



Guidelines for Conducting External Research in the York Region District School Board

Email: External.Research@yrdsb.ca

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Introduction

The York Region District School Board (YRDSB) considers requests by institutions, agencies, staff members, or other individuals to conduct research in its schools and departments. While being supportive of external research, the Board recognizes that students have been entrusted to the schools for their own personal education and considers this its primary focus. The YRDSB **External Research Review Committee (ERRC)** reviews applications for all requests to conduct research in the Board to ensure the research complies with ethical and methodological standards and aligns with system priorities as outlined in Board Plans (i.e., Trustee's [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#), [Director's Action Plan](#) and [Board Strategies](#)). This document includes guidelines for submitting research applications and conducting research in the YRDSB.

Applications will be accepted from:

- Master's and Doctoral candidates.
- Persons conducting institutionally-funded research projects (e.g., universities, colleges, agencies, hospitals).
- YRDSB staff conducting research for graduate degrees; and
- Ministries or ministry-funded consultants conducting research/evaluation.

Note: Because of the large number of requests to conduct research in the YRDSB, proposals from undergraduates are given low priority. Market research is only considered if there is educational application or relevance.

If you are interested in conducting research within the YRDSB, please do not approach any staff member or school administrator prior to receiving approval from the ERRC. Please note that approval of external research applications is not guaranteed, and ERRC approval does not obligate the Board or any department, school, or individual within the Board to participate in the research.

Application Deadlines

The YRDSB External Research Review Committee accepts applications four times per year and approval is granted for **one school year only**. Application deadlines are updated annually and are found on the [External Research website](#).

Applicants will be notified of the ERRC's decision by email within six weeks following the application deadline on one of the following outcomes: **Approved**, **Approved with Conditions** (e.g., revisions or additional information required), or **Not Approved**. Applications that are **incomplete** or **do not meet the submission deadline** will not be reviewed. Please note that all ERRC decisions are **final**, and we do not accept appeals.

Contact

For questions regarding the research application and review process, please contact: External.Research@yrdsb.ca.

Application Process

To be considered for approval, all applicants must ensure the following:

- The application is consistent with the Guidelines for Conducting External Research.
- All sections of the YRDSB External Research application are complete.
- All supporting documentation is included (see [Appendix A](#): ERRC Application Checklist, page 14).
- All materials are organized into collated packages for distribution.
- [Application to Conduct Research form](#) is submitted by the application deadline.
- **All supporting documents collated as one PDF file** are submitted by the application deadline to: External.Research@yrdsb.ca

What happens after I have submitted my application?

- The External Research Review Committee reviews the proposal.
- Committee members make recommendations to the Director of Education, who makes the final decision.
- The applicant is notified in writing of the committee's decision within six weeks following an application deadline.
- If the study is approved, researchers must submit a summary of the study to External.Research@yrdsb.ca, which will be forwarded to school principals by a member of the External Research Review Committee.
- Researchers should wait until principals have been notified of the project's approval by a member of the ERRC in the Research and Assessment Services department before contacting them with an invitation letter to participate in the research.
- If principals agree to their school's participation, researchers may make practical arrangements for implementing the project. **Please note that principals have the right to refuse research projects in their schools even after the ERRC committee approves the study.**
- Researchers must complete and submit the [Annual Status Report](#) by June 30 of the academic year in which the study was approved.
- If applicable, researchers must submit a [Request to Renew, Extend, or Amend and Existing External Research](#) by the next application deadline.
- Upon completion of the study (as outlined in [TCPS 2](#), refers to the last interaction with the final participant, serving the purpose of data collection or follow-up monitoring. It also denotes the conclusion of final data analysis. When a study reaches the concluding stages of data analysis and the preparation of manuscripts or reports, it becomes eligible for closure, provided that no further contact or follow-up with participants occurs, no new data are integrated into the analyses, and no adjustments are made to the YRDSB-approved research protocol):
 - A study [Completion/Termination Report](#) indicating the completion or termination of the study must be submitted by June 30 of the academic year in which that data was collected.

