or phrases you would use to describe the culture of your workplace. For example, would you say people are typically friendly/unfriendly, casual/formal, personable/distant, etc.? Do coworkers socialize after work? During work? I'll give you a couple of minutes to write down your words and phrases on anything you'd like to describe about the culture of your workplace. Let me know when you're finished by putting your pens down on the table. [WAIT TWO MINUTES].**

As a First Generation Professional, have you had to adjust to the culture of your workplace?

If so, how?

What about adjusting how you speak or how you relate to others?

What about adjusting how you dress or wear your hair?

[OPTIONAL PROBE] **How has being a First Generation Professional affected your experiences with other colleagues at work?**

[OPTIONAL PROBE] **How about your experiences with supervisors?**

[OPTIONAL PROBE] **Do you think colleagues have treated you differently as a First Generation Professional?**

[OPTIONAL PROBE] **If so, how?**

PART C: CAREER ADVANCEMENT AS A FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONAL
(15 MINUTES)

Do you think being a First Generation Professional has helped or hindered your career progress?

If it helped, what are ways it helped?

If it hindered, what are ways it hindered?

Now we're going to talk specifically about promotions. Do you think being an FGP has stopped you from getting a promotion in some way?

**PART D: GENERAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
THE FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM (45 MINUTES)**

What types of preparation, including lessons from family or friends, in school, in special programs etc., helped you prepare to be a professional in your current job?

How has being a First Generation Professional affected your access to preparation opportunities and experiences?

Is there anything about your preparation you would have changed?

Is there anything you want to still develop?

[ASK IF NOT ADDRESSED PREVIOUSLY] When it comes to networking, does being a First Generation Professional affect your ability to meet people and build new relationships?

If so, how?

What has been your experience with mentors as a First Generation Professional?

What types of professional development opportunities have been made available to you, if any?

Do you feel these opportunities are helpful for meeting your needs as a First Generation Professional?

Do you think there are any stigmas associated with being a First Generation Professional?

How so?

[OPTIONAL PROBE] Another issue we wanted to discuss is how to create and brand a professional development program without stigmatizing First Generation Professionals. How could this program be presented to first-generation professionals without being stigmatizing to them?

What about the name "First Generation Professional" itself? Is this name appropriate to use to describe the people we want to be in this program?

Are there other names that are more appropriate than "First Generation Professional?"

Based on what we've talked about today, what are the most important things for the Department of Commerce to remember from this discussion?

Does anyone have any final comments?

Thank you very much for your participation!

Phase 2 Moderator Guide

First Generation Professionals Research – Phase 2

Focus Group Moderator Guide

Date: ____ / ____ / ____ **Start time:** ____ AM / PM **End time:** ____ AM / PM

Location: _____ **Moderator:** _____

[THE ASSISTANT HANDS THE CONSENT FORM OUT TO ALL PARTICIPANTS AS THEY ENTERED THE ROOM].

[THE ASSISTANT AND MODERATOR USE THIS EXPLANATION WITH EACH PARTICIPANT AS THEY ENTER THE ROOM]. **The consent form explains everything we will do and it asks for your permission to audio and video record our conversation. It also explains that we will keep everything you say confidential, meaning that we will group what everyone says and the results will not identify you personally. We will only use it for research purposes to improve the Department of Commerce. Do you have any questions before you sign it?** [COLLECT SIGNED FORMS FROM EACH PARTICIPANT].

[THE ASSISTANT HELPS SET UP THE NAME PYRAMIDS FOR EACH PARTICIPANT AS THEY ENTER THE ROOM]. **Please write down your name and set up a pyramid.** [SHOW THE MODERATOR'S PYRAMID AS AN EXAMPLE].

INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

GREETING:

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. The purpose of our group is to talk about your experiences being the first person in your family to have a white-collar professional job. We are interested in learning about your experiences as part of an effort to improve the work experiences of Department of Commerce employees.

I understand everyone has read the consent form. Let me know if somebody has not signed the consent form yet.

