

## Philadelphia Department of Human Services' External Research Committee Guide for Study Submission

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) is committed to using research and data-informed decision making to improve services and outcomes for children and families receiving prevention, juvenile justice, and child welfare services. DHS' External Research Committee (ERC), which is comprised of research staff from DHS' Division of Performance Management & Technology and legal staff from the City's law department, supports this work by actively engaging in research partnerships with external institutions. The goal of the ERC is to facilitate research that produces actionable findings that directly benefit families and align with DHS' goals (e.g., Improving Outcomes for Children<sup>1</sup>).

This document provides guidance on the process for submitting a study proposal and conducting research with DHS and associated stakeholders. Successful applicants should justify how they plan to partner with DHS to produce concrete deliverables that support the following goals: More children and youth maintained safely in their own homes and communities; more children and youth achieving timely reunification or other permanence; reduction in the use of congregate care; and improved child, youth, and family functioning.

### Studies in Need of Approval

DHS requires approval for studies proposing to use either primary data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews) or administrative data from DHS or its contracted agencies. Studies that require approval include those that:

- Involve persons receiving services directly, indirectly, or funded by DHS (including focus groups, surveys, and interviews as well as administrative data)
- Involve persons employed by DHS or any of its contracted agencies (e.g., CUAs, providers)
- Use any form of DHS or contracted agency data (e.g., CUAs, providers)

### Overview of Approval Process

It is preferable that the researcher request approval for their study **before** writing research grants and proposals. If a grant is received and includes using departmental data or other information, DHS cannot guarantee that it will approve the study and data request.

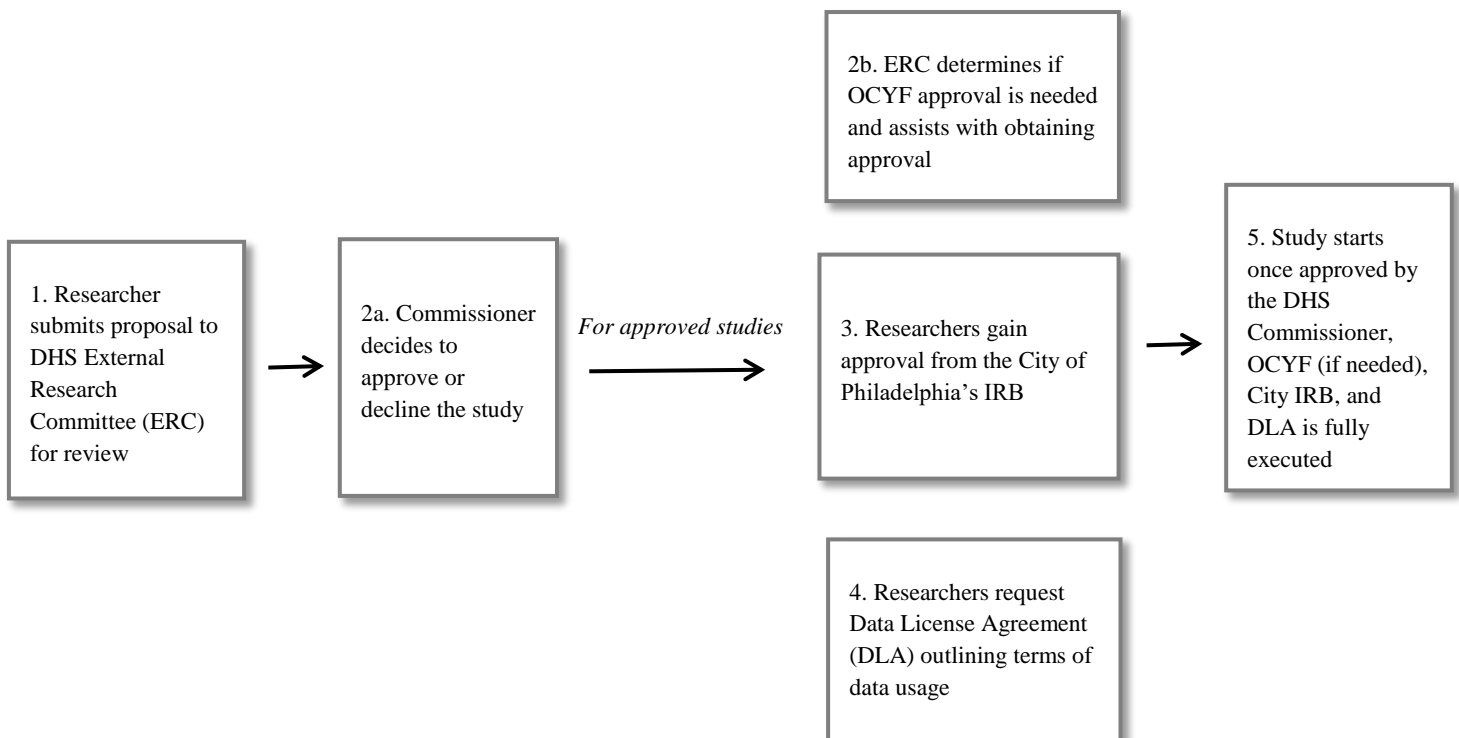
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.phila.gov/departments/department-of-human-services/about-us/improving-outcomes-for-children-ioc/>

Studies submitted to DHS for approval must go through the following steps:

1. Review by the External Research Committee (ERC)
  - a. The researcher submits the Proposed Study Application to the ERC.
2. Written approval from the DHS Commissioner
  - a. The ERC submits a recommendation to the DHS Commissioner, who makes the final decision to approve or decline the study.
  - b. The ERC determines if further approval is required from Pennsylvania's Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF). If OCYF approval is needed, the ERC assists the researcher with obtaining such approval.
3. Approval from Philadelphia's Department of Public Health (PDPH) IRB<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Once the Commissioner has approved the study, the researcher must submit an application to the City's IRB.
4. Data License Agreement (DLA) from the City's law department.
  - a. Once the Commissioner has approved the study, the ERC assists the researcher with applying for a DLA. The study cannot begin until approval is obtained in writing from the DHS Commissioner, OCYF (if needed), the PDPH IRB, and a DLA is fully executed.

As shown in the figure below, steps 3-5 may occur concurrently.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.phila.gov/health/commissioner/IRB.html>

## Ongoing Partnership

Once the study is approved by all relevant entities and has begun, the DHS ERC will remain an active partner throughout the research process, as outlined in the study proposal. This partnership may include activities such as study recruitment, data collection, analyses, interpretation of findings, and/or dissemination of results. All anticipated reports, publications, and presentations resulting from the study should be specified in the researcher's Proposed Study Application.