

Guideline for Payment to Participants to Recruit Their Peers to the Study (Peer Recruiters)

[Policy 302 Subject Recruitment and Compensation](#) prohibits NIH investigators (or their Institutes/Centers (ICs)) from providing or receiving finder's fees (e.g., payment in exchange for referrals of individual prospective research subjects, also referred to as "recruitment incentives"), from any source in connection with research at NIH. However, the NIH Institutional Review Board (IRB) will consider payment to adult peer recruiters on a study-by-study basis, appropriate to the level of risk, the type of research being conducted (e.g., community engaged research), and the method of recruitment and proposed compensation. Minors (e.g., subjects under 18 years of age) may not be peer recruiters.

Snowball recruiting (also known as participant-driven recruiting, peer recruiting, or chain referral sampling) is a recruitment method where existing participants in a research study are involved in referring and recruiting additional participants from their social networks or personal connections. We will refer to these recruitment methods as "peer recruiting" more generally in this guideline.

Payment for Secondary Recruitment. It may be permissible to compensate peer recruiters to promote their aid in recruiting new participants into studies, depending on the method and amount of the proposed compensation. Any payment to peer recruiters must be prospectively approved by the IRB. The IRB will carefully consider whether these recruitment methods are appropriate for each given study, including whether the methods ensure adequate privacy for peer recruiters and for individuals being recruited. In making the determination whether peer recruitment methods are appropriate, the following should be considered:

1. The peer recruitment process may not be used for research in which the peer recruiter is in a subordinate relationship to the investigator, (e.g., mentor/trainee, or parent/child relationship).
2. Payment to peer recruiters cannot be conditional upon the referred person enrolling or completing any aspect of the study.
3. Peer recruiting activities may not pose additional risks to peer recruiters or to prospective participants. Examples of risks to peer recruiters or potential participants include:
 - a. A breach of privacy that might place them at legal risk or personal or reputational harm (e.g., accidentally exposing that someone is undocumented, transgender, a drug user, or the victim of domestic violence.)
 - b. Feeling undue pressure to participate in the study.
 - c. Incidental or accidental disclosure of private health information or status.
4. Payment to peer recruiters must ensure coercion is minimized. The protocol must clearly state procedures and discuss practices that will be taken to minimize the potential of coercive behavior and have a plan to detect coercive activity.
5. In addition, the research protocol must provide a detailed, written description of:
 - a. Justification for use of peer recruitment.
 - b. The parameters for selection of peer recruiters and methods of selection.
 - i. Selection of peer recruiters must be equitable.
 - c. The amount peer recruiters will be paid, as well as the payment timing and

- procedures.
- d. The recruitment methods peer recruiters will use.
 - e. Privacy risks to peer recruiters and to potential participants, and the measures used to protect their privacy.
 - f. Any other risks of peer recruiting to potential participants and the measures to reduce these risks.
6. Investigators should develop a peer recruiter information sheet that will provide a description of how peer recruiters will be selected, the amount to be paid to peer recruiters as well as timing and payment procedures, and methods of recruitment to be used, consistent with what is described in the protocol. Further, the information sheet should describe any potential risks to the peer recruiter and the measures taken to protect the peer recruiter. The peer recruiter information sheet must be approved by the IRB before use.
 7. Any recruitment materials for use by the peer recruiter must be approved by the IRB prior to use.
 8. Adverse experiences or consequences resulting from the peer recruiting process must be reported according to [Policy 801 Reporting Research Events](#).
 9. Review [Policy 302 Subject Recruitment and Compensation](#) for additional information.