

Conducting Research Virtually with Participants: Platforms, Programs and Security

Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ was compiled by the Human Research Ethics Office, the University Privacy Office and University Systems. Contact information appears at the end of the document.

Definitions

The following definitions are important to distinguish between the “public/free versions” of certain services/platforms from the internet compared to “UVic-hosted/supported versions” which are available to UVic users free of charge:

Skype: <https://www.uvic.ca/systems/services/emailcalendar/skype-for-business/index.php>

The UVic-hosted version of Skype for Business available to Desktop Support Services (DSS) supported departments. Calls are hosted on the UVic campus. Only the host of a call needs to be part of a participating UVic department; and guests can join using a link or dial-in. This is in contrast to free versions of Skype that we do not host and may not be routed through Canada.]

Note: UVic Skype for Business will be de-commissioned in January 2021.

Microsoft Teams: <http://oac.uvic.ca/o365>

Refers to the UVic tenant of Microsoft Teams that is currently being built as a pilot. Conversations and calls are routed through Canada. [In contrast to free Microsoft accounts or accounts from other Microsoft 365 tenants].

Microsoft 365 and Teams for Faculty, Staff and Students. Microsoft 365 is a cloud-based service that includes familiar Office 365 apps like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint and combines them with powerful collaboration services like OneDrive, Microsoft Teams, and Microsoft Stream. Currently the priority for Microsoft Teams has been focused on enabling instructors to teach online. In early June we will have training resources available and the DSS staff prepared to start on-boarding departments and admin staff to Microsoft Teams. If you want to get started reviewing some of the online documentation that has been created, check out our Microsoft 365 micro site on the Online Academic Community: <http://oac.uvic.ca/o365>

Zoom: <https://www.uvic.ca/systems/services/avmultimedia/zoomvideoconferencing/index.php>

UVic Zoom Videoconferencing Service for all Faculty, Staff and Students.

Zoom lets you have online real-time sessions with up to 300 people. You can share your presentations or desktop, collaborate with others, conduct small group activities, use polling to ask questions and more, from any device. Service is available to faculty, staff, and students that is setup to enable a number of security and privacy features that are not available in the free versions of Zoom. Zoom for online meetings offers better performance and ease of use than BlueJeans.

[See Zoom-specific guidance and Zoom best practices in this document]

BlueJeans: <https://www.uvic.ca/systems/services/avmultimedia/desktopcollaboration/index.php>

UVic BlueJeans service available to faculty, staff, and researchers to support small to medium video conferencing via computer, mobile device, or telephone.

General

- Q. I am a student researcher. Are university-hosted platforms limited to faculty and staff only?**
- A. Some UVic-hosted platforms, such as Connect or Skype for Business are limited to UVic faculty and staff, but many are not. Zoom, for example, is a video conferencing platform that must be hosted by a UVic employee or student, but that can invite non-UVic attendees. We recommend contacting University Systems to determine which platform best suits your needs. Contact the Computer Help Desk at helpdesk@uvic.ca for more information on available options.
- Q. What if I use a platform that is not supported by the university?**
- A. Any platform that is used on UVic networks must comply with [UVic's Information Security Policy \(IM7800\)](#). Compliance with IM7800 will protect the confidentiality of the research as well as the security of UVic's information technology systems. As a starting point email University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](#) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](#) to find the right solution.
- Q. I've heard that if there is no secure wifi available, researchers and their assistants should log-in to the UVic *virtual private network* (VPN) on their computer or smart phone when using platforms or logging into emails etc. What does the VPN do and how do I install it?**
- A. VPN is available for all UVic faculty, staff, and students and is recommended if connecting from an unknown or untrusted network. VPN may be required to access some UVic resources. For more information and setup instructions, please visit the University Systems website: <https://www.uvic.ca/systems/services/internettelephone/remotearchive/index.php>
- Q. Where do I find UVic policies or guidelines around platforms and security that apply to conducting research with human participants?**
- A. The use of UVic approved video conferencing platforms on [UVic approved computing devices](#) would provide for the secure conduct of research. Currently, the most applicable application for virtual research with human participants would likely be [Zoom](#).

Social Media

- Q. Are there best practices for using social media in research with human participants?**
- A. The following are excellent guidance documents:
1. [Guidelines for Using Social Networking Sites](#) from UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board
 2. [Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics](#) from the University of Aberdeen

Apps

- Q. I will create an app (have one created) or use an app to collect data. What should I do?**
- A. Check with the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](#) ideally before you submit your ethics application. The Ethics Office and Privacy Office will work with you.

