

Research Ethics Board - Delegated Review Process

For all research that is defined as minimal risk

Minimal Risk is defined in Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 as follows: “research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research”.

Given that research involving humans spans the full spectrum of risk, from minimal to significant; a crucial element of Research Ethics Board (REB) review is to ensure that the level of scrutiny of a research project is determined by the level of risk it poses to participants. A reduced level of scrutiny applied to a research project assessed as minimal risk does not imply a lower level of adherence to the core principles (respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice). Rather, the intention is to ensure adequate protection of participants is maintained while reducing unnecessary impediments to, and facilitating the progress of, ethical research. This approach is in keeping with the need to respect academic freedom and not to place unwarranted constraints upon it.

The selection of the level of REB review shall be determined by the level of foreseeable risks to participants; the lower the level of risk, the lower the level of scrutiny (delegated review); the higher the level of risk, the higher the level of scrutiny (full board review). A proportionate approach to assessing the ethical acceptability of the research, at either level of review, involves consideration of the **foreseeable risks**, the **potential benefits** and the **ethical implications** of the research.

Applications that meet the minimal risk criteria are eligible for delegated review. However the REB retains the right to decide to put any application submitted for delegated review forward for full board review. In such cases, the applicant will be notified of the change in the status of the application.

Risks to Researchers

Risks in research are not limited to participants. In their conduct of research, researchers themselves may be exposed to risks that may take many forms (e.g. injury, incarceration). Risks to researchers may become a safety concern, especially for student researchers who are at a learning stage regarding the conduct of research, and who may be subject to pressures from supervisors to conduct research in unsafe conditions. The REB may consider a project as more than minimal risk due to perceived potential risk to researchers as well as risk to participants. As in risks to participants, such protocols will be put forward for full board review and the researcher(s) notified of this decision.

Research Risk

Types of risk include: physical risks, psychological or emotional risks, and social risks. Physical risks are risk of harm through bodily contact or administration or any substance – this is not a common risk in social science, behavioural or humanities research. Psychological or emotional risks are risks of harm due to feeling embarrassed, uncomfortable, anxious or upset. Psychological harms vary tremendously

from study to study, from a temporary emotional reaction to a survey question to the possibility of trauma in rare cases. Social risks are risks of harm due to loss of status, privacy, reputation, as well as legal or financial risk as a result of confidentiality breaches.

Research Considered More than Minimal Risk

Types of studies that would **NOT** qualify for minimal risk review include but are not limited to:

- Research that includes BOTH vulnerable populations AND highly personal, sensitive or incriminating topics or questions; e.g. studying people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. illicit drug use etc.).
- Research that uses deception unless the researcher has convincingly argued that the deception is of a minor nature and the possibility of harm is remote
- Research that involves the generation of databases of populations where potential future research is unknown, and where the data could possibly be linked or traced to personally identifiable information