



[Visit Series website](#)

Recruiting Participants

Step 2. Recruit participants

In some cases, experiments do not require recruitment, as in instances of centralized communication (where participants do not need to agree to participate in the intervention) or oversubscription (where participants have already agreed to participate in the intervention). Where recruitment is necessary,

opportunistic experiments still offer advantages. First, because sites are already planning to implement the intervention or are eager to implement it, researchers do not have to “sell” the study to sites (explaining how the benefits of the intervention outweigh the disruption that comes with it). Framing the experiment as a staggered rollout rather than as a pilot can facilitate recruitment because in a staggered rollout, the control group still receives the intervention, but in a pilot, it may receive the intervention only if the study results are favorable. Second, if the research relies on administrative data, the experiment does not require data collection that disrupts classrooms, which may make it easier to recruit participants. Where random assignment is added for research purposes, however, the research team will need to work with the state, district, or school that implements the intervention to encourage participants to undergo random assignment (box 9).

Excerpted from: Resch, A., Berk, J., & Akers, L. (2014). Recognizing and conducting opportunistic experiments in education: A guide for policymakers and researchers (REL 2014–037). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Analytic Technical Assistance and Development. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Box 9. Encouraging participants to participate in research using random assignment

Educators may hesitate to randomly assign schools or students to treatment conditions for many reasons, including ethical or logistical concerns (Cook, 2001). The following strategies can encourage educators to participate:

- Emphasize that because the district is planning to implement the intervention with or without a study, it is in the district’s best interest to know whether the intervention works. An experiment can enable districts to discontinue use of an intervention found to be ineffective or expand use of an intervention found to be effective.
- Name the study’s potential benefits, such as enabling districts and schools to better serve students and better allocate limited resources by continuing the use of effective interventions only.
- Discuss the ramifications of making decisions without rigorous evidence.
- Convey that in the case of oversubscription or limited resources (or both), randomization is a fair and transparent way to distribute resources and services.
- Assure participants that the study has been designed to minimize disruption for schools, classrooms, and students.
- When necessary, allow for a limited number of exemptions from random assignment.
- If needed, the district can offer incentives, such as financial compensation, to encourage participation.