



The
Research
Society



GLOBAL DATA QUALITY

Incentive Guidelines for Market and Social Research

A Global Data Quality Initiative from The Research Society

2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE	7
Purpose.....	7
Global Scope with Local Flexibility.....	7
1B. ETHICAL AND COMPLIANCE FRAMEWORK	7
Adherence to International Standards.....	7
Informed Consent.....	7
Non-coercive Nature.....	7
Target Audience.....	7
Research Context.....	7
Legal and Ethical Considerations.....	7
2. ROLE OF INCENTIVES IN RESEARCH	8
3. TYPES OF INCENTIVES	8
3.1 Monetary Incentives.....	8
3.2 Charitable Donations.....	8
3.3 Prize Draws or Sweepstakes.....	9
3.4 In-Kind Rewards.....	9
3.5 Flexible Incentives.....	10
4. LONGITUDINAL INCENTIVE PROGRAMS	10
4.1 Tiered Incentive Structures.....	10
4.2 Use of Loyalty Programs.....	11
4.3 Milestone Bonuses.....	11
4.4 Gamification Elements.....	11
4.5 Flexible Incentive Options.....	11
4.6 Frequent, Small Incentives.....	11
4.7 Transparent Communication.....	11
4.8 Personalised Rewards.....	11
4.9 Non-Monetary Benefits.....	11
5. DETERMINING INCENTIVE AMOUNTS	12
5.2 Participant Demographics.....	12
6. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS	13
6.1 Tailoring Incentives to Local Preferences.....	13
6.2 Religious or Cultural Considerations.....	13
6.3 Local Legal Restrictions.....	14
6.4 Vulnerable Groups.....	14
7. COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY	15
7.1 Clear Information.....	15
7.2 Incentive Conditions and Criteria.....	16
7.3 Redemption Process.....	16
8. ENSURING DATA QUALITY	17
8.1 Non-Coercive.....	17
8.2 Avoiding Bias.....	18
8.3 Participant Selection.....	18

Incentive Guidelines for Market and Social Research

A Global Data Quality Initiative from The Research Society



9. DETECTING AND PREVENTING FRAUD	19
9.1 Monitor for Unusual Patterns	19
9.2 Implement Fraud Detection Technologies	19
9.3 Regular Audits and Data Reviews	19
9.4 Set Alerts and Thresholds for Suspicious Activity	19
9.5 Flagging and Investigation Procedures	20
9.6 Protecting Against Click Farms and Bots	20
9.7 Transparency in Invalidating Incentives	20
9.8 Reimbursement for Fraud Victims	20
10. POST-RESEARCH OR REPORT INCENTIVE SHARING	21
10.1 Delayed Sharing	21
10.2 Risk Assessment	21
11. COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING	22
11.1 Legal Compliance	22
11.2 Ethical Standards	22
11.3 Regular Reviews	22
11.4 Detailed Records	22
11.5 Transparency in Reporting:	22
12. PARTICIPANT WELL-BEING	23
12.1 Respect and Fairness	23
12.2 Privacy and Confidentiality	23
APPENDIX	24
Definition of Terms	24

Executive Summary

This document, “Incentive Guidelines for Market and Social Research,” sets out clear guidance for using incentives in market and social research. It provides best practices to ensure participants have a positive and straightforward experience while also protecting the quality and integrity of data. These guidelines are designed for use by research agencies, direct clients, and fieldwork agencies around the world, with room for local flexibility to account for cultural, legal, and economic differences.

1. Purpose and Scope (Section 1A)

The goal of these guidelines is to promote participant engagement and ensure high-quality data collection through a fair and transparent approach to incentives. Incentives should be ethical, respect participant well-being, and be adapted to different research methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The global nature of this document acknowledges that different countries and communities may require tailored practices.

The guidelines:

- Focus on participant well-being and informed consent
- Support global use while allowing local adjustments
- Align with TRS, ESOMAR, MRS, and GDPR guidelines but do not replace legal advice

2. Ethical and Compliance Framework (Section 1B)

These guidelines follow international standards like TRS, ESOMAR, MRS, and GDPR. They focus on getting clear agreement from participants, not pressuring anyone to join, and making sure taking part is a choice. A key point is being open and honest so participants know what the incentives are, any rules for using them, and how their data will be used, all while protecting their privacy and data protection laws.

Incentives should be fair and neutral - they should thank participants, not try to change how they respond. Key principles include:

- **Informed Consent:** Clear disclosure of incentive type, conditions, and participant rights.
- **Non-Coercive Approach:** Incentives should reflect effort, not induce biased responses.
- **Audience Suitability:** Incentives must align with participant demographics, local culture, and research context.

3. Role and Types of Incentives (Sections 2 & 3)

Incentives encourage participation while protecting data quality. They should be simple to redeem and not linked to the research topic.

Types of Incentives:

- **Monetary:** Cash, vouchers, gift cards - most versatile and preferred (3.1).
- **Non-Monetary:** Branded items, free services - good for product-aligned research (3.2).
- **Charitable Donations:** Suitable for socially-conscious demographics (3.3).
- **Prize Draws:** Effective in large-scale surveys but less reliable than guaranteed rewards (3.4).
- **In-Kind Rewards:** Tangible goods tailored to audience needs (3.5).
- **Flexible Options:** Digital vouchers, mobile payments - crucial in diverse markets (3.6).

Each type of incentive comes with tips on how to keep things fair, adjust for different regions, and make sure people know how to use and when they need to use their incentives.

4. Longitudinal Studies (Section 4)

Long-term studies like panels or diary studies need special approaches to keep participants engaged. Incentives should be clearly explained and balance motivation with fairness and budget. Options include:

- **Tiered Incentives** (4.1)
- **Loyalty Programs** (4.2)
- **Milestone Bonuses**(4.3)
- **Gamification:** (4.4)

- **Flexible Incentives** (4.5)
- **Frequent Small Incentives** (4.6)
- **Personalised Rewards:** (4.8)
- **Non-Monetary Benefits:** (4.9)

It is recommended to actively involve participants and ask for their feedback to help keep the data high-quality in long-term studies.

5. Determining Incentive Amounts

Incentive amounts should reflect regional economic factors, participant demographics, how complex the research is, and what's normal in the market. This makes sure that payments are fair and competitive for that area. Things like local cost of living and how much time and effort participants put in are also important to consider, so that incentives are fair and reasonable.

Fair incentive values depend on multiple variables:

- **Regional Economics:** Adjusted for PPP and cost of living (5.1).
- **Demographics:** Professionals and hard-to-reach groups may require higher value (5.2).
- **Time Commitment & Complexity:** Align rewards with effort and task duration (5.3).
- **Market Norms:** Follow industry benchmarks and local expectations (5.4).

6. Special Considerations (Section 6)

Special consideration should be taken when working with vulnerable groups, such as children or older adults, and cultural differences should always be respected. Incentives must be selected carefully to ensure they do not exploit or offend anyone. It is also essential to comply with local laws about which types of incentives are allowed.