- All reports/publications (e.g., thesis, research article) that emerge from the research must be submitted to External.Research@yrdsb.ca.
- An [External Research Snapshot](#) must be completed with links to all reports/publications for the purpose of knowledge mobilization.

Review Criteria

Applications must meet the following criteria to be considered for approval.

Educational Relevance and Contributions to the YRDSB

- Does the study align with YRDSB's priorities as outlined in the Trustee's [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#), [Director's Action Plan](#), and [Board Strategies](#)?
- Is there a clear benefit of the study to public education and to the YRDSB community?
- Is the study consistent with Board policies and procedures, including [Board Policy and Procedure #180 - External Research](#)?
- Does the study align with (but not duplicate) YRDSB initiatives?
- Is there a process for providing feedback of results to participating schools or departments?

Research Methodology

- Does the study include a well-designed methodology?
- Does the methodology align with the study's objectives?
- Are the theory and research questions clearly articulated and explained in plain language?
- Are there explicit procedures for selecting the sample?
- Are the study instruments adequate and appropriate?
- Does the study design align with the [YRDSB Policy 261.0- Equity and Inclusivity Policy](#)?
- Is the intended use of the research results clearly outlined?

Ethical Standards

- Does the study adhere to the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 \(2022\)](#) (i.e., the study involves minimal risk to participants; there are clear procedures for obtaining active informed consent; the researcher ensures the privacy and confidentiality of participants; there is no conflict of interest)?

Protection of Staff, Students and Board Resources:

- Are the requests made for staff, students, or Board resources reasonable and realistic?
- Does the study involve minimal time commitment for teachers, administrators, or other Board staff, and minimal disruption to the school day?
- Is this study free from intrusive and sensitive items?

- Are the well-being and safety of participants ensured throughout the study?
- Is there an appropriate protocol in place to address sensitive issues that may arise during the study (e.g., right to withdraw, disclosure of sensitive information by participants, debriefing participants)?
- Does the study safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of participants?
- Do requests for personal information comply with the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act \(MFIPPA\)](#), [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, Board Policy and Procedure #158.0 – Information Access and Privacy Protection](#), and [Canada’s Anti-Spam Legislation \(CASL\)](#)?
- Does the study align with [Anti-Racism Data Standards](#) and [The Human Rights-Based Approach \(HRBA\) Framework by the Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)?

Application Guidelines

Applications must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Ethics:** All members of the research team who belong to an institution with a Research Ethics Board (REB) must first get approval from their own REB before submission to YRDSB. The YRDSB External Research Review Committee will not accept applications currently under review by an REB. The study must be free of topics that students, staff, or parents/guardians may consider an invasion of privacy. The study must outline a clear process to deal with sensitive issues should they arise during the research (e.g., disclosure of sensitive information by participants).
- Collection of Personal Information:** Personal information is defined as: Information related to racial identity, religion, age, sex, marital or family status, psychiatric, criminal or employment history, and any identifying number assigned to an individual such as address, telephone number, or email address. Personal information may only be used for the specific purposes for which it is gathered and must be necessary for the adequate interpretation of the research findings. Study participants must be informed when personal information is being collected and how it will be used. Where personal information is requested, the researcher must complete the **Use of Personal Information for Research Purposes Agreement** ([Appendix B](#)). Please note that under the [MFIPPA](#), information collected as the routine part of school records is not obtained with the expectation of disclosure to independent researchers. Therefore, it is not possible for the YRDSB to identify individuals or groups of students for the researchers.
- Staff as Researchers:** Researchers who are also YRDSB staff may **not** gather data from their own students or departments, or from any staff over whom they have authority for the purpose of collaboration with external agencies or to meet academic requirements (e.g., course requirements, thesis). If a YRDSB employee is collaborating with someone from outside the YRDSB, the application to External Research Review Committee must include the application and approval letter from the Research Ethics Board of the collaborator's institution.
- Contacting Schools:** Individuals seeking to access YRDSB schools for the purposes of any data collection are not permitted to contact the schools directly, or share any materials related to the research with staff or schools without first submitting an application and obtaining written approval from the ERRC. The Committee reserves the right to restrict access for researchers who do not follow this protocol. If approval is granted, researchers will be notified when they are permitted to contact schools.
- Access to Schools:** Approval by the ERRC does not guarantee that principals or department managers will accommodate the study. Principals or department managers have the right to refuse research projects in their schools. The final decision to participate in the research rests with individual participants.

