Research and Information Sharing Request Guidelines

Research and Information Sharing Request Guidelines

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1. Guidance Statement

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), the regional centres for education (RCEs), and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) value educational research and are committed to promoting a strong culture of collaborative research and data-driven work in Nova Scotia. This goal must be balanced with the need to protect

- students' instructional time
- staff's time and resources
- students' and staff's confidentiality and privacy
- students' and staff's safety and well-being

2. Scope and Objectives

These guidelines are intended to

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of all partners in the research and information sharing request process.
- clarify EECD's research agenda and align research and knowledge mobilization and use with departmental priorities.
- ensure consistency of practice and expectations across EECD, the RCEs, and CSAP regarding research and information sharing requests from researchers.
- provide guidance on privacy protection and confidentiality to researchers and members of committees evaluating research proposals.

These guidelines apply to anyone who wishes to conduct research or recruit research participants in the Nova Scotia public school system. **Program evaluation activities, assessments, and surveys conducted or commissioned by EECD, RCEs, CSAP, or other government entities do not fall under these guidelines.**

Research requests to obtain provincial educational data or to conduct research that involves EECD staff, must be approved by the department using the guidelines and procedures outlined in this document.

Research that involves students or staff of an RCE or CSAP must be approved by the research review committee of the affected RCE or CSAP using the guidelines and procedures outlined in this document.

Note: EECD, the RCEs, and CSAP must consider individual research requests, the volume of incoming requests, and the welfare and consent of students and staff. For this reason, approval from the researcher's university's Research Ethics Board is not sufficient to conduct research involving students and staff.

3. Definitions

active consent: a type of consent where participants must opt-in to a research study. In Nova Scotia public schools, parents/guardians of students below the age of 18, as well as students over the age of 18 must sign and return a letter of consent.

knowledge mobilization or translation: the process of moving research knowledge into active use by education practitioners. This process relies on connections between research, policy and practice.

knowledge dissemination: the process of communicating research knowledge to target audiences. This communication is typically tailored to be accessible to the audience.

practice-based action research: a type of self-reflective inquiry that informs teaching, learning, and/or student well-being for the purposes of post-secondary study. It includes actions teachers already do as part of public school programming during the instructional day.

research ethics board: a committee, typically at a university or other institution that conducts research, that reviews the methods proposed for research projects to ensure that they are ethical and in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) as well as other relevant institutional guidelines.

research review committee: a committee struck by each of the RCEs, CSAP, and EECD to review research requests. Membership on the committees will be determined by the individual organizations. The committees will be responsible for reviewing research requests and provide responses to researchers.

verbal consent script: a script aimed at participants who are under the age of 18, that details the nature of the research, its voluntary nature, and its risks in age-appropriate language. Participants must agree to participate verbally or in writing and the script may be delivered verbally or by letter.

4. Guiding Principles

Formal Partnerships

EECD is committed to supporting Nova Scotia-specific school research and may choose to enter into research partnerships that promise to be beneficial to the public education system of Nova Scotia.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (2018) defines a formal partnership as a
" … bilateral or multilateral formal collaboration agreement between an applicant and one or more partner organizations […] These partner organizations agree and commit to work collaboratively to achieve shared goals for mutual benefit. Partners must provide evidence attesting to the commitment that has been agreed upon." Research partners must have a relationship of trust and mutual respect and must commit to providing contributions: either cash or in-kind to the research project (e.g., goods or services supporting the research).

