



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 our board to ensure that 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 Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being](#)). 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, etc.);
- 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 can be found on the [External Research website](#).

Applicants will be notified of the ERRC's decision by email within 6 weeks following the application deadline on one of the following outcomes: *Reject*, *Approve*, *Approve with Conditions*, or *Revise and Resubmit*. 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 ERRC Review Criteria and the Application Guidelines.
- All sections of the YRDSB External Research Application are complete.
- All supporting documentation is included (see Application Checklist, page 12).
- All materials are organized into collated packages for distribution.
- **One (1) electronic copy** to External.Research@yrdsb.ca is submitted by the application deadline.
- **Ten (10) paper copies** of the application and all supporting documents are submitted by the application deadline to:

ATTENTION: External Research
Research Services
Centre for Leadership and Learning
300 Harry Walker Parkway South
Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 8E2

What happens after I have submitted my application?

- The proposal is considered by the External Research Review Committee.
- Committee members make recommendations to the Director of Education, who makes the final decision about the approval, rejection or deferral of applications.
- The applicant is notified in writing of the committee's decision within 6 weeks following an application deadline.
- If the study is approved, researchers must submit a summary of the study to: External.Research@yrdsb.ca, to be forwarded to school principals by a member of the External Research Review Committee.
- Researchers may then contact principals 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 committee approves the study.
- Researchers must submit a Status Report Letter (see page 11) by June 30th of the academic year in which the study was approved to External.Research@yrdsb.ca.
- If applicable, researchers must submit a Request for Project Renewal, Extension, or Amendment (see page 11) by the next application deadline.
- Upon completion of the study, a Study Completion Report (see page 6) and any other reports/publications (e.g., thesis, research article) that emerge from the research must be submitted to External.Research@yrdsb.ca for the purposes 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 research align with YRDSB's priorities as outlined in the Trustee's [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#), [Director's Action Plan](#)?
- Is there a clear benefit of the study to public education and to the YRDSB community?
- Is the research consistent with Board policies and procedures, including [Board Policy and Procedure #180 - External Research](#)?
- 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 research adhere to the External Research Review Committee's application guidelines?
- Is the intended use of the research results clearly outlined?

Ethical Standards

- Does the research adhere to the [Tri-Council Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 \(2018\)](#) (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)?
- Do requests for personal information comply with the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1989](#) (MFIPPA), [Board Policy and Procedure #158.0 – Information Access and Privacy Protection](#), and [Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation](#) (CASL)?

Protection of Staff, Students and Board Resources:

- Are the requests made of 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?
- Does the study align with (but not duplicate) YRDSB initiatives?

Application Guidelines

Applications must adhere to the following Application Guidelines:

