



Guidelines for using Online Survey Tools

Researchers planning to use online survey companies should acquaint themselves with the relevant laws. In particular, section 30.1 of the BC **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)** states:

A public body must ensure that personal information in its custody or under its control is stored only in Canada and accessed only in Canada, unless one of the following applies:

- (a) if the individual the information is about has identified the information and has consented, in the prescribed manner, to it being stored in or accessed from, as applicable, another jurisdiction;
- (b) if it is stored in or accessed from another jurisdiction for the purpose of disclosure allowed under this Act.
- (c) If it was disclosed under section 33.1 (1) (i.1).

Under FIPPA, “personal information” is defined as “recorded information about an identifiable individual.” This includes directly identifying information (e.g. SIN number, student number, etc.) as well as indirectly identifying information (e.g. postal code, date of birth) that alone or in combination with other information might reasonably be expected to identify an individual. **Please be aware that an IP address constitutes indirectly identifying information.** Collecting someone’s personal opinions about something is only considered “personal information” if the information is linked or could possibly be linked to the individual. Personal opinions alone do not constitute “personal information” for the purposes of BC FIPPA.

If you are not collecting any personal information in your survey, then you are free to use whatever online survey tool you prefer as long as the survey is completely anonymous – i.e. the online survey tool you are using has the capability to switch off the IP tracking feature (online survey tools collect this information from users as a matter of course).

If you are collecting personal information from respondents, then survey tools hosted and serviced in Canada should be used.

The REB recommends the online survey tools located in Canada. If you use an online survey tool hosted outside of Canada (e.g. the United States, Europe) respondents must consent to having their information stored in a jurisdiction outside Canada (note: “click-through” consents are acceptable). If the server is located in the USA, then the respondent must be made aware of the fact that the data is potentially subject to the Patriot Act. In such instances, the consent information must clearly indicate the location of the survey company’s server and include a description of any associated limits to confidentiality.

The consent document or letter of introduction must indicate the location of the survey company's server and include a description of any associated limits to confidentiality. An example of a typical statement is, “This online survey company is hosted by a web survey company located in the USA and as such is subject to U.S. laws. In particular, the US Patriot Act which allows authorities access to the

records of internet service providers. This survey or questionnaire does not ask for personal identifiers or any information that may be used to identify you. The web survey company servers record incoming IP addresses of the computer that you use to access the survey but no connection is made between your data and your computer's IP address. If you choose to participate in the survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and accessed in the USA. The security and privacy policy for the websurvey company can be found at the following link: _____.”

See the UBC Online Survey Guidance Notes for more information

(https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/sites/ore.ubc.ca/files/documents/Online_Survey-GN.pdf).