



# **MRS Guidelines for Qualitative Research**

**Including observational, ethnographic and deliberative research**

**July 2011**

MRS is the world's largest association for people and organisations that provide or use market, social and opinion research, business intelligence and customer insight.



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## **Introduction**

These Guidelines interpret the MRS Code of Conduct (revised 2010) and provide additional best practice guidance. Unless otherwise stated, Guidelines are not binding. Their aim is to promote professionalism in the conduct of research.

Research is founded upon the willing co-operation of the public, businesses and other organisations. It relies on the confidence of those involved that it is conducted honestly, objectively, without unwelcome intrusion and without harm to respondents. Its purpose is to collect and analyse information and not to create sales or to influence the opinions of anyone participating.

The general public and other interested parties are entitled to complete assurance that every research project is carried out in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct and that their rights and privacy are respected.

Rules from the MRS Code of Conduct applicable in each section of this document are stated in bold. These rules are binding on MRS members and MRS Company Partners and breaches may result in disciplinary action. The guidance that follows the rules provides interpretation and additional best practice. Members and Company Partners are reminded that this document is designed to complement the MRS Code of Conduct and should not be consulted in isolation.

As specified in the MRS Code, it is the responsibility of the researcher to keep abreast of any legislation which could affect research and to ensure that all those involved in a project are aware of and agree to abide by the MRS Code of Conduct.

This material is provided for information only. It is not legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Specific legal advice should be taken in relation to specific issues.

## **The Principles of the MRS Code of Conduct:**

1. Researchers shall ensure that participation in their activities is based on voluntary informed consent.
2. Researchers shall be straightforward and honest in all their professional and business relationships.
3. Researchers shall be transparent as to the subject and purpose of data collection.
4. Researchers shall respect the confidentiality of information collected in their
5. Researchers shall respect the rights and well being of all individuals.
6. Researchers shall ensure that respondents are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities.
7. Researchers shall balance the needs of individuals, clients, and their professional activities.
8. Researchers shall exercise independent professional judgement in the design, conduct and reporting of their professional activities.
9. Researchers shall ensure that their professional activities are conducted by persons with appropriate training, qualifications and experience.
10. Researchers shall protect the reputation and integrity of the profession.

## Definitions

Qualitative research is defined as marketing and social research conducted whereby:

- the basic methodology involves techniques which seek to reach understanding through observation, dialogue and evocation, rather than measurement, and
- where the data collection process involves open-ended, non-directive techniques (not structured questionnaires), and
- where the data analysis output is descriptive and not statistical

Ethnographic observation is a qualitative research method in which the researcher goes into the field to observe and/or interact with research subjects in their natural setting as they go about normal activities.

The researcher can limit participation to observation, with limited or no questioning of the subjects, or can join in as an active member of the community being observed. [Definition from ISO 20252]

Deliberative research or Deliberative methods describe a wide range practices that combine quantitative and qualitative methods to allow respondents/respondents to make informed decisions or judgements on the topic of the research.

### *Attributes of Deliberative Methods*

- combination of group discussion, workshops, events and individual polling;
- provision of information to inform and guide respondents;
- feedback/suggestions/responses from groups shared with all respondents during the event;
- Events are longer than traditional groups (from three hours to a number of days);
- Groups may be reconvened following further deliberation;
- Individuals may be re-pollled after a period of time to measure effect of deliberations;
- for large projects, the sample will be recruited to represent population.

## **Definitions from the MRS Code of Conduct:**

### Children:

Children are defined as those aged under 16. See Section B for full details about children.

### Client:

Client includes any individual, organisation, department or division, including any belonging to the same organisation as the Member, which is responsible for commissioning or applying the results from a research project.

### Company Partner:

An organisation with MRS Members that has signed the MRS Company Partner Service Quality Commitment which applies throughout the organisation.

