QRCA
GUIDELINES TO PROFESSIONAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PRACTICES

A PUBLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

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I. FOREWORD

This publication of the Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA) was first released in 1989 with the title, "QRCA Code of Ethics and Recommended Practices." Subsequently, it was revised and published as two separate documents – commonly called the "Code" and the "Guidelines." Creating two separate documents served to emphasize the importance of member ethics, and to position the Guidelines more clearly in the way that they were intended: earnest suggestions rather than rules.

This Guidelines document has become recognized within the industry as one of the most comprehensive and thoughtful efforts on the part of any professional research association. When colleagues in related disciplines gather to discuss issues of professionalism and accepted business practices, "QRCA Guidelines to Professional Qualitative Research Practices" is often the document most frequently referenced. As a result, cooperation among qualitative research consultants ("consultants"), clients, and the field has grown enormously.

The Guidelines that follow reflect changes that have occurred within the industry since the 1997 edition. This revision was undertaken by a subcommittee of the Professionalism Committee chaired by Linda LaScola, who also worked on the previous editions, and vice-chaired by Christopher J. Herbert. The other subcommittee members were J. Robert Harris and Maureen Quinn Olsen. The subcommittee acknowledges and thanks the QRCA Field Committee, especially Anndel Martin and Jan Lohs (Chair), for their contributions to this publication. The subcommittee is also grateful to QRCA member Pamela J. Blake for her input in preparing the document for publication.

We would like to bring to the reader's attention the other QRCA publications related to practices and ethics for conducting qualitative research effectively, which are referenced in this document:

- "QRCA Code of Member Ethics"
- "Recommended Communication Responsibilities for the Qualitative Research Consultant and Facility for Qualitative Studies Taking Place in the Facility"

November 2006

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II. INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research achieves its full value when practitioners adhere to the highest standards of good practice and professional behavior. QRCA believes it is important to publish those practices that the organization considers desirable, if not essential, in conducting qualitative research. QRCA asserts that unprofessional conduct (as defined in the QRCA Code of Member Ethics) on the part of members is not acceptable and that sanctions may be imposed in accordance with the QRCA Bylaws.

Qualitative research is also dependent on the professionalism of field personnel and clients, and we include our recommendations for their "best practices." Indeed, in many respects, it is good communication among all parties that will make or break a research project. Clients, consultants, and field personnel need to regularly and candidly communicate about project expectations and progress. Questions, concerns, problems, and other issues can almost always be overcome if discussed early. If one party is not holding up its share of the communication burden, it is incumbent on others to make the communication happen. QRCA is aware, however, that the consultant is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of qualitative research and asks its research partners to respect these guidelines with that in mind.

In this effort to identify and encourage professional practices, QRCA does not intend to challenge its members' entrepreneurial independence, or to legislate away a healthy diversity in consultant style and analytic technique. We believe that the profession is enriched by differences in consultant philosophy, training, experience and theoretical orientation.

At the same time, however, we believe that consultants have responsibilities to the public, to the profession, to QRCA itself, to clients, and to field personnel. We also believe that the value and professionalism of QRCA is enhanced when members adopt practices recommended by the majority of their colleagues. Our intent has been to offer recommended practices to consultants, clients and field personnel who strive to enhance the professionalism of qualitative research.

No guidelines, of course, can be complete nor determine best practice for every contingency. Yet if there is one overriding theme of our efforts, it is this: to the extent that we communicate and work together as respected colleagues, we enhance the quality of research overall. We hope that these guidelines are helpful in serving this objective.

The guidelines put forth in this document are subject to change over time. Thus, we consider them a work in progress. The QRCA Professionalism Committee will review this document periodically to keep it up to date. We welcome any comments, feedback and suggestions to ensure that it remains relevant.