SELF-DISCLOSURE:

My name is [MODERATOR NAME] and I will guide today's conversation. I'm a researcher at [AGENCY]. My job is to do research by going out and talking to wide varieties of people and groups. By asking questions and listening, I can help the decision makers hear the voices of people like you and apply that information to help make improvements at the Department of Commerce.

IF APPLICABLE:

- [POINT TO THE ASSISTANT] **This is [ASSISTANT NAME]. (S)he is my colleague from [AGENCY] and will also help me with today's conversation.**
- **We are in a room with [RECORDING EQUIPMENT]. Observers, including project team members, sponsors, and stakeholders may observe and listen from the back room. The observers and I are sworn to protect your confidentiality. Only those working on this project and those who have been sworn to protect your confidentiality may view or listen to the recordings of this group.**

Let me mention a few basic rules.

- **First, I will ask a lot of questions. There are no wrong answers to my questions; we just want your honest opinions. We don't need to have everyone agree. In fact, if you have a view different from others it is especially important for us to hear it because you may be the only person who is representing a different point of view here today.**
- **Be respectful of other's people comments. It is fine to disagree with each other's comments. But please do not interrupt, and wait for your turn and cordially explain to the group your point of view. We are interested in listening to everybody's opinion in a respectful manner.**
- **Only one person speaks at a time and we'd like everyone to get a turn. Please do not have a side conversation with the person sitting next to you or speak while somebody else is talking. Please speak up and let us know what you are thinking. If you are the type of person who always participates, please give a chance to others to talk.**
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- **Please keep what everyone says here private. During the group conversation, we use first names only. We keep what you say entirely confidential and I ask that each of you treat as confidential what others say around the table. Your names will not be used in any reports.**
- **Please turn off your phone and put it away in your bag or pocket before we begin.**
[IF IN THE CENSUS BUREAU OR BUILDING WITH SIMILAR RULES]
- **As far as rules for this building, visitors have to be accompanied by an [AGENCY] employee at all times while inside the building. If you need to leave the room, please let me know. Unfortunately, we have limited time so there are no scheduled bathroom breaks during the focus group conversation. Of course, if you really need to**

go to the restroom, quietly let me know so we do not interrupt the conversation and either my colleague or I can show you where the bathroom is and we will wait for you outside.

ICEBREAKER:

Let's go around the room and have each one of you tell us briefly:

- **Your first name or nickname**
- **What you like to do in your free time**

I'll go first. My name is...

Please feel free to jump in and introduce yourself. We do not necessarily need to follow an exact order around the table.

[SINCE THIS IS A "POPCORN" STYLE OF INTRODUCTIONS, MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO].

[ENCOURAGE EACH PERSON TO SPEAK AND PROBE FOR AGREEMENT AND DIFFERENCE IN OPINION].

Before we begin, are there any questions?

PART A: PERSONAL ASPECTS OF THE FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
(15 MINUTES)

What is it like to be the first in your family to have a white-collar professional job?

At work, are you conscious of being the first in your family to have a white-collar professional job?

In what ways?

PART B: RELATIONSHIPS TO COWORKERS AND THE AGENCY AS A
FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONAL (25 MINUTES)

Think about the culture of your work place, for example, whether your coworkers are typically friendly/unfriendly, casual/formal, personable/distant, etc. Or whether coworkers socialize after work or During work?

To make our conversation easier, we are going to call people who are the first in their families to have white-collar professional jobs "First Generation Professionals."

As a First Generation Professional, have you had to adjust to the culture of your workplace?

If so, how?

What about adjusting how you speak or how you relate to others?

What about adjusting how you dress or wear your hair?

What about figuring out the employee and manager structure in your workplace to get things done?

What about connecting with people at social events?

[OPTIONAL PROBE] How has being a First Generation Professional affected your experiences with other colleagues at work?

[OPTIONAL PROBE] How about your experiences with supervisors?

Do you think there are any stigmas associated with being a First Generation Professional?

How so?

[IF THE GROUP AGREES VERY QUICKLY ON ONE ANSWER, PRESENT THE COUNTERPOINT] In discussions with other first generation professionals, some of them mentioned that [COUNTERPOINT]. What do you all think about that?

