

FACT SHEET

Hints and Tips for applicants for ethical review

Consider ethics early

The process of obtaining ethical clearance can be constructive and relatively easy if the various issues are considered early in the planning phase of a research project, rather than just before work is scheduled to commence.

Apply for the right level of review

The University has established three pathways for ethical review (see reverse). This matches the level of documentation, who reviews the paperwork and the processing time to the ethical sensitivities and risks of a proposed research project. Refer to the guidelines and ensure that you apply for the right level of review. Over or under applying can result in unnecessary delays.

Consult the Research Ethics Manual

The University is in the process of releasing a booklet-based research ethics manual. Many booklets are already available. This Manual provides advice on specific research ethics issues (such as the participation of children in research) and presents accepted solutions to common ethical problems (eg how to appropriately seek parental consent). By referring to the Manual, a researcher can anticipate the kinds of questions and concerns that the ethics committee is likely to raise and can seek prior advice on the appropriate way to address specific issues.

Discuss with your REA

Every research centre and school of the University has been invited to appoint one member of academic staff to serve as a Research Ethics Advisor for that area. One of the roles of a REA is to provide advice to students and staff on making an application for ethical clearance, and for guidance on how to respond to questions / instructions from the ethics committee.

Established positions

The Griffith University Human Research Ethics Manual provides an insight into the positions previously accepted or articulated by the ethics committee. To avoid common delays, refer to the relevant sections of the Manual to check for such positions. Sometimes a research project will require a different approach from what is anticipated in the Manual, but at least you will understand the 'default' position that the ethics committee will expect.

Make your own ethical reflections transparent

In planning their own research, researchers will often consider and address ethical issues automatically as a component of the professional conduct of the proposed research. However, it is important that, in making an application for ethical clearance, you make this process transparent to the ethics committee. In that way, the committee can see that you are aware of, and have responded to, the issue, rather than being unsure whether the silence means that you are unaware of the issue.

Fully complete the form

Do not leave sections of a research ethics form blank. Even if you write "No" or "Not Applicable", fully complete forms. The ethics committee is likely to query a blank response field. Before responding "Not Applicable", especially to a key ethical question such as Risks, carefully reflect upon whether or not there is an answer that should be tendered.

Include attachments

Applications for ethical clearance will often include attachments (eg a copy of the informed consent instrument, some sample questions from the instrument / indicative line of questioning, or copy of the approval from another organisation). Ensure that all the required attachments are included with your application for ethical clearance OR that you provide an indication of when the attachments will be provided.

Levels of Ethical Review at Griffith University (as of February 2004)

Level of Review	Applies to	Paperwork	Considered by	Processing time
E1	Research without any significant ethical issues or risks.	Expedited Ethical Review Checklist (24 y/n questions and 6 short answer questions).	Chair or Deputy Chair of HREC	5 – 10 work days
E2	Research where the ethical issues or risks are easily managed OR research already approved by another HREC OR a renewal application OR research where the main procedure is listed in the Register of Approved Procedures.	As above, with some additional questions and attachments.	Panel of HREC (Chair or Deputy Chair, External member, and relevant REA)	10 – 15 work days
Full	Only research that does not qualify for E1 or E2.	Full ethical clearance application form	Meeting of HREC	Monthly meeting cycle + 10 – 15 work days

Further information

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Refer to the new Research Ethics Web site

(<http://www.griffith.edu.au/or/ethics>).