

Incentives Guidelines

Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guideline is to provide researchers with information related to the ethical use of incentives as it pertains to research related activities.

TCPS2 Definitions:

Incentive (also known as Honorarium) - Anything offered to participants, monetary or otherwise, to encourage participation in research. Examples include cash, gift cards, draws, gifts, course credit etc.

Reimbursement – Payment to participants to ensure that they are not put at a direct, or indirect, financial disadvantage for the time and inconvenience of participation in research. Direct expenses refer to the costs incurred, and indirect expenses refer to losses that arise because of research participation. Examples include paying for transportation, gas, or parking at the research site.

Undue influence – The impact of an unequal power relationship on the voluntariness of consent. This may occur when prospective participants are recruited by individuals in a position of authority over them (e.g., doctor/patient, teacher/student, employer/employee).

Use of Incentives

The TCPS 2 states that any incentives and reimbursements to individuals for their participation in research-related activities must not undermine the voluntary nature of their consent. These must not be so large or attractive as to encourage a reckless disregard of risks. Payment is not based on effort or how well a participant performs in a study.

To maintain the element of voluntariness, participants must be free to withdraw their consent to participate at any time, without offering any reason for doing so. The participant should not suffer any disadvantage for withdrawing, which means that incentives to be paid prior to the point of withdrawal cannot be withheld.

In considering the possibility of undue influence from incentives and reimbursements, researchers should be sensitive to issues that may affect the voluntariness of consent such as:

- a. Economic circumstances of those in the pool of prospective participants,
- b. Age and decision-making capacity of participants,
- c. Customs and practices of the community, and
- d. Magnitude and probability of harms.

The TCPS 2 also states parents, guardians and/or authorized third parties should not receive incentives for arranging the involvement of the individual they represent. However, they may accept reasonable reimbursement on behalf of that individual, as long as these are suitable to the circumstances.

Considerations When Including Incentives

Researchers should consider several points when developing their incentives plan:

- What type of incentive will be offered?
- How will participants receive the incentive?
- When will participants receive their incentive?
- What information will you need to collect from participants to provide the incentive?
- How will you store this information?

Value of Incentives

While the TCPS 2 does not provide values for what is considered reasonable, the REB will review the incentive proposed to ensure it is appropriate (sufficient but not so large as to unduly influence participants to join or stay in the study when they would otherwise have withdrawn). It is the responsibility of the researcher to justify all incentives.

Payments

Ordinarily, incentives for a study that has one data collection point are given to participants after they have consented to participate in a study.

If there are multiple data collection points, payment may be made as the study progresses with each payment provided at the beginning of each data collection point.

Payment cannot be contingent upon the participant completing the study.

Example: If a participant is asked to complete 8 surveys over a period of time (e.g., 1 per week for 2 months), they can be paid for each survey that they begin and not be paid for those surveys they do not begin.

Information in the REB Submission

The amount of the incentive and the method and timing of disbursing payments must be included in the initial submission. The REB will review both the amount of payment and the proposed method of disbursement to ensure that plan is fully justified and complies with the TCPS2. Information on incentives must be included in the consent form.

Amendments must be submitted for any changes to the approved incentive or disbursement plan.

Note that payment to participants for participation in research studies is not considered a benefit when describing risks and benefits of the proposed study.

Special Considerations:

Online Surveys

Wording in the consent form should be clear that participants may skip any questions and still receive compensation when they reach the end of the survey.

Instructions are needed in the consent form to inform participants on how to receive compensation if they decide to withdraw from the study.

Example Language (to be adapted): “You may withdraw from the study for any reason. You do not have to explain why. You will not be penalized in any way. However, to receive your honorarium you must click through to the end of the study. You do not have to respond to any subsequent questions.”

Course Credit

To avoid unduly influencing students to participate in research with the offer of participation credits or bonus marks/percentages, an assignment of equal/equitable effort and time commitment must be provided to all students being invited to participate in a research opportunity, in the event some wish to qualify for the bonus but do not wish to participate in the research.

International Research

When providing incentives to participants outside of Canada, researchers should ensure that the incentive is not seen to unduly influence participation. Incentives should be culturally appropriate, considering the standard wage (for monetary incentives) or forms of gifts typical for the region/culture. Discussing the issue of incentives with community leaders and/or experts during the consultation/planning phase of the research is highly advised.

UM Finance Information

Information on gift card and honorarium declaration forms can be found [here](#).

Gift card and honorarium declaration forms must be kept for 7 fiscal years.

Please note that if participants will be receiving an honorarium or honorariums over \$250 in a calendar year, a non-employment payment to a Canadian individual under \$5,000 [form](#) must be completed.