November 2006

The QRCA Professionalism Committee

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Christopher J. Herbert
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III. RECOMMENDED CONSULTANT PRACTICES

A. OVERVIEW

The value of qualitative research depends heavily on the skills, personal integrity and professional conduct of the individual qualitative research consultant. Indeed, one of the great strengths of qualitative research is that every phase of the research process benefits from the direct, personal involvement of the consultant.

These Guidelines present QRCA's recommended practices for qualitative research consultants in client relationships, field relationships, responsibilities to respondents, and responsibilities to the profession itself.

B. CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

1. RESEARCH PLANNING

a) Consultants should feel confident that they understand and can fulfill the client's research needs before accepting an assignment. Any questions or ambiguities should be clarified in advance.

b) Consultants should be sensitive to possible conflicts of interest in accepting research assignments. When consultants have doubts about the ethics or propriety of accepting a project, it is best practice to discuss the issue candidly with the client.

c) Consultants should not accept assignments on a topic where perceived personal bias might affect the conduct and analysis of the research without discussing that bias with the client.

d) Cost estimates should be prepared in an ethical manner.

e) It is recommended that the consultant send a letter of agreement for the client's signature. Such a letter should clarify respondent specifications, costs, and the timing of research and reports.

f) Consultants are under no obligation to show clients "sample" reports or recordings. It is improper to present such materials to a prospective client without permission from the client for whom the project was initially conducted.

g) Consultants should not allow recruiting or other billable work to begin without express client authorization. If a study is postponed or canceled, the consultant and client should discuss any associated cost implications.

h) If a client recommends a field facility, the consultant should share any reservations he or she has about that facility's services.

i) Consultants should take initiative in clarifying issues that may cause misunderstandings during a research project (for instance, the number of respondents required for a successful recruit, incidence figures from which cost estimates are prepared, etc.).

j) Consultants should accurately represent the applicability of qualitative research, indicating how specific study methods and findings provide unique value to the study, and not leading clients to expect statistically projectable results.

k) If asked, consultants should not misrepresent the authorship of a report.

l) Consultants are encouraged to use this document, "QRCA Guidelines to Professional Qualitative Research Practices," to clarify project issues with clients.

2. CONDUCTING RESEARCH

a) Clients should be kept informed of the progress of recruiting and of any problems that might affect the success of the project or require a change in specifications.

b) In order to ensure good communications, consultants should determine who is in charge of the research project on the client side, both during research planning and execution.

c) Consultant preferences with regard to "pass-in notes" should be made clear to the client prior to conducting the research.

d) Participation in research by "shills" or "pretend respondents" is unethical. Consultants should not permit clients, or others whom clients designate, to participate in research sessions unless there is a legitimate research purpose.

e) Consultants should dissuade clients from reaching premature conclusions about research findings. If debriefings are required immediately after group sessions, consultants should make it clear that careful analysis may well produce additional and perhaps different perspectives and conclusions.

f) Reports should be submitted to clients on or before the agreed upon deadline. If a report is unavoidably delayed, the consultant should notify the client in advance about the cause and length of the delay.

C. FIELD RELATIONSHIPS

1. THE BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

a) Consultants should treat field personnel as respected colleagues and fellow professionals.

b) Consultants should make every effort to provide feedback to field personnel about both positive and negative aspects of their services.

c) Consultants should actively solicit opinions and constructive advice from field personnel about ways to improve working relationships.

d) Consultants are encouraged to use this document, "QRCA Guidelines to Professional Qualitative Research Practices," to clarify project issues with field personnel.

2. RESEARCH PLANNING

a) Consultants should work cooperatively with field personnel and both should make every effort to ensure that high standards of quality are maintained.

b) Consultants should ideally submit written specifications and/or screeners to the field in a timely manner to facilitate successful recruiting. Both the field and the consultant should provide confirmation of the project.

c) If feasible, consultants should provide facilities with a list of viewer names or devise a system for field personnel to differentiate between respondents and clients.

d) Consultants and field facilities should communicate as early as possible about schedule changes, postponements, cancellations, and releases from holds or bookings.

e) Consultants should arrive at facilities well in advance of the research sessions to ensure that all preparations have been properly made. However, QRCs who want to arrive at a facility more than one hour early should request permission from the facility.

f) A facility person should be designated to provide assistance to the consultant.

g) Consultants should communicate with facilities about all special requirements well in advance of the project date, e.g., food, equipment, re-screening procedures, recordings, approximate size of the client group, respondent incentive policies, etc.

