

Research Review Guidelines

**Guidelines for Conducting Research
in the Thames Valley District School Board**

2024-2025

Email: ResearchApplications@tvdsb.ca

Website: www.tvdsb.ca/researchandassessment

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in conducting research in the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB). To facilitate the process, our school board has established the Thames Valley District School Board Research Review Committee. The role of the committee is to review applications to ensure that the research meets ethical and methodological standards and to support and encourage research and evaluation that contributes to educational knowledge and the TVDSB Strategic Plan. You are welcome to contact the Research Review Committee to discuss your research project prior to submitting an application. **Please do not approach TVDSB staff, including administrators, about conducting research prior to speaking with or receiving approval from the TVDSB Research Review Committee.**

These guidelines apply to all individuals, agencies or Ministries outside of TVDSB who are requesting permission to conduct research (including, but not limited to, surveys, focus groups, interviews, or feedback) involving TVDSB students, parents/guardians, staff, or administrators on school property or recruiting for research that is conducted off of board property. These guidelines also apply to all **TVDSB employees** who would like to conduct research in TVDSB that would not be considered part of their regular practice and duties as a board employee.

Researchers can expect a response from the committee within six weeks of the application deadline date. The response to the researcher will be “approve”, “not approve”, or “revise and resubmit”. Applications deemed incomplete will not be reviewed. The length of time for a final decision will vary depending on the complexity of the project, the extent of the required revisions to the application, the amount of time the researcher takes to return the revised application, and the current demand of other research applications and internal board projects. Approved applications will receive an approval letter from the committee that will grant permission to approach our schools and/or employees following the process outlined in these guidelines. All decisions made by the committee are final and we do not accept appeals. **Approval from the committee does not obligate the board, or any department, school, or individual within the board to participate in the research.** The decision to participate is always the prerogative of the individual(s) involved. Other board or provincial level factors may also impact the approval and/or participant response (e.g., shortage of supply teachers, other staff responsibilities, job action, Public Health protocols).

APPLICATION DEADLINES

The TVDSB Research Review Committee currently accepts new applications once a year and extensions for previously approved applications once a year. The **deadlines for applications** for the 2024-2025 school year are:

Application Type	Application Deadline	Review Period	Earliest Start Date
Extension Application (Applications Approved by the TVDSB RRC during the 2023-2024 school year)	August 31, 2024	September-October	October 2024
New Application (New applications that have not been approved by the TVDSB RRC during the 2023-2024 school year)	October 11, 2024	November–December	January 2025

REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications must meet the following criteria in order to be considered for approval:

- Research adheres to the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 \(2022\)](#). The Principal Investigator will need to confirm their completion of the TCPS-2 online modules and ensure that all members of the research team adhere to the policy.
- Research is designed to make an important contribution to education for the broader educational community, school board, school community, and/or individual participants. **TVDSB reserves the right to reject applications solely based on the board’s priorities or commitments.** The committee does not approve market research.
- Research must directly align with the [Thames Valley District School Board Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#).
- The impact of the request on the school system (e.g., the number of participants, the amount of time required of students, staff, and/or administrators, the disruptions to the school day) and the timelines are deemed reasonable. Research must require little to no time during the instructional school day for students and/or staff to participate.
- Research follows appropriate methodology and is rigorous enough to warrant the time allocation.
- Research meets school board policy and TVDSB Research Review Guidelines. Research does not duplicate the work that is currently being conducted or has previously been conducted by the TVDSB research department or by other TVDSB programs or services.



Applications will be accepted from:

- (1) University or College Faculty Members
- (2) Community Organizations
- (3) Ministries or consultants funded by a Ministry to conduct research/evaluation
- (4) TVDSB employees who are conducting research that is not part of their regular practice

PLEASE NOTE:

- (1) Student research projects (e.g., Master's Thesis, Doctoral Dissertation) must be submitted by the Faculty Supervisor; however, the research may be conducted by a qualified graduate student who is closely supervised by a faculty member.
- (2) The TVDSB research review process is not required for internal action research/reflective inquiry initiated by board staff, the school, or classroom teacher, if it does not involve an external partner and will not be shared outside of TVDSB.

If you have any questions about the research review process in TVDSB, please email* the committee at:

ResearchApplications@tvdsb.ca

*Please note that this email address is not monitored during school closures (two weeks in December, March Break, July and August).