[OPTIONAL PROBE] Another issue we wanted to discuss is how to create and brand a professional development program without stigmatizing First Generation Professionals. How could this program be presented to first-generation professionals without being stigmatizing to them?

What about the name “First Generation Professional itself? Is this name appropriate to use to describe the people we want to be in this program?

Are there other names that are more appropriate than “First Generation Professional?”

[GENERAL NOTE: ONLY PROBE ON GENDER OR RACE ISSUES IF PARTICIPANTS DISCUSS IT. ONLY DISCUSS FOR A FEW MINUTES]

PART C: CAREER ADVANCEMENT AS A FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONAL
(15 MINUTES)

Do you think being a First Generation Professional has helped or hindered your career progress?

If it helped, what are ways it helped?

If it hindered, what are ways it hindered?

Now we're going to talk specifically about promotions. Do you think being an FGP has stopped you from getting a promotion in some way?

**PART D: GENERAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
THE FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM (45 MINUTES)**

What types of preparation, including lessons from family or friends, in school, in special programs etc., helped you prepare to be a professional in your current job?

How has being a First Generation Professional affected your access to preparation opportunities and experiences?

Is there anything about your preparation you would have changed?

Is there anything you want to still develop?

[ASK IF NOT ADDRESSED PREVIOUSLY] When it comes to networking, does being a First Generation Professional affect your ability to meet people and build new relationships?

If so, how?

What has been your experience with mentors as a First Generation Professional?

What types of professional development opportunities have been made available to you, if any?

Do you feel these opportunities are helpful for meeting your needs as a First Generation Professional?

Based on what we've talked about today, what are the most important things for the Department of Commerce to remember from this discussion?

Does anyone have any final comments?

Thank you very much for your participation!

7.2 Appendix B – Qualitative Interview Protocols

Phase 1 Protocol

First Generation Professionals Research – Phase 1

Interview Protocol for Supervisors/Hiring Officials

Date: ____ / ____ / ____ Start time: ____ AM / PM End time: ____ AM / PM

Location: _____ Interviewer: _____

INTERVIEW CONSENT

[INTERVIEWER: PLACE THE CONSENT FORM IN FRONT OF PARTICIPANT]

Hello, I'm [NAME OF COGNITIVE INTERVIEWER]. I work for the Census Bureau. Thanks for agreeing to help me today.

Before we start, I would like you to read over the document in front of you. This document explains a little bit about this interview and provides information about your rights as a participant. It also asks for your permission to have this session audio recorded. The document also lets you know that your identity will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of this project. Please ask me any questions you have about this document. When you finish reading the document, please sign it if you agree to participate.

[IF PARTICIPANT PROVIDES CONSENT TO HAVE THE SESSION AUDIO-TAPED] I will now turn on the audio recorder to ask for your consent again.

[TEST AUDIO RECORDER AND TURN IT ON AGAIN AFTER TEST] Do you consent to being recorded for this interview?

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. The purpose of the interview is to talk about your experiences as a supervisor who has worked with people from different backgrounds. We are interested in learning about your experiences as part of an effort to improve the work experiences of Department of Commerce employees. By interviewing you, I can help the decision makers hear the voices of people like you and apply that information to help make improvements at the Department of Commerce.

Please remember that I am really interested in your honest thoughts and opinions, so there are no right or wrong answers. We will also keep what you say entirely confidential, and only those working on the project will know of your answers.

Observers, including project team members, sponsors, and stakeholders may observe and listen from the phone or a back room. The observers and I are sworn to protect your confidentiality. Only those who work on this project and those who have been sworn to protect your confidentiality may view or listen to the recordings of this interview.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

PART A: WORKPLACE CULTURE - GENERAL

The first topic is about the culture of your workplace. How would you describe the culture of your workplace?

[IF NOT DISCUSSED] For example, would you say people are typically friendly/unfriendly, casual/formal, personable/distant, etc.? Do coworkers socialize after work? During work?

What types of things do you do, if anything, to promote a particular culture in your workplace?

Are there differences between your ideal workplace culture and how things actually work in your workplace?

PART B: CAREER ADVANCEMENT - GENERAL

In your workplace, what can employees do to help advance their careers?

