

Conducting research and evaluation with department staff and students procedure

This is a mandated procedure under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this procedure must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting policy documents](#) page.

Overview

This procedure describes how the department will assess and approve research and evaluation with:

- the department workforce
- children and young people under the department's care
- the department's administrative data
- the families of children and young people who will be approached through the department.

This procedure is used in combination with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research about the design, review and conduct of research.

Scope

This procedure applies to research carried out by those seeking access to research participants on department sites or administrative data held by the department. This includes:

- research organisations
- education providers
- student researchers
- independent researchers
- employees,
- other individuals
- external agencies

Sites may include childcare centres, family day care, out of school hours care, preschools, schools and corporate sites.

This procedure does not apply to:

- independent schools, Catholic schools or other non-government education sites



- the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) – CaFHS related research is governed by the Women’s and Children’s Health Network (WCHN) processes with applications managed through its Research Secretariat
- research that involves surveys, observations or the evaluation of educational programs or practices by a current department site leader, staff member or university students undertaking a teaching placement within their own or neighbouring sites. Research matching this description must be approved by the relevant principal, director or site manager.

If you are unsure if you need to submit an application, contact the Priority Reforms and Strategic Support directorate via email at education.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au.

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Detail

Applications to undertake research

Research projects require formal applications for approval

Projects will only be considered and approved if a formal application is submitted.

The application form and associated material are publicly available on the [department website](#).

The format of the online application form, as well as required information, may be modified as needed. This will be subject to the approval of the director, Priority Reforms and Strategic Support.

Expressions of interest and advice prior to formal submission

For initial feedback or advice, applicants may submit a shorter expression of interest as part of the online application form. They can do this before submitting a full application or university Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) application, if needed.

Review applications to conduct research

Applications will be reviewed by the Priority Reforms and Strategic Support directorate. Advice from other department units will be requested if it is relevant.

Reviews of applications will be made with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) and applicable legislation and departmental policies. These reviews will consider the:

- potential value of new information to be gained from the research
- workload required from the department and participating young people
- potential risk for harm, discomfort or inconvenience to result from participating, including threats to privacy and confidentiality. Refer to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research for definitions of types of harm, discomfort and inconvenience.

Applications will be reviewed against the information requested within the online application form.

Applicants may be asked to supply more information if:

- the steps that department staff or participants need to take, so that the research project can proceed, are not clear
- there is not a clear and logical statement about how the research will produce knowledge that will then lead to benefits for children
- there is not enough information to determine that the proposed research is necessary in the context of previous research. Where possible, applications should include a summary of previous research, the quality of evidence and the remaining gaps in the evidence.

Any proposal assessed to involve more than low risk to participants will not be approved without a copy of a final approval letter from a HREC.

The department will consider the terms of approval for a project issued by any recognised HREC. Even with approval from an HREC, the department may still determine not to approve a project or may require additional conditions or modifications before the project may proceed.

Approval of applications to conduct research

Applications may either be approved to proceed, approved to proceed subject to specified conditions or modifications to the project, or not approved to proceed. Where applications are not approved, a summary of the reasons for this decision must be provided in writing to the applicant.

Approval provides the researcher with the authority to approach principals, directors or site managers of department sites to invite them to participate in a research study. The final decision as to whether or not the research proceeds at a specific site will be made by the relevant principal, director or site manager.

Modifications or extensions to already approved projects

Minor modifications to an already approved project may be approved by the director, Priority Reforms and Strategic Support.

Minor amendments must not result in an expected increase in the risk of harm or workload or burden to participants or department staff.

A formal resubmission of a full application form is not needed for a minor amendment. Send an email to education.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au describing exactly what changes are necessary, the reason for the change and any resulting impact on the risks to participants and the workload associated with participation.

Resubmission

Applicants may resubmit an application. The resubmission must include a covering note describing any relevant changes to the original application, including how any feedback from the department has been incorporated.

Appeal against decision

Applicants may request that a decision about their application is reviewed. In this case, the department will ask a senior officer to review the information provided in the application against this procedure and any other relevant policies. This senior officer must not have been directly involved in the original decision.

Conduct of research

Consent to participate in research

Seek express, opt-in consent from participants or their guardians, wherever practical. For consent to participate in research, researchers are not required to use a specific departmental template.

