

A Guide to Partnering with Charter Schools for Lottery-Based Research

Overview

Lottery-based research designs are a powerful way to assess the effectiveness of education policies and programs. Because charter schools allocate seats via lottery when oversubscribed, this sector is a strong setting for evaluating causal impacts.¹

To conduct a lottery-based study of charter schools, researchers typically need to approach charter schools or CMOs individually to discuss research goals before collecting lottery data (if the district or state educational institution does not house lottery records). This guide compiles insights from many of Blueprint Labs' charter school studies to support effective outreach, partnership-building, and data collection.

Preliminaries: What To Prepare Before Contacting Schools

Because charter research involves working with schools and identifiable student data, institutional approval is required prior to recruitment.

Required approvals and materials:

1. IRB approval: Your application should clearly describe your study objectives and the data you will request from charter schools. Lottery data are considered secondary (pre-collected) data.
2. IRB attachments (below are those commonly included in Blueprint Labs studies):
 - a. A [data-use agreement \(DUA\) template](#) to share with schools that specifies the study's purpose and the secondary data requested
 - b. A **recruitment deck** used to introduce yourself and the study and discuss participation with schools
 - c. A [lottery data intake form](#) to help schools compile lottery records.
 - i. This form also signals to schools that the requested data is generally readily available or minimally burdensome to collect.

Any additional recruitment or study materials (e.g., brochures, letters of support, or completed DUAs) should be submitted to the IRB as amendments to your application. It

¹A summary of findings from lottery-based charter school studies, as well as a discussion of benefits and limitations of lottery-based research designs, can be found [here](#).

can also help to have the support of external funders or charter associations prior to recruitment.

Blueprint Labs is happy to share study/recruitment material templates with anyone who needs them.

Recruitment: Making Initial Contact

We recommend starting by compiling a list of target schools and relevant contacts (e.g., principals, CEOs, operations staff, or other school leaders). It's helpful to build and maintain a recruitment tracker with contact information and next steps for outreach.

Recruitment often proceeds in phases. The approaches below have all been employed by Blueprint Labs to great effect, though effectiveness can depend on your setting. The overarching goal of making initial contact is to connect with a school leader who is open to learning more about your study.

Cold Emails

- Send an initial outreach email to each school introducing yourself, briefly describing the study, and proposing times to meet.
- Follow up every two to three weeks.
- Plan for at least three email attempts per school.

Phone Calls

- For schools that don't respond to emails, call the main office or front desk.
- Aim to reach a school leader or a data/operations staff member.
- Prepare a concise script that introduces you, summarizes the study, and asks about their interest in participating – ideally in under one minute.
- Once you identify the appropriate contact, follow up by email to request a meeting.

Emails from Senior Researchers or PIs

If your study is supported by a well-known or senior researcher, a brief outreach email from them can help increase response rates. In our experience, PI emails were most effective after trying to contact schools by cold emails and phone calls. We typically sent PI emails two weeks after last contact.

Introductions from Charter Associations or Funders

When cold outreach stalls, external partners such as funders or local charter associations can help facilitate introductions.

- Share a list of schools you are trying to reach with external partners.
- Ask the partner to send a short introduction that includes a brief study description, copying you.

- Follow up every two weeks by email, with phone follow-ups as needed.

General Outreach Tips

- When you identify a new point of contact at a school, restart the outreach cycle (two to three emails plus phone calls).
- Maintain a consistent two-week outreach cadence.
- If a school is interested in your work but not able to participate immediately, schedule a follow-up in a few months.
- Respond promptly to schools that express interest in connecting and propose meeting times quickly.

Recruitment: Meeting with Charter Leaders

When a meeting with a school is secured, we recommend the following practices:

1. *Keeping the meeting brief:* Thirty minutes is usually sufficient.
2. *Set a clear agenda:* Share a brief deck in advance introducing your team and research goals.
3. *Listen actively:* Be prepared to address [school-specific questions or concerns](#), even if they aren't directly relevant to your study.
4. *Set clear expectations:*
 - a. For lottery-based studies, emphasize that participation primarily involves sharing lottery records.
 - b. If collecting any primary data, clearly specify the required data elements.
 - c. Provide a realistic, conservative project timeline.
 - d. Explain how their lottery data will be securely stored and protected.

Recruitment: After the Meeting

After meeting with a school:

- Share the DUA and lottery intake form.
- Send reminders every two to three weeks until the DUA is signed. Data cannot be shared before this.
- Once the DUA is fully executed, provide a secure method for lottery data transfer.

A Final Note

Forming partnerships and collecting data takes time. For example, recruitment and data collection for one of our lottery studies has been ongoing for nearly two years - and will continue!

Some schools may not be interested in being part of a study, and others may not respond to outreach. However, this doesn't mean that you should stop reaching out. Persistence is crucial - continued, respectful follow-up can make all the difference between stalled outreach and a successful partnership.