
Research Ethics Board Procedure

PURPOSE

This document describes requirements for NBCC's Research Ethics Board (REB)'s composition, meetings, review, communication, and reporting. These guidelines are provided to ensure the college maintains:

1. clear expectations for current and potential REB members;
2. consistent, fair, and transparent REB processes;
3. compliance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) and the Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR).

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This procedure applies to voting and non-voting members of NBCC's REB, and to College Office of Research Enterprise (CORE) staff providing administrative support for research ethics review.

1.0 IMPLEMENTATION

The REB is a group of volunteers serving the college by promoting ethical conduct of research involving humans and reviewing plans for proposed research before they commence. The REB receives administrative support from the College Office of Research Enterprise (CORE), primarily from the REB Office Personnel Role responsibility assigned to one team member (currently the Manager, Applied Research Services).

The REB Office Personnel acts as liaison between the REB and the rest of the college. They maintain a private REB Teams channel to provide a shared work environment for the REB, schedule meetings, monitor the REB@nbcc.ca inbox, and respond to inquiries.

1.1 Voting Board Members

1.1.1 Composition of Voting Membership

"The REB shall consist of at least five members, including both men and women, of whom at least:

- a. two members have expertise in relevant research disciplines, fields and methodologies covered by the REB;
- b. one member is knowledgeable in ethics;
- c. one member is knowledgeable in the relevant law. [. . .].
- d. one community member has no affiliation with the institution.

It is advisable that each member be appointed to formally fulfill the requirement of only one of the above categories.

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To ensure the independence of REB decision making, institutional senior administrators shall not serve on the REB” (TCPS 2 2022, 6.4).

One of the members shall take on leadership responsibilities to serve as REB Chair. The Chair shall hold a faculty position.

1.1.2 Board Recruitment and Appointments

REB appointments are based on an inclusive recruitment process and a fair and impartial selection process that ensures geographic representation from the college’s campuses as well as from sectors aligned with the college’s research areas. The REB Office Personnel approves nominations of REB members, ensuring appropriate composition of the REB.

The Chair shall be appointed by the President, based on the recommendation of the REB and the College Office of Research Enterprise, normally from among the appointed members.

1.1.3 Term of Membership

The normal term-of-office for REB members is three years, which may be renewed once. Appointments can range from one to four years to allow for continuity of membership.

The Chair shall normally serve for a term of three years, which may be renewed once.

1.2 Board Member Responsibilities

REB members are accountable for maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of the ethics review process at NBCC. Their decisions must be reasoned and well-documented and made impartially and independently based on the standards described in the TCPS.

1.2.1 Training and Expertise

New REB members do not require previous experience with research ethics review processes, but they must be willing to develop the knowledge required to provide fair and reasoned reviews.

In addition to participating in ethics-related training activities organized by the college or other REB members, all board members must:

- Read and understand this procedure, [Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans \(3303\)](#), and Other Related Documents below.
- Complete the TCPS CORE online training course.

1.2.2 Meeting Attendance

Members must commit to attending the regular board meetings where review decisions are made. They may also be asked to join delegated REB committees on a rotating, as-needed basis.

1.2.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality shall apply to:

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- Ethics application forms and their contents
- Attachments (and their contents) to ethics application forms.
- Oral and written deliberations of the REB
- Oral and written decisions of the REB
- REB minutes
- Names of applicants
- Correspondence with ethics applicants
- Other matters identified by majority REB decision.

1.3 Non-Voting Members

Additional individuals may attend REB meetings with the board's permission, or at their request. Depending on the individual's role (see below), they may attend regularly or on an as-needed basis. These attendees do not vote on decisions and are not counted toward quorum.

Non-voting members have the same responsibility as voting members to maintain confidentiality, impartiality, and independence with regards to research ethics review board activities.

1.3.1 REB Office Personnel

As the liaison between the REB and the college, they attend REB meetings and take minutes.

1.3.2 *Ad hoc* advisors

The TCPS encourages the addition of ad hoc advisors to provide specific subject matter expertise not available among the REB's regular members. Past REB Chairs are encouraged to serve as ad hoc members for one year after their term has ended.

1.3.3 Observers

REB members in training may be permitted to observe as non-voting members before their term officially begins.

1.4 Meeting Schedule

The NBCC REB meets on the second Thursday of each month of the regular academic year.

There are no meetings in July or August.

1.5 Prior to Each Meeting

1.5.1 Receiving Applications

Applications are due on the first day of each month, or the first business day after that if the first falls on a weekend.