Personal Information, Privacy, and Information Sharing Agreements

Occasionally, researchers request the disclosure of personal or non-public information for the purposes of their projects. Section 29, clause 3(1)(I) of the FOIPOP Act defines personal information as

" ... recorded information about an identifiable individual, including:

(i) the individual's name, address or telephone number,

(ii) the individual's race, national or ethnic origin, colour, or religious or political beliefs or associations,

(iii) the individual's age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status or family status,

(iv) an identifying number, symbol or other particular assigned to the individual,

(v) the individual's fingerprints, blood type or inheritable characteristics,

(vi) information about the individual's health-care history, including a physical or mental disability,

(vii) information about the individual's educational, financial, criminal or employment history,

(viii) anyone else's opinions about the individual, and

(ix) the individual's personal views or opinions, except if they are about someone else;"

The EECD/RCE/CSAP may disclose personal information for research purposes if certain conditions are met, as outlined in the Information Sharing Agreement and below:

(a) the research purpose cannot reasonably be accomplished unless that information is provided in individually identifiable form;

(b) any record linkage is not harmful to the individuals that information is about and the benefits to be derived from the record linkage are clearly in the public interest;

(c) the head of the public body concerned has approved conditions relating to

(i) security and confidentiality,

(ii) the removal or destruction of individual identifiers at the earliest reasonable time, and

(iii) the prohibition of any subsequent use or disclosure of that information in individually identifiable form without the express authorization of that public body; and

(d) the person to whom that information is disclosed has signed an agreement to comply with the approved conditions, this Act and any of the public body's policies and procedures relating to the confidentiality of personal information." (FOIPOP 1993, c. 5, S. 29.)

It is important to note that the province has an obligation to de-identify and aggregate personal information where and when possible. This should be considered by researchers when they are designing their studies.

Research conducted in Nova Scotia must comply with relevant legislation and regulations, including the Personal Information International Disclosure Protection Act (PIIDPA). Under PIIDPA, personal information must be stored and accessed in Canada unless the exceptions in the Act are met.

Under the Government of Nova Scotia's *Information Sharing Policy*, disclosure of personal or non-public information will require an Information Sharing Agreement. An Information Sharing Agreement template is provided at www.ednet.ns.ca/ERP for your convenience. This template must be filled out by researchers to the best of their ability and submitted with the research application.

If a project does not require a research application but personal or non-public information is requested (e.g., commissioned program evaluation), the information sharing agreement must still be completed and submitted.

5. Responsibilities

EECD, RCEs, and CSAP will

- strike research review committees to review and respond to each research proposal in a timely manner.
- evaluate the educational benefit and value of each research proposal.
- ensure approved research proposals meet high ethical and scholarly standards.
- ensure the proposed collection, use, disclosure, maintenance and disposition of personal information for research complies with the FOIPOP Act and PIIDPA.
- protect students' and staff's time, safety, and well-being.

Researchers will

- submit complete research applications with all attachments in their final format.
- obtain permission from the RCE or CSAP before contacting schools.
- obtain approval from their Research Ethics Board, if required.
- ensure the collection, use, disclosure, maintenance, and disposition of personal information comply with the FOIPOP Act, PIIDPA, and the TCPS2.
- carry out all duties related to the research, including distribution and collection of research materials.
- structure their research to minimize demands on school administrators', students' and staff's time.
- ensure that the following checks are conducted and current, if they are required as per Section 8.5:
  o criminal record check
  o vulnerable sector check
  o child abuse register check
- provide meaningful research feedback and summaries to EECD, the RCEs, CSAP, and school as per the submitted knowledge dissemination plan.

Consent

Researchers working on projects inside Nova Scotia public schools are responsible for ensuring students or their parents/guardians, teachers, and school staff have consented to participating. All projects governed by these guidelines require active consent.

Consent forms for participants who are under 18 years old must be signed by parents/guardians. Consent forms for participants who are 18 years and older must be signed by the participant. Student participants under 18 years old must be informed of the research, its voluntary nature, and its risks in age-appropriate language and must agree to participate. Consent forms signed by parents/guardians or participants, student information letters, or verbal consent scripts must be included with the research application.

Research Review Committees

Research review committees will be struck by EECD, the RCEs, and CSAP, as needed. The committees will meet a minimum of four times a year and provide responses to researchers by the 15th of November, December, February, and May, depending on when the application is submitted. Some committees may meet more often and return decisions more quickly but this will be dependent on the volume of research applications received.

