

The 'Call for Participants' platform connects researchers with participants so as to improve the efficiency and accuracy of research trials.

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*Callforparticipants.com is a free online tool designed to address the many challenges faced by researchers in finding appropriate sample sizes for trials as well as helping participants looking to get more involved. **Matthew Terrell** and **Martin Kruusimägi** provide an overview of the platform, identifying how trust, security and transparency are necessary to ensure the tool's lasting success.*



About six months into my PhD I started to notice an increasing trend of four to five emails a week appearing in my inbox requesting participants for various research trials taking place – namely to say all from people in my university and predominantly the same research department. As most of my undergraduate degree was spent in the school of art and design I had managed to avoid being added to many, mainly student, participant mailing lists. It was not the continuous emails that proved to be an issue, but the time spent reading, filtering and often talking to the researchers conducting the trials only to find I did not match the full list of participant requirements. Ultimately many 'call for participant' emails me and my colleagues received went unread, creating a problem for researchers and participants who often enjoy the (mainly financial) benefits of research trials.



After many months of ignoring these emails I met up with two colleagues who had also been ignoring just as many, if not more emails, to discuss an upcoming entrepreneurial competition. The three of us continued to explore solutions to the many problems we had observed as research students, including the frustration and effort endured by researchers recruiting participants, and the discontent expressed by those unable to engage in research. Although many online technologies and networks are useful in diffusing information on current research trials often the researchers we talk to find their reach is limited to friends, family and colleagues – requiring them to increase their resources and efforts to reach participants outside these circles. Although many institutions and research centres often have a database of participants, the same problems remain. Access is often limited to those inside the institutions or centre and their database is limited to a set number of individuals that might not meet the demographics or criteria to participate – the researcher is then required to extend their efforts and resources in order to get the participants they need.

In the UK

134,805

Research-intensive academic staff members in UK



568,505

Postgraduate students writing pieces of original research with people participating in their research

638,000

volunteers for NHS clinical trials in 2012. According to a recent story by BBC, medical trials are also increasing in popularity



Problem

Researchers need participants for their work and often struggle finding people outside their institution

Callforparticipants.com was built in response to many of the challenges and problems faced by both researchers and participants. *Call For Participants* is a two-sided platform that enables researchers to create a landing page for their current research trials and studies, and add both simple and customisable pre-screening questions to the landing page to remove the burden of filtering and managing non-qualifying participants. Secondly, pre-screening questions act as a match-making tool, to automatically inform participants of the studies they qualify for, using the information they have chosen to save – ultimately saving both researchers and participant's time and resources. One of the highlights of the platform is that no sign-up is required to answer the researchers pre-screening questions. Participants can just answer the questions and choose to sign-up later enabling researchers to share their landing page and recruit participants outside callforparticipants.com, yet continue to save time using the landing page feature and pre-screening questions.

During the development of the platform we felt very strongly that trust would play a key part in populating both sides of the platform. We also felt very strongly about distancing ourselves from the few commercial companies that claim to provide participants for a fee. We designed the platform to build trust between participants and researchers by enhancing security and transparency so that participants can see the study type, location, completion time and benefits, and only researchers from registered institutions and research centres can create landing pages. We've also chosen to keep this service free for academics researchers as our aim is to simplify and speed up the recruitment process of participants, without draining additional effort or resources. However, creating a unified platform of participants and researchers is challenging. The time both researcher and participants can save by connecting in one place, rather than working in silos, remains valuable to industry and society – predominately by reducing the completion time for trials. In 2012 approximately [638,000 people took part in medical trials](#) – we can only start to imagine the time and resources needed to recruit each participant. In addition 134, 805 research-intensive academic staff operate in the UK alone, many of which will reside outside medical research. From talking to many researchers around the UK, Europe and in North America the problems and challenges of reducing the resources, effort and recruitment time appear to be present, yet they have not found a suitable solution, until now.

Solution - Call for Participants - an online platform that effortlessly connects universities and the public

Unique Selling Point



Free for academics and the public - now and always



Participants aren't paid by CFP - no 'professional' participants giving a sample representative of the real world



Savings in time and effort



Involvement of universities

Developed by researchers for researchers, callforparticipants.com only launched in early spring this year, with little promotion, we have seen a growing number of researcher and participants using the site with successful results. As we continue to expand and develop the platform we encourage academic researchers to join the discussion and provide us with an insight into the challenges faced when recruiting participants. After recently being recognised and rewarded through the [Summer of Innovation elevator](#) the *Call For Participants* team has been talking with many institutions, research and public engagement centre's to discuss how the platform can be used to help connect with hard-to-reach areas of local communities and track public engagement activates and campaigns. We have also been discussing with the team working on the NHS open data platform the amount of time and resources that go in to recruiting participants with little return, and we are currently exploring opportunities to collaborate with the NHS open data platform team to help tackle many of the issues faced by researcher and participants.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Authors

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