

<b>Guidance Document</b>	Participant Recruitment
<b>Effective Review</b>	Health Sciences and Non-Medical REB (Delegated & Full Board)
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## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide researchers with information about the requirements related to recruitment of participants and guidance on how to develop recruitment materials. This document is a guideline aimed to assist researchers in preparing their recruitment strategies and communicating such strategies to the REB. The REB may have additional questions/recommendations depending on the context of the research and the information provided in the REB application.

## Requirements for Recruitment Material

There are specific ethical guidelines when considering your recruitment procedures. For example, research recruitment must adhere to the ethical principles of autonomy and respect for persons. Recruitment should always be voluntary, and measures must be in place to protect participants' privacy. Recruitment can be done in a variety of ways depending on the context of research. Some examples include posting flyers on bulletin boards, speaking to someone in-person or via telephone, sending someone an email, or posting online through social media.

In the REB application, be sure to fully describe the recruitment plan as well as submit any recruitment materials to accompany the recruitment plan (i.e., anything a participant will see or hear when being introduced to the study, such as telephone or email scripts, posters, etc.). As well, include all applicable details such as how contact information will be accessed (e.g., publicly available contact information? email forwarded through approved mailing list?), where the recruitment notices will be posted, and who will be responsible for the recruiting of participants. Consider possible implications to potential participants' privacy/confidentiality, voluntary participation, and wellbeing. For example, if the person involved in recruitment will be in any position of influence over potential participants, the researchers must address how this influence will be mitigated to ensure voluntary and confidential participation and that there are no negative impacts on participants.

Researchers must be aware that additional approvals/permissions may be needed beyond Western's REB approval. For example, researchers may need to obtain approval and/or permission from other institutions, organizations or groups to recruit through them and/or on their premises (e.g., Poster Patrol at Western, hospitals, school boards, community agencies, commercial establishments, online forums or social media platforms, etc.). Researchers must ensure that all appropriate permissions are in place prior to recruiting participants.

What should be included in recruitment materials?

- Institutional/departmental logo/letterhead and all partner logos, if appropriate. If logos cannot be included it should be clear which institutions are involved.
- Study title

- Short description of the study purpose
- Inclusion criteria (who can participate) and, if applicable, exclusion criteria (who can't participate)
- Approximate duration of participation
- Brief outline of what the participant will be asked in surveys or interviews
- NMREB only: Incentives may be noted, but should not be so prominent as to be coercive. Avoid coercive language (e.g., "Do you want to earn \$25?! WE NEED YOU!")
- NMREB only: Reimbursement of costs incurred by the participant (i.e. transit, child care, parking)
- HSREB: You may provide a simple statement of compensation such as "you will be compensated/reimbursed for your time/travel". Do not include specific compensation as incentive to participate.
- How to contact the researcher using their institutional contact information (i.e., Western University e-mail address/phone number)
- If project is funded include statement stating the funder.
- Language should be appropriate for the participants you will be recruiting

## **Common Recruitment Strategies that Raise Ethical Considerations**

### Snowball Sampling:

Western's REBs do not permit active snowball sampling, but instead recommend modified (passive) snowball sampling. That is, researchers should never request or obtain the identities/contact information of potential participants from third parties (including existing participants). Instead, the REB recommends that researchers provide third parties with recruitment information, which the third parties can provide to their network or potential participants as applicable, and the potential participants can then contact the researchers directly for more information if they are interested. The reason for this is to protect the potential participants' identity/confidentiality, and also to promote voluntary recruitment. If this process is not possible/feasible in your research, the REB would need to understand why, and measures would need to be in place to ensure that potential participants' name/contact information are not being provided to researchers without their knowledge/consent.

### Recruitment within Organizations:

Western's REBs' general guideline is that the appropriate organization representative forward recruitment materials to potential participants who can then contact the researcher for more information. This guideline stems from feedback from the Secretariat on the Responsible Conduct of Research, indicating that contact information should never be passed on for person A to person B through person Z (see snowball sampling guidance above). However, in some instances there can be exceptions to this rule, and the destination organization can decide what is most appropriate for their context (i.e., in keeping with privacy/confidentiality procedures, etc.).

