COVID-19 and Qualitative Research:

Franklin University IRB Guidance for Investigators Transitioning from Face-To-Face to Virtual Data Collection

Several US states and countries have implemented mandatory shelter-in-place orders to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to social distancing efforts and limiting movement to slow the spread of coronavirus, the Franklin University IRB suspended all face-to-face interactions between investigators, research teams, and study participants as of March 20, 2020. All investigators with active protocols or who are developing research proposals must modify their study designs to account for this change or wait until it is safe to resume human contact 1) as determined by the CDC and 2) when restrictions are lifted by country, state, and local authorities.

To help research teams through these developing events, the Franklin University IRB has prepared guidelines to assist investigators who can and wish to convert any qualitative, face-to-face data collection plans to virtual means. All protocol modifications must be reported to the IRB and, along with new submissions to the IRB, must identify specific data collection tools and data security plans. Doctoral students should consult their dissertation committee chairs to determine if such a modification is appropriate for their research.

The Franklin University IRB recommends that investigators use Zoom or Microsoft Teams to conduct virtual interviews. If recorded (with prior consent by each participant), these interviews should be encrypted and stored securely (e.g., encrypted cloud storage, OneDrive, Principal Investigator’s computer, etc.). See the end of this document to learn how to encrypt local and cloud-synchronized documents for safe storage.

To use Zoom or Microsoft Teams:

**Zoom**

All faculty, staff, and students have a basic Zoom license. This basic license provides investigators with recordable 40-minute meeting sessions, but full licensing is available to investigators who require more time to conduct interviews or carry out other aspects of their projects. Investigators should contact helpdesk@franklin.edu for assistance with acquiring a full license.

If investigators choose to record their Zoom sessions, select the option to record locally (to a PC) to ensure confidentiality and immediate access to the recording. Remember that participants must consent to being recorded, and this must be explained in the informed consent document.
Use this link to learn how to install Zoom: https://support.bluequill.com/hc/en-us/articles/360035102393-Installing-and-Signing-into-the-Zoom-Desktop-Application

Use this link to learn more about Zoom for students: https://support.bluequill.com/hc/en-us/articles/360022590773-Zoom-for-Students-Overview

**Microsoft Teams**

Investigators may also use Microsoft Teams to conduct and record interviews. Please see the link below for Microsoft Teams support that was created for students.


**How to Encrypt Files**

1. Create a directory to hold the data you want to encrypt.
2. Right-click (or press and hold) the folder and select *Properties*.
3. Select the **Advanced** button and select the *Encrypt contents to secure data* check box.
4. Select **OK** to close the *Advanced Attributes* window, select **Apply**, and then select **OK**.

For more detailed guidance on encryption options, see https://www.howtogeek.com/170352/how-to-password-protect-files-and-folders-with-encryption/. Any data that you put into this encrypted directory will itself be encrypted. If this folder resides in cloud storage (e.g., Dropbox, OneDrive, Google Drive, etc.), then its contents will be doubly encrypted (once locally, and once in the cloud).

Please send questions to irb@franklin.edu.