3. FEES

a) Consultants should act responsibly in paying field bills in a timely fashion.

b) While consultants should seek the advice of facilities about appropriate incentives, the consultant is ultimately responsible for determining the amount of the incentive. Consultants must accept responsibility if substandard recruiting is the result of an incentive amount that is below the facility's recommended amount.

4. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

a) Consultants should take the initiative to ensure that facilities maintain proper security and confidentiality regarding recordings of the sessions and all research materials, e.g., screeners, product samples, and stimulus materials.

b) Consultants should ask clients to refer any facility-related problems to the consultant -- not to facility personnel.

c) Consultants should make it clear that any field facility assessment they make is their own; QRCA does not rate facilities.

d) Consultants should not abuse facility hospitality. For example, facilities are not expected to pay for excessive copying or to provide concierge services.

D. RESPONSIBILITIES TO RESPONDENTS

1. DISCLOSURE

a) Consultants should ensure that statements made to respondents during screening are truthful regarding the general purpose of the study, incentive amount and likely interview length.

b) Consultants should disclose the use of audio and video recording, video streaming, one-way mirrors and the presence of observers. It is acceptable to withhold such information from children, as long as their parents have been informed.

d) Consultants should abide by any legislation that may govern the practice of qualitative research.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY

a) Consultants should not release respondents' personal information, e.g., last names, phone numbers, email addresses, to clients without obtaining the respondents' permission.

b) Consultants should acquire specific written authorization from respondents if interviews are recorded for purposes other than research, e.g., for advertising or product promotion.

c) Consultants should be especially sensitive to confidentiality when conducting employee research sponsored by their employer. Special care should be taken to ensure that observers and others involved in the research fully respect the confidentiality of employee respondents.

3. RESPECT

a) Consultants should maintain high standards of personal conduct in their interaction with respondents.

b) Consultants should not use interviewing techniques designed primarily to entertain clients rather than to meet research needs.

c) Consultants should respect the right of any respondent to refuse to answer specific questions, to sample test products, or to leave the interview.

d) Consultants should be tactful in those rare instances when respondents have to be asked to leave a research session because of incorrect recruiting, disorderliness or disruptive behavior.

e) Consultants should work with facility staff to assist respondents who are ill or impaired to arrive home safely.

f) Consultants should thank respondents for their participation and contribution, recognizing the importance of respondents leaving with a favorable impression of qualitative research.

IV. RECOMMENDED CLIENT PRACTICES

A. OVERVIEW

Qualitative research is a collaborative effort that provides opportunities for clients and consultants to work together during all stages of the research process and to assist each other in ensuring research excellence.

QRCA addresses the issue of recommended client practices because we believe that the client, as well as the consultant and recruiter, should maintain standards that enhance the value of qualitative research.

B. RESEARCH PLANNING

a) The client should make every effort to provide formal research authorization in a timely manner, to ensure that screener development, facility selection, recruiting and guide development are carried out according to the highest professional standards.

b) The client should involve the consultant as early as possible in research planning and should provide consultants with adequate background information to assure full understanding of the issues to be researched.

c) If the client significantly delays or cancels a study, the client should recognize that consultants are entitled to reasonable cancellation or consultation charges. Charges are justified once the consultants have reserved time to the exclusion of other clients or have begun work on the study, e.g., recruitment screener, guide development, or recruiting, etc.

d) The client should inform the consultant as early as possible about the approximate size and composition of the client observer group and should ideally provide observers' names, titles and company affiliations.

