

Research Ethics Bulletin #5: RESEARCH INVOLVING SURVEYS

Outlined below are some tips for researchers when conducting research that involves a survey (either paper-based or online).

Obtaining and Documenting Consent

It is a general principle that prior to participating in research participants must give their free and informed consent. When collecting data through a survey, evidence of consent may be documented via completed questionnaires (in person, by mail, or by email or other electronic means). This form of consent is called 'implied consent.'

If the implied consent model is proposed, it is recommended that a cover letter for the survey or a 'letter of information' for the participant be developed that contains the elements of consent (Article 3.2 of TCPS2 outlines the required elements of consent).

Online survey tools

Ideally, Canadian companies with servers located in Canada should be used for survey purposes rather than using online survey companies located outside of Canada. Familiarize yourself with the privacy policy of the website you are using.

Use of enhanced security features is recommended for identifiable and/or sensitive data. You can enhance security features by enabling the SSL (Secure Socket Layer) feature within the survey tool.

Survey companies housing data in the USA:

If necessary to use a survey tool which houses information in the USA, the information/consent letter for participants must contain a statement regarding data storage and privacy. For example:

The on-line survey company, *name of company (e.g. SurveyMonkey)*, hosting this survey is located in the United States. The US Patriot Act allows authorities to access the records of internet service providers. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. If you choose to participate in this survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and may be accessed in the US. The security and privacy policy for the web survey company can be found at the following link: (*insert a link to the company's security and privacy policy*).

Unless you indicate otherwise when constructing your survey, a U.S.-based company's servers will record incoming IP addresses – including that of the computer that participants use to access the survey. You are advised to set up your survey to collect anonymous responses. The procedure for this depends on the type of collector(s) you are using:

- If you use a Web Link Collector (or any other collector), you must configure it to not collect IP addresses.
- If you use the Email Invitation Collector, you must configure it to not save the email addresses (in the Analyze section) and not to collect IP addresses.

Note about FluidSurveys: In 2014, SurveyMonkey acquired Fluidware, provider of FluidSurveys. For FluidSurvey accounts, the data is hosted in Canada; however, admin data may be shared internationally and the survey data may be shared outside of Canada. For further information, you can access FluidSurveys' Privacy Statement here:

<http://fluidsurveys.com/about/privacy>.