6. **Recruitment:** The Board does not assist with the recruitment of participants for any External Research projects. The Board cannot provide email addresses of Board staff or post information regarding External Research studies on any Board website or intranet.
7. **Data Collection Instruments:** Final copies of all data collection instruments (e.g., questionnaires, interview questions, tests) must be submitted to the ERRC as part of the application.
8. **Participant Information Letters:** Researchers must provide to all participants and parents/guardians, an information letter that explains the purpose of the research, explicitly states that the research is voluntary, and describes the types of questions that will be asked and when, where, and how the information will be collected. This information should be clearly outlined in sufficient detail so that potential participants can determine the relative risk versus benefit for themselves and/or their child and make an informed decision about participating in the research. Information letters must indicate that the research has ethics approval from the REB of the researcher's institution (if applicable) and that the YRDSB External Research Review Committee has approved the research. See [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information.
9. **Informed Consent Forms:** All researchers **must obtain active consent** for all participants and all forms of data collection (e.g., audio/video recording, photo taking, interviewing). Active parent/guardian consent and separate student assent are required for all students under 18. If student assent will be obtained verbally (when age appropriate), the verbal assent script must be submitted with the application. Researchers are not allowed to collect personal information (e.g., birthdates, phone numbers, or email addresses) through the consent form not deemed necessary for consent provision. Researchers will not collect any information on participants who decline to participate. See [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information.
10. **Invitation Letter for Principals:** Researchers are required to provide an invitation letter for principals that is to be sent to school principals by Research and Assessment Services staff **for approved studies only** (see [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information). Please note that approval by the ERRC does not guarantee that principals or department managers will accommodate a study. Principals have the right to refuse research studies in their schools.
11. **Accessibility of Research Materials:** At the request of the school principal, participant, or department supervisor, the study must adapt all materials to meet the needs of the participant. This may include, but is not limited to, the provision of accessible formats or the translation of materials into the appropriate language(s).
12. **Confidentiality and Data Storage:** Participating students, families, staff, schools, and the Board must be assured confidentiality. Under no circumstances will researchers identify individual

participants, individual schools, or the Board in any report, presentation, or publication of results. Researchers must inform participants about what data will be collected, who will have access to the data, how the information will be securely stored and used, the protections in place to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and who to contact for more information about the data collected. This information should be included in the information letter and consent forms. It is the researcher's responsibility to securely retain the data and evidence of written consent for all research participants for at least five years. **Storing data for future use (e.g., another study) is not permitted.**

13. **Incentives and Honoraria:** Offering incentives to research participants (e.g., gift cards) is not permitted. If the researcher wants to thank participants, as a token of appreciation, honoraria in the form of a direct contribution may be offered to participating schools or departments to use for relevant school-based activities or resources.
14. **Police Vulnerable Sector Check:** A Police Vulnerable Sector Check (PVSC) is required for all researchers who will have direct contact with a student(s) at any time. Costs, timelines, forms, and locations differ by jurisdiction of the researcher. Applicants must contact their local police department for information. The PVSC should be dated no more than 6 months prior to the YRDSB's application deadlines.

All researchers are to always carry the original PVSC while on board property for the purpose of the research or while collecting data off Board property. Researchers may be asked to present the police check to an administrator or staff member at any time. Should the research staff change, a PVSC for replacement or additional staff should be submitted to the committee prior to their engagement in any research activities.

