Email Recruitment Guidance

Version Date: December 4, 2008 July 9, 2015

The University of Wisconsin-Madison allows researchers use email to send its faculty, staff, and student information about research opportunities as part of its research mission. The University of Wisconsin IRBs recognize email to be a reasonable means to recruit potential research subjects and one which generally does not pose an ethical or human subjects protection concerns. In addition, the University of Wisconsin-Madison believes that sending mass emails to alert its faculty, staff, and student of research opportunities falls within the mission of this institution. Many research teams use a mass email service provided by the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Division of Information Technology (DoIT). Information about this service and the requirements for its use are available at: http://www.doit.wisc.edu/lists/massemail/.

Email recruitment may also be used to approach potential subjects who are not UW-Madison faculty, staff or students. In this case, study teams must adhere to the requirements described on this page, except where the requirements apply only to mass emails sent out to the UW-Madison campus through DoIT. In addition, study teams must describe who is sending out the emails, i.e. the researchers themselves or another entity on behalf of the researchers. If the study team will send the emails, a description of how they will obtain the prospective subjects’ email addresses must be included in the application.

As with any other recruitment materials, the script of email advertisements must be reviewed by an IRB prior to its use. Research teams are expected to specifically describe use of email solicitation as a recruitment method in their Application for Initial Review of Research Involving Subjects submitted to the IRB. If email is not a recruitment method originally approved by the IRB, research teams are required to submit a change of protocol to add this method and obtain approval from the IRB before implementing it.

What to Provide in the IRB application

If email will be used as a recruitment method, the IRB application should describe:

- The source of the email list
- The targeted population of the email
- How frequently the email will be sent
- In cases when an email will be sent more than once regarding a specific study, a method for individuals who do not wish to receive additional emails to be taken off the list

In addition a copy of the proposed email text, including the subject line and any graphics used, should be included with the IRB application.

What to Include in the Email Message

Outlined below are specific recommendations regarding the content of email messages:

- The subject line of the email should clearly state that it is an advertisement for a research study, such as: "Seeking participants for a research study" or "Information about a Research Opportunity".
• The text of the email should clearly identify the source of the email list, such as “You are receiving this email because you are a student at UW-Madison. Your email address was obtained from the UW-Madison Division of Information Technology (DoIT).”
• If the study involves testing experimental drugs or devices, identify them as such. In addition, if some subjects will receive placebo, ensure that this is mentioned in the email as well.
• If a DoIT email list will be used, include a statement that the UW-Madison allows researchers to send emails to its faculty, staff, and students as part of its research mission.
• Include a statement that the email has been approved by a UW-Madison Institutional Review Board. Note: this statement is not necessary in the case of studies that qualify for exemption.
• Adhere to the other requirements outlined in UW-Madison’s guidelines and policy for Recruitment of Research Participants.

If a research team receives complaints from a recipient of a recruitment email, the individual can be referred to these email recruitment guidelines. If the recipient does not accept these guidelines, the complaint should be reported to the IRB that approved the research study. For further guidance, contact the office of the IRB that will review or has reviewed your research study.

Sample Recruitment Email

Subject Line: Participants being sought for a [area of research] research study

[Insert name of researcher or research group] is looking for participants for her research study. You are receiving this email because you are a [insert description of targeted population, e.g. student, employee, faculty] at UW-Madison. Your email address was obtained from [insert source of email addresses; e.g., the UW-Madison Division of Information Technology (DoIT)].

This study is about [insert description of study]. If you take part in this study, you would [provide brief description of what subjects are required to do, how long they would be in the study, and, if they would receive drugs]. To be able to take part in this study, you must be/have [briefly describe primary eligibility criteria].

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please email [insert name and email address of contact] or call [insert name and telephone number of contact].

IF DoIT LIST WAS USED, ADD IN SMALLER FONT AT THE END OF THE MESSAGE: The University of Wisconsin-Madison allows researchers use email to send its faculty, staff, and student information about research opportunities as part of its research mission. Use of these email addresses has been approved by the campus data custodian (Registrar’s Office for students and Budget Planning & Analysis for faculty/staff). The content of this email message has been approved by a University of Wisconsin-Madison Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRBs are charged with protecting the rights and welfare of people who take part in research studies.

See Also:

• Subject Recruitment and Screening Procedures