



SDCI User Research Participant Compensation Policy

April 2024

Statement of Purpose

The SDCI Customer Experience (CX) Team is conducting regular user research with SDCI's customers, community-based organizations, and interested city residents. The CX team takes a human-centered approach to ensure SDCI serves its customers better by putting people at the center of everything we do. The goal of user research is to learn directly from our customers and incorporate their voices into the design process to improve SDCI's services. When conducting user experience (UX) research, participant compensation plays a crucial role in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusivity in government organizations by acknowledging the value of participants' time and expertise, addressing power dynamics, promoting accessibility, and upholding ethical principles of fairness and reciprocity.

Reimbursement Justification

UX research participant honoraria, which refers to monetary or non-monetary compensation given to individuals who participate in UX research studies, are crucial for ensuring equity and fairness. The justification for providing participant honoraria is as follows:

- 1. Inclusivity and Representation:** Offering honoraria encourages a diverse range of individuals to participate in UX research studies. Without compensation, participation might be limited to those who can afford to give their time for free. Honoraria ensure that people from various socioeconomic backgrounds, including those with limited financial means, can contribute their perspectives. This helps in achieving a more representative sample, ensuring that the products and services developed cater to a broader spectrum of users.
- 2. Acknowledgment of Time and Expertise:** Participating in UX research requires time and effort from individuals. Offering honoraria acknowledges and respects their contribution, recognizing the value of their time and expertise. This acknowledgment fosters a positive relationship between the organization and the participants, encouraging continued engagement and feedback in the future.
- 3. Addressing Power Dynamics:** In government organizations, as in any other setting, there can be power differentials between researchers and participants. Offering honoraria helps to mitigate these imbalances by valuing the participants' contributions and recognizing them as active partners in the research process rather than passive subjects. This can lead to more meaningful and collaborative engagements where participants feel empowered to share their honest opinions and experiences.

4. Promoting Accessibility: Honoraria can also help remove barriers to participation, such as transportation costs or the need for childcare. By providing compensation, government organizations make it easier for individuals to take part in research studies regardless of their personal circumstances. This promotes accessibility and ensures that the insights gained from the research are more inclusive and representative of the population as a whole.

5. Ethical Considerations: Offering compensation for participation aligns with ethical principles of fairness and reciprocity. It ensures that participants are not exploited for their time and insights. This ethical approach is particularly important for government organizations, which have a responsibility to uphold standards of integrity and fairness in all their activities, including research.

Distribution Method

Great Question, our participant management tool, includes functionality to easily add, distribute and track honoraria per study, per team, and per participant. Budgets can be set to limit the amount of honoraria sent to any one participant, or used per any study, or for a set period of time, such as per quarter or per year. Honoraria can be distributed directly through the tool and its partner [Tremendous](#) via pre-approved formats (such as Amazon, Fred Meyer, Starbucks, or other gift cards). Great Question will store funds previously charged and approved by SDCI finance from the SDCI credit card to have a pool of monies within the software to pay honoraria to participants throughout the year. No physical funds or gift cards will be acquired or stored for this purpose.

Research operations will ensure that no one person is asked to participate in more than 5 studies in a calendar year through the configuration set up in Great Question. This is important to reduce bias in our research activities. Through policies and configuration, we will ensure no participant receives \$600 or more in gift cards from SDCI over the course of the tax year. This will ensure SDCI does not need to issue a Form 1099-MISC for the participant to report the income.

Note: Research participants who are government employees are not eligible for gift cards or monetary honoraria. They will be asked to participate voluntarily and thanked for their participation with non-monetary gestures (such as a thank you card).

Budget Estimates

The amount of honoraria offered to UX research participants can vary depending on various factors such as the nature of the study, the time commitment required from participants, active or passive participation, in-person or remote, etc. It is common for organizations to offer honoraria compensation in the form of gift cards ranging from \$50 to \$200 per session, depending on the complexity and duration of the study.

In 2023, The SDCI team conducted numerous studies with support from our partners at Anthro-Tech. In total, \$4,200 in honoraria was distributed to participants in those studies in amounts of \$100 gift cards or less per person.

Year	Number of studies	Number of participants per study	Amount per participant	Total
2023	6	7	\$100	\$4,200
2024	6 (estimated)	10	\$100	\$6,000
2025	8 (estimated)	10	\$100	\$8,000

To estimate for 2024, the CX team can assume we will run one 10-person interview or usability study every other month. We would recommend an honoraria budget of \$100 per participant, or up to \$6,000. Once research operations are fully established, the CX team would estimate the number of studies run each will slightly increase by 2025.

Note: \$100/hr reimbursement is aligned with similar efforts by the City of Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA), the Innovation and Performance Team (IPT) within the Mayor's Office, and UX honoraria reimbursement policies at the federal level and across the county. This reimbursement is at a level where it is attractive for customers to participate and contribute in a full capacity to share their lived experiences akin to advice sought from a consultant in improving a service.