Local and Cultural Adaptation:

- **Preferences:** Cash vs. gift cards, relevance to lifestyle (6.1).
- **Religious Sensitivities:** Avoid offensive products (e.g., alcohol in certain regions) (6.2).

Legal Requirements:

- Tax implications, incentive limits, and reporting (6.3).

Vulnerable Groups:

- Tailor approach for children, elderly, and people with disabilities (6.4).
- Secure appropriate consent and offer suitable, non-exploitative rewards (6.4).

7. Communication and Transparency (Section 7)

Clear communication about the types of incentives, how much they're worth, and any conditions is key to building trust and making sure participants have a good experience. This includes giving clear details on who can take part, how to claim incentives, and any deadlines. It's a good idea to have easy ways for people to ask questions or get help, and to be open and honest in all dealings with participants. Clarity and honesty are essential:

- **Disclose incentive type, value, eligibility, and redemption process** (7.1).
- **Conditions & Criteria:** Communicate thresholds, transaction fees, point expiry rules (7.2).
- **Redemption:** Must be simple, transparent, and fee-free to the participant (7.3).

8. Ensuring Data Quality (Section 8)

Incentives should not pressure or sway participants, so that the data stays unbiased. Offering neutral rewards that don't influence what people say helps keep the data accurate and fair. The process for choosing who gets to take part and how incentives are handed out should also be fair and clearly explained, with records to back it up.

Incentives must:

- Be **non-coercive** (8.1).
- **Avoid bias** by remaining unrelated to the topic or sponsor (8.2).
- Support **inclusive selection** to avoid demographic skews (8.3).

9. Fraud Prevention (Section 9)

A strong system for preventing fraud is needed to keep research honest and reliable. This includes things like watching for unusual patterns, using tools to catch fraud, and doing regular checks. It's also important to be open about what will happen if someone acts dishonestly and to have clear steps for dealing with fraud cases.

To maintain integrity and fairness:

- **Monitor Patterns:** Flag unusual redemption or participation trends (9.1).
- **Implement Fraud Detection Technologies:** eg: IP tracking, 2FA, CAPTCHA, and digital fingerprinting (9.2).
- **Conduct Regular Audits:** Detect and rectify discrepancies (9.3).
- **Set Clear Protocols:** For suspension, investigation, and participant education (9.4–9.6).
- **Protect against Bots & Click Farms:** Employ bot detection and IP blacklists (9.7).
- **Ensure Transparency in Penalties** (9.8).
- **Offer Reimbursement for Victims** (9.9).

10. Post-Research Incentive Sharing (Section 10)

Being open about how incentives are shared after the research is very important for keeping participant trust. Practitioners should clearly explain if there are any delays in giving out rewards and should carefully check for any risks before sharing the research findings to protect both participants and the organisation.

11. Compliance and Monitoring (Section 11)

It's important to always follow legal, ethical, and industry rules. Regularly checking incentive programs, keeping good records, and reporting clearly help make sure everything meets these standards and that the organisation stays responsible. To keep this up:

- **Legal Compliance:** Align with local laws (11.1).
- **Ethical Compliance:** Align with local industry codes (11.2).
- **Regular Reviews:** Update programs based on effectiveness and feedback (11.3).
- **Maintaining Detailed Records:** Track incentive distribution with clear logs (11.4).
- **Transparency:** Internally and with external stakeholders (11.5).

12. Participant Well-being (Section 12)

Making sure participants feel safe and respected is key to building trust and creating a positive research environment. This means treating people fairly, giving out rewards properly, and always protecting their privacy and personal information.

Ethical engagement depends on:

- **Respect & Fairness:** Equitable treatment and acknowledgment (12.1).
- **Privacy & Confidentiality:** Data protection and consent are mandatory (12.2).

1A. Purpose and Scope

Purpose: This guideline provides a framework for using incentives in research to boost engagement, improve response rates, and ensure data quality while maintaining ethical standards and prioritising participant well-being.

Practitioners: This document is intended for research agencies, clients, fieldwork partners, and other organisations or panel companies around the world. It provides guidance on offering incentives across different research methods, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups. For this guideline, the term ‘practitioners’ refers to individuals or organisations that offer or manage incentives.

Global Scope with Local Flexibility: The guideline ensures incentives are fair and effective by addressing legal, cultural, and ethical differences across regions, promoting compliance and adaptability.

1B. Ethical and Compliance Framework

Adherence to International Standards: This guideline is designed in alignment with globally recognised industry standards such as The Research Society Code of Professional Conduct, ESOMAR, MRS, among others. It ensures that the ethical use of incentives is grounded in these comprehensive frameworks. In addition to international standards, compliance with local regulations is paramount, as different jurisdictions may have specific rules governing data privacy, participant compensation, and the distribution of incentives. Research agencies, clients, and fieldwork partners must stay updated on these local requirements to avoid legal and reputational risks.

Informed Consent: Participants must be clearly informed about the incentive type, distribution, and conditions. Consent should cover the use of their personal data, ensuring compliance with privacy laws.

Non-coercive Nature: Incentives should encourage participation and express appreciation for participants’ participation, not pressure them or influence how they answer questions. The incentive should fairly reflect the participant’s contribution without creating any bias.

Examples:

- In automotive research, offering participants a test drive of a luxury vehicle as an incentive might sway their opinion of the brand or vehicle—this could bias their responses. Instead, neutral incentives such as general vouchers or digital gift cards are more appropriate.
- In travel and tourism studies, giving participants a free stay at a hotel brand being researched could bias them towards positive feedback. A neutral cash or voucher incentive is more balanced and avoids this.

Target Audience: Tailor incentives to the demographic and cultural preferences of the participants. For example, young adults may prefer gift cards to popular stores, while professionals might appreciate cash or professional development resources.

Research Context: Ensure incentives are suitable for the nature of the study. High-value incentives may be appropriate for longitudinal studies but not for short surveys to avoid coercion.

Legal and Ethical Considerations: Adhere to local laws and ethical standards regarding incentive values and types. Avoid incentives that might be seen as bribery or that could unduly influence participants’ responses.

Additional Consideration: It is also important to ensure that participants can take part in the research. For example, in B2B studies, employees may be restricted by their employment contracts from participating in research involving potential competitors.

2. Role of Incentives in Research

In research, incentives are meant to encourage people to take part, not to affect how they answer questions or the outcomes of the study. Incentives should be neutral, not connected to the brand or topic being studied, and easy for participants to claim. The main aim is to gather honest and high-quality data.

It is important to ensure participants are fairly rewarded for agreeing to participate in research, and that their contributions are acknowledged promptly. Incentives should be meaningful, fair, simple, timely, and engaging. This helps ensure that participants are satisfied with how incentives are provided. It also supports the research industry by encouraging people to take part in future studies and protecting the sector's reputation.

To achieve these best practices, it is essential to:

- **Send regular reminders** to participants, explaining how and when to claim their incentives. This helps ensure participants get their rewards on time and feel valued.
- **Provide clear instructions on updating personal details**, which helps prevent delays and makes sure incentives go to the right person.

By keeping communication open and proactive, organisations can build trust with participants, support ongoing participation, and maintain high-quality data collection.