15. **Debriefing:** Researchers are required to debrief with participants following their participation in the research. Participants should be debriefed orally immediately following data collection and be provided with a copy of the written debriefing. Debriefing must include an explanation about the purpose of the research, why the research approach was used, an explicitly stated opportunity for the participant to withdraw their consent to use their data in the research, and the researcher's contact information. Parents/Guardians who provided consent for their children's participation should also be given a copy of the written debriefing. All forms of debriefing should be presented in accessible, age-appropriate language (see [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information). If the research includes sensitive questions (e.g., related to mental health), the researcher must provide adequate follow-up resources. Use of school resources (e.g., staff psychologist, social worker, resource teacher) for the purpose of this debriefing protocol must be approved by the Board and school administrator in advance and should not be the extent of the debriefing.
16. **Timing of Access to Schools:** Research must involve minimal time commitment for students, teachers, administrators, or other Board staff, and minimal disruption to the school day. Data collection during the months of September and June, and January (in semestered schools) will

not be approved due to the large number of demands on schools during these months.

17. **Approval Period:** EERC approval is for **one academic year** only. All approvals will expire on June 30 of that academic year.
18. **Annual Status Report:** By June 30 of the academic year in which the study was approved, the researcher must submit an electronic copy of an [Annual Status Report](#) to confirm completion of data collection, or a [request to renew, extend, or amend](#) the existing study. Failure to submit this report will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee. See [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information.
19. **Requests for Study Renewal, Extension, or Amendment:** Ongoing and longitudinal studies require annual renewal and approval. If a researcher would like to extend a previously approved study in a new academic year, a [Request to Renew, Extend, or Amend form](#) and/or new application that clearly outlines the rationale for continuing the research and any modifications or amendments to the original research protocols is required. Requests to extend or renew previously approved studies will be considered on a case-by-case basis and are conditional upon availability and interest of schools. See [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information.

Note: If research staff changes, a [Request to Renew, Extend, or Amend form](#) must be completed and submitted to EERC before they become involved in the research.

20. **Study Completion and Knowledge Mobilization:**

- Upon completion of the study:
 - A study [Completion/Termination Report](#) indicating the completion or termination of the study must be submitted.
 - A [Research Snapshot](#) form must be completed with links to all reports/publications (e.g., thesis, research article) that emerge from the research. Please note that all publications and reports must respect the anonymity of participants and should contain results of aggregate data only. Under no circumstances should a researcher share individual data with participants, school staff, or parents/guardians. The researcher agrees to allow the report to be circulated within the Board and publicly. Where appropriate, the researcher(s) also agrees to provide presentations or workshops at the conclusion of the study to make research connections for YRDSB staff.

Note: Failure to submit the above-mentioned documents will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee. See [Guidelines for Supporting Documentation](#) section for more information.

Guidelines for Supporting Documentation

All supporting documentation (i.e., Invitation Letters, Information Letters, Consent Forms, etc.) must contain clear, easy-to-read, and age-appropriate language and adhere to the ERRC guidelines. Applications that do not contain appropriate supporting documentation and documents that do not follow the guidelines will be considered **incomplete**.

Principal Invitation Letter

Researchers whose applications are approved by the ERRC who wish to conduct research in schools must obtain permission from school principals. Please note that principals have the right to refuse research projects in their schools. After a study has been approved, the Research and Assessment Services department will forward the invitation letters submitted by the researcher to school principals.

Principal Invitation Letters must contain the following information:

- An introduction with detailed information about the researcher/s.
- A brief description of the study's purpose, research question(s) and the theoretical foundation informing the study.
- A statement that the research has been approved by the institution's Research Ethics Board and the YRDSB External Research Review Committee.
- An explanation of how the study relates to broader topics/issues.
- Timelines about when data collection will take place.
- Who will be invited to participate in the research (e.g., students, teachers, principals).
- What the participant will be asked to do for the research (e.g., complete a survey, focus group).
- The types of questions that will be asked of participants.
- Whether participation will be individual or in a group.
- Whether participation will be during school time or outside of school hours.
- The approximate time required for participation.
- Information about how data will be securely stored and used, for how long, and who will have access to participants' information.
- A statement that individual results will not be shared and that participants will remain anonymous in any reports generated from the research.
- Contact information for the researcher, the institution's Research Ethics Board, and the YRDSB External Research Review Committee (External.Research@yrdsb.ca).

