

# **EMS Guidance on the Ethics Requirements of Permission Letters from Institutions**

This document has been developed to guide you when you, as a researcher, need to obtain permission letters from an institution (i.e. company, municipality, professional society, professional body, governance agency, etc.). This is sometimes time-consuming since some institutions also have their own specific internal processes for ethics approvals.

Please note that a permission letter differs from an informed consent letter, where the latter should be given to all human participants (regardless of whether permission letters are required from their institution).

## **Here are specific scenarios when a permission letter is required:**

- When a researcher needs to utilise the institution's facilities (especially distributing surveys or conducting interview(s) on-site).
- When a researcher needs access to the contact information of the employees, customers, members, or other parties affiliated with an institution.
- When a researcher needs access to restricted information (not publicly available) (i.e. database; management documents, policies) from an institution.
- When the researcher needs access to a specific participating group (i.e. employees from a specific organisation, members of a retirement home, members of a closed community on social media, customers of a specific shop or shopping mall, etc.).
- When a researcher obtains information that focuses on specific functions of the institution (such as the institution's processes or structures or employees' views), ensure the data is deidentified and stripped of identifiers. If not possible, instead request permission.
- When an institution may be impacted negatively (i.e., reputational impact; loss of sales/customers/members) by the research results from publicly available data, permission must be obtained to utilise the results. This is when the research results will initiate a negative impact on the institution and not when the institution's reputation has already been publicly compromised (via media or previous research).
- When a researcher needs access to participants from the public schools (i.e. teachers and learners), you need not only permission from the school's principal but also the Department of Education (regardless of whether you use one school or multiple schools). For private schools, you only need permission from the principal.
- When a researcher wishes to utilise a survey/instrument with a copyright, the survey/instrument's developers (or custodians) must provide permission. This occurs when survey/instrument items are not freely available and can only be accessed through a formal permission process.

**When is a permission letter not required:**

- A researcher using a ‘convenient’ or ‘random’ sample from a specific population (i.e. auditors from the private sector; several veterinarians from various practices).
- A researcher collecting data once, and not on multiple occasions, with one member of a specific institution who will discuss their role and their experiences (or complete a general survey) without the institution being recognised, then no permission is required.
- When distributing a survey or invitation to participate in a study and by chance, quite a few members from a specific institution participate, no permission is required. Only when the specific institution may be recognised by the study results should permission instead be acquired.

If a researcher requires permission letter(s) and applies for ethics approval before receiving permission letter(s) from the participating institution, the EMS Research Ethics Committee will provide *conditional approval*. *Final approval* will be provided after the permission letter(s) are received and uploaded to the designated ethics protocol number on the system. In some instances, participating institutions require approval from the researcher’s university before granting permission to conduct research at their institution. In this case, the researcher will receive *conditional approval* from the EMS Research Ethics Committee, which the researcher can submit to the participating institution to receive and upload to the system their permission letter. Then *final approval* will be provided by the EMS Research Ethics Committee.

Take note, when using UP Staff, Students, Alumni and other University stakeholders as participants, researchers need to follow the guidelines set by the Institutional Survey Committee.