Cell Phone Use for Research Purposes

Per guidance from campus Legal Services, personal cell phone numbers should not be used on research documents as a way of providing contact information to research subjects. Subject privacy and confidentiality assurances may be more difficult to maintain using personal cell phones.

The IRB recognizes that there may be no feasible alternative to the use of personal cell phones in certain cases. If the study team feels that a personal cell phone number is vital to the research, please review this guidance document and include additional detail within the protocol application.

Provide an appropriate justification as to why an office phone number and e-mail contact is not sufficient for the study. This should be included - along with the safeguards in place – in the Privacy & Confidentiality section of your application.

When cell phones must be used due to the nature of the study’s population or geographic requirements, the following guidelines and safeguards should be followed:

- Cell phones must be password protected;
- Conversations with and about participants and research team members should be limited to private spaces; and
- If conversations occur in public spaces, language should be limited to non-identifiable information (e.g., do not say the participants’ names aloud or discuss any sensitive information) or a time should be scheduled to call the subject back from a private setting.

If personal cell phone numbers or study team members change, all related research documents must be updated.

While not a human subjects protection issue, the IRB urges PIs and study team members to consider the following when using personal cell phones for research:

- Personal cell phone number(s) will be available to all potential participants for as long as that number remains active;
- If posted in a public venue, the personal cell phone number becomes publicly available; and
- Accessibility of the cell phone during personal (non-research) times, and to non-research personnel.