

110 CMR 16.00: REQUESTS FOR RESEARCH

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16.01: Introduction

110 CMR 16.02 shall be the criteria for approval or denial of research requests when the Department receives requests for access to Department data by independent researchers. 110 CMR 16.00 shall apply to projects originating outside of the Department, to research requested and contracted for by the Department or to routine requests from outside individuals or organizations for aggregate data.

16.02: Criteria for Approval of Research Requests

(1) The expected end-product(s) of the research will benefit the Department in one or more of the following ways:

(a) it will provide significant information that is not otherwise available and will be of use in improving case practice or service delivery, or in developing new or improving current service delivery; and/or

(b) it will result in provision of useful training for the Department by the research team or their associates, that is otherwise unavailable for Department staff, foster parents and/or providers; and/or

(c) it can be used to improve management of service delivery by increasing knowledge on family needs, service costs, effectiveness and/or benefits; and/or

(d) it will aid the development of new mechanisms for service, personnel, systems or fiscal administration.

(2) The person or persons conducting the research will be professionally qualified to carry it out. Evidence of such qualifications must include one or more of the following:

(a) a degree that requires demonstration of research competency from an accredited university, e.g., Ph.D. or Ed.D.;

(b) publication(s) of prior research;

(c) a faculty or research unit or educational department appointment or student status requiring research activity at an accredited college, university or hospital, or an appointment requiring research competency at a social service organization.

(3) The external research project will be time limited from initiation to completion of end-product(s) preferably lasting no more than six - nine months, unless the benefits to the Department are such that a longer period is warranted.

(4) Proposed research projects requiring data collection from case records or other confidential materials, although not totally prohibited, shall be approved only under circumstances warranting the increased Department supervision and staff involvement

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necessary in such cases. This increased Department supervision and staff involvement is necessary because researchers who are not Department employees may not have access to families' records (whether stored in written or electronic form) due to confidentiality constraints. As a result, research requiring confidential information must involve Department staff in order to protect the confidentiality of such records. While the Department supports the concept of social research, and recognizes the value of the Department's data base to researchers, the Department must nevertheless set priorities for use of its limited staff resources. The Department requires, therefore, that the investment of Department staff time and other resources be commensurate with the results to be derived from the research. As a result, projects by independent researchers that require use of confidential materials will be limited to those expected to be of benefit to the Department equal to or greater than the resulting drain upon Department resources. Unless written consent is obtained from the parent(s) and/or a child over the age of 18, Department information will be released to researchers only in forms that do not allow identification of Department family members, *i.e.*, either as aggregated data or as case data that has been redacted in order to remove any information that could be used to identify the family members, and any other persons mentioned in the case record, or Department staff.

(5) Researchers must agree to:

- a) provide a copy of the final draft research study, report or product to the Department for review; and
- b) acknowledge Department support in any article published as a result of the approved research proposal; and
- c) provide the Department with a copy of any reports or publications produced as a result of the approved research proposal.

(6) Data sources (including redacted case records) that are required for research projects may be made available as copies of materials already collected or prepared, and charges will be made to the researcher to cover costs of provision (*e.g.*, copying costs). When responding to the data request requires extensive programming or comparable use of Department staff time or resources, the Department will estimate the costs to the researcher in advance.

(7) Consent for participation of children in Department care or custody in research studies is governed by 110 CMR 11.23.

16.03: Department Research Review Committee

The Department will establish a research review committee which will consist of three to five standing members appointed by the Commissioner to provide clinical, legal, operational, research and information system expertise. The Commissioner will designate one member as the chair.

The purpose of the research review committee is to review requests for access to Department data by researchers. The committee will convene as necessary to consider all conforming research proposals. Proposals will be evaluated according to the criteria for approval set forth in 110 CMR 16.02.

16.04: Procedures for Processing Research Proposals

(1) A researcher must contact the Department's Research Review Committee Chair to initiate a research proposal, who will provide the researcher with a copy of the Department research policy.

(2) Research proposals are initially reviewed by the Department for conformity with the following required components:

- (a) A research proposal including at least the following:

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1. objective(s) of research;
 2. preliminary description of research methodology;
 3. type(s) of data needed;
 4. expected data source(s);
 5. expected end-products of the research;
 6. estimate of completion times for entire project and principal stages;
- (b) letters of approval from the Department Area Director and/or Regional Director, when the research is anticipated to have an impact on staff or families in a participating Area and/or Regional Office;
- (c) letters of support from other involved Department offices or units, agencies, residential facilities, institutions, or organizations, as available;
- (d) resume(s) of principal researcher(s);
- (e) description of any relevant institutional or organizational involvement;
- (f) copies of University and/or Hospital Human Subjects Committee or Internal Review Board approval of project, if relevant;
- (g) copy of informed consent form that meets Department approval;
- (h) source(s) of funding for project;
- (i) description of benefits expected to accrue to the Department's families, or staff, or to the management of service delivery;
- (j) evidence that Department consent and confidentiality requirements will be maintained; and
- (k) an estimate of staff time and/or other Department resources needed for the project.

16.05: Notification of Approval/Disapproval

The Committee shall determine whether to approve or disapprove a research request, and shall thereupon notify the requesting researcher(s) as soon as possible in writing. If a request is approved, further arrangements regarding collection and/or provision of data will be made between the researcher and the Department.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY

110 CMR 16.00: M.G.L. c. 18B, §§ 2, 3, 7.