

**ARTICLE 51**

**WORKGROUPS/FOCUS GROUPS/EMPLOYEE INPUT**

**The purpose of this article is to provide bargaining unit employees an opportunity to provide input on existing or future SSA policies, procedures or initiatives.**

**Whenever the agency intends to form or continue a workgroup, focus group, conference call, on-line chat or other method of including bargaining unit employee input, the Agency will follow the policies and procedures shown below.**

**Should employee input be gathered through other means than those included in this article, such as social message boards, such information will be gathered in accordance with the following policies and procedures that would be most appropriate based on the nature of the activity.**

**Section 1. Workgroups**

**If a workgroup is formed to address any Agency issue concerning programmatic and/or process change, SSA should strongly consider participation of both AFGE and bargaining unit employees.**

**If the Agency decides not to utilize either AFGE or bargaining unit participation in the workgroup, the Agency will communicate with AFGE, at the General Committee level, regarding such decision and will engage in pre-decisional input with AFGE utilizing the procedures of Article 41.**

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**If the Agency decides to include either AFGE or bargaining unit representation on such a workgroup, notice will be provided to AFGE at the appropriate level. The procedures below will be used for selection of workgroup members.**

**A. The Parties agree to utilize the following process for recommending and selecting workgroup members chosen from the bargaining unit who will serve in an Agency “assignment of work” capacity as follows:**

**The Union will recommend “assignment of work” workgroup members based on the following criteria:**

- 1) Knowledge of subject matter appropriate for workgroup activities**
- 2) Technical skills necessary for workgroup activities**
- 3) Performance rating of successful**
- 4) Ability to work in a group environment**
- 5) Other criteria as may be appropriate for the particular workgroup as agreed to by the parties.**

**B. The Agency will select workgroup members from the recommendations provided to them from the Union. If the Agency does not agree to the initial recommendations, the Union will have the option of submitting**

47 **additional recommendations or designating individual(s) to serve as**  
48 **Union representative(s).**

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50 **C. If the Agency selects workgroup members based on the**  
51 **recommendation by the Union, it shall inform the workgroup member**  
52 **that his/her role as a workgroup member is in an Agency “assignment**  
53 **of work” capacity. It is understood that the recommendation and**  
54 **selection for workgroup membership in an Agency “assignment of**  
55 **work” capacity shall be based solely on the above criteria.**

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57 **D. All selected workgroup members’ accounting of time spent shall be**  
58 **charged in the same manner as all Agency “assignment of work”**  
59 **responsibilities. As such, employees selected for participation in**  
60 **Agency workgroups, in accordance with these procedures, will be**  
61 **evaluated and are eligible for consideration of awards based upon work**  
62 **performed in connection with these workgroups. Any resource**  
63 **individual selected in connection with a workgroup will be treated in the**  
64 **same manner as a workgroup member.**

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66 **E. The Agency will give serious consideration to invite the Union to name**  
67 **employees to serve as full participants in all existing workgroups as of**  
68 **the effective date of this agreement. The Agency will provide a list of all**

69           **existing workgroups to the Union within 60 days of the date of this**  
70           **Agreement.**

71

72       **F.     Workgroup meetings will be scheduled at times that allow all**  
73           **participants to be present throughout the meeting and will be in**  
74           **accordance with Article 10 of this Agreement.**

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76   **Section 2. Focus Groups**

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78   **The purpose of focus group meetings will be to provide SSA employees an**  
79   **opportunity to provide input on products, services, and/or ideas, etc. Reports**  
80   **accurately reflecting employee attitudes, opinions, and beliefs will be prepared by**  
81   **professionally trained employees who are members of the focus group team and**  
82   **will be provided timely to the Union , at the appropriate level, at the same time**  
83   **they are provided to the Agency requestor. One (1) copy of each video tape will**  
84   **be provided to the Union at the appropriate level.**

85

86   **A. The Agency will determine the number of employees and job types for each**  
87       **focus group. The Agency will provide the Union with notice of the proposed**  
88       **site(s), date(s), subjects, and time(s) of the focus group discussions planned**  
89       **no later than thirty (30) days prior to the scheduled discussions.**

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91 **Focus group discussions will be scheduled for dates and times which**  
92 **minimize any adverse impact on employees. Focus groups will not be**  
93 **scheduled to begin outside of core hours. Additionally, office lunch/break**  
94 **rooms or rooms used for lunch/break purposes will not be used for focus**  
95 **group meetings. Focus group meetings will not be held on the day**  
96 **immediately preceding and/or following a holiday. Site selection will**  
97 **emphasize safety, security, parking availability, etc. The Agency agrees to**  
98 **consult with the Union regarding any specific Union objection to a selected**  
99 **site.**