APPLICATION GUIDELINES

- (1) **INCOMPLETE/LATE APPLICATIONS and RESPONSES TO REVISIONS:** Applications deemed incomplete (see APPLICATION DOCUMENTS), or that do not meet the submission deadline (see APPLICATION DEADLINES), will not be reviewed but can be resubmitted for the next application deadline. It is expected that the researcher(s) will respond to requests for revisions from the RRC within four weeks of receiving the revisions. If the RRC does not receive a response from the researcher(s) within four weeks, the application will be withdrawn from the review process.
- (2) **REB APPROVAL REQUIRED:** All members of the research team who belong to an institution that has a Research Ethics Board (REB) must first submit an application to and obtain approval from their own REB prior to submitting an application to TVDSB. Applications that are currently under review by an REB will not be accepted by TVDSB.
- (3) **SINGLE APPLICATION:** Applications that seek to collect data for more than one study/project or that attempt to answer a large number of research questions will not be reviewed.
- (4) **TVDSB EMPLOYEES:** TVDSB employees who submit an application to conduct research that falls outside of their regular duties must ensure that their methodology distinguishes their role as “staff member” vs. “researcher”. Other than reflective inquiry/action research, staff would not typically conduct research with their own students and/or colleagues. If the research will be occurring during the work day and/or in their school, the TVDSB employee’s supervisor/administrator and their superintendent should be aware and supportive of the research. A letter of support from the TVDSB supervisor/administrator must be included with the application. If a TVDSB employee is collaborating with someone from outside of TVDSB, the application to the TVDSB Research Review Committee must include the application and approval letter from the Research Ethics Board of the collaborator’s institution.
- (5) **CRIMINAL RECORD CHECK/VULNERABLE SECTOR CHECK (CRC/VSC):** All researchers who will be on board property for the purpose of the research, who will be involved with data collection off of board property, or who will have access to the data are required to submit a copy of their CRC/VSC with their application. If the researcher will be going into TVDSB schools and/or working with students under the age of 18 or other vulnerable populations, a VSC is required. If the researcher will have access to personal information and/or identifiable data and/or will be working with 2023adults in TVDSB, a CRC is required. The CRC/VSC should be dated no more than 6 months prior to the TVDSB Research Review application deadline (see APPLICATION DEADLINES). The researcher will be asked to upload copies of the CRC/VSC and the Electronic Police Record Check Declaration form for all members of the research team who fit the criteria in the online application. All researchers are to carry government-issued photo identification and the CRC/VSC **at all times** while on board property for the purpose of the research or while collecting data off of board property. Researchers should be prepared to present their government-issued photo identification and CRC/VSC to an administrator or staff member at any time. Should research staff change, the CRC/VSC for new staff should be submitted to the committee prior to the staff engaging in any research activities. If the CRC/VSC is submitted electronically (i.e., a scanned version of the original copy), the researcher must also complete and submit the Electronic Police Record Check Declaration form.
- (6) **CONFLICT(S) OF INTEREST.** Prior to submitting an application, and during the recruitment and research phases, researchers are encouraged to consider any potential conflicts of interest. These may include dual relationships (e.g., researcher’s child attends a school in which the research might occur or researcher invites personal contacts to

participate in the research) or financial implications (e.g., researcher or their personal connections may benefit financially from research findings).

