

Protocol and resources development for prioritised recruitment and retention strategies (PRESS)

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Study Team

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Background

- Evidence on effective strategies to improve recruitment & retention lacking – need for more SWAT replications
- Trial Forge SWAT Network and Implement SWATs (WG1), identified and prioritised six recruitment and five retention strategies to be evaluated using randomised SWATs



A LIST OF 11 PRIORITY RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION SWATS

By Shaun Treweek Posted February 9, 2024 In News



Studies Within A Trial (SWATs) are a good way of generating evidence to support trial process decision-making. SWATs are designed to be replicated, which means it's important to have some focus otherwise we end up with lots of single evaluations that don't really provide much certainty as to what is and is not effective.

The **York Trial Forge SWAT Centre** working together with the SWAT Network has produced a list of 11 priority recruitment and retention SWATs. These SWATs were prioritised by looking at recruitment and retention interventions that are used a lot in the UK (with ones used often ranked higher), Cochrane systematic reviews of **recruitment** and **retention** strategies and the **PRIoRiTY 1 and 2 process** that identified important unanswered questions in trial recruitment and retention, respectively. Evaluations of these SWATs, including of cost-effectiveness, would be very welcome.

Example SWAT priority questions for recruitment include 'What is the most effective way of involving patients and the public in trials to improve participant recruitment?', 'What is the most effective way to use video(s) to support trial recruitment?' and 'What are the most effective strategies to recruit underserved groups?'

Priority SWAT questions for retention include 'What is the most effective way of offering flexibility to support participant retention?', 'What is the most effective way of using participant reminders to support retention?' and 'What is the most effective way to use financial incentives to support retention?'

A document describing the 11 priority SWATs, including some example SWAT questions in the priority areas and SWAT on the **SWAT repository** that fall in the priority areas can be **downloaded here**.

How to cite the priority list:

Baker A, May B, Okunlola A, A, Morrill C, Coleman E, Arndal C, Treweek S (2024 February 9) WP1:



<https://www.trialforge.org/2024/02/a-list-of-11-priority-recruitment-and-retention-swats/>

Objectives

- To develop SWAT protocols and resources for prioritised trial recruitment and retention strategies
- Develop accompanying practical resources for all 11 top prioritised recruitment and retention strategies, to support trial teams to ensure easy facilitation of SWAT implementation
- Make it easier for trial teams to adopt and replicate priority SWATs



Methods

- We used 12 sources including the SWAT Repository and Cochrane systematic reviews to inform a Master Protocol Template
- Three PPI Partners selected SWAT questions
- PPI-focused protocols co-designed with PPI partners
- Developed resources to support replications of priority SWATs, inc:
 - Guidance for Researchers Applying for Funding
 - Guidance on applying for ethical approval
 - Statistical Analysis Plans
 - Health Economics Guidance



Methods: Developing PPI recruitment & retention SWAT protocols

We

- Shared current evidence on PPI SWATs
- Identified the priority question - How can PPI best improve recruitment and retention?
- Provided guidance on some criteria for choosing SWAT protocols
- Facilitated meetings & between meeting tasks

PPI Partners

- Generated ideas on the purposes of the PPI SWATs
- Generated ideas for potential interventions for SWATs
- Chose with us which PPI SWATs we should develop into protocols
- Created examples of possible intervention materials & provided feedback



PRESS Methods: PPI

- PPI partners determined that SWAT interventions should be:
 - Co-designed & co-developed with researchers
- And their purpose was to:
 - Increase trust between communities & researchers
 - Educate on the value of clinical trials & benefits of participation
 - Have PPI involvement in tailoring follow up strategies
- Also, that the team should explore how marketing strategies could help



PRESS Agreed PPI SWATs

- Recruitment SWAT – use of a participant biography
- Retention SWAT – use of a PPI co-developed participant newsletter
- We mapped PPI suggestions to other priority questions for SWATs
- We used identified behaviour change theory elements that related to PPI proposed contents of the bio & newsletter

Behaviour change theory taken from Jones et al. (2019) RESPONSE: A behavioural insights checklist for designing effective communications; Practitioners' Play book. Available from: <https://www.comminit.com/global/content/response-behavioural-insights-checklist-designing-effective-communications>.



