# RYERSON UNIVERSITY

# Research Ethics Board Guidelines for

**Incentives, Reimbursements and Compensation for Research Participants**

# Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to provide researchers with an understanding of what constitutes reasonable incentive for participation in research and what might constitute undue influence or coercion.

**Definitions (as stated in the Tri-Council Policy Statement - TCPS2)**

**Incentives** are anything offered to participants, monetary or otherwise, for participation in research

**Reimbursements** are payments to participants to ensure that they are not put at a direct, or indirect, financial disadvantage for the time and inconvenience of participation in research. Direct expenses refer to the costs incurred (e.g. parking, transit cost, paying for child care), and indirect expenses refer to losses that arise, because of research participation (e.g. taking unpaid time off work).

**Compensation** relates to any reparation, damages or restitution a participant may be entitled to due to injury resulting from research.

# Reasonable Incentives

Incentives are used in research to encourage participation but the incentive must not be so large or attractive that it compromises voluntariness.

Researchers may consider reimbursement for direct and indirect costs that a participant will incur (e.g., travel costs, child care); however the TCPS distinguishes reimbursement from incentive.

The TCPS does not recommend or discourage incentives. Justification for incentives must be included in the REB protocol. It is not possible to specify exactly what amount of incentive will be appropriate. Each case must be determined on its own merits and should be consistent with the principle of volunteerism. Researchers should consider sensitive issues such as the economic circumstances of those in the pool of prospective participants, the age and capacity of participants, the customs and practices of the community, and the magnitude and probability of harms (TCPS, p. 30).

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Draws or lotteries are not a preferred method of compensation, but may be ethically acceptable provided that the prize, irrespective of the odds of winning, is not significant enough to unduly influence participation in the study. For research involving draws, information on the prize(s) and its/their value, the probability of winning and the number of participants in the study, should all be provided through the informed consent process.

**Incentive payment, confidentiality and anonymity**

Payment and draws are not usually appropriate for anonymous research, as they would require identification where otherwise none would be needed, and present an unfair advantage to those willing to identify themselves, versus those who do not. However, if personal information (name, phone number) must be collected for payment of incentive or for a draw/lottery the researcher should maintain security of this information throughout the duration of the study, and should destroy the information once payment/prizes have been awarded.

**Incentives, recruitment and consent**

In general, recruitment techniques (e.g., advertising) should not focus on incentive as a means of enticing potential participants. It is inappropriate to use incentive as the main reason for individuals to consider participation in research. Any incentives (as well as reimbursements and compensation if appropriate) must be stated through the informed consent process. The REB should review all advertising materials – flyers, print ads and internet postings – to ensure that they are appropriately written and displayed.

**Withholding incentives**

Participants of research should not be disadvantaged or suffer reprisal for withdrawing from research or not fully completing a study. Such reprisal would negate the voluntary nature of research. Participants should be free to withdraw at any point without penalty. As such, any payment that a participant is entitled to must be provided to the participant regardless of the point of withdrawal from a study. If a lump-sum payment was stated for participation, the participant is entitled to the entire amount. If a payment schedule was used, payment will be in proportion to their participation. An hourly rate of participation should be avoided due to differences between individuals ability to complete research tasks. Rather, a payment schedule based on commencement of each stage of research should be offered. When research involves multiple occurrences or takes place over a series of time period, final payments should not be offered. Rather, a payment schedule should be developed.