REB Office Personnel will monitor the REB@nbcc.ca inbox and screen applications for completeness. They will upload all applications (and associated attachments) ready for review to the file folders on the REB's Microsoft Teams site and add them to the next meeting agenda.

1.5.2 Applications for Course-Based Research

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REB Office Personnel will notify the REB Chair of any applications received for course-based research eligible for delegated program-level review.

The REB Chair may delegate review to a program-level committee, following the procedure described in [Program-Level Ethics Review Procedure \(3303.4858\)](#).

1.5.3 Meeting Agenda

REB Office Personnel will draft a meeting agenda and ensure a copy is in the MS Teams folder for the REB Chair's review and approval. This will be completed by the end of the first week of each month the REB meets.

The REB Office Personnel will email the agenda link to REB members and other meeting attendees, along with links to all relevant applications and attachments.

1.5.4 Reviewing Applications

Prior to each meeting, REB members will review all applications and attachments and evaluate whether they conform to the ethical standards detailed in the TCPS.

When applicable, they will also disclose any real or apparent conflicts of interest regarding applications to the Chair and REB Office Personnel (see TCPS 2 2022, Ch. 7).

1.6 Meeting Requirements

1.6.1 Quorum

A quorum will be at least 50 percent of the REB voting members plus mandatory representation from the categories set out in TCPS 2 2022, 6.4 (i.e., 1.1.1. above).

To avoid logistical difficulties in achieving quorum, if a member is unable to attend a meeting they may provide comments in advance, including a recommendation for decision. These must be signed and sent to the Chair and REB Office Personnel.

1.6.2 Opening Meeting

The Chair will call and lead each REB meeting after confirming quorum has been met.

When applicable, the Chair will report on any REB-related activities that occurred after the previous meeting.

If any REB members reported a conflict of interest regarding an application on the agenda, the board will decide how to manage the conflict before beginning discussions (see TCPS 2, 7.3).

1.6.3 Discussion

Each ethics application is discussed in turn.

Appendix A: Minimum Criteria for Approval of Research provides a summary of baseline requirements for approval, but the board may consider and discuss additional issues unique to specific applications.

REB Board Members have the right to request information:

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- demonstrating that the applicant or another research team member has the skills needed to execute the research plan.
- not included in the original application package, when the project has prior REB approval.

1.6.4 Decisions

After each application has been reviewed, a decision is made concerning its outcome. The application may be:

- Approved
- Approved with conditions
- Rejected

The REB shall operate by consensus. In the event that consensus cannot be attained, a 50% +1 majority vote shall be required to approve or reject a research project.

The Board shall take note of:

- Conditions that must be met for full approval to be granted;
- Clarifications needed by the REB in order to make an informed decision, and;
- Recommendations for the applicant that are independent of the REB's decision.

1.7 After Each Meeting

1.7.1 Minutes

The REB Office Personnel will file a copy of the minutes in the MS Teams folder.

REB members must communicate any required corrections to the minutes within one week.

1.7.2 Communication with Researchers

The REB Chair will issue requests to researchers for any clarifications required by the board.

The REB Office Personnel will draft and the REB Chair will sign approval or modification letters.

The REB Office Personnel will communicate decisions to applicants.

The REB Office Personnel will follow up with researchers with active REB approvals to request an [Ethics Study Completion Form \(3303.4760\)](#), [Course-Based Research Ethics Year End Form \(3303.4771\)](#), or [Ethics Study Renewal Form \(3303.4741\)](#) prior to the expiration date on their most recent approval or modification letter.

1.8 Academic Year End

1.8.1 Continued Membership

At the **April** REB meeting, members will confirm whether they will continue to serve during the subsequent academic year. A call for new members will be circulated by the REB Office Personnel when necessary.

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1.8.2 Annual Report

The REB Chair will prepare an REB Annual Activity Report (3303.4781) and submit it to NBCC's President **by Aug. 31**. This report will reflect activities by both the Research Ethics Board and any delegated program-level committee(s).

