



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

MIKIE SHERRILL
Governor

DR. DALE G. CALDWELL
Lt. Governor

JOSEPH E. RIBSAM JR.
Acting Commissioner

DCF Research Review Committee Overview

Guidelines for Submission of Research Applications

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to data-driven decision making and encourages the use of research to inform program and policy. The DCF Research Review Committee is responsible for ensuring that research requests funded by DCF, involving access to DCF-affiliated staff, programs, families, individuals, children and youth and/or involving confidential DCF client data are reviewed, approved, and monitored in accordance with relevant NJ State and Federal laws and regulations.¹

1.1.2 DCF Research Review Committee Structure

The DCF Research Review Committee is composed of staff from the Department's Office of Applied Research & Evaluation and Office of Legal Affairs and is chaired by the Director of the Office of Applied Research & Evaluation. The Committee additionally consults with DCF Division and Program leadership and the Office of Information Technology.

The Committee meets and reviews applications for new research projects on a monthly basis using a structured review form (Appendix B). Applications must be submitted at least **2 weeks** prior to the meeting date in order to be reviewed during a specified meeting. A current list of meeting dates and application submission deadlines can be found on the DCF Research Review Committee webpage at: <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/research/>

1.1.3 Criteria for Research Review Committee Review

DCF determines whether a project needs to be reviewed and approved by the Research Review Committee based on a set of pre-determined criteria. These criteria include: 1) whether the project is a research project; 2) whether the project is a needs assessment or evaluation; 3) who is included in the study population; 4) who the entity is funding the study; 5) what the data sources are for the study; and 6) whether the topic or methodology is considered sensitive. A decision flow chart with inclusion and exclusion criteria for projects is located in Appendix A and can be found on the DCF Research Review Committee webpage at: <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/research/Decision-Flow-Chart.pdf>

¹ New Jersey law, N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10a.d., permits the New Jersey Department of Children and Families to release records and reports to any person engaged in a bona fide research purpose provided that no names or identifying information shall be made available.

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1.1.4 Publicly Available Data and Information

Currently, aggregate data and statistics are available on the DCF website that do not require permission from DCF for access and usage. Links to these resources are found on DCF's website:

<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/>. Publicly available data from DCF's Division of Child Protection & Permanency and Children's System of Care can also be accessed through the NJ Child Welfare Data Hub: <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/>.

Deidentified child welfare-specific data from New Jersey and nationally can also be requested through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect: <https://www.ndacan.acf.hhs.gov/>

1.1.5 Definitions of Pertinent Terms

a. Outside Researcher:

An outside researcher is any person or entity with an academic or professional interest in studying DCF-related practices, outcomes, or issues, who is not employed by DCF.

b. Bona Fide Research:

The research or evaluation project must be sincere in design and have a purpose in which:

- The goal(s) are sound, achievable, and feasible;
- The design is scientifically valid and defensible and is appropriate to the goal(s) of the research and;
- The results will contribute significantly to the body of existing information on the subject.

1.2 APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Researchers from universities, other State or Federal agencies, research institutes, or other entities need to complete an application to apply for access to DCF client data, to collect data from individuals involved with DCF or to conduct a research or evaluation project with DCF funding.² Only institutions or individual researchers with established Institutional Review Boards (IRB) or access to an IRB are eligible to apply.

All applications must include a completed and signed application. The application template can be found on the DCF Research Review Committee website:

<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/research/>

1.2.1 New Research Projects

Due to resource constraints, NJ DCF accepts a limited number of applications for new research projects. Researchers whose proposed projects are not currently funded or otherwise supported

² Note: Certain types of research cannot be allowed with children in DCF custody, even with consent, such as medical, pharmaceutical, or cosmetic experiments.

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by DCF should submit a one paragraph email to DCFData.Request@dcf.state.nj.us detailing 1) the aims of the proposed research project; 2) DCF data and other resources (e.g., staff time) that will be needed; and 3) how the project aligns with DCF's strategic plan prior to submitting a full application for review by DCF's Research Review Committee.

1.2.2 Secondary Data Analysis

For applications requesting access to existing data for secondary data analysis, the application should detail the specific data elements being requested. If the Researcher is not familiar with DCF data, it is recommended they submit an inquiry to DCFData.Request@dcf.nj.gov prior to submitting an application.

All applications requesting access to existing DCF data will require a Data Use Agreement with DCF. The Data Use Agreement will be initiated by DCF's Privacy Officer after the project receives approval from the Research Review Committee.