Now let's talk specifically about hiring. When you are hiring for a position, what qualifications are most important to you when selecting a candidate?

How important is cultural fit between the candidate and your workplace?

What types of things do you look for during an interview when you are considering cultural fit?

What about in a resume?

What about for employees you work with that are looking for a promotion or advancement, what do you look for in terms of fit when making decisions for current employees?

How important are the schools they went to?

How important are the extra-curricular organizations that candidates may be involved in outside of the office?

Professionalism is another concept that we hear about when talking to people. How important is professionalism when you are making hiring and promotion decisions?

What types of things do you look for on a resume when you are thinking about professionalism?

What about during an interview?

What about in a current employee?

What about soft skills? How important are soft skills (social graces, communication, language, personal habits, interpersonal skills, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterize relationships with other people). How important are soft skills when you are making hiring and promotion decisions?

Can you think of any factors that might keep candidates who are otherwise qualified from advancing their careers?

If so, what?

PART C: SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONALS

As part of our work for the Department of Commerce, we are interested in a specific group of professionals that we are calling First Generation Professionals. This group is the first in their families to have white-collar professional jobs, and they also may come from working class backgrounds. We're interested in learning about the challenges and advantages of working with and managing First Generation Professionals.

To your knowledge, have you worked with any First Generation Professionals?

[IF YES] Tell me about your experiences working with First Generation Professionals.

[IF YES] How did you become aware that someone you worked with was a First Generation Professional?

[IF NO] Has anyone else ever talked with you about working with First Generation Professionals to you? What types of things did they talk about?

[IF NO] Has anyone ever complained to you about aspects of coworkers or supervisees that you think might be attributable to the person being a First Generation Professional?

[IF NO] You mentioned to your knowledge that you haven't worked with any First Generation Professionals. Have you ever worked with Young Professionals? [IF NECESSARY] Let's define Young Professionals as people 30 years of age and younger who have white-collar professional jobs.

What were the positions of the First Generation/Young Professionals you've worked with?

Has working with First Generation/Young Professionals been different than working with people who are not First Generation/Young Professionals? How so?

Has supervising First Generation/Young Professionals been different than supervising people who are not First Generation/Young Professionals? How so?

[IF NOT DISCUSSED] Have you had any challenges supervising First Generation/Young Professionals when it comes to fit and professionalism?

Have you talked with others at work about any challenges related to supervising First Generation/Young Professionals in your workplace?

What did you talk about?

**PART D: GENERAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
THE FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM**

For each of the First Generation/Young Professionals you have worked with, how prepared do you think they were to play the role of a professional in the workplace?

What – if anything – about their preparation would you change?

Have you ever been a mentor to one or more First Generation/Young Professionals?

Was this through a formal program or an informal arrangement?

[IF EVER A MENTOR TO FGPs/YOUNG PROFESSIONALS] What has been your experience being a mentor to First Generation Professionals?

Did you initiate the mentorship or did they?

How do you support your mentee [PROBE WITH THE FOLLOWING TOPICS AS EXAMPLES IF NEEDED: CAREER GUIDANCE, INTERPERSONAL, PERSONAL, WORK-RELATED]?

[INTERVENTION: MOOD SHEET EXERCISE]: **Here we have red, yellow, and green sheets of paper where we'll put different activities that might be included in a professional development program for First Generation/Young Professionals. If a program were made to help First Generation/Young Professionals in the workplace, what should be included in the program? As you say them, I'll write them on index cards and put them on the green sheet.** [THE INTERVIEWER WRITES THE ACTIVITIES NAMED BY THE RESPONDENT ON INDEX CARDS AND PUTS THEM ON THE GREEN SHEET OF PAPER]. **Okay, now I'll put on the table other things that could be included in a program.** [THE INTERVIEWER PUTS THE INDEX CARDS OF PERSONAL BRANDING; NETWORKING; FINANCIAL LITERACY; POLITICAL SAVVY; AND EMBRACING AUTHENTICITY IDEAS ON THE TABLE].

