

I13C GD2 Use of E-mail for Human Research Recruitment

Overview

The use e-mail to recruit potential research participants for University of Nevada, Reno and affiliate research must occur within the context of an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved or IRB-exempted study; comply with University policy for the use of student directory information (see the University General Course Catalog 2011-2012, University of Nevada, Reno Privacy Notice and Request for Confidential Status of Directory Information); University Administrative Manual, Acceptable Use Policy; 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 information about how the e-mail address was obtained, and must provide the recipient with 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 University e-mail account or other email account listed among the individual's directory information for participation in a research study must comply with University policy related to the use of student directory information and computing practices. Use of e-mail to recruit potential research participants, when used responsibly, can streamline recruitment efforts to enroll 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 to specify when additional approvals may be needed in addition to IRB approval of the study that proposes to use e-recruitment procedures.

Use of Student Directory Information

Federal law considers that "directory information" (i.e., student name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and athletics (including Greek organizations), weight and height measurements for members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, enrollment status (full-, half- or part-time; undergraduate or graduate), degrees and awards received, and listings of the most recent educational agency or institution attended) is considered to be public in nature, the release of which is not generally deemed to be an invasion of privacy.

The University is somewhat more restrictive than federal law related to the release of student directory information limiting release of this information to non-commercial and educational purposes; and select commercial purposes. The University Office of Admissions and Records considers requests for release of directory information on a case-by-case basis

University policy also provides a mechanism for students to refuse to have their directory information disclosed for commercial purposes, noncommercial educational purposes or both commercial and noncommercial purposes.

University Policy for Acceptable Use of Computer Services

University policy requires that use of computing resources be ethical. Users must respect individual privacy, and minimize the effect of their work on the work of other users. Users are to access computer accounts only for which they are specifically authorized and may only use such accounts for authorized purposes (e.g., related to education).

Use of Official University E-Mail Lists for Research Recruitment

Use of official, institutional e-mail lists such as those maintained by the Dean's office or departmental lists require approval by the appropriate office official. Only those projects deemed to be relevant to the University's mission or which show a legitimate need that cannot 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 the source of the emails should be identified. IRB protocols using e-recruitment procedures will be approved by the IRB if these meet all other IRB requirements for approval.

The IRB will not limit who can and cannot 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 the number of potential participants contacted is the minimum necessary for the researchers to enroll 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 emails, any "cold e-mailing" distributions must provide e-recruitment recipients the option to join a no-email list. Any investigators wishing to distribute unsolicited e-recruitment advertisements 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.

Required Content for E-Mailed Recruitment Materials

E-recruitment messages must follow the general guidelines for all recruitment advertisements and must include the following information:

- researcher qualifications or title (e.g., stating that the study is being conducted for an undergraduate's senior project);
- researcher contact information;
- statement that the project is research;
- brief statement of study purpose;
- inclusion and exclusion criteria (when specific);
- brief description of what subjects may experience;
- balanced, unbiased presentation of possible benefits;
- location where the research will take place;
- information for opting out of future e-recruitments; and
- 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 purpose of the e-mail.