### Identity:

The identity of a Respondent includes, as well as his/her name and/or address, any other information which offers a reasonable chance that he/she can be identified by anyone who has access to the information.

### Interview:

An interview is any form of contact intended to obtain information from or about a Respondent or group of Respondents. This can involve passive as well as direct contact.

### Interviewer:

Person involved in the collection of data. [e.g. the Group or research exercise moderator or Depth interviewer]

### Member:

A Member is an individual who has been admitted to membership of the MRS in one of the four categories set out in Article 3 of the Articles of Association (i.e. Nominated Members, Full Members, Associate Members, and Affiliate Members).

### Publication:

The communication of information to the public.

Recruiter:

Person who identifies and invites Respondents to participate in projects.

Research:

Research is the collection and analysis of data from a sample or census of individuals or organisations relating to their characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, opinions or possessions. It includes all forms of market, opinion and social research such as consumer and industrial surveys, psychological investigations, qualitative interviews and group discussions, observational, ethnographic, and panel studies.

Respondent:

A Respondent is any individual or organisation from or about whom data are collected or who is approached for interview.



## 1: Recruitment

### A: Planning Recruitment

#### The Rules

**A1** Research must conform to the national and international legislation relevant to a given project including in particular the Data Protection Act 1998 or other comparable legislation applicable outside the UK.

**A3** Members must act honestly in dealings with Respondents, Clients (actual or potential), employers, employees, Sub-contractors and the general public.

**B2** All written or oral assurances made by any Member involved in commissioning or conducting projects must be factually correct and honoured by the Member.

*Comment: A re-contact question asks permission for a follow-up interview, i.e. an interview for which a respondent is selected as a consequence of participating in a previous interview.*

*Any re-contact question should be agreed at the design stage with the client to cover any planned or possible consequential interviews.*

**B11** A follow-up interview with a Respondent can be carried out only if the Respondent's permission has been obtained at the previous interview. The only exception to this is re-contact for quality control purposes.

**B12** Any re-contact must match the assurances given to Respondents at the time that permission was gained, e.g. when re-contact was to occur, the purpose and by whom.

**B13** Respondent details must not be passed on to another third party for research or any other purposes without the prior consent of the Respondent. The only exception to this is if the Client is the Data Controller of the Respondent data.

- B17** Respondents must not be misled when being asked for cooperation to participate.
- B21** Members must ensure that all of the following are clearly communicated to the Respondent :
- the name of the interviewer (an Interviewer's Identity Card must be shown if face-to-face);
  - an assurance that the interview will be carried out according to the MRS Code of Conduct;
  - the general subject of the interview;
  - the purpose of the interview;
  - if asked, the likely length of the interview;
  - any costs likely to be incurred by the Respondent.
- B34** At the time of recruitment (or before the exercise takes place if details change after recruitment), Members must ensure that Respondents are told all relevant information as per rule B21 and:
- the location of the exercise and if it is to take place in a viewing facility; and
  - whether observers are likely to be present; and
  - when and how the exercise is to be recorded; and
  - the likely length of the exercise including the start and finish time; and
  - the Member, moderator and/or Agency that will be conducting the exercise
- B35** Members must ensure that completed recruitment questionnaires, incentive and attendance lists, or any other information or outputs which identify Respondents are not passed to or accessed by Clients or other third parties without the explicit permission of the Respondents; and

**Members must take reasonable steps to ensure that the information or outputs are used only for the purpose agreed at the time of data collection.**

**B62 Members must take reasonable steps to ensure that all hard copy and electronic lists containing personal data are held, transferred and processed securely in accordance with the relevant data retention policies and/or contractual obligations.**

## **Guidance**

1. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and to ensure adherence to Rule A1, most recruiters and agencies that recruit respondents must notify the Information Commissioner's Office that they act as Data Controllers, unless they only recruit on behalf of other agencies and do not hold or retain respondent details.
2. In interpreting the Code of Conduct, it should be noted that recruiters fall within the definition of interviewers as "persons involved in the collection of data". Rule B21 must be applied accordingly.
3. In accordance with rules A10 and B38, the identity of any potential observers (if known) should be disclosed at the time of recruitment where the presence of the observers may adversely affect the interest or wellbeing of the respondent.
4. Informed consent, from potential respondents, to participate in any research exercise should be gathered in a verifiable form (for example, written, recorded) which can be referred to in case of any doubt.