On the table are red, yellow, and green sheets of paper along with the index cards of ideas. If a program were made to help First Generation/Young Professionals in the workplace, what should be included in the program? The green sheet is for activities that are most important to include, the yellow sheet is for activities that are second-most important to include, and the red sheet is for activities you would not want in the program. Are there any questions? If you need to, take a minute or so to decide and then please go ahead and place the index cards on the color sheets of your choice.

[POINT TO AND CALL OUT THE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE ON THE GREEN SHEET OF PAPER] **For these activities you've identified in green as things you'd especially want in the program, what about them makes them beneficial for First Generation/Young Professionals?**

[POINT TO AND CALL OUT THE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE ON THE YELLOW SHEET OF PAPER] **For these activities that you picked to be in the program as your second choices, what about them makes them beneficial for First Generation/Young Professionals?**

[POINT TO AND CALL OUT THE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE ON THE RED SHEET OF PAPER] **For these activities that you picked not to be in the program, what about them would not be beneficial for First Generation/Young Professionals?**

Is there anything you would change as far as how your agency deals or doesn't deal with challenges faced by First Generation/Young Professionals?

Based on what we've talked about today, what are the most important things for the Department of Commerce to remember from this discussion?

Does anyone have any final comments?

Thank you very much for your participation!

Phase 2 Protocol

First Generation Professionals Research – Phase 2

Interview Protocol for Supervisors/Hiring Officials

Participant ID: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / ____ **Start time:** _____ AM / PM **End time:** _____ AM / PM

Location: _____ **Interviewer:** _____

INTERVIEW CONSENT

[INTERVIEWER: PLACE THE CONSENT FORM IN FRONT OF PARTICIPANT]

Hello, I'm [NAME OF INTERVIEWER]. **I work for the Census Bureau. Thanks for agreeing to help me today.**

Before we start, I would like you to read over the document in front of you. This document explains a little bit about this interview and provides information about your rights as a participant. It also asks for your permission to have this session audio recorded. The document also lets you know that your identity will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of this project. Please ask me any questions you have about this document. When you finish reading the document, please sign it if you agree to participate.

[IF PARTICIPANT PROVIDES CONSENT TO HAVE THE SESSION AUDIO-TAPED] **I will now turn on the audio recorder to ask for your consent again.**

[TEST AUDIO RECORDER AND TURN IT ON AGAIN AFTER TEST] **Do you consent to being recorded for this interview?**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. The purpose of the interview is to talk about your experiences as a supervisor who has worked with people from different backgrounds. We are interested in learning about your experiences as part of an effort to improve the work experiences of Department of Commerce employees. By interviewing you, I can help the decision makers hear the voices of people like you and apply that information to help make improvements at the Department of Commerce.

Please remember that I am really interested in your honest thoughts and opinions, so there are no right or wrong answers. We will also keep what you say entirely confidential, and only those working on the project will know of your answers.

Observers, including project team members, sponsors, and stakeholders may observe and listen from the phone or a back room. The observers and I are sworn to protect your confidentiality. Only those who work on this project and those who have been sworn to protect your confidentiality may view or listen to the recordings of this interview.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

PART A: CAREER ADVANCEMENT - GENERAL

1. First, let's talk specifically about hiring. When you are hiring for a position, what qualifications are most important to you when selecting a candidate?
 2. How important is cultural fit between the candidate and your workplace?
 3. What types of things do you look for during an interview when you are considering cultural fit?
 4. What about in a resume?
 5. What about for employees you work with that are looking for a promotion or advancement, what do you look for in terms of fit when making decisions for current employees?
 6. How important are the schools they went to?
 7. Professionalism is another concept that we hear about when talking to people. How important is professionalism when you are making hiring and promotion decisions?
 8. When interviewing a job candidate, what kinds of things do you look for when you are thinking about professionalism?
 9. What about in a current employee?
 10. What about soft skills? How important are soft skills (social graces, communication, language, personal habits, interpersonal skills, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterize relationships with other people)? How important are soft skills when you are making hiring and promotion decisions?

PART B: CHALLENGES THAT SOME EMPLOYEES MAY EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

The next topic is about challenges that some employees might experience in the workplace, and whether you have seen or heard about any of these challenges experienced by employees you supervised.

