

# Strategy Support and Integrated Initiatives

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MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR EXTERNAL RESEARCHERS

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION UNIT  
Strategy Support and Integrated Initiatives V 2.1 January 2023

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### 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services (hereafter referred to as “PSES”), and the Strategy Support and Integrated Initiatives Branch (hereafter referred to as SSII) considers academic research to be a significant contributor to the development and maintenance of organizational knowledge and evidence-based decision-making.

SSII Branch (a branch within PSES) has a responsibility to ensure that research conducted in relation to its services does not infringe upon the rights, or jeopardize the welfare, of individuals involved in the criminal justice system or personnel employed by PSES; and that research activity does not impede offender rehabilitation programs, or the provision of a safe and secure environment.

It is a condition of approval for any research study that the researchers shall prepare and present their Research Results in the forms of presentations and reports to PSES. PSES may determine that the Research Results do not meet sufficient standards and may direct the Researcher to amend and resubmit their Research Results to an appropriate standard.

This document details the policies and procedures for external researchers aiming to conduct studies involving individuals under custodial supervision (e.g., prisoners), PSES staff, or PSES data. Persons interested in conducting research should request the Research Application form and submit completed applications to SSII RE Unit via e-mail:

#### **SSII Research Unit**

**E-mail:** [goa.pses-ssiiresearchunit@gov.ab.ca](mailto:goa.pses-ssiiresearchunit@gov.ab.ca)

<https://www.alberta.ca/public-safety-and-emergency-services.aspx>

## 2. Supported research

The use of research and Research Results for commercial or material gain is strictly prohibited.

The potential contribution of the research must be of sufficient value, purpose, or significance for PSES to justify any operational onus and the time and effort required of participants and PSES staff. The potential contribution of the research should be sufficient to justify the level of involvement which participants are being asked to make. The level of disruption considered acceptable will be dependent on the potential value of the research to PSES. Research that imposes unacceptable levels of disruption to PSES will not be approved.

Research should usually attempt to extend, rather than duplicate, existing academic knowledge. Applicants will show that they are aware of existing knowledge and research in the area (e.g., in their literature review), and are required to demonstrate how the proposed project will add to the body of knowledge and understanding or generate new knowledge/understanding. Where a study is designed to replicate earlier work, it is necessary to provide grounds to justify such replication.

Grant Applications: For researchers planning to include PSES as a data source or potential participant in any grant application, consultation regarding the research will need to occur within a substantial amount of time prior to the submission of any grant application. This will ensure that SSII is fully aware of their role and that all details of the research are agreed to prior to monies being secured. All research will require approval from SSII after any securing of grant monies, as agreement by SSII to support grant applications does not translate into blanket approval for research methodologies and sampling.

## 3. SSII Application Process

### 3.1. Application Process

There are three stages to the process:

Screening: All applications are to be submitted for screening to SSII Research and Evaluation (hereafter referred to as RE) Unit. All relevant sections of the application form must be completed. The application form must be accompanied by all relevant paperwork, including any recruitment materials, research board ethics approval, informed consent forms, surveys, risk assessment tools, interview guides, etc. SSII RE Unit will screen applications to ensure all supporting documentation has been received and form an opinion about whether the research methodologies are ethical, rigorous, appropriate, and capable of producing valid and reliable outcomes. SSII RE Unit may also seek clarification or additional details related

to the application and/or make recommendations to improve the methodology and/or minimize the impact on participants and operations. Researchers can expect this to be an iterative process and should allow ample time to revise the proposal based on SSII recommendations. If the RE Unit determines that the research application merits further consideration, RE Unit will then forward the application to the PSES Research Committee.

PSES Research Committee: the committee is chaired by a member of SSII RE Unit and consists of representatives from across the PSES branches. The Committee meets quarterly, and also when deemed necessary. The role of the Committee is to develop and maintain the foundational blocks of the committee (e.g., policies and procedures, research strategy, research agreements, etc.), evaluate research applications, and lead outreach activities with postsecondary institutions. Moreover, the PSES Research Committee recommends the approval or rejection of all research applications submitted to PSES.

Approval: Senior Management draws from the recommendations of the PSES Research Committee to come to three possible decisions, which are:

- a) approve the research project;
- b) approve the research project with modifications; or
- c) reject the research project.