Some factors that researchers and the REB may need to consider, which could affect what recruitment procedure is approved, include:

- The nature of the research (e.g., asking about personal vs. professional experiences; perhaps incriminating or negative information such as experiences of not following organizational procedures, etc.)
- The size of the potential participant pool (e.g., triangulation concerns – is there any possibility of being able to indirectly identify participants?)
- If there is going to be a summary report to the ED, for example, and there is a vested interest in the research, it might be more appropriate for the researchers to contact the participants directly to minimize any potential for the ED to influence participation (i.e., contact would preferably be through publicly available contact information; however, if appropriate, the organization representative might be able to provide this information to the researcher)

In sum, research recruitment strategies are approved on a case-by-case basis, as the sensitivity of the research dictates NMREB recommended procedures, not precedents. The NMREB avoids ‘policies’ but instead offers guidelines only; the NMREB must be flexible. In one study a procedure may be acceptable, while in another context it may not be. This is not a matter of consistency, but rather a discretionary approach to evaluating the project overall using the guiding principles of TCPS2. Researchers must sufficiently justify their proposed recruitment strategies if they are requesting an approach that is contrary to the REBs’ general guidelines.

### Recruitment through a person with an existing relationship with the potential participant and/or in a position of influence:

Recruitment materials should make the following clear:

- Decision to participate (or not) is completely voluntary;
- Decision to participate (or not) will be kept confidential;
- Participation (or lack thereof) will not impact the recruited individual in any way (e.g., employment, education, health care, etc.)
- If applicable, communications should be provided through a person not in a position of influence (e.g., research assistant, administrative assistant, teaching staff not affiliated with the course/grading, etc.)

### Recruitment within a clinical setting:

A person from within a client/patient’s circle of care must first introduce the study to the potential participant. This includes in-person recruitment, as well as recruitment via mail or email (i.e., where a cover letter/communication from the primary care personnel will introduce the study, accompanied by a letter of information and consent form). This protects the privacy/confidentiality of potential participants’ names/contact information. The potential participant can then voluntarily choose to follow-up with the researcher directly for more information if interested.

## Recruitment within classrooms:

Researchers can post a slide on the overhead before/after class with the instructors' permission, including a brief description of the research and the researcher's contact information (i.e., passive recruitment). This slide would need to be submitted for REB review/approval.

Researchers can also present an in-class verbal recruitment script at the beginning of class or at the end of class, **without the instructor present**. This minimizes any perception of obligation/influence to participate. Researcher contact information should be provided for potential participants to contact the researcher if interested.

If the instructor is the Principal Investigator, measures must be implemented to minimize any perception of influence to participate, such as:

- A third party, not involved in grading or in any position of authority, must recruit/obtain consent;
- The instructor/PI must not know who agreed to participate (or not);
- Data should be collected at the least level of identifiability possible;
- Data should be provided to the instructor only after course grades have been finalized;
- If there will be any compensation provided, this cannot overly incentivize participation;
- If any compensation impact course grades (e.g., bonus), there must be an alternate assignment to avoid coercing participation;
- The process for allocating course credit or providing monetary compensation needs to be done in a way that protects confidentiality and voluntariness, and needs to be fully disclosed in the REB application and Letter of Information and Consent.

## **Online Methods of Recruitment**

### Email Recruitment:

Email recruitment should occur via publicly available contact information, whenever possible. If this is not possible, the method for obtaining contact information needs to be described in the REB application. The above considerations regarding snowball sampling, recruitment within organizations, etc. need to be followed when using email recruitment. Researchers must outline these procedures in the REB application, along with uploading the email script that will be sent to potential participants.