## B: Client databases

### **The Rules**

**B7**            **Where lists of named individuals are used, e.g. Client databases, the list source must be revealed at an appropriate point in the interview, if requested. This overrides the right to Client anonymity.**

### **Guidance**

1. Before agreeing to the receipt of client databases, the researcher or recruitment agency should ask their client (the data controller) to confirm that their notification with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) includes 'research purposes' and thus that they have the right to process customer information for research purposes.
2. If they ask, respondents must be told the primary source of the list, as stated in B7. This means telling them the name of the client company whose list it is, though this can be revealed at the end of the interview/group discussion rather than the beginning. This instruction must be contained within the recruitment instructions. If the client needs to remain anonymous at recruitment stage, then the respondent should be told this and offered the opportunity to proceed on that basis.
3. If a supplied list contains addresses that are incorrect, or if an individual on the list has died, then that information may be passed back to the data controller, e.g., the client. Corrected data such as new addresses cannot be passed back. In such circumstances the data controller should conduct a separate data cleansing exercise. Other incorrect information, for example about brand usership, cannot be passed back to the client.
4. Researchers and clients should agree the definitions of customers/potential respondents to be included on the lists. It is recommended that the researcher or recruitment agency checks if their client includes ex-directory telephone numbers and numbers that have been excluded by the Telephone Preference Service (TPS). There is no obligation to remove numbers that are ex-directory or listed on the TPS, but some respondents may object or complain on that basis. Researchers should also ask if their client is aware of any problems with the lists

and advises their client not to provide any personal customer information that is not relevant to the study.

5. Clients should send informative letters on their own letterhead to all customers likely to be contacted before recruitment starts. This is particularly important when the customer information could be regarded as sensitive or private. It is also good practice for respondents to be able to ring a client freephone telephone number if they want to opt out of the study.
6. Researchers/recruitment agencies should build sufficient time into the setting up of recruitment, to allow for lists to be produced, telephone searches to be done and recruitment to be completed satisfactorily.

## **2: During the Research Exercise**

### A: Ensuring Emotional Well-Being

#### **The Rules**

- A10**            **Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities.**
- B2**              **All written or oral assurances made by any Member involved in commissioning or conducting projects must be factually correct and honoured by the Member.**
- B.14**           **Members must take reasonable steps to ensure all of the following:**
- **that the data collection process is fit for purpose and Clients have been advised accordingly;**
  - **that the design and content of the data collection process or instrument is appropriate for the audience being researched;**
  - **that Respondents are able to provide information in a way that reflects the view they want to express, including don't know/prefer not to say where appropriate;**
  - **that Respondents are not led towards a particular point of view;**
  - **that responses are capable of being interpreted in an unambiguous way;**
  - **that personal data collected are relevant and not excessive.**
- B15**            **If there is to be any recording, monitoring or observation during an interview, Respondents must be informed about this both at recruitment and at the beginning of the interview.**

**Comment:** *This does not include monitoring (listening to but not recording) telephone interviews for the purpose of quality control where interviewers have been informed that such monitoring takes place.*

**B17** Respondents must not be misled when being asked for cooperation to participate.

**B18** A Respondent's right to withdraw from a project at any stage must be respected.

**B19** Members must ensure that Respondents are able to check without difficulty the identity and bona fides of any individual and/or their employer conducting a project (including any Sub-contractors).