The research review committees will consider the proposals using the evaluation criteria (see link in Section 9: Resources) and the guidelines provided in this document. Researchers will be notified regarding the review committee's decision regarding their proposal:

- approved
- conditionally approved (with minor revisions or requests for additional information)
- deferred until next meeting (e.g., not enough information to decide, significant revisions or consultations needed)
- not approved
- no capacity in system (e.g., the proposal may have merit, however, at this time there is not enough instructional time, staff time, or other resources to permit the research)

6. Application Process Exemption for Practice-Based Action Research Projects

Staff who are pursuing post-secondary education may engage in practice-based action research for their studies. If their action research projects meet **ALL** of the following criteria, they do not need to go through the research application process outlined in this document. Action research projects must

- be initiated and conducted by school staff or classroom teacher.
- not extend beyond the teacher's classroom or school.
- have the support of the school principal if it generates a product such as a research paper or presentation.
- only include actions teachers would already do as part of regular public school programming during the instructional day. Regular classroom activities such as assessment, observation and conversation are permitted (e.g., observing the effects on student engagement of a flipped instructional model, observing the effect of small group instruction on classroom behaviour management).
- have a clear purpose intended to inform teaching, learning, or student well-being.
- must anonymize results regarding students. The data should not have any personal information such as first or last name or address, and the researcher must ensure that the possibility of identification using identifiers such as homeroom teacher, city, birth month, or unique personal characteristics is very low.
- not make use of educational databases such as PowerSchool and TIENET.
- not share research (e.g., papers, presentations) that includes student likeness or work; audio, video, or photograph; or other recordings of students and their work outside of their public school without media release forms signed by the parents of all participating students.
- not publicize results in any media outlet or share on social media.

Research projects that do not meet these criteria MUST follow the research application process.

7. Application Process Overview

Research that involves students or staff of the RCEs and CSAP must be approved by the affected RCE or CSAP through their own research review committees. If a project requires access to department staff or resources, EECD will also strike a research review committee to evaluate the research project application. For a research project to be considered, the researcher must submit a completed application form and all required supporting documents to the relevant Research Review Committee(s).

Research applications and research instruments and documents such as consent letters, surveys, and guided interview templates should be in their **final formats** when they are submitted. **Drafts will not be considered**. If changes occur to the research protocol after approval has been received, researchers are expected to notify and submit updates for approval to the organization(s) that provided approval(s).

Research review committees will meet at least four times a year according to the schedule under Section 8.5. To be assured of review by a certain date, the application package must be received by the deadline date in the schedule to be placed on the meeting agenda for review.

Lead researchers on approved projects will receive a letter of support from the appropriate committee. If students or school staff will be asked to participate in the project, this letter must be provided when contacting the principal(s) of the proposed study school(s). **Researchers may not contact a school without this letter of support or without the permission of the RCE or CSAP**. The letter of support does not obligate schools, staff, or students to participate in a study.

Researchers must, at the same time, provide school principals with a letter of invitation to inform them of the scope, value, and impact of the study. Guidelines are included in Section 8: Research Application Process. Principals may provide written or verbal consent for their school to participate. If principals consent to participating, researchers must collaborate with them to minimize disruption to students and staff.

School, RCE, or CSAP-based recruitment of participants for research to be conducted off of school premises or outside of instructional time is subject to this process. Researchers are encouraged to manage recruitment for off-site research by other means than through the education system.

Communicating Results

Researchers must provide a knowledge dissemination plan. At minimum researchers will provide participating schools, RCEs or CSAP, and EECD with a copy of the executive summary of the final report of the research results and a full copy or abstract of the materials written for other forms of publication. Researchers are also encouraged to provide short, teacher-friendly research summaries to participating schools.

