



# Guidance for Protocols Involving Suicide

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance

Version 2

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This document is intended for use by researchers to help determine whether the proposed IRB protocol includes suicide ideation, planning, or intent, or other sensitive procedures/topics in which immediate action should be taken to protect the safety of study participants. If further assistance or clarification is required, please contact the ORIC at 304-293-7073, or at [IRB@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:IRB@mail.wvu.edu).

## Determining if Sensitive Procedures are Involved

Any protocol that includes suicide or other sensitive topics must be reviewed by the convened full board during an IRB meeting. Please carefully read the *Requirements* section of this document if your research protocol includes:

1. A research purpose to study suicide, suicide ideation, depression, or trauma;
2. A research purpose to study traumatic life events that may evoke powerful emotion or induce mood changes in participants; or
3. Includes assessments (i.e. questionnaires, exams, interviews, etc.) that can be used to identify suicide ideation, suicide plan, or the intent to commit suicide
  - a. Suicide ideation is defined as thoughts of suicide and can either be active or passive.
  - b. Suicide plan is defined as the means or mechanism to commit suicide.
  - c. Intent is defined as the expressed desire and wiliness to act on the plan.

## Requirements

If your research includes any of the 3 criteria above, the IRB protocol application:

1. Should include research staff who are qualified to assess suicidality, when possible;
2. Must describe a plan to link participants with psychological help if needed, and include written materials listing those resources as an attachment to the protocol;
3. Must describe a plan to address the situation if a participant is assessed to be a danger to themselves, but refuses treatment.

The plan to address and handle situations where suicidal ideation, plans, or intent arise during the course of the research should include resources and referrals for the participant to receive help. Examples of action plans are listed below:

- ▮ If the protocol recruits WVU students as participants, the plan may describe providing contact information or an escort to the Carruth Center or Well WVU.
- ▮ If the protocol is in the local community, the researcher might provide a list of local psychiatry/psychotherapy providers.
- ▮ If the part is assessed to be actively suicidal, but refuses assistance, the plan may include steps to contact the Mental Hygiene Commissioner and/or call emergency services (911).