Participant and Parent/Guardian Information Letter

All researchers are required to provide an **Information Letter** to participants and/or parents/guardians. Information letters must contain clear, easy-to-read, and age-appropriate language. All information letters should accompany the consent form and must contain the following information:

- An introduction with detailed information about the researcher/s.
- The purpose of the study.
- A statement that the project has been approved by the institution's Research Ethics Board and the YRDSB External Research Review Committee and the school principal.
- Timelines about when data collection will take place.
- What the participant will be asked to do for the research (e.g., complete a survey, focus group).
- The types of questions that will be asked of participants.
- Whether participation will be individual or in a group.
- Whether participation will be during school time or outside of school hours.
- The approximate time required for participation.
- A statement that participation in the research is voluntary and that individuals may refuse to answer any questions.
- A statement that participants may withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason and with no adverse consequences.
- Information about how data will be securely stored and used, for how long, and who will have access to participants' information.
- How anonymity and/or confidentiality will be ensured.
- A statement that individual results will not be shared and that participants will remain anonymous in any reports generated from the research.
- **For research involving students:**
 - A statement that student assent must be obtained regardless of parent/guardian consent and that students may refuse participation in the research.
 - A statement regarding what the child will be doing during the data collection period if the parent/guardian declines consent and/or the child declines assent; and
 - A statement that the research results will not appear in any school records or be shared with the child's teacher or school principal.
- If applicable, the process of video/audio recording should be clearly outlined.
- Translation of letters where appropriate

- Contact information for the researcher, the institution's Research Ethics Board, the YRDSB External Research Review Committee (External.Research@yrdsb.ca) and the school principal.

Informed Consent Form

Informed consent is required from all participants (e.g., students, principals, teachers). Informed consent must be obtained from parents/guardians for all students under 18. Students aged 18 years or over or who have withdrawn from parental control may consent on their own behalf. Student assent must also be obtained regardless of parent/guardian consent. Consent forms should be accompanied by a participant or parent/guardian information letter. Consent forms must contain clear, easy-to-read, and age-appropriate language. All consent forms must include:

- Study title.
- Researcher's name and contact information.
- A statement that participation in the research is voluntary and that individuals may refuse to answer any questions.
- A statement that participants may withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason and with no adverse consequences.
- Information about how data will be securely stored and used, for how long, and who will have access to participants' information.
- How anonymity and/or confidentiality will be ensured.
- A statement that individual results will not be shared and that participants will remain anonymous in any reports generated from the research.
- A statement that the participant or parent/guardian has read and understood the request to participate or, if applicable, for their child to participate in the study.
- An option to provide consent for all forms of data collection (e.g., survey, interviews, video recording, audio recording, photo taking).
- An option for the participant, or parent/guardian to print their name or student's name.
- An option for the parent/guardian to sign and date the form.
- An option for the student to sign and date the form (if 18 years or older).
- A statement that only those participants or parents/guardians who consent should return the form.
- Instructions on how to submit the form.

Debriefing

Researchers are required to debrief participants following their participation in the research. Participants should be debriefed orally immediately following data collection and be provided with a copy of the written debriefing. Parents/Guardians who provided consent for their children's participation should also be given a copy of the written debriefing. All forms of debriefing should be presented in accessible, age-appropriate language, and should contain the following information:

- A statement thanking participants for their time and participation in the research.
- A statement that the research has been approved by the institution's Research Ethics Board and the YRDSB External Research Review Committee.
- Details about the study's purpose, research question(s) and the theoretical foundation informing the study.
- An explanation of how the study relates to broader topics/issues.
- Affirmation that individual results will not be shared and that participants will remain anonymous in any reports generated from the research.
- Contact information for the researcher, the institution's Research Ethics Board, the YRDSB External Research Review Committee, YRDSB Research and Assessment Services, and the school principal.
- An opportunity for participants to ask questions or, for written debriefs, an invitation for participants to contact the researcher with any questions they may have after their participation.
- Information about follow-up resources (e.g., Kids Help Phone) for any research involving sensitive questions or topics.
- Information about how interested participants may obtain further information about the topic of study

Annual Status Report

By June 30 of the academic year in which the study was approved, the researcher must submit an electronic copy of an [Annual Status Report](#) that confirms completion of data collection, and expected date of submission of the Summary Report, [Completion/Termination Report](#) of the study, **or** intention to [Request to Renew, Extend, or Amend an Existing External Research](#) study. Failure to submit this report will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee.

