

Intended Audience: This document is relevant to researchers and their students or research staff who seek to recruit prospective participants to a study using large-scale email efforts.

Email is an efficient and invaluable communication tool, which often facilitates recruitment of prospective participants into research. Use of email in recruitment plans can, however, create feelings of invaded privacy, resentment, and ill-will toward the research community. This guidance document provides some technical assistance to guide researchers in making the most of email recruitment.

Always first consult policies, procedures, and terms of service governing the email structure you wish to make use of.

Email is a highly effective way to reach a large number of people with minimal effort on the part of the research team. Because it is such an effective communication tool, it can also be overutilized; even mass email approaches that are **well-structured** are rarely effective in garnering a response rate above 20% for studies at Utah State University, so please plan for that in your recruitment goals.

A **poorly structured** email approach can result in complaints, discouragement of others to engage with research projects, ill-will toward the research community, and other issues. Exceptionally low response rates tend to follow. Here are some tips to avoid poorly structured email approaches:

- ✉ *In your email, share information about how and why that person is being reached if the email distribution is not via an established list that they signed up for.*
- ✉ *In creating your own distribution methods, ensure that the ability to reply to anyone other than the research team is disabled.* Efforts to maximize privacy among prospective participants are strongly encouraged; people should not be able to discover the identity of others on the same list because of your email distribution. It is a good idea to test your list structure with a small number of colleagues before sending out larger-scale communications.
- ✉ *Make use of existing structures that are known to your prospective participants wherever possible.* This builds trust among your prospective participant pool.
- ✉ *Do **not** subvert existing procedures and mechanisms in order to reach a particular audience.* Many institutions and organizations have policies governing bulk or mass emails *specifically* because they would like to minimize these kinds of outreach to their constituencies. Subverting those mechanisms does not respect the boundaries that prospective participants have come to expect in line with their roles with that institution or organization.
- ✉ *Be available for responses to inquiries or concerns.* It erodes trust when a recipient feels like they have been reached out to, but cannot garner a response from, someone on the research team. Do not send mass emails just before a weekend, holiday, or other structured time that does not permit you to be responsive to your prospective participants.

Here at Utah State University, several policies and procedures exist with regard to electronic communications. Reaching *all* students, staff, and faculty should **only** be done using existing approval mechanisms from the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Vice President for Business and Finance, and the Provost's Office, respectively (See [Policy 553](#) and accompanying [Procedures](#)).

The USU Human Research Protections staff review every research project involving human participants carried out by USU personnel, and as a result, are aware of a great deal of recruitment methods that are generally more effective than mass emails. Request a meeting or consultation to discuss recruitment plans that respect privacy, build trust, and successfully accrue participants.