

Moderator guide

2023 Pew Research Center Asian American focus group study

Note: The following instructions were given to moderators who led focus group discussions in the Center’s 2023 Asian American focus group study, conducted across the United States from Feb. 7 to Feb. 23, 2023. Each focus group had eight participants and the discussions lasted for 90 minutes.

Objectives: Building on the 66 focus groups among 18 Asian American groups conducted in 2021 and a national survey conducted in 2022-23, Pew Research Center is seeking to better understand the experiences of Asian Americans with economic mobility in the U.S. – specifically moving up the economic ladder and their views of achieving the “American dream.”

This research will explore:

- Attitudes about economic mobility in the U.S.
- Experiences with economic challenges and economic mobility
- Disparities that exist within the Asian American community

The following discussion guide is a tool used as a road map to facilitate the flow of the discussion and is not intended to be read as a script. We will cover each topic area and explore opportunities as they present themselves during the focus groups.

ROADMAP FOR THE DISCUSSION

Category of information to be covered	Approx. allotted time
Stage I. Welcome/Ground rules/ Self-introduction	10 min
Stage II. Immigration or refugee experiences & language (for immigrants) or Experience growing up & U.S. educational experiences (for U.S. born)	15 min
Stage III. Community & resources	20 min
Stage IV. Current economic situation context	20 min

Stage V. Writing exercise on their American dream	5 min
Stage VI. American dream discussion	15 min
Stage VII. Closing	5 min
TOTAL TIME ALLOWED	90 min

STAGE I

Welcome/Ground rules/Introductions [10 minutes]

PURPOSE: Hi, my name is _____, and I will be the moderator for today’s discussion. I work with the Pew Research Center – a nonpartisan research organization that collects data about issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world and reports findings without identifying individuals.

AGENDA: You were invited today to share your thoughts and experiences as an Asian living in America. Our discussion will last roughly 90 minutes and you’ll be doing several things in this session: participating in a group discussion and participating in a brainstorm session. There are no wrong answers tonight.

DISCLOSURES: This session is being recorded and all responses today will be kept confidential. There are also research team members observing this group. They are here to learn from this discussion and help me along in case I have missed anything. The results of this research will be used to create a report to inform the American public of the experience being Asian in America. This report will not contain any personally identifiable information. I would like to thank you in advance for being here – I’m looking forward to a lively discussion tonight with different opinions expressed across the topic.

REMINDER: When you were recruited for this group, you filled out a survey, a consent form stating you were over the age of consent in your state, and that you understand **this is a voluntary session and you can leave at any time.**

GROUND RULES: There are some rules for this group to make an efficient session:

- Please speak one at a time and in a voice at least as loud as mine.

- If more than one of you want to talk at the same time, I will start with one person then go to the other.
- If there is a question you do not want to answer, you can say “pass.”
- I am interested in how each of you thinks on these questions. However, you don’t have to answer every question.
- I would encourage everyone to be mindful of equal “airtime,” so that no one talks too little or too much.
- Say what is on your mind whether or not anyone else agrees with you.
- Excuse yourself at any time to visit the restroom or get a drink. Only one person out at any one time so the discussion continues to go forward.
- Anything anyone wants to add to ensure this is a space we all can participate fully in?

INTRODUCTIONS: What I’d like to do is start off with some introductions and an ice breaker question. Tell me your:

1. First name (or the name you would like to be called)
2. How long you’ve been living in [**CITY LOCATION OF THE GROUP**] and where you moved here from or if you’ve been here all your life
3. Your favorite place to get food in [**CITY LOCATION OF THE GROUP**]

STAGE II [IF IMMIGRANT]

IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE EXPERIENCE [15 minutes]

4. Everyone here at this table immigrated to the United States from somewhere else, so I want to begin our discussion by talking about your experience coming to the United States. Can you start by telling me about what led to you to leave your home country and come to the United States?

PROBE: How old were you when you came to the United States?

5. What did you do to prepare for your move to the United States?

PROBE: What about financially, what did you do to prepare?

PROBE: How financially prepared did you feel when arrived in the United States?

6. What challenges, if any, did you face when first arriving in the United States?

PROBE: What was the source of some of these challenges? (**LISTEN FOR:** Their race/ethnicity)

PROBE: Were there any economic challenges you faced when you first came to the United States?

EXAMPLES (IF NEEDED): Finding a job, difficulty paying bills, affording rent/mortgage, paying for medical care or emergencies

PROBE (IF LIVED IN CO-ETHNIC COMMUNITY): How did living among mostly people like yourself affect you economically? (**LISTEN FOR:** More/less challenges, more/less assistance)

PROBE: Were you able to read, write, and speak English before you came to the United States?

7. How do you think your life would have been different if you hadn't come to the United States?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: How different would your *economic prospects* be?

CLARIFICATION (IF NEEDED): You'd be either more or less financially secure compared to where you are today. Perhaps your job or housing situation would be different.

8. Thinking about your life here, what do you think it means to be successful in the United States?

PROBE: Do you feel that you have achieved success based on that definition? Why or why not?

STAGE II [IF U.S.-BORN]

GROWING UP/EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE [15 minutes]

9. I want to begin our discussion by talking about your experience growing up in the United States. What was your experience like in the school system where you grew up?

PROBE: Were there a lot of other people like you in your schools?

IF YES: What impact did going to school with others like yourself have on your experience?

IF NO: What was it like being [**ETHNIC GROUP**] where you grew up?

