



# FOCUS ON RESEARCH

## PUTTING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY INTO PRACTICE: PRODUCING USEFUL EVIDENCE ABOUT TRIAL RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR TRIAL DESIGNERS AND RECRUITERS (HIPS/16/7)

### Researchers

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### Aim

A randomised trial is a test of one treatment against one or more alternative treatments, where who gets what is decided by chance; they are the fairest way of evaluating healthcare treatments. Recruitment of participants to trials is important, but it is a process that is known to be difficult. This project aimed to find out what sort of evidence researchers need to design effective trial recruitment strategies, and how evidence about recruitment strategies should be presented to trialists (the staff charged with the task of design and delivery of trials).

### Project Outline/Methodology

Three linked phases of research: 1a) brainstorming group discussions with trial staff to inform the development of topic guides used in; 1b) interviews with trial staff with both active recruitment and recruitment strategy design experience; 2a) design of an initial resource reflecting findings in Phases 1a and 1b; 2b) user-testing and subsequent modification of the resource; 3) publication of the [final user-tested web-based resource](https://www.trialforge.org/telephone-reminders-to-non-respondents/) on the Trial Forge website ([www.trialforge.org](http://www.trialforge.org)) for wider feedback.

### Key Results

23 interviews explored on how trialists develop their recruitment strategies. Staff spent time sharing their experience of the recruitment process, how limited time can impact on their ability to plan, how good communication and cohesive teams can make the recruitment process more successful and less stressful, and how they build in imprecision into grant applications and protocols to try and reduce the amount of additional work spent filing amendments later in the trial's timeline. Participants were asked about their preferences for a resource aimed at supporting recruitment decision-making; key points raised throughout the interviews were the need for layered information, uncluttered text, and images, infographics, or graphs rather than blocks of text. We began with a simple, 2-part presentation. After three rounds of user-testing this was revised to a 4-part presentation that presented similar information but included detail about studies that the recruitment intervention had been tested in. This allowed

participants to assess the studies' context, and therefore relevance to their own trials. The final presentation can be seen at:

<https://www.trialforge.org/telephone-reminders-to-non-respondents/>

### Conclusions

We have designed, developed and user-tested a way of presenting recruitment evidence that allows trialists to explore and assess that evidence in a way that standard publication-based systematic reviews has not. The resource is free to access, and will be used to inform Trial Forge's evidence communication across the trial pathway. We will continue to share the resource, update it as required, and use it as a presentation template for all trial process evidence.

### What does this study add to the field?

Our study has provided insight into recruitment planning, and led to presentations of evidence that users believe can support this process. It has identified features of recruitment evidence that users are most interested in, and in what order.

### Implications for Practice or Policy

Our findings have led to the development of a user-tested resource that provides trialists with up-to-date evidence about recruitment strategies at a glance. We believe this resource will improve engagement with recruitment evidence, making it easier for trial staff to make informed decisions about whether to implement a given intervention in their own trials.

### Where to next?

Future work will focus on expanding the evidence presented using our template and assessing whether these presentations increase the use of effective strategies, and ultimately on the ability of trials to recruit to time and target. We hope that the resource designed in this project serves as a starting point for trialists, and may act as a gateway to consumption of more recruitment evidence.

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