

State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
DCF Research Review Committee

DCF Research Review Committee Protocol
Part I: Overview of Procedures

Purpose: The Department of Children and Families (DCF) Research Review Committee is responsible for ensuring that research requests are reviewed, approved, and monitored in accordance with relevant NJ State and Federal laws and regulations. The Committee's procedures are pertinent to research requests involving access to DCF clients (children and adults), and field staff as well as confidential DCF client data.

The Committee is composed of staff from the Office of Research, Evaluation and Reporting, the Office of Performance Management and Accountability, and the Assistant Commissioner for Legal, Regulatory, and Legislative Affairs or his designee. The Committee is chaired by the Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Performance Management and Accountability. This Committee reviews research requests in a timely manner and notifies the applicant about whether or not the project can proceed.

As the State's lead public child welfare agency, DCF's Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) [now known as the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P)] is, by law, the repository of information regarding the reported incidence of child abuse and neglect. As a result, CP&P is frequently the recipient of requests from outside (i.e., non-agency) researchers in the academic and advocacy communities for permission to gain access to DCF/CP&P client case files, workers, or clients themselves in order to conduct child welfare research. State laws and regulations provide explicit protection of the confidentiality of case-specific identifying information maintained by DCF/CP&P and its staff.

The purpose of this protocol is to outline the procedures to be employed by DCF/CP&P in assessing these requests and the conditions that must be satisfied for DCF/CP&P to grant access.

Definition of Pertinent Terms:

- **Outside Researcher:**

An outside researcher is any person or entity with an academic or professional interest in studying child welfare or family service cases, practices, outcomes, or issues, who is not employed by DCF/CP&P

- **Bona Fide Research:**

The research must be sincere in design and have a purpose in which:

- The goal(s) of the research are sound, achievable, and feasible;
- The research design is scientifically valid and defensible and is appropriate to the goal(s) of the research; and
- The results of the proposed research will contribute significantly to the body of existing information on the subject.

Evaluation Criteria for Research Investigations and Data Sharing: DCF evaluates requests for research projects that involve primary data as well as secondary data collection and analyses. These requests are evaluated in the context of the Department's mission to serve vulnerable children and families in New Jersey. Researchers must explicitly discuss how their proposed project meets the priorities of one or more of the three DCF Divisions:

1. Family and Community Partnerships (FCP): The primary goal of FCP is to build a continuum of child abuse prevention and intervention programs that are culturally competent, strengths-based, and family-centered, with a strong emphasis on primary child abuse prevention. More information is available at: <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/dfcp/>
2. Children's System of Care (CSOC): This Division serves children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral health care challenges and their families. CSOC is committed to providing services based on the needs of the child and family in a family-centered, community-based environment. More information is available at: <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/dcsc/>
3. Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P): This Division is New Jersey's lead child protection and child welfare agency, whose mission is to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and to support families. More information is available at: <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/dcpp/>

In addition, research project proposals are evaluated on the basis of their potential demands on DCF's personnel and resources, how they might affect service delivery to clients, as well as on their potential contribution to families and children involved with, or at risk of involvement with, child welfare services.

The Committee obtains feedback from the Division Directors about the potential impