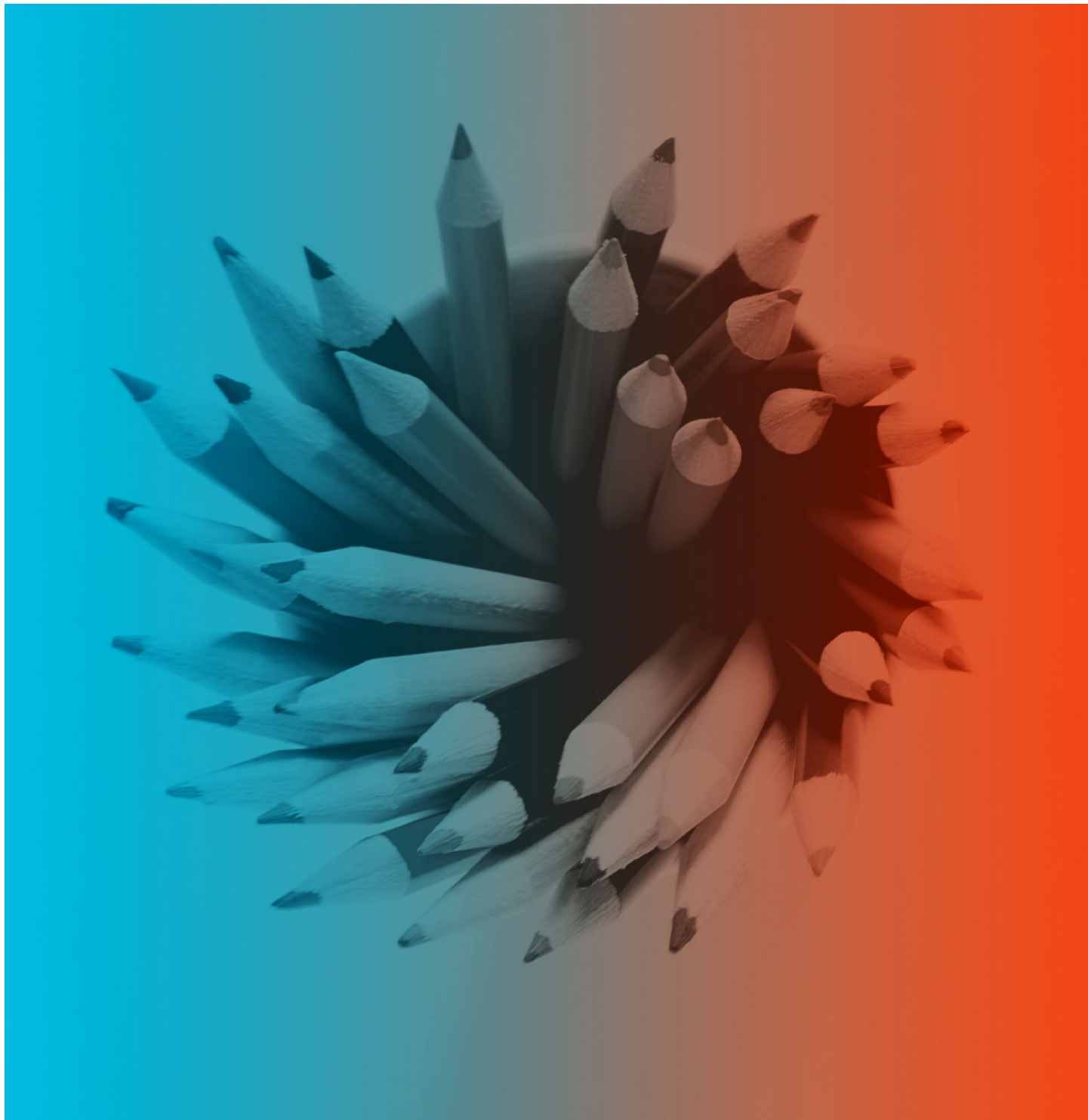


CommonLit 360 RCT Recruitment Plan

iF intentional futures

Prepared for
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This section draws from research to suggest a collection of best practices for recruitment (and retention). A bibliography as well as iF's synthesis of best practices are included.