**B21** Members must ensure that all of the following are clearly communicated to the Respondent:

- the name of the interviewer (an Interviewer's Identity Card must be shown if face to face);
- an assurance that the interview will be carried out according to the MRS Code of Conduct;
- the general subject of the interview;
- the purpose of the interview;
- if asked, the likely length of the interview;
- any costs likely to be incurred by the Respondent.

**B34** At the time of recruitment (or before the exercise takes place if details change after recruitment), Members must ensure that Respondents are told all relevant information as per rule B21 and:

- the location of the exercise and if it is to take place in a viewing facility; and
- whether observers are likely to be present; and

- **when and how the exercise is to be recorded; and**
- **the likely length of the exercise including the start and finish time; and**
- **the Member, moderator and/or Agency that will be conducting the exercise.**

## **Guidance**

1. The potentially intrusive nature of qualitative research means that emotional wellbeing is an area of particular concern. The objectives of any study do not give the researcher a special right to intrude on a respondent's privacy nor to abandon normal respect for an individual's values.
2. In terms of sensitivity, topic areas can be divided into:
  - those topics that are judged sensitive to everyone, because of the nature of that subject;
  - those topics that may be sensitive to a group for cultural, religious or political reasons; and
  - those topics that may be sensitive to a particular individual, because of that individual's past history, behaviour and attitudes.
3. In the case of the latter, researchers cannot necessarily take precautions in advance of the interviews, but can treat each case sensitively and individually, giving respondents a genuine opportunity to withdraw. Any topic can potentially be sensitive to an individual. Respondents who feel their privacy and personal sensitivities are not being recognised or respected may be less forthcoming. Equally, respondents who feel they have not been treated with honesty and openness may feel patronised. In both cases, the nature of their responses may be affected. In addition, these respondents may feel less willing to participate in further research.
4. In accordance with Rules A10 and B21, where the topic is judged to be sensitive to most people, respondents must be told explicitly the subject and content of the discussion.



5. In accordance with rule A10, where the subject is difficult, emotional or stressful for respondents, researchers should consider undertaking a debrief or providing information on follow-up support.
6. In accordance with Rules B18 and B34, invitations should always make reference to respondents' rights to withdraw and withhold information and must state when recording is to be used and whether observers are likely to be present.
7. Researchers should not ask respondents to reveal unnecessary personal identifiable information during the interview or discussion.
8. Moderators must respect respondents' requests not to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the research exercise if they wish to do so.
9. Respondents should feel they have a choice whether to participate in exercises or tasks where they may feel particularly embarrassed or uncomfortable, e.g. role playing exercises, touching other respondents, sitting or kneeling on the floor.
10. In accordance with Rules B17 and B34, assurances as to the length of the interview must be honoured and, in the event of the discussion or interview running over time, respondents should feel they have the opportunity to leave.
11. If the respondent asks who the client is, the Researcher must not lie. If there is a concern that giving respondents information about the client company may affect responses, then the respondents need not be told at the beginning of the group/interview but should be told at the end.

## B: Observation of Interviews and Group Discussions

### **The Rules**

- B34** At the time of recruitment (or before the exercise takes place if details change after recruitment), Members must ensure that Respondents are told all relevant information as per rule B21 and:
- the location of the exercise and if it is to take place in a viewing facility; and
  - whether observers are likely to be present; and
  - when and how the exercise is to be recorded; and
  - the likely length of the exercise including the start and finish time; and
  - the Member, moderator and/or Agency that will be conducting the exercise;
- B36** If Members have agreed with Clients that observers are to be present, Members must inform all observers fully about their legal and ethical responsibilities.
- B37** Members must make clear to Respondents the capacity in which observers are present; Clients must be presented as such, even if they are also researchers and/or Members of MRS.
- Comment: This also applies to Members themselves when an employee of a Client organisation, advertising/design/PR agency etc.*
- B38** There are some situations where observers could adversely affect Respondents' interests and/or wellbeing, and in such instances, Members must ensure that Respondents are told at an appropriate stage the identity of any observer who might be present at the exercise.

