



## Research Approval Guidelines

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (DAC) is committed to facilitating and promoting research that will increase the ability of the agency and researchers to inform corrections policy and practice and that contributes to general knowledge of criminal justice and other academic fields. This guide is meant to provide a basic orientation to conduct research with DAC.

Generally, the DAC approval process will take 1-2 months to complete. However, extenuating circumstances or more complicated applications may delay the review process. If you (the Principal Investigator) have questions about the DAC approval process or about your study design as it relates to DAC policies and practices, please feel free to contact [administrative-analysis@dac.nc.gov](mailto:administrative-analysis@dac.nc.gov).

### 1. Permitted Research

DAC performs many functions and has research interests in legal, sociological, psychological and other applied topics that relate to offender or correctional professionals. In our judgment, for research to be approved, it must be relevant to offenders, prisons and/or other correctional issues and must follow certain guidelines.

Not all research is permitted with prisoners and probationers. There are both departmental policies and federal regulations (<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/regulations/45-cfr-46/common-rule-subpart-c>) that may prohibit certain projects. If your research involves offenders, the following seven criteria must be met:

1. The research must be one of the categories of permissible research under [§46.306\(a\)\(2\)](#).
2. There cannot be any undue incentives as a consequence of taking part in the research study.
3. The risks involved in the research must be equivalent to risks that would be accepted by non-offender volunteers.
4. Procedures for the selection of subjects must be fair to all offenders and correctional authorities; furthermore, other offenders cannot intervene in the selection.
5. Information about the project must be written at a level that offenders can understand.

6. There is no gain, nor perception of gain, for any offender who takes part in the study, and there is no penalty, nor perception of a penalty, for any offender who declines to participate.
7. If needed, adequate provisions must be made for follow-up examination/ care after participation has ended.

## 2. Applying to Conduct Research

DAC is committed to the safety and rights of individuals placed in our custody and in our employ. For these reasons, all proposed research that involves employees of DAC, offenders in the custody of DAC, or data belonging to DAC are considered human subjects research and must be approved by **both** an accredited Institutional Review Board (IRB) and DAC. For DAC approval consideration, the following are required.

### 2.1 Official IRB Approval Letter

You must obtain IRB approval from your institution **prior to** applying to conduct research with DAC. Once you receive IRB approval, submit your signed IRB approval letter along with the documents listed below. Be aware that your IRB must have a prisoner representative as a member – this is a federal regulation.

### 2.2 DAC Application for Research Approval

The DAC Application for Research Approval must provide the information necessary to demonstrate your ability to conduct the project. You will need to explain the purpose and design of the study and exactly how DAC will be involved. Since confidentiality is a significant concern with research involving offenders, you will need to thoroughly explain your method of preserving confidentiality. The application explicitly details DAC expectations concerning the type of information you are to provide. Please read the instructions carefully and submit a complete application with all requested information. A copy of this document can be found [here](#).

### 2.3 Informed Consent Statement

The Informed Consent document contains several statements that are required unless you can provide justification for exemption. Please use these statements as written. You may use any format you desire but be certain to include the required statements. A document containing these statements can be found [here](#).

### 2.4 Copies of any tests, surveys and/or interview questions

Copies of the actual tests, surveys, interview forms and/or training videos to be used during the study must be approved by DAC. You must indicate whether the instrument has been field tested and/or validated or provide a proposal that incorporates these elements. If the instrument cannot be validated, you must provide justification in your study design.

## 3. Submission Instructions

Please submit the required documents above to [administrative-analysis@dac.nc.gov](mailto:administrative-analysis@dac.nc.gov). You may also direct any questions or concerns to this address.

## 4. DAC Research Approval Process

During the approval process, your proposal will be

- assessed for scientific merit
- reviewed for protection of human subjects
- evaluated for operational feasibility.

### 4.1 DAC Research Authorization Panel (RAP) Review

Once all required documents have been received, your application will be reviewed by the Research Authorization Panel (RAP) within one to two weeks. The RAP will look for evidence of sufficient methodological rigor, as well as useful and generalizable information to benefit the NC correctional process. The panel will make certain that adequate precautions have been taken to protect the human subjects in your study from coercion to participate, and from physical or mental harms. The panel also ensures that adequate safeguards have been provided to protect the confidentiality of subjects. If the panel has questions or concerns about the information in your application, they will ask you to clarify or revise your application and resubmit it for review. If there are no revisions, this process usually takes two weeks.

### 4.2 Section Review

Next, your application will be forwarded to a review committee within the Section where your research will be conducted. This committee typically meets the third week of each month. The committee will evaluate your proposal for issues that may impact the operations and security of correctional institutions, offenders, staff, and the individual(s) conducting the research. The committee will notify the RAP chairperson of the approval decision within one to two days. If the committee has questions or concerns about the information in your application, they will ask you to clarify or revise your application and resubmit it for review at the next scheduled Section committee meeting.

### 4.3 Approval Notification

If all parties have reviewed and approved the application, you will receive a Final Authorization letter from the RAP chairperson permitting you to conduct your research with DAC, as well as a Certification letter outlining approved study activities. If the project is not approved, you will receive a letter outlining issues/concerns and what revisions are needed if resubmission is a possibility.

Your research with DAC cannot begin until you have received these documents. Please be aware that authorization by DAC means that you can conduct the research, **but** you will still need to work out the administrative details (e.g., times, dates, room locations, etc.) with appropriate DAC staff.