Understanding the Recruitment Process

Recruitment is a long process that seldom goes according to plan.⁶

Recruitment can be classified into phases.⁷

- Study Design
- Intervention Packaging
- Planning the Recruitment Process
- Designing Recruitment Messaging
- Running the Recruitment Campaign
- Following Up after Recruitment

Design

Consider the balance between the quality and value of the study and the requirements of participants and the burden of data collection.⁸

- Learn what the norms of communication and sharing resources are between teachers of different grade levels. If mitigating risks of contamination requires working against the culture and norms of a school or district in order, lower retention and decreased fidelity can result.
- Consider the burden of intrusive, long-term experiments (requiring a teacher to implement a new curriculum). In considering what faithful implementation looks like, consider what components (if any) of a teacher's day-to-day will not be touched by the intervention and what components may become easier through the intervention (this can be used in messaging).

⁶ Roschelle, J., Feng, M., Gallagher H., Murphy, R., Harris, C., Kamdar, D., & Trinidad, G. (2014). Recruiting participants for large-scale random assignment experiments in school settings. SRI International, 1. <https://www.sri.com/publication/education-learning-pubs/recruiting-participants-for-large-scale-random-assignment-experiments-in-school-settings/>

⁷ Roschelle, J. et al. p. 2.

⁸ Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 7-8.

Choose a sample strategically.⁹

- Determine what broader population should be represented to be able to make generalizable statements of efficacy.
- Thoughtfully determine which subpopulations need to be represented and at what scale in the sample in order to be able to state efficacy for a particular subset of students.
- Consider difficulty or ease of recruitment. While this is not the most important consideration, once sample representation is prioritized, strategic choices around where to recruit and the ease of recruitment should enter into the analysis (rural vs. urban school settings, costs of travel, school size).
- In efficacy (vs. effectiveness) studies, selecting a sample that can implement a program with fidelity is a consideration.
- Longer-term studies can consider easing the burden of data collection by reducing the amount of data collected during the “warm-up” year.
- In general, the more requirements around data collection increase, the challenges of initial recruitment and long-term retention increase.

Consider adaptation of intervention packaging based on specific district needs.¹⁰

- Packaging an intervention to fit local circumstances can make implementation and research less burdensome for participants (note: this does not mean changing the intervention itself). Modest changes to the intervention packaging can lead to an easier recruitment and implementation process and lead to increased data accuracy because there will be more faithful implementation (Roschelle, et al., 2014, p.11).
- Identify the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that would incentive participants. Ideally, this can lead to a better understanding of what is valuable to participants and what would be minimally intrusive and aligned to the participants’ needs.



Productivity – Consider the impact on productivity.

- For teacher buy-in, understand that time is a valuable resource, and implementing a new curriculum and collecting data can lead to time being taken away from day-to-day teaching responsibilities. Therefore, considerable thought and effort should go towards identifying strategies that will allow teachers to “ramp up on the new intervention while also fulfilling their regular teaching duties and participating in the required data collection” (Roschelle, et al, 2014, p. 11). Also highlighting the ways that the program (short-term and long-term; sending them printed copies of any physical materials they may want vs. requiring them to print them themselves, providing on-demand support and coaching) can save teachers time can be an important messaging point. Consider if there are services that can be offered to teachers (setting up integration with the school’s LMS, for example) that can save them time.
- Note: RCT reporting should note if teacher burden was significantly reduced and indicate how this might be different in a “typical use scenario.”

⁹ Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ Roschelle, J. et al. p. 11-14



Alignment – Consider the intervention packaging’s alignment with broader district and state initiatives and requirements.

- Prior to recruitment efforts beginning, seek to have a general understanding of a broader context that may cause alignment or misalignment between requirements and expectations of CommonLit and the districts or state (Roschelle, et al, 2014, p. 13).
- Awareness of the ways in which CommonLit may help a district or school achieve a larger initiative can be used in recruitment messaging. Schools and districts are more likely to want to participate if there is greater alignment and a clear value add.
- If there is misalignment, a strategic decision should be made on whether it is worth the resources to recruit that school/district.
- Be sensitive to areas where there may be perceived (vs. real) misalignment in messaging.