**B39**            **Members must ensure that, in instances where observers may know Respondents (as may occur in business-to-business research), Respondents are informed before the start that their interviews are to be observed, with a warning that the observer may include Clients who already know them.**

## **Guidance**

1. The researcher and their client should consider carefully whether the benefits of observation outweigh the disadvantages.
2. If the client wishes to observe interviews or groups for quality control or training reasons, then consideration should be given to the other options such as listening to recordings, reading group transcripts (following the guidelines on Primary Data and Recording of Interviews and Group Discussions in this document), or setting up dummy interviews/groups.
3. So that the researcher can assess the observer effect and interpret the group/interview responses with more confidence, only some of the groups/interviews on a project – ideally no more than half – should be observed. Where this is difficult to achieve, e.g. in small samples, then researcher and client should be mindful of the observer effect when interpreting the data. The potential effect on respondents applies both with ‘covert’ (via viewing theatres) and with ‘visible’ (in the same room) observations.
4. Visible observation of interviews (for example, where the observer is present in the room) with two or three people can be particularly intrusive and therefore researchers should only consider such observation as acceptable in exceptional circumstances and ideally only for some of the interviews on that project. There should ideally only be one observer per group/interview.
5. In accordance with Rule A1, observers must not to note down respondents’ personal data without their consent.
6. Researchers should advise observers prior to attending qualitative research sessions (in the same room as respondents) how best to ensure respondents’ well-being and minimise the observer effect. Consideration should be given to aspects such as style of clothes, promptness, where the observer sits, whether the observer has a role on the group/interview, paying attention to all comments equally, note-taking and when questions may be asked.

7. When observing in a viewing facility, Researchers should advise observers of the potential damage to the group/interview dynamics from any form of interruption such as noise or light from behind the mirror, entering the interviewing room during the group/interview or sending in notes or slipping them under the door.
8. Researchers must advise observers of their responsibilities:
  - if any observer recognises any respondent, they must leave the observation
  - room (apart from when pre-introduced in business/employee research exercises), and
  - audio, visual or written records or any other respondent generated material taken away afterwards by clients (with all of the respondents' consent) must only be used for the purposes to which respondents agreed that the recordings could be used; this must be set out in writing in an agreement between the researcher and client.

## **The Rules**

**B37**            **Members must make clear to Respondents the capacity in which observers are present; Clients must be presented as such, even if they are also Researchers and/or Members of MRS.**

*Comment: This also applies to Members themselves when an employee of a Client organisation, advertising/design/PR agency etc.*

**B38**            **There are some situations where observers could adversely affect Respondents' interests and/or well-being and, in such instances, Members must ensure that Respondents are told at an appropriate stage the identity of any observer who might be present during the exercise.**

## **Guidance**

1. Researchers should give a general explanation of why observers are present and what they will do (e.g. take notes). This includes both covert and visible observation.
2. Researchers must reassure respondents about the confidentiality of their responses and their personal details.
3. Clients should respect Researchers' recommendations that there are no observers on a particular project if there is a strong concern that the client's presence will adversely affect the nature of the response.

## D: Primary Data and Recording of Interviews and Group Discussions

### **The Rules**

**A1** Research must conform to the national and international legislation relevant to a given project including in particular the Data Protection Act 1998 or other comparable legislation applicable outside the UK.

**B8** The anonymity of Respondents must be preserved unless they have given their informed consent for their details to be revealed or for attributable comments to be passed on.

*Comment: Members must be particularly careful if sample sizes are very small (such as in business and employee research) that they do not inadvertently identify organisations or departments and therefore individuals.*

**B9** If Respondents have given consent for data to be passed on in a form which allows them to be personally identified, Members must:

- demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that it will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected and
- fully inform Respondents as to what will be revealed, to whom and for what purpose.

