California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Research Oversight Committee

Research Application and Approval Guidelines

Division of Correctional Policy, Research, and Internal Oversight

Office of Research

Special Projects, Evaluation, and Research Branch

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Research Oversight Committee Process

The Research Oversight Committee (ROC) process consists of eight steps, beginning with the applicant submitting a research request to CDCR and concluding with the applicant submitting a final report to the Office of Research if the research project is fully approved by the ROC.

Part 1: The New Research Application Guidelines section of this document covers in detail the first four steps (CDCR Research Request through ROC Review and Decision). When a project receives full ROC approval, steps five (Data Request Input Form) through eight (Reporting) apply, which are detailed in Part 2: Approved Research Application Guidelines. For more information regarding definitions, see the frequently asked questions (FAQs).

Part 1: New Research Application Guidelines

In order to conduct research with CDCR, applicants must first complete steps one through four. If ROC approval is received, ROC applicants must complete steps five through eight. This section details the required steps and documentation to obtain a research project approval.

Step 1: CDCR Research Request

1.1 Applicants shall submit a complete CDCR Research Application Form, and all required supporting documents to the Office of Research, Data Concierge Service (DCS) unit (Data.Request@cdcr.ca.gov).
1.2 The DCS unit will analyze and determine the scope of the request to ensure research requests are routed to the Special Projects, Evaluation, and Research (SPEAR) branch.
1.3 A project number will be assigned to the research request for tracking and reference.
1.4 Staff will send a letter acknowledging receipt of the request to the applicant.

Step 2: Application Packet

2.1 Research Application Form

Applicants are required to submit a complete CDCR Research Application Form along with all required supporting documentation. Below are the sections of the application along with a description for each item:

2.1.1 Principal Investigator Contact Information

Specify the Principal Investigator contact information, position, title, and organization.
Note: 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 an application. For more information regarding academic students, please see the FAQs.

2.1.2 Project Details

2.1.2.1 Project Title

Specify the project title, which shall match the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter.

2.1.2.2 Project Funding and Sponsorship

Provide detailed information about the project sponsorship and funding source, including the amount, purpose, duration, and specific conditions or associated restrictions.

2.1.3 Research Overview

2.1.3.1 Background

Provide an overview of the research topic, including its historical development, current trends, and significance in the field. Discuss existing studies and highlight their contributions to the subject.

2.1.3.2 Research Problem

Clearly articulate the research problem. Identify the gap in current knowledge or practice that your study aims to address. Explain why this issue is significant and worth exploring.

2.1.3.3 Research Objectives

State the specific objectives of the study. The objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). The objectives should be directly addressing the research problem and align with the proposed methodology.

2.1.3.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Clearly define the central questions the study aims to address and state the hypotheses that provide a clear prediction or expected outcome based on the research questions. Ensure questions are specific and hypotheses are measurable, concise, and directly related to the study.

2.1.3.5 Research Significance

Describe the significance of the research and discuss the practical applications of the study and the potential impact on CDCR. Provide specific examples of how the findings may influence future research, policy, or practices.

2.1.4 Research Methodology

2.1.4.1 Research Design

Describe the overall design of the study (e.g. case study, survey, experimental) and explain why this approach is appropriate for addressing your research questions.

2.1.4.2 Data Collection Methods

Explain the data collection methods to be used and justify the choice. Include details on the tools, instruments, and data resources the study will use to gather the necessary information.

2.1.4.3 CDCR Data Resources

Select from the list provided the necessary CDCR resources needed to conduct the study.

2.1.4.4 Target Population

Select the target population from the list provided in the CDCR Research Application Form.

2.1.4.5 Population Sample

Identify the sample size needed to meet the scientific aim(s) of the research. Describe any criteria for inclusion and exclusion and explain in detail the recruiting procedure.

Note: Recruitment strategies for CDCR personnel must ensure compliance with state bargaining unit agreements and consider the impact imposed on employees' workload and duty schedules. Employees are not permitted to use work hours or state time to participate in voluntary external research studies without the support of the ROC and approval from the impacted hiring authority.

2.1.4.6 Implementation Procedure

Explain in detail the step-by-step process of how the research will be carried out.