The RE Unit will notify the external researcher(s) when a decision is made. If the research project is approved, the researcher(s) will be required to provide criminal record checks (and if required, vulnerable sector checks and court orders) to SSII for all project investigators, and for research personnel (e.g., research assistants or coordinators) who have access to PSES facilities (e.g., correctional centres), and data obtained either by research participants or data obtained through PSES. Upon receipt of all required documentation, the external researcher and appropriate PSES personnel (e.g., Executive Director) will sign the Research Application and Research Agreement. Finally, the external researcher will be provided with an approval letter and contact information for the centre(s)/office(s) (if applicable).

*External researcher(s) should expect that PSES will come to a final decision (and communicate that decision) within 3 to 6 months from the date that the researcher(s) submitted their finalized project.*

### 3.2. Criteria for Assessing Research Projects:

- i. The potential contribution of the research is of sufficient value, purpose, or significance for SSII to justify any operational onus and the time and effort required of participants and PSES staff;
- ii. Priority will be given to research that:
  - demonstrates direct, visible, and practical benefit to PSES;

- will have minimal operational impact; and
  - is within the scope of the PSES' research objectives and priorities.
- iii. The research methodologies are rigorous, appropriate, and capable of producing valid and reliable outcomes;
  - iv. The research does not infringe upon the rights, or jeopardize the welfare of individuals involved in the justice system or personnel employed by PSES, and does not impede offender rehabilitation programs, or the provision of a safe and secure environment;
  - v. The research does not impose an undue burden on the individuals under our jurisdiction, PSES personnel, and/or operations;
  - vi. The research does not affect the responsibility of PSES to ensure that individuals in care receive the best possible care and are protected from physical, psychological, and other forms of harm (research designs should not adversely affect an individual's well-being);
  - vii. Appropriate methodology for maintaining participant confidentiality and obtaining informed consent;
  - viii. The research has been approved by a recognized Research Ethics Board (REB), if necessary;
  - ix. Criminal record checks, Vulnerable Sector Checks (if applicable), and Court Orders (if applicable) are received;
  - x. Appropriate data management and security procedures;
  - xi. The project timeline in relation to competing activities at proposed centres/community offices, as well as the impact of maintaining larger scale research projects within SSII.

### 3.3 Research Ethics

Research Ethics: All research conducted within SSII will be in accordance with the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#)<sup>1</sup> (TCPS2). When approval from a recognized REB is required, projects will only receive final approval after SSII has received written notice of approval from a recognized research ethics review committee. It is the external researcher's responsibility to obtain Research Ethics Board approval. A copy of the ethics application is required to ensure that the methodology approved by the REB is consistent with SSII application. Any changes made to the proposed study as a result of the ethics approval process will have to be approved by SSII.

Security Checks: Once a project has been approved, all investigators and any persons who will have direct contact with PSES centres, offices, or PSES data must:

- provide a criminal record check to SSII that was completed within the last 180 days; and
- provide a Vulnerable Sector Check to SSII, if the project involves access to youth or youth information.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique\\_tcps2-eptc2\\_2018.html](https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2018.html)

A Vulnerable Sector Check may also be requested by SSII under other circumstances involving vulnerable adult populations. Applications are available from your local police station or RCMP detachment. Any investigators or persons who have direct contact with PSES centres, offices, or personally identifying information must report any new criminal charges that were incurred during the course of the research to SSII.

Further, access to information regarding young persons or the alternative measures program requires a court order. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain these documents.

### **4. Implementation of the Approved Research Project**

Once the external researcher has received final approval, SSII RE Unit will contact the proposed centre(s)/office(s) via email to inform them that the project has been approved (if applicable). The RE Unit will also provide the external researcher with contact information for the centre(s)/office(s) along with a letter outlining the approval of their research project. The external researcher can then contact the relevant centre(s)/office(s) and set up a meeting to discuss the project's implementation. The external researcher will document the implementation plan in writing (e-mail) to both the centre/office contacts and SSII RE Unit.

#### **4.1. Reporting requirements to SSII whilst the project is being implemented**

Receiving approval to conduct research requires that the external researcher report on the progress of the research to SSII's RE Unit on a regular basis. SSII RE Unit will monitor the progress of the research against the project timeline provided by the external researcher in the application. If there are any major deviations from the project timeline, the external researcher is obliged to obtain approval for a new timeline by contacting SSII RE Unit.

SSII RE Unit is to be informed of any problems or difficulties affecting the research. If there are problems/difficulties faced during the implementation of the research project, the external researcher is to contact SSII RE Unit to attempt resolution of the issue(s).

The external researcher must adhere to all aspects of this document, the Research Application, and the Research Agreement. SSII RE Unit must approve any proposed change to the research project or research methodology before such changes are implemented. This includes but is not limited to changes to the research question(s) or scope, timelines, sample size, and data collection instruments.