**B34** At the time of recruitment (or before the exercise takes place if details change after recruitment), Members must ensure that Respondents are told all relevant information as per rule B21 and:

- the location of the exercise and if it is to take place in a viewing facility; and
- whether observers are likely to be present; and
- when and how the exercise is to be recorded; and

- the likely length of the exercise including the start and finish time; and
- the Member, moderator and/or Agency that will be conducting the exercise.

**B35** Members must ensure that completed recruitment questionnaires, incentive and attendance lists, transmissions or recordings or any other information or outputs which identify Respondents are not passed to Clients or other third parties without the explicit permission of the Respondents; and Members must take reasonable steps to ensure that the information or outputs are used only for the purpose agreed at the time of data collection.

**B42** Members must ensure that any material handed to Clients or included in reports, without consent from Respondents, is anonymised e.g. transcripts containing verbatim comments and projective material.

*Comment: Special care must be taken when the universe is small, as in the case of some business to business research studies.*

## **Guidance**

1. The Data Protection Act 1998 stipulates that respondents have a right to know how their personal data (which includes recordings of their voice and/or appearance) will be used. In accordance with the legislation and Rule A1, Researchers have a responsibility to inform respondents accordingly and ensure that the data will only be used in the way that respondents have been told it will be used.
2. In accordance with Rule B8, the anonymity of respondents must be preserved unless they have given their informed consent for their details to be revealed or for attributable comments to be passed on. Researchers should take responsibility for all primary data. Materials resulting from projective techniques and produced in groups or depths are considered to be primary data.
3. In accordance with Rule B8, Researchers must ensure that qualitative data labelled as anonymised does not contain any identifiable data. Qualitative

primary data are often difficult to anonymise because an individual's identity rests in their appearance, their voice, and in some cases, their turn of phrase.

4. In accordance with Rule B15, Researchers must ensure that qualitative groups are only recorded with the consent of the respondents. Viewing facilities must be reminded of this requirement.
5. In accordance with B35, any material which identifies respondents must not be released by the Researchers unless explicit permission has previously been obtained from the respondents involved.
6. In accordance with Rule B9, researchers must ensure that respondents are given as much relevant information as possible about the future use of primary data in particular
  - to whom they are to be given
  - to whom they are to be shown
  - for what purposes they are to be used
7. Researchers should inform clients of restrictions on the use of primary data at the start of the project where there is any possibility that the client may later ask to see copies of these.
8. Researchers should ensure that sufficient contracts are in place to allow recompense from the client for any costs arising from a request to obtain permission from respondents for release of primary data.



### 3: Other Types of Research

#### A: Observational Research

##### The Rules

**A1** Research must conform to the national and international legislation relevant to a given project including in particular the Data Protection Act 1998 or other comparable legislation applicable outside the UK.

**B47** Members must ensure that all of the following are undertaken when observation equipment is being used:

- Clear and legible signs must be placed in areas where surveillance is taking place.
- Cameras must be sited so that they monitor only the areas intended for surveillance.
- Signs must state the individual/organisation responsible for the surveillance, including contact information and the purpose of the observation.

*Comment: Rule A10 of the Code requires Members to take all reasonable precautions to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected. This may have particular pertinence in an ethnographic and observational setting. Issues to be considered are:*

- *the need to be sensitive to the possibility that their presence may, at times, be seen as an unwarranted intrusion; here safeguards, and the ability to end the observation quickly, must be built into any ethnographic situation.*
- *the need to be sensitive to the possibility that Respondents may become over involved with them at a personal level.*
- *the need to be sensitive to the possibility of 'observation fatigue'; again there is value in having the*

***ability to end the observation quickly within any ethnographic situation.***

## **Guidance**

There are two types of observation: Participant, where the individual is interviewed as well as observed and Non-participant, where the individual is observed but not interviewed. Audio and visual recordings in any format of individuals are defined as personal data under the Data Protection Act 1998.