1.2.3 Primary Data Collection

Applications requesting direct access to, or observations of, research participants (e.g., DCF staff, DCF program participants) to gather data require a higher level of scrutiny than those that involve secondary analysis only. In most cases, informed consent and minimal risk to the participants are mandatory elements.

In addition to the above-mentioned application requirements, applications for primary data collection must also include:

- a. a copy of the consent form(s) to be used,
- b. a copy of all data collection instruments and;
- c. participant recruitment materials.

1.2.4 Student Research

Students are eligible to apply for approval of projects conducted for the purposes of completing dissertation theses, Master's theses or capstone projects, provided that a faculty member (e.g., dissertation committee chair, academic advisor) oversees the project including the handling of data and/or data collection. Students must complete the application, follow the same guidelines discussed in the application AND include a faculty co-signer on the application with a letter of support.

1.2.5 Amended Applications

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To amend an application, the Researcher should update their previously submitted application using “track changes”. If any changes are made to the approved research protocol, you are required to submit an amendment to the DCF Research Review Committee for approval. The updated application should be submitted to DCFData.Request@dcf.nj.gov with a cover letter outlining the proposed changes to the research project. The amended application will be reviewed during the monthly Research Review Committee meeting.

1.3 COMMITTEE DECISION

1.3.1 Evaluation Criteria for Applications

DCF evaluates requests for research projects that involve primary data as well as secondary data collection and analyses. Requests are evaluated in the context of the Department’s mission and strategic priorities. Committee members conduct a review of all submitted applications in alignment with a set of pre-specified criteria. A copy of the reviewer form is located in Appendix B.

1.3.2 Notification of Committee Decision

The Principal Investigator will receive correspondence with the Committee’s decision via email. The Committee may approve the application, deny the application, provide conditional approval or request additional information prior to making a decision. All applications must also be approved by the appropriate Division or Department Leader prior to an approval being issued.

1.3.3 Timeline for Notification of the Committee’s Decision

DCF will generally notify the Principal Investigators about the Committee’s decision within 4 weeks of the Committee’s review. For projects that interact with multiple divisions and require additional approvals, the Committee’s final decision may take up to 6 weeks. If a data use agreement with DCF is required to undertake your research project, your application will be submitted by DCF’s Research Review Committee to DCF’s Privacy Officer for processing and next steps.

1.4 ANNUAL REPORT

For all approved research projects, the DCF Research Review Committee requires annual updates via Survey Monkey. The updates assist the Committee in keeping track of the demands on DCF’s resources and execution of deliverables and help to ensure that all results are appropriately disseminated and applied to DCF’s mission to serve vulnerable children and families in New Jersey. The link to the annual report is shared in the Committee’s approval letter.

1.5 QUESTIONS OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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If you have any questions or need additional information regarding the review process, please contact
DCFData.Request@dcf.nj.gov.

