**Invitation Letter for Exempt Research**

A formal signed consent document is not necessary or appropriate for Exempt research involving surveys, questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. In these cases, the investigator should prepare an invitation letter to inform the subjects about the study and invite them to participate. The format may vary from that of a coversheet, memo, letter, or a script to be read to the subject; whichever is most appropriate for the study.

Generally, the invitation letter should be written in simple terms and in second person (e.g., “you/your”). Do not use first person (e.g., “I understand that I will”). Headers are not recommended but are shown below as an aid to the explanation. A **sample invitation letter** follows these instructions:

**Introduction and Purpose**

Introduce yourself, explain your connection to the University of South Carolina, and explain that you are inviting them to participate in a research study. If you are a student, disclose this, and include information about the degree that you are working on, and if the study is being conducted to fulfill degree requirements, state this. If you are a professor, please state your department. Describe what you are studying. If the study is funded internally or by an agency, disclose this.

**Description of Study Procedures**

Describe all study procedures so that the subject knows what her/his participation will involve. You should include a description of the topics that the subject be asked about (especially if there are any sensitive topics), the length of time required to complete the activities, and whether the subject will be contacted again in the future.

If the research involves deceiving the subjects about the nature or purposes of the research, the subject must be informed that deception is involved. This can be a general statement which does not have to disclose fully the extent of the deception.

**Confidentiality**

Describe how you plan to preserve the subject’s confidentiality. Do not interchange the terms “confidential” (i.e., maintained in a way that prevents inadvertent or inappropriate disclosure of participants’ identifiable information) and “anonymous” (i.e., identifiers are not collected or known).

**Payment**

Tell the subject whether s/he will be given any payment for her/his time and/or travel expenses. Payment should not be coercive in amount or method of distribution.

**Voluntary Participation**

Explain that subjects are under no obligation to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if they withdraw.

**Questions**

Provide the subject with your contact information, your faculty advisor’s contact information (if applicable), and the phone number for the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-6670) if they have any questions about their rights as a research subject.

**Sample Invitation Letter:**

Dear \_\_\_,

My name is (insert). I am a (professor/doctoral candidate/graduate student) in the \_\_\_\_\_ Department at the University of South Carolina. *(If appropriate)* I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in \_\_\_\_\_, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study is sponsored *(or)* funded by \_\_\_\_\_.

I am studying (describe purpose). If you decide to participate, you will be asked to (describe procedures, e.g., complete some surveys about \_\_\_\_\_ *(or)* meet with me for an interview about \_\_\_\_\_\_ *(or)* participate in a group discussion about \_\_\_\_\_\_.

In particular, you will be asked questions about *(or)* we will discuss (insert topics). (If appropriate) You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meeting will take place at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(or)* a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about \_\_\_ minutes. *(If appropriate)* The session *(or)* interview will be audio *(or)* videotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

*(If study involves deception.)* Although we have described the general nature of the tasks that you will be asked to perform during this study, the full intent and purpose of the study cannot be explained because doing so would bias the study results.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. *(or)* Participation is anonymous, which means that no one (not even the research team) will know what your answers are. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

*(For focus groups)* Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

*(If applicable)* You will receive \_\_\_ for participating in the study.

*(If USC students involved)* Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way. If you begin the study and later decide to withdraw, you will still receive research credit *(or)* there are other research credit opportunities available to satisfy your research requirement.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (insert phone number and e-mail address) or my faculty advisor, (insert name, phone number, and e-mail address).

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please (explain what they should do, e.g., open the attached survey packet and begin completing the study materials.) When you are done, please (insert instructions about what to do with completed instruments). *(or)* contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

(Signature)

(Name)

(Address)

(Phone number)

(e-mail address)