Institutional Review Board for Research on Human Subjects (IRB)

Application for Projects with Human Participants

Personal/Project Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher’s Name:</th>
<th>Robert J. Johnston</th>
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<tr>
<td>Advisor:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dept./Box Address:</td>
<td>George Perkins Marsh Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title of Research Project:</td>
<td>Climate Change Adaptation and Ecosystem Service Resilience in Northeast Coastal Communities: Quantifying Economic Values and Tradeoffs for Regional Decision Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant Agency:</td>
<td>Northeast Sea Grant Regional Consortium / National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (subcontract through Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sea Grant)</td>
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Survey Information

1. The Nature of Your Subjects:

This project will include two sequential components involving human subjects. This application only requests human subjects approval for the first component: focus groups that will be held with adult residents of southern Connecticut coastal communities east of New Haven. These include Old Lyme and Old Saybrook. These focus groups will be used to provide information that will be used to develop a subsequent household mail survey, for which separate IRB approval will be sought.

These focus groups will address adult residents’ preferences for adaptation strategies used to mitigate or minimize the effects of climate related sea level rise and flooding in coastal Connecticut, and perceptions/opinions regarding the effect of these strategies on coastal ecosystems and human benefits from these ecosystems. Strategies that will be discussed include such options as hard adaptation (e.g., building sea walls, raising homes) and soft adaptation (using natural habitats such as salt marshes to buffer storm surges).

There are no special physical or psychological characteristics defining the subject population. We foresee no circumstances that compromise subjects’ ability to consent. The project will include up to 10 focus groups, each with between 6 and 12 adult residents of the study area.

2. Identification of Subjects:
Sampling will follow standard approaches used in prior IRB approved research of this type. Respondents of the target area (see Nature of Subjects above) will be invited to participate via public solicitations on Craigslist and other internet bulletin boards, and in public locations such as libraries and farmers’ markets in the region. Additional respondents may be identified via mailing or email lists housed at the Nature Conservancy, Southern Connecticut Chapter and their partner organizations (i.e., those who already receive reserve mailings from these groups). All potential respondents will be sent identical solicitations. Focus group participants will volunteer to participate – there will be no coercion, implicit or otherwise.

Recruitment for focus group participants will use the following statement, with minor (non-substantive) modifications as required to suit each posting location:

**Seeking Paid Focus Group Participants**

Clark University seeks [insert community name] residents for a focus group discussion. Participants must be 21 years or older and residents of [insert community name], Connecticut. Qualified participants will take part in a 90 minute focus group discussion at [insert focus group location]. This research is being conducted by Professor Robert Johnston from Clark University, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, Southern Connecticut Chapter.

**About the Focus Group:**
A focus group is a small group discussion with 6-12 participants. Participants will be engaged in a moderated discussion about perceptions and opinions regarding government policies that affect coastal communities and natural areas such as beaches and wetlands. Each participant will be paid $75 to participate. Refreshments will be provided.

**Date and Time:**
This focus group will be held on [Insert Date], from [Insert Time].

**About the Study**
This focus group is made possible through a competitive research grant, and is being conducted by researchers from Clark University and The Nature Conservancy Southern Connecticut Chapter. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question that you do not wish to answer, and you may leave the focus group at any time. All responses will be confidential (your name will not appear on any of the focus group recordings or transcripts).

If interested please respond with the following information to Christos Makriyannis at cmakriyannis@clarku.edu (or leave a message at (617) 458-0165):

- Your Name:
- Your Age:
- Your Contact Information (email and/or telephone):

Interested participants will receive information regarding location, directions, time and other details along with their confirmation response. You will also be provided with a consent form that includes additional information on the research study. If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Professor Robert Johnston at 508-751-4619 or rjohnston@clarku.edu.
3. Testing Procedure:

As noted above, subjects will be asked to participate in voluntary, moderated focus groups in which they will discuss topics related to their preferences for coastal adaptation strategies that can be used to address climate related sea level rise and flooding in coastal Connecticut, and perceptions/opinions regarding the effect of these strategies on coastal ecosystems and human benefits from these ecosystems. Focus groups will be moderated by either Professor Robert Johnston or his graduate research assistant and will last approximately 90 minutes each. There is no deception in focus group discussions. No topics of a sensitive or personal nature will be discussed. Participants will be compensated approximately $75 for their participation; and will receive this payment upon leaving the focus group. Participation will be voluntary, and consent will be obtained. No personal information of a sensitive nature will be solicited or recorded. Focus groups will be audio taped and then transcribed into Microsoft Word documents; neither tapes nor transcripts will contain any information allowing identification of individual participants. Additional details on procedures to ensure confidentiality of focus group data are detailed in section 4 below.

Focus groups will be held in private, secure locations in close proximity to target communities. These locations will be easily accessible to potential respondents, but will be such that focus groups cannot be observed by non-participants. Examples include private conference rooms, focus group facilities provided by private research firms, and meeting rooms at university facilities such as those maintained by the University of Connecticut, Avery Point and the Center for Land Use Education and Research.

