

SOP #: 002 – 15-16

**Title: Use of Online Web-Based Survey Tools for Research with Human Participants**

## **1.0 PURPOSE**

TCPS 2 (2014) builds its guidelines on three core principles – one being Concern for Welfare. A contributing factor to participant welfare is ensuring the privacy and control of participant information, which includes participant data housed by survey companies. Researchers and REBs must ensure that participants are not exposed to unnecessary risks, and, if risks are present, that participants are made aware of these risks (i.e., collecting and housing online data).

The use of online web-based survey tools has become a popular method for data collection from human research participants. Web-based surveys are a cost effective way of administering a survey that allow researchers to collect large amounts of information for typically a very low cost at a rapid rate in a timely manner. Web-surveys are convenient for participants and typically assume a minimal level of computer literacy.

This Standard Operating Procedure outlines the precautions that must be taken when using survey companies to ensure that participants are aware of privacy risks and agree to the survey company terms.

## **2.0 DEFINITIONS**

Research Ethics Board (REB): The body of researchers, community members, and others with specific expertise established by Lakehead University to review the ethical acceptability of all research involving humans conducted within Lakehead University's jurisdiction or under its auspices.

Web-based Survey Tool – A survey designed for completion and submission on a computer or any electronic device connected to the internet.

## **3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES**

Data anonymity and confidentiality can be vulnerable when collected and stored via the internet. Researchers planning to use online survey companies must acquaint themselves with the relevant laws. For example, survey companies that house data in the USA are subject to the US Patriot Act which allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers, thus access to research participants information. One example of a popular survey provider with information housed in the USA is SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>)

Ideally, Canadian companies with servers located in Canada should be used for survey purposes for researchers conducting research in Canada. The Research Ethics Board

endorses no particular online survey tool. However, for researchers who wish to look into Canadian-hosted sites, the following links may be helpful:  
<https://www.qualtrics.com/> (choose option CA1 when purchasing license to ensure data storage is in Canada)  
<http://hostedincanadasurveys.ca/>

Researchers and participants must understand that any data collected online and stored electronically is subject to some risk of privacy.

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.

#### **4.0 PROCEDURES**

##### 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 the following statement:

*Please note that the online survey tool used in the study, (add here the name of the survey company), is hosted by a server located in the USA. The US Patriot Act permits U.S. law enforcement officials, for the purpose of anti-terrorism investigation, to seek a court order that allows access to the personal records of any person without the person's knowledge. In view of this we cannot absolutely guarantee the full confidentiality and anonymity of your data. With your consent to participate in this study, you acknowledge this.*

##### Survey Companies housing data outside of the USA (including data housed in Canada):

For survey tools outside of the USA, the information/consent letter for participants must contain the following statement:

*Due to collection and storage of data via an online tool, we cannot absolutely guarantee the full confidentiality and anonymity of your data. With your consent to participate, you acknowledge this.*

Following this statement, the Information Letter must contain the steps the researchers *will* take to protect confidentiality (as described in the REB Informed Consent Checklist) i.e., methods for secure storage of data, who has access to the data, that participants will not be named in publication of results, etc.

The REB suggests, if feasible, that the researcher offer the option of paper-based surveys.

#### **5.0 REFERENCES**

- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2014 (TCPS 2014), Article 1.1

- SurveyMonkey.com

- Qualtrics.com
- Department of Justice USA
- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- UBC Research Services webpage

Author: \_\_\_\_\_REB Coordinator\_\_\_\_\_

REB Chair: \_\_\_\_\_L. Chambers\_\_\_\_\_

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