Things to Consider when Working with Human Subjects and Surveys

• **General Survey Development**
  o Make sure that the response options on your survey match what is asked for in the question
    • ex: If the question is a yes/no question, the responses should not be a scale
  o Decide if you want your survey to be anonymous or confidential and then plan on how you can ensure confidentiality or anonymity
    • NOTE: “Anonymous” means that there is no link whatsoever (at any time) between participant identity and data, and “confidential” means that there is a link between participant identity and data, but you have taken steps to protect that information and keep identities private.
    • Anonymity and confidentiality concerns exist throughout the life of a study, from recruitment to follow up. You need to think about how identifiers will (or will not) be associated with data throughout the data collection process, analyses and publication.
    • If you at any point in time are able to link participant identity to their data, the survey is NOT anonymous.
  o Discuss how you will compile, transfer, and/or manage data from the survey
    • How are you transferring data from one place to another?
    • Are you using encrypted software?
  o Do you plan to retain data indefinitely or destroy it after a period of time (NOT earlier than 3 years after the end of the study)?
    • If you will retain it, will you strip of any identifying information?

• **If implementing your Survey online**
  o You should not plan to e-mail surveys back and forth to participants. This is NOT a secure medium for data collection.
  o Use Qualtrics: [http://www.qualtrics.com/](http://www.qualtrics.com/)
    • As an NCSU person, it is free for you to use. It is more reliable, more secure, and seemingly more legitimate for your participants than all other survey tools available
  o If you want your survey to be anonymous, make sure to check the settings and ensure you are not recording any kind of information like IP addresses
    • Make sure the link type (generic or unique) that you are sending to your participants matches your confidentiality/anonymity plans
  o If using the MTurk population for online surveys, remember that MTurk worker IDs count as identifying information so you need to come up with a plan for that
  o Adding an optional section on your survey for participants to add their contact information (or other identifying information like role/job title) makes your survey identifiable.
    • Instead, you can collect contact information on a survey without it connecting to participant responses. At the end of the survey, simply provide a link that connects your participants to a separate un-linkable site/survey that allows them to input their contact information, names, and or codes for payment
  o In many surveys, you can “click to consent”. This means that informed consent is handled online and no signatures are necessary. To do this, you would make the first page of the survey the “consent form,” containing necessary consent
information. The end of the form, instead of having a line for signatures, would direct participants to click a link entitled, “I agree” if they agree to participate. That link will take them to the survey.

- If minors are taking the survey, other considerations must be made regarding “click to consent”. If using minors in surveys, discuss how you plan on getting parent/guardian consent
  - Another option is to include informed consent information in a recruitment email alerting potential participants about your study. In this method, necessary consent information would be included in the email body, with instructions to “click the URL below to go to the survey” if participants agree to participate.

- If implementing your survey in hard copy
  - Plan ways to collect the surveys from the participants that protects their anonymity or confidentiality (sealed envelope, sending through the mail, etc.)
  - Think about the location and context where participants will be taking the survey, is it private? Do the questions warrant a private location? Will there be unspoken pressure to participate?
    - For example, giving a survey about job satisfaction to a group of teachers during a staff meeting might a) not be private as teachers could inadvertently see how their colleagues are rating questions, and b) provide social pressure to complete the survey.
  - How are you storing and transferring the surveys that you have collected?
    - This is especially important if the content of the surveys is not harmless and if the surveys are identifiable