
 DIVISION OF RESEARCH & INNOVATION Research Integrity & Compliance		Institutional Review Board Standard Operating Procedures	
Title: Conducting Research Using Crowdsourcing Platforms			
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Approval/Date: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <hr style="width: 100%;"/> Jamie Peno Assistant Vice President, Research Integrity and Compliance </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 4/1/2021 Date </div> </div>			
REVISION HISTORY			
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to define of the appropriate use of compensated research panels, or crowdsourcing platforms, by Researchers performing human subjects research at UNT.

SCOPE

This SOP delineates systematic process activities and functions for compliance with the US Department of Health and Human Service, Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Common Rule requirements, and University of North Texas (UNT) requirements for the management, coordination, and operation of the Institutional Review Board program. It applies to all staff members whom are engaged in the operations and support of the Institutional Review Board, and to all UNT researchers performing human subjects research.

DEFINITIONS/ ABBREVIATIONS

1. Definitions

- 1.1 *Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk)*: A crowdsourcing platform where participants take part in Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) for which they are paid. HITs posted to MTurk dashboard and may include requests such as answering survey questions, transcribing services, data entry, or identifying photos of products. MTurk participants are called workers. Those who recruit workers to complete HITs are called requestors. The MTurk Acceptable Use Policy prohibits the collection of personally identifiable information from workers, such as email addresses.
- 1.2 *Crowdsourcing*: An arrangement in which a separate third-party entity aggregates a large group of people to perform a task or provide information online via a research survey.

Typically, the third-party entity is responsible for compensation of the research participants. Crowdsourcing does not include cases where the participant is known and compensated directly by the UNT researcher.

- 1.3 *IRB*: An appropriately constituted group that has been formally designated to review and monitor research involving human subjects.
- 1.4 *Principal Investigator*: The individual who is actively leading and/or supervising the initiation, execution, and completion of a research project in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and institutional policy governing the conduct of research. It is ultimately the PI's responsibility to ensure that all personnel actively working on the project and interacting with human subjects are following the guidelines of the approved protocol and are treating subjects in a manner befitting ethical use of human subjects. The PI should be the party responsible for submitting the research protocol, providing the RIC or the IRB with requested changes in order to garner approval, and for following the guidelines stipulated for annual review of the protocol and submission of any modification requests.
- 1.5 *Prolific*: An alternative crowdsourcing platform that was specifically designed for academic research. Prolific has established a minimum amount that participants can be awarded per hour (\$6.50) and has standards in place for the fair treatment of participants. Prolific also stores information about participants, including participants' demographic information.
- 1.6 *Qualtrics Panels*: A crowdsourcing platform where participants are recruited from a variety of sources, including website intercept recruitment, member referrals, targeted email lists, gaming sites, customer loyalty web portals, permission-based networks, and social media. When participants are invited to take a survey, they are informed by the Qualtrics Panel provider how they will be compensated for their participation. Compensation may be distributed in a variety of forms such as loyalty points, gift cards, and cash.
- 1.7 *Researcher*: An individual performing various tasks related to the conduct of human subjects research activities, such as obtaining informed consent from participants, interacting with participants, collecting data and communicating with the IRB.

2. Abbreviations

- 2.1 HIT – Human Intelligence Task
- 2.2 IRB- Institutional Review Board
- 2.3 MTurk - Amazon's Mechanical Turk
- 2.4 OHRP- Office for Human Research Protections
- 2.5 PI- Principal Investigator
- 2.6 RIC- Research Integrity and Compliance
- 2.7 SOP/SOPs - Standard Operating Procedure(s)

RESPONSIBILITIES

This SOP is applicable to all members of Research Integrity and Compliance and Institutional Review Board members who are involved in record keeping, reviewing, or approving research studies for the Institutional Review Board program. This SOP is also applicable to all UNT Researchers performing human subjects research under the oversight of the UNT Institutional Review Board.

