



Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO COLORADO SPRINGS

Guidance for Human Subjects Compensation

Federal regulations do not explicitly outline rules about when and how to compensate research participants. Instead, the IRB and investigators must work together to ensure compensation is appropriate. The UCCS IRB has issued guidelines to consider when deciding to pay participants (see [SOP Special Topics: XXXIV: Subject Payment for Participation in Research](#)).

The following is a summary of the guidelines issued in the Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs). For additional guidance, including how to report compensation in your IRB application or consent document, please review the SOPs.

The goal of compensating research participants is to account for costs incurred by participating in a study, such as from travel, time, and effort. Concerns around fair compensation revolve around preventing undue influence and coercion. In general, the aim is to provide participants enough to compensate for their time and effort but not so much that the compensation creates a potentially unethical situation. For example, providing too much might incentivize a participant to overlook risks so that they can engage in the research against their better judgement.

Researchers can compensate participants using various methods including cash, check, or gift card. Which method to choose can depend on several factors, including the amount or type of compensation, the procedures of the study (face-to-face vs. online, for example), and the study population.

The following are some additional guidelines to consider when developing a compensation structure for your research:

- Consider what is appropriate for the population you will be working with. This may include any characteristic which could affect their susceptibility to undue influence or coercion, such as their socioeconomic status or age.
- In some circumstances, compensation can create coercive situations, such as when an authority figure is paid for the participation of their charge (e.g., a guardian is paid for their ward to participate). While this compensation strategy may be approved by the IRB, special precautions need to be taken to protect those more vulnerable populations.
- If appropriate, consider prorating your compensation. For example, if your study includes three sessions, consider paying participants smaller amounts at the end of each session rather than paying one lump sum at the end of the study.
- Ensure that compensation is not highlighted or exaggerated in your recruitment materials.

If you have questions or concerns about your prospective compensation structure, feel free to contact the [IRB](#). We are happy to help!

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