2.1.4.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Explain how the study will analyze the collected data. Specify the analysis methods and tools you will use and justify why these are the best choice for the research.

2.1.4.8 Ethical Considerations

Describe any ethical considerations in the study. Discuss how you will ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality.

2.1.4.9 Conflict of Interest Disclosure

Disclose if the research involves any potential conflict of interest with CDCR, including but not limited to financial interests, personal relationships, and professional commitment that would compromise the integrity or objectivity of the research.

2.1.5 Research Deliverables

2.1.5.1 Expected Outcomes

Describe what you anticipate discovering or confirming through the research. Clarify the expected results and discuss the implications of your findings, including potential applications in practice or policy.

2.1.5.2 Research Product(s)

Select from the list of categories of end products that will be produced from the study provided in the CDCR Research Application Form. If the end product is not listed, select "Other", and describe the end product in the space provided.

2.1.6 Study Location(s) and Data Sources

2.1.6.1 Planned Correctional Institution Visits

Please indicate which correctional institution(s) you or your research team plan to visit as part of this study. Select all that apply from the provided list.

2.1.6.2 Targeted Institution(s) for Administrative Data

If the study involves using administrative data, please indicate which correctional institution(s) you plan to target for data collection or analysis. Select all that apply from the provided list.

2.1.6.3 Research Team Contact List

List all research personnel information involved in this study.

2.1.7 Proposed Research Timeline

The project timeline should account for required reviews and approvals (e.g., IRB approval). Please see the FAQs for more information.

2.1.8 Principal Investigator

Provide the Principal Investigator's full name and the date of application form submission.

2.2 Required Supporting Documentation

2.2.1 Research team members Resume(s)/Curriculum Vitae(s)

Provide a curriculum vitae for each member of the research team, limited to a maximum of five pages each.

2.2.2 Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

Provide a copy of the IRB approval letter. IRB approval is required for all research projects. The project title in the IRB approval letter must match the research application project title. Please see the FAQs for more information regarding IRB approval.

2.2.3 Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) Approval Letter (Only required if requesting CDCR administrative data)

Provide a copy of the CPHS approval letter if requesting CDCR administrative data only. CPHS review is only required for projects requesting CDCR administrative data; CPHS does not serve as an IRB for applicants

requesting to conduct research. The project title in CPHS documentation must match the research application title. Please see FAQs for more information.

2.2.4 Copies of research instruments and data collection tools

Include data collection tools (including survey documents) for review and approval by ROC.

2.2.5 Copies of written Informed Consent Forms (If interacting with subjects)

Provide copies of Informed Consent Form(s) if interacting with subjects. Oral and signed written informed consent must be obtained and documented for all actual study participants, except in situations where the approved research project only uses large administrative non-identifiable datasets.

2.2.6 Copies of grant/contract award documentation relevant to the study, project, or program (If applicable)

Provide copies of all pertinent grant or contract award documents directly related to the study, project, or program, including funding details and specific project scope, if applicable.

2.2.7 Letter of support from Fiduciary Entity (Only required for students)

Provide a letter signed by the fiduciary support entity if a student is identified as a Co-PI. Applicants conducting academic or professional research as a student Co-PI must specifically identify and acknowledge their fiduciary entity. A fiduciary support letter is required as the fiduciary entity is ultimately responsible for risks associated with completing the research. For more information regarding student researchers and fiduciary letters, please see the FAQs.

2.2.8 Letter of support from principal academic advisor (Only required for students)

An Academic Support Letter is required to be provided by the Principal Academic Advisor of the student Co-PI research applicant(s). For more information regarding student researchers and letters of support, please see the FAQs.

Step 3: Application Review

3.1 The Office of Research, SPEAR branch will conduct an initial review of the research application packet to ensure all required information is provided and documents are complete.

3.2 Staff may contact the applicant to request additional clarification, ask questions, or obtain any missing documents.

3.3 If the research application is deemed complete, the application will be scheduled for presentation to the ROC for approval.

Step 4: ROC Review & Decision

The ROC membership is comprised of CDCR Leadership representing each Division. The Director of the Division of Correctional Policy, Research, and Internal Oversight (CPRIO) serves as the presiding officer of the ROC. The Office of Research provides administrative, technical, and research support for the ROC. The ROC meets every other month on a published schedule.

