

Guidance Document	Guidelines for Incentives, Reimbursement, and Compensation
Effective Review	NMREB and HSREB; Delegated & Full Board
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Purpose:

The purpose of this REB guideline is to provide researchers with information related to the ethical use of incentives, reimbursements, and compensation as it pertains to research-related activities.

Important Notes:

- Payments from researchers to participants must be done in accordance with institutional policies and procedures, including *MAPP 2.16 - Travel & Expenses Reimbursement Policy*.
- Reimbursements to researchers are outside the scope of the REB. Researchers are responsible for understanding their obligations.
- Donations to charitable organizations in lieu of participant compensation are not permitted.
- *Contact Western University Financial Services (Research Finance) for more information.*

Definitions:

Incentives

Incentives are distinct from compensation or reimbursements in that they involve pre-determined schemes to reward participants for responding in particular ways on various tasks. That is, incentives are typically based on participants’ performance within the study/experiment. It is important to note that incentives are only appropriate in certain study designs. In order to facilitate informed consent, researchers need to disclose the maximum and minimum possible incentive that an individual participant can obtain in the study. When applicable, incentives should be unrelated to any other compensation (i.e., above and in addition to a ‘base’ compensation). As well, if there are any factors that could impact the maximum or minimum amount of incentive a participant could obtain (e.g., group assignment), then this needs to be disclosed and justified, and participants should have equal opportunity to be entered into either group in order to promote the principle of justice and minimize any inequities. Any exceptions to these guidelines will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis within the context of the specific research objectives and proposed study design.

Reimbursement

Reimbursement is payment to participants to cover out-of-pocket expenses incurred by participants for participating in the study, such as travel expenses, food costs, parking, etc. This amount could vary per participant based on the cost of the expenses (i.e., gas and parking versus bus fare). Participants may be asked, by the study team, to provide receipts for reimbursement. It should be clear in the Letter of Information if participants will be reimbursed, what they will be reimbursed for, how they will be reimbursed, and any limits on reimbursement.

Compensation

Compensation may be offered to participants, monetary or otherwise, for their participation in research. Forms of compensation could include (but are not limited to) cash, gift card, cheque,

reward points, prizes, research credits or bonus grades for students. While research projects do not need to offer compensation for participation, compensation can be provided to acknowledge participation in a research project and is an important consideration when assessing voluntariness. Where compensation is offered to participants, it should not be so large or attractive as to cause participants to overlook the potential risks involved with the study.

When determining the compensation being provided, be sensitive to issues such as the economic circumstances of those who may be prospective participants, the age and decision-making capacity of potential participants, applicable customs and practices of participating communities, and the magnitude and probability of harms. When there are different participant groups or study procedures for which compensation will be offered, researchers need to offer equitable compensation for each group or activity.

The logistics of providing compensation to their participants must also be considered. What type of compensation is being provided? How will participants receive compensation? What information is required of participants to receive compensation? How will this information be collected/stored? Who will have access to this information? It is important to understand the logistics of providing compensation to ensure participants are able to receive promised compensation even if they skip questions or withdraw early, and also so that all relevant information can be properly disclosed to participants.

Compensation for Injury

As per TCPS2, article 3.2j and GCP 4.8.10 j, information about compensation and/or treatment available to a participant in the event of a study related injury must be included in the consent form.

Recruitment Panels Providing Compensation

Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) - MTurk allows researchers to recruit participants for online surveys through their panel and allows researchers to provide monetary compensation to participants anonymously. The amount of compensation provided through MTurk is at the discretion of the researcher. When deciding how much compensation to provide, researchers should remember that compensation for participation is intended to ensure that participants are not put at a financial disadvantage for the time and inconvenience of participation in research. The amount provided should not be such that it will compromise the voluntariness of the research. Also, be sure to confirm the mechanism for facilitating compensation to participants based on the specific study design. For example, will a unique Human Intelligence Test (HIT) code be provided to participants (e.g., at the end of the survey/experiment, or will the researchers collect participants' MTurk ID? Also, be sure to verify what currency participants' compensation will be provided in (e.g., USD) and communicate this accordingly.

Prolific Panel - Prolific is a recruitment panel which offers financial compensation to panelists who consent to participate in research and the same considerations apply as with MTurk described above. In addition, note the currency participants' compensation will be offered in and describe it accordingly (e.g., £, if applicable).

Qualtrics Panel – Participants are provided compensation based on their agreement with Qualtrics. Qualtrics provides points for various rewards systems, such as Air Miles or Aeroplan points. While this compensation is provided to the participants directly from Qualtrics and may not be able to be pre-determined and specified in the WREM application and Letter of Information, participants must still be able to skip any question they wish and receive their compensation, and participants recruited for the same task must receive equitable compensation.

