

Seven strategies for recruiting Pacific People as research participants in a post-Covid world

COVID-19 brought unprecedented change and disruption, uncertainty and complexity to many facets of our lives. For researchers, international lockdowns and social constraints wreaked havoc on projects that were either ready to launch or underway. Countless studies were suspended, and researchers had to rethink approaches to projects so they complied with pandemic safety rules.

As we now know, many researchers quickly pivoted and found other ways to recruit participants and conduct interviews that were safe and robust and supported the study objectives. For example, face-to-face focus groups and in-person interviews were replaced with online audio and video platforms such as Zoom or Messenger.

But how do these online and virtual approaches work for populations with limited access to digital devices such as the Pacific people? Are there other practical, respectful, and culturally appropriate strategies that could be used to recruit and collect data from Pacific people in a post-Covid world?

In this article, we share seven successful strategies for researchers to boost their recruitment and data collection of Pacific people.

1. Use Pacific methods and researchers for studying Pacific people.

Firstly, employing researchers of Pacific descent in your team makes sense considering that you are studying Pacific issues. Pacific researchers can call upon their networks to assist with recruitment numbers during challenging times. Also, using Pacific styles of recruiting based on cultural values such as *teu le va* (respectful, harmonious relationships) and *talanoa* (Pacific style of conversation) are more likely to enhance participation and engagement which is precisely what you are after regarding rich, authentic stories.

2. Tie research objectives to Pacific spiritual notions of *va* and wellbeing.

Pacific people are highly spiritual, so linking the research objectives to *teu le va* and wellbeing contextualises the message that your study and outcomes are valuable and beneficial. Pacific people need to know that their contributions support holistic Pacific outcomes. This view ties the Pacific worldview's spiritual and physical dimensions that are important to them.

3. Consult with Pacific leaders such as chiefs, pastors, and reverends.

Pacific community and church leaders such as *Ariki* (Cook Island Māori Chiefs), *Matai* (Samoan Chiefs), pastors and reverends are powerful resources to engage and recruit Pacific people. They have access to extensive Pacific networks and hard-to-reach communities that non-Pacific people do not have. Pacific leaders are well-positioned to identify other avenues that support Pacific issues, such as government-supported services.

4. Advertise using Pacific radio, church and community noticeboards and newspapers.

Research tells us that Pacific people are less likely to own digital devices and might not know about current Pacific research. However, many Pacific people listen to island-based radio stations and read Pacific newspapers to connect locally, nationally, and globally with other Pacific nations. Church and community noticeboards are other key information-sharing avenues. We recommend approaching a local Pacific radio station or newspaper and placing

notices on church and community boards to advertise your study and recruitment. A small fee might be requested or provided for free.

5. Offer traditional Pacific food at focus group sessions.

Food has cultural, social, and spiritual meanings to the Pacific people. Offering traditional island food as an incentive to engage in the study builds rapport and symbolises reciprocity and goodwill. Furthermore, using Pacific caterers demonstrates philanthropy or giving back to the Pacific communities by supporting and investing in Pacific businesses.

6. Offer letter writing and telephone calls as alternative forms of communication.

Considering the digital divide for some populations, offer letter writing and telephone calls as alternative methods of communication. For example, we found several Pacific people (including older people) preferred writing lengthy letters or having long phone conversations to being interviewed in person or online. Offering participants these modes of communication demonstrates your willingness and commitment to ensuring your research is inclusive.

7. Keep in touch with people who could not partake in the study.

Your ongoing outreach shows meaningful engagement and keeps open the opportunity for other research and future collaborations.

Research methods that acknowledge and adapt to cultural contexts can enhance and strengthen a project even – and especially – in the face of challenges. In the long run, researchers who care about their study design and participants' safety and wellbeing will likely have more compelling engagement and results. That is an outcome all researchers want.