Purpose

To outline the requirements for designing a recruitment strategy to include in a human research proposal and recruit human participants.

Scope

All UNSW students, staff and researchers are conducting human research.

Recruitment of human research participants

National Statement, chapter 3.1, element 2 outlines the requirements for recruiting human research participants and specifies that research proposals should clearly describe the recruitment strategy and criteria for selecting potential participants.

Stakeholder engagement and recruitment

Activities that are considered stakeholder engagement.

National Statement, item 3.1.17 specifies that the recruitment strategy should promote voluntary participation and be respectful of the target populations' culture, traditions, beliefs, and privacy rights. Stakeholder engagement or community consultation may be required to obtain information from the target population or communities to design the research, recruitment strategy and consent process to meet this requirement. The following activities are considered stakeholder engagement:

- Contact with an organisation involved with a target population to establish how recruitment is to be conducted or identify and recruit individuals to participate in research.
- Engaging with vulnerable populations, communities, groups, or leaders in remote, rural, ethnic, or indigenous communities to establish:
  - The way information about the research will be disseminated to community leaders, groups or populations.
  - How recruitment is to be conducted, and whether culturally appropriate protocols are to be adhered to or put in place.
  - The way community group leaders, groups or populations are updated on the research, recruitment and consenting processes.
  - The process is for reporting the research.
  - How and who within the communities is to provide evidence of support for the research.
  - Engaging with organisations relevant to the target population to identify appropriate support services, facilities, and locations to research.
  - Consulting with organisations relevant to the target population on designing the research or development of research materials.

Activities that are not considered stakeholder engagement.

The following activities are not considered stakeholder engagement, and human ethics approval is to be established before conducting these research activities:

- Seeking and obtaining contact details or contacting individuals to participate in research.
- Introducing the research to a person via adverts, email, phone, word of mouth discussions, professional networks, online or social media.
- Advertising or promoting the research via social media, email, word of mouth, or professional networks.
- Assessing existing records to identify, include, screen, or exclude individuals from participating in research.
- Co-designing recruitment materials or procedures with individuals of an intended target population where the information collected during this process is included in the research results.

Recruitment

National Statement, item 3.1.12 indicates that recruitment proposals must clearly describe the recruitment strategy and criteria for selecting potential participants. The recruitment strategy is to include the following:

  i. A description of the research's intended participants will be, and an explanation of how the cohort to be recruited aligns with the research's objectives and theoretical basis (National Statement, item 3.1.14).

ii. The criteria to determine whether a person is to be included in the research or excluded from the research (National Statement, item 3.1.15).

iii. The procedure to be followed to identify individuals for the research and an explanation of how the research team have ensured that the process of identification is respectful of their circumstances, culture, traditions, beliefs and will not breach their right to privacy (National Statement, item 3.1.15, 3.1.17 c, g).

iv. The methods used to introduce the research (e.g. adverts, email, phone, word of mouth discussions, professional networks, online or social media) to the intended target population (National Statement, item 3.1.19).

v. A description of the strategies that will be used to minimise the risk of coercion and exploitation during the recruitment process (whether real or perceived) as a result of existing or unequal relationships (e.g., medical professional-patient, teacher-student, employer-employee, support service-client, supervisor-team member, organisation-client) (National Statement 3.1.17, d).

vi. A list of the risks or discomforts (if any) associated with the recruitment strategy and the plan for mitigating these risks (National Statement 3.1.17, b).

vii. An explanation of how the research team has assessed whether it is necessary to conduct stakeholder engagement or establish agreements with organisations or communities involved in the research (National Statement 3.1.17, g).

viii. If applicable, an indication of payments or incentives to be provided to assist with recruitment (National Statement 3.1.22).

1.1. Multiple research participant groups
If there are multiple participant groups involved in the research, and if the above criteria are not the same for each group, the recruitment strategy is to describe the above criteria for each group and explain how groups of individuals will be asked to participate in separate components of the research.

1.2. Multiple research components
The recruitment strategy is to describe the procedures ensuring that individuals are provided with information relevant to all research components and describe each research component's recruitment process.

2. Identifying human research participants
National Statement, item 3.1.19 indicates that researchers are to justify their approach to potential participants. It is recommended that the following methods are used to identify and recruit individuals to participate in research. Additional recruitment methods can be used if the procedure is described and meets the National Statement, items 3.1.12, 3.1.14, 3.1.15, 3.1.17, 3.1.19, 3.1.20, 3.1.21, and 3.1.22.

2.1. Advertisements
Recruitment using advertisements involves the placement of information about the research in public places such as waiting rooms, information boards, websites, online platforms, and social media platforms. Research advertisements are to specify the purpose of the research and provide a description of the intended target population, the research procedures participants will be asked to complete, an indication of the time commitment, and, if applicable, any incentive payments or reimbursement amounts that will be paid. The advertisement is to provide instructions for individuals that meet the inclusion criteria on how to register their interest in participating in the research. It is recommended that online advertisements are to include links to downloadable versions of the participant information statement. The recruitment strategy is to specify where the advertisements are to be placed and whether permission to do so will require any organisations or individuals.