Definition of incentives: A gift, payment or other considerations offered to potential participants to encourage participation in research.

The term 'research' is used throughout this document to include all kinds of research activities, including market research, social and opinion research, and UX and CX research. These guidelines apply to all these types of research.

3. Types of Incentives

3.1 Monetary Incentives

Monetary incentives are the most commonly used in research and include cash payments, gift cards, and vouchers. These rewards are typically straightforward and universally appreciated.

- **Cash Payments:** These are often preferred for in-depth interviews or longer research engagements. They provide immediate, tangible value to participants.
- **Gift Cards:** These can be physical or digital and offer flexibility, allowing participants to choose their reward. Popular options include major retailers or e-commerce platforms.
- **Vouchers:** Offering vouchers for specific products or services can be valuable in cases where the research is closely related to the product, service, or industry in question (e.g., a food brand offering grocery vouchers).

Recommendations:

- Ensure the incentive amount is fair - enough to thank participants for their time but not so high as to bias their responses.
- If using gift cards or vouchers, make sure the participant can access the brand either online or in a physical location.
- Disclose the value of the incentive clearly during the recruitment process.

3.2 Charitable Donations

Charitable donations allow participants to contribute to a non-profit organisation on their behalf, appealing to those who favour altruistic rewards. This approach can also support corporate social responsibility efforts, aligning participant preferences with broader ethical initiatives.

- **Donation Amount:** Specify the donation amount clearly upfront. It's important that participants know how much will be donated on their behalf.
- **Charity Selection:** Choose recognised and reputable charities. Offering participants a choice of charities can increase engagement.
- **Transparency:** Provide clear information about how the charity uses funds. Many participants will want to know the impact of their donation.

Recommendations:

- Ensure transparency about the donation process and provide participants with evidence (e.g., a confirmation email) that the donation has been made.
- Align the charity options with the research audience's values. For example, donations to environmental causes may resonate well with participants in a sustainability-focused study.
- Give participants the choice to opt for a monetary incentive instead if they prefer.

3.3 Prize Draws or Sweepstakes

Prize draws are popular in large-scale or low-incentive research, such as online surveys. This method incentivises participation by offering the chance to win a valuable prize.

- **Rule of entry:** Entry into prize draws or sweepstakes must be free, and the process of selection should be clearly explained in the rules.
- **Prize Selection:** The prize should be significant enough to motivate participation (e.g., electronics, travel vouchers, or cash prizes).
- **Clear Terms and Conditions:** Clearly outline the prize draw rules, including entry deadlines, the method of drawing winners and the number of prizes.
- **Winner Notification:** Specify how and when winners will be notified and ensure there is a transparent process for selecting winners (e.g., a random drawing).
- **Regional Rules and Regulations:** Some countries have laws that prohibit prize draws or sweepstakes. When planning incentives, it's important to check the local regulations and, if necessary, choose alternative incentive options that comply with those laws.

Recommendations:

- Prize draws should comply with local laws and regulations, which may include licensing or reporting requirements depending on the region.
- Clearly provide how one qualifies for the prize draw and terms and conditions to avoid misleading participants.
- Consider offering multiple smaller prizes rather than a single large one, as this may increase perceived chances of winning and overall participation.
- While prize draws can be an exciting addition, they are generally less effective at encouraging participation than defined incentives like points or cash awards. It is recommended that prize draws be used as a supplementary incentive.

3.4 In-Kind Rewards

In-kind rewards refer to non-cash incentives such as physical products, technology gadgets, or service subscriptions. These are particularly useful in regions or cultures where non-monetary rewards may be more acceptable or appealing due to local preferences or economic conditions.

- **Examples:** Technology gadgets (like headphones, smart devices), household items, or subscriptions (e.g., streaming services, software, or fitness apps) are commonly offered. These rewards are often well-suited for tech-savvy participants or research related to specific product categories.

- **Cultural Relevance:** In many regions, offering tangible products or services can be seen as more personal and meaningful than cash. This is especially true in markets where cash incentives may be seen as inappropriate or less culturally acceptable.
- **Tailored to Participants:** It's important to match the in-kind reward with the demographic and interests of the participants. For example, younger participants might appreciate tech-related products, while older participants may value household items or service-based rewards.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that in-kind rewards are relevant and valuable to participants to maintain engagement.
- Be transparent about the reward's value, and make sure it is proportionate to the time and effort required for participation.
- Consider delivery logistics, especially in international studies, to ensure participants receive the rewards in a timely and cost-effective manner.

3.5 Flexible Incentives

Flexible incentives adapt to the economic, cultural, and technological realities of local markets, allowing participants to choose or receive rewards that best fit their preferences. This approach is especially important in markets where participants may prefer digital vouchers, mobile payments, or other forms of non-traditional compensation.

- **Digital Vouchers:** In many regions, digital vouchers are preferred due to ease of use, especially for online shopping or services. These vouchers can be for global platforms (e.g., Amazon, Google Play, or Netflix) or local retailers, allowing participants to choose what suits them best.
- **Mobile Payments:** In economies where mobile wallets or digital payment platforms (e.g., PayPal, Venmo, or local apps like M-Pesa in Africa or Alipay in China) are widely used, offering mobile payments as an incentive can be more practical and accessible than cash or vouchers.
- **Cashless Economies:** In countries with a move towards cashless economies, offering digital payments provides convenience and aligns with participants' everyday financial practices. This also eliminates the challenges of handling physical cash or checks, especially in large or remote studies.

Recommendations:

- Offer participants multiple reward options where possible, giving them the flexibility to choose what is most beneficial to them (e.g., selecting between a voucher, a mobile payment, or a charitable donation).
- Research local market conditions and payment preferences to ensure the incentive is appropriate and practical for the region.
- Consider using digital platforms that have global reach or cater to local markets, ensuring the incentive can be easily accessed by participants regardless of location.

4. Longitudinal Incentive Programs

Longitudinal studies, such as long-term research panels, or diary studies, require strategies to keep participants consistently engaged over extended periods. Incentive programs for such studies must balance motivating participants with maintaining cost-efficiency and minimising bias. Below are recommended strategies for designing effective longitudinal incentive programs.

4.1 Tiered Incentive Structures

Description: Offer a progressively increasing reward structure to encourage continued participation.

Example: Provide modest incentives for initial tasks but larger rewards for completing critical milestones or the entire study.

Benefit: Participants are more motivated to stay engaged as they perceive a greater payoff for long-term commitment.

4.2 Use of Loyalty Programs

Description: Implement loyalty points or credits that accumulate over time and can be redeemed for higher-value rewards.

Example: A participant earns points for each completed task or diary entry, which can be exchanged for gift cards, cash, or merchandise.

Benefit: Builds a sense of progression and encourages consistent participation.

4.3 Milestone Bonuses

Description: Offer bonuses for reaching specific study milestones.

Example: Completing 50% of the study earns a mid-study bonus, and finishing all tasks earns a completion bonus.

Benefit: Reduces drop-off rates by reinforcing commitment at critical stages.

