

A Guide to Research Incentives

What is a research incentive?

A research incentive is any form of reward, compensation or thank you to a research participant to encourage their participation in a research project. It is often a monetary reward or voucher. Previously, the ODI has used £25 Amazon vouchers for members of the public.

When to use research incentives

You should use these to encourage participation or to prevent drop out rates when participation becomes a burden on people's time or income. These are particularly important for the general public who may need to organise childcare, take time away from other responsibilities or paid work.

Incentivising participation more generally

You should also think more broadly about why people will want to take part in your research, what their motivations are and how you can build on these. For example, stakeholders and experts may value opportunities for networking and collaboration with others and with the ODI. You should also consider how to incentivise participation through the methods you use. For example, difficult questions and unwieldy surveys or a lengthy interview may dis-incentivise people to continue engaging in research. The incentive to stay involved should be embedded in all of your research communications, methods and interactions, to continually show its importance and that participating will be engaging, interesting, worthwhile and even fun.

Key guidelines on incentives

The Market Research Society offers some [useful guidelines](#), including:

Incentives should:

- Encourage participation in projects,
- Be proportionate and balanced to the type of project and involvement

Incentives should not:

- Constitute, or are not perceived to constitute, a bribe.
- Require the participant to spend any money.
- Be offered as price discounts (monetary vouchers are fine if they do not require participants to spend extra money)
- Be used for further research purposes with the participant/participant data
- Include the use of client goods or branding (this is direct marketing/promotion)

Should you use incentives with stakeholders?

Stakeholders may not require incentives to take part in research and indeed, their participation may be considered part of their work. However, if you are asking for a high level of involvement a small thank you rather than an upfront incentive could be proportionate and balanced. An example might include a thank you email or card, a box of chocolates or a prize at the end of a workshop. You should also ensure events and workshops are well organised with refreshments and good breaks to ensure they do not feel burdensome.

Are there any issues with using research incentives

Offering research incentives does create extra administration in terms of informed consent, processing the finances and recording the process internally. You should also consider the extent to which incentives will encourage meaningful participation in research. Furthermore, using a research incentive may appear at odds with the nature of the research, the subject, the participant or the context. You need to consider how this will be interpreted.

Informed consent

Where incentives are offered to encourage participation in projects, participants must be clearly informed. This needs to be included in Informed Consent Information provided to participants as well as recorded in an informed consent form, as outlined in the [Informed Consent guide](#). Personal details of all participants eligible for the incentive must remain confidential and not accessible to anyone in the organisation outside the research team.