

Ethics for Engaging Participants

Great insights come from establishing a quality and trusted relationship with your participants. When they feel comfortable, they go beyond superficial responses and share at a deeper level. With this level of access and openness the interviewer must be respectful, responsible and honest in every engagement.

Principles of Good Ethics

RESPECT

We honor participants' limits and value their comfort.

Consider: Am I treating our participants as people—as collaborators—rather than “subjects”? Am I aware and considerate of the cultural expectations and sensitivities at play? Are my actions thoughtful and kind?

RESPONSIBILITY

We act to protect people's current and future interests.

Consider: Am I confident that our research isn't harmful to our participants? Is a participant aware of the consequences of what they have shared with me? Do I have their informed consent? Am I sharing information about a participant that might compromise them in some way?

HONESTY

Be truthful and timely in communication.

Consider: Am I doing my best not to mislead participants or leave them with false impressions? When and how should we identify ourselves, what we're doing, and the intended outcome of their participation?

SOME RULES-OF-THUMB TO GUIDE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH PARTICIPANTS:

Successful observations and interviews require a partnership with other people, often strangers, sharing generously their time, thoughts, and feelings. Have consideration for their health, safety, privacy and dignity at all times.

- + Approach people with courtesy
- + Identify yourself, your intent and what you're looking for
- + Offer to compensate participants fairly for their time
- + Describe how you will use this information and why it's valuable
- + Ask for permission to record or take photos/video at the beginning
- + Get permission to use and share the information and any photos or video you take

- + Keep all the information you gather confidential
- + Let people know they can decline to answer questions or stop participating at any time
- + Maintain a non-judgmental, relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere
- + Protect a participant's identity and confidential data before, during and after the interview when agreed upon.

Participant Consent

In private locations, such as people's homes, or when participants visit you, you must always gain informed consent with all participants about information and image capture.

INFORMED CONSENT

An observation consent and confidentiality agreement should always be shared with and agreed to by the participant. If video/ photo/audio recordings are captured during the session, the consent form should explain what the resulting media (film, records, photos) might be used for and get the participant's permission for this purpose.

We design our consent forms and our process of asking for consent to be as human-centered as possible so that we can have a shared sense of mutual trust, respect and understanding throughout the time we are working together.

In many cultures, it is best practice to introduce the written consent form at the start of the session, and leave a copy for reference.

CONSENT FORM

For illustrative purposes, we have included a slightly more generic version of consent forms we might use at IDEO.

There are a couple of things that we've done with this form that we'll call to your attention:

- + Explicitly outlined potential intended uses of the data and media (e.g. to inspire the project team and to educate the client)
- + Assured the participant of the limits of the intended use (we are explicit about not commercially publishing or broadcasting their image and use it only internally)
- + Written it in plain language so as not to disrupt the atmosphere of sharing and openness

A NOTE ABOUT LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONNECTIONS

It's important to understand the local best practice and legal implications of obtaining participant consent and using/ storing/sharing their information. We advise that you work with in-country lawyers to create a consent form that protect both the interests of the research participants and the organization, and that is appropriate for the best practice and legislation of your country.

Recruiting Tips

FINDING AND CONTACTING PEOPLE FOR INTERVIEWS OR OBSERVATIONS

Once you've identified specific profiles or types of people you'd like to interview, you'll need to go out and find them.

Recruiting participants is a craft and creative process all on its own. But we wanted to provide a few tips here to help you get started.

If you just want 1-2 people to observe, interview, connect with and learn from, here are a few ways to find them:

- + Search for people online
- + Send out/post a short online survey for people to respond to
- + Reach out to family and friends with profiles or descriptions of the types of people you'd like to meet
- + Observe people in public places (like arcades, shopping areas or open kitchens)

If you're looking for a larger number of participants (ten or more), we suggest that you look into using a professional recruiter.

TIPS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

When recruiting participants, it's important to:

- + Allow time to locate and recruit the right people in your project timeline. This often takes more time than you might expect.
- + Establish appropriate contact. You want to ensure you're seeing the right types of people who will help you learn.
- + Always offer to compensate people fairly for their time.
- + Be clear about the time period you will be spending with them.
- + Collect participant's details particularly if you're exploring more than a few potential people to meet with (participant's name, address, email and phone number). You'll need this information to get back to them and schedule your visit.
- + Sort through your potential participants. Are you meeting all the right participants? Do you have a spread of the types of people you're hoping to meet?