



## **Greenberg Millennial Project**

*Focus Group Guidelines*

*December, 2007*

### **I. Introduction (10 minutes)**

- Confidentiality/anonymous/first names only in this discussion
- Mirrors/taping/transcripts/colleagues behind glass
- *Focusing tonight on issues involving current events, the political process, and your attitudes about the future and the challenges our country faces*
- Most important thing to keep in mind tonight is that we're here for one reason, and that's to hear **your opinions** – no right answers, no wrong answers
- Participant introductions

### **II. Defining the Millennial Generation (35 minutes)**

- When we look at America, we often talk about our history in terms of generations – groups of similar age and experience who often share specific attitudes and priorities regarding the world around them – Baby Boomers, Generation X, and so on. As you look at your own generation of Americans under 30 – which includes all of you here tonight – do you believe that your generation shares specific beliefs, attitudes, and experiences that set you apart from generations that have come before you?
  - **Open-ended discussion, get everyone involved**
- What is it that is unique about your generation?
  - Are there specific experiences that have helped to define your generation?
- What are the motivations or values that drive your generation of Americans? Where do those values come from?
  - Young adults in the 80's and 90's were often referred to as the 'Me Generation.' Do you feel your generation is focused more on personal goals or on the greater good?
    - **[IF GREATER GOOD]** What does it mean to pursue 'the greater good?' How do you do that in your life?
    - **[IF GREATER GOOD]** Would it be better to refer to your generation as the 'We Generation' rather than the 'Me Generation?'
- Yours is the first generation to have really grown up with the technology of the Internet, cell phones, e-mail, and so on. How has this shaped your generation?



- How would you label the values and beliefs of your generation? [**Open-ended, let them offer language initially**]
  - We often hear political views described on a scale, with liberal on one side and conservative on the other. Do you believe your generation's values fit anywhere on this scale?
  - Another term we hear more and more these days is 'progressive?' Do you feel this is an accurate description of your generation's values and beliefs? Why/why not?
  - Is there another term in this vein that you would use that is a better fit?
  - Do you believe your generation is patriotic? What does that mean to you?

### III. Measuring Today's Leaders (15 minutes)

- How would you rate the overall leadership – whether it be political leaders, corporate leaders, religious leaders, etc. – in our country today?
  - [**IF NEGATIVE**] How are our current leaders failing us?
  - What does this say about the major institutions in our society?
  - Are there any individuals or organizations who you feel are providing effective leadership? Who, and what are they doing that sets them apart?
- Let's talk specifically about our political leaders. How would you rate the political leadership in our country today?
  - **Move beyond Bush to a larger discussion of the broader political culture**
  - We've heard a great deal in recent elections about so-called 'social issues' – especially gay marriage and abortion. Do you feel these issues should be a major part of our political dialogue? Why/why not?
- So, if our current leaders are failing, where does that leave us?
  - You've all heard the saying, 'If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.' Is that the case here? Can your generation take the lead in changing the direction of this country? Why/why not?
  - What will it take to get people in your generation to take action?



#### IV. Identifying the Challenges (15 minutes)

Now, I'd like to talk in more detail about some of the specific issues and challenges facing our country today.

- What do you see as the greatest challenges facing our country today?
  - How did this issue become such a big problem in our country?
  - Is the problem getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same?

#### [Written Exercise – Handout #1]

- Now I'd like you to look at Handout #1 in the packets I'm handing out. You'll see a list of some of the major challenges facing our country today – 10 in total. I'd like you to read through the list and then rank order these 10 challenges in terms of the importance of that issue and the urgency with which our country must address it, with 1 being the most important issue for our country to address and 10 being the least important of those listed.
  - a. *America's dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels like coal, natural gas, and oil*
  - b. *Declining quality and rising inequality in America's public education system*
  - c. *The rising cost of health care and growing number of uninsured*
  - d. *America's rapidly growing national debt*
  - e. *The future solvency of Social Security, Medicare, and other social insurance programs*
  - f. *Illegal immigration*
  - g. *The threat of terrorism*
  - h. *A trade imbalance (amount imported minus amount exported) of \$1 trillion / yr*
  - i. *The influence of lobbyists and special interests in our government*
  - j. *A lack of long-term job, benefit, and retirement security for U.S. workers*
  - **Go around room, get rank order of priorities from each person, discuss**
  - **If not discussed already, be sure to probe on energy, health care, deficit, special interests**

## V. Charting a New Course (25 minutes)

- So, now that we've identified the problems, let's talk about the solutions. Do you believe we are moving in the right direction to address any of these big problems that we just discussed?
  - **[IF YES]** What progress do you see being made?
  - Who is providing the leadership needed to produce a solution?
  - Is this a model that can be applied to other issues?
  