2.2. The letter or email invitations
Recruitment using letter or email invitations involves distributing emails or letters sent by mail to a list of individuals. The email or letter of invitation must describe the purpose of the research and provide a description of the intended target population, the research procedures participants will be asked to complete, an indication of the time commitment, and, if applicable, any incentive payments or reimbursement amounts that will be paid. The email or letter provides instructions for individuals who meet the inclusion criteria for registering their interest in participating in the research. A copy of the participant information statement should be attached to the email or letter.

2.2.1. Accessing email/mail contact lists or health records for research
Recruitment letters or emails may be sent to potential participants using their publicly available contact details. This process may include undertaking an internet search for individuals who meet the inclusion criteria. The process of searching for, identifying, and cataloguing a list of potential participants to contact must be documented in a step-by-step format such that the process is verifiable. The measures that will be put in place to

respond to complaints from individuals who raise concerns about how the research team obtained their contact details must also be outlined.

Existing contact lists or health records are only accessed by those who can view and use personal or health information.

If accessing existing contact lists or health records, the organisation, company, or institution responsible for the contact list or health records should be asked to send an email or letter of invitation to the intended target population on the research team's behalf. Only where appropriately justified and supported by the following can personal information stored in contact lists or health records be provided to or be accessed by a research team:

- Evidence of the individual's consent for personal or health information is shared for a research purpose.
- Written evidence from a person with the delegated authority to release information is to be provided with the research proposal confirming that the release of the information to the research team will not breach the original permissions obtained when the information was collected or the individual's privacy.

2.2.2. Evidence of consent to access information for research purposes

- Evidence of consent must specify that personal or health information can be accessed for research purposes and must define who can access their information for research and the format that it can be accessed.
- Researchers or students must not access identifiable (or potentially identifiable) personal or health information for a research purpose to remove identifiers from records or screen patients for inclusion if they do not have access to the information for a routine business or patient care process.

2.2.3. Sending reminders to participate in research

Reminders that are to be sent to individuals who did not respond to an initial invitation email or letter are to be limited to two follow up emails or letters to ensure that the recipients are not inundated with reminders. The follow-up reminders include a mechanism to allow participants to opt-out of receiving further reminders.

If reminders are sent using multiple methods (e.g. email, text and via social media), reminders must be limited to two reminders per method with a mechanism to allow participants to opt-out of receiving further reminders included.

The intention to send reminders is to be specified in the recruitment strategy, and copies of the reminder communications used are to be provided for review.

2.2.4. Sending group or bulk emails

Sending group or bulk emails have the potential to disclose an individual's contact details inadvertently. For this reason, sending group emails using the carbon copy (cc) or blind copy function are not approved methods when using emails to recruit participants. The following are approved methods for recruitment using email:

2.2.4.1. Mail Merge

To create a mail merge using a template email written in Microsoft Word and a list of recipients saved in an excel spreadsheet:

- Start Word. A blank document opens by default. Leave it open. If you close it, the commands in the next step are not available.
- On the Mailings tab, in the Start Mail Merge group, click Start Mail Merge.
- Click Step by Step Mail Merge Wizard. The wizard will guide you through the Mail Merge process and allow you to connect your document to your list of recipients. Emails sent using this process will send to each participant instead of sending to a list of participants, resulting in confidentiality breaches.

2.2.4.2. UNSW- Mailman Mailing List Service

UNSW IT has a mailing list service that is similar to the above mail merge system. Further instructions on how to access this service can be found by accessing the following link: https://www.it.unsw.edu.au/students/mailman/index.html

2.3. Social media, online and social media

Recruitment online or using social media involves the promotion of research using digital advertisements. Study-specific social media or accounts managed by the school are to be used to promote the research. The methods for introducing research using online and social media platforms are as follows:

- A short description that reflects the research aim in a post introduces the research to the intended target population with links to a study advertisement and participant information statement.
- The study advertisement included a post with a link to the participant information statement.

The advertisement or post provides instructions for individuals who meet the inclusion criteria for registering their interest in participating in the research. The recruitment strategy is to specify which social media platforms or website are to promote the research.

Researchers may share the posts made from the study-specific or school managed social media accounts. The use of individual social media accounts as the sole method of promoting the research via social media or online websites is not recommended.

2.4. Market Research Platforms

Recruitment using market research platforms involves the promotion of the research to the platform consumer groups. Market research platforms commonly have recruitment procedures that need to be used to promote research and generally require the payment of a fee or reimbursement for those that participate. The recruitment strategy is to describe how the research will be introduced using a market research platform. Besides, researchers are required to provide examples of the wording these platforms will use if it is not possible to UNSW recommended templates to demonstrate that adequate information about the research will be provided to the individual in order for them to make an informed decision about taking part in the research. Researchers commonly use platforms such as Qualtrics, Amazon Mechanical Turk, Roy Morgan, Research Connections.

2.5. Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling involves a participant or potential participant promoting the research by participants by providing information about the research (e.g. advertisement, link to the study website, participant information statement or a letter of invitation) to people they may know. The recruitment materials provide instructions for individuals for registering their interest in the research (e.g. generally by contacting the research team directly).