11. Have you ever seen or heard about one of your employees:

11A. Appearing to lack soft skills when interacting with people at work?

Yes _____ No _____

11B. Consistently not being engaged with people at work?

Yes _____ No _____

11C. Having trouble navigating authority structures to get work done?

Yes _____ No _____

11D. Appearing to not have a plan for how to advance in their career?

Yes _____ No _____

11E. Acting shy in social events with coworkers or other professionals?

Yes _____ No _____

Has one of your employees:

11F. Come to you and discuss challenges to adjusting to the workplace?

Yes _____ No _____

[FOR EACH TOPIC WITH "YES" RESPONSE]

12. Earlier you mentioned that [MENTION THE TOPICS THE PARTICIPANT SAID "YES" TO]. Tell me more about that.

13. [IF NOT DISCUSSED] What were the positions of this/these employee(s)?

14. [IF NOT DISCUSSED] How was this situation addressed, if at all?

15. Has working with this/these employee(s) been different than working with people who did not experience this issue? How so?

16. Has supervising this/these employee(s) been different than supervising people who did not experience this issue?

PART C: SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONALS

As part of our work for the Department of Commerce, we are interested in a specific group of professionals that we are calling First Generation Professionals. This group is the first in their families to have white-collar professional jobs, and they also may come from working class backgrounds. We're interested in learning about the challenges and advantages of working with and managing First Generation Professionals.

17. To your knowledge, have you worked with any First Generation Professionals?

18. [IF YES] Tell me about your experiences working with First Generation Professionals.

19. [IF YES] How did you become aware that someone you worked with was a First Generation Professional?

[IF NO] You mentioned to your knowledge that you haven't worked with any First Generation Professionals. Instead, think of the employees you mentioned having challenges in the workplace that we discussed earlier.

20. What were the positions of the First Generation Professionals/those with challenges that you've worked with?

21. Has working with First Generation Professionals/those with challenges in the workplace been different than working with people who are not First Generation Professional/do not have challenges? How so?

22. Has supervising First Generation Professionals/those with challenges in the workplace been different than supervising people who are not First Generation Professional/did not have challenges?

23. [IF NOT DISCUSSED] Have you had any challenges supervising First Generation Professionals/those with challenges when it comes to fit and professionalism?

24. [IF NOT DISCUSSED AND ONLY FOR SUPERVISORS WHO SUPERVISED FGPs] In our recent research with FGPs, some FGPs said that some supervisors do not know how to engage FGPs or recognize challenges they experience because of

their FGP background. How difficult do you think it is to engage FGPs and recognize any FGP-related challenges [like inability to network] they experience?

25. What about difficulty in resolving these issues?

PART D: GENERAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
THE FIRST GENERATION PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM

26. For each of the First Generation Professionals/those with challenges that you have worked with, how prepared do you think they were to play the role of a professional in the workplace?

27. What – if anything – about their preparation would you change?

28. Have you ever been a mentor to one or more First Generation Professionals/those with challenges in the workplace?

29. Was this through a formal program or an informal arrangement?

30. [IF EVER A MENTOR TO FGPs/YOUNG PROFESSIONALS] What has been your experience being a mentor to First Generation Professionals/those with challenges?

31. Did you initiate the mentorship or did they?

32. How do you support your mentee [PROBE WITH THE FOLLOWING TOPICS AS EXAMPLES IF NEEDED: CAREER GUIDANCE, INTERPERSONAL, PERSONAL, WORK-RELATED]? [IF THE PARTICIPANT REPORTED “YES” TO ITEMS IN PART C OR HAS WORKED WITH FGPs OR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS] If a program were made to help First Generation Professionals/those with challenges in the workplace, what should be included in the program?

33. [IF THE PARTICIPANT IS AN FGP (WILL NEED TO CONFIRM BEFORE INTERVIEW)] What kinds of training or experiences would have helped you better adjust to the workplace?

34. Is there anything you would change as far as how your agency deals or doesn't deal with challenges faced by First Generation Professionals/those with challenges in the workplace?

35. Based on what we've talked about today, what are the most important things for the Department of Commerce to remember from this discussion?

36. Does anyone have any final comments? Thank you very much for your participation!