

Ethics process and plan

Ethics best practice when working with
citizens and research participants



Overview

This is an overview of the ethics process for User Researchers and Service Designers to ensure they meet ethical standards when designing and delivering research with participants. An ethical review is a way to consider the impact of your work on the participants involved and how to safely process the personal data you collect. It should provide a rigorous review that is proportionate to the potential risks.



Overview of ethics process:

When planning a project, you should perform an ethics review and create an ethics action plan for your project. You should engage with project stakeholders throughout. There are steps you should follow, including:

- 1.** Read and understand the ethical principles for designing and delivering research which involves participants
- 2.** Complete an ethics checklist and develop actions to ensure ethical standards are followed throughout the project
- 3.** Submit an ethics plan for sign off, including the project plan and informed consent docs (to your relevant manager)
- 4.** Upload ethics plan to your records management system, e.g. eRDM (see Information Asset Guide for further information)
- 5.** Review ethics plan and make sure the ethics actions happened
- 6.** Discuss effective actions and suggest improvements at any wash-up meetings Improvement Reporting meeting when the project is completed, eg Improvement Reporting meeting

Principles for User Research

Intro

The Scottish Government expects that its researchers follow five key ethical principles:



P1. Do research ethically and ensure results are used and shared

- ✓ Results need to be robust and relevant
- ✓ Findings need to reflect the needs of government business
- ✓ Findings need to be actionable and have purpose in improving a service and/or reducing costs
- ✓ Findings should be shared with public sector colleagues
- ✓ Existing data should be used where possible to avoid unnecessary replication of research
- ✓ Consider the value of researching vulnerable groups and the benefits that the research will bring

P2. Make sure you get consent

- ✓ Tell participants there is no pressure to take part and they can stop at any point
- ✓ Tell participants if audio or visual recording is involved
- ✓ Consent should be tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups
- ✓ If using social media as a research tool or for recruitment, make sure you confirm age, identity and ability of participants

P3. Increasing participation

- ✓ Consider excluded or disengaged groups and put steps in place to help participation, for example providing assistance with costs, like travel and child care
- ✓ Choose an appropriate venue for acoustics and accessibility. Think about different types of disabilities and impairments; Are all areas accessible - not just the room where the research will take place

P4. Avoid personal harm

- ✓ Great reputational harm is associated if this principle is not considered
- ✓ Consider whether post-interview support should be provided
- ✓ Consider the safety of the researchers

Participants may feel uncomfortable if:

- ✓ Research is unnecessary – keep it relevant
- ✓ Intrusive – keep it short and consider each question
- ✓ Gives false hopes – keep questions appropriate

P5. Keeping personal information safe and secure

- ✓ Data must be anonymised and stored safely
- ✓ Dispose of information by shredding or secured recycling

Further information can be found
in the Ethics Guidance for Scottish
Government Social Researchers



Ethics plan

Complete the questions below and identify actions. Make your research meets ethical standards. The questions have been divided into how your research project will run; planning, recruitment, activity, analysis and communication. The final section is on how to make the process safe for the participant and researcher.

Project Name:

Sign off (person):

Project Dates:

Project Type:

Sign off (date):

URE Lead:

Client Lead:

Project planning

Yes **No**

1. Have you identified a gap in existing research, which demonstrates a need to undertake further primary research?
2. When identifying participant groups, what steps have you taken to make sure they are diverse and relevant to the area being researched?

Explain how the project will address inclusion of diverse perspectives

Recruitment

Yes **No**

3. Have you offered British Sign Language (BSL) support in the recruitment process?

(Please provide information if no)

Check that recruitment information provides a statement that a BSL interpreter can be provided if required. For example:

"We can provide BSL interpreters if required. Please give us 2 weeks' notice to ensure we can provide this service." (see appendix 1)

Recruitment (continued)

4. What steps are being taken to encourage participation from excluded or disengaged groups?

Can you take any extra steps to identify and involve excluded or disengaged groups (socially disadvantaged areas, low literacy participants, etc).

5. What steps have you taken to ensure all participants can understand and give informed consent?

Check the consent statement is at a reading age of around 10-11. Use plain English.