#### **4.2. Right to withdraw approval of research projects**

SSII reserves the right to withdraw approval of any research project, at any stage, if:

- the external researcher is not adhering to all aspects of the Policies and Procedures for External Research, the approved Research Application, and the Research Agreement; or
- the research is having an adverse impact on PSES staff, centers, offices, clients, or programs; or
- the research is considered to be adversely affecting centre/office operations or taking up an excessive amount of PSES resources; or
- The external researcher goes beyond the scope of their research application or research questions; or
- Communicates with the media without prior written approval from the RE Unit.

PSES may withdraw approval of any research project at any stage.

### **4.3. Self-withdrawal from approved research**

If for any reason the external researcher is unable to complete their research project, the researcher is to notify SSII RE Unit in writing immediately.

The external researcher can request an extension of the research project in the case of serious personal issues or larger systemic factors (e.g., Covid-19), and may be granted the opportunity to re-start the research at a later date.

### **4.4. Dissemination and publication of Results**

It is a condition of approval that the researcher(s) will present their findings to SSII via presentations (e.g., PowerPoint) and reports. Moreover, the researcher(s) grants SSII the right to use the findings for its own internal purposes and for distribution to interested third parties.

Researcher(s) must notify SSII 42 days in advance of any dissemination of research findings (publication, presentation, etc.). The following disclaimer must be attached to all materials:

“This study was conducted in cooperation with Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services. The interpretations and conclusions contained herein are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Alberta. Neither the Government of Alberta nor Alberta Public Safety and Emergency Services have expressed an opinion in relation to this study.”



### **5. Factors to consider when planning research in SSII**

#### **5.1. PSES facilities**

Researchers may submit applications aiming to conduct research involving accessing PSES centres/offices. However, such access will depend on security considerations. The centre/office contacts will inform the external researcher about security protocols and all persons accessing the site are obliged to adhere to them. Access to a centre/office, programs, any PSES staff, personnel, or clients (including inmates or individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system) is at the discretion of the centre/office contact and may be impacted by operational considerations. Management has the right to refuse access to anyone. Modifications to the research methodology or research questions may also be required at the discretion of the centre/office contact. PSES facilities are busy environments and external researchers must respect that the first priority of personnel will be to the needs and security of our clients/inmates and the operation of our centres and offices.

With respect to research conducted within correctional centres, an important provision for individuals in custody is that there should be minimal disruption to their normal daily activities. It is important that no serious disruption to the normal routine of individuals under Correctional jurisdiction should occur. A system of continuous feedback from centre and community staff will be instituted to ensure disruption caused by research is kept under control.

#### **5.2 Resources and staff participants**

Research projects must not adversely affect the work requirements and efficiency of staff. External researchers must be cognizant of the operational impacts their study may have. The office/centre contact will need to devote time collaborating with the researcher on implementation plans, communicating with staff regarding the study, arranging safe access to participants, etc. Office/centre space for conducting research may be limited and the safety of clients, staff, and the external researcher must be considered at all times and be of first priority.

External researchers may wish to include PSES staff as participants in their study. The research application should clearly state what type of staff members the researcher would like to include. In the custody setting, this may include frontline staff (Correctional Officers and Supervisors), managers (Centre Director, Deputy Director of Programs, Deputy Director of Operations, Assistant Deputy Director), or Indigenous Program Coordinators. In the community setting, this may include Probation Officers, Supervisors, or Office/District Managers. Additional resources will be required to arrange and provide cover off for positions when staff participation is part of the project during work hours.

The amount of staff resources required for a research project will be strongly considered as part of the approval of applications.

### 5.3. Access to data and personnel from other organizations working in PSES facilities

SSII works in collaboration with several government and non-government organizations to provide high quality services to individuals under its supervision. For example, with respect to correctional services, the Edmonton and Calgary Public School Boards and various post-secondary institutions provide educational services at Correctional Centres and Alberta Health Services provides medical, health, and mental health services. Additionally, PSES maintains contracts with external agencies and personnel to provide various programs within our centres (e.g., chaplaincy services, elders, life skills and employment programming).

Any research approval granted by SSII **does not** allow access to: information held by other agencies/departments working in Correctional centres; personnel employed by other agencies for the purpose of participation in research; programs/educational curriculum utilized by other agencies/departments for the purposes of research and/or evaluation. Separate approvals will be required from the appropriate agency. Additionally, personnel employed by agencies contracted by PSES will not be permitted to devote contract hours to research participation. Any participation from contracted personnel will need to be done outside paid working hours.