Because focus groups are conversational and interactive, it is impossible to provide the exact wording of all potential questions. However, it is possible to provide an outline of the types of questions which will be asked and topics that will be addressed. The structure and contents of the proposed focus groups will draw from prior focus groups conducted elsewhere in the US, which have collected public input on similar topics.

Example focus group questions may include:

1. Would you say that you are familiar with the condition of coastal areas where you live?
2. How would you characterize or describe the condition of these areas?
3. Have these coastal areas been changing in recent years? Could you explain?
4. Is the quality or condition of Connecticut’s beaches and wetlands important to you? Why or why not?
5. Do you use the coast in Connecticut—including beaches and wetlands—for recreation or other uses? Could you explain how you use these areas?
6. Would you say that these areas are good for the uses you are talking about? Why or why not?
7. Are there other reasons why you value the beaches and wetlands in this area?
8. What aspects of beaches and wetlands in your area are most important to you? Could you explain why?
9. What do you see as the most significant things that affect beaches and wetlands in this area?
10. Are coastal areas near your home affected by flooding or changes in water levels? Could you explain?
11. When you hear the term “sea level rise,” what comes to mind? What does this term mean to you?
12. What do you see as the most important risks associated with coastal storms and sea level rise in your area?
13. Do flooding or coastal storms affect you personally in any way? Please explain.
14. Have you seen any recent changes to the coast?
   a. Have any of these been related to flooding or sea level rise?
15. Have you personally experienced or seen any connections between the ways that people use or develop the land in this area and the condition of coastal areas?
16. Could you explain these connections?
17. Can you tell me about the different types of wetlands that are in this area?
18. Have these areas changed in recent years? How or why have they changed?
19. Can you think of ways that wetlands in this area benefit or harm you?
20. In your opinion, are wetlands being protected sufficiently in the area where you live? Why or why not?
21. Have you ever heard the term “coastal adaptation” before? If so, what does it mean to you?
22. Are you familiar with any government programs to protect coastal communities from flooding? If yes, could you explain them?
23. Do you think that the condition of beaches and wetlands in your area might be affected by some of these protection efforts? Could you describe any of these effects?
24. Would you support government programs that protect coastal communities from flooding, even if these programs were damaging to beaches and wetlands?
25. Do you think it is possible for a government program to protect coastal communities from flooding while also protecting wetlands and beaches? Could you give some examples of how such programs might be to do that?
26. What kinds of programs would you support most? Why?
27. Would you favor programs that would limit development or other uses of private land in return for greater protection of beaches and wetlands? Why or why not?
28. Do you have any experience with the use of sea walls or other hard structures that prevent coastal flooding? Could you explain?

4. Subjects Rights:

What are the procedures for safeguarding the subjects' rights with respect to the following during research:

a) security of person including physical, psychological, legal or social risk. If either is possible, indicate available safeguarding measures including termination of procedure or psychological counseling availability,

Completion of the focus groups and surveys should involve no discomfort. We foresee no physical, psychological, legal or social risk associated with completion of focus groups. No sensitive topics will be discussed. The researcher (Robert Johnston) has moderated over 300 focus groups in similar projects of this type, and no adverse events or risks have ever been reported—participants typically enjoy the discussions and the chance to express their opinions. Participation in focus groups is entirely voluntary, and respondents may cease participation at any time.

b) If confidentiality is required or has been assured, specify who will have access to the data, security of storage of data (state where it will be kept such as locked file cabinet in advisor's office), how the data will be coded to assure confidentiality and how results will be reported.

Focus groups will be audio taped; neither tapes nor focus group transcripts will contain names or any other information allowing identification of individual participants. No identifying information, including first names, will be shared with other focus group participants. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet within Dr. Johnston’s office in the George Perkins Marsh Institute at Clark University, and will be accessible only to the project leader and his administrative assistant, separate from audio tapes and transcripts. Focus group tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the project leader (Robert Johnston), accessible only to him. Transcripts will be stored in electronic form only, in password protected Microsoft Word files on Dr. Johnston’s computer. Any reporting of data (e.g., in publications) will refer to respondents only by number. Audio tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the two year
Focus groups will address well-known environmental conditions and issues in southern Connecticut coastal communities. The topics that will be discussed (e.g. coastal sea level rise and flooding) have been a frequent topic in the media in the study area, and are familiar to most community residents. Information on these topics is already freely available from public sources (newspapers, internet, etc.), and has been discussed in prior public meetings in these towns. Hence, the project is anticipated to have minimal if any impact on respondents’ opinions, beliefs, attitudes or emotions. Focus groups are not expected to change the participant in any substantive manner. No sensitive topics will be discussed. No deception or discomfort is involved. No debriefing should be necessary. The project leader will provide his full contact information to all focus group respondents, should they wish to discuss focus group content in any way after the meeting concludes.

5. Consent Form:

Focus Group Consent Form

The signing of this form constitutes consent to participate in a 90 minute focus group discussion being conducted by Professor Robert Johnston from Clark University, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy Southern Connecticut Chapter. The purpose of this study is to understand your preferences for coastal flood protection in Connecticut. You are being paid $75 for being in this focus group, and your participation may impact society by helping us to better manage and protect important coastal resources.

