
Yale University Institutional Review Boards

410 GD 3: Use of e-mail for Human Research Recruitment

Overview

The use of University e-mail to recruit potential research participants must occur within the context of an IRB-approved or IRB-exempted study, comply with the University Information Technology Appropriate Use Policy (Yale policy 1607) and, when appropriate, any requirements of the holder of the e-mail distribution list. E-mail recruitment (e-recruitment) messages must include specific information related to the study and provide the option of not receiving future e-recruitment solicitations.

Reason for the guidance

Use of e-mail to recruit University students, staff, faculty and other holders of a yale.edu e-mail account for participation in a research study must comply with the Information Technology Appropriate Use Policy (IT-AUP; <http://www.yale.edu/ppdev/policy/1607/1607.pdf>). The IT-AUP prohibits the reckless distribution of unwanted mail or other unwanted messages, resource hogging, using e-mail in a manner that interferes with service or spreading e-mails widely and without good purpose (also known as "spamming"). However, use of e-mail solicitation of potential research participants, when used responsibly, can streamline obtaining the needed number of participants to meet a study's goals. The aim of this guidance is to outline the proper and responsible use of e-mail solicitation for research studies, and when additional approvals may be needed in addition to IRB approval of the study for which the e-mail recruitment is being sought.

Use of official University e-mail lists for research recruitment

Use of the official institutional e-mail lists such as those maintained by the Dean's office or departmental lists will require approval by the appropriate office official. A list of the approving body for different University target audiences can be found at: <http://www.yale.edu/its/communications/messaging/additional-approval.html>. Only those projects deemed to be relevant to the University's mission or which show a legitimate need which can not be met through other contacting methods will be approved at the discretion of the Dean's Office.

Use of investigator-generated or other "unofficial" e-mail lists for recruitment

The use of self-generated lists should be explicitly outlined in the research protocol and will be approved by the IRB for research projects which meet all other IRB requirements for approval. The IRB will not limit who can and can not use e-mail to recruit potential University participants, however the IRB will require specific information to be included in any e-recruitment message (detailed in the next section). The IRB will also scrutinize the recruitment and research plans to ensure that only the minimal number of potential participants is contacted to obtain the appropriate sample size for the research project.

Investigator - generated e-mail lists can be created either by asking participants in a research study if they are willing to be contacted for other, future studies, or the lists can be gleaned from other University sources and directories. E-recruitment without prior agreement to be contacted by the e-mail recipient is the e-mail equivalent to "cold calling", and may not always be welcome. To prevent future unwelcome e-mails, any "cold e-mailing" distributions must provide e-recruitment recipients the option to join a no - e-mail list. Any investigators wishing to distribute unsolicited e-recruitment ads or messages must first check their e-mail list against the no - e-mail list and exclude those not wishing to be contacted to ensure that these individuals' wishes are respected.

Elements required within the body of widely e-mailed recruitment materials

Any e-recruitment message must follow the general guidelines for recruitment ads including a brief description of the project and the need for a balanced, unbiased presentation of possible benefits and compensation (see 410 PR4: Advertisements, Notices and Scripts Used for Recruitment). In addition, the message should include the qualifications or title of the researcher (for instance, stating that the study is being conducted for an undergraduate's senior project), information for opting out of future e-recruitments, the contact information for the IRB and the IRB protocol number. The subject line of the email should be stated, and reflect a reasonable and balanced description of the e-mail's purpose.