### 5.4. PSES data

Research projects involving aggregate data and individually identifiable personal information will be in accordance with Section 42 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP). Moreover, any data access will depend on the degree of PSES resources needed to produce the required information. Data will be provided to the researcher by SSII staff after obtaining the appropriate approvals. Researchers are advised to submit applications that request PSES data early on to avoid delays to their own timelines. Researchers will need to consult with SSII RE Unit in relation to data availability and the meaning of field variables, data values, and their reliability.

Whenever possible, data will be stripped of all individually identifying information. Data at an individually identifying level will only be provided in accordance with Section 42 of FOIP: the research purpose cannot reasonably be accomplished unless the information is provided in individually identifiable form; any record linkage is not harmful to the individuals the personal information is about; and the benefits to be derived from the record linkage are clearly in the public interest.

### 5.5. Data management and security

External researchers are required to maintain accurate and up-to-date records of the number and location of all data. Data must be stored securely and protected by taking reasonable precautions against unauthorized access, use, modification, or disclosure, and against all other misuse. Data must not be left unattended except when stored in a secure location to which access is given only to persons authorized to have access. The premises where data is stored must be securely locked and the data stored in locked filing cabinets. Electronic data must be protected by restricting access through the use of passwords, restricted access to folders, and other security measures. Removable hardware must also be password protected and stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room. No data shall be transmitted by means of any telecommunication device, including e-mail, telephone, fax, or modem.

Drawing from Government of Alberta policy and procedure requirements for Information Management Technology, external researchers must encrypt all data that was obtained through PSES. This includes any data that researchers obtained while facilities operated via PSES (e.g., a correctional centre) or any primary or secondary data obtained through PSES databases.

In the event of unauthorized disclosure, use, possession or knowledge of data, the researcher must: notify SSII in writing immediately; promptly furnish SSII with full details of the event and participate in any inquiries; and take reasonable steps to prevent the recurrence of such an event. If deficiencies or breaches in security practice are identified by SSII, the researcher will take all reasonable steps to rectify them.

Data should be retained for only as long as is necessary and securely disposed of (e.g., paper shredded, files double/triple-deleted, hard drives reformatted) as soon as possible. Ensure, prior to disposing of any media, that any data contained on it has been erased or destroyed and keep records of all such disposal.

Data is to be used only for the purpose stated in the Research Application and may not be reused for any other purpose without prior approval from SSII.

### 5.6. Confidentiality requirements

#### Protection of privacy and confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are governed by a number of pieces of legislation that applies to PSES. Such regulations include but are not limited to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and*

*Freedoms, FOIP, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA). Researchers are responsible for ensuring they are aware of and abide by all relevant legislation.*

Any breach of confidentiality will result in the termination of the research, and the relevant bodies will be notified (i.e., the university and/or funding body).

### **Personally identifying information**

Any personally identifying information being collected will need to be detailed and approved during the application process. Researchers who wish to collect identifying participant information must be able to demonstrate the necessity for collecting such information and describe the procedures that will be adopted to ensure confidentiality. If the identity of a participant is crucial to the continuation of research, for example in longitudinal research, the confidentiality of participants must be assured. The researcher is required to prevent unauthorized disclosure, use, possession, or knowledge of personally identifiable information by employees, agents, consultants, or other persons.

Access to personally identifiable information should be restricted as much as possible within the research team. All persons who will have access to personally identifying information must be identified in the research application and the researcher will obtain a written confidentiality agreement from each of them. Moreover, if the researcher includes a new team member that is not included in the research application, the researcher will inform SSII in writing of this change. The researcher is fully and solely responsible for these persons with respect to any unauthorized disclosure, use, possession, or knowledge of the data.

Identifying information shall not be left unattended at any time. De-identification measures (e.g., replacing individual identifiers in the data with pseudonyms or researcher-derived case numbers, suppressing values under a threshold, and masking or removing unique values) should occur as soon as possible.

Identifying information must be stored at the address specified in the application separate and secure from the other data collected and other records and databases. It shall be destroyed at the earliest reasonable time. Persons outside the research team must not be able to link the information collected to the individual participants. As per above, no personally identifiable data shall be transmitted by means of any telecommunication device, including e-mail, telephone, fax, or modem; or stored or transmitted outside of Canada.

