



BUFFALO STATE
The State University of New York

Institutional Review Board

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ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

Often social scientists conduct research in which organizations, rather than individuals, are the units of analysis. Since the information gathered in this form of research is not about individuals, there is often a great deal of confusion about compliance with human participants requirements. “Organizational Research” is defined as research obtaining information only about organizations, not about the individuals in or served by the organizations. Any research that gathers information about individuals (whether identified or not) must meet the human participants requirements described herein.

The human participants requirements for organizational research depend on the source and nature of the information obtained. There are three categories of organizational research:

- Information about organizations obtained from publicly available records: Since the definition of human participants research is the gathering of information “from or about living human beings,” this type of research would not be considered human participants research and would not require IRB review.
- *Non-sensitive* information obtained through interviews or questionnaires: Since this information is obtained “from” individuals, it would fall under the definition of human participants research and would require IRB review; however, this type of research would be eligible for expedited review and no organizational permission would be required. Investigators would have to submit a copy of the interview questions or questionnaire.
- *Sensitive* information obtained through interviews or questionnaires: Sensitive information is information that might be proprietary or damaging to the organization if divulged. This type of research would require documentation of organizational permission and would require review by the full IRB.

Investigators must consider the following when developing their research:

- Are employees told what will be done with the data and who will have access to their information?
- Is the data identifiable regardless of whether names have been recorded (e.g., affiliation/position within the company)?
- Could the employee perceive that the questionnaire must be completed since a supervisor was making the request?

- Could the employee lose his/her position within the company if the information they give is negative and disseminated to management?
- Are the procedures to protect confidentiality/anonymity of the data adequate?
- Has the distinction between research and normal job activity been made clear?