2.0 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

Research Ethics Application Procedure (3303.4838)

Program-Level Ethics Review Procedure (3303.4858)

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 (3303.47151)

Ethics Change Request Form (3303.4732)

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)

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Appendix A: Minimum Criteria for Approval of Research

The REB will take the following into consideration when deciding whether a research project is eligible for REB approval:

1. The College Office of Research Enterprise has been notified about the research via the 3302.4711 Faculty and/or Student Research Project Notice (unfunded projects) or 3302.4731 Request to Apply for External Research Funding (funded projects).
2. Any potential conflicts of interest are declared and managed appropriately to prevent compromising data integrity, analytical objectivity, or the safety or well-being of participants;
3. The research will generate knowledge that could lead to improvements in health or well-being of individuals or society;
4. The methodology is appropriate and capable of answering the research question (TCPS 2 2022, 2.7);
5. The research design does not expose participants to unnecessary risk, with sound procedures selected to minimize potential or unavoidable risks whenever possible;
6. The risks to participants (if any) are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, and the importance of the knowledge that will be generated;
7. The selection of participants is equitable. In making this assessment, the REB will take into account the research's purpose and setting and whether potential risks and benefits of the project are fairly distributed between societal groups;
8. Where applicable, there are sound methodological and ethical justifications for excluding classes of persons who might benefit from the research, or actively recruiting individuals experiencing vulnerability;
9. When some or all of the participants may be in situations or circumstances that make them vulnerable in the context of the research, additional safeguards have been included in research procedures (including data handling and dissemination of results) to protect the rights and welfare of these participants;
10. When applicable, participants should be informed of the amount, method, and schedule of payments or other benefits for participation. The REB should consider whether incentives are proportional or if they could provide undue inducement and lead participants to disregard risks or feel coerced;
11. Informed consent will be sought from each prospective participant or from the participant's legally authorized representative;

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- 12.** The informed consent process will ensure the research purpose and procedures and other required elements of consent are accurately explained to participants, including the right to withdraw from the study;
- 13.** The informed consent process will be appropriately documented;
- 14.** There will be adequate provisions to protect the privacy of participants and to maintain the confidentiality of data;
- 15.** There will be adequate provisions for the timely publication or dissemination of the research results, unless there is an ethically acceptable reason for withholding publication or dissemination (e.g., Indigenous community control);
- 16.** Studies proposing access to, or collection of, personal information include adequate security and data management measures to ensure that information is protected and in compliance with applicable privacy legislation;
- 17.** Additional criteria should be considered for research involving Indigenous peoples in Canada, research on materials related to human reproduction, or genetic research to ensure it complies with TCPS Chapter 9 and other relevant policies and/or Regulations.

†This has been adapted from the N2 (Network of Networks)/CAREB-ACCER (Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards / L'association canadienne des comités d'éthique de la recherche) REB Standard Operating Procedures: <https://careb-accer.org/resources-section/n2-careb-accer-reb-sops/>. NBCC acknowledges with gratitude this helpful resource.

Appendix B: Criteria for Reviewing Applications

Considerations for reviewing risk

- Could participating in this research pose greater than minimal risk to participants?
- What precautions have been taken to minimize risk to participants?
- Are the risks reasonable in relation to the benefits?
- Do the application attachments advise prospective participants of risks involved, appropriate support services available, and the costs incurred by accessing these support services?

Considerations for reviewing informed consent

See also *Research Ethics Application Procedure (3303.4838), Appendix B for an Informed Consent Checklist.*

- Will the researchers seek consent from all research participants? How will consent be obtained and documented?
- Will participants be provided with enough information to make an informed decision about participating? (E.g., project goals, who is conducting/funding the project, research procedures, obligations of participants, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality.)
- Are procedures sufficient to ensure that consent is freely given? (E.g., adequate time provided to consider participation; no coercion/pressure, including from disproportionate incentives; potential power imbalances between participants/researchers are considered.)
- Are participants informed of their right to withdraw consent to participate? Are procedures in place that would enable them to do this, or to report concerns about the project? If there are limits to ability to withdraw, are they reasonable and disclosed?

Considerations for reviewing privacy and confidentiality

- Access to contact data of participants and raw data (including audio or video files): How will data be stored? How long will it be stored? Will it be made public? What security measures have been put in place to safeguard the information? How and when will the data be destroyed or archived?
- How will participants' privacy be respected? (E.g., qualitative with names and quotes vs. quantitative aggregated data, use of pseudonyms vs. real names, participant review of data before publication.)
- Will it be possible to identify participants owing to uniqueness, recognizability, or community/population size? Are there precautions to alleviate this?
- For group settings, how will the researcher manage confidentiality among the participants? How will confidentiality guidelines be described to participants?
- If anonymity is optional, is there a provision in the consent form or a separate confidentiality waiver to have the participant allow the use of his/her/their name?

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