

TIPS TO

LEVEL UP

YOUR ETHICS APPLICATION



01. ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS ARE ASSESSED ON PROPORTIONATE RISK

There are two types of reviews outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2): full board review and delegated review (for more information please visit ethics.gc.ca/eng/home.html). There isn't a separate review process for student and postdocs vs. faculty applications; instead, all applications are reviewed based on the "the level of foreseeable risks to participants" (TCPS Article 6.12, p. 106). All ethics applications go through the same processes, and all are assessed to determine the level of review scrutiny proportionate to the perceived risks introduced by the research. From the participants' standpoint, it doesn't matter WHO is conducting the research, but rather HOW the research is conducted.

02. WE CAN ACCEPT ORAL CONSENT. YOUTH CAN TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

Oral consent is an acceptable method. You will need a way to document and record that consent has been given but oral consent is a valid method. In some cases, oral consent is the safest means of collecting consent.

We can also accept consent from children of varying ages, assent is scoped to age and development level of cognitive abilities. The important piece is ensuring that the participant(s) are able to understand what is being asked of them. We accept consent from 16-18 year olds. We also accept consent from children as young as 14 as long as you have a process to assess their capacity to consent (this usually involves asking them a series of questions to make sure they understand the research process). Please note that some school boards do not allow children under 18 to consent, and you will need to get consent from parents and assent from the children in those situations.

03. STUDENTS APPLY AS 'TRAINEES'

While you may be the person writing some (or most) of the application, students are Co-Investigators, with a faculty member as the **Primary Investigator** (PI). The PI is the one responsible for oversight and the final sign-off for the application submission.

This does not affect publications or ownership of research project - that is between you and your supervisor, and based on your intellectual property agreement.

04. RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS (REB) ONLY REVIEW THE FINAL PRODUCT: NO DRAFTS

The REB cannot review draft versions of documents or projects. Details like inclusion criteria, wording of interview questions, or data management plans might seem like small details, but they can have big impact on the feedback from reviewers. The advice from reviewers is specific to your study. Changing the study design means that our feedback will change too. To avoid multiple rounds of reviews and potentially save a lot of time, submit your application when the study design is complete. If you aren't sure when you should apply, talk to your supervisor.

You can modify and tweak the application later based on new learnings or if utilizing emergent designs, but you **MUST** identify this in your initial application.

i.e., "Using emergent design for our project, we will begin by sending out a phase one survey. Based on the results of that survey and feedback from our community engagement, we will develop our phase two approach. We will post a modification to our ethics application as soon as we have created a plan for phase 2 to ensure our file stays up to date."

05. BEWARE CUT AND PASTE!

It can be very tempting to cut and paste from proposals or assignments but the context and questions being asked in the ethics application are different to that of coursework or funding proposals. Particularly study objectives (see section 6.0 in the application). **Write this section freehand and focus on the participant's experience of the research project. What will the project be like for them?**

06. TOP SECRET? ANONYMITY IS NOT ALWAYS REQUIRED

Research does not always have to be anonymous or anonymized. Studies can have participants attributed in the work and cited in the project depending on the circumstances. You need to determine what works for your project and your participants. The key is to be explicit and consistent about what level of confidentiality or exposure you can provide in your project. This needs to be clear in the application, recruitment, and consent form.

07. WE CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT TO WRITE, AND THAT IS A GOOD THING

The REBs, analysts, and the Indigenous Research Support Team (IRST) cannot and do not tell you how to do your project (methods, documents, protocols etc.). We do not tell you what to write in your application. Your project is unique, as are your goals, relationships, previous work and knowledge. We do let people know when they missed portions of the application or parts of the application questions. We do ask questions to make sure that your application is clear and gives a fulsome, consistent picture of your research project. You can speak to folks like IRST when you are creating your protocols or consult with us on wise practices.

08. DO I HAVE TO DELETE MY DATA?

The minimum data retention requirements are outlined in the Master Records Retention Schedule (MaRRS). If you want to keep your data for future uses, make sure the data collection parameters are fully outlined at the informed consent stage and application. For more information on the master records retention schedule for information on retention of research data involving human subjects, please visit: asc.ucalgary.ca/marrs/humansubjects.

09. MINDFUL RECRUITMENT MEANS CONSIDERING POWER DYNAMICS

Be cognisant of power dynamics in terms of who you are recruiting, how you are recruiting, where you are recruiting, and how safe people feel saying no. Consider possible pressures on your potential participants. How will you alleviate and or mediate pressures? How will you ensure that people have time to understand what you are asking them to do, and time to consider their response. How will you ensure that people have privacy during the consent process?

For example, if you contact the manager or leader at an organization and have them recruit their employees for your study, how does that affect the comfort of those employees to say no? Remember too that there can be cultural differences in power dynamics.

10. LAY LANGUAGE IS WELCOME (EVEN PREFERRED)!

Ethics applications do not require citations or formal academic language. In fact, try to avoid unnecessary jargon as you write your application. The research board reviewers come from a variety of fields and while they are research ethics experts and knowledgeable about other areas of study, they may not always be subject area experts in your field. Be clear, avoid leaps of logic, and ensure that your application is consistent throughout. Be mindful of language in your consent forms as well. Make the language appropriate for the people you are working with and remember to use **the right consent form for the right participant**.

11. NO RECRUITMENT? THAT DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN ETHICS ISN'T REQUIRED

Research projects involving self-study or methods like autoethnography still require ethics approval. Self-study often involves scholarly reflection your own experiences or your interactions with other individuals or communities. Part of the ethics review process is to make sure that your privacy and the privacy of others are considered.

Similarly, collecting observational data or using data collected for non-research purposes (like school or employment records "secondary use") can be a great source of information but might require ethics review. The details are important in these circumstances and REB analysts can determine if your study needs review. Please connect with REB analysts before you start your study.

12. FEAR NOT — WE ARE ON YOUR SIDE!

We care about your research, and we want your research project to be the best and most ethically situated that it can be. While the application can be daunting there is a great team of people (no bots) who are reading your applications. The application is your way of explaining to us what you want to do, and how you want to do it. Tell us how you have considered the risks of the project, and how you have decided to mitigate those risks. Bring us through your process and **do not be afraid** when we talk to you through comments on your application. Comments are good! This is the way we connect with you to make sure we understand your plans. We are here to support you in this process, so that you can do your best research!

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