

# Contacting Organisations, Institutions or Business for Research Purposes - Human Research Ethics Guidelines

## 1. Context

These guidelines outline the procedures to be followed by University researchers when seeking to involve organisations, institutions or businesses in research projects.

## 2. Scope

These guidelines apply to two primary types of external organisation involvement:

- i. the distributor model - where the organisation is simply a conduit to potential participants in research; and
- ii. the organisational case study or workplace research model - where the organisation is itself the subject of the research; and
- iii. a mixed model with features of both.

## 3. Models of External Involvement

3.1 Distributor Model - a conduit to potential participants.

- i. In the distributor model of external involvement the organisation is not the subject of the research.
- ii. The organisation is used only to provide access to potential participants by distributing participant information statements, consent forms and/or surveys, etc.
- iii. This model can provide access to a large potential participant pool of staff, customers or members.
- iv. Participation in the research is voluntary.

3.2 Organisational Study or Workplace Research Model.

- i. In the organisational model, the organisation is the subject of the research.
- ii. Researchers may be seeking, for example, to investigate aspects of the organisation's: performance, management, occupational health and safety practices/standards; staff satisfaction or attitudes.
- iii. Employee participation in this model may be voluntary or be directed by the organisation. The latter is most common in research initiated by the organisation.

3.3 Mixed model

In the mixed model:

- i. Some aspects will be from the Organisational Study model e.g. investigation of management practices, and
- ii. Others will be from the Distributor model e.g., client participation coordinated by the organisation.

## 4. Timing and Type of Approach

- i. The type of model used: 'Distributor' or 'Organisational Study' affects the timing and type of initial approach to the organisation by the researcher.

### 4.1 Distributor model

Timing of approach

- i. An approach should be made to the organisation prior to the submission of an application to the Human Research Ethics Committee, to ascertain the organisation's willingness to assist with the research.
- ii. Researchers should ensure that the organisation is willing to distribute invitations or other material, e.g., via email or as hard copies to be left in a staff room. (Note: There

is little point in submitting an application to an organisation with policies that preclude distributing surveys to people.)

- iii. Written indication (e.g., an email) of support from the organisation should be provided with the ethics application.
- iv. The organisation must be advised that the research will not proceed until reviewed and approved by the University's HREC.

#### Type of approach

- i. An approach can be informal, eg via email, but must be directed to a person in the organisation who has the authority to make that decision and is in a position to distribute, or direct the distribution of participant information statements, surveys, consent forms, etc.
- ii. The researcher should never ask the organisation to provide the names or details of potential participants without the prior consent of the individuals involved. The only exception occurs if the information is in the public domain, eg the membership lists of some associations which are publicised.
- iii. Equally, a researcher must not advise the organisation of who has or has not participated.

### **4.2 'Organisational Study' model**

#### Timing of approach

- i. An informal in-principle agreement to participate in the research may be obtained from the organisation prior to an ethics application.
- ii. However, formal, written approval must be obtained after all relevant documents have been approved by the HREC and have been sighted by the organisation.

#### Type of approach

- i. The formal approach to the organisation must be: (i) in writing; (ii) addressed to a person with the appropriate authority in the organisation; and (iii) accompanied by documents which have been approved by HREC and already sighted by the organisation.
- ii. The accompanying documents should provide all necessary details including who is eligible to be a participant and what will be required of them.
- iii. In addition, the organisation must be provided with an information statement setting out the research, details of the organisation's involvement, and a consent form for signing.

## **5. Issues to consider**

### **i. Potential participants must be made aware of method of contact**

The information statement for participants approached via an organisation must state how they have come to receive the invitation to participate in the research. E.g., "You are being invited to participate in this research because you are a member of the Master \*\* Association (M\*\*A). The M\*\*A is distributing this invitation to its members on behalf of the researchers and has not provided any information about you to the researcher."

### **ii. Protection of organisational contacts**

An individual's decision must be informed and freely given. Recruitment methods should ensure this. Where participation is voluntary, i.e., not directed by their employing organisation, future contacts

between potential participants and the researchers should be direct i.e. not through the organisation.

The information statement must:

- assure recipients that the organisation will not be advised as to who participates; and
- explain how potential participants can contact the researchers for further information or to return surveys, consent forms, etc.

Face-to-face activities, e.g., interviews or focus groups, should ideally be held at a venue other than the organisation's premises. This is particularly important if participants are asked to comment on organisational practices or their relationship with the organisation and could be disadvantaged if the organisation was aware they had participated.

### **iii. Anonymity**

When possible, participants should be able to contribute to the research anonymously; identifying information should therefore not be collected. Survey research, unless it has a follow-up phase, or there is a duty of care to respond to information collected, should not ask for identifying information. It then does not need a consent form. Consent is implied by participating, i.e., participants receive full information about the research and what it involves and indicate their consent by completing and returning the survey.

Feedback of results to participants can be catered for by either:

- publishing a summary of the results via the organisation's newsletter or company bulletin;
- posting a summary on a website participants can access;
- providing them with a *Request for Summary of Results* form which they can return separate from the anonymous survey; or
- providing an email address for them to lodge a request for a summary.

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