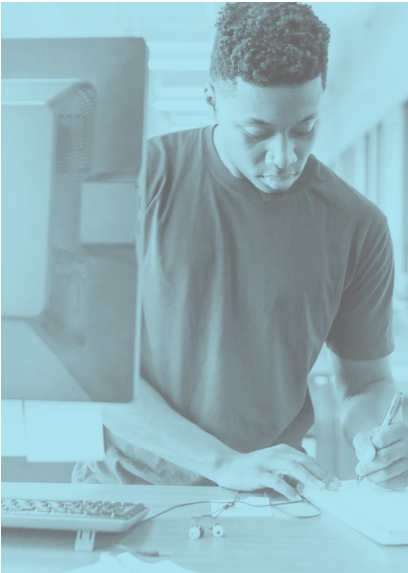
Incentives

- Financial incentives alone, especially the amounts researchers can often offer, are not effective for recruitment. Communicating the intrinsic incentives of participation is key and often a larger motivator for participation over financial incentives alone.
- Financial incentives should be used to offset additional costs that teachers would otherwise bear for their participation but are not a primary reason to participate and should be used not as an enticement but as a counter to the disadvantages of participating.
- Financial incentives should be based on the number of hours teachers/administration will spend doing extra work for the RCT and should be compensated at a reasonable hourly rate based on their location.

Consider convening a stakeholder advisory team.¹¹

- Involving stakeholders (those who are not directly participating in the study) can be used as a successful strategy to increase buy-in and effective communication, as well as reduce the risk of attrition.
- The group is ideally composed of members who represent all relevant stakeholder types (teachers, students, parents, administrators).
- Pay stakeholders for their time.
- Host meetings at times that are convenient for the group.
- Initial membership can come from pilot studies.
- Composition of the group can shift from meeting to meeting depending on the topic.
- The advisory team can advise on a wide array of areas: messaging and incentives, recruitment of schools, engagement with teachers, acceptable measures, communication with parents, etc.

¹¹ Lloyd, J. McHugh, C., Minton, J., Eke, H., & Wyatt, K. (2017). The impact of active stakeholder involvement on recruitment, retention and engagement of schools, children, and their families in the cluster randomized control trial of the Healthy Lifestyles Programme (HeLP): A school-based intervention to prevent obesity. *Trials* 18, 378.



Recruitment Process

Employ multiple levels of recruitment.¹²

- Strategies that rely on recruitment at one level of the K-12 system often are not successful. Strategies should consider recruitment at the levels of districts, schools, and teachers and understand that stakeholder interests may not always be aligned.
- While district recruitment can be effective and important, it alone may not serve as more than “consent” for individual schools and teachers to participate. It does not necessarily lead to buy-in or commitment.
- At the school level, principals play an important role, and it is key to garner their buy-in and support. Principal support can create a supportive environment for teachers using the study, can help address parental concerns, and can help if problems arise with data collection practices.
- Teacher recruitment is important in ensuring there is sufficient buy-in since they will often carry the most responsibilities concerning implementation. Since teachers often do not have the power to make decisions around curriculum adoption and professional development scheduling, relying on the recruitment of teachers alone will not lead to large-scale recruitment.
- Early awareness of district and school-decision making processes in different states is foundational. Learning early on about district-specific policies and requirements surrounding curriculum adoption and IRB/ research data collection and use is key in ensuring a smooth recruitment process. Some states may require state or district leadership’s approval first while in others it may be possible to recruit at multiple levels concurrently and build support.

Recruitment Timeline¹³

- First professional development session(s)/training(s) should be held in the summer before the first school year of the RCT.
- Teachers should be notified of when the training(s) will be held by early May at the latest.
- Large sample recruitment efforts can take up to a year. The shortest time frame possible would be 4-5 months (although this is not ideal).

Recruitment Operations - Campaigning¹⁴

- Understand that recruitment is similar to an election campaign: “the goal is challenging, the process unfolds as unforeseen obstacles arise, and many people must work together in a coordinated manner to make it happen” (Roschelle, et al., 2014, p. 22).

¹² Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 15-16

¹³ Roschelle, J. et al. p. 16

¹⁴ Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 22-23.

- Hold weekly conference calls with key stakeholders such as recruitment partners, CommonLit's core staff relevant to the RCT workstream, and research partners. The regular check-ins foster timely responses to new developments, promote greater clarity and understanding among stakeholders, and ensure that the integrity of the research process is not compromised with any strategy adaptation. The main goal of these meetings is to share status updates on work being done by different stakeholders, name any challenges encountered, and brainstorm solutions and adaptations.
- Successful recruitment often operates on multiple and simultaneous channels, such as:
 - Media and public engagement like news outlets, newsletters distributed in partner networks, events, and conferences)
 - On-the-ground recruitment efforts (one-on-one meetings with district leadership)
 - Consider who is the most appropriate person for some contexts. For example, a district with questions about the research design and data sharing might feel more assured by hearing from a member of the research team).