4.4 Gamification Elements

Description: Add elements of gamification, such as badges, rankings, or small rewards for specific achievements.

Example: Participants receive a "gold badge" or a bonus reward for completing 7 diary entries on time.

Benefit: Enhances engagement by making participation more interactive and rewarding.

4.5 Flexible Incentive Options

Description: Allow participants to choose from a range of incentives.

Example: Provide options such as digital gift cards, charitable donations, or cash payouts to suit individual preferences.

Benefit: Increases satisfaction and reduces the risk of disengagement due to irrelevant incentives.

4.6 Frequent, Small Incentives

Description: Distribute smaller rewards at regular intervals rather than offering a single large reward at the end.

Example: A weekly or monthly reward for completing ongoing tasks, coupled with a final bonus for study completion.

Benefit: Maintains participant engagement by providing continuous positive reinforcement.

4.7 Transparent Communication

Description: Clearly communicate the incentive structure and timelines to participants.

Example: Share a detailed schedule outlining when and how participants will receive their rewards.

Benefit: Builds trust and prevents frustration over unclear or delayed incentives.

4.8 Personalised Rewards

Description: Tailor incentives to participant demographics or preferences.

Example: Young professionals may prefer digital rewards like streaming subscriptions, while older participants might appreciate physical vouchers or checks.

Benefit: Ensures participants feel valued, boosting retention.

4.9 Non-Monetary Benefits

Description: Highlight intrinsic rewards, such as contributing to meaningful research or receiving exclusive insights.

Example: Provide participants with a summary of study results or a certificate of participation.

Benefit: Appeals to participants' sense of purpose and interest in the study.

For long-term panels, actively engage participants by soliciting feedback about their experience and incorporating their suggestions to enhance participant loyalty and foster a sense of collaboration. Use periodic surveys to assess satisfaction with incentives and adjust the program if necessary. By combining these practices, longitudinal incentive programs can effectively maintain participant motivation, reduce attrition, and ensure high-quality data throughout the study's duration.

5. Determining Incentive Amounts

Setting fair and competitive incentive amounts is key to ensuring participant trust, engagement, and high-quality data. Incentive amounts should consider regional economics, participant demographics, study complexity, and local market expectations. Tailored, ethically balanced incentives foster participation while upholding research integrity.

5.1 Regional and Market Adjustments

To ensure incentives are fair and appropriate across different regions and markets, it is important to consider both local economic factors and established market practices.

- **Purchasing Power Parity (PPP):** Use PPP to adjust incentive amounts based on the cost of living in different areas. This ensures that participants are compensated fairly and that incentives are competitive in local contexts.
- **Multi-country projects:** To assess PPP across countries, you can use resources like <https://livingcost.org/cost> to compare regional benchmarks.
- **Currency of incentive payments:** Incentives should generally be offered in the local currency of the country where the research is conducted. However, in countries with high inflation, such as Argentina, it is common to offer incentives denominated in US dollars.
- **Cost of Living Considerations:** In high-cost-of-living markets, incentives may need to be higher to remain attractive to participants. In lower-cost markets, smaller incentives may still be sufficient.
- **Market Norms and Industry Guidelines:** Refer to industry standards and local or regional guidelines from bodies such as TRS, MRS, and ESOMAR. These provide ethical benchmarks for setting fair compensation for participants.

Recommendations:

- Regularly review and update incentive amounts to keep pace with inflation, currency fluctuations, and other economic changes.
- Consult local experts or fieldwork partners to ensure incentives are competitive and meet local expectations.
- Benchmark incentives against local market rates by reviewing similar studies in the region.
- Remain flexible and responsive to feedback from participants and fieldwork partners to maintain fair and competitive incentive practices.

5.2 Participant Demographics

Different participant groups may need varying incentive amounts based on their profiles and recruitment challenges.

- **General Consumers vs. Professionals:** Professionals like doctors or specialists typically require higher incentives due to their expertise, time limitations, and opportunity costs.
- **Hard-to-Reach Audiences:** Niche or specialised groups (e.g., B2B participants, migrants, or young people) are harder to recruit and may require higher incentives to encourage participation.

Recommendations:

- Create tiered incentive structures that are fair and appropriate for different participant groups.
- Ensure incentives are appealing and sufficient to encourage participant involvement.

5.3 Research Complexity and Time Commitment

The complexity and demands of the research should guide the incentive amounts.

- **Time-Intensive Studies:** In-depth interviews and long-term diary studies may need higher incentives because they involve more complex participation and may require sharing more personal or sensitive information.
- **Shorter Studies:** For simpler research methods like surveys, smaller incentives are generally appropriate.
- **Associated Costs:** When participants need to travel or cover other costs, these should be fully reimbursed to avoid creating barriers to participation. Travel costs are not incentives and should not be treated as such.

Recommendations:

- Establish clear incentive brackets based on the demands of the research method.
- Adjust incentives for qualitative studies to reflect the time required and any additional participant costs.

6. Special considerations

Incentives for vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, or those with disabilities, require extra care to ensure they are appropriate and respectful. Cultural sensitivity is also essential for effective and ethical incentive use, enhancing engagement and improving research quality while fostering trust and integrity.

6.1 Tailoring Incentives to Local Preferences

Recognising and adapting to local preferences in incentive distribution is crucial for maximising participant engagement.

- **Understanding Preferences:** Different cultures have varying perceptions of incentives. For instance, while cash payments may be highly valued in some regions, others may view them as inappropriate or insufficiently personal. In certain markets, gift cards to local retailers may be more appealing, as they provide participants with the flexibility to choose their rewards while still maintaining a personal touch.
- **Relevance to Participants:** Incentives should be relevant and meaningful to participants. Conducting preliminary research or focus groups can help identify what types of incentives resonate most with a specific audience, allowing practitioners to tailor their offerings accordingly.
- **Inclusivity:** Consideration should also be given to ensuring that the incentive choices are inclusive and do not inadvertently exclude or offend any participant groups. This may involve offering a range of incentive options that cater to different demographics and cultural backgrounds.

Recommendations:

- Engage local experts or conduct surveys to gather insights on preferred incentive types in different regions.
- Be adaptable and willing to change incentive strategies based on participant feedback and local trends.

6.2 Religious or Cultural Considerations

Cultural and religious sensitivities must be considered when selecting incentives to ensure appropriateness and respect.

- **Avoiding Inappropriate Incentives:** Certain products or services may be considered inappropriate or offensive in specific cultural or religious contexts. For example, providing incentives that involve alcohol or pork products in predominantly Muslim communities could alienate participants and damage the research's credibility.
- **Respect for Beliefs:** Understanding the values and beliefs of different cultures can help practitioners choose incentives that align with participants' norms and ethics. This consideration reflects a commitment to respecting participants' lifestyles and cultural practices.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** Additionally, aligning incentives with local customs or celebrations can enhance participant engagement. For example, offering incentives that coincide with major local festivals or holidays can

demonstrate cultural awareness and appreciation.

Recommendations:

- Consult with cultural experts or community leaders to ensure that incentive options are respectful and appropriate.
- Conduct training for research staff on cultural awareness to minimise the risk of misunderstandings.