100

101 **B. The Agency will select a moderator who has received training from a**  
102 **recognized professional research organization, and is certified as a focus**  
103 **group moderator by such organization. Moderators will take every step to**  
104 **ensure the confidentiality of the focus group participants.**

105

106 **C. Based upon the screening guide (that identifies the demographic or other**  
107 **factors to be considered when selecting participants) developed for each**  
108 **focus group issue, the Agency and the Union will seek bargaining unit**  
109 **volunteers to participate in the focus groups. Employees will be asked to**  
110 **notify both the Union and Management if they wish to volunteer. A solicitation**  
111 **form for this purpose is listed in Attachment A to this Article.**

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113 **The Union Local/Council President, or designee, will select 2/3 of the**  
114 **respondents for focus groups conducted with bargaining unit employees.**

115 **Management will select 1/3 of the respondents for these focus groups.**

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117 **The Agency designee who makes management's selections will provide a**  
118 **listing of the employee selected to the Union's Local President, or designee,**  
119 **no later than 20 days prior to the date set for the focus group activity. The**  
120 **Union will make their selections known to the Agency's designee no later than**  
121 **10 days prior to the focus group discussion.**

122

123 **Either party, at its option, may defer selection authority regarding a specific**  
124 **focus group to the other party. If elected, this must be documented in writing.**

125

126 **D. All travel shall be paid in accordance with Federal Travel Regulations and this**  
127 **Agreement. Employees will not be required to carpool. In the event overnight**  
128 **lodging is necessary, management will make no recommendation regarding**  
129 **accommodation unless mutually agreed to by the parties.**

130

131 **E. Employees will not be precluded from earning credit hours, overtime, or**  
132 **compensatory time in lieu of overtime should their commute and/or focus**  
133 **group time exceed the normal tour of duty for that day pursuant to this**  
134 **Agreement.**

135

136 **F. Opinions, statements, etc will not be attributed to individual employees, and**  
137 **no employee shall be subject to redistribution for personal opinions.**

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139 **G. Any recording made of the focus group session (audio or video) will be used**  
140 **solely to compile the report of focus group findings. Any and all tapes will be**  
141 **destroyed within thirty (30) days of the issuance of the final report, or within**  
142 **ninety (90) days of the recording (whichever comes first). Video tapes will**  
143 **only be viewed by the moderator and another focus group team member for**  
144 **completion of the final report.**

145

146 **During the videotaping, employees will be identified by first name only. Under**  
147 **no circumstances will the audio or video record be made available to any**  
148 **other agency official, other than the copies to the Union.**

149

150 **H. The Employer will not issue any publication or video that references these**  
151 **meetings as “AFGE approved” or implying AFGE approval, nor presented in**  
152 **such a manner in which the audience would reasonably infer AFGE approval,**  
153 **without first obtaining concurrence from the Union.**

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159 **APPENDIX A**

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161 **SOLICITATION OF INTEREST FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION**

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163 **Date:**

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165 **To:**

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167 **From:** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Agency Designee): FAX:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

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170 \_\_\_\_\_ **(AFGE Designee): FAX:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

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173 **Subject: Focus Group** \_\_\_\_\_

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176 **We are asking volunteers to participate in a focus group on the above issue**  
177 **scheduled for:**

178

179 **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

180

181 **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

182

183 **A focus group is a group discussion (normally 8 to 10 persons) led by a**  
184 **moderator. The purpose is to explore the perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and**  
185 **beliefs of participants about a product, service, idea, etc. The focus group**  
186 **discussion, which will normally last between 1 and 1 ½ hours, will be videotaped**  
187 **to ensure the results of the group discussion are accurately reflected in any**  
188 **report.**

189

190 **If you are interested in participating in this focus group, either hand deliver, fax or**  
191 **electronically submit this form to both the Agency and the Union designee above.**  
192 **You will be notified if you are selected.**

193

194 **I wish to volunteer as a participant for the above focus group.**

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196 \_\_\_\_\_  
197 **Print name**

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199 \_\_\_\_\_  
200 **Work location**

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202 \_\_\_\_\_  
203 **Office telephone number**

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\_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail address**

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**Specific job position: BA, CA, T2 CR, T16 CR, Generalist CR, SR, TSR, Case Technician, etc.**

**RETURN THIS FORM ONLY IF YOU ARE VOLUNHTEERING FOR THE FOCUS GROUP**