

Applying for ethics approval in advance of a funding application: Why it makes good research sense.

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There are at least five good reasons to apply for ethics approval in advance of a funding application.

- 1) While it's true that faculty members do not require ethics clearance to submit an application for Tri-Council funding, it certainly is beneficial. If an applicant receives funding, they will be able to begin conducting their research immediately.
- 2) If a faculty member indicates to a potential funder that they have obtained ethics approval and can proceed immediately upon receipt of funds, their application may be viewed more favorably. The advance approval may be interpreted to suggest that the researcher is unequivocally committed to carrying out the research.
- 3) Obtaining ethics approval in advance also demonstrates that the proposed research is viable. There are no questions as to whether it can actually be carried out. Viability has been a consideration in circumstances where proposed research has focused on a lesser known population such as Buddhist monks in remote mountainous regions, underage homeless youth sleeping rough or miners exposed to toxic chemicals. Viability may also be raised as an issue by adjudicators if the research methods are considered "unorthodox". For example, one proposal that was initially questioned suggested that rural inhabitants interview themselves rather than be interviewed by the academic.
- 4) Completing an ethics application in advance also offers the researcher an opportunity to consider methodological aspects of their work. Unanticipated challenges may become evident while determining details. One researcher discovered that research subjects expected to be paid for their participation. Because they had not yet submitted their funding application, they were able to revise their budget and include the cost of honoraria.
- 5) Submitting an ethics application in advance may reveal problems that might otherwise go unnoticed till after funding has been received. This situation may arise more frequently when scholars are researching "vulnerable populations". One researcher sought to interview psychiatric inpatients. The researcher dealt with complex legal issues, such as whether the proposed research subjects could consent to participate in the study or whether third party consent was required. Ultimately, the researcher in this situation did not complete the proposed study. Had they been aware of the logistical difficulties inherent in their study, the researcher might have chosen to pursue an alternate research question.

In conclusion, obtaining ethics approval in advance of a funding application a) means a researcher can begin their project immediately b) enhances the perceived commitment of the researcher c) allows researchers to anticipate methodological challenges and address them d) confirms the viability of the proposed program of research and e) provides an opportunity to revise the proposal if design flaws are uncovered. For all the above mentioned reasons, obtaining ethics approval in advance of a funding application makes good research sense.