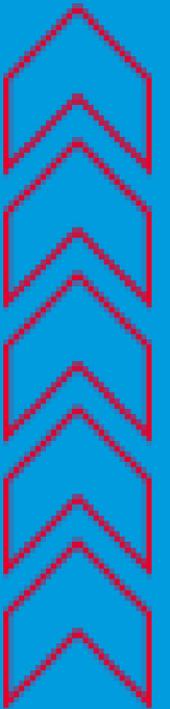




ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCH COMPENSATION



BALANCING FAIRNESS, UNDUE INFLUENCE, AND
PARTICIPANT RESPECT

JANUARY 2026

COMPENSATION PRESENTATION

OVERVIEW



● SLIDE OVERVIEW:

Why participant compensation matters ethically

Types of payment used in human subjects research

Federal and IRB guidance on payment and incentives

Risks of coercion and undue influence

Data-driven approaches to ethical compensation decisions

Key compliance takeaways for researchers and IRBs

WHY PARTICIPANT COMPENSATION MATTERS

Participant payment is not a benefit of research, but it is an ethical practice when done correctly.

- Recognizes participants' time, effort, and contribution
- Reduces financial barriers to research participation
- Supports equitable access across socioeconomic groups
- Reinforces respect for participants as partners in research





CATEGORIES OF RESEARCH PAYMENT

THREE DISTINCT RATIONALES FOR PAYMENT

01

Reimbursement

Covers out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., travel, parking, childcare)

02

Compensation for Time & Burden

Payment for time, inconvenience, and procedural burden

03

Recruitment Incentives

Additional payment intended to improve enrollment or retention

Distinguishing these categories improves transparency and IRB review



REIMBURSEMENT



- Covers actual or reasonably estimated expenses
- Does not constitute undue influence



- Ethically encouraged and often expected
- Should be clearly itemized in IRB submissions



COMPENSATION FOR TIME AND BURDEN



- Analogous to wages for unskilled labor
- Reflects time commitment and procedural burden



- Should be consistent across participants
- Should not vary based on personal income or status



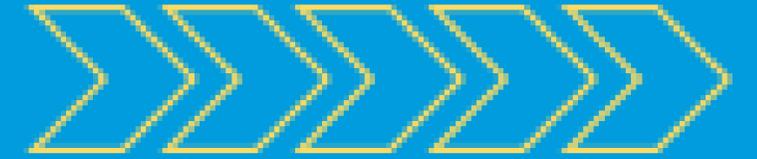
RECRUITMENT INCENTIVES



- Intended to increase participation or retention
- More likely to raise concerns about undue influence



- Requires careful justification to the IRB
- Must not distort risk perception or voluntariness



FEDERAL GUIDANCE ON PARTICIPANT PAYMENT

WHAT REGULATIONS SAY (AND DON'T SAY)

- No federal regulation requires participant payment
- OHRP: payment is generally acceptable
- IRBs must ensure payment does not create undue influence
- Payment must be disclosed (amount, timing, type) during IRB review

Regulatory guidance emphasizes review, not prohibition



COERCION VS. UNDUE INFLUENCE

The ethical concern with payment is undue influence not coercion

Coercion:

Involves a threat of harm (payment cannot coerce)

Undue Influence

An excessive or inappropriate offer that compromises judgment



IRB Evaluation of Payment

Is the amount clearly specified and justified?

- Is payment prorated and not contingent on completion?
- Is the form of payment appropriate?
- Is payment information included in consent materials?



Risks of Payments That Are Too Low

Ethical and Practical Concerns

- Participants feel undervalued
- Reduced enrollment and retention
- Disproportionate exclusion of marginalized populations
- Can itself be considered unethical



Risks of Payments That Are Too High

Ethical and Scientific Concerns

- Potential distortion of decision-making
- Risk of dishonest eligibility reporting
- Participation motivated solely by payment
- Heightened concern for undue influence
- Test subject comprehension during the consent process.





THE CASE FOR DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Moving Beyond Guesswork

- Payment is an important factor for subject decision making.
- Stakeholders differ significantly in what they view as “fair”
- Data from prior studies can inform reasonable ranges
- Transparency improves consistency and trust



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Ethical Compensation in Practice

- **Payment is ethically acceptable when justified and transparent**
- **Distinguish reimbursement, compensation, and incentives**
- **Avoid both exploitation and undue influence**
- **Use data, documentation, and IRB guidance to support decisions**
- **Ethical compensation strengthens research integrity**

GET IN TOUCH

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