**Guidance on Snowball Sampling**

In a "snowball sample" each respondent is asked to recommend other persons for inclusion in the research. These persons are then contacted to see if they wish to serve as research participants. This is a valid procedure often used by investigators who seek to recruit from populations for which adequate sample frames are not available. For example, a researcher seeking to study patterns of informal leadership in a community may ask individuals to name others who are influential in a community. Similarly, studies of the diffusion of ideas and acceptance of new technologies can be traced through scientific and medical communities.

For example, studies on drug users or studies tracking sex partners require extreme caution with information gathered from one subject about another.

**Applicability to research:** If the topic of the research is not sensitive or personal, it may be acceptable for subjects to provide researchers with names and contact information for people who may be potentially interested in participation. Care should be taken to ensure that the potential subjects' privacy is not violated. The steps taken to minimize the risk of violating an individual’s privacy should be articulated in the recruitment section of the protocol should include carefully articulated information on steps to minimize risks to potential participants.

**Recruitment:** In snowball sampling, each participant may introduce another potential participant. Recruitment language should include in the protocol whether the researcher is planning to contact the new potential participants, or they will have a chance to contact researchers if interested. Researchers must ensure there is no coercion. The following should be incorporated into the recruitment strategy:

* Provide recruitment script to the participant who may contact potential participants to convey information about the study.
* Include language stating participants will not be penalized for not recruiting potential participants.
* If the protocol is sensitive, recruitment script should include measures to protect privacy and confidentiality.
* It should be clearly stated that participants cannot receive incentives or compensation for referrals. We suggest the following elements are included in the recruitment email, letter, social media post, flyer include the following:
  + - 1. Information on how potential participants were identified;
      2. Study purpose and researcher contact information;
      3. Procedures;
      4. An overview of risks or potential benefits;
      5. Information on how to contact the study team if interested in participating,
      6. Contact information to get answers to additional questions; and
      7. When using email, explicit information about the confidentiality issues associated with email communication.