### Mass Email Recruitment of Students at Western:

The Registrar's Office is able to send out recruitment emails on behalf of researchers, as long as the email subject line includes: "**Mass Email Recruitment**". Students who do not wish to be recruited into research are advised to block emails with this subject line, which protects the principle of voluntary recruitment. If using mass email recruitment, ensure this is outlined in the REB application, along with the recruitment email script that will be sent to potential participants.

## Social Media Recruitment:

Use of social media must be outlined in the REB application. Ensure to state where the online material will be posted and clarify whether or not a login is required to post the material, if the page is private or public, etc. Also ensure to outline which account the post will originate from. For example, if you are posting to a Facebook page, please specify if you are posting from your personal account or from a different profile that is research-specific (recommended). If using Twitter, provide the specific 140-character tweet that will be posted and the account from which it will be posted.

It is important to remember that participants on social media may comment or reply to a tweet or posting, and therefore confidentiality may be compromised. Make it clear in the posting, using explicit language, that the participant should contact the researcher directly through the means provided. Researchers must consider the confidentiality of their participants and ensure to design their recruitment procedures in a way that protects potential participants' privacy and confidentiality. Such measures increase as the level of research risk increase, and all measures must be described to the satisfaction of the REB.

It is recommended to treat online communities the same as you would treat any other community, and ensure to conduct yourself with the same professionalism and respect for hierarchical structures as you would a community agency, for example. Researchers must ensure to obtain permission from online site moderators prior to attempting to recruit participants through online forums. Researchers should also consider the context of the online forum and ensure to be sensitive to the needs and customs of these groups.

If using a job board or classified site such as Kijiji or Craigslist, please note that these should be under volunteer or research work, rather than under employment.

## Survey Panel (e.g., MTurk):

If using an online survey panel, specify in the REB application which platform is being used, upload the description that will be provided to participants through this platform, and ensure that all privacy/confidentiality and compensation information is outlined in the appropriate places within the REB application.

## SONA Recruitment Database:

SONA has been approved as a recruitment platform for students enrolled in certain courses within the following faculties/departments at Western:

- Department of Psychology (including PSYC 1000 and other non-introductory courses)
- DAN Department of Management and Organizational Studies (e.g., MOS 1021)
- Ivey Business School (e.g., BUS 1220E, HBA1)

Students in these specific courses are required to obtain specific research credits for course completion, and they are provided with alternate options (e.g., written review of a research

article) in order to obtain their research course credit without participating in research (thus protecting the principle of voluntary research participation).

When using these platforms, researchers must ensure to outline the following in the REB application:

- Will any screening questions be used to limit the pool of participants viewing the post?
- What information will be visible to participants in the posting? Note: Upload these fields in a separate document and upload when prompted in WREM.
  - o Study name (Complete title as it appears in the REB application form and on the Letter of Information and Consent document)
  - o Study type (e.g., online? In-lab?)
  - o Number of credits (i.e., what is the compensation scheme, how many credits will participants receive for participation; will this be pro-rated; etc.) – Note: refer to departmental policies
  - o Study duration (number of sessions, length of each session, total time to complete)
  - o Abstract (brief overview of study)
  - o Study Description (including study activities, locations, and commitments)
  - o Preparation requirements (if applicable)
  - o Researcher (i.e., Principal Investigator)

## **Other Western-specific Recruitment Options:**

### Psychology Summer Pool:

Students in summer classes in the Department of Psychology may be invited to voluntarily indicate their willingness to be contacted for research recruitment by providing their email addresses on a sign-up sheet which is managed by within the department. Researchers using the Psychology Summer Pool for recruitment will need to indicate in the REB application that they are using this pool, specify who will be contacting potential participants, and upload the recruitment information (i.e., email script) for approval.

### Ivey Paid Pool:

Similar to Ivey's SONA pool, Ivey manages a recruitment database for individuals interested in participating in research conducted by Ivey's Behavioural Lab. Researchers using this pool for recruitment purposes must follow the guidelines outlined by the Behavioural Lab Manager, which have been coordinated with the Office of Human Research Ethics. All relevant information must be outlined in the REB application for approval.