Recruitment Operations - Comms and Organization

- Establish a consistent point person for a district/school for the recruitment process.
- Create a shared database of all schools (and potentially each teacher) in districts, which can help recruiters make strategic choices that align with the ideal sample makeup. SRI recommends including the following information:
 - Relevant demographic information for each school
 - State standardized test performance
 - Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
 - Title 1 School status
 - Enrollment size
- Reviewing recruitment efforts and the ideal sample makeup should happen often to ensure that over- or under-representation does not occur.
- Track recruitment in a project management tool/database as if it is a sales pipeline and track schools/districts/teachers' level of engagement and commitment.
 - The beginning of the pipeline can reflect initial leads and interest. Another stage can be when a school/district expresses intent to participate/apply.
 - Record the number of conversations that occur prior to application. This can help the team plan and understand over time what percentage of recruitment conversations lead to realized commitment and the average amount of time it takes to recruit a district/school.
 - Tracking allows recruiters to make strategic decisions to identify and prioritize engagements with the most promise of being realized.
 - Salesforce has been used to do this in other RCT recruitment efforts to track milestones, implement a sales pipeline model, and track leads.

Recruitment Operations - Flexibility¹⁵

- Don't be afraid to adapt recruitment strategies for different districts and schools. Increasing or adding incentives may be needed (for example, adding a school-referral bonus).
- Regularly examine the recruitment process with the team to identify what is working and what is not.
- If the conditions or context within a certain district is challenging, don't be afraid to adjust and redirect recruitment efforts elsewhere.

Recruitment - Leveraging Local Connections¹⁶

- Think strategically about who are the “frontline recruiters.” Ideally, recruiters should already have trust and credibility with districts and communities.
- Contracting and setting clear quotas with local recruitment partners (like Educational Service Centers) has been a successful strategy for RCTs.
- Look for local recruitment partners who have established relationships with teachers and/or district leadership and who are viewed as credible in districts.
- Champion teachers can be effective in gaining the trust of other educators.
- Consider exploring if the state Departments of Education or the Offices of the State Superintendent would be willing to send an introductory email about CommonLit and the RCT.
- Identify where key stakeholders are already gathering (disciplinary like ELA educators and role-specific like superintendents or principals).
- Determine if educational news is usually picked up by local news. If so, consider employing local press efforts.
- Remember that trust is critical in all communities, especially communities where there is a high enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds, immigrant families, and additional marginalized communities. Plan to cultivate community and trust, and identify clear and agreed-upon boundaries with these communities.¹⁷

Team Morale¹⁸

- Recruitment is hard and most successful recruitment efforts will have moments when there are setbacks or when it looks like goals will not be met.
- Celebrate small successes with the team.
- Remind the team of the bigger “why” behind the work.
- Create an environment where team members can share challenges and be met with support.

¹⁵ Roschelle, J. et al. p. 23.

¹⁶ Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 23-24.

¹⁷ Chicago Beyond. (2019). *Why am I always being researched?* <https://chicagobeyond.org/researchequity>

¹⁸ Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 23-34

- Allocate resources with flexibility and expediency to address challenges promptly and not take up unnecessary time and energy of team members.
- Take a moment to celebrate the end of recruitment.



Messaging

Messaging requires a shift in framing.¹⁹

- How you talk about the research with participants will need to be very different from how it is framed for an expert audience.
- Messaging is akin to a marketing campaign.
- Messaging should communicate five points:
 - How the study addresses pain points and makes education better; clearly frame the current problems (and how they impact teachers and students) and how the study, in particular, addresses these problems
 - A clear message about what CommonLit 360 will do for participants
 - A summary of potential costs and benefits, monetary (e.g., free access to curriculum and PD) and non-monetary alike (e.g., making analysis results available, grading essay time reduced, features that benefit ELL students and students with IEPs, etc.).
 - A succinct statement of requirements to participate (e.g., grade levels, ELA, etc.) and expectations (e.g., how long they must use the curriculum)
 - Explanation of the control group and random assignment (this can be a major concern for many participants)
 - Address potential participant concerns such as alignment with state and local requirements, any opportunities to customize and adapt the intervention, expected ease or difficulty of implementation, continued availability of the product after the study ends, availability of support during the study, privacy, and protection of teachers and students, and ability to drop out of the study (voluntary participation is a requirement of IRB)

The EAST framework should be followed when designing messaging.²⁰



Easy – The message should be easy to understand, simple, and focus on the need and the intervention.