PROCEDURE

1. IRB Reviewer Responsibilities

- 1.1 Research projects utilizing crowdsourcing platforms are reviewed by the IRB just as

any other human subject research study. Additional considerations may include the establishment and protection of human research participants' identity, research data security, and compensation concerns.

1.1.1 Because the nature of research involving these technologies continues to evolve, it is not possible to identify every circumstance or type of research activity that may warrant special consideration.

1.1.2 If there are circumstances that are unique to a human subjects research study, the IRB will review these circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

2. The following crowdsourcing platforms may be used by UNT Researchers for the conduct of Human Subjects Research:

2.1 Amazon MTurk

2.2 Prolific

2.3 Qualtrics Panels

3. Researcher Responsibilities

3.1 Researchers are often required to enter into a contract through the University with the vendor to provide some or all of the services related to the creation and management of crowdsourcing surveys.

3.1.1 All contracts should be reviewed by the Research and Commercial Agreements office. Investigators are advised to collect data using third-party survey software with known policies for data security and anonymity.

3.2 The responsibilities of the Principal Investigator for human subjects research studies utilizing a third-party crowdsourcing platform conducted under the oversight of UNT IRB include:

3.2.1 Addressing the following items, in addition to standard items required in IRB submissions, specific to the use of the crowdsourcing platform:

3.2.1.1 Description of which platform will be used;

3.2.1.2 Description of how participants will be identified as eligible for participation in the study;

3.2.1.3 Data that will be collected from participants, including survey questions, demographic information, and any identifiers (including IP address and worker IDs);

3.2.1.4 Conditions under which participant work will be rejected;

3.2.1.5 The plan for participant compensation as described by the crowdsourcing platform;

3.2.1.6 Conditions under which participants will not be paid such as failing attention checks, discontinuing participation, or failing to complete the study tasks;

3.2.1.7 The time required to complete the research study;

3.2.1.8 Description of risks including the potential for loss of confidentiality;

3.2.1.9 Description of attention checks that will be employed; and

3.2.1.10 The consent document should explicitly mention that the research project is "research" and not a "job."

3.2.1.10.1 Survey question responses must be voluntary and contain language stating that prospective participants may choose not to participate or stop participation in the research at any time.

3.2.2 Tracking participants to ensure all participants have been compensated in the format stated within the consent form and in accordance with any signed contract related to the project. Researchers are required to keep logs showing the number of participants enrolled, including their study ID number.

- 3.2.3 If any identifiers are collected by the Researchers, the data must be deidentified at the earliest point possible.
- 3.2.4 The following language is required to be contained within the consent form for the use of MTurk:
 - 3.2.4.1 “This research examines [purpose described]. You will be asked [a series of questions about these issues.] The survey should take [#] minutes to complete. After completing the survey, you will be paid [amount] for your participation. We do not ask for your name or any other information that might identify you. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any question, but you must proceed to the final screen of the study in order to receive your completion code, which you must submit in order to be paid. In accordance with Mechanical Turk policies, we may reject your work if the HIT was not completed correctly or the instructions were not followed. If you have any questions about the research please contact me at [email address] if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, contact UNT’s Institutional Review Board at untirb@unt.edu or 940-565-4643.”
- 3.2.5 The following language is required by all platforms as an explanation of compensation:
 - 3.2.5.1 “Compensation for participation is not being provided by the University of North Texas researchers. Upon survey completion you may be compensated in the amount previously agreed upon when you started the survey by [Amazon MTurk; Prolific; your Qualtrics Panel Provider]. Any compensation is directly provided by [Amazon MTurk; Prolific; your Qualtrics Panel Provider]. If you choose not to complete part or all of study procedures, or if you fail attention checks, you may not be compensated for participation. If you have questions or would like to discuss issues regarding your compensation, please contact [Amazon MTurk; Prolific; your Qualtrics Panel Provider] directly. You may also discuss this with the research team at [contact information].”

REFERENCES

1. US Department of Health and Human Service, Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)
2. 45CFR46

APPENDICES

1. IRB SOPs