



TO All Parties Preparing Research Proposals

FROM Research Manager
Research Review Committee

DATE November 1, 2022

RE Research Review Process

This memo provides an overview of how the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections reviews and manages proposals submitted to it by researchers wishing to study inmates, staff or any other aspect of the agency. The Department has an official procedure for the review of unsolicited research proposals submitted to the Department. This procedure is codified in the Department's Research Activities Policy (02.01.02). The Research Policy also establishes a Research Review Committee (RRC) made up of key department officials. The RRC provides feedback to the RRC Chair, who is responsible for issuing a final decision on research proposals.

The Department has a standard Research Approval Request Form (RARF), which is available on the Department's web site (www.cor.state.pa.us), along with the Research Activities Policy. Anyone preparing a research proposal for submission to the Department should take the opportunity to familiarize themselves with these documents. All research proposals must be prepared in accordance with the guidelines established on the RARF. The RARF consists of three primary sections. Please note that descriptive narratives for these sections need not be typed directly onto the form; they can be attached on separate sheets, but in any event should not be handwritten. The narrative portion of the proposal need not be lengthy; five to ten pages is adequate for most proposals.

The Research Overview section of the RARF asks for basic information on the topic, goals, specific questions and significance of the proposed research, as well as a brief overview of previous research. Researchers need not provide an extended literature review or theoretical exposition for their proposals; rather, we simply need to understand what the proposed study is about and why it is important. The Research Design section of the form asks for specific information about what types of data are needed for the study, and how these data will be collected. It is critical that the researcher be as detailed and as clear as possible here, as this section provides the RRC with the best indication of what will be involved for the Department. If research instruments are to be used, please attach a copy. Researchers should also attach a copy of any approval forms from their Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Expected Outcomes section asks for a brief discussion of possible benefits from the research.

Proposals submitted in accordance with the guidelines found on the RARF and in the Research Activities Policy undergo initial technical review at the Bureau of Planning, Research, and Statistics by the RRC Chair. This review process focuses on compliance with the requirements set forth above and with the overall supportability of the research design. At this stage, proposals may be rejected on the basis of poor quality or because the topic or methods are not feasible within the Department (e.g. medical research). Researchers may also be asked to make modifications at this stage.

After review by the Bureau of Planning, Research, and Statistics most proposals are then forwarded to the full RRC for further review. The RRC provides the RRC Chair with feedback on whether a proposal is suitable to be conducted within the Department. Please note that the RRC does not function as an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects. As noted above, researchers should provide evidence of human subjects review and sign-off from their university or other research organization IRB. The RRC is charged with ruling on whether the goals and design of research proposals are appropriate for a correctional setting. Based upon the input of the full RRC, the Chair issues a final decision on the proposal and communicates that decision to the researcher. The Department, RRC and/or RRC Chair reserve the right to reject proposals due to inadequate design, absence of necessary information, overall poor quality, or other reasons.

We cannot offer a firm promise regarding the time needed to review any research proposal. This time will vary with the complexity of the proposal and with the volume of proposals currently under review. Please note also that any data runs or other additional work by Department staff that are needed in connection with approved projects must generally be taken as a second priority to work that is central to the Department's core mission of the care, custody and control of the inmate population. Thus, we cannot offer any firm promises about the time required to complete data runs or other related work requested in connection with approved projects. On a similar note, institutional security is a top priority of the Department; requests for interviews with inmates and visits to institutions will at all times be balanced against the mandate to maintain security.

Questions about the Department's Research Activities Policy, Research Approval Request Form, procedures for review of research proposals, specific research proposals or general conduct of research, should be directed to:

Research Manager

Chair, Research Review Committee

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