

MPA Research Reports Ethics Submissions Guide

You should read this document if you are an MPA student who has not yet completed his/her Research Report work AND anticipates doing work for the report that requires ethics review; OR if you are a supervisor of such a student.

Do I require ethics review?

MPA students require ethics review for their Research Report work IF it involves living human participants. Some examples of the methods used to conduct this type of research include surveys, focus groups, or interviews that are more than just informational (i.e., you are asking about recollections and opinions, rather than just collecting factual information/data).

If your work does **not** involve any of the above (for example, if you're only using documents, written reports, media articles, and/or previously gathered statistical data), you do not need ethics clearance, and you do not need to read the rest of this Guide.

Any MPA Research Report work that requires ethics clearance must go through the University-wide Research Ethics approval process, which consists of review by the Research Ethics Board (REB). In order to prepare for ethics review, you need to first work out the details of your research design for interviews or surveys, including the kinds of people/organizations that you will reach out to, and what you plan to ask them.

The rest of this Guide provides information for both students and supervisors on the logistics of the ethics review process. It also provides links or references to documents that can help you to develop the substance and wording of your ethics submission.

Timeline

Most of our students will qualify for a “delegated” ethics review process (intended for minimal risk research that does not involve work with vulnerable populations) through the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board. There is no University deadline for ethics submissions to the delegated process. However, the process can take approximately 2-3 months from initial submission to initial approval (depending on how many REB recommendations are made, how quickly and thoroughly the recommendations are responded to, and whether additional recommendations are raised upon review of the response to recommendations). You cannot begin your research until you have received your approval notice, so please budget sufficient time to complete it.

I'm a supervisor. What do I need to do?

1. The supervisor helps the student to decide whether ethics review is necessary; if it is, the supervisor helps the student as necessary through the process of designing the research strategy, completing the online ethics application, and developing the study documents (e.g., Letter of Information and Consent Form; survey; interview guide; etc.).

2. In addition, for ethics purposes, ONLY the supervisor can be “Principal Investigator” (PI) on student projects. What does this mean? It means three basic things:
 - a. The supervisor must be a research-eligible faculty member, as defined by Research Western’s guidance: Research-Eligible Faculty Appointments at Western (available here: <http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/resources/policies/index.html>).
 - b. The supervisor must have, or establish, a personal profile on WesternREM (WREM), the on-line ethics submission system. If you are a supervisor who doesn’t have a profile on WREM, go to this page to make one (it only takes a couple of minutes): <https://applywesternrem.uwo.ca/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2fHome%2fIndex>.
 - c. The student will fill out the ethics submission form and attach necessary documents (see below). However, the supervisor must be the one to **submit** the ethics documentation, both in initial form, and once any revisions requested by the Office of Human Research Ethics have been made.

How does this work? The student will list the supervisor as PI on the student’s project. The student will inform the supervisor when the ethics documents are ready for submission; the supervisor will then log in to the WREM system, review the documents as he/she deems necessary, and electronically sign-off on the application. The same process applies if the student is required to make any revisions by the Office of Human Research Ethics; however, the PI may delegate resubmission authority to the student.

I’m a student. What do I need to do?

1. Determine whether or not your research will require ethics review.
2. If you require ethics review, establish a WREM account. This is quick. Go here: <https://applywesternrem.uwo.ca/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2fHome%2fIndex>.

Once you complete the required information you will receive an email from WREM verifying that the registration has been received. Once your identity is verified by the Office of Human Research Ethics (this can take up to 24 hours) you will receive access to WREM.

Log in to the WREM system and click on the “Create Project” button in the actions toolbar at the top left of the screen. Familiarize yourself with the various tabs in the form and the information that you will be required to provide. In particular, go to the HELP tab in the black navigation bar at the top of the WREM screen. From the dropdown menu, clicking Help will bring you to user guides/manuals/tutorials; FAQs will show responses to common questions; and Templates includes templates and guidance documents to assist you in preparing study documents. Ensure to complete your application beginning with Q1.1, as the application system uses smart form technology, which populates the appropriate questions depending on how previous questions are answered. *Mandatory*

questions are the ones with red asterisks beside them. You will not be able to submit your application if you have left blank mandatory questions. When responding to the application questions, click the blue information icon for additional information to ensure you are responding correctly and completely.

3. Fill in the form. Note that you can save, exit, and then re-open the form later (by logging in to WREM and selecting the study from your Project List), so you don't need to do it all at once. **IMPORTANT:** List your supervisor as Principal Investigator for the project in application form Q1.2, and also give him/her a **ROLE** (see action tiles on the left-hand side). You will also ensure to add yourself as 'other study team member' in Q1.3 and identify your role in the project.
4. Attach a Letter of Information and Consent Form (LOI/C) and any other study documents that you are prompted to upload (e.g., survey or questionnaire). You can find guidelines and a template for the LOI/C in WREM under Templates as indicated above. Note: If you're doing interviews, you will need to obtain consent from your participants (e.g., written consent or verbal consent, depending on the logistics of your study). If you're using a survey or questionnaire, participants can indicate their consent through implied consent – you'll just note in your LOI that completion of the survey/questionnaire is indication of participants' consent (see suggested language in template). Ensure the information provided in the LOI/C is consistent with the information provided in the WREM application form.
5. Let your supervisor know that your ethics submission is ready to send in by clicking "Request Signature" on the final section of the ethics application; your supervisor will log in to WREM, review the submission, and sign-off on the application. The study will be automatically submitted upon receipt of signature.
6. If your submission is incomplete, the application will be returned to you within 1-3 days. Within 2-3 weeks from initial submission of a complete application, you will receive an email notification that your submission has been reviewed, along with instructions for responding to any REB recommendations (or, if it has been approved as is, you will receive your approval letter). Depending on volume at the Office of Human Research Ethics, responses to recommendations should be reviewed within 1-2 weeks. Assuming you've made acceptable revisions, you should receive an e-mail notifying you that you have ethics approval at that time. However, if there are errors in your resubmission, or your responses have generated further questions from the REB, you may need to respond to subsequent round(s) of recommendations. Once you receive your approval letter, you're good to do your research as outlined in the ethics application using the REB-approved study documents! You will receive approval for one year to complete your study activities.
7. During the course of your study, you may need to amend your study procedures and/or study documents. If this need arises, you will need to submit an Amendment form in WREM (i.e., Create Sub-Form). The Amendment must be approved by the REB before implementing these changes.

8. If you require more than one year to complete your research, you will be prompted to submit a Continuing Ethics Review form in WREM (i.e., Create Sub-Form) for additional approval.
9. At the end of your project (i.e., after completing your analyses, etc.), you will need to submit a Study Closure Form (i.e., Create Sub-Form) to close out this study with the REB.

Further resources:

The LGP webpage contains sample approved Ethics Protocols from MPA Research Reports submitted (with all supporting documents) under the old Romeo Platform. Since you will be using the WREM system, your application will look different, but you will be asked similar questions and will need to provide similar documentation. You can review these materials for ideas about wording and content, but you will need to tailor your application to your specific project.