Yes No

6. Do your consent forms tell the participants:

The purpose of the project

Who will have access to the information collected

They can withdraw at any time

How information will be securely stored

How long information will be stored for

(Please attach a copy)

Yes No

7. Do any participants need extra assistance to understand and give consent ?

BSL

Interpreter

Carer/helper (proxy)

Under 16

(please explain if yes)

8. If your research includes children (under 16) how will you ensure they understand the purpose of research and what is expected from them? Is the consent opt-in or opt-out?

(please use opt-in wherever possible)

Research Activity

9. When designing the research engagement and materials, what steps have you taken to identify individual needs?

Check questions have a low reading age, use plain English, and have been checked by a context expert in the area.

Analysis and Communication

10. When designing the research materials and analysis, what steps have you taken to reduce bias?

Identify relevant biases and suggest ways to mitigate. See [20 cognitive biases that screw up your decisions](#). What measures are in place to ensure that the reporting and interpreting of findings protects against distortion and bias?

11. How do you plan to share your findings and who will you share them with?

What elements of the research are you going to discuss? What are the most effective and efficient ways of explaining this? What report format best meets the need of the customers/service providers/users? What accessibility measures are in place to ensure information is available to all?

12. Do you need to over sample certain groups, or weight the data?

(please explain if yes)

Have you identified the different types of people that make up the target population, and worked out proportions needed for the sample to be representative? For further information on sampling please check "[what is sampling?](#)" On explorable.com

Participant / research safety

13. If your questions cover stressful or sensitive subjects, how will you reduce stress?

What are you doing to keep the interview length to a minimum? Is there post-interview support? Are you informing the participant that they can stop at any time?

Yes No

14. Are interviewers properly trained and vetted?

Yes No

15. Do you and other researchers have the appropriate level of disclosure?

16. What procedures are in place to ensure the safety of all researchers and participants? (Will there be home visits for the research)

Contact participants in advance to explain the format and introduce yourself prior to meeting. For home visits, check who the participant is more comfortable with (2 female or 2 male or mixed researchers). Researchers should check in with their a designated colleague before and after every home visit.

17. What procedures are in place to ensure participant confidentiality? How is this communicated to the participant? How will this information be kept and disposed of securely?

Where will the information be kept securely? How will notes be disposed of? How will you make sure the information is disposed of in the correct amount of time? When do you tell the participant about this?

Glossary

Bias – an opinion or view that affects the decisions and judgments that people make. By identifying these and considering how to reduce their effect will improve data capture, analysis and insights.

BSL – British Sign Language is a sign language spoken in the United Kingdom (UK), and is the first or preferred language of some deaf people in the UK.

Diverse and minority groups – gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and age.

Participant groups – the individual colleagues or citizens involved in your research project.



Primary Research – research involving data collection of personal information from research participants.

Robust insights – The insight(s) can be tested and remain effective when the situation is varied.

Appendix 1 BSL Inclusion information

Our aim

People whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) will be able to participate on a fair and equal basis in the design of Scotland's digital public services and policies, and will be provided with the information and support required to do so. We will learn how to do this together as part of the national movement to create a shared, Scottish Approach to Service Design.

How we will do this?

We will offer BSL services to participants to allow them to take part in our research. We will offer a BSL interpreter to allow BSL users to participate on a fair and equal basis.

How do I contact a BSL interpreter?

We have been advised by the Deaf Sector Partnership (DSP) that we should use Deaf Action . DSP have advised that we should allow 2 weeks to ensure an interpreter can be booked and attend.

Resources?

One interpreter can sign for between 20-30 minutes. This means if you are doing a 1 hour interview then you will need 2 interpreters, who will divide the signing between them. Please check with Deaf Action for up-to-date costs.

Any other considerations?

You will need to make sure the venue can accommodate the BSL interpreter. If the interpreter is signing for multiple BSL users - where would they stand while signing etc. We will have additional documents to help with considerations for venue use.

Example of text that can be used

"We are working towards being fully inclusive and try to arrange events that allow you to participate. If you require a BSL interpreter or have other personal requirements please contact us on the details provided. We may need to pass this information on to a third party to support your requirements. Please contact us if you are happy for this to happen."

¹ http://www.deafaction.org.uk/our_services_type/communication-interpreting-agency-cia/



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This resource may be made available in alternative formats on request. Please contact phillip.kirk@gov.scot to make a request.