UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Why do I need to complete a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form?

Ethics approval is required for any research that involves human participants (including yourself) and/or their tissue or data.

Remember – you may not start collecting data until you have received ethics approval

Participant Information Sheet

The Participant Information Sheet contains all the information anyone taking part in your research may need. It is important as it provides participants with the information, they may need in the event they have any issues or questions relating to your project.

All University of Sussex research uses the Participant Information Sheet template provided at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/apply. This allows UoS to ensure that accurate and relevant information is provided to participants and is all the same standard and presentation.

What do I need to do?

Work your way through the Participant Information Sheet template and adapt it to your research project. You can delete the sections/information that are not relevant to your research as you go, but you should keep the headings as they are currently.

Remember that your participants need to fully understand this document, so try to use non-academic language and spell out any anacronyms if you use them.

When might a Participant Information Sheet not be appropriate?

It may be the case that your research involves a participant group who may be at risk from holding physical copies of information that relate to your research (such as those in precarious employment, economic migrants or those experiencing domestic violence) or your research might involve participants who may not understand fully or engage with this document. In such cases some researchers consider other ways to relay this information to their participants such as a webpage or audio recording of the information.

If you are considering another method of relaying the Participant information you will need to ensure that all the information in the template is covered and state clearly in your ethics application why you have chosen this approach.

Consent Form and Verbal Consent Form

Informed consent is one of the founding principles of research ethics so that human participants can enter research freely and voluntarily with full information about what it means for them to take part. A fundamental principle of ethical research is the expectation that participants can give consent after fully understanding possible risks, inconvenience or the possibility of any harm. Great care is needed in ensuring consent from a participant regarded as 'vulnerable' is clearly informed. In some instances, achieving this may need the assistance of a parent, guardian or carer.

Consent should be obtained **before** the participant enters the research. The minimum requirements for consent to be informed are that the participant understands what the research is and what they are consenting to.

What do I need to do?

Firstly, decide if a Consent Form (paper copy or PDF, signed by the participant) or Verbal Consent Form (information is read out to the participant by you, and then the agreement of consent by a participant is recorded by you) is best for your research project.

If you are meeting participants offline and in a physical setting then usually a Consent Form is the most appropriate method of gaining consent, whereas if you are conducting interviews online using (UoS MS Teams or UoS Zoom) then Verbal Consent may be more appropriate.

The templates for these documents can be found at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/apply and you should adapt these according to your research, making sure you remove any information that is not relevant to your research (video recording, photographs etc).

Whichever way you obtain consent from a participant, you need to store this data securely. Paper copies of Consent Forms (scanned) and Verbal Consent recordings should be stored in your UoS OneDrive as soon as you have them and deleted from any other location.

Remember that participants should understand and know how to withdraw from your research at any time during their participation. This could be by speaking to you directly or via email. You should also provide participants with a specific date/time by which they can no longer request withdrawal from the research (such as a week after an interview has taken place etc). This prevents the possibility of a participant withdrawing from your research during your writing-up process.

Case Study

Jacmen wants to interview a participant group whose culture mistrusts written documents and especially the use of signatures on 'official-looking;' documents. He wants to make sure that this participant group are aware of the implications of taking part in his research and especially the withdrawal process as some of the information they might provide is legally complex. This participant group are often 'on the move' and can be difficult to physically locate for research.

How might Jacmen gain meaningful consent from this group?