

Research Recruitment Guidance and Samples

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide you with information about the ethical requirements related to recruitment of human research participants set by the [Tri-Council Policy Statement 2](#) (TCPS2) and samples on the development of recruitment materials. A few examples of research recruitment methods include email, poster/flyer, in-person, social media and telephone. Sample recruitment materials are provided at the end of this document.

Background Information

The recruitment process is an important component of the fair and equitable conduct of research (Chapter 1, TCPS2). The voluntariness of study participation is of utmost importance because it respects human dignity and means that individuals can choose to participate in research based on their own values, preferences and wishes (Chapter 1, TCPS2). The guiding principles from the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) are:

- Respect for Persons
- Concern for Welfare
- Justice

These principles should always be followed as you create your recruitment materials.

The REB must review all recruitment documents prior to their implementation. This requirement is based on Article 6.11 of TCPS2 which states, "REB review and approval of the ethical acceptability of research are required before recruitment, formal data collection involving participants, access to data, or collection of human biological materials".

Remember that participant recruitment cannot commence until ethical clearance has been granted by the Ontario Tech REB.

General recruitment material requirements

The items below are required in your recruitment materials .

- Institutional logo of the principal investigator (PI).
- The PI's contact information consisting of email and institutional phone number. Personal phone numbers should not be used, unless permitted by the REB under special circumstances.
- Affiliation for all research team members. This is important for multi-site research projects.
- The full title of the study. The study title must match the title of the REB application.
- A clear statement that participants are being invited to participate in a research study. The word "research" must be included in the recruitment document.
- Emphasize the optional voluntary nature of the study.
- Brief description of the research, eligibility criteria, exclusion criteria and what is required of the participants and an estimate of the time required to participate in the research.
- Include information on compensation and incentives if this is part of the study design. It is important to note that compensation and incentives for study participation is not a potential benefit to the study. Study compensation must be described in the compensation or incentive section of the recruitment material.
- REB contact information.
- A statement indicating that the REB has reviewed your recruitment material and the date of the review. The REB does not support language in recruitment materials that indicates that a study was "approved" by the REB.

Recruitment materials must be written at an appropriate reading level for the target audience. For general audience members, the recruitment materials must use plain language and be written at a grade 6 to 8 reading level. Please avoid technical words/jargon for general audience members, if technical wording must be used, include a simple definition beside the terminology in brackets. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score in Microsoft Word can be used to assess the reading level.

Recruitment templates – Links

Appendix 1: Email/phone/in person template

Appendix 2: In-class recruitment script template

Appendix 3: School Board Recruitment Letter for Template for parent(s)/guardian(s)

Appendix 4: Posters

Social media recruitment

Select social media groups, chat rooms, discussion boards or group pages may be private and may have their own individual norms, cultures and rules, as well as moderation practices. You must seek permission from the social media moderators to recruit participants within their group/page. Kindly attach the permissions as an appendix to your research application.

Privacy and confidentiality implications are important considerations when recruiting through social media. For example, individuals may comment upon a recruitment posting on Facebook which is visible to others. Participants who respond to open comments in social media may reveal personal and confidential information. As such, social media recruitment materials should include explicit wording to instruct individuals to email/call/private or direct message the researcher with questions about the study.

Social media requirements:

- Include in your REB application the name of the website, social media platform or social media network/group where you will post the recruitment materials.
- Clarify if the page or network/group is open to anyone to post (as opposed to requiring login) or if permissions must be sought.
- Use a research social media account to post the recruitment materials in a social media platform if an account already exists. A personal social media account may be permitted by the REB under special circumstances.

Recruitment through X (formerly Twitter) must include the following information in your REB submission.

- Information about the X (formerly Twitter) account from which the recruitment notices will originate.
- A copy of the posting.
- Information about the landing page to which an individual will be taken to, if they click on a URL in the tweet.

Recruitment through Facebook must include the following information in your REB submission.

- Information about the Facebook account from which the recruitment notices will originate.
- A copy of the Facebook post.
- Information about the pages/groups where the notice will be posted.
- Information about whether the pages/groups are open or closed.

Recruiting Ontario Tech students for research

Recruiting a student population is common in university research and can provide educational value for students. However, you need to be aware of several ethical issues that may arise. Article 3.1 of the TCPS2 notes, “REBs and researchers should also pay particular attention to elements of trust and dependency in relationships (e.g., between physician and patient or between professor and student). These relationships can impose undue influence on the individual in the position of dependence to participate in research projects.” For this reason, recruitment should not be completed by the instructor of a classroom, instead a third-party who is not connected with the research should recruit students, if possible. However, there may be situations in which instructors are involved in the research. In this case, the instructor should leave the classroom while the study is being introduced or recruitment is underway, in order to avoid undue influence for students feeling obligated to participate. Care must be taken to ensure that the professor does not have knowledge of who agrees to participate. Also, your REB application must describe the approaches you will use to avoid undue influence, how free and informed consent is obtained and maintained, and any risks associated with confidentiality.