e) The client should work cooperatively with the consultant to establish a reasonable travel schedule, assuring that consultant fatigue will not impair research quality.

f) To the extent possible, the client should familiarize consultants -- well in advance of the interviews -- with relevant concept statements, story boards, test commercials, packages, products, or other stimulus materials used in the research.

g) Prior to conducting the research sessions, the client should specify the consultant's primary contact for determining the appropriateness of any changes made during the course of the study. Clarifying communication channels minimizes consultants' risk of being confronted by uncoordinated, conflicting, or last-minute instructions from clients.

h) Consultant preferences with regard to "pass-in notes" should be made clear to the client prior to conducting the research.

i) In selecting consultants, clients should understand that requests for examples of reports or recordings cannot always be met without a breach of confidentiality.

j) Clients should not expose competitive research proposals or research designs to other bidders, nor should they solicit proposals for purposes other than their stated intentions.

C. CONDUCTING RESEARCH

a) The client ideally should be present at field facilities in advance of the scheduled time of the first session and, unless absolutely necessary, should not request that sessions be delayed, shortened or postponed because of lateness or last-minute conferences. Delayed respondents are often irritable and impatient. Such feelings are likely to impair rapport and distort responses.

b) Clients are asked to keep in mind that it is not the consultant's personal responsibility to meet the clients' non-research needs. The consultant's primary responsibility is to conduct the research.

c) Client complaints about recruiting should be communicated only to the consultant. Clients and consultants should agree in advance on a procedure for handling complaints if the consultant is not immediately available (e.g., conducting an interview). Clients are asked not to approach consultant subcontractors or their employees with complaints or criticisms regarding recruiting, no matter how justified they may seem.

d) Clients should accept QRCA guidelines recommending that consultants fully inform respondents about the presence and intent of one-way mirrors, audio and video equipment and observers (except in the case of child respondents, which require only that parents be informed).

e) A decision to lengthen or shorten a research session ideally should be made jointly by the consultant and the client.

f) While viewing group sessions, the client should be sensitive to the fact that many one-way mirrors are not soundproof. Thus, comments and laughter can often be heard in the interviewing room, possibly disrupting the discussion.

g) Consultants should be informed if clients want other consultants or research suppliers to observe their research sessions or to review recordings of the sessions.

h) Clients should respect the confidentiality of proprietary qualitative research techniques, materials or stimuli and should not reveal them or impose them on other consultants without express consent.

i) Clients should not have any direct communication with respondents without the consent of the consultant.

j) Clients should respect the internal security practices of research facilities and should not examine materials unrelated to the clients' own research.

k) If clients directly observe an interview (e.g., when no mirror is available), they are asked to respect the consultant's professional judgment regarding the maximum number of observers, seating arrangements, note taking and interaction with respondents.

l) Participation in research by "shills" or "pretend respondents" is unethical. Consultants should not permit clients, or others whom clients designate, to participate in research sessions unless there is a legitimate research purpose.

m) The client and the consultant should agree about whether immediate "post mortems" or debriefings are appropriate. While some consultants welcome these opportunities, others feel that such efforts are premature and may interfere with good research practice. Even when such immediate debriefings are held, neither the consultant nor the client should conclude that the "final word" has been said prior to analysis.

D. RESEARCH FOLLOW-UP

a) To foster professionalism, the client should provide the consultant with both positive and negative feedback, as warranted, at the conclusion of a project.

b) Research findings and results become the intellectual property of the client. Nevertheless, clients should identify and give proper credit to the consultant who conducted the research and/or prepared the report. Similarly, a qualitative research firm should give proper credit to a subcontractor for work conducted on the project. If a subcontractor prepares all or part of a report for a primary contractor, authorship should be determined by previous agreement between these two parties.

c) The client should not alter a consultant's report, either for internal or external distribution, without the consultant's express consent or without providing an opportunity for the consultant to disclaim authorship.

V. RECOMMENDED FIELD PRACTICES

A. OVERVIEW

The successful outcome of qualitative research is dependent on a strong consultant-field relationship that recognizes each partner's roles and responsibilities.

