How to Apply to Conduct Research with CDCR: Frequently Asked Questions

Must a potential study participant (incarcerated or paroled individual or CDCR employee) be informed orally and in writing about the study to obtain informed consent?

Yes. Per CDCR policy, the researcher must obtain oral and written informed consent from all potential research study participants prior to participation in the study with the understanding that this consent may be withdrawn at any time by the participant after consent has been provided. The Department reserves the right to request documentation of written informed consent from the researcher at any time.

Must an entity operating under contract with CDCR to provide a service or program submit a research application for ROC approval if the entity intends to publish their research findings to the public?

Yes. All research/program evaluations within CDCR locations/facilities and/or using CDCR data and/or data generated by the researcher (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups) that is intended for public release must be approved by the Research Oversight Committee (ROC) prior to initiation of the research.

Must a CDCR research application disclose all potential conflicts of interest?

Yes. A complete CDCR research application must disclose and discuss any potential conflicts of interests, specifically if any personal interests that may be in conflict with the applicant's professional obligations. The research application must clearly delineate the relationship between the research organization and the organization responsible for providing the program. If evaluating a program, the application should clearly distinguish the role of the research staff and program staff with regard to conducting the study. The application must disclose and discuss the extent and duration of any potential conflicts of interest regarding the research rationale, the study design/methodology, data collection, analysis, and report writing. The research application must clearly delineate all efforts to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest.

Must an entity under contract with CDCR (contractee) to provide a rehabilitative program for CDCR secure the services of an independent third-party research entity to evaluate their program if the contractee also intends to externally publish their program research findings to add to generalizable knowledge?

Yes. If a CDCR contractee is responsible for providing a rehabilitative program for CDCR and this contractee also desires to evaluate the efficacy of their program for external publication, the contractee must obtain the services of an independent third-party research entity to ensure the use of an independent rigorous systematic research effort to gather, track, and report on performance/efficacy outcomes.

Is there any CDCR administrative data that is not permitted for release to external entities for research purposes?

Yes. There are administrative data that CDCR will not share with external entities. These data include, but are not limited to, any data not owned by CDCR (e.g., DOJ owned data such as CII#), gender identity, Social Security Numbers, complete date of birth, and HIPAA-covered health care data.

Can an individual below the doctoral level be the Principal Investigator for a study?

No. Academic students below the doctoral level are not permitted to apply independently and/or serve as the sole Principal Investigator (PI) to conduct research with CDCR. An academic student below the doctoral level may apply as a Co-PI with their university academic advisor serving as the PI for the study. Multiple Co-PIs are permissible on a specific application. High school students may not apply as PI or co-PI. Students who do not meet the above criteria are encouraged to explore data already provided publicly or through the CDCR Public Records Act Process.

What technical guidance can the CDCR provide to a research applicant to increase the thoroughness of their research application to limit any alternative explanations for the observed changes?

Consider the impact(s) on their proposed study participants who are simultaneously participating in or have previously completed other rehabilitative programs. The CDCR is interested in studies that can single out the cause/association of the observed behavioral change that their study participant may demonstrate.

The below considerations may add thoroughness to the study and help provide CDCR with valuable results.

- Consider including proper negative and positive controls, randomization, blinding, measures to control bias, controlling for inter-operator variability, robust and accurate statistical methods, and appropriate experimental design;

- Consider using a comparison or control group with comparable characteristics to the experimental group for comparative purposes;
- Consider adding intermediate outcome measures to the study design;
- Consider requesting administrative data that is collected by CDCR and other governmental agencies;
- Consider the limitation of solely relying on pre- and post- self-assessed surveys;
- Consider identifying and providing steps to mitigate all potential biases and weaknesses in the study design;
- Consider including a limitations discussion to the study design.

Are CDCR staff email addresses obtainable through the CDCR ROC process?

No. CDCR staff employee email addresses are public information. As such, CDCR staff email addresses may be obtained through the CDCR PRA request process. However, if an individual wants to contact CDCR staff for the purpose of conducting a research study, it is required that the study receive ROC approval before any CDCR employee is contacted.

Can the CDCR provide an incarcerated or paroled individual's arrest record to a researcher?

No. The CDCR cannot provide an incarcerated or paroled individual's arrest record to a researcher. The US or the California Department of Justice may be able to assist a researcher to obtain this information independent from CDCR.

What administrative data is available to a researcher to add thoroughness to the study?

The CDCR collects administrative data as part of ongoing operations; this information is available in various forms to assist the researcher. It is the responsibility of the researcher in preparing their application to describe the categories of data relevant to the aims/objectives of the study. Below is a simple non-extensive and incomplete list of CDCR in-custody population metrics available:

- Rules Violations Reports (RVRs): RVRs are categorized as "counseling", "administrative", or "serious." Serious RVRs are for the most egregious level of misconduct, which could be prosecuted as a criminal offense (misdemeanor or felony). Administrative RVRs are misconduct at a lower level, but which could not be prosecuted as a criminal offense;
- Reports of facility incidents;
- Visitation information;
- Participation in and completion of rehabilitative programs.

Must data custodians identified in the CDCR Data Sharing Agreement be cleared through CDCR's criminal background check process?

Yes. Data custodians identified in the Data Sharing Agreement must clear CDCR's criminal background check process.