Processes, where participants provide personal information such as an email address, phone number or address of their known contacts to the research team to be used to introduce the research, has the potential to compromise an individual's privacy and, for this reason, is not a method that is approved to be used when snowball sampling.

3. Coercion

National Statement, item 2.2.9 National Statement specifies that measures are to be put in place to ensure that recruitment is free from coercion or pressure. The recruitment of individuals using a direct approach by the research team or situations where pre-existing or unequal relationships exist introduces participants' potential to be coerced or pressured into participating in research.

3.1. Mitigating the potential for coercion when recruiting research participants

Medical professional-patient, teacher-student, employer-employee, support service-client, supervisor-team member, organisation-client, parent-child, or situations where a carer is responsible for a person are examples pre-existing or unequal relationships. The following are recommended methods for conducting recruitment without the potential for coercion. Other methods can be used if appropriately justified:

- Introduction of the research using an email or letter of invitation sent by an organisation, school administrator, medical professional, school on behalf of the research team. To remove the recipients' potential to perceive the act of non-participation as harming their relationship with the organisation or individual that introduces the research, the email or letter of invitation instructs those interested in contacting the research team directly they are interested in taking part in the research.

- Introduction of the research using a direct approach where a study advertisement is placed in waiting rooms of a walk-in clinic. An administrator or receptionist can direct participants to the advertisement and a hard copy or link to the participant information statement to read while waiting. Those interested in the research following this approach are directed to discuss their involvement with their clinician. Because of the potential for coercion, the research's introduction by a direct approach where clinicians, administrators, or receptionists can access patient contact details or have prior contact with their patients to schedule appointments will not be approved. The research team will need to introduce the research by mail, email or phone, providing recruitment materials before a scheduled appointment.

3.2. Mitigating the potential for coercion when recruiting students

- Email: A school administrator should be asked to distribute an invitation email with a copy of the participant information statement and consent form attached to students on the research team's behalf before attending the course lectures, tutorials, or presentations. Introducing the research using this method research removes students perceiving non-participation as impacting their course results. The email used to introduce the template must specify that participation in the research is not a course requirement, and their decision not to participate will not impact their course grades. The wording used in the student email invitation or recruitment advertisement templates on the Human Ethics page must be used.

- During Lectures: A hard copy study advertisement or flyer may be placed in the lecture theatre near the entry or exit, allowing students to select whether to collect one. To remove the potential for pressure or coercion, the lecturer, course convenor or tutor must not specifically introduce the research project during lectures or presentations. Introducing the research using this method research removes students perceiving non-participation as impacting their course results. The study advertisement or flyer must specify that participation in the research is not a course requirement, and their decision not to participate will not impact their course grades.
- Moodle: Research study advertisements can be placed in the announcements, news forums and site news sections of Moodle using the student recruitment online platform post-template available on the Human Ethics page.
- School-Based Participant Pools: Formal student participant pools set up for research recruitment exist in some schools. Researchers should enquire with their school administrators to establish what the process is for accessing these recruitment pools.

4. Payments in Human Research

National Statement, item 3.1.22 specifies that researchers and reviewers consider the degree to which any payment in money or incentives of any kind, whether to researchers, participants or others involved in recruitment, could result in pressure on individuals to consent to participate.

4.1. Payments to participants of human research

Information about monetary or in-kind support that is to be provided to participants of human research encompassing remuneration, compensation, reimbursement, and incentive are to be disclosed in the research proposal and where applicable in the recruitment and consent materials. Measures for ensuring that payments coerce individuals into participating should also be described.

- Remuneration: Money paid to participants to recognise their services as participants in research (comparable to wages). Remuneration could be provided in recognition of time's contribution to the research and recognition of any inconvenience experienced by research participation.
- Compensation: Money or in-kind support that is provided to participants (a) to compensate participants for any documented loss of wages or other financial loss resulting from their participation in research OR (b) to compensate participants for any loss of wages or other financial loss resulting from an injury suffered as a direct consequence of participation in research.
- Reimbursement: Money paid to participants toward their recovery of any expenses incurred because of participation in research (e.g. travel, accommodation, meals).
- Prize Draws Prizes, rewards, or incentives used to recruit research participants are considered "games of chance" and are subject to the NSW Lotteries Act. It is acceptable to run and promote such competitions, for non-commercial purposes (including as an aid to academic research), provided that:
  o Ethics approval is obtained before recruitment commences.
  o Prizes are limited to non-monetary options, such as gift/store vouchers (not redeemable for cash) or goods.
  o Advertising is honest, not misleading and includes an indication of when the competition will be drawn, and
  o Winners are notified promptly (within a day or two) of the prize being drawn. Different types of competitions are subject to different regulations and can raise additional legal issues. If in doubt, contact the Legal Office on x52701.

4.2. Payments to the research team

Information about monetary or in-kind support that is to be provided to the research team of human research encompassing remuneration, compensation, reimbursement, and incentive are to be disclosed in the research proposal, the recruitment materials, the consent forms, and where applicable in the results of the research. Measures for ensuring that payments coerce individuals into participating should also be described in the proposal.