Individual One-on-One Interviews

- Q. What virtual or electronic platforms are permitted for one-on-one individual interviews with research participants such as Skype or Facetime?**
- A. Skype/Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or BlueJeans would be preferred. FaceTime may also be a secure option but its use should be discussed with University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](#) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](#).
- Q. What about using my cell phone or WhatsApp if I have a home (secured) network?**
- A. The use of cellphone for secure research interviews may be done if a secure communications application is used. WhatsApp is not a secure communications platform. UVic approved and configured applications such as Skype/Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or BlueJeans would be secure options. Contact University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](#) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](#) to get assistance.

Focus Group and Group Discussions

- Q. What virtual or electronic platforms are permitted for conducting a focus group or group interview with participants? Like Zoom, Skype?**
- A. UVic approved and configured applications such as Skype/Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or BlueJeans. Contact University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](#) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](#) to get assistance.

[See Zoom-specific guidance and Zoom best practices]

- Q. Are there special considerations I should know about Zoom, Skype platforms if I don't use the UVic-hosted version?**
- A. The use of UVic approved and configured applications such as Skype/Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or BlueJeans is the best and easiest way to ensure communications are secure. The use of non-UVic versions carries the risk of misconfiguring the applications and making them vulnerable to security and privacy breaches. Contact University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](mailto:helpdesk@uvic.ca) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca) for assistance.

Security-specific

- Q. Does recording (audio or video) an interview or group discussion on a virtual platform make information less secure than if I disable the recording function?**
- A. Yes. If a conversation is not recorded there is no risk of unauthorized access to the recording. If sessions must be recorded it is essential that the cloud service, computer, or storage device be encrypted to ensure security of the recording. UVic-hosted and configured applications such as Skype/Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or BlueJeans are the most secure method of ensuring secure communications and storage. Contact University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](mailto:helpdesk@uvic.ca) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca) to get assistance.

[See section below about storage]

- Q. I have my own Zoom account that's not a UVic-hosted version. Does having my own account give me more security compared to using the free public version without an account?**
- A. The greatest benefit from a security point of view is using the UVic-hosted Zoom service as opposed to a free or paid personal Zoom account. University Systems has enabled a number of settings and features as defaults to minimize the chance of things like "Zoom bombing" a session.
- Q. My research team is using MS Teams. What should I know about storage of information?**
- A. Some limited contact information may be stored outside of Canada when MS Teams is used. Contact the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca) for assistance if you are unsure.

Cloud-Storage and US-based Storage **Data Storage for Researchers Conducting Community Studies**

- Q. Some platforms store data and other information on servers or clouds based in the United States. Why is this a concern for Canadian institutions?**
- A. The [Protection of Privacy Policy \(GV0235\)](#) states that the university must comply with BC's [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#) (FIPPA). FIPPA requires that storage

and access of personal information, which may include email addresses, contact information, or other personally identifiable details, must be stored only in Canada ([FIPPA section 30.1](#)). For further information about storing and handling data at UVic, including the classification of information, refer to the [Information Security Policy \(IM7800\)](#).

Q. What do I need to know about cloud storage?

- A. University Systems does not recommend storing any university data on Internet storage services such as (but not limited to) Dropbox, iCloud, Google Docs, and Office Live. You may inadvertently synchronize sensitive information stored in these files. University Systems is currently not aware of any Internet storage provider that can guarantee that your content will remain exclusively in Canada.
- Please see University Systems site on [data security and cloud storage](#).

Q. Why does storing my participants' data or research information in the US present a concern for me, my participants and/or my research team? As a researcher who conducts studies in the community (off-campus) nation-wide and world-wide what are my options?

- A. Data and information stored in the US (with or without identifiers) are subject to access by the US government via the [US Patriot Act](#). The Act permits access to the information without the knowledge or permission of the researcher, their participants and/or persons to whom the information relates.

The best choice is to keep data and information in Canada by using one of the UVic-hosted platforms named in this document.

Researchers who frequently conduct their research in the community (or “the field”) in particular, should consider creating an account to upload data to UVic network storage.

University Systems provides [network storage](#) for all active faculty, staff, and students that can be accessed from on-campus and over the Internet. This network storage is hosted solely in Canada and is the best place to store university data.

See website on [Data Security and Cloud Storage](#).

Q. What must I do if there are no options except to use a US-based platform or to store data in the US (e.g., there is a US-based team member or US funding)?

