
Research Ethics Application Procedure

PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to clearly communicate the expectations and requirements for researchers applying for research ethics review at NBCC.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This policy applies to NBCC employees and students, and anyone else conducting research under the auspices of the college, as defined in the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans Policy (3303).

1.0 DEFINITIONS

Please also see Definitions in the [Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans Policy \(3303\)](#).

Minimal risk research

- research is defined as “minimal risk” when the probability and seriousness of possible harms resulting from participation are no greater than those encountered by participants in the parts of their everyday life related to the research topic.

Course-based research involving human participants

- any research (see Definition in [Policy 3303](#)) involving human participants conducted by students for academic credit. This includes applicable in-course projects, senior technical reports, practicum projects, capstones with or without a partner, and research internships.

Faculty Research Supervisor

- the course instructor responsible for supervising students conducting research and related activities as trainee researchers.

2.0 CONTEXT

The NBCC Research Ethics Board meets on the second Thursday of each month during the regular academic year. There are no meetings in July or August.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring applications are received sufficiently in advance of proposed research activities to allow adequate time for review and possibly clarification, revision, and resubmission.

Keep the above meeting schedule in mind when preparing and submitting applications for ethics review. You can avoid unnecessary delays by carefully following the guidelines below.

3.0 IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Step One: Evaluating Review Requirements or Seeking an Exemption

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Principal Investigators are responsible for being sufficiently familiar with standards, policies, and requirements for the responsible conduct of research that they can evaluate what types of certifications or approvals a research project requires.

There are three options for obtaining ethics approval for research projects being conducted under the auspices of NBCC:

1. **Regular REB Review** is the default requirement for most research projects involving human participants
2. **Course-based research** may be eligible for Program-Level Delegated Review if it is minimal risk and primarily intended to teach students about research. See [Program-Level Ethics Review Procedure \(3303.4858\)](#) for eligibility and application requirements.
3. **Research projects that already have REB approval from another institution** may be exempt from full ethics review at NBCC. The REB approval must still be active, and from an institution eligible to receive Tri-Agency funds (i.e., obligated to adhere to the requirements of the Tri-Agency Framework for the Responsible Conduct of Research). The Principal Investigator at NBCC must submit the required application materials for Multi-Jurisdictional Review, as detailed in *3.2 Step Two: Applying for Ethics Review*.

If unsure about whether a project requires ethics review, or eligibility for program-level or multi-jurisdictional ethics review, the Principal Investigator must write to REB@nbcc.ca requesting a written opinion from the REB Chair.

If your project does not require REB approval, but a funder or other stakeholder requires an exemption letter to verify this, please complete the [Ethics Review Exemption Form \(3303.4705\)](#) and submit to REB@nbcc.ca.

3.2 Step Two: Applying for Ethics Review

Deadline: Applications must be submitted to REB@nbcc.ca by the first day of the month to be eligible for review in that month's REB meeting (or the next business day if the first falls on a weekend or holiday).

Applications, Renewals, and Change Requests must be submitted by June 1 to be considered for review prior to the summer.

Required Application Materials for Regular REB Review:

1. Completed [Application to Involve Human Participants in Research \(3303.4652\)](#)
2. TCPS 2: CORE-2022 Course on Research Ethics Certificate of Completion for the applicant (unless already on file with NBCC's College Office of Research Enterprise).

Additional Attachments for Regular Review (as applicable to the specific project):

3. Recruitment materials (Posters, emails, templates for social media posts)
4. Information letter for participants
5. Consent form
6. Waiver of confidentiality

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7. Script of oral explanation given to participants
8. Survey / Focus group / Interview / etc. questions
9. Debriefing script / feedback given at end of survey
10. Data Management Plan
11. TCPS 2: CORE-2022 Course on Research Ethics Certificate(s) of Completion for all additional research team members listed on the application (unless already on file with NBCC's College Office of Research Enterprise).
12. Any other relevant research instruments or materials

Required Application Materials for Multi-Jurisdictional Review:

1. Completed [Ethics Multi-Jurisdictional Research Form \(3303.4711\)](#)
2. TCPS 2: CORE-2022 Course on Research Ethics Certificate of Completion for the applicant (unless already on file with NBCC's College Office of Research Enterprise).
3. Letter or Notice of Research Ethics Approval from eligible external institution
4. Ethics Application package approved by external institution
5. And Ethics Amendment/Change Application packages approved by external institution

Guidance and Support in Preparing Applications:

For specific guidance to help in preparing ethics applications, see: *Appendix A: Guidance on Assessing Risk in Research*; *Appendix B: Guidance on Informed Consent in Research*; *Appendix C: Guidance on Data Management, Privacy and Confidentiality*; and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS). NBCC's [Research Ethics Board Procedure \(3303.4878\)](#) also provides insight into the review process, and minimum criteria for approval.

Faculty researchers may request support preparing ethics applications from CORE's Faculty-Industry Research Liaison Officer. Non-faculty researchers may request support from CORE's Applied Research Projects Manager.

3.3 Step Three: Ethics Review and Decision

The REB reviews applications following the [Research Ethics Board Procedure \(3303.4878\)](#).

Following their meeting, you may receive a request for additional information the REB requires to make an informed decision.

Applications may be a) Approved; b) Approved with conditions; or c) Rejected.

Read the notice of decision carefully to note requirements, including required follow-ups and the date an approval will expire if not renewed.

You have the right to request an appeal of an REB decision by writing to REB@nbcc.ca within 30 business days. Your request must include an explanation of why you believe the REB decision is not supported by the TCPS, or why you believe the proposed research procedures and activities are necessary and justified.

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3.4 Step Four: Maintaining Approval

You must maintain REB approval for the duration of research activities involving human participants and must continue to follow the protocols approved by the REB.

If you wish to make changes in the study's methods, recruitment materials, or other procedures from your REB application, you must complete and submit and [Ethics Change Request Form \(3303.4732\)](#) to REB@nbcc.ca and await REB approval before implementing the changes.

The only changes that can be implemented prior to REB review are those needed to remove an immediate hazard to research participants. Such changes must be immediately reported to REB@nbcc.ca.

If you have not completed research activities prior to the expiration date of your REB approval, you must apply for an extension by submitting a completed [Ethics Study Renewal Form \(3303.4741\)](#) to REB@nbcc.ca.

3.5 Step Five: Unanticipated Outcomes

You must immediately report any unanticipated issues, risks, costs, or other adverse effects suffered by human participants in your study to REB@nbcc.ca.

This requirement applies to all studies being conducted at NBCC, including those with multi-jurisdictional approval through another research ethics board and program-level approval.

3.6 Step Six: Completing the Project

When research activities involving human participants are complete, you must notify the REB by sending a completed [Ethics Study Completion Form \(3303.4760\)](#) to REB@nbcc.ca.

4.0 OTHER RELATED DOCUMENTS

Federal Policies

Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) (3303.4649)

NBCC Policies

Integrity in Research (3301)

Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (3303)

Procedures

Program-Level Ethics Review Procedure (3303.4858)

Research Ethics Board Procedure (3303.4878)

Forms

For Applicants:

Application to Involve Human Participants in Research (3303.4652)

Faculty Application to Involve Human Participants in Course-Based Research (3303.4672)

Ethics Review Exemption Form (3303.4705)

Ethics Multi-Jurisdictional Research Form (3303.4711)

Ethics Change Request Form (3303.4732)

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Ethics Study Renewal Form (3303.4741)
Ethics Study Completion Form (3303.4760)
Course-Based Research Ethics Year End Form (3303.4771)

For REB Chair:

REB Annual Activity Report (3303.4781)

Templates

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Template (3303.4650)

Appendix A: Guidance on Assessing Risk in Research

Risk is defined in terms of the magnitude or seriousness of potential harms and the likelihood of these harms occurring. Proper ethical analysis of research must consider both foreseeable risks and any available methods through which they could be eliminated or reduced.

Bear in mind that while the analysis of risk generally focuses on individuals, research in certain disciplines (such as epidemiology, genetics, sociology or cultural anthropology) may present risks that involve the interests of communities, societies, or other defined groups.

