

**Australian Catholic University – Human Research Ethics Committee**  
**Guidelines on Recruitment, Advertising and Reimbursements**

**Recruitment**

**National Statement: Element 2: Recruitment**

A single project may employ more than one recruitment strategy, especially where discrete cohorts are required to meet the objectives of the research. For some research designs, the recruitment and consent strategies occur concurrently; for others, they are separate. It is essential that recruitment strategies adhere to the ethical principles of justice and respect.

**ACU Expectations**

When research will involve the direct participation of people (e.g. testing, surveys, interviews, focus groups, observation and health or behavioural interventions) the recruitment element can include such matters as identifying individuals as potential participants, contact between the research team and potential participants, screening or exclusion of some individuals, and preparing to seek consent from the potential participants. A single project may employ more than one recruitment strategy. It is essential that recruitment strategies adhere to the ethical principles of justice and respect.

The ACU HREC understands that in some instances stakeholder engagement during the development and design of the recruitment strategy is the only time where prior ethical approval is not required. This would involve engagement with specific groups (generally in person) to discuss the research and, if necessary, to obtain feedback from relevant stakeholders on whether the proposed recruitment strategy is appropriate. This engagement should not involve direct recruitment (including identifying or making contact with individuals as potential participants) or involve data collection.

Research proposals should include the criteria for the selection of potential participants. The inclusion/exclusion criteria for the potential participants in a project must be justifiable and should be fair. The exclusion of some groups without justification may amount to unfair discrimination, and/or exclude individuals and groups from the potential benefits of research.

Research proposals should clearly describe each of the recruitment strategies being undertaken. Recruitment strategies would normally include a clear description of the manner in which researchers intend to identify individuals as potential participants, how contact will be made between the research team and potential participants (see initial contact and advertisement section below for additional detail), process for screening, or exclusion of some individuals, and how the research team will seek consent from the potential participants.

Within recruitment strategies, researchers must ensure that:

1. Advertising and recruitment procedures protect potential participant confidentiality;
2. When obtaining the names of potential participants from third parties, the investigator must consider whether this might constitute a breach of confidentiality;
3. Investigators are responsible for ensuring that approved procedures are followed by any third parties (e.g., teachers, or social-service providers) who may be aiding in the recruitment and/or advertising process;
4. Researchers may not share names of previous research participants with other researchers without permission from the participants and this would normally be obtained through the informed consent process;

5. Researchers should carefully consider perceived, potential or actual conflict of interests and how these will be managed, particularly when, for example, recruiting students, colleagues or persons in their workplace.
6. The recruitment strategy in the application form should provide all recruitment materials, and clearly describe the following:
  - the criteria for the selection of potential participants;
  - the approach to contacting potential participants (eg: email, advertisement, phone call) and how they will find out about the possibility of participating, or not, in the research, and your justification for that approach

### Initial contact and Advertisements

**National Statement** 3.1.20 For many research projects, researchers should provide reviewers with proposed recruitment materials (e.g. notices, flyers, advertisements, and social media posts) prior to use, including those materials that are developed subsequent to the initial review of the research proposal. However, for some research designs or where recruitment material needs to be ad lib, adapted or tailored to the context (such as some social media, radio or other oral communication) a description of the strategy and broad messages is sufficient.

### **ACU Expectations**

Research projects often involve recruiting potential participants using a variety of methods. Some of the more commonly used recruitment methods include flyers, posters, brochures, media advertisements, recruitment letters and word-of-mouth recruiting.

Recruitment is part of the informed consent process; therefore, the recruitment and advertising methods must be reviewed by the ACU HREC prior to their use by an investigator. The review is done to ensure that the information is not misleading to subjects. Any alterations to approved advertisements also need to be approved by the HREC.

1. Advertisements should
  - a. be written in simple lay language, particularly recognizing the needs of your potential participant groups eg: children, and should not contain coercive information that may entice readers to participate;
  - b. present the nature of the research and may present any potential benefits to the participants in ways that are not misleading or coercive;
  - c. include eligibility criteria;
  - d. clearly state that volunteers are being recruited for research purposes;
  - e. include the statement 'This study has been approved by the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee';
  - f. identify the study as an ACU project and state the responsible contact person including phone number and/or email address. Include the research website if relevant;
  - g. may state that participants will be paid for their time/effort but cannot include specifics of reimbursements or mentions of dollar amounts with lotteries/prize draws. The full detail of reimbursements, prize draws etc can be included in the participant information letter and can be used as the first point of recruitment as participants are then fully informed about the project and any risks involved.