Planned media releases must be reviewed with EECD, and participating RCE and CSAP communications staff prior to release. When the research is contracted by the department, RCE, or CSAP, additional clauses pertaining to knowledge dissemination and external communication may be applicable.

8. Research Application Process

1. Obtain approval from research institution (e.g. university).
2. Obtain approval from the university's Research Ethics Board where needed.
   Note: EECD, the RCEs, and CSAP may conditionally approve projects based on Research Ethics Board applications. Final approval is dependent on the approval of the Research Ethics Board.
3. Complete the Research Application Form in full, no handwritten applications will be accepted.
   See Section 9: Resources for the link to the form.
4. Attach final copies of the following (if applicable):
   - letter of explanation or invitation for school principals and personnel
   - letters of consent for participants and parents/guardians
   - verbal consent scripts or letters for participating students under the age of 18
   - recruitment materials

- data collection instruments (e.g., interview schedules, structured observations, questionnaires)
- Research Ethics Board application and approval status
- knowledge dissemination plan

5. Provide required criminal record and vulnerable sector checks

CIRCUMSTANCE	REQUIRED DOCUMENTS
When researchers may have direct contact with students during the course of their research (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations where students and staff are present, being in areas of the school where students are located, regularly visiting schools when there is a chance for unsupervised contact with students).	Copies of their current criminal record and vulnerable sector checks.
When researchers may be alone with students (e.g., without a teacher or school administrator present).	Copies of their current criminal record and vulnerable sector checks **AND** Department of Community Services' Child Abuse Register search

Note:

- Once researchers are working with a school, the principal may also request that they provide copies of their background checks.
- In cases where a vulnerable sector check cannot be obtained, a criminal record check will be submitted instead.
- For outside researchers, the criminal record and vulnerable sector checks, along with the child abuse register searches (if needed) must be completed no more than six months before conducting research with students. Once obtained, criminal record checks, vulnerable sector checks, and child abuse register searches are valid for the duration of the research project, to a maximum of three years.

6. Submit separate applications to each site of interest (EECD, RCEs, CSAP).
Note: The table below shows the deadlines for research applications and when researchers should hear from research review committees.

APPLICATION DEADLINE	RESPOND BY
October 15	November 15
November 15	December 15
January 15	February 15
April 15	May 15

Letter of Invitation for School Principals and Staff

A letter of invitation to school principals and staff must contain

- the title of the project
- a clear description of the project, its purpose(s), and how it is to be carried out
- an accurate description of the involvement expected from each participant, including the duration and nature of participation, including time commitments required of potential participants, especially any research related burdens that fall to the school (e.g., distributing surveys).
  Note: all possible steps should be taken to minimize impact on student and staff time.
- a description of the research procedures
- the name(s) of the researcher(s)
- the researcher's institutional affiliation
- a clear description of the harms or benefits of participation for individuals and for the school

Letter of Consent for Parents/Guardians or Participants Over the Age of 18

A letter of consent to parents/guardians must be on the letterhead of the organization conducting the research and must contain the following information:

- clear description of the project, its purpose(s), and how it is to be carried out
- accurate description of the involvement expected from each participant including duration and nature of participation as well as a description of the research procedures
- name(s) of the researcher(s)
- institutional affiliation
- clear description of harms or benefits from participation
- title of the project

The following statements must also appear in the letter:

- The [*insert RCE name/CSAP*] has given permission for this project to be carried out at your child's school.
- Your child's participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.
- All information collected will be strictly confidential and participating students will not be identified individually.
- The research data will be collected under the authority of the FOIPOP Act.
- Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this research project, please contact:
  o Name of researcher:
  o Institutional affiliation:
  o Telephone:
  o Researcher's signature:
  o School principal's signature:

9. Resources

The following resources are available on the EECD Educational Research and Partnerships website, www.ednet.ns.ca/ERP.

- Research Application Form
- Information Sharing Agreement template
- Contact Information for EECD, RCEs, and CSAP

10. References

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