Deception and Incomplete Disclosure

The IRB understand that some studies need to use deception or incomplete disclosure in research to promote scientific validity. However, the use of such techniques raises special concerns for the IRB in the perspective of research ethics. Thus, the IRB reviews the protocol using deception and incomplete disclosure more carefully.

1. What is Deception or Incomplete disclosure?

- **Deception**: The study purposely misleads participants by providing them with false information about some aspect of the research during the consent process. This might relate to the purpose of the research, the role of researcher or other subjects, the true nature of the procedures, or other parts of the study.
- **Incomplete Disclosure**: The study withholds information about the study purpose during the consent process because disclosing the study purpose in detail could significantly impact the validity of your study results.

2. IRB review and approval of deception or incomplete disclosure

- The IRB approves deception or incomplete disclosure if it is necessary and/or appropriate to promote scientific validity by enabling researchers to obtain unbiased data.
- Deception/incomplete disclosure is only acceptable in studies with no more than minimal risk. The deception/incomplete disclosure should have no adverse effects on subjects' welfare.
- The IRB will consider whether the study population is appropriate for the project that involves deception of incomplete disclosure of information. The IRB also consider potential harms of these techniques.
- The IRB may not approve deception or incomplete disclosure if non-deceptive alternatives are available or the technique may place participants at significant risk.
- The IRB will not approve deception or incomplete disclosure that may affect the potential participants' willingness to participate in the study. For example, if the IRB regard the deception or incomplete disclosure of information as a trick to make people participate in something they would not want to participate in, using deception or incomplete disclosure will not be allowed.
- The deception/incomplete disclosure is explained(debriefed) to the subject before the end of participation in the research.

3. Deception or incomplete disclosure qualifying for exempt review

- The 2018 Revised Common Rule allows for deception to be approved as Exempt if the research falls into one or more exempt categories and participants authorize the deception or incomplete disclosure as a part of the consent process. Use the following language in the consent form for this purpose.

  "We cannot tell you everything about what we are doing in this study or why. A full explanation of the purpose of the research and procedures will be provided after you complete the study."

  -OR-

  "Some research requires that the full purpose of the study not be explained before you participate. We will give you a full explanation at the end of the study."

4. Debriefing Statement

- The debriefing is mandatory when the research involves deception or incomplete disclosure of information. The debriefing should provide participants with a full explanation of the true purpose of the study, procedures, and the reason(s) why deception or incomplete disclosure was necessary.
- Participants should be provided a chance to ask questions and informed that they have the right to have their data be excluded.
- Refer to the Debriefing Statement Template in the Forms and Template on the IRBNet.

5. What information and document(s) should be included in the IRB protocol?

- In your application, describe the extent of deception/incomplete disclosure in detail and justify use of deception and explain why deception is necessary to achieve the goals of the study.
- In the risk section, explain if use of deception is likely to cause the participant psychological discomfort (i.e., stress, loss of self-esteem, embarrassment) while the deception is taking place. Explain how this risk will be minimized.

- If the study is anticipated to qualify as an exempt, the appropriate template language (see 3) regarding deception has been included in the Consent Form.
- A debriefing statement should be submitted with your application.