- **The magnitude or seriousness of harm:** Potential harms in research span the spectrum from minimal (e.g., inconvenience of participation in research) to substantial (e.g., a major physical injury or an emotional trauma). Harms may be transient, such as a temporary emotional reaction to a survey question, or longer lasting, such as loss of reputation following a breach of confidentiality. Participants' perspectives about harm and risk may vary from researchers'. Individual participants may also vary in their reactions to the research. To whatever extent is possible, researchers and REBs should assess harm from the perspective of participants.
- **The probability of occurrence of harm:** This refers to the likelihood that participants could suffer potential harms. An assessment of this probability may be based on the researcher's past experiences conducting similar studies, on the review of publications detailing rates at which harms occurred in similar situations, or on other empirical evidence. While researchers should attempt to estimate the potential occurrence of relevant harms, this may be difficult or impossible for new or emerging areas of research where comparable studies or publications do not yet exist (TCPS 2 2022, Ch. 2 Sec. B).

Considerations for assessing risk

- Will participating in this research cause participants to be at risk physically?
- Are there any reasons some or all participants might be unduly vulnerable to harm (e.g., age, culture, socioeconomic status, health status)?
- Are there power imbalances between the researcher(s) and participants that might cause potential participants to feel pressure or obligation to participate in the study (e.g., inmates, learners registered in programs, workplace employees, agencies receiving funding or other forms of support from NBCC)?
- Do risks flow from confidentiality (e.g., could the information be of interest to law enforcement agencies)?
- Could participants suffer undue psychological stress?
- Could individuals or groups be stigmatized due to participating in the study?
- Could individuals' or groups' reputations be put at risk due to participating in the study?

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- Could individuals' or groups' political and/or immigration status be put at risk due to participating in the study?

Appendix B: Guidance on Informed Consent in Research

Consent to participate in research must be informed, freely given, and maintained on an ongoing basis, with opportunities to withdraw.

The basic elements of informed consent are:

- it must be expressed explicitly, either verbally or in writing;
- it must be collected in a suitable and understandable form, like a signed consent form, completed questionnaire, or pre-recorded video or audio statement (the REB recognizes that, in some situations, such as ethnographic field work, other methods may be necessary);
- it must be obtained from all participants, their parents (if participants are minors) or authorized third parties (for adult participants lacking the capacity to provide informed consent);
- participants must be allowed sufficient time to make an informed decision.

Informed Consent Checklist*

Most commonly, research participants indicate consent by signing a consent form attached to a letter disclosing information about the research study. Consent forms that will be distributed outside of the college should be printed on NBCC letterhead. The [Consent to Participate in a Research Study Template \(3303.4650\)](#) provides sample text and formatting to meet the requirements below.

Participants should be given the following information about the study, in plain, easily understood language:

- The goal(s) of the research.
- The identity of the student/faculty member/researcher conducting the project.
- The names of any funders or sponsors.
- The expected duration and nature of participation.
- A description of research procedures.
- An explanation of the responsibilities of the participant.
- All reasonably foreseeable risks and potential benefits that may arise from research participation, both to the participants and society.
- An assurance that prospective participants:
 - are under no obligation to participate and are free to withdraw at any time

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- without losing pre-existing rights or benefits;
- will be given information relevant to their decision to participate in a timely manner (e.g., changes to research procedures, newly discovered risks);
- will be informed of their right to withdraw consent for access to data or human biological materials, including information about any limitations on the feasibility of that withdrawal.
- have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm by consenting to participate.
- Information about any possibility of commercializing the research findings.
- Information about any real, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest on the part of the students/faculty members/researchers, their institutions, or the research sponsors.
- An explanation of how research results will be communicated, and whether participants will be directly or indirectly identified.
- The identity and contact information of a qualified representative (e.g., Principal Investigator/Faculty Research Supervisor) who can explain scientific or scholarly aspects of the research to participants.
- The identity and contact information of one or more institutional contacts outside the research team whom participants may contact regarding possible ethical issues in the research (This must include NBCC Manager of Applied Research Services Leanne Carroll, REB@nbcc.ca).
- An indication of what information will be collected about participants and for what purposes.
- An indication of who will have access to information collected about the identity of participants.
- A description of how confidentiality will be protected (see TCPS 2 2022, 5.2).
- An explanation of any potential obligations to disclose information collected, and to whom such disclosures could be made.
- Information about any payments, including incentives for participants, reimbursement for participation-related expenses, and compensation for damages.
- In clinical trials, information on stopping rules and when researchers may remove participants from the trial.