- (7) **SAFE AND WELCOMING PRESENCE:** Spaces available for research to be conducted in our board are highly variable and will be determined by the participants involved and/or the school principal. Two adults must be present at all times when the research is being conducted with students. Applications for research involving children under the age of 18 that do not commit to having a second adult present in a safe and welcoming space will not be considered.
- (8) **TIMING OF ACCESS TO SCHOOLS:** In general, researchers will not have access to students or school staff in September, May, or June due to the large number of demands on schools during these months. Exceptions may be made for applications that demonstrate the necessity of access to schools during these months (e.g., a program evaluation involving pre and post data collection for a program that ends in May) if the research can be accommodated by the school(s), staff, and students involved and is approved sufficiently in advance to allow the schools to plan for the research.
- (9) **CONTACTING SCHOOLS:** You are welcome to contact the Research Review Committee to discuss your research project prior to submitting an application. Please do not approach or share any materials with other TVDSB staff, including administrators, prior to speaking with or receiving approval from the TVDSB Research Review Committee. The Committee reserves the right to restrict access for researchers who fail to follow this protocol. Once approval has been granted, the Committee will work with the researcher to contact potential participants.
- (10) **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RESEARCH TEAM:** It is the responsibility of the research team to carry out all duties pertaining to the research, including the printing, copying, distribution, and collection of Information Letters, Consent Forms, and other documents, the administration of the tasks, the scheduling and set up of online meetings using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or another secure online meeting platform, and the debriefing. Participation in the research will not have any financial implications on the individuals, the schools, or the board. The school Principal or department supervisor should be provided with a copy of the TVDSB Research Review Committee Approval Letter and the approved Information Letter(s) and Consent Form(s) when first making contact with the Principal or other potential participants and prior to the distribution of any documents or any collection of data.
- (11) **CONSENT:** All researchers are required to obtain active consent (see SAMPLE CONSENT FORM) when seeking the participation of students, families, staff, or administrators and must obtain consent specific to each mechanism or format used for capturing data (e.g., audio/video recording, photo taking). Active parent/guardian consent and separate student assent are required for all students under the age of 18. If student assent will be obtained orally (when age appropriate), the verbal assent script must be submitted with the application. The consent and assent forms should be accompanied by an Information Letter (see INFORMATION LETTER GUIDELINES) that explains the purpose of the research, explicitly states that the research is voluntary and describes the types of questions that will be asked and when, where, and how the information will be collected. This information should be clearly outlined in sufficient detail that participants can determine the relative risk versus benefit for themselves and/or their child and make an informed decision about participating. The letter must also indicate that the research has ethics approval from the REB of the researcher's institution (if applicable) and that the TVDSB Research Review Committee has approved the research. Researchers are not permitted to collect personal information (e.g., birthdates, phone numbers, email addresses) on the Consent Form that is not deemed necessary for the provision of consent. Furthermore, researchers will not collect any information on participants who decline to participate. The committee may consider approving consent collected electronically from participants and/or parents/guardians. The process for collecting online consent must be clearly outlined in the application in order to be considered by the committee.

- (12) QUESTIONS NOT PERMITTED:** Approval will not be granted for surveys, interviews, or focus groups that require participants to report illegal activity, harming or being harmed by self or others, or to rate behaviours or characteristics of others, unless there is a relevant link to education and parents/guardians have been adequately informed of the specific questions that will be asked. If sensitive questions are included, follow up resources will need to be provided to participants. See “(18) DEBRIEFING” for additional information about follow up resources.
- (13) STANDARDIZED TESTS:** For data collection tools that require specific training and skills to administer, applicants are required to demonstrate that qualified personnel will be administering the test. Researchers will generally not be permitted to administer tests that are also administered by board staff to our students for assessment purposes. Exceptions will be made in some cases and may require the researcher to share the results with the school board (with consent from the parent/guardian).
- (14) ACCESSIBILITY OF RESEARCH MATERIALS:** At the request of the department supervisor, the school Principal, or the participant, the researcher must adapt all materials to meet the needs of the participant. This may include, but is not limited to, the provision of accessible formats or the translation of materials into the appropriate language(s).
- (15) COLLECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION:** Personal information is defined as: information related to race, religion, age, sex, marital or family status, psychiatric, criminal or employment history, and any identifying number assigned to an individual such as: address, telephone number, email address and personal views of the individual relating to another individual. Personal information may only be used for the specific purposes for which it is gathered and the collection of personal information must be deemed necessary for the adequate interpretation of the research findings. Study participants must be informed when personal information is being collected and how it is being used. Participants’ names and contact information must be securely stored separately from their data.
- (16) CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA STORAGE:** Participating students, families, staff, administrators, schools, and board must be assured confidentiality. Under no circumstance will researchers identify individual participants, individual schools, or the board in any presentation or publication of results. Researchers must inform the participants about what data will be collected, who will have access to the data, how the information will be securely stored and used, the protections in place to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and who to contact for more information about the data collected. This information should be included in the Information Letter. It is the researcher’s responsibility to retain the data and evidence of written consent for all research participants for a minimum of five years. Storing data for future use (e.g., another study) is not permitted.
- (17) HONORARIA, COMPENSATION, AND INCENTIVES:** If the researcher would like to offer an honorarium or expression of appreciation to participants, it must be provided to all students in the class and should not exceed a value of \$5.00 per student. Expressions of appreciation or honoraria may also be in the form of a direct contribution to the participating school or department to use for relevant educational activities. Offering compensation to research participants will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- (18) RANDOMIZED CONTROL TRIALS AND DELAYED INTERVENTIONS:** If the research involves an intervention and a control group, it is generally required that students assigned to the control group receive the intervention at some point during the time that the research is being conducted to ensure that students are not excluded from a potentially beneficial intervention.
- (19) DEBRIEFING:** All research (including online surveys) must conclude with an approved debriefing protocol (see DEBRIEFING GUIDELINES). If the research includes sensitive questions (e.g., related to mental health) the

researcher must provide adequate follow up resources. Please note that the use of school resources (e.g., staff psychologist, social worker, resource teacher) for the purpose of your debriefing protocol must be approved by board supervisors and the school administrator in advance and should not be the extent of the debriefing. Participant debriefing must include an explanation about the purpose of the research, why the research approach was used, an explicitly stated opportunity for the participant to withdraw their consent to use their data in the research, and the researcher's contact information. The Debriefing Form should be submitted with the application.