4.1 The ROC Decision

The ROC process provides a standardized and comprehensive approach for selecting and overseeing CDCR research projects. The ROC process emphasizes a department-wide and open approach in determining which research projects will be approved by the CDCR, ensuring the intent of the research has merit as it relates to the CDCR mission. The ROC also ensures proper protections for CDCR incarcerated and supervised populations, as well as staff and data resources.

Applicants are notified of the ROC's decision by formal letter. The ROC may decide to approve, deny, conditionally approve, or continue an application.

4.1.1 Approved Applications

If the ROC approves an application, it will automatically expire two years from the date of approval letter issued to the applicant, regardless of the status of the research. If additional time or resources are required beyond the initial approval period, the researcher must submit a request to the Office of Research to extend the DSA/project period. If the request includes any changes to the project scope, data cohort, methodology, or data analysis, the applicant must submit a new Research Application.

4.1.2 Denied Applications

If the ROC makes the decision to deny a research application, the applicant will receive a formal letter communicating the decision and indicate the reason(s) why the application was denied. The ROC decision to deny an application is final; however, applicants are encouraged to submit new research applications in the future.

4.1.3 Conditionally Approved Applications

The ROC may request minor, specific revisions to an application to better meet the department's needs and to comply with CDCR's mission and specific rules and regulations for research activities. Conditionally approved applications must be revised as requested and a complete, revised application must be submitted to CDCR within 30 business days of the date of the decision letter for the application to remain under consideration. Otherwise, the application is subject to administrative denial.

4.1.4 Continued Applications

The ROC may require major, significant changes to an application to comply with departmental legal, labor, ethical, and procedural concerns; to meet the department's needs; or to comply with CDCR's mission and specific rules and regulations for research activities. If the ROC decides to continue an application, the applicant must provide a complete, revised application to CDCR within 90 business days of the date of the formal decision letter for the application to remain under consideration. Otherwise, the application is subject to administrative denial.

Once a project receives full approval, additional steps and documentation are required. Please see the Approved Research Application Guidelines section for details.

4.2 Conflict of Interest

A complete CDCR research application must disclose and discuss any potential conflicts of interests, specifically if any personal interests may be in conflict with the applicant's professional obligations. The application must state all efforts to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest. If participant-based research is conducted, the application must disclose and discuss the extent and duration of participation regarding the research rationale, the study design/methodology, data collection, analysis, and report writing.

To ensure the quality of CDCR program evaluations, program providers must obtain the services of an independent third-party research entity to ensure the use of an independent rigorous systematic approach to gather, track, and report on performance or efficacy measure outcomes for external program evaluation purposes. The approach becomes a program evaluation when the systematic approach is intended to add to "generalizable knowledge," which requires a third-party researcher.

Part 2: Approved Research Application Guidelines

Once a project receives full ROC approval, research projects will follow the steps below.

Step 5: Data Request Input Form (DRIF)

If the researcher requests CDCR administrative data, staff will provide a DRIF to the applicant for completion. The DRIF describes the information that will be used to generate the departmental data sharing agreement. The following information is captured on the DRIF:

SECTION 1
Please answer whether this DRIF is an amendment to a previously executed DSA. If yes, type the date and select the reason for the DSA amendment.
SECTION 2
Project Title
Date
Data Requestor's Company/Organization
Custodian of Files – Contact Person Name
Custodian Contact's Title/Position
Custodian Contact's Company/Organization:
Custodian Contact's Company Physical Address:
Custodian Contact's Phone Number:
Custodian Contact's Email Address:
Notification Contact Person Name:
Notification Contact's Title/Position:
Notification Contact's Company/Organization Name:
Notification Contact's Phone Number:
Notification Contact's Email Address:
Requestor's Signatory Name:
Signatory's Title/Position:
Signatory's Company/Organization Name:
Signatory's Phone Number:
Signatory's Email Address:
SECTION 3
Description of Intended Use of Data
SECTION 4
List of Project Team Members
SECTION 5
Time span of the project
Which database is the data being extracted from, if known:
Time Basis
Time Span of the data
Delivery Format
Delivery Method
Cohort
Type of Data Requested
SECTION 6
Data Metric/Available Annotation
Data Metric/Variable Requested
Requestor Description/Substantiation

List if variable is a Point in Time, Over a Period of Time, for Current Term, or for All Terms
CDCR Data Source(s), if known

Step 6: Data Sharing Agreement (DSA)

All approved studies and data requests require a DSA. The DSA is generated following the submission of a complete DRIF and the subsequent review and approval by the CDCR Information Security Office (ISO). Applicants are encouraged to complete and return the DRIF as early as possible, as this will expedite the process of generating the DSA by the Office of Research.