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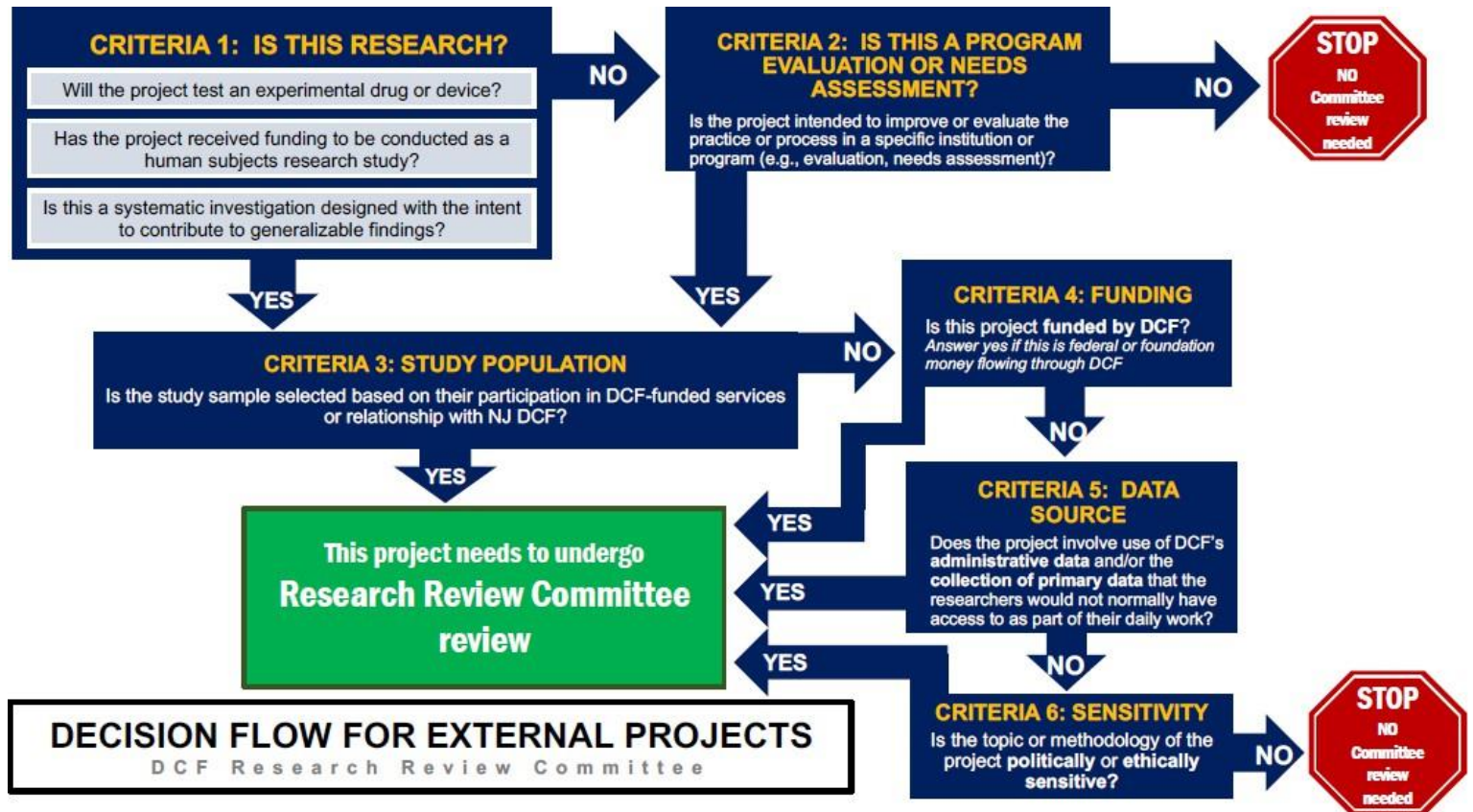
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Appendix A. Research Review Committee Decision Flow Chart for External Projects



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APPENDIX B



RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE

MEMBER REVIEW FORM

Reviewer: Please review each application based on the criteria listed below. Place a check in the appropriate column to note your determination. Note that not every reviewer needs to complete every section of this form.

Areas of Review	Yes	No	NA	Need More Information	Did Not Review Criteria
Potential Benefits (Reviewers: All)					
1. Shows promise of producing, confirming or otherwise advancing knowledge that may help improve NJ residents' health, safety, and/or wellbeing.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
2. Aligns with NJ DCF's departmental priorities.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
3. The time and additional workload that will be borne by NJ DCF staff is justified by the expected benefits of the research.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
Potential Risks (Reviewers: Legal, Research)					
4. Offers minimal risk to the children, families, and adults served by NJ DCF.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
5. The safest procedures are proposed consistent with sound research.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
6. The proposed study is politically and/or ethically sensitive.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
Sample Description and Selection (Reviewers: Research)					
7. The participants will be selected in an equitable manner consistent with the goals of the research, if appropriate.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					

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Consent (Reviewers: Legal, Research)					
8. Informed consent or assent procedures are adequate.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
Confidentiality (Reviewers: Legal, Research)					
9. The procedures make adequate provisions to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
Methodology (Reviewers: Research)					
10. The study design is sound.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
11. The proposed research methods are adequate to answer the research questions.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
12. Data elements requested from DCF are available through the proposed data source and are of adequate quality.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
13. Research integrates population considerations (e.g., analysis are stratified by community considerations, research integrates societal or community considerations into research questions or approach.)	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
14. Research participants are compensated for their participation in the project, as appropriate.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
Dissemination (Reviewers: Research)					
15. There is a clear plan and timeline for reporting findings back to DCF.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					
16. Research findings will be disseminated to research participants and/or relevant community stakeholders, as appropriate.	Yes ☐	No ☐	NA ☐	More Info ☐	Did Not Review ☐
Comments:					