2. Advertisements should NOT:
  - a. state or imply a certainty of a favorable outcome or other benefit beyond what is outlined in the informed consent form and the application/protocol;
  - b. make claims, either explicitly or implicitly, that the drug, biologic or device is safe or effective for the purposes under investigation;
  - c. use catchy words like “free” or “exciting”;
  - d. make claims, either explicitly or implicitly, that the test article is known to be equivalent or superior to any other drug, biologic or device;
  - e. promise "free medical treatment" when the intent is only to say participants will not be charged for taking part in the investigation;
  - f. include reference to dollar amounts for reimbursement or prize draws.

### [Reimbursing Participants in Research](#)

The NHMRC provides the following information (in addition to the National Statement) on payment for participation in research.

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/payment-participants-research-information-researchers-hrecs-and-other-ethics-review-bodies>

**National Statement 2.2.10** It is generally appropriate to reimburse the costs to participants of taking part in research, including costs such as travel, accommodation and parking. Sometimes participants may also be paid for time involved. However, payment that is disproportionate to the time involved, or any other inducement that is likely to encourage participants to take risks, is ethically unacceptable.

**National Statement 3.1.22** Researchers and reviewers should 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 (see paragraphs 2.2.10, and 2.2.11). This is especially important with respect to research that involves more than a low risk of harm.

### **ACU Expectations**

Offering reimbursements, incentives or the possibility to win a prize as the result of participating in research has the potential to impact on the voluntary nature of consent and could be considered coercive to some participants. Researchers need to reflect on how the payment will be described in recruitment material so that it cannot be seen as an inducement to participate.

ACU is of the view that monetary amounts cannot be included in advertising materials except where appropriate justification has been made. However it is appropriate to state on the advertising material that participants will be reimbursed eg: for their travel and parking expenses etc.

Researchers must ensure that it is clear to participants whether credit for payment accrues as the study progresses or whether it is contingent upon the participant completing the entire study.

### Guidelines when offering incentives

It is the researcher's responsibility to provide justification for whether a payment would be considered coercive or not. Whether an incentive is considered an inducement or not could depend on the following:

- a. the **circumstances of the potential participant pool** eg: a payment of \$50 to a homeless person or a student might be considered coercive, while the same amount offered to an office worker would probably be not.
- b. **the relationship between the inducement and the 'market'**. Increasingly market research and other fields utilise inducements to encourage participation in their data collection. An important consideration in determining whether an inducement should be considered coercive is whether the proposed inducement is comparable to what participants might be offered from other reputable sources. E.g. a sporting venue might offer the chance to win a ticket to the next game to encourage members of the crowd to complete a survey, so it would be appropriate for researchers in the same context to offer the same kind of inducement.
- c. It is considered not appropriate to offer any incentives for projects that are considered high risk and any time appropriate reimbursements should be justified;

### Incentives and Anonymous Research

When offering an incentive to participate in anonymous research the researchers must ensure that the anonymity of responses is maintained, whilst at the same time having a mechanism to send the individual the incentive/enter them into the draw.

One solution is to separate the data collection and the incentive mechanism. For example, with online data collection researchers can record the data from the completed instrument and the incentive entry in completely separate tables / online survey tools without any relational link between the two tables.

### Prize Draws

If running a lottery or lucky draw the researchers need to ensure that their approach is consistent with the lottery laws. If a raffle is held in Sydney, then the participant is meeting NSW laws, if a raffle is organised overseas then the researcher is required to meet the laws of that country.

The details and conditions of the draw process should be included in the consent process, generally as an attachment to the participant information letter and informed consent package.

Prize draws must be administered and conducted by someone independent of the participant pool and ideally also from the research team.

### SONA credit points

Student course credits are acceptable where the School has determined that research experience as a participant is beneficial and to be encouraged. However, alternatives to participation should also be available eg: assignments and this should be acknowledged in the participant information letter.

### Using third party recruitment agencies

Researchers sometimes buy access to participants and/or data from 3rd party market research companies (eg: Prolific, MTurk). In the ethics application the researcher needs to provide:

- a rationale for this approach to sourcing participants;
- evidence that any payments made to participants via this 3rd party are in line with Australian Catholic University HREC reimbursement guidelines;

- evidence that the 3rd party has clear ethical policies and processes in place in relation to the collection and management of participants' data.