The CDCR DSA is entered into by and between CDCR and the applicant/applicant's research organization following approval of the research application to establish the content, appropriate disclosure, use, and protection of the data requested by the applicant to support a contracted service, research study, and/or an operational business need of CDCR or other governmental agency, whether or not such data is provided by CDCR or collected or created by the applicant on behalf of CDCR.

A typical DSA will cover in detail the following:

1. Requestor's Data Custodian
2. Point-of-Contact for CDCR
3. Period of Agreement
4. Intended Use of Data
5. Constraints on Use of Data
6. Data Security
7. Network Security
8. Compliance with Applicable Laws and Regulations
9. Notification of Security Breaches
10. Indemnification
11. State's Option to Participate in Defense
12. Amendments and Alterations to this Agreement
13. Expiration, Suspension, or Termination of Services
14. Survival
15. Signatory Authority
16. Attachment A: Security Controls
17. Attachment B: Requested Data Elements
18. Attachment C: Notification of Breach

6.1 Criminal History Background Check

Before a research workforce member may enter a CDCR facility or access any source data, including, but not limited to, CDCR Protected Health Information (PHI), personal information (PI), and other confidential data, the workforce member must undergo and pass a state and federal fingerprint-based background check. A criminal history that warrants substantial concerns on the part of CDCR, because of either the background check or any subsequent criminal record review, shall exclude that workforce member from access to CDCR facilities and access to any source data, including, but not limited to CDCR PHI, PI, and other confidential data.

Step 7: Project Implementation

Once ROC approval is obtained and the DRIF and DSA have been approved (if applicable), project implementation can begin in accordance with all dates set forth in the ROC approval and DSA.

Step 8: Reporting Expectations

8.1 Progress and Completion Reports

For all approved research projects, applicants must provide progress reports to the CDCR as specified in the ROC approval letter and the DSA. A final completion report is also required by the ROC at the conclusion/termination of the research.

As previously noted, the ROC approval expires two years from the date of the approval letter. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to submit an updated IRB approval letter to the ROC during the second year of the approved research agreement to ensure that the approved application remains in compliance. This applies to CPHS approval letters also, if the project requires administrative data only.

Applicants may submit a progress or completion report via email to Data.Requests@cdcr.ca.gov. Failure to provide progress reports and maintain application compliance may result in CDCR terminating the research project.

8.2 Publication of Research Findings

Applicants must notify CDCR of any publication efforts to disclose research findings when known. Researchers should note that the final copy of the research findings submitted to CDCR may be made available on CDCR's website. The CDCR reserves the right to require the inclusion of a research limitation section in the publication of the project's final report.

Research findings of approved research projects shall be emailed to Data.Requests@cdcr.ca.gov prior to publication. Examples include research reports, theses, dissertations, manuscripts, conference presentations, journal publications, press releases, internet postings, discussion papers, posters, and chapters in edited books are considered publications.

Termination of Approved Research Projects

CDCR reserves the right to suspend or terminate an approved research project when:

- The methodology or project scope for an approved research project is changed at any time during the project without CDCR approval.
- Continuation of the approved research project may prove detrimental to participant(s) or the safe and orderly operation of Departmental premises.
- CDCR determines, at its sole discretion, that a researcher is not abiding by the Research Guidelines, Department's Code of Conduct, rules, regulations, protocols, procedures, or directions.
- A researcher is arrested for a criminal offense or is engaged in misconduct contrary to CDCR's Code of Conduct.
- If CDCR terminates an approved research project, approval to access CDCR's premises is terminated, and researchers must leave CDCR premises immediately.