SONA – Research credits may be provided to students who participate in research when it is included in their syllabus, and they are recruited through a departmental research recruitment database. Often, compensation is 0.5 research credits per half hour of expected participation. Researchers must ensure they are following departmental policies and procedures when using SONA for research recruitment (note: these policies and procedures are outside of the jurisdiction of Western’s REBs).

Considerations for Online Research

If you are conducting an anonymous online survey and offering compensation, this necessarily requires the collection of identifiable information such as email address. However, directly identifiable information cannot be obtained in the same survey with the survey data. As such, participants must be prompted to provide their information on a survey link separate from their data. This way, their data would remain anonymous, and the contact information would be collected/stored in a separate database solely for purposes of compensation.

Be aware when conducting online research that there is a possibility that persons or bots may complete the survey multiple times to receive compensation. Unfortunately, all ‘participants’ must be compensated even if the activity is suspicious. To mitigate these issues, researchers could choose to add Captcha’s, attention checks, or other creative strategies.

For more information on this issue, refer to the NMREB guideline, [Ethical Challenges in Online Research: Bots, suspicious data and other issues](#), available [here](#):

Compensating Western Students with Course Credit/Grades

To avoid unduly influencing students to participate in research with the offer of participation credits or bonus marks/percentages, students must be given an alternate opportunity to obtain that same credit/bonus apart from participating in research. For example, an assignment of equal/equitable effort and time commitment must be provided to students who are being invited to participate in a research opportunity in the event they wish to obtain the bonus but do not wish to participate in the research opportunity.

Pro-rated Compensation

Compensation can be pro-rated based on the tasks or sessions a participant is asked to participate in. For example, if a participant is asked to complete 6 surveys over a period of time (e.g., 1 per month for 6 months), they can be compensated for each survey that they begin, and not compensated for those they do not begin. Another example is if participants are randomly assigned to different conditions requiring different time commitments from them (i.e., condition one is expected to take 1 hour while condition two is expected to take 2 hours). As such, if a participant is assigned to condition one, they are asked to respond to a survey but if they are

assigned to condition two, they are asked to respond to the same survey and participate in an additional task. Participants in condition two could be entitled to additional compensation for participating in the additional task. This plan for pro-rated compensation should be clearly described within the letter of information.

Compensation cannot be pro-rated based on time spent participating in the study. For example, if participation is expected to take all participants 2 hours, compensation should be based on the entire 2-hour timeframe, and not pro-rated by actual time spent participating. It is not acceptable to indicate that participation will be pro-rated per half-hour for example (i.e., “You will receive \$5 per half-hour of participation”), as participants are free to withdraw at any time without consequence, and participants should not be compensated differentially for spending different amounts of time to complete the same tasks.

Use of Third-Party Vendors to Facilitate Compensation

Any use of a third-party vendor to facilitate compensation needs to be disclosed to the REB and to participants. For example, if you will be using an online gift card distributor, which requires the collection of the participants’ email address in order to process their compensation, then participants need to consent to the researchers sharing their email address for this purpose. The sharing of participants’ information should be minimized whenever possible and this can only be done with participants’ prior informed consent.

Where should I disclose compensation/reimbursement/incentives?

Recruitment Materials - You may only include a simple statement of compensation or reimbursement on recruitment materials such as “you will be compensated/reimbursed for your time/travel”. Dollar amounts must not be specified in recruitment materials.

Letter of Information and Consent (LOI/C) document – In order to provide fully informed consent, participants must be informed of all applicable compensation/reimbursement/incentive information in the LOI/C. The compensation/reimbursement/incentives section should have its own header and should not be included under the benefits section. Include specific information such as amount of compensation or reimbursement and method of receiving it. If there is a draw, additional information is required, per Western’s Office of Legal Counsel, which can be found in the LOI/C guidance documents (NMREB: Appendix A; HSREB: Appendix B), available [here](#).

WREM Applications –The plan for compensating/reimbursing participants must be clearly described in the WREM application for REB review and approval. The application will have a section dedicated to describing this plan. Neither reimbursement, incentives, nor compensation should be included on the application or LOI/C as a direct benefit to participating.

NOTE: If you wish to modify the compensation or reimbursement scheme after initial approval has been issued, then an amendment will be needed, and all applicable sections of the Amendment application and corresponding study documents will need to be submitted with these changes for approval, prior to implementing this change.