The focus group will be audio taped and transcribed. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to terminate your participation in this research at any time without penalty, or to refuse to answer any questions to which you don’t want to respond.

Your participation in this study is confidential. Neither tapes nor focus group transcripts will contain names or any other information allowing identification of individual participants; participants will be identified by code number only. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked storage area in the George Perkins Marsh Institute at Clark University accessible only to Professor Johnston and his administrative assistant, separate from audio tapes and transcripts. Focus group tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of Professor Johnston, accessible only to him. Transcripts will be stored in electronic form only, in password protected files on Professor Johnston’s computer. Focus group tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the three year research project. Password protected transcript files will be retained indefinitely, in accordance with standard data requirements for economic research.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Robert J. Johnston at 508-751-4619 or rjohnston@clarku.edu.

By signing below, I verify that I have read this consent form and agree to participate in this focus group.

______________________________ (Signature) __________________________ (Date)

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This study has been approved by the Clark Committee for the Rights of Human Participants in Research and Training Programs (IRB). Any questions about human rights issues should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. James P. Elliott (508) 793-7152.

6. Program Necessity:

   If the design of the study/program prevents full explanation of the nature of the study and/or procedures of the study, if deceit is involved, or if the nature of the study prevents written informed consent, then briefly explain why this is necessary to accomplish your research goal. Please justify your answer. Why is deceit involved and what is your debriefing script? Written informed consent is required unless there is a good reason for oral consent (i.e. foreign research where participants would be at risk if signing something). Do not respond with NA (not applicable); but state that no deceit is involved and that written consent will be obtained or explain the reason for oral consent.

No deceit is involved in this study and written consent will be obtained.

7. Risks

   In your estimation, do the procedures involve any risk for the subject (e.g., physical, psychological, social, legal or other)? If so, assess their likelihood and seriousness. Please justify your answer whether or not you feel there is risk (e.g. no risk if no personal or political value to study; subject matter is innocuous, etc.)  Do not respond with just “no risk”.

The subject matter for focus groups and interviews includes common and innocuous topics related to management of the local shoreline and its natural environment. These topics have been the subject of numerous recent newspaper articles, radio programs and public meetings in the study area, and are very familiar to residents. No sensitive topics will be discussed. No deception or discomfort is involved. All data are confidential. As a result, we foresee no substantive risks associated with participation.
CHECKLIST FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS TO THE IRB (HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE)

To avoid delays in the approval of your application:

1. Be sure to answer all questions fully in the application.

AND

2. Review your application to ensure it includes these checklist items. Check-off the items in this list or mark N/A if not applicable.

This Form Must Be Included with Your Application

Consent Form\(^1\) – Includes:

- \(\Box\) Name(s) of Researcher(s)
- \(\Box\) Advisor’s name, title, and department
- \(\Box\) Reference to your affiliation with Clark University
- \(\Box\) Brief description of the purpose of the study and the tasks involved
- \(\Box\) Approximate duration of participation
- \(\Box\) Any foreseeable risks/discomforts and/or expected benefits to participant or others
- \(\Box\) Statement that participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn without penalty at any time
- \(\Box\) Statement that participants may choose to not answer any question that they wish not to answer

Procedures for ensuring confidentiality (explanation of coding, storage, and disposal of data)

- \(\Box\) Data will not contain any names, only code numbers
- \(\Box\) Data and identifying information, such as consent forms, will be stored separately from each other
- \(\Box\) Data will be stored in a locked or password protected storage on Clark campus accessible only to researchers. Undergraduates must store data with faculty advisors.
- \(\Box\) Final disposal of any audio or video tapes is described

\(^1\) Not required for Anonymous Surveys. See [http://www.clarku.edu/offices/research/compliance/humsubj](http://www.clarku.edu/offices/research/compliance/humsubj) for sample consent form.
Where potentially necessary, a list of counseling/support resource(s) for participants

Contact information for the researchers

Statement of Assent for participants under the age of 14 (consent form must be addressed to parents/guardians in this circumstance)

The statement: “This study has been approved by the Clark Committee for the Rights of Human Participants in Research and Training Programs (IRB). Any questions about human rights issues should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. James P. Elliott (508) 793-7152.”

**Attachments – Include the following where relevant to your study:**

Recruiting Script(s)² (oral script, telephone script, email script, flyer, etc.) which includes the following information:

- Researcher’s name
- Advisor’s name and department
- Reference to affiliation with Clark University
- Brief description of the task(s)
- Approximate duration of participation
- Statement that participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty
- Contact information of researchers
- A statement that if participants are recruited in a class, their participation or non-participation will have no effect on their standing in class

Questionnaires, Surveys (hard copy for on-line surveys) and/or Interview Protocols

Written permissions from schools, agencies, organizations, etc. at which research will be conducted

Text of debriefing statement when deception is involved in the study

For research being conducted in a foreign country by a student, provide a letter from a local sponsoring institution certifying they have reviewed the research from the perspective of safety for the student and they find it reasonable to proceed

² See [http://www.clarku.edu/offices/research/compliance/humsubj](http://www.clarku.edu/offices/research/compliance/humsubj) for sample recruiting text.