Results

- The PRESS Protocols and Resources are available online:
- [Trial Forge PRESS Webpage](#)
- [PRESS project page on Open Science Framework \(OSF\)](#)



Results: Recruitment

SWAT overarching priority Question	SWAT Protocol question chosen by PPI partners for replication	Link to protocol and resource pack online
What is the most effective way of involving patients and the public in trials to improve participant recruitment?	The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a trial participant biography on participant recruitment rates (BIOREC): Study Within A Trial Protocol	https://osf.io/8kcdr/files/osfstorage
What is the most effective way of sending potential trial participants invitation letters by post to optimise recruitment rates?	An evaluation of a theoretically informed written trial invitation compared to a standard written invitation to improve recruitment (INVITE): Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/r735x/files/osfstorage
What is the most effective way to use financial incentives to support recruitment?	An evaluation of whether cash-based monetary incentives increase trial recruitment of people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage compared to vouchers (CASH): Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/6e2fz/files/osfstorage
What are the most effective strategies to recruit underserved groups?	An evaluation of whether video(s) providing information about a trial increases recruitment of particular under-served groups, important for the trial, compared to written information only (VISUAL): template Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/5mx4k/files/osfstorage

Results: retention

SWAT overarching Question	SWAT Protocol question chosen by PPI partners for replication	Link to protocol and resource pack online
What is the most effective way of offering flexibility to support participant retention?	An evaluation of whether offering flexibility in in-person follow-up visit location increases trial participant retention compared to not offering flexibility (FLEXI): A cluster-randomised Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/274jf/files/osfstorage
What is the most effective way of involving patients and the public in trials to improve participant retention?	The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of trial newsletters, co-produced with Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) partners, on participant retention rates (NEWSLETTER): template Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/cv9ag/files/osfstorage
What is the most effective way of using participant reminders to support retention?	An evaluation of whether electronic reminders increase questionnaire completion rates compared to usual follow-up (E-PROMPT): template Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/vbnj5/files/osfstorage
What is the most effective way to use financial incentives to support retention?	Do monetary incentives increase retention compared to no monetary incentive? (MONCENTIVES): Study Within A Trial Protocol	https://osf.io/t2gnf/files/osfstorage
What is the most effective way of using routine data collection to support retention?	An evaluation of whether using routinely collected data, to shorten a follow-up questionnaire, increases the retention of under-served groups, compared to using a longer, participant-reported questionnaire (SHORT-Q): template Study Within A Trial protocol	https://osf.io/m2bac/files/osfstorage

Developed resources to support SWAT replications

Resource	Citation and link to document online
Guidance for Researchers Applying for Funding to Conduct High-Priority SWATs of Recruitment and Retention Strategies	Parker, A., Wilkinson, J. A., Treweek, S., Gkekas, A., Bruhn, H., Arundel, C., ... Shiely, F. (2025, March 31). PRESS Guidance for Researchers Applying for Funding to Conduct High-Priority SWATs of Recruitment and Retention Strategies. Retrieved from https://osf.io/w6zym/files/osfstorage
Statistical Analysis Plan Template for Randomised Recruitment SWATs	Sutton, C., Gkekas, A., Shiely, F., Treweek, S., Bruhn, H., Wilkinson, J. A., ... Parker, A. (2025, March 29). PRESS Randomised Recruitment SWAT Master Statistical Analysis Plan Template. Retrieved from https://osf.io/vqt6g/files/osfstorage
A Statistical Analysis Plan Template for Randomised Retention SWATs	Sutton, C., Gkekas, A., Shiely, F., Treweek, S., Bruhn, H., Wilkinson, J. A., ... Parker, A. (2025, March 31). PRESS Randomised Retention SWAT Master Statistical Analysis Plan Template. Retrieved from https://osf.io/h73ke/files/osfstorage
Health Economic Guidance. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costing models for trial teams to embed the SWATs in grant applications• Guidance on assessing costs and cost-effectiveness of SWATs• Guidance on reporting the costs associated with SWATs	Gkekas, A., Shiely, F., Wilkinson, J. A., Sutton, C., Treweek, S., Bruhn, H., ... Parker, A. (2025, March 31). Health Economics Guidance for Undertaking Randomised SWATs of Recruitment and Retention Strategies. Retrieved from https://osf.io/sebnk/files/osfstorage
Guidance on applying for ethical approval for SWAT (including template text for researchers to use for their ethics applications)	Detailed guidance on applying for ethical approval for each individual SWAT, including template wording for researchers to use for their ethics applications is included in each SWAT Resource Pack. https://osf.io/ap5cv/
Guidance on Making Accessible Documents	Wilkinson, J. A., Bennett, A., Shiely, F., Treweek, S., Sterniczuk, K., Powponne, M., ... Parker, A. (2025, March 31). Guidance on Making Accessible Documents. Retrieved from https://osf.io/8ek76/files/osfstorage

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