### **“Duty of care” considerations and the issue of limited confidentiality**

PSES has a duty to ensure that individuals in its care receive the best possible care and are protected from physical, psychological, and other forms of harm. Research designs should

not adversely affect an individual's well-being. Approval to conduct research will be granted only when the PSES Research Committee and designated PSES signing personnel are satisfied that researchers who will come into contact with individuals and the research procedures do not represent a risk to the individuals involved.

The confidentiality of participants must be protected at all times. Researchers should not ask about, and participants should not discuss, current charges or any potentially unreported illegal activities.

### **5.7. Minimization of risk or harm to participants**

SSII acknowledges that some necessary research around psychological well-being or questions around families and/or past experiences may be traumatic for participants. Therefore, researchers have a responsibility to ensure that all appropriate measures will be used to ensure that distress to participants is minimized

Where there is a possibility that individuals may become distressed as a result of participating in the project, researchers will need to include strategies to ensure that adequate mitigation/counselling support is available and that participants are made aware of the availability of such support during the informed consent process. This will need to be outlined when submitting the full application, especially if the researcher is requesting to use Correctional resources for counselling support/debriefing procedures. In the event that a participant exhibits signs of distress, the external researcher should immediately notify the centre/office contact.

If there are a significant number of individuals who become unduly distressed as a result of participating in the project, the research will be recommended for termination.

### **5.8. Informed consent to participate in research**

The informed and voluntary consent of individuals to participate in research must be obtained prior to the research commencing and maintained during all phases of the project. Research participants must be fully informed of the purpose of the research, potential benefits and risks, the expectations of their participation, and any other factors that might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate. Participant information and consent forms are to be used in the informed consent process (see TCPS2, Chapter 3, for information about the content of these forms). The information sheet must be attached to the consent form and a copy provided to the participant. In situations where written consent is perceived as inappropriate, the rationale and alternative documentation of consent must be fully described in the application and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

If the research involves data recording formats such as audio/videotape or photographs, consent specific to that will need to be obtained. Audio or video recordings may not be released publicly without the prior authorization of PSES.

### **Specific informed consent considerations for research participants**

Care must be taken to ensure that no undue influence or coercion is involved when obtaining informed consent to participate due to the vulnerable nature of criminal justice clients.

Incentives for participation or soliciting the enrollment of individuals in custody is considered unacceptable and is not allowed. Similarly, incentives for soliciting the enrollment of staff or staff participation are not allowed. Incentives for participation of clients outside of custody will be considered on a case-by case basis. The main considerations are whether the incentives would be coercive and whether such incentives could be deemed as rewarding criminal behaviour.

Individuals over the age of 18 years can provide informed consent unless their decision-making capacity is such that they are unable to sufficiently understand the nature of the research project, and the risks, consequences, and potential benefits associated with it.

For those under the age of 18 years, written and informed consent for participation must be obtained from the parent/legal guardian of the young person. This age restriction will not be reduced under any circumstances. Consent cannot be assumed or given by the parent/legal guardian if they do not respond to the request for written consent – assuming consent in the face of non-response is not acceptable. Additionally, documentation of youth assent must also be provided.

When there is a requirement for the involvement of participants to be ongoing, this must be detailed in the consent form and the information sheet. Details of follow up periods and expectations of the participants at the follow up time(s) will also need to be detailed. Consent will need to be obtained again at the follow up point.

If there are significant changes in the nature or conduct of the research, which might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate, participants and the parent/legal guardian (if the person is under the age of 18 years) must be informed by the researcher of such changes in writing. The written consent of parent/legal guardian and/or the participant must be obtained again.

Consideration must be given to literacy skills. All consent forms and participation sheets should be written in plain language, and should not contain jargon or complex

words/sentences. Where the use of complex words/sentences is necessary, a standard definition of this must be provided to the individual and/or their parent/legal guardian. Where the potential participants are unable to read effectively, researchers will be required to read the content of consent forms and participant information sheets to the potential participant. Moreover, when a participant reports that they cannot read, the researcher(s) will note on the participant's consent form that the researcher(s) read the consent form and that the research participant gave their oral consent.

In addition to the regular content of consent forms described in TCPS2, the following information is to be included:

- Any planned linkage of the data being collected to other data sources.
- The decision to participate (or not participate) will in no way affect the services provided by PSES or other service providers involved in their supervision.
- The decision to participate (or not participate) will have no impact on any future court outcomes.
- Limits to confidentiality must include threats of harm to the participant or another, reports of child abuse, and unreported crime. Participants should not discuss current charges or any potentially unreported crimes to the researcher.
- Specific consent for audio/videotapes or photographs (if applicable).