

A Guide to the Research Approval Process

This guide is meant to provide a basic orientation to the conduct of research within the Department of Public Safety. We want to help you through the process but please realize your research must comply with our guidelines and that you must submit an application in a timely fashion with the all the requested information. Please feel free to email us for help or if you have questions about whether your research design requires approval.

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety is committed to facilitating and promoting research that will increase the ability of the agency and researchers to inform corrections policy, practice, and that contributes to general knowledge of criminal justice and other academic fields. We are committed to the safety and rights of individuals placed in our custody or in our employ. For these reasons all proposed research that uses employees of, or offenders in the custody of, or data belonging to the Department shall submit an application that is:

- (1) Assessed for scientific merit
- (2) Reviewed for protection of human subjects and
- (3) Authorized by the participating Section (e.g., adult & juvenile facilities, community supervision)

After you submit your application, a review panel composed of research and corrections professionals will review the application for evidence of sufficient methodological rigor to provide useful and generalizable information related to the rehabilitation of offenders or other Departmental interests. Don't worry if you topic doesn't deal directly with offender rehabilitation, the Department performs many functions and has interests in legal, sociological, psychological, and other applied topics that relate to offenders or corrections professionals. If the review panel has any questions about the information in your application, they will ask you to revise your application and re-submit it for review. If there are revisions this process usually takes about a month.

If the panel has no questions or after you have successfully revised your application, it will be forwarded to the Human Subjects Review Committee, the Department's IRB. Your application will be reviewed to make certain adequate precautions have been taken to protect the human subjects in your study from coercion to participate, from physical or mental harms, and have adequately provided safeguards to protect their confidentiality. If you are conducting research on incarcerated offenders there are additional restrictions on permitted research. We extend many of these restrictions to other offenders placed in our custody as well. (See the section on permitted research if you have questions about whether or not your research requires this additional scrutiny.) If this committee has any questions about the information in your application, they will ask you to clarify or revise your application and re-submit it for review. If there are no revisions this process usually takes about a month from the time your application is accepted.

Lastly, your application will be reviewed by a representative from the Section where your research will occur. This authority is charged with evaluating your proposal for issues that may impact the operations and security of correctional institutions, offenders, staff, and the individual(s) conducting the research. If the Section has any questions about the design you propose or the materials required to complete the study they will ask you to clarify or revise your application and re-submit it for review. If there are no revisions this process usually

takes about a month from the time your application is approved by the human subjects committee.

Once all parties have reviewed and approved the application, you'll receive certification from the Department which permits you to conduct the research you've proposed. If the IRB at your institution has approved your proposal, you may contact the individuals within the Department to arrange the start of your study.

Our aim is to help you minimize delays in your research and to help you navigate our large agency. If you have questions about your study design as it relates to Departmental policies and practices, please feel free to email us and we will try to help answer your questions.

Permitted Research

Not all research is permitted with prisoners and probationers. There are both federal regulations and departmental policies that may prohibit certain projects. There must be a compelling reason to conduct research with offenders. Your research, in our judgment, must be relevant to offenders, prisons and/or other correctional issues.

The Code of Federal Regulations stipulates the type of research that can involve prisoners as subjects. On the OHRP website, you can view the categories of permissible research (45 CFR 46.306(a) (2)). As noted earlier, we extend many of these restrictions to other offenders placed in our custody as well.

Your research must meet seven criteria in addition to that of relevance:

- (1) the research is in one of the categories of permissible research (<http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/45cfr46.html#46.306>)
- (2) there cannot be any undue incentives as a consequence of taking part
- (3) the risks involved in the research are equivalent to risks that would be accepted by non-prisoner volunteers
- (4) procedures for the selection of subjects within the prison are fair to all prisoners and that prison authorities or other prisoners cannot intervene in the selection
- (5) information about the project is written at a level that prisoners can understand.
- (6) that there is no gain, nor perception of gain, for a prisoner taking part, and that there is no penalty, nor perception of a penalty, for a prisoner saying "no."
- (7) adequate provision is made for follow-up examination or care after the end of their participation, if needed.

Applying to Conduct Research

- [Application](#)

The application must provide a brief but comprehensive description of the project with enough information to demonstrate your ability to conduct the project. You need to explain what you expect staff to do. You also need to thoroughly explain your method of preserving confidentiality, since this is a significant concern with most research involving offenders. The application contains explicit details on the type of information we expect you to provide. Please read the instructions carefully and submit all requested information.

- [Informed Consent Statement](#)

The Informed Consent document contains several required statements. Please use these statements as written. You may use any format you desire, but please be certain to include the 11 required elements.

You must also include the following with your application:

- [Copies of any tests, surveys and/or interview questions](#)

The merit panel and review committee will need to review and approve copies of the actual tests, surveys or interview forms. You may have to send these copies via postal mail. You must indicate whether the instrument has been field tested and/or validated or provide a proposal that incorporates these elements. If the instrument cannot be validated you should provide justification in your study design.

- [Approval letter from your institution's IRB](#)

We will need the IRB approval letter from your institution prior to our certification. You need to be aware that the IRB from your institution will be the IRB of record. In this case, that IRB needs to have a prisoner representative as a member. If that committee has a requirement of needing our approval letter first, we will negotiate with that committee.

Approval by the Department means that you may conduct the research at the sites you have specified but you will still need to work out the administrative details (e.g., times, dates, room locations, etc.) with appropriate field staff. Your certification will include these contacts.

Dates and deadlines

Applications are reviewed as time permits. The Research Merit Panel requires two weeks for review and meets at the discretion of the Human Subjects Review Committee Chair. The Human Subjects Review Committee has scheduled meetings on the 3rd Friday of each month. You need to have received an acceptance letter from the Research Merit Panel by the 1st Friday of a particular month to fall on this committee's agenda. The Divisional Authorizing Authority requires 3 weeks for review and meets at the discretion of the Human Subjects Review Committee Chair. Staff will return incomplete proposals to the investigator.

Submission Instructions

Please submit as much as possible of the required information electronically. The application and informed consent statement *must* be submitted electronically and in Word format.

The appropriate email address for submissions is: megan.q.howell@ncdps.gov

The postal address is:

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Questions?

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