

## Research Recruitment: Essential considerations before you reach out to potential participants

Participant recruitment can be a significant challenge in many research studies. Ensuring sufficient volunteers are identified who meet the project specific inclusion criteria, and encouraging/maintaining interest to study completion often requires a higher level of effort than first anticipated. The Office for Research has developed some useful tips to aid participant recruitment by ensuring that anyone and everyone involved in approaching and/or contacting patients/research participants is fully aware of their responsibility to first consider the person they are approaching about potential research participation.



### PRELIMINARY TASKS

1	<b>RESPECT-</b> Be mindful of your ethical responsibility to research participants. Participants must be respected and protected. <b>RESPECT</b> for human beings is the common thread in all considerations of human interaction. Always maintain both organisational and ethical standards in all contact. Undertaking research is a privilege not a right.
2	Confirm that the HREC approved your involvement? Are you listed as personnel/investigator on approved project? Ensure you are included on the delegation log. It is essential that the HREC has approved a detailed and complete recruitment plan for each site at which the reviewing HREC has oversight. A detailed step by step description of all recruitment methods must be provided for HREC review and approval before you start. Comments such as “ <i>participants will be identified from departmental databases</i> ” are not sufficient – describe exactly how and who will do this and how and when the first approach to a potential participant will be made. Transcripts of telephone calls, letters of invitation and project flyers/posters must be approved by the HREC.
3	Be mindful of both the conditions of your HREC approval and your target demographic - are they a vulnerable population, such as elderly, ATSI? Are there language barriers? Tailor your approach to the study at hand. Think about the people you will be approaching.
4	Know the study thoroughly to enable you to adequately explain the study to potential participants in lay language, discuss strategies for follow-up and provide clarification to any questions raised.
5	Identify potential candidates based on project specific inclusion criteria. Then ascertain before contacting them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening questions to ask</li> <li>• Any conflict of interest. Are they involved in other trials that may be compromised?</li> <li>• Do they have capacity to commit to study completion?</li> <li>• Type of care setting required?</li> </ul>



### CONTACT APPROACHES IN KEEPING WITH HREC APPROVAL

1	A personal face to face approach is the best approach. Avoid cold calling, wherever possible. If face to face contact is not possible or practicable, consider cold outreach instead by sending a letter or postcard, or emailing or sending a message via patient portals to potential research participants first to raise awareness of an impending telephone call about potential participation in a research study or trial.
2	Distribute or display posters, flyers or pamphlets in clinic waiting rooms, etc.
3	Approach the primary healthcare provider’s consulting rooms/office or community clinic to raise awareness of your study and assist in gauging potential participant interest.
4	Telephone potential participants using the HREC approved transcript verbatim.



### CONTACT BY TELEPHONE

1	Always introduce who you are, which organisation and department you represent and follow your HREC approved transcript verbatim.
2	<p>Always ask if it is a good time to <b>TALK</b> after the introduction. During the introduction please let them know how you obtained their contact details. If <b>YES</b> ... proceed/if <b>NO</b> ... ask when would it be a good time to ring them back to chat?</p> <p>If there is any indication of distress, reluctance or confusion from the patient/potential participant, <b>APOLOGISE</b>, and ask if they are OK or need any assistance. Once confirmed that the person is OK, thank them for their time and end the call. <b>DO NOT</b> persist/insist/hassle the patient – it is their right to not speak with you and your duty to respect the patient’s wishes and their autonomy to make their own decisions.</p>
3	<p>If the potential participant is happy to speak with you, confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the call is only gauging interest in being involved and that consent will <b>NOT</b> be sought now</li> <li>• their interest and availability to commit to participating for the duration of the study</li> <li>• any action implemented to minimise the burden on participants (i.e. monetary compensation)</li> </ul>
4	Advise them that this study/trial will be discussed at their next appointment and/or at a later date. If a Participant Information and Consent Form will be posted to them, to provide more information about a study, let them know.
5	Give them contact details and reiterate your name, organisation and department in case they wish to contact you again.
6	<b>THANK THEM</b> for their time.