* Bouchard, N. N., M. Briand, M.-C. Dumas, and L. Lapostolle (2024). *Benchmarks for the ethics review of course-based research activities carried out by college students*, 2nd edition, Association pour la recherche au collégial. <https://eduq.info/xmlui/handle/11515/38170> NBCC acknowledges with gratitude this helpful, college-specific resource.

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Appendix C: Guidance on Data Management, Privacy, and Confidentiality

Privacy is the right to control access to information about oneself. **Confidentiality** is an individual or organization's obligation to safeguard information entrusted to them. Fulfilling this ethical duty is essential to maintaining trust between researchers and participants, and to the integrity of research projects. **Security** refers to measures used to protect information. It includes physical, administrative, and technical safeguards. An individual or organization fulfills their confidentiality duties in part by adopting and enforcing appropriate security measures. When external partners are recipients of the research findings, the confidentiality risks are heightened.

Effective retention and safeguarding of accurately recorded and retrievable results are also crucial for maintaining research integrity. Researchers must have access to their original results to respond to questions regarding their research.

Types of Information

Researchers may seek to collect, use, share, and access different types of information about participants. Such information may include personal characteristics or other information about which an individual has a reasonable expectation of privacy (e.g., age, ethnicity, educational background, employment history, health history, life experience, religion, social status).

Researchers and REBs must consider whether personal information proposed to be collected and used in research is identifiable. The following categories provide guidance in assessing the extent to which information could be used to identify an individual participant and strategies for reducing the likelihood of this happening:

- **Directly identifying information**—the information is directly linked to a specific individual's identity (e.g., name, social insurance number, personal health number).
- **Indirectly identifying information**—pieces of information that do not readily reveal the identity of an individual participant on their own, but which could be used to do so when combined (e.g., date of birth, place of residence, or unique personal characteristics).
- **Coded information**—data with direct identifiers removed and replaced with a code. Depending on access to the code, it may be possible to re-identify specific participants (e.g., the principal investigator retains a list that links the participants' code names with their actual names so data can be re-linked if necessary).
- **Anonymized information**—data irreversibly stripped of direct identifiers: there are no codes used to enable future re-linkage. The risk of reidentification of individuals from remaining

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indirect identifiers is low or very low.

- **Anonymous information**—the information never had identifiers associated with it (e.g., anonymous surveys). The risk of identification of individuals is low or very low. (TCPS 2 2022, Chp. 5, Sec. A.).

Data storage and handling procedures

Researchers have a responsibility to participants to safeguard the data with which they are entrusted. Physical safeguards include the use of locked filing cabinets and keeping computers containing research data out of public areas. Administrative safeguards include developing and enforcing organizational rules about who has access to personal information about participants. Technical safeguards include using computer passwords, firewalls, anti-virus software, encryption and other measures that protect data from unauthorized access, loss, or modification.

Data should be stored in a double-locked environment (e.g., a locked filing cabinet in a locked office for paper documents or a password-protected folder on a secured server for electronic documents). If, at some point in the research process, it becomes necessary to transfer files or documents using email, portable file storage devices, or other methods, researchers must take additional precautions to protect their participants' information.

Researchers should consider the following ways to safeguard data when designing their research project, selecting procedures, and preparing ethics applications:

- **Encryption of files and digital storage devices:** if research team members will be transporting or storing data mobile devices—including USB keys—these tools should be handled with the utmost care to avoid loss or theft and should be encrypted to prevent any loss of information should the latter occur.
- **Servers:** Researchers should store confidential research information on secure, NBCC servers whenever possible.
- **Online Surveys:** if online surveys will be used for data collection, the research team must ensure that the service used is secure. NBCC staff and students should use the Microsoft Forms program available to college staff and students.

Secure data destruction on NBCC servers should be conducted with the help of NBCC Information Technology Services. Any breaches in security or loss of data should be reported to the College Office of Research Enterprise at research@nbcc.ca.