Alternative forms of consent (e.g., implied consent, opt-out consent) will be considered on a case-by-case basis, referring to the criteria set out in the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#).

Participants and parents or guardians must be given sufficient information to provide informed consent. Consent documentation should include:

- the project title
- description of purpose
- benefits to the department
- description of research activities
- expected duration of participation
- assurances of confidentiality and anonymity
- statement about voluntary participation and withdrawal
- description of foreseeable risks
- separate consent for audio or video-taping
- details of support in the case of stress or adverse effects
- possible outcomes of the research
- the likely form of the research findings.

Where the research involves questions of a specific or sensitive nature, the consent documentation must clearly disclose this information.

Participation must be voluntary. It must not involve any inducement, coercion, pressure or deception to participate. Individuals who choose not to participate must not be required to give a reason for their decision. Participants must also be entitled to withdraw from the research at any stage, including any data they have contributed.

Child safety

Researchers visiting or participating in department sites or services must follow the requirements of the [screening and suitability – child safety procedure \(PDF 669KB\)](#). This includes obtaining and maintaining appropriate criminal history screening and reporting inappropriate conduct towards children and young people.

Roles and responsibilities

Researcher

Submit the online research application in line with the requirements of this procedure.

Conduct research in a manner consistent with this procedure.

Assistant Director, Data Reporting and Analytics

Manage the research approval process.

Assess whether research proposals meet the requirements outlined in this procedure.

Ensure that relevant Senior Executive Group members are advised of research projects that may negatively impact staff.

Review this procedure as required.

Director, Priority Reforms and Strategic Support

Approve minor amendments or modifications to approved research projects.

Approve proposed changes to the online application form.

Executive Director, System Performance

Approve research projects submitted to the department.

Supporting information

[National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#)

Related legislation

[Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)](#)

[Education and Children's Services Act 2019 \(SA\)](#)

[Family and Community Services Act 1972 \(SA\)](#)

Related policies

[Data access and transfer procedure \(PDF 604KB\)](#)

[Screening and suitability – child safety procedure \(PDF 669KB\)](#)

Record history

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Policy sponsor: Director, Priority Reforms and Strategic Support

Responsible Executive Director: Executive Director, System Performance

Approved by: Executive Director, System Performance

Approved date: 27 June 2023

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Revision record

Version: 2.10

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Approved date: 27 June 2023

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Amendment(s): Minor changes to language for clarity and updated position titles.

Version: 2.9

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Amendment(s): New branding applied to document, published as HTML document on EDi, edited for plain English in consultation with Communications directorate.

Version: 2.7

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Amendment(s): Minor edit. Update departmental logo and titles. Update and add hyperlinks.

Version: 2.6

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Amendment(s): Minor edit. Chief Executive replaced by executive director, System Performance as authority to approve projects that involve DECD funding (p6 & p8). Approved by Chief Executive and executive director, System Performance. Change to procedure title to clarify purpose.

Version: 2.5

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Amendment(s): Minor edit. Remove references to Families SA and Child Protection:- Scope – FSA removed and noted in 'out of scope' Approval of applications to conduct research (p6) – FSA removed as delegated authority Roles and responsibilities (p8) – removal of DCE, Office for Chief Safety All references to executive director, Strategy and Performance changed to executive director, System Performance

Version: 2.4

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Amendment(s): Minor edit. Incorporates changes required by the Senior Executive Group.

Version: 2.3

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Amendment(s): Minor edit. Typographical errors updated following PPP committee endorsement. Purpose section converted to dot points. Reference to Data Management and Information Services added regarding assessment and approval of projects seeking access to administrative data.

Version: 2.2

Approved date: 23 March 2016

Amendment(s): this incorporates revisions and feedback from across relevant policy areas in DECD and the university sector. Materials removed from the previous version are incorporated through the application form and associated researcher agreement to undertake research.

Version: 2.1

Approved date: 2015

Amendment(s): Minor edit. This removes appendix 1-6 and replaces it with a link.

Version: 2.0

Approved date: 22 July 2014

Amendment(s): Major edit. This incorporates revisions and feedback from across relevant policy areas within DECD, including Families SA.

Version: 1.0

Approved date: 12 June 2014

Amendment(s): Revised guidelines and research application.

Contact

Research Unit

Email: education.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au