Study Completion/Termination Report

Upon completion of the study:

- A study [Completion/Termination Report](#) indicating the completion or termination of the study must be submitted.
- All reports/publications (e.g., thesis, research article) that emerge from the research must be submitted to External.Research@yrdsb.ca.

Requests for Study Renewal, Extension, or Amendment

ERRC approval is for one academic year only. Ongoing and longitudinal studies require annual renewal and approval. If a researcher would like to extend previously approved research in a new academic year, a new application that clearly outlines the rationale for continuing the research and any modifications or amendments to the original research protocols is required. Requests to renew, extend, or amend previously approved studies will be considered on a case-by-case basis and are conditional upon availability and interest of schools. Participant consent must also be renewed annually.

- [Request to Renew, extend, or amend](#) must be submitted by the first application deadline of the academic year in which the researchers would like to continue the study. Applicants will be notified of the decision within four to six weeks following the application deadline.

Appendix A: ERRC Research Application Checklist

Before submitting, please confirm your application complies with the following requirements:

1. **The proposed study has the prior approval of the affiliated agency or institution.** A copy of the ethics approval is submitted with this application.
2. **The YRDSB research application form is completed in full using the template provided.** Applications deemed **incomplete** or who **do not meet the submission deadline** will be notified that their application will not be reviewed.
3. **Final copies of all data collection instruments are included** (e.g., copies of all tests, questionnaires, and other data collection instruments which students, staff, and/or parents/guardians will be asked to complete).
4. **A copy of the Invitation Letter for School Principals** is included, if applicable (see page 9).
5. **Copies of Information Letters, Active Consent Forms and Student Assent Forms for staff, students or parents/guardians are included** with the application materials (see pages 10-11).
6. **Debriefing Form is included** (see page 12).
7. **Copies of Police Vulnerable Sector Checks** dated no more than 6 months prior to the YRDSB's application deadline, **have been included** for all person(s) who will be in direct contact with students as part of the research.
8. **Use of Personal Information for Research Purposes Agreement is included, if applicable** (see Appendix B).



Appendix B: Use of Personal Information for Research Purposes Agreement

[Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990](#)

This agreement is made between (name of researcher) _____, referred to below as the researcher and (name of institution) _____, referred to below as the institution.

The researcher has requested access to the following records that contain personal information and are in the custody or under the control of the institution:(describe the records below.)

The researcher understands and promises to abide by the following terms and conditions:

1. The researcher will not use the information in the records for any purpose other than the following research purpose unless the researcher has the institution's written authorization to do so:
(describe the research purpose below.)

2. The researcher will give access to personal information in a form in which the individual to whom it relates can be identified only to the following persons: (*name the persons below.*)

3. Before disclosing personal information to the persons mentioned above, the researcher will enter into an agreement with those persons to ensure that they will not disclose it to any other person.
4. The researcher will keep the information in a physically secure location to which access is given only to the researcher and to the persons mentioned above.
5. The researcher will destroy all individual identifiers in the information by (date) .
6. The researcher will not contact any individual to whom personal information relates directly or indirectly without the institution's prior written authority.
7. The researcher will ensure that no personal information will be used or disclosed in a form in which the individual to whom it relates can be identified without the institution's written authority.
8. The researcher will notify the institution in writing immediately upon becoming aware that any of the conditions set out in this agreement have been breached.

Signed on this day of , 20.

Researcher

Name:
Signature:
Address:
Telephone:

Representative of Institution

Name:
Signature:
Position:
Institution:
Address:
Telephone:

Personal information is collected pursuant to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Privacy Act. Questions about this collection can be directed to the Coordinator of Research and Evaluation Services, The York Region District School Board, 60 Wellington Street West, Aurora, Ontario, L4G 3H2 (905) 727-0022.