The first chapter of these Guidelines to Professional Qualitative Research Practices recommends ways in which consultants can collaborate more effectively with the field. This chapter suggests ways in which field services can also help assure the excellence of qualitative research. In offering these suggestions, however, QRCA does not intend to dictate business practices or to constrain the flexibility that is so important in QRC-field working relationships.

B. RECRUITING

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES

The success of every qualitative research study ultimately depends on accurate, professionally- managed recruiting, which is conducted according to specifications. The role of the field service is extremely critical in this area.

a) Field services should confirm their understanding of recruiting specifications and raise recruiting issues that need to be clarified and resolved.

b) Field services should be realistic in accepting recruiting specifications and quotas. Problems that jeopardize recruiting, such as low incidence or short lead-time, should be raised and discussed before accepting a project.

c) Field services should alert consultants to any atypical local population characteristics that might affect group composition (e.g., ethnic or occupational balance), and ask if recruiting specifications should be modified accordingly.

d) When accepting a project, the field service should designate a supervisor who assumes overall project responsibility and is readily accessible to the consultant throughout the course of the study.

   A back-up supervisor should also be designated to provide continuity if the supervisor is unavailable.

e) The supervisor should brief and continually monitor all recruiters involved with the project, whether they are in-house or hired as independent contractors.

   Screener requirements about product usage, behaviors, demographics, previous participation and security issues must be met unless unrealistic, in which case the consultant and the project manager must agree on a solution and modify the screener accordingly. All screener questions must be asked, and responses should be accurately recorded.

f) It is best practice to maintain tallies of screener calls and "terminations." Calculations of actual project incidence can be very useful to both consultants and field personnel.

g) If recruiting difficulties arise or screener ambiguities become apparent, supervisors should alert consultants immediately. Specification changes should be made only after receiving the consent of the consultant.

> Supervisors should also propose solutions to recruiting difficulties. Consultants rely on the experience and judgment of their field colleagues in solving such problems.

h) Consultants appreciate timely progress reports, even when recruiting is progressing smoothly. If consultants do not request daily updates, it is recommended practice for the field service to take the initiative to provide them.

i) If supervisors or consultants discover unprofessional or inaccurate recruiting, field service management must take firm and immediate corrective action.

2. RECRUITING PROCEDURES

a) There are many techniques for recruiting respondents for qualitative research, e.g., random telephone dialing, emailing, website solicitation or using data banks, mall intercepts, referrals, facility files, advertising. The field service should obtain explicit consultant approval of recruiting techniques.

b) Field services should make every effort to exclude "cheater" respondents and to follow consultant guidelines regarding "repeater" respondents. Recruiters should be trained in appropriate screening techniques and to be on the alert for familiar names, email and street addresses and telephone numbers.

c) Except for in-house employee studies or those involving professional groups, field services should make reasonable attempts to ensure that respondents are not acquainted, unless a limited recruiting pool makes this restriction unreasonable. If facility personnel notice that some respondents seem to be acquainted, the consultant should be notified.

d) Unless otherwise instructed by the consultant, field services should screen out respondents who cannot speak or hear clearly enough to participate effectively in a discussion, as well as those who cannot make themselves understood in the language in which the session is conducted.

e) Respondents should be informed of the likely duration of a research session.

f) Recruiters should provide no more information to respondents about the research than what is mentioned in the screener or authorized by the consultant.

g) It is the consultant's responsibility to define minimal group size and the field service's obligation to assure that no ambiguities exist about show rate expectations.

Recruiting quotas should not be modified without the consultant's explicit approval.

To ensure an acceptable "show rate," field services should rely on their local experience to advise consultants about the number of respondents to be over-recruited, as well as reasonable incentive amounts and optimal hours for scheduling research sessions.

h) Confirmation calls should be made no later than one day prior to a scheduled research session. Hesitation on the part of a respondent should be explored, and if commitment seems uncertain, a replacement respondent should be recruited.