When it comes to participant observation, all the normal rules and practices apply (as detailed in sections 1 and 2 of this guidance).

For non-participant observation, such as using CCTV cameras for research observation, in addition to the rules above:

1. The quality of the recorded image should be appropriate to meet the purpose of the surveillance.
2. Images must be retained no longer than is necessary.
3. Disclosure of recorded images to third parties must only be made in limited and prescribed circumstances and with the individual's consent.
4. Adequate security measures must be in place to ensure against any unauthorised processing, loss, destruction or damage to the data.
5. In accordance with Rule A1, Researchers who use CCTV must follow Security Industry Authority licensing requirements where applicable. For more information please see [www.sia.gov.uk](http://www.sia.gov.uk).

## The Rules

- A10** Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities.
- B2** All written or oral assurances made by any Member involved in commissioning or conducting projects must be factually correct and honoured by the Member.
- B15** If there is to be any recording, monitoring or observation during an interview, Respondents must be informed about this both at recruitment and at the beginning of the interview.

*Comment: Rule A10 of the Code requires Members to take all reasonable precautions to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected. This may have particular pertinence in an ethnographic and observational setting. Issues to be considered are:*

- *the need to be sensitive to the possibility that their presence may, at times, be seen as an unwarranted intrusion; here safeguards, and the ability to end the observation quickly, must be built into any ethnographic situation.*
- *the need to be sensitive to the possibility that Respondents may become over involved with them at a personal level.*
- *the need to be sensitive to the possibility of 'observation fatigue'; again there is value in having the ability to end the observation quickly within any ethnographic situation.*

## Guidance

1. Researchers should provide clients and sponsors of research with a clear account of any limitations involved in specific research projects.
2. Researchers should avoid situations where they could become vulnerable to accusations of misconduct (especially when working in respondents' homes) or where they became over-involved at an emotional level with the observed.
3. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Rule A1, respondents must be told what will happen to any data gathered in the process of observation.
4. Researchers should inform respondents of the extended nature of ethnographic research at the point of recruitment before agreeing to participation and should be made aware of their 'right to withdraw' at any time.
5. Researchers should inform respondents (at the point of recruitment) of any activities they will be asked to engage in or undertake.
6. Researchers should inform respondents of the purpose and rationale for observation of their behaviour.
7. Where children and young people are to be the subject of observation, for instance where the Researcher is living with a family, the MRS Guidelines for Research with Children and Young People should also be consulted.

## C: Deliberative Research

### The Rules

- B3** Members must take reasonable steps to design research to the specification agreed with the Client.
- B4** Members must take reasonable steps to design research which meets the quality standards agreed with the Client.
- B14** Members must take reasonable steps to ensure all of the following:
- that the data collection process is fit for purpose and Clients have been advised accordingly
  - that the design and content of data collection process or instrument is appropriate for the audience being researched;
  - that Respondents are able to provide information in a way that reflects
  - the view they want to express;
  - that Respondents are not led towards a particular point of view;
  - that responses are capable of being interpreted in an unambiguous way;
  - that personal data collected are relevant and not excessive.

### Guidance

*Note: Deliberative research projects may range from very small local events to national exercises. The following guidelines will be particularly suitable for large projects and/or for potentially contentious subject areas. Researchers should adopt a risk based approach particularly where the exercise itself or the results it generates are likely to be subject to public comment or challenge.*

#### Commissioning and Project Design

1. Researchers should ensure that clients and all other third parties involved in the development and implementation of the project are fully aware of their responsibilities and clearly outline what is required of them (and when) within the proposal.
2. Researchers should provide with proposals a detailed initial risk assessment which includes risk to both clients and research suppliers including the possible time that may be spent on designing the materials to be presented to respondents (often referred to as participants) and also the time that may be spent defending processes and the results of deliberative projects. This should be discussed and modified as appropriate with clients. The need to regularly review and update the risk log should be built into the project process.
3. Where projects are especially complex, involve a wide number of stakeholders and/or need to meet very specific timings, researchers should consider using an established project management process, which is regularly updated throughout the life-cycle of the project.

