MTURK Tip Sheet for Researchers:

Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) has become an increasingly popular tool when recruiting human subjects for social and behavioral research. MTurk is a crowd-sourcing marketplace that provides businesses and researchers with the opportunity to collect human intelligence tasks (HITs) from a large number of people in an efficient and cost-effective manner. MTurk HITs range from simple surveys that last a few minutes to more complex experiments lasting over an hour.

At UMD, researchers across campus may use MTurk to recruit participants for human subject's research. This document provides recommendations from the UMD IRB for researchers to consider when using MTurk as a platform to collect research data.

ENROLLMENT:

- ✓ **Understand Who Counts Towards Participant Enrollment.** Enrolled participants include the total number of participants who consent to participate in the research, regardless of whether the participants' responses were invalid or incomplete.

- ✓ **Consider Invalid Data when Determining the Number of Participants Needed.** When collecting data using MTurk, the UMD IRB suggests that researchers consider the possibility of receiving invalid and/or incomplete participant responses and include a "buffer" in the number of participants needed for the research. For example, if you need 100 participants to power your study, request 150 to allow for participant dropout and incompletions/invalidity of data. This information should be included in Initial Application Part 2, Section 2d/e.

VALIDITY OF DATA:

- ✓ **Use Attention Check Questions.** Attention check questions can be a helpful tool to aid in the identification of low-quality data from participants speeding through studies or from bots. Proper attention check questions should be straightforward and not ambiguous. These questions should not be designed to "trick" participants, but rather to ensure participants are putting forth reasonable efforts.

  NOTE: If participants will not be compensated for missing or incorrectly answering attention check questions, please include this information on the Consent Form (as well as in Initial Application Part 2, Section 3). An example of appropriate language for the Consent document: "any suspected fraud or abuse will result in forfeiture of compensation".

CONFIDENTIALITY:

- ✓ **Use External HITs.** External HITs involve recruitment through the MTurk platform, but link participants to a separate survey posted on an external site. The UMD IRB recommends that tasks be configured as external HITs using Qualtrics. Qualtrics is the survey software approved and licensed for use at the University of Maryland.

- ✓ **Minimize the Collection of Personally Identifiable Information (PII).** Consider how the information collected on MTurk could be combined to indirectly identify participants. Researchers should try to minimize the collection of specific information if higher level information will answer the research question. For instance, avoid collecting exact dates of birth (DOB) if an age or year of birth is sufficient.

- ✓ **Avoid Collecting MTurk Worker IDs.** Recent research shows that MTurk worker IDs can easily be linked to individuals' Amazon profiles including individuals' wish lists and previous product reviews. This means that researchers must be careful in deciding what information to collect from participants. The default should be to avoid collecting participants' MTurk worker IDs. But, if it is necessary to collect worker IDs, then the researchers should ensure that worker IDs are kept confidential and secure, are not linked back to survey data, and are deleted after use.

✓ **Do NOT Collect IP Addresses.** Configure program settings so that IP addresses are not obtained if the aim is to collect data anonymously.

CONSENT:

✓ **Explain all Research Requirements.** Researchers should be clear about the eligibility requirements and the types of tasks participants will be asked to perform. For instance, if the task involves writing, or watching videos, this should be stated in the Procedures Section of the Consent Form. If any extraneous software is required to complete the task, this should also be included (e.g. this task requires javascript or inquisit).

✓ **Be Transparent Regarding Compensation and Bonuses.** Researchers should be clear about compensation and bonuses. If participants will not be compensated for incorrectly responding to "attention check" questions, please include this information on the Consent Form (as well as in Initial Application Part 2, Section 3). Also, be aware that certain types of tasks, such as writing tasks, often elicit higher compensation. *An example of appropriate language for the Consent document: "any suspected fraud or abuse will result in forfeiture of compensation".*

✓ **Avoid Collecting Participant Signatures.** On the first page of the online survey, participants should be presented with the consent document. The online Consent Form should include all the elements of informed consent, but should not require a participant's signature. Participants should click a button to indicate their consent to participate.

Note: While typed names and digital signatures are acceptable, in order to best minimize confidentiality issues, providing participants with a checkbox is considered best practice.

✓ **Apply for a Waiver of Written Consent Documentation**. Whenever participants will not provide their typed name or digital signature on an online consent document, the researchers must apply for a Waiver of Consent Documentation in their IRB Application. To do this, the researchers must include at least one of the waiver of consent documentation points in Initial Application Part 2, Section 7 and provide a brief rationale to explain how at least one point relates to their research.

DEBRIEF:

✓ **Understand When Debriefing is Required.** If the research includes deception then it is important to include a debriefing statement at the end of the survey. In the debriefing statement, researchers should include the following: 1.) an acknowledgement that participants were deceived; 2.) an apology for the deception; 3.) state the reason for the deception; 4.) provide an explanation of how the deception occurred (e.g. false purpose of the study or false information about the procedures); and 5.) give participants an opportunity to withdraw their data from the research should they choose to do so.

✓ **Understand When Debriefing is Recommended.** If the research includes presenting false/manipulated materials (like a manipulated news story) or withholds an element of the true purpose so as to not bias participants, debriefing is highly recommended as a risk minimization strategy, particularly if the false information might be harmful (e.g. perpetuates health misinformation). In the debriefing statement, researchers should include a post-participation information document that "corrects the record" stating: 1.) that the true purpose of the research was not altered; 2.) describes what was created/altered by the researchers; and 3.) provides the PI's contact information for any further questions.

RESPECT THE MTURK WORKERS:

✓ **Understand the Implications of Rejecting HITS.** Rejections remain with MTurk workers forever, negatively impacting their ability to get future work on MTurk. Please avoid arbitrary rejections or rejecting work in error. If rejections are made in error, work with MTurk to promptly correct these mistakes.