Are You Planning on Conducting Research Online?

Research that utilizes the internet as a resource is becoming increasingly popular. These types of research involve many of the same considerations as other forms of human subjects research. As such it is important for Investigators to consider the following when designing their projects:

**Informed Consent** - Is obtaining written informed consent appropriate or even feasible for your study? Examples of types of internet research in which an Investigator may obtain informed consent from subject(s) without requiring a written signature include:
- Online surveys and questionnaires
- Interviews not conducted in-person, i.e. via Skype or email

Note: If your study meets specific conditions, you can apply for a waiver of documentation of informed consent in the IRBaccess application form.

**Recruitment** - All study recruitment procedures must be described in your IRB protocol. Please be as specific as possible when listing all formats to be used for recruiting potential subjects such as e-mail, blogs, Facebook, and/or the use of any online forums or websites. DO NOT post any recruitment materials without first securing prior IRB approval.

**Subject Privacy and Confidentiality** - Consider if the collected data will be either:
- Anonymous – in which it is impossible to trace data or study information back to individual participants at any point of the study, even by the researcher; or
- Confidential – in which data can potentially be identified and/or linked to a particular individual. It is possible to de-identify data by aggregating participant responses and removing all individually-identifiable information such as participant names and contact information.

How to Obtain Informed Consent Online

In the event the IRB grants a waiver for the requirement of written documentation of informed consent, the IRB must still review a written description of the information that will be provided to subject(s). Investigators should provide internet consent documents that include all the elements of a regular signed consent form. Investigators should also maintain the format of the template consent document, with study specific information added, as much as possible. These documents can then be:
- Posted at the start of a survey or questionnaire for subjects to read and review; or
- Forwarded to subjects prior to beginning an interview (the Investigator may also verify consent verbally before starting the interview).

Please contact the Office of Research Support with any questions, comments, or concerns.
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