In the recruiting process, it is recommended that recruiters obtain day, evening and cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses in case last-minute reconfirmation is needed, e.g., in bad weather.

i) Respondent punctuality is important, and should be stressed in recruiting and confirmation calls. Respondents should be asked to arrive 15 minutes early, especially if a meal is served.

j) When multiple consultants are working at the same facility in a similar time frame, facilities should have effective mechanisms to ensure the smooth handling of respondents, e.g., adequate staffing, flexible interview start times, means of easily distinguishing among respondent groups.

C. FACILITY SUPERVISION

1. RESPONDENT MANAGEMENT

a) Consultants rely on field services to treat respondents efficiently and courteously when they participate in qualitative research.

b) When problems arise with respondents (e.g., respondents are unqualified, intoxicated or disorderly), the consultant should be informed immediately, before respondents enter the research session. The consultant will determine appropriate action.

In the case of respondents who appear to be intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, every effort should be made to ensure that such individuals arrive home safely.

Facilities should exclude disorderly, intoxicated or otherwise inappropriate respondents from future recruitment.

c) Field services should discuss with the consultant how to deal with respondents who arrive with children, spouses, or friends expecting to accompany them into the research session.

d) Field services should also ask consultants how to deal with volunteer or substitute respondents.

e) If more than the desired number of respondents arrives, the consultant, not the field service, should determine how to handle the situation. Any respondents not invited to join the session should be discreetly held behind, given the incentive fee, and excused.

f) Rescreening respondents immediately prior to a research session is a matter of individual consultant preference. Accordingly, field services should ask consultants in advance whether or not they want respondents to be rescreened.

g) The field service should also predetermine whether the consultant prefers incentive fees distributed before or after a research session.

h) Some consultants prefer that facility forms are not passed out until after the research sessions are completed, on the grounds that such questions may bias or otherwise influence attitudes. Facilities should ask consultants' preferences in advance.

i) Facility personnel should not discuss their perspectives about the research process to waiting respondents. Questions from waiting respondents about the topic of discussion, the presence of a mirror or possible videotaping should be referred to the consultant.

2. SUPERVISOR REPONSIBILITIES

a) Supervisors should ensure that they are supported by a staff large enough to manage qualitative research projects effectively and to cope with emergencies or unanticipated problems.

b) Supervisors should ensure that all personnel clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. If trainees are used on a project, they should be supported by an experienced staff member who can supply advice and guidance.

c) Supervisors should ensure that all personnel communicate professionalism in their dress, grooming and demeanor.

d) Supervisors should ensure that all audio and video equipment is carefully checked well in advance of and immediately before the research session and that recording devices are turned on and properly adjusted before a session begins.

3. CONSULTANT SUPPORT SERVICES

Consultants appreciate facilities' assistance in meeting special requests. While facility hospitality should not be abused, certain office and travel amenities can be very helpful.

a) It is reasonable for a consultant to expect assistance with office services, such as access to a private telephone, providing adequate connections for electronic devices and internet access, and having a staff member available to make photocopies, arrange for deliveries, call a taxi, etc.

b) Assistance with travel services, such as clear and accurate driving instructions from airports and hotels, written for someone unfamiliar with the area and specifying travel time in rush and non-rush traffic, is extremely helpful. Consultants should also be alerted to circumstances that might cause delays, such as road improvements or disruptions in parking areas or at entrances.

4. CLIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

a) Field services should treat the consultant's clients with respect and consideration, meeting reasonable requests for personal service and providing a clean and comfortable viewing room, telephone and internet access, appropriate food and refreshments and clearly identified rest rooms.

b) When the consultant has contracted for the study, questions about procedure, recruiting, or respondent management should be raised only with the consultant, and not with the consultant's clients, unless the consultant instructs otherwise.

c) The consultant should be notified immediately if clients contact the facility inquiring about the recruiting process, tallies and other project-specific details. This kind of question should be referred to the consultant, unless the consultant instructs otherwise.

d) Facility personnel and subcontractors (such as video operators) should not make personal observations to client observers about the research, respondents or the consultant.

e) Facility personnel should not be in the viewing room any longer than required to attend to client needs, operate audio and video equipment or deliver messages.

f) Facility promotional materials should not be actively distributed to client observers without the consultant's express consent.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

a) Field services should ensure that confidentiality is strictly maintained and that all personnel are instructed in proper security precautions. Facility managers should be willing to sign non-disclosure and confidentiality agreements, if the consultant requests it.

b) All screeners and other study materials should be kept out of the sight and reach of people not involved in the study, including other consultants and clients. Test products and stimulus materials, if left at the facility, should be stored in a secure location.

c) Neither the client's name nor title of the study should appear on respondent sign-in sheets, rescreeners, or other documents that can be seen by respondents. Listings of future projects should not be accessible to consultants or clients.

d) Consultants should be advised if the facility is aware that another client in the same industry group will be using the facility on the same date, to ensure that appropriate security precautions can be taken.

D. CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

1. STUDY ESTIMATES AND BOOKINGS

a) Cost estimates should be based on an agreement between the field service and the consultant about screening specifications, incidence figures, quotas, and other study requirements.

While it is the consultant's responsibility to provide this information, it is the field service's responsibility to ensure that all issues relating to costs have been raised and addressed.

b) It is the field service's responsibility to explicitly state any policies and contingencies that affect the quoted study estimate and to inform consultants in advance about costs that may be added to the bill, e.g., respondent, client and consultant food, audio and video recordings, copies, long distance calls, shipping and deliveries.

c) Field services should not release tentatively held dates without providing a "last call" option to the consultant holding the dates. Since consultants may travel extensively and need time to contact their clients, a minimum of one business day should be provided for the confirmation process.

d) Once having formally committed itself to a booking, the field service must honor its commitment to the consultant.

e) Consultants should immediately be informed of recruiting difficulties.

f) In the event that a consultant requests changes in study specifications, the field service should inform the consultant about the positive or negative cost implications of those changes.

2. INCENTIVE FEES

a) Incentive fees should be agreed upon by the field service and the consultant at the time the original cost estimate is prepared and should not be changed without the express approval of the consultant.

b) Field services' policies on collecting incentive fees from consultants should be made explicit at the time a bid is submitted.

c) Field services should determine in advance consultant policies on compensating late-arriving respondents.

3. CANCELLATIONS AND DELAYS

a) When studies must be postponed or canceled after making a formal agreement to proceed, consultants and field services should treat each other fairly. Field service policies regarding cancellations or postponements should be made clear to the consultant at the time of formal booking.

b) Each cancellation or postponement is unique. In general, however, the following factors should be taken into account in reaching an equitable settlement:

- Whether a study is canceled or is to be rescheduled;
- Length of advance notice of a cancellation or postponement;
- Whether the facility can sell the time to another client;
- If the study is rescheduled, the number of respondents already recruited who will be able to participate;
- The actual costs the field service has already incurred.

c) When sessions are delayed because of "acts of God," flight cancellations or other unavoidable travel delays, consultants appreciate field service efforts to reschedule them promptly.

In such situations, field services should be paid to cover their out-of-pocket recruiting costs for respondents who cannot be rescheduled. Respondents who cannot be reached in time to stop their arrival should receive their incentive.

4. BILLING DISPUTES

a) Many billing disputes can be avoided if field services and consultants explicitly state their requirements and policies for typical problem situations, e.g., recruiting specifications, minimal number of respondents or quality of recordings.

b) Other problems can arise as well, and there is no intention to list them all here. While a consultant and the consultant's clients may decide to conduct a research session even though field service performance is in some way below the agreed-upon standards, this does not necessarily imply acknowledgement of having received full value for the agreed-upon fees.