- (20) APPROVAL PERIOD:** Approval for all applications expires on June 30th of the school year in which the application was approved. **The approval period is for one school year only** and data collection should not occur after the expiry date.
- (21) AMENDMENTS:** If any changes will be made to the research design, the researcher will need to submit an amendment using the [online application](#). Amendments can be submitted anytime within the approval period but please note that amendment reviews generally take up to six weeks. Applications for amendments require an outline of the changes that will be made to the research design and/or materials and a rationale for the changes. The researcher will be asked to upload the updated REB Application and Approval Letter, Criminal Record Checks/Vulnerable Sector Checks, and all new and amended documents with the changes highlighted or recorded in track changes. Amendments will not be accepted after April 30th of each school year.
- (22) PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROJECTS:** If a project was approved by the TVDSB Research Review Committee during the previous school year and the researcher would like to continue the research into the next school year (due to insufficient number of participants, longitudinal design, etc.), an Extension Application will need to be submitted. Extension Applications for previously approved research can be submitted during the first application deadline (see APPLICATION DEADLINES) using the [online application](#). Researchers will be required to outline any changes and/or additions made to the research and provide a rationale for continuing the research. The researcher will be asked to upload the updated REB Application and Approval Letter, Criminal Record Checks/Vulnerable Sector Checks, and all new and amended documents with the changes highlighted or recorded in track changes. Changes to the study must be minimal or the researcher will be asked to submit a new application. Approval from the committee will be required in order for the research to continue in the following school year.
- (23) STUDY COMPLETION:** By August 31st following the school year in which the study was approved, the researcher must submit an electronic copy of the Study Completion Form. In addition, upon completion of the project (and within one year of receiving approval from the committee), a one to three page summary report and any other reports/publications (e.g. thesis, research article, report to funding agency, presentation) must be sent to the TVDSB Research Review Committee. The summary report should outline the purpose, method, results, and implications of the research, and should include a 100 to 200 word abstract. All reports must respect the anonymity of participants and should contain results of aggregate data only. In no circumstance should a researcher share individual data with participants, school staff, administrators, or parents/guardians without approval from the committee and the participant's (and/or parent's/guardian's when applicable) explicit written consent. The researcher agrees to allow the report to be circulated within the board and publicly. Failure to submit the Study Completion Form by August 31st of the school year in which approval was obtained and the final report within one year of obtaining approval will result in the refusal of future applications to the committee. The Study Completion Form and reports can be emailed to ResearchApplications@tvdsb.ca.



APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

Applications to the TVDSB Research Review Committee must be submitted using the [online application](#). The electronic submission must contain ALL of the following pieces of information (additional details about each of the documents can be found in the APPLICATION GUIDELINES section):

- TVDSB RESEARCH REVIEW APPLICATION.** The application is completed online and must be signed by the Principal Investigator.
- REB APPLICATION AND APPROVAL LETTER.** A copy of the completed and approved application that was submitted to the REB of the researcher's institution and the official approval letter from the REB. This is required if any member of the research team belongs to an institution with an REB.
- INSTRUMENTS.** Copies of all tests, surveys, questionnaires, interview and focus group questions and all other data collection instruments must be submitted in final form (drafts will not be considered).
- INFORMATION LETTER.** The Information Letter(s) must adhere to the committee's guidelines (see INFORMATION LETTER GUIDELINES).
- ACTIVE CONSENT FORM.** The Active Consent Form(s) must adhere to the committee's guidelines (see SAMPLE CONSENT FORM). Parent/guardian active consent and student assent are required for all students under the age of 18.
- DEBRIEFING FORM.** The Debriefing Form must adhere to the committee's guidelines (see DEBRIEFING GUIDELINES). In cases where the debriefing will be verbal (e.g., with child participants), a copy of the script must be included.
- CRIMINAL RECORD CHECK/VULNERABLE SECTOR CHECK.** An up-to-date (within 6 months of the application deadline) scanned copy of the CRC/VSC and Electronic Police Record Check Declaration form for all members of the research team.