Participant confidentiality is another consideration if the research is conducted in-class, where others can easily identify each other as participants in the research. In some instances, a first-year university student’s age may be identifiable if they have a birthday in the Fall/Winter months (e.g. September to December) and data is collected prior to their birthday. In this case, the first-year student would be 17 years of age at the time of data collection when the other students are 18 years of age or older.

If a course credit is offered as an incentive for participation, a comparable alternative must be offered to students that do not wish to participate in the research study. Article 3.1 of the TCPS2 notes, “Pre-existing entitlements to care, education and other services should not be prejudiced by the decision of whether to participate in or withdraw from a research project [...] Similarly, where students do not wish to participate in research studies for course credits, they should be offered a comparable alternative.”

Refer to:

- Appendix 1: Email/phone/in person template
- Appendix 2: In-class recruitment script template

Recruiting school aged (K-12) students for research

An added layer of review is required for research involving students from school boards. Ethics review and clearance is required from the Ontario Tech REB and a review is required by the school board’s Research Advisory Committee, or a similar committee, where you intend to

conduct your research. Your submissions to the Ontario Tech REB and the school board's Research Advisory Committee, or a similar committee, can occur in parallel.

To support your submission, connect with the Ontario Tech REB and the school board(s) to find out more information on their research application requirements. The Ontario Tech ethics approval is contingent on obtaining approval from the school board's Research Advisory Committee, or a similar committee. Evidence of school board approval must be submitted to the REB to receive full ethics approval.

Since you need to go through an additional review process, make sure you leave enough time to obtain both clearances.

Refer to Appendix 3: School Board Recruitment Letter for Template for parent(s)/guardian(s)

Recruiting participants from a healthcare institution

Access to study participants from a healthcare institution requires approval from the healthcare institution first. You should connect with the healthcare institution's REB to inquire about the ethical requirements to recruit study participants from their organization. In parallel, you should connect with the Ontario Tech REB for advice on the ethics submission.

Permissions may be needed to post posters on bulletin boards in healthcare institutions. It is your responsibility to seek the proper permissions prior to engaging in any research or recruitment at any institution, and that these permissions may require review and approval by a healthcare REB, as well as the Ontario Tech REB. The REB applications must include relevant documentation to demonstrate that permission has been granted to post on external research sites.

Refer to:

- Appendix 1: Email/phone/in person template
- Appendix 4: Posters

Email and telephone recruitment

Email and telephone recruitment approaches must indicate how you obtained the individual's contact information in your REB submission (e.g., from a webpage, person indicated in a previous survey that they would be interested in being contacted for a future study, etc.). The

REB applications must include relevant documentation to demonstrate that permission has been granted to access study populations.

Email recruitment requirements:

- If someone is sending an email on your behalf, you must include: "This email is being sent on behalf of the researchers" at the top of the email to let people know that their contact information was not shared.
- Email recruitment materials must include the following statement, "Please note that communication via e-mail is not absolutely secure. Thus, please do not communicate personal, sensitive information via e-mail."
- If you would like to recruit Ontario Tech Students via mass email, refer to the [REB's Submission Tools](#) for the required steps. Sending recruitment via mass email must be jointly reviewed by the Ontario Tech REB and the [Student Life Communications](#) team, who will edit and vet your recruitment email for university style, as well as compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Telephone recruitment requirements:

- Indicate in your REB application who will initiate contact with the study participant, if voice messages will be left for potential participants and the number of follow-up calls.
- Telephone scripts for each interaction are required in your REB application.

See sample Appendix 1: email/phone/in-person recruitment template.

Snowball recruitment

If potential participants were referred to the study through snowball recruitment and if their contact information was provided to the study, consent must be obtained (formal or informal) from individuals to share their name and contact information with the study team. The REB applications must include relevant documentation to demonstrate that consent was granted to share contact information for the study.

Appendices for recruitment templates

Appendix 1: Email/phone/in person template

Internal instructions: This template provides you with assistance and guidance on the development of recruitment materials that meet the ethical requirements set out by TCPS2. These templates can be refined to a particular study.

- Internal instructions are denoted within square brackets and should be deleted/replaced before uploading the document to the research ethics application.
- When inserting a name the message is being sent on behalf of, please include the Student Lead's name (if applicable), supervisor's name, and the lab (if applicable).
- In the first paragraph, you may wish to insert an optional and brief description of the research and the aim of the research or include the title of the project to give readers insight to the content in order to consider participation.
- This template is a framework of a recruitment email that is expected to be tailored to each individual project. Other information that may be outlined could include: names and information for researchers, purpose of the research, further compensation, confidentiality, any conflicts of interest, etc.

Remember to delete these internal instructions in your recruitment materials.

Date to be sent: [insert date]

Sender: [insert name of sender]

Target audience: [insert segmented group]

Subject line: Optional Research Study: [insert email title - neutral, non-incentivizing subject line]

Header: [insert header file name]

Body:

This message is being sent on behalf of [insert name(s)/lab, etc.]. You are invited to participate in an **optional** research study [insert optional description of research/research title]. Participation is entirely **voluntary** and there is no obligation nor need to participate if you do not want to do so. Please direct inquiries to [insert contact email(s) and phone number(s) with extension(s)].