6.3 Local Legal Restrictions

Compliance with local laws regarding incentive distribution is critical to maintaining ethical and legal standards.

- **Understanding Regulations:** Different regions may have specific laws governing how incentives can be offered, including restrictions on monetary gifts and required disclosures. Practitioners need to understand these rules to avoid legal issues and to stay compliant.
- **Gift Reporting Requirements:** Certain jurisdictions may require practitioners to report gifts or incentives provided to participants. Ensuring that all necessary paperwork and reporting obligations are fulfilled can help mitigate potential legal risks.

Recommendations:

- Collaborate with local legal experts or compliance officers to understand applicable laws and regulations regarding incentive distribution.
- Maintain thorough documentation of incentive distribution processes to ensure transparency and compliance with local laws.

6.4 Vulnerable Groups

When offering incentives to vulnerable groups like children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, it's important to be extra careful. We must ensure that these incentives are suitable and fair, without taking advantage of anyone.

- **Understanding Vulnerability:** Vulnerable groups may have specific needs and circumstances that require careful consideration when designing incentives. For instance, children may not fully grasp the implications of participation, and elderly individuals may have health or mobility challenges that could affect their involvement in research.
- **Appropriate Incentives:** Incentives should be carefully chosen to avoid exploitation. For children, for example, non-monetary incentives like toys, educational materials, or experiences can be more appropriate than cash. For elderly participants, incentives might include health-related products, travel vouchers, or discounts on services that are relevant to their needs.
- **Informed Consent:** Ensure that the process for obtaining consent is tailored to the vulnerabilities of the group. When involving children, consent must be obtained from a parent, guardian or responsible adult, and the information provided should be age-appropriate and understandable. For elderly participants, provide support to ensure they fully understand the research and the incentives involved.
- **Accessibility of Digital Products:** If a participant with an impairment is expected to claim their reward online, the website or platform used must meet relevant accessibility standards (e.g., [WCAG](#)). This ensures participants can access and redeem incentives independently, without needing assistance.
- **Monitoring Participation:** Monitor the participation of vulnerable groups closely to ensure that they are comfortable and that the incentives are not influencing their responses unduly. Consider implementing feedback mechanisms to gauge their experiences and perceptions.

Recommendations:

- Collaborate with experts or organisations that specialise in working with vulnerable populations to develop appropriate incentives.
- Regularly review and update incentive offerings based on feedback from vulnerable participants to ensure ongoing appropriateness and ethical compliance.

7. Communication and Transparency

Clear communication about incentives builds trust, ensures informed consent, and creates a smooth research process. Practitioners should provide participants with transparent details on incentive type, value, conditions, eligibility, and redemption steps. This fosters engagement, upholds ethical standards, and improves data quality.

7.1 Clear Information

Providing clear information about incentives is crucial for setting expectations and ensuring informed consent.

- **Terms and Conditions:** Ensure that any applicable terms and conditions - such as those related to panel reward schemes - are clear, easily accessible, and easy for participants to understand.
- **Type of Incentive:** Clearly outline the type of incentive participants will receive. This could include monetary rewards, gift cards, merchandise, or other forms of compensation. Specify whether the incentive is a one-time payment or a series of payments based on their participation in multiple sessions or tasks.
- **Value of Incentive:** Clearly communicate the value of the incentive in monetary terms or equivalent. This transparency helps participants understand what they are being offered and can enhance their motivation to participate. For instance, stating “You will receive a \$40 gift card for completing the survey” sets a clear expectation.
- **Inclusion in Documentation:** Include this information in the initial invitation and the informed consent form to ensure participants have access to all necessary details before agreeing to participate. This documentation serves as a reference point for participants, reinforcing transparency and accountability.
- **Loyalty Scheme Points Balance:** Participants should have easy and ongoing access to view their points balance at any time. Providing clarity around the accumulation of points ensures transparency and allows participants to track their progress toward redeeming their incentives. Accessible and clear account information contributes to a positive user experience and sustained engagement.
- **Clear Instructions:** Offer straightforward, easy-to-understand instructions on how participants can claim their incentives. Include details such as deadlines, required actions, and any documentation they may need to provide.
- **Accessible Communication Channels:** Establish multiple channels for participants to reach out with questions or concerns regarding their incentives. This could include email support, a dedicated phone line, or a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section on the research website.
- **Prompt Resolution:** Ensure that queries or issues related to incentives are addressed promptly and effectively. Having a dedicated team to manage incentive-related inquiries can enhance the participant experience and reinforce their trust in the research process.
- **Disqualification:** Clearly communicate any conditions or circumstances which may disqualify participants from receiving incentives e.g. identified participant fraud.

Recommendations:

- Use straightforward language free from jargon to ensure that all participants, regardless of their background, can easily understand the information provided.
- Consider creating a FAQ section in your materials that addresses common questions about incentives, including their value and type.
- Monitor and evaluate the support provided to participants regularly, gathering feedback to identify areas for improvement.
- Consider implementing a follow-up process to ensure that participants successfully received their incentives and to address any potential issues that may have arisen.

7.2 Incentive Conditions and Criteria

It is essential to clearly communicate any conditions associated with receiving the incentive.

- **Eligibility Criteria:** Clearly state any requirements participants must meet to qualify for the incentive. This might include completing a survey, attending a follow-up session, or participating in a focus group. Clearly defined criteria prevent misunderstandings and set clear expectations for participation.
- **Completion Requirements:** Inform participants if the incentive is contingent upon completing all aspects of the research. For example, you might say, “Participants must complete all three surveys to receive the full incentive.” This information should be explicit to avoid confusion about how and when incentives will be awarded.
- **Minimum Redemption Value:** The minimum threshold for redeeming an incentive should not be set at a level that prevents a large proportion of participants from cashing out due to lack of opportunity or diminishing interest in future research participation. Setting reasonable minimum redemption values ensures that participants feel their contributions are valued.
- **Transaction Fees:** If transaction fees are to be applied during the redemption of incentives, these fees must be clearly communicated to participants upfront. Additionally, fees should not include any profit margin for the panel company. Ensuring that participants are fully aware of any associated fees promotes transparency and avoids any dissatisfaction during the redemption process.
- **Points Expiration:** Organisations should clearly define, within their terms and conditions, the circumstances under which incentive points will expire or become invalid. To ensure fairness, research participants must be notified when their points are approaching expiration, allowing them time to take necessary actions. Clear communication regarding point expiration promotes transparency and enhances participant trust.
- **Incentive Expiration:** Once an incentive is redeemed for a voucher or gift certificate, the expiration countdown should begin. The expiration period should not be less than three months from the time of issuance, giving participants ample time to use their reward. Clear expiration timelines ensure that participants can plan and redeem their rewards without undue pressure.

Recommendations:

- Use bullet points or a checklist format to clearly outline conditions, making it easy for participants to understand what is required to earn their incentive.
- Include a brief explanation of the rationale behind the conditions, helping participants understand the importance of their participation in the research process.

