

Pilot Studies and Field Tests

When is a Pilot Study Conducted?

*To validate a quantitative survey instrument that you developed yourself and you need to know the psychometric properties of the instrument (i.e., how valid and reliable the instrument is).

*To conduct a "test run" of your dissertation study. You want to do a test run of the sampling and data collection procedures to iron out any "wrinkles" in the procedures *The sample for the pilot study is similar to the sample for the dissertation study

Example of a Pilot Study:

Learner A developed an instrument called "Calculus Exam Performance Anxiety." The reason this instrument was developed was because after an extensive literature search, no instruments were found. Instruments found for math anxiety were not specific enough and were mostly developed for grade school, junior high and high school students. Before conducting the large scale study with 1,000 college students from five different Midwestern universities, a pilot study had to be conducted to determine how valid and reliable this instrument was for college students.

For the pilot study, the learner decided to conduct a study with 30 community college students at a Local Community College A.

Note: A pilot study makes sense here because this is a newly development instrument and no one knows how valid and reliable it is.

The sample for the pilot study is the same as the large scale study.



What are the IRB Procedures for Pilot Studies at NCU?

*A separate IRB application has to be submitted for pilot studies.

*Be sure to review the IRB resources related to recruitment process, recruitment materials, and site permissions before completing the IRB application for the pilot study. All of the information in these resources is applicable to pilot studies.

*The responses for the questions on the IRB application and any supplemental information should be targeted to the *pilot study* and not the dissertation study.

*Select the option in the IRB application that the application is for a pilot study.

*When IRB approval is provided for the pilot study, the learner may then conduct the pilot study. After the pilot study is completed and the appropriate analyses are conducted, the findings of the pilot study should be weaved into the IRB application for the dissertation study. For example, when talking about the instrument in the Research Procedures section of the IRB application, the learner can now talk about the instrument's validity and reliability and factor analyses findings.

*Close the pilot study in IRBManager and wait for the IRB to confirm via email that the study has been closed before taking the next step below.

*A separate IRB application, a copy of the instrument, and corresponding supporting documents for the *dissertation study* should be submitted to the IRB for review.

*Remember, data collection cannot commence for either the pilot study or the dissertation study until each have been reviewed and approved by the IRB.

When is a Field Test Conducted?

*To have experts in the field review a draft of the interview questions for a qualitative study to ensure for its credibility and dependability.

*The individuals assisting with a field test are **not** the same as the participants for the dissertation study.

*The majority of the time, the field test involves experts in the field. This reduces the risks of the study tremendously. As a result, a separate IRB review is not needed for field tests.

*Experts will review the interview questions to make sure it captures the key concepts being studied, the questions make sense, the questions are not awkwardly phrased, etc.



*Use the "findings" from the field test to refine and revise your interview question items.

Example of a Field Test:

Learner B is conducting a qualitative study about how families cope with anorexia. Indepth interviews will be conducted with the family members, but Learner B wants to ensure that the interview questions adequately capture the coping process and unique issues that families who have a family member experiencing anorexia. Even though the learner has conducted a comprehensive literature and the literature guided the development of the interview questions, Learner B wants to run the interview questions by some experts in the field. Learner B has decided to conduct a field test with 3 social workers who have worked extensively with families and anorexia. The three social workers will review the interview questions and provide recommendations for Learner B on how to improve the interview questions.

> Note: Having these social workers review the interview question items is considered no to minimal risk. That is why a separate IRB application is not needed.

A field test can provide some objective feedback from individuals who will offer a fresh perspective as well as their expertise.

What are the IRB Procedures for Field Tests at NCU?

*Unlike pilot studies, there is **no** need to submit a separate IRB application for a field test.

*When submitting the IRB application for the dissertation study, the learner can mention that the interview questions have been field tested by experts. The learner can provide a brief summary of some of the recommendations offered by the experts. (This summary of recommendations can be submitted as Supplemental Information as a separate attachment along with the other corresponding IRB documents).



*The interview questions should be attached as part of the IRB application within IRBManager.

Why is All This Important? What Does All This Have to Do With Ethics?

*Field testing has both methodological and ethical implications.

*If there is no evidence to the validity and reliability of a quantitative instrument or credibility and dependability of a qualitative measure, then it raises questions about the accuracy of the data that will be collected.

*Methodologically, it raises questions about whether the findings are accurate.

*Ethically, what will ultimately be portrayed about the topic and the study population in the findings section will not be accurate. This could potentially depict the population not only in an inaccurate but a negative manner. This then violates the Belmont principles of beneficence.