

Seeking Alternative Ways of Gaining Consent in Social Science Research

Chapter 2 of the *National Statement* states that research participation should be “voluntary, based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of the purpose, methods, demands, risks and potential benefits of the research. This information must be presented in ways suitable to each participant” (p. 19). Sometimes it is challenging to do this by standard ways of communication e.g. in an overseas country with particular cultural standards or when the participants may be particularly vulnerable (eg homeless children who cannot read) so alternative procedures are sometimes needed.

Section 4 of the *National Statement* has chapters on special situations such as research involving children and young people, people in dependent relationships, people who are highly dependent on medical care, peoples with cognitive impairment, people involved in illegal activities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people in other countries. In these situations, it is especially important for researchers to demonstrate ethical capacity and integrity.

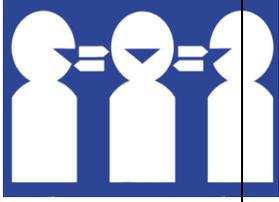
Some alternative ideas for consideration are:

1. Recruitment

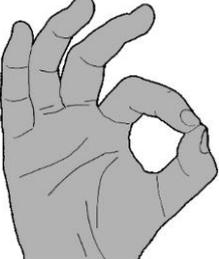
- Researchers need to demonstrate cultural understanding in order to recruit in the most appropriate manner and be aware of the local context by accessing local government agencies, non-government organisations and support networks.
- Negotiate recruitment with networks, directly or word of mouth.
- A different process may be needed for recruiting vulnerable participants eg sometimes recruitment needs to be done through “liason” where a “trusted contact” might be used. eg in Pakistan, cultural and traditional norms do not appreciate direct approach with people who are not known to the participant or may not be trusted. When using an intermediary it is important that they are aware of ethical conventions and will respect the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

2. Negotiating Informed Consent

- An information sheet is preferred but if this is not possible (eg participants cannot read) then key aspects of the research still need to be communicated. In some cases this can be done by alternative means such as using culturally appropriate images of who approved the research and the data gathering methods including interview/focus group verbally, written, actions.
- Images can also be used to convey the methodology. Below are some sample images. There are samples only and should NOT be copied, as the nuances of each situation and participant group need to be taken into account.

Approval	Interview	Focus group	Survey	Interpreter
				

- It is important for participants to also be aware of harm/discomfort/inconvenience and benefits
- It may also be culturally appropriate to encourage participants/informed others to identify risks involved in the research as well as identifying ways to minimise the risk.

No risk	Risk	Checking	Stopping	Security
				

3. Establishing Consent (see p. 19-24 of the National Statement, which requires the researcher to establish that consent has taken place)

Establishing consent should meet three conditions:

- (i) sufficient information provided;
- (ii) (ii) adequate understanding, and
- (iii) (iii) be voluntary:

4. Recording consent

This can be done by various methods, depending on the research project.

- Where identifiable information is being collected the consent documentation should include the name of the participant.
- Where no identifiable information is being collected (eg an anonymous survey) some form of tacit consent should be used.

Examples of mechanisms to record consent include obtaining signatures, verbal consent which may be audio recorded or documented in field notes or a diary, and tacit consent such as clicking on an acknowledgement on a web site or returning a survey form.

Please note that for long term projects consent may need to be renegotiated at different stages.