- 1. Ethics:** All members of the research team who belong to an institution that has a Research Ethics Board (REB) must first obtain approval from their own REB prior to submission to YRDSB. Applications that are currently under review by an REB will not be accepted by the YRDSB External Research Review Committee. The study must be free of topics that students, staff, or parents/guardians may consider to be 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).
- 2. 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 Form](#) (see Appendix A of the [External Research Application Form](#)). 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 particular individuals or groups of students for the researchers.
- 3. 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. 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.
- 4. 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 YRDSB External Research Review Committee. 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.
- 5. Access to Schools:** Approval by the External Research Review Committee does not guarantee that a study will be accommodated by principals or department managers. 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. We 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, etc.) must be submitted 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 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 Participant and Parent/Guardian Information Letters on page 9 for guidelines on completing participant information letters.
- 9. Informed Consent Forms:** All researchers are required to obtain **active** consent for all participants and must obtain consent for **all** forms of data collection (e.g. audio/video recording, photo taking, interviewing, etc.). Active parent/guardian consent **and** separate student assent are required for all students under the age of 18. If student assent will be obtained verbally (when age appropriate), the verbal assent script must be submitted with the application. Researchers are not permitted to collect personal information (e.g. birthdates, phone numbers, or email addresses) on the Consent Form that is not deemed necessary for the provision of consent. Researchers will not collect any information on participants who decline to participate. See Active Consent Forms on page 10 for guidelines on completing informed consent documents.
- 10. Invitation Letter for Principals:** Researchers are required to provide an Invitation Letter for Principals that is sent to school principals by Research Services staff **for approved projects only** (see Guidelines for Principal Invitation Letters). Please note that approval by the External Research Review Committee does not guarantee that a study will be accommodated by principals or department managers. Principals have the right to refuse research projects in their schools.
- 11. Accessibility of Research Materials:** At the request of the school Principal, participant, or department supervisor, the research 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 a minimum of 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, etc.) is not permitted. If the researcher would like to offer a token of appreciation to participants, 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. The original copy may be mailed to the YRDSB's Research Services at 300 Harry Walker Parkway in Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 8E2. Upon request, the original PVSC may be mailed back to the researcher. All researchers are to carry the original PVSC at all times 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 research staff change, police checks for new 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 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 page 10 for guidelines on Debriefing). 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 your debriefing protocol must be approved by board supervisors and the 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:** ERRC approval is for one academic year only. All approvals will expire on June 30th of that academic year.
- 18. Status Report Letter:** By June 30th of the academic year in which the study was approved, the researcher must submit an electronic copy of a Status Report Letter to confirm completion of data collection and expected date of submission of the **Study Completion Report** (#20 below) or a request for renewal, extension, or amendment of the existing study. Failure to submit this letter will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee. See page 11 for guidelines on completing the Status Report Letter.
- 19. Requests for Project Renewal, Extension, or Amendment:** 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 **Status Report Letter** (#18 above) 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 page 11 for guidelines on Requests for Project Renewal, Extension, or Amendment.
- 20. Study Completion Report and Knowledge Mobilization:** Upon completion of the project, a Study Completion Report and any other reports/publications (e.g. thesis, research article, etc.) that emerge from the research must be submitted to YRDSB's Research Services. The summary report should outline the purpose, method, results, and implications of the research, and should include a 100- to 200-word abstract. All reports must respect the anonymity of participants and should contain results of aggregate data only. In 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. Reports can be emailed to External.Research@yrdsb.ca. Please note that failure to submit a Summary Report will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee. Please use the following Study Completion Report template.

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 External Research Review Committee 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. Invitation Letters will be sent to school principals by Research Services staff **for approved projects only**. Principal Invitation Letters must contain the following information:

- 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.
- Who will be invited to participate in the research (e.g. students, teachers, principals, etc.).
- What the participant will be asked to do for the research (e.g. complete a survey, focus group, etc.).
- 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 entirely 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.
- How anonymity and/or confidentiality will be ensured.
- 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. All Information Letters should accompany the Consent Form and must contain the following information:

- 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.
- What the participant will be asked to do for the research (e.g. complete a survey, focus group, etc.).
- 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 entirely 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.
- 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.

Active Consent Form

Active consent is required for all participants (e.g. students, principals, teachers, etc.). Active consent must be obtained from Parents/Guardians for all students who are under the age of 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 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, videotaping, audio taping, photo taking, etc.).
- 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 with participants following their participation in the research. Participants should be debriefed orally immediately following data collection, and be provided 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 following participation.
- Information about follow-up resources (e.g. Kids Help Phone, etc.) for any research involving sensitive questions or topics.
- Information about how interested participants may obtain further information about the topic of study.

Status Report Letter

By June 30th of the academic year in which the study was approved, the researcher must submit an electronic copy of a Status Report Letter that confirms completion of data collection, and expected date of submission of the Summary Report or provides a statement of intention to request renewal, extension, or amendment of the existing study. Failure to submit this report will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee. All Status Report Letters must include:

- Study Title
- Researcher's Name and Contact Information
- Date of ERRC approval
- Confirmation of completion of data collection and expected date on which the researcher will submit the Summary Report, or a statement of intent to submit a Request for Project Renewal, Extension, or Amendment.

Requests for Project 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.

Requests for project renewal, extension, or amendment 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 4-6 weeks following the application deadline. Requests for renewal, extension of amendment must include the following information:

- Name of Principal Investigator(s)
- Institution/Agency
- Contact information (e.g. mailing address, phone number, email)
- Title of previously approved study
- Date of original ERRC approval
- Nature of the request (i.e. renewal, multi-year study, extension, or amendment)
- Rationale for the request
- Updated documentation (e.g. intuitional REB approval letters, Police Vulnerable Sector Checks)