Participation in this research study will include [insert a brief description of the research and what is required of participants] [if compensation will be provided, state this here].

If you are interested in participating or have any further questions, please contact [include name(s), contact email(s), phone number(s) with extension(s)].

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant or have any concerns about this study, please contact the Research Ethics Office at researchethics@ontariotechu.ca or 905.721.8668 x3693.

This study has been reviewed by the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board [insert assigned REB #] on [insert date].

Sincerely,

[insert sender information]

Appendix 2: In-class recruitment script template

Internal instructions: This template provides you with assistance and guidance on the development of recruitment materials that meet the ethical requirements set out by TCPS2. These templates can be refined to a particular study. Internal instructions are denoted within square brackets and should be deleted/replaced before uploading the document to the research ethics application. Remember to delete these internal instructions in your recruitment materials.

Hello, my name is [insert name] and I am a [year of study or graduate student] in the Department of [insert department name]. I am currently working in the [insert name] lab in [insert location] with Professor [insert Professor name] and doing my [insert thesis, PhD etc]. I am studying how [insert research topic and why you are researching it]. [insert benefits of research].

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be asked to [insert what you will ask participant to do during the study]. You will be asked to [include any requirements needed for the day of the research e.g. you will need a working computer]. The session should take approximately [insert how long the participation will take].

[Briefly describe any inclusion and exclusion criteria]

[Briefly describe any risks involved with the research]

[Include any incentives for taking part of the research but ensure this is not overstated]

This study has been reviewed by the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board [insert assigned REB #] on [insert date].

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact me at **[insert email address]**.

Thank you,

[Insert name]

Appendix 3: School Board Recruitment Letter for Template for parent(s)/guardian(s)

Internal instructions: This template provides you with assistance and guidance on the development of recruitment materials that meet the ethical requirements set out by TCPS2. These templates can be refined to a particular study. Internal instructions are denoted within square brackets and should be deleted/replaced before uploading the document to the research ethics application. Remember to delete these internal instructions in your recruitment materials.

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

We would like to invite **[insert board name]** to participate in the **[insert research]** being conducted across **[general location]** in the **[20xx-20yy]** school year and led by Ontario Tech University. **[Include any sponsor/funding information]**.

Project Details

The **[insert research]** consists of a **[research method e.g. survey]** of students in **[Grade years]** with parent/guardian permission.

[Insert relevant project details and the reason you wish to recruit student participants]

This research is being conducted by **[insert research group name or researchers]** at Ontario Tech University. **[Sponsor names]** sponsors this **[research method e.g. survey]** in order to **[reason sponsor is contributing to this research]**.

Sampled Schools

We are seeking your permission to approach the following schools in **[insert board name]** area:

- **[sch_name]**
- **[sch_name]**
- **[sch_name]**
- **[sch_name]**
- **[sch_name]**

Key Documents

Included in this letter are documents that provide comprehensive project information including;

- project description,
- permission protocol details,
- benefits to participating schools, and
- details regarding data sharing.

[Attach all relevant participant facing documents, questionnaires/surveys, and data management plans.]

Ethics Details

This study has been reviewed by the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board **[insert assigned REB #]** on **[insert date]**.

If you have any questions regarding participant rights or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office at researchethics@ontariotechu.ca or 905.721.8668 x3693.

For all other questions, please feel free to ask the researchers at the email address listed.

We would like an opportunity to speak with you to discuss our project and answer any questions you may have. We look forward to the opportunity in collaborating with you on this exciting project.

Sincerely,

[Include Principal Investigator, any local collaborators, and coordinator, if applicable, as well as contact information. For privacy reasons, do not include personal contact number for Student Investigator.]

Appendix 4: Posters

Internal instructions: This template provides you with assistance and guidance on the development of recruitment materials that meet the ethical requirements set out by TCPS2. These templates can be refined to a particular study. Internal instructions are denoted within square brackets and should be deleted/replaced before uploading the document to the research ethics application. Remember to delete these internal instructions in your recruitment materials.

Participants invited for Research in [specific topic/area]

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
[briefly describe topic].

Your participation will consist of **[indicate in general terms what all of the expectations are, e.g. an online or in-person survey; interview or focus group; assessment of balance; physiological assessment etc.].**

Your participation would involve **[insert number]** session(s),
which will take approximately **[insert number]** minutes of your time.

Who can participate:

- **[insert criteria 1 for the study]**
- **[insert criteria 2 for the study]**
- **[insert criteria 3 for the study]**

In appreciation for your time, you will receive
[insert details of remuneration, if applicable].

For more information about this study, please contact:
[insert name of contact person and department]
at
905-721-8668 ext. **[insert ext.]** or
E-mail: **[insert Ontario Tech email address]**

**This study has been reviewed by the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board
[insert assigned REB #] on [insert date].**