  - **[IF NO]** Why do you think there is no progress being made?
    - **Probe on failed leadership, who is to blame**
  - How do we reverse course? Where will the leadership come from?
    - **Push on ability of their generation to provide the leadership**
  - What is the role of government in meeting these challenges?

### [Handout #2]

- Now let's talk about some of the specific issues we just discussed, starting with health care.
  - We all know the situation with health care – costs are rising, employers are offering less and less coverage, and there are more uninsured people than ever. At the same time, we see rapid increases in obesity and chronic diseases. What will it take to solve this problem?
  - Take a look at Handout #2, where you'll see a statement about addressing this issue. We'll read it together, then discuss it.

*Each new generation is suffering an epidemic of chronic, preventable diseases due to a polluted environment, a lack of basic health care, and the poisons we feed them every day. Every child in America – regardless of race, class, or income – should have full health coverage and proper nutrition. Parents must be taught the impact that preventive care and proper nourishment will have on a child. If we continue to spend more and more money on health care without addressing the root causes of this crisis, we will only weaken our economy and condemn millions more children to suffering and disease.*

- What do you think of this statement? What stands out to you?
- What can your generation do to make this a reality?
- What will it take to get them motivated and to take action?

**[Handout #3]**

- Next, let's talk about our country's dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels.
  - We've already talked about some of the implications of this issue, but what will it take to solve the fundamental problem here?
  - Take a look at Handout #3, where you'll see a statement about addressing this issue. We'll read it together, then discuss it.

*Our dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels is the greatest threat to our national security, our quality of life, and our economic future. That's why we must launch a massive, concerted national effort, similar to the Apollo Program that put a man on the moon, with the goal of moving America beyond fossil fuels and inventing the next generation of energy, based on new technologies such as hydrogen or fusion. This plan would require a huge national investment but would produce millions of new jobs, dramatically reduce environmental damage, and free us from our dependence on foreign oil that subsidizes regimes who support the terrorists who are targeting us.*

- What do you think of this statement? What stands out to you?
- What are the consequences if America is not the country that innovates the next generation of energy sources?
- What can your generation do to make this a reality?
- What will it take to get them motivated and to take action?

**[Handout #4]**

- Let's shift gears again now and talk about our national debt.
  - Our national debt is now over \$8 trillion and increasing at a record rate. A growing percentage of that debt is owned by countries – most notably China – that will be our greatest competitors and potentially adversaries in the decades to come. Again, what will it take to address this problem?
  - Take a look at Handout #4. Again, we'll read it together, then discuss it.

*We must stop our elected leaders from spending money they don't have and passing their crushing debts onto our generation. But we can't dig out of this hole simply by cutting spending here or raising taxes there. We must rebuild our economic base by restoring the industrial infrastructure needed to provide the essential components for our defense and basic needs and reversing the decline of our middle class, which has always fueled our greatest economic expansions. This will in turn allow us to end our huge structural trade imbalances and more effectively compete with countries who currently exploit our growing need for basic goods.*

- What do you think of this statement? What stands out to you?
- What can your generation do to make this a reality?
- What will it take to get them motivated and to take action?

**VI. Millennial Leadership (15 minutes)**

- OK, so now we've talked about the challenges and some of the solutions. Your generation is the most at risk here, but you also represent the largest generation in American history with – as we've discussed – a unique set of experiences and beliefs and the potential to wield real power on these issues. What role can your generation play in addressing these challenges?
- How would members of your generation lead in a different way?
  - What is the vehicle for change?
    - **Probe on government, big businesses, small businesses, charitable organizations, individual action, collective social movements**
    - **[IF INTERESTED IN COLL. SOCIAL MOVEMENT]** How can people affect change more effectively by coming together in a collective effort?
- How much of a difference can one individual make? Are there any specific actions you have taken to try to make a difference in your world?



**[Written Exercise – Handout #5]**

- Let's get more specific on this point. On Handout #5, you will see a list of actions that individuals can take to try to make a difference. In the first column, please mark how many of these steps you have already taken in your life. In the second column, mark actions you would be likely to take, but haven't yet. And in the third column, mark the steps you would be unlikely to take.

*Voting in federal and local elections*

*Blogging about political/social issues or participating in online chat groups or forums*

*Signing petitions or sending letters to your elected officials*

*Attending public meetings or forums*

*Writing newspaper/magazine letters or articles*

*Participating in public protests or demonstrations*

*Base personal purchasing decisions on political/social behavior of the companies producing those products*

*Volunteering or working for a political campaign*

*Joining political/social groups and participating in regular actions with them*

*Founding a business or other organization with political/social objectives*

*Running for office*

- **Show of hands on each level, then discuss**

**VII. Postcard (5 minutes)**

**[Handout #6]**

- Corporations and organizations often have a mission statement that seeks to capture the nature of the organization, the values that drive it, and the goals toward which it strives. I'd like you to think for a moment and craft a mission statement for your generation of Americans.

- **Written only, do not discuss**