



## Online Survey Consent Procedures

We have received several inquiries about best practices for conducting online surveys and how best to obtain the required assent for participation from the underage participant and the required informed parental permission from the participant's parent or guardian. This document was developed as a guide to facilitate the online survey process.

### **Informed Consent, Minor Assent, and Parental Permission**

Informed consent refers to the process of ensuring that potential human participants understand that they may choose whether or not to participate in a study. Individuals should never be forced or coerced to participate in a research study. A teacher, school administrator or anyone requiring students to participate in a research study as a human participant would be considered a serious violation of informed consent principles. That is, the research participant must freely decide to participate and not feel coerced or forced into doing so.

Participants 18 years and older **must** be provided with all of the information mentioned above and provide their **Informed Consent** before participating in a research study. In most cases, if participants are under the age of 18, a parent or legal guardian must be presented with all of the information described above before giving **Parental Permission** for their minor child to participate (in some cases, the governing IRB may waive this requirement). **Minor Assent** refers to procedures giving developmentally appropriate information to children and to adolescents about the study and giving them a choice as to whether or not they will participate.

Please refer to the [Intel ISEF Risk Assessment Guide](#) and the [Intel ISEF Human Participants Rules](#) for additional information.

### **Online Survey Consent documents**

1. All information required for the Informed Consent/Assent Process must be presented to the potential research participant before the survey begins.
2. The following statement or something similar must also be included:
  - *There is always the possibility of tampering from an outside source when using the internet for collecting information. While the confidentiality of your responses will be protected once the data are downloaded from the internet, there is always a possibility of hacking or other security breaches that could threaten the confidentiality of your responses. Please know that you are free to decide not to answer any question.*

3. The survey should be set up in a way that the potential participant must click on a 'button' or type in a response indicating that he/she has read the consent/assent information and agrees to participate. Once the 'button' is selected, the potential participant will be redirected to the research survey questionnaire. That is, the survey questions are not viewed by participant until he/she clicks on or types in a response to indicate his/her voluntary participation.

Below are several ways to obtain parental permission prior to an underage participant completing the survey instrument.

- The participant would complete an online form that collected parental contact information such as an email address, phone number, fax number, and physical address. This form would be transmitted to the researcher via secure email.
  - There are many ways to obtain parental consent electronically using electronic signatures, electronically scanning and e-mailing a copy of the signed permission form back to the researcher, and collecting facsimiles via the facsimile telephone line.
  - Many programs exist that will assist the researcher in collecting these data. Some commercial survey packages contain this functionality for a fee.
  - An option that some researchers choose is to setup two surveys: one to collect information for parental permission and one to conduct the actual survey.
    - For example, a participant recruitment survey could be constructed that describes information related to the survey document and the aims of the research. If an underage participant was interested in participating in the survey they would complete this survey document that would collect the parental contact information as described above. Once this information is transmitted to the researcher a parental information packet with proper consenting documents and information would be provided to the participants' parent (if required by the IRB). Once received by the parent, the form would be completed and returned to the researcher via the method specified in the study information packet (email, postal mail, or fax).
    - Once permission was obtained from the participant's parent/guardian an email link would be generated to the child which contains the survey link and password. The child would follow the link or type the URL into a web-browser, be directed to the survey site, enter password, complete the electronic assent, and complete the survey.
- Anonymity of underage participant survey responses are maintained by using a password for the survey document. This password is not unique to specific participants which limit the ability to track responses.

This document serves only as a guide to streamline the process for researchers with limited budgets. As always, the institutional review board with jurisdiction over the research should be consulted about the research plan, required permissions, informed consent/minor assent collection methodologies, and to ensure the research procedures are in compliance with rules and regulations.