

Use of Social Media for Interactive Recruitment Guidance

Background

Some study teams choose to recruit subjects through two-way communication via researcher-initiated social media accounts. This type of recruitment involves sustained and focused outreach to potential research subjects through direct messages on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook / Instagram / Twitter direct messages).

Importantly, the IRB discourages study teams from establishing a social media account simply for the purposes of recruitment. Pilot initiatives led by the Penn Medicine Office of Communications found that study teams had little success in recruiting subjects using social media accounts. Isolated and sporadic recruitment messages, posts and tweets failed to kindle interaction that led to recruitment. The pilot study concluded this was due to the lack of a sustained, creative, and focused plan for cultivating meaningful interaction with target communities. Moreover, the social media accounts were not online “destinations” for members of the target communities, and they struggled without this established foundation.

Please note that the IRB will consider this approach to interactive recruitment when research is conducted at a Center within the University that has already established itself as a viable online destination for communities from which researchers might want to draw potential subjects. Some examples of centers at Penn which have developed a well-maintained, self-sustaining and highly trafficked online presence include:

- Penn Heart & Vascular Center: [Facebook](#)
- Penn Pathology and Laboratory Medicine: [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Penn Memory Center and Alzheimer’s Disease Core Center: [Facebook](#)
- Penn Medicine Center for Healthcare Innovation: [Twitter](#)
- Penn Social Media & Health Innovation Lab: [Twitter](#)
- Penn Center for Aging: [Twitter](#)

IRB Review Requirements for Interactive Recruitment

1. Creating & Registering your social media account

Please consult the useful guidance offered in the [Penn Privacy Office and Office of Information Security’s Guidelines for the Use of Social Media at Penn](#) and the [Penn School of Medicine Social Media Handbook](#) before creating your account. For research affiliated with PSOM, please register the account using the PSOM Social Media Proposal Form and indicate in your IRB application that you have done so.

For Centers, Institutes, Departments, or other groups (not individual faculty) aiming to develop a social media strategy should obtain approval from the [Penn Medicine Social Media Committee](#).

2. What to include in the protocol or HS-ERA application (Populations Page, Recruitment section):

- a. Please provide the text of researcher-initiated posts and planned responses. Please ensure that the language used follows the IRB Guidance Document on developing recruitment materials.
- b. Please provide a plan for the frequency of messages, the method of communication (i.e., private Facebook messages) and the process for responding to incoming messages.
- c. Please specify which study personnel will be charged with communicating and monitoring the recruitment account as well as any procedures to monitor the activity of those personnel.
- d. Please clearly describe the targeted population and rationale for targeting that population.
- e. Please specify if data will be collected as part of the recruitment process via social media. If so, please describe what data will be collected. If that data is of a sensitive or confidential nature, please describe how that data will be transferred to Penn servers and how will it be protected during transmission and upon receipt.
- f. Please describe how you will communicate to potential subjects during the recruitment process that information shared via social media is not secure. Please refer to the IRB-approved template language about privacy, confidentiality and social media which can both be found here. This information can be sent electronically to study participants. Alternately, the text may be posted visibly and permanently on your social media page.