Mechanical Turk

Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT, MTurk) is a crowdsourcing digital marketplace that enables individuals and businesses (known as Requesters) to coordinate the use of human intelligence to perform tasks that computers are currently unable to do. It is part of the larger entity Amazon Web Services. Requesters are able to post tasks known as HITs (Human Intelligence Tasks); requesters complete tasks such as writing product descriptions or checking a sentence’s grammar. Workers (called Providers or Turkers by AMT) can then browse for existing tasks and complete them for a monetary payment set by the Requester. To create a HIT, an open application programming interface (API) or the more limited MTurk Requester site is used. Requesters are restricted to US-based entities.

NOT ALLOWED
Reimbursements for payments to AMT are not allowed.

Ordering and Additional Information below:

1. Departments are responsible for setting up specific processes to account for funds distributed through AMT. A payment to AMT will show up as a charge on your Procard, but that “charge” requires additional supporting documentation. A detailed Requester Report from AMT showing the date, time, and “worker id” to whom fund were distributed and the amount paid must be provided for each charge.

In addition, all services done through AMT must have a qualifying question asked on every survey/service request that asks the participant, “Are you an employee of the University of Washington, family member of a UW employee, or UW student involved in this particular research?” If the participant answers “yes” to any question, they must be disqualified from participating in the task. As UW’s compliance for fiscal accountability and conflict of interest, we must ensure funds are not distributed to UW employees, immediate relatives, or students involved in the actual research. Procard charges must be reconciled in a timely manner as required by policy.

2. Do not split purchases or make back-to-back charges exceeding our standard Procard limit of $3500 or you (and/or your department) may lose your Procard privileges. A $3500 charge followed by another $3500 charge the following week after funds are expended/distributed will be acceptable at this time but two charges on the same day or back-to-back days that exceed $3500 to fund a specific project will be viewed as a split charge and will be considered an unauthorized purchase unless the department is able to show that the funds have all been disbursed within the prior business day.

3. UW departments may choose to establish “business” accounts with AMT in the name of the University *with* the approval of the funding approver. Procurement is not setting up parent-child accounts as AMT discussed below. Each account created needs to be approved as a new and separate UW business account and will be tied to a specific payment account (Procard) based on how you set up each account.
4. AMT business accounts should not be tied to an individual’s Amazon.com account. As such, it is even more critical to ensure that personal and Procard charges are made to the correct accounts at time of payment in Amazon. We strongly caution against use of the Procard on an individual’s Amazon account, and if this is abused or results in unauthorized procurements, this guidance may be revoked and the use of AMT will be suspended.

5. Amazon has a difficult time linking businesses to specific accounts. Should there be funding issues between Procards and AMT, it is the responsibility of the Requester and Procard holder to work out any issues with Amazon. This is **not** an issue Procurement will be able to advise on.

For the same reasons AMT is making a big deal about setting up and verifying accounts and payment methods, departments need to be aware that this entire process contains countless opportunities for issues, fraud, lack of accountability, etc… The guidance above is guidance at this point, but should issues arise that we were not aware of and/or cannot control, or processes not put in place to properly manage risk, the guidance may be retracted and use of AMT may be prohibited for all of campus. We recognize the value of this service to researchers and want to support our faculty, but at the same time the faculty must recognize the very sensitive nature of the fiscal accountability this process creates and support the necessary requirements/processes to make this work.