7.3 Redemption Process

A clear and straightforward redemption process is vital for ensuring participants can easily claim their incentives.

- **Crediting of Incentive Points:** Incentive points should ideally be credited to a participant’s account in real-time to maintain engagement and trust. However, in some cases, logistical issues such as quality reviews may delay this process. To maintain transparency, all points should be credited within fourteen days unless otherwise stated before the research activity. Clear timelines and communication about when participants can expect their incentives foster a positive experience.
- **No Payment** Participants should not be required to make any payments as part of the incentive redemption process. The full value of the incentive should be realised by the recipient without additional financial burdens.
- **Missing Points:** A process should be established for participants to challenge any discrepancies in their points balance. If participants believe they were not properly credited, they should be able to submit an inquiry. All inquiries should be resolved within seven days, ensuring a swift resolution and maintaining participant trust in the integrity of the incentive system.
- **Points Value:**

The value of incentive points should be easily converted into a recognisable currency, such as local currency or a widely used reference currency. This allows participants to understand the value of their points and makes the incentive system transparent and straight forward.

- **Points/Incentive Invalidation:**

In cases where a completed survey or research activity is deemed unusable due to poor quality or fraudulent activity, participants should be given an explanation for why their incentive was invalidated.

If possible, provide a general reason for the invalidation (e.g. “did not meet quality standards” or “did not meet participation requirements”) without revealing specific detection methods, algorithms, or thresholds used to identify poor quality or fraud. Avoid listing exact issues such as “speeding,” “straight-lining,” or other behaviours that could help bad actors refine their tactics.

Instead, practitioners should:

- Reiterate quality expectations: Reference the agreed-upon participation terms or community guidelines (e.g. “Incentives are issued for complete and thoughtful responses that meet our quality criteria.”)
- Encourage improvement (if appropriate): If it’s a repeat or engaged participant, you might invite them to review the guidelines and try again, where possible.
- Log the decision: Maintain internal documentation of the invalidation, including reasons and evidence, in case of participant follow-up or audit.
- Apply consistency: Ensure decisions are based on clear internal standards and are applied fairly across all participants.

Transparency in this process helps build participant trust while protecting the integrity of the research.

- **Instructions for Claiming Incentives:**

Provide detailed, step-by-step instructions on how participants can claim their incentives. This may include online procedures, such as filling out a form, or physical processes, like mailing in a receipt or verification of participation. All restrictions on how an incentive can be redeemed or used should be clearly stated. For instance, if a virtual Visa card can only be used for online purchases, that limitation must be communicated upfront. Providing participants with this information ensures there are no surprises or frustrations during the redemption process.

- **Deadlines:**

Clearly outline any deadlines associated with claiming the incentive. For example, if incentives must be claimed within a specific timeframe after participation, this should be communicated upfront to prevent disappointment or confusion later.

- **Support Contact Information:**

Offer contact details for participants to reach out with any questions or issues related to the incentive redemption process. This could include an email address, phone number, or dedicated support team. Ensure that support is accessible, friendly, and responsive to participant inquiries.

Recommendations:

- Consider providing a sample of the redemption form or process within the initial communication, so participants know what to expect.
- Follow up with participants post-research to remind them of deadlines and provide assistance if they encounter difficulties with the redemption process.

8. Ensuring Data Quality

Ensuring data integrity is crucial for reliable research. Incentives must be non-coercive, unbiased, and fairly distributed to enhance engagement without compromising validity. Ethical incentive management upholds research credibility and trustworthy results.

8.1 Non-Coercive

Incentives should never pressure participants into participating or completing research against their will.

- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation in research must always be voluntary. It’s essential that participants feel free to decline or withdraw without any negative consequences or loss of the incentive. Clearly communicate that the incentive is a token of appreciation for their time, not a means of coercion.

- **Transparency in Communications:** Include language in consent forms and invitations that clearly emphasises that participation is voluntary, while also explaining that incentives are provided based on survey completion. For example: “Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. However, incentives are only provided for fully completed surveys that meet quality standards.” **Creating a Comfortable Environment:** Design the research environment to be welcoming and respectful, encouraging participants to share their thoughts openly. Assure them that their responses will be confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Recommendations:

- Monitor feedback from participants regarding their experience with incentives to ensure that they feel comfortable and not pressured.
- Provide a mechanism for participants to express concerns about feeling coerced, reinforcing that their feedback is valued and important.

8.2 Avoiding Bias

It is crucial to select incentives that do not inadvertently influence participant responses.

- **Neutrality of Incentives:** Choose incentives that are unrelated to the research topic. For example, if the research involves a new beverage, offering participants vouchers for that beverage can lead to biased responses, as participants might provide more favourable feedback to justify their reward.
- **Impact on Data Quality:** Be mindful that incentives can unintentionally create expectations or pressures that might affect how participants respond. Participants may feel inclined to give socially desirable responses or to agree with statements they think will please practitioners in hopes of receiving their incentives.
- **Diverse Incentive Options:** Consider offering a range of neutral incentives that cater to different interests, ensuring that no particular incentive skews the data collected. For example, general gift cards or donations to charities can serve as unbiased incentives.

Recommendations:

- Regularly review and adjust the incentive structure based on participant feedback and research outcomes to minimise potential biases.

8.3 Participant Selection

It is vital to ensure that all eligible participants have an equal opportunity to receive incentives to avoid selection bias.

- **Inclusivity in Recruitment:** Make certain that recruitment strategies are inclusive and reach diverse demographics, allowing all eligible participants to have an equal chance at receiving the incentive. Consider barriers that might exclude certain groups and strive to create an equitable recruitment process.
- **Transparent Criteria for Incentives:** Clearly communicate the criteria for receiving incentives so that all participants understand how they can qualify. This could include requirements related to participation length, survey completion, or engagement in discussions.

Recommendations:

- Document the selection process and criteria used for awarding incentives to promote transparency and accountability.
- Analyse the demographics of participants receiving incentives to ensure diversity and representation, adjusting recruitment strategies if necessary.

9. Detecting and Preventing Fraud

Detecting and preventing fraud is essential to maintaining the credibility and integrity of research, as well as ensuring that incentives are distributed fairly to legitimate participants. The following guidelines outline key strategies and best practices to identify and mitigate fraudulent activity effectively:

9.1 Monitor for Unusual Patterns

It is vital to regularly review participation and redemption activity for signs of unusual behaviour. Key indicators of potential fraud include:

- **High Volume of Redemptions from a Single Account:** Participants rapidly redeeming incentives in a short period may indicate the presence of fraudulent activity.
- **Multiple Accounts Using Identical Information:** Watch for the use of the same IP addresses, email addresses, or physical addresses across multiple accounts, which could signal the use of bots or multiple fraudulent accounts.
- **Unusually Fast Survey Completion Times:** Completing surveys in significantly less time than expected may indicate that participants are not engaging with the research but rather rushing through to claim incentives.