- Share specifics in follow-up communication
- Have a teacher or admin (depending on the audience) review before sending.
- Allow direct replies to any initial email communication
- Send messaging to multiple stakeholders (those most aware of the need and decision-makers) to promote a conversation between stakeholders
- Don't use jargon

¹⁹ Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 18-19.

²⁰ Wagner et al. (2021) "Giving schools a nudge: Can behavioral insights improve recruitment of schools to randomised controlled trials?" BMC Research Notes. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-021-05509-8>



Attractive – Messaging should have a professional but memorable design.

- Visually appealing
- Careful use of subheadings, bullet points, and boxed content
- Use testimonies of students and teachers
- Employ indirect reward approach - e.g., “by implementing this you could benefit students and the school.”



Social – Use stories, testimonies, and case studies to help readers connect messaging to specific classroom contexts and specific children they know.

- Include photographs of a person alongside their testimony in messaging



Timely – Consider when the audience is most likely to be receptive and the immediacy of cost and benefits.

- Communicate timeline of when you will respond to someone who responds
- Convey any immediacy (RCT beginning next school year, so on)

Messaging Format²¹

- Plan and prepare consistent and coherent messaging in advance.
- Use a variety of formats (e.g., one-pager, postcards, short brochures) and distribute them in a variety of channels (mail to teachers, principals, and administrators, hand out at conferences, leave behind after one-on-one meetings).
- Have a presentation with a product demonstration prepared.
- Consider having a simple website (or an easy-to-find page on the main CommonLit website) for the study where interested parties can find updates and relevant information about the study, an avenue to submit their interest and provide contact information (for recruitment partners and participants alike), and a formal application form.
- Consider creating a short video about the study (this can help maintain a consistent message).
- Consider creating “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) messaging to ensure that key questions will be answered with consistency.
- Following up individually with potential leads will always be key.
- Use templates that can be personalized while maintaining a level of consistency.

²¹ Roschelle, J. et al. p. 20.

Application

Create a formal application process.²²

- Having potential participants undergo a formal application process to participate in the study has a number of benefits.
- An application process can create a greater sense of commitment for participants.
- The application process should be designed so that there has to be thought put into participating. Allowing participants to think through the committee will likely help with long-term retention.
- Require signatures from both administrators and teachers, which will again reflect that there is a substantial commitment to participate and ensure that teachers are aware of study participants (know that these signatures will be nonbinding, however, due to the need for voluntary participation).
- Be willing to have frank and open conversations with stakeholders. This will help build trust and ensure that there are no misunderstandings that could lead to withdrawal from the study.
- The application can be used to gather further basic data about the school/district and teachers and ensure that they meet the requirements for participation.
- Having an application process and a formal acceptance notification makes clear a school's/district's participation status, ensuring that there is clarity.



²² Roschelle, J. et al. pp. 20-21.

Mitigating Attrition

Plan for attrition.

- Plan as if there will be some attrition in participants.
- Consider having a plan for an as-needed recruitment process ready to employ after the RCT launches (and ensure that a shortened duration of involvement for new participants aligns with quality standards). Sometimes a two-cohort recruitment model can be employed.

Build rapport and relationships.

- Notification of random assignment can be a significant point of attrition. Prompt notification of assignments is important, and assigning participants in batches (every number of schools) can help ensure that there isn't significant attrition once the recruitment effort was thought to be completed. It also allows for participants who agreed to participate early in the process to have a more complete picture of their participation without having to wait for the recruitment process to be complete.
- Followthrough during the intake process following an agreement to participate is key. Extend a "warm welcome" and maintain ongoing communication (especially with teachers who will not implement the curriculum initially).
- The two Rs, Rapport and Relationships, can help prevent attrition and are incredibly important for long-form studies.
- Have a team member personally call schools at key moments (when they apply, when they have been accepted, to notify them of random assignment conditions, and periodically with relevant updates or to check in / assess how they are feeling and their level of commitment.
- Drop-outs because a school realizes they are overcommitted can occur. This points back to the importance of messaging and an application process that manages the tension of being attractive but also allows participants to think through the realistic implementation of the study.

Thank you.

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