10. What challenges, if any, did you face growing up?

PROBE: Were there any economic challenges for your family growing up?

LISTEN FOR: Unemployment/job loss, difficulty affording rent/mortgage, food, bills, medical care/insurance, paying for emergencies

PROBE: What was the source of some of these challenges? (**LISTEN FOR:** Their race/ethnicity)

PROBE (IF NOT MENTIONED): What about local crime, violence, or gang activity?

11. What did you expect to do when you became an adult? How did that compare to your parents' expectations?

12. For those of you that have relatives that were born and raised **outside** the United States, how do you feel that your experience growing up was different than theirs?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: What has been easier/harder for you having been born in the U.S.?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: What differences in *economic opportunities* have you experienced because you were born in the United States?

13. Thinking about the present day, how would you define what it means to be successful in the United States?

PROBE: Do you feel that you have achieved success based on that definition? Why or why not?

STAGE III**COMMUNITY/RESOURCES [20 MINUTES]**

MODERATOR: Now I'd like to learn more about your community and the people you spend time with and lean on in challenging times. Community is something that people define differently. How do you define community? Who do you consider to be part of your community?

PROBE: Is your community primarily made up of other **[ETHNIC ORIGIN GROUP]**, other Asians not in your ethnic origin group, or non-Asians?

PROBE: How important is it to you to have Asian people in your community?

14. What are some of the challenges facing the Asian American community specifically today?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: Economic inequality?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: What about the amount of economic opportunities to advance your financial situation?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: Racism/racial discrimination?

PROBE: Are there any challenges that are unique to the **[ETHNIC ORIGIN GROUP]** within the Asian American community?

LISTEN FOR: Whether participants describe local or national issues

15. When you face challenges in your life, who do you turn to when you need help?

PROBE: Who do you go to for financial help specifically?

MODERATOR: We are seeking to understand here if people seek economic help when in need once or is it after several times? Is it for one-time assistance or something more long-term?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: Family or friends?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: Churches, mosques, temples, or other religious institutions?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: Government assistance (local, state, or federal level?)

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: Asian community organizations?

PROBE: At what point when experiencing economic difficulties do you think it is appropriate to ask for help?

PROBE: When others close to you have faced (economic) challenges in their lives, have they turned to you for help? How have you helped them?

STAGE IV

CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION CONTEXT [20 minutes]

MODERATOR: Thinking more about your life today...

16. In general, how would you describe your current financial situation?

PROBE: How comfortable or stressed do you feel about your current situation and why?

PROBE: How do you feel about your current ability to save money for the future?

What do you want to be saving money for?

PROBE: Have you ever had to take on gig work (e.g., Door Dash, Uber) or a second job to make extra money?

PROBE (IF IMMIGRANTS): Are you better or worse off today than you expected to be when you immigrated?

17. Where do you think it is easier to achieve economic success – here in the U.S. or in your family's country of origin? How come?

PROBE: What things affect someone's economic success in the United States?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED (gender): What about gender, does a person's gender affect their opportunities for economic success here in the U.S.? How come?

PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED (education): How is education related to success, if at all?

18. Thinking more broadly, there is a stereotype in America that Asians are a “model minority” – raise your hand if you’d heard of this phrase being applied to Asians?

MODERATOR: Say the number of people raising their hand out loud.

IF THEY HAVEN’T HEARD: The term model minority is often applied to Asians as a group stereotypically being viewed as more successful than other minority groups.

PROBE: How does this term make you feel?

PROBE (IF NEEDED): Do you or anyone you know fit into this stereotype?

STAGE V

WRITING EXERCISE ON THE AMERICAN DREAM [5 MINUTES]

MODERATOR EXPLAINS: I am now going to pass out paper and a pen to everyone for a writing exercise. When you think of the “American dream” what do you think of? I’m going to give you 3 minutes to write down or draw your thoughts – whatever helps you think – and then we can discuss. **MODERATOR:** Pass out paper and pens

19. Now that everyone’s had some time to think about it, let’s go around and share what we wrote. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers! I’ll write the responses on the white board for everyone to see – who wants to get started? **MODERATOR:** Write down what participants say

STAGE VI

AMERICAN DREAM DISCUSSION [15 MINUTES]

20. Of all the things I have written down, which do you think is the most important when it comes to achieving the “American dream”? Why?

MODERATOR: Probe on which resonates the most with people and which resonates the least. Check if anyone is interpreting items on the list differently from others.

21. Which aspects of the American dream are easiest to achieve?

PROBE: Which are hardest to achieve?

22. What barriers do people like you experience to achieving the American dream?

PROBE: How much does race, citizenship, language, and religion come into play in achieving the American [dream]?

PROBE IF IMMIGRANT: How important is it to be able to speak English well to get ahead in the United States?

How helpful is it to have materials that are translated or to have a translator available?

23. In what ways do you think you have or have not achieved the American dream?

PROBE: What about younger or future generations?

STAGE VII

CLOSING [5 MINUTES]

24. We've talked a lot today about your financial experiences and achieving the "American dream" today – looking ahead to the future, what's one thing that could help improve your financial situation or make it easier for you to achieve the American dream in this country?

25. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me today that we haven't gotten a chance to cover?

MODERATOR: As the end of our session approaches, I would like to thank you for sharing your stories and opinions on various issues we talked about today. I learned a lot about your unique experiences. This will help me to write my final report. Thanks again and have a wonderful day!