INFORMATION LETTER GUIDELINES

Information Letters and Consent Forms must contain clear, easy-to-read, and age-appropriate language. Information letters should be concise, contain all of the necessary information, and be printed on the researcher's institution's letterhead. Consent Forms should be printed on a separate page from the Information Letter. The following information should be included in the Information Letter, as appropriate:

- The purpose of the study.
- That the project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the researcher's institution and the TVDSB Research Review Committee.
- The TVDSB project number.
- What the participant will be asked to do and the types of questions that they will be asked.
- Whether participation will be individual or in a group.
- Whether participation will be during school time or outside of school hours.
- The duration of participation, including number of sessions and approximate time required.
- That participation is entirely voluntary and that individuals may refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and with no adverse consequences.
- How anonymity and/or confidentiality will be ensured.
- Access to data, how data will be used and securely stored, and how/when data will be destroyed.
- That the sharing of study results will not include any information that could identify an individual, a school, or the school board.
- The rationale for use of video/audio recording and whether or not an individual may participate in the research if they do not agree to be recorded.
- That active consent is being sought and that the Consent Form does not need to be returned should they decline participation in the research.
- The researcher's name, signature, and contact information including a telephone number for answering questions about the research.
- Contact information for the institution's Research Ethics Board, the TVDSB Research Review Committee (ResearchApplications@tvdsb.ca) and TVDSB Research and Assessment Services (519-452-2000, ext. 20107), should participants have ethical questions or concerns.
- That the Information Letter is theirs to keep.

Information letters to parents/guardians for student participants should include the following information (in addition to the items listed above):

- That any scheduling will be at the teacher and school's convenience to minimize interference with daily routines.
- That a minimum of two adults will be present at all times.
- That if the parent/guardian provides consent for their child to participate in the research then children will be asked to provide their own (verbal or written) assent and children may refuse to participate in the research.
- What the child will be doing should the parent/guardian decline consent and/or the child decline assent.
- What information is to be collected or shared from board or school files or records for individual students.
- That research results will not appear in any school records or be shared with the child's teacher or principal.

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

This sample Consent Form is for active parent/guardian consent for a student participant. Please note that active consent is required for all participants (students, teachers, principals, etc.) and this sample Consent Form may be modified for other participants. Students under the age of 18 may only participate in research with active parent/guardian consent. It must be clearly articulated that only parents/guardians who consent should return the form. Permission must be obtained for video/audio-recording or photographic procedures as provided in this example.

[Study Title]

[Researcher's Name and Contact Information]

This form is to be completed and returned to the school only if I consent to my child participating in this research. I have read and understood the request for my child to participate in the study entitled [study title]. I have discussed it with my child and...

- I give permission for my child to participate in this research.
- I give permission for my child to be audio-recorded.
- I give permission for my child to be video-recorded.

Name of Student (please print): _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print): _____

Relationship to Student: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____



DEBRIEFING GUIDELINES

Debriefing is an important part of the research process. The debriefing helps to enhance the educational value of the study for the participant and is an important mechanism in maintaining the participant's trust and support of the research community. After participating in the research, participants should be debriefed orally and should be given a copy of the written debriefing. For young children, an oral debriefing is required and the written debriefing should be sent home to the parent/guardian who provided consent. For online surveys, the debriefing should occur prior to exiting the survey. During the debriefing process, the participant should be given an opportunity to ask any questions that they may have about the research. The written debriefing is ideally no more than a page in length and should be written in simple language and using lay terms.

The Debriefing Form should include the following:

- A statement thanking participants for their time and participation in the research.
- Details about the study's purpose and research question(s) so that participants have an opportunity to learn about the research process as well as the theoretical reasoning behind the study. This description should be brief and written in simple, easy to understand language (i.e., avoid the use of jargon, statistical terms, or highly specialized terminology).
- An explanation of how the research relates to the general topic and to a broader, important area of knowledge.
- A reiteration that participation has no impact on school results and that individual results will not be shared with the school or board.
- A statement that the research has received approval from the institution's Research Ethics Board (if applicable) and the TVDSB Research Review Committee.
- Contact information for the institution's Research Ethics Board (if applicable), the TVDSB Research Review Committee (ResearchApplications@tvdsb.ca), TVDSB Research and Assessment Services (519-452-2000, ext. 20107), and the school principal (if applicable) in the event that the participant has any ethical concerns about the research.
- The researcher's contact information in the event that the participant has further questions or concerns about the research.
- If your methodology contains sensitive questions (e.g., mental health related questions), you must provide adequate follow up resources for participants (e.g., Kids Help Phone).
- Researchers may choose to include one or two references for further reading at the end of the Debriefing Form so that participants who are interested in the research can seek out further information and learn more about the topic of study