- A. Researchers must inform their potential participants that their data or information will be stored in the US and thereby subject to access by the US government (Patriot Act). As part of the informed consent process with participants, researchers must declare/explain the Patriot Act information on the *Consent Form, Verbal Consent Script or Implied Consent Form* so participants can make up their mind about joining the study:

Please be advised that information about you that is gathered for this research study (STATE IF IT INCLUDES IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION) uses an online program located in the US or a program that can be accessed from the US (name of program). As such, there is a possibility that

information about you may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the US government in compliance with the US Patriot Act.

Zoom-Specific & Zoom Best Practices

Q. Does Zoom store data in Canada or only in the US? Do I select data storage in Canada?

A. The UVic-hosted and configured applications such as Skype/Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or BlueJeans are configured to store data inside Canada where possible. It may not be possible for individuals to use non-UVic versions and ensure that data remains inside Canada. Contact University [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](mailto:helpdesk@uvic.ca) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca) to get assistance.

Notice: UVic has contracted with Zoom to have all content stored on servers inside Canada, however, the implementation of the Canadian servers will not be complete until approximately mid-May 2020.

Until the above is confirmed, the use of the UVic-hosted version of Zoom is permitted by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) with the consent of the participants/individuals attending the Zoom meeting. Research participants must be informed in writing, in the *Consent form, Implied Consent or Verbal Consent Script*, that:

Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and Zoom stores *users' names and usage data outside of Canada*. No other information is stored outside of Canada, and recordings of Zoom meetings are not stored on Zoom servers.

Q. How do I prevent Zoom recordings from being stored in the Zoom cloud and accessible in the US?

A. If the UVic approved and configured implementation of Zoom is used then recordings are stored on local computer devices, not in the Zoom cloud. If you are using Zoom transcription feature, please note that the transcription file (titled `closed_caption.txt` in Windows), is written to the same folder as the Zoom recording after the meeting ends and the Zoom client performs the recording post processing.

In order to store these recordings securely for your use, you must ensure that your computer or storage device is encrypted. Contact UVic [Systems \(helpdesk@uvic.ca\)](mailto:helpdesk@uvic.ca) or the [Protection of Privacy Office \(privacyinfo@uvic.ca\)](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca) to get assistance.

Zoom Best Practices for Research with Participants¹

Zoom is a useful tool for research interviews and focus groups. Zoom has many features, including video and audio recording as well as the ability to share screens between those participating in the conversation.

¹ Adapted from UBC and SFU guidance

When using Zoom with research participants care needs to be taken to maintain the confidentiality of research participants and to ensure that the data is collected in a secure manner.

Zoom do's and don'ts for research activities with participants:

DO

- ✓ Familiarize yourself and do a test run. Learn how to turn off (mute) audio/video for participants and attendees, and how to remove participants/attendees.
- ✓ Find out whether your potential participants are familiar with, and have used Zoom. People with older model computers or those without a camera may not be able to use Zoom or its video function.
- ✓ Provide instructions to participants prior to the interview or group discussion that they can protect their identity and increase the protection of their personal information by not using their actual name in Zoom. This is important for research that is sensitive and confidentiality between participants is critical.
- ✓ Participants can do the above by: i) using only a nickname or a substitute name; ii) they can turn off their camera (if the research allows for this and they would like to do this); iii) they can mute their microphone (if it is not needed).
- ✓ Manage Screen Sharing to prevent random people from taking over the meeting - Restrict sharing to you as the researcher/host.
- ✓ For larger focus groups, as the researcher, you will be able to approve screen-sharing requests from participants.
- ✓ Consider disabling the video function if you do not require the video feature for your research. The meeting host can block the video capacity of the participant to prevent unwanted, distracting, or inappropriate gestures on video.
- ✓ Introduce a Waiting Room. The Waiting Room is a virtual staging area that allows you to invite participants for the interview or group conversation when you are ready for them.
- ✓ Introduce a password for participants to gain access to the meeting. This is especially important when the research is sensitive.
- ✓ Lock the meeting after all invited participants have entered and the meeting has started. By locking the meeting, no uninvited individuals can join.

DON'T

- Don't share meeting links on social media or public outlets (unwanted individuals may join or lurk in a meeting).
- Don't instruct your participants to share meeting links with others or anyone outside of the group.
- Don't use your Personal Meetings ID (PMI) to host the interview, group discussion. Your PMI is a permanent meeting room that anyone can pop into and out of at any time.

Contacts

Q. Who do I contact if I have a question about a particular platform, program or app for research?

A. Contact University Systems (helpdesk@uvic.ca) or your departmental IT personnel for assistance.

Q. If I have a question about human research ethics and there are questions that come up about platforms or technology, who should I contact?

A. Contact Human Research Ethics Office ethics@uvic.ca

The staff work closely with the Privacy Office, University Systems and other campus entities and will connect you to them.