



HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATIONS FACT SHEET SERIES

Fact Sheet 13: Conducting Virtual Investigations

- 1 NHRI's can conduct thorough investigations virtually

- 2 Virtual investigations tend to take more time

- 3 Build the challenges and opportunities of conducting virtual investigations into your investigation plan

- 4 Access to technology is crucial

- 5 Virtual interviews have some challenges, but can be done effectively

What is a virtual investigation?

A virtual investigation is when some or all of your evidence gathering is done remotely – usually via the Internet

Other terminology

Sometimes virtual investigations are called 'remote' investigations or 'investigating using the Internet.'

Why should NHRI's know how to conduct virtual investigations?

- they may have no other option, possibly because of the pandemic
- it gives an NHRI an additional investigative methodology for conducting investigations, even after the pandemic passes

Are there any upsides?

- there may be cost savings for the NHRI, particularly when witness and other evidence is in a remote location.
- it is generally safer
- it is another tool that NHRI's can use when they see fit

Are there any downsides?

- There are several. Here are a few:
- the NHRI and/or people/organizations involved in the investigation may not have access to the technology required
- even if they do, that technology may be unreliable, such as poor internet connectivity
- not physically present when conducting interviews.
- individuals with a disability or impairment may find the process challenging
- unable to visit places where things that are being investigated happened
- more difficult to collect and share physical and digitally stored evidence
- may add time to the investigation, sometimes because of delays coordinating interviews and obtaining physical and digitally stored evidence
- security and confidentiality concerns when exchanging information electronically with colleagues and involved parties. Consider using passwords, and be extra careful before pressing 'send'
- This may result in loss of control of aspects of the investigation, or at least give you less control than you would normally have.

The biggest disadvantage

- if you are unable to attend your office, perhaps due to pandemic restrictions, it is more difficult to confer with colleagues to the same degree as when working together physically. You can't lean over your cubicle and bounce ideas off your teammates or others.

So why bother?

- Because it is usually possible to conduct thorough and objective investigations virtually. Sometimes it is just as efficient and effective as doing investigations the usual way.

Some basic principles for conducting investigations virtually

- have the right equipment
- know the platform / technology you are using
- establish if people you want to contact to further the investigation have access to the Internet and a device, such as a smartphone or computer by which you can contact them
- explain what you are doing and why you are doing it
- set aside more time than usual to conduct the investigation