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RHODES UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE SOP 4.5 GATEKEEPER CONSENT AND GATEKEEPER WAIVER

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GATEKEEPER CONSENT AND GATEKEEPER WAIVER

1. Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to describe and delineate the role of gatekeeping in research with human participants, occasions when gatekeeper permission is necessary, and those when it is not. It will also explain the purposes of and processes for acquiring gatekeeper waiver.

2. Gatekeepers in research

Gatekeepers are people who can provide or deny access to research participants and/or study settings and are therefore essential mediators for social researchers. They can be:

- 1) Formal: people with the official power to give or withhold permission to undertake research. These include internal ethics committee members, heads of various agencies, and service providers who have the power to grant or withhold permission for research to be conducted.
- 2) Informal: not in an official position where they can refuse a request to conduct research, but able to assist or hinder the progress of a research project.

3. Cases in which gatekeeper's consent is not required

- 3.1. Where research involves observation of people interacting in public spaces but no interaction with human participants.
- 3.2. Where participants are over the age of 18, legally competent, and acting voluntarily and in their own capacity. They must not have been recruited as scholars / employees / residents / inmates etc of any company, organisation, or institution.
- 3.3. Where participants are recruited in public spaces, provided they are first informed that they are being approached for the purposes of data collection and what the study is about. They must give their (preferably written, alternatively audio recorded) consent to participating in the study and to the researcher's method of recording data obtained from them.
- 3.4. Where the gatekeeper assists in recruitment of participants and/or distribution of research instruments. For example, if an HR manager is requested to forward the link to an online survey to particular potential participants, or employees more generally in their organisation: they play dual role of gatekeeper and recruiter and their granting or refusal of consent is demonstrated by their forwarding or not of the instrument, so it is not necessary for the applicant to obtain consent prior to receiving ethical approval. Similarly, in the case of placing surveys on online platforms that are moderated by administrators: where consent is demonstrated by posting of the instrument (or not) by site moderators, gatekeeper consent does not need to be obtained in advance.
- 3.5. Where individuals are interviewed as experts in their own right (i.e. not as representatives of the institution they work for) and if no information about the institution they work for will be obtained (i.e. their company processes/procedures/policies, or how they go about doing specific things, or any other information that is relevant to their particular institution), they are subject matter experts in their own right and the institution they work for is completely incidental to the research – i.e. it makes no difference who their employer is.

4. Cases in which gatekeepers are required

- 4.1. Where participants are recruited based on their being scholars / employees / residents / inmates, members etc of any company, organisation, institution, or association.
- 4.2. Gatekeepers are to be named in the ERAS online application form and once the ethics application has been approved by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC), the applicant will be granted Approval Pending Gatekeeper Permission.
- 4.3. Once the applicant forwards the Gatekeeper permission letter to the RU-HREC ethics coordinator at ethics-committee@ru.ac.za, full ethics approval will be granted and a letter to this effect will be emailed to the applicant.

5. Informal gatekeepers

- 5.1. Cultural sensitivity is to be observed when working in rural or certain other contexts where traditional leaders exercise important roles of guidance and leadership.
- 5.2. Recognising members of rural traditional communities as autonomous adults, RU-HREC does not require gatekeeper permission from traditional leaders to approve ethical clearance.
- 5.3. All researchers are expected to adhere to appropriate local norms in requesting audience with traditional leaders in their research areas to pay their respects and discuss the purposes and requirements of their proposed study with them and seek their endorsement of the project.

6. Gatekeeper waiver

- 6.1. Where there is a conflict of interest between a particular gatekeeper and the aims of the research project or the research question itself, there might be a case for gatekeeper waiver.
- 6.2. There are circumstances where the informing a gatekeeper about research activities might result in adverse events and unexpected outcomes for human participants from a (limited) sample population.
- 6.3. These adverse events and unexpected outcomes and the possibility of them occurring might outweigh to benefits which would be derived from obtaining gatekeeper permission prior to starting of the research project by Rhodes University staff and/or student(s).
- 6.4. Under these circumstances, the applicant(s) can request an exemption from the gatekeeper permission requirements according to this SOP.
- 6.5. For example, if the researcher is interested in the basic wages of waitrons as against how much of their income comes from tips and has reason to believe that the owner/s of one or more specific restaurants are paying below basic minimum wage, they would want to recruit people working as waitrons from those specific restaurants, while knowing that the restaurant owner/s act as gatekeepers to their potential participants and might be sufficiently offended by the research question so as to block access to the participants.
- 6.6. Where an applicant believes that their study requires gatekeeper waiver, this is to be indicated in the ERAS online application form, with a clear motivation for the request given in the space provided.
- 6.7. The matter will be deliberated upon in a quorate RU-HREC meeting where gatekeeper waiver will be approved or not, depending on the merits of the case put forward by the applicant.

7. Effective date of this SOP

2 April 2024 with the next revision date being 2 April 2027, or as deemed necessary by a quorate meeting of RU-HREC.