#### Stakeholder Involvement

1. Researchers should work with clients to consider whether and what extent stakeholders need to be involved in the project.
2. If stakeholders are required, researchers should ensure that relevant / key stakeholders are identified. It is the responsibility of clients to ensure that any list of stakeholders identified is comprehensive, but researchers should not rely on clients' choices alone and should ensure that stakeholders cover important viewpoints that may exist upon the subject under scrutiny. There should be a written audit trail of why stakeholders are included or not and while the final choice will be the responsibility of the client, the researchers should take sufficient steps to ensure that clients have considered the implications of including/not including each stakeholder.
3. Researchers should bring to clients' attention the potential imbalance or biases in arguments if positions and assumptions are not challenged, where appropriate. Also, researchers should take reasonable steps to bring to the clients' attention, any prominence or unfair prominence of argument on one or more of the sides being presented.

4. Researchers should take reasonable steps to ensure that the views and stance of those stakeholders who refuse or are unable to participate are taken into consideration in materials development.
5. Researchers, with clients, should decide upon, and document, contingency plans should one or more key stakeholders refuse to contribute/comment, miss a deadline or withdraw from a project part-way through.

### Materials

1. Researchers should ensure that materials include, where appropriate:
  - Accepted facts around which there is consensus.
  - Differing views or interpretations due to different academic, commercial or political disagreements, including views of official bodies and citizen or community voices.
  - Well-referenced information from credible, verifiable and trustworthy sources.
2. In addition to stakeholders, researchers with clients should decide on whether it is important to bring in any independent specialist or academic to help ensure that the materials express the breadth of views on the issues under scrutiny fairly and to help to ensure that factual material is accurate.
3. Researchers should confirm with clients whether there are vested interests who might be expected to have different, or extreme, views, as well as making their own efforts to find this out, and agree whether their views should be included in the materials.
4. At the proposal stage, researchers should outline who they think is appropriate to be responsible for the compilation of, and the final approval of materials shown or presented to respondents. Particular care should be taken with introductory materials which set out challenges and the roles and views of different bodies and stakeholders, as this is likely to set the tone for the whole event.
5. Where using expert witnesses to present perspectives, researchers should take reasonable steps to ensure that individuals are well briefed and familiar with guidelines for presenting evidence in deliberative events (e.g. Sciencewise guidance).

6. Where there is divergence of opinion between experts, researcher should explain to respondents how this divergence will be handled in the consultation process, even if this cannot be done in real time and has to be communicated to the respondents at a later date.
7. Researchers should ensure that all sources are clearly identified in materials (e.g. in notes on slides), make sure moderators and facilitators know where these come from. The sources should be available to respondents on request. Members of the core research team who are present on the day should be able to explain why these sources, rather than others, were chosen.
8. Researchers should take reasonable steps, e.g. through the use of stakeholders or independent specialists, or through their own research, to ensure that sources are credible and are accurately represented in the materials.

#### Reporting results and feedback

1. When reporting the results from a deliberative project, researchers should make it clear how many respondents took part in the deliberative project and any selection criteria used.
2. When reporting (particularly for larger events) it is important that the report/presentation makes it clear that post-deliberation responses may not reflect/represent the views of the general public if polled.
3. As part of the deliberative process, researchers should acknowledge the contribution of respondents by feeding back the conclusions of the research to them.

#### ***Other Sources of Information:***

##### **INVOLVE**

Deliberative Public Engagement - Nine Principles

[http://www.involve.org.uk/nine\\_principles/](http://www.involve.org.uk/nine_principles/)

##### **Sciencewise**

Guiding Principles for Public Dialogue

<http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/publications/>



**Notes**



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