9.2 Implement Fraud Detection Technologies

Leveraging technology is a powerful tool in detecting and preventing fraud. Consider implementing the following:

- **Two-Factor Authentication (2FA):** Require participants to verify their identity using an additional authentication method, such as a mobile device or email confirmation, to ensure the legitimacy of the respondent.
- **IP Address and Location Monitoring:** Track and review IP addresses to detect anomalies, such as multiple completions from the same location or geographic areas inconsistent with the respondent's provided information.
- **CAPTCHA Tools:** Using CAPTCHA or other verification tools can help distinguish between human participants and automated bots designed to complete surveys fraudulently.
- **Reputation systems and tools:** These systems are designed to help prevent fraud, detect bots, and ensure that participant engagement is genuine, thereby enhancing the quality and integrity of online research data. Examples include digital fingerprinting systems, Research Defender, RelevantID, and certain incentive payment or voucher companies that offer advanced fraud detection and prevention capabilities.

9.3 Regular Audits and Data Reviews

Conducting regular audits of participant activity can help uncover suspicious patterns early. Establish a routine process to:

- **Review Redemption Logs:** Check for any patterns that deviate from the norm, such as large clusters of redemptions at similar times or locations.
- **Cross-Reference Data:** Compare survey responses to ensure consistency. Inconsistent or contradictory answers across multiple surveys can be a sign of fraudulent behaviour.
- **Quality Checks:** Implement quality review processes to ensure that survey responses meet research standards before approving incentive payouts. Fraudulent participants often submit low-quality or incomplete responses.

9.4 Set Alerts and Thresholds for Suspicious Activity

Implement automated alerts to flag suspicious activities, such as:

- **High-Frequency Participation:** Set a threshold to identify participants who are completing surveys or redeeming incentives at a rate significantly higher than average. This can help detect accounts attempting to exploit the incentive system.
- **Redemption Value Caps:** Establish a maximum limit for the value and frequency of redemptions per account. This helps to detect fraudulent accounts trying to claim large volumes of incentives.
- **Duplicate Account Prevention:** Use software to prevent users from registering multiple accounts with the same personal information, ensuring that each participant is unique.

9.5 Flagging and Investigation Procedures

When suspicious activity is identified, it's critical to have a process in place to handle it:

- **Temporary Account Suspension:** If an account exhibits signs of fraudulent behaviour, consider temporarily suspending the account while the activity is investigated.
- **Fraud Investigation Team:** Designate a team or use specialised personnel to investigate flagged accounts. This team should have the authority to review data, contact participants for verification, and escalate concerns to management.
- **Clear Consequences for Fraudulent Behaviour:** Make participants aware of the penalties for engaging in fraud, such as permanent account suspension or forfeiture of incentives. Clear communication can act as a deterrent for would-be fraudsters.

9.6 Protecting Against Click Farms and Bots

Fraud schemes, such as click farms or the use of bots, present a significant risk to research. To protect against these, consider the following measures:

IP Monitoring: Monitor and block IP addresses linked to suspicious or fraudulent activity. Keep these measures updated to address new threats as they arise.

Bot Detection Software: Use technology to identify and block automated or non-human responses to protect the integrity of the survey data and the distribution of incentives.

9.7 Transparency in Invalidating Incentives

In cases where a survey or activity is invalidated due to fraud or poor-quality responses, it is essential to clearly communicate with the participant. Where appropriate, provide an explanation for the disqualification, unless sharing details could result in further fraudulent attempts. This transparency helps build trust with legitimate participants while maintaining the integrity of the research.

9.8 Reimbursement for Fraud Victims

In cases where legitimate participants are victims of fraud (e.g., their incentive points are stolen due to a third-party fraud scheme), the panel company should reimburse the participant for the lost value. The responsibility for preventing fraud lies with practitioners, and participants should not be penalised for vulnerabilities in the system. By following these guidelines, practitioners can significantly reduce the risk of fraud in research and ensure that incentives are awarded fairly and transparently. Maintaining a proactive stance on fraud prevention not only safeguards the quality of the research but also reinforces the trust and confidence of legitimate participants in the incentive process.

Recommendations:

- Reasonable safeguards should be in place to ensure that redemptions are being processed by legitimate research participants.
- Panel companies and incentive providers should implement measures to detect and prevent fraud schemes, such as click farms, bots, or ghost completions.
- Fraud detection mechanisms, including two-factor authentication, should be employed to safeguard against fraudulent activity and protect the integrity of the research.

- If a participant's incentive points or awards are stolen due to a fraud scheme targeting the practitioners, the value of the stolen incentive should be reimbursed to the participant.
- It is the responsibility of practitioners to prevent fraud and compensate participants who are victims, provided the loss was not due to the participant's negligence.

10. Post-Research or Report Incentive Sharing

Post-research incentive sharing fosters transparency, trust, and participant satisfaction. Clear communication about timing and risks ensures ethical standards are upheld, enhancing engagement and safeguarding participant interests while supporting research integrity.

10.1 Delayed Sharing

Informing participants about the timing and conditions for sharing research materials is essential for transparency and managing expectations.

- **Clear Communication:** When certain materials or concepts from the research will be shared after a specific period, it is vital to communicate this information upfront. Participants should understand when they can expect access to these materials, whether it's post-product launch or after a specific project milestone.
- **Transparency:** This communication should also include the rationale behind the delay. For example, if the insights gained from the research are tied to a product launch, explain how sharing this information post-launch protects the company's competitive advantage while still providing value to participants.
- **Informed Consent:** Ensure that this information is included in the consent forms provided to participants at the outset of the research. By outlining the sharing timeline and the types of materials that may be shared later, participants can make informed decisions about their involvement in the study.

Recommendations:

- Set clear expectations about the timeline for sharing research materials and ensure participants have a way to follow up if they have questions.
- Provide updates to participants once the materials are available, fostering a sense of community and engagement.

10.2 Risk Assessment

Conducting a thorough risk assessment before sharing research materials at a later date is crucial for maintaining ethical standards and protecting both participants and the organisation.

- **Identifying Risks:** Evaluate the potential risks associated with sharing specific research materials, such as participant privacy concerns, proprietary information, or intellectual property issues. Consider how sharing might affect the organisation's reputation or its relationship with participants.
- **Alignment with Policies:** Ensure that the decision to share materials aligns with your organisation's and Client's internal policies and ethical guidelines. Review existing protocols to determine what types of information can be shared and under what circumstances. This may include seeking approval from legal or compliance departments to mitigate any potential legal liabilities.
- **Participant Impact:** Assess how sharing research materials might impact participants. Will their identities be protected? Are there any concerns about their contributions being attributed to them without consent? Addressing these questions can help ensure that participant rights and privacy are upheld.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a formal risk assessment prior to the decision to share any research materials, documenting potential risks and mitigation strategies.
- Communicate any findings from the risk assessment to stakeholders involved in the research to ensure everyone is informed about the implications of sharing materials.

11. Compliance and Monitoring

11.1 Legal Compliance

It is crucial to ensure that all incentives comply with local laws and regulations. Practitioners should understand the legal requirements in each area where they operate, including any restrictions on the types of incentives that can be offered (such as cash versus non-cash incentives). Not following these laws can result in legal issues and harm the organisation's reputation.

11.2 Ethical Standards

Maintaining high ethical standards is essential for building trust with participants and ensuring the integrity of the research process. Practitioners should adhere to established industry codes of conduct, such as those set by The Research Society (TRS), ESOMAR, and the Market Research Society (MRS). These guidelines outline best practices for offering incentives, including ensuring that incentives do not unduly influence participant responses and that all research is conducted fairly and transparently. Following these ethical standards not only enhances the credibility of the research but also protects the rights and well-being of participants.

11.3 Regular Reviews

Conducting regular reviews and evaluations of the incentive program is vital to its ongoing effectiveness and compliance with ethical guidelines. Practitioners should establish a routine for assessing how well the incentives are working in terms of participant engagement and data quality. This may involve analysing participation rates, gathering feedback from participants about their experiences with the incentives, and identifying any areas for improvement. By actively seeking participant input and adapting the incentive program based on this feedback, practitioners can enhance the overall incentive process, ensuring it remains relevant and effective in encouraging participation while upholding ethical standards.

11.4 Detailed Records

Maintaining accurate and detailed records of all incentives offered and distributed is essential for effective compliance and monitoring. This includes documenting key information such as:

- **Participant Information:** Record participant identifiers (while ensuring privacy and confidentiality), demographics, and consent forms. This helps in tracking who received which incentive and ensures proper handling of personal data.
- **Type of Incentive:** Clearly specify the type of incentive provided (e.g., cash, gift cards, merchandise, etc.). This helps in analysing the effectiveness of different incentive types and making informed decisions for future research.
- **Date of Distribution:** Log the date each incentive was distributed to track the timing of incentive delivery in relation to participation. This information can be crucial for assessing participant satisfaction and the overall effectiveness of the incentive strategy.

Keeping these detailed records not only aids in compliance with legal and ethical standards but also supports accountability by practitioners. In case of any audits or reviews, having thorough documentation allows practitioners to demonstrate adherence to policies and regulations.

11.5 Transparency in Reporting:

Transparency is key to fostering trust both within the organisation and among stakeholders. To maintain transparency in reporting, consider the following practices:

- **Internal Communication:** Ensure that all team members involved in the research process are aware of the incentive policies and procedures. Regular updates and clear documentation can help ensure that everyone understands how incentives are managed and distributed.

- **Stakeholder Reporting:** Provide clear and comprehensive reports on the incentive program to relevant stakeholders, such as clients, ethics boards, and regulatory bodies. This may include summaries of incentive distributions, participant demographics, and any issues that arose during the incentive process.
- **Public Accountability:** When appropriate, share information about the incentive program publicly (e.g., on the organisation's website or in reports) to demonstrate commitment to ethical research practices. This can enhance the organisation's credibility and reassure participants that their well-being is prioritised.

12. Participant Well-being

Prioritising participant well-being is key to ethical and trustworthy research. Respect, privacy, and support during incentive distribution foster engagement, build trust, and enhance research integrity by valuing participants' contributions.

12.1 Respect and Fairness

All participants should be treated with the utmost respect throughout the research process.

- **Equitable Treatment:** Ensure that incentives are distributed fairly and consistently to all eligible participants. This means having clear guidelines for who qualifies for incentives and applying those criteria uniformly. Avoid favouritism or selective distribution, which can lead to dissatisfaction or feelings of inequity among participants.
- **Clear Communication:** Communicate openly with participants about the criteria for receiving incentives. This includes explaining how incentives are determined and distributed, which helps to set clear expectations and fosters trust.
- **Acknowledgment of Contributions:** Recognise and value the time and effort participants invest in the research. A simple thank you, whether verbal or written, can go a long way in reinforcing their importance in the research process.

Best Practices:

- Gather feedback from participants about their experience with the incentive distribution process to identify any areas for improvement.
- Implement regular training for staff on treating participants fairly and with respect, ensuring that the values of respect and fairness are ingrained in the research culture.

12.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

Protecting participants' personal information is critical to maintaining their trust and ensuring ethical compliance.

- **Data Protection Measures:** Implement robust data protection protocols to safeguard participants' personal information throughout the incentive distribution process. This includes securely storing data and limiting access to authorised personnel only.
- **Informed Consent:** Clearly outline in the informed consent process how personal data will be used, including any implications related to incentive distribution. Ensure that participants understand their rights regarding their information and how it will be protected.
- **Third-Party Disclosure:** Do not share participants' personal information with third parties without obtaining explicit consent. If sharing is necessary for incentive fulfillment (e.g., sending gift cards), ensure that participants are informed of this and have consented to the disclosure.

Recommendations:

- Regularly review data protection policies and practices to ensure compliance with relevant regulations (such as APPs, GDPR or local data protection laws).
- Provide training for staff on the importance of privacy and confidentiality in research, emphasising the ethical obligations involved.

Appendix

Definition of Terms

<https://www.globaldataquality.org/glossary>

Incentive Offer: A unique item that can be chosen from a selection of incentives offers e.g. \$25 Amazon Gift Card.

Award Catalogue: The selection of incentive offers that are available to the research participant. These catalogues tend to be country specific and may be hosted as part of the panel management system or be part of a separate website managed by the incentive provider.

Incentive Fulfillment: The process of fulfilling an incentive order

Open Loop Incentive: A payment card that is not associated with a specific merchant

Closed Loop Incentive: A payment card that is limited to one or a few merchants

Virtual Cards: Payment cards that only exist in the electronic form

Breakage: Any incentive value that has been awarded to a recipient but where some or all of the value was not received by the recipient. There are two main types of breakage: pre-redemption and post redemption.

Pre-redemption Breakage: This normally accrues to the panel or research company, and it reflects points that were awarded but not redeemed for a number of reasons but most commonly due to a points balance less than the minimum for redemption.

Post-redemption Breakage: A relatively small percent of incentive awards do not get redeemed due to them being lost, forgotten, technical difficulties and residual values caused when someone has a small value left on a reward card that is impractical to use.

Gift Cards: Cards that are redeemed by a person that can be transferred to another person

Vouchers: A term used to describe merchandise or retailer gift cards.

Transaction Fees: These are fees charged to cover the cost of incentive processing. These fees are typically hidden from research participants and are often covered by the value of the breakage.

Recruitment incentives: Incentives provided for joining a research panel or study. Often the initial incentive is used to compensate people for providing the information necessary to get them enrolled in a panel or study.

Reloadable Cards: physical cards that can have value added after they have been issued. These are typically used for continuous research projects.

Retailer Cards: Cards that are only valid for use with a particular retailer whether a bricks and mortar or online retailer.

Prize Draws or Sweepstakes: These are games of chance where many people are given a chance to win in exchange for some activity such as completing a survey or a monthly draw for continued collaboration.

Charitable Donations: Although there is no consistent definition of what qualifies as a charity on a global level, these organisations should at minimum be non-profit and be working towards a defined goal such as ending world hunger or saving the rainforests.



The Research Society

20-40 Meagher Street, Chippendale NSW 2008

Ph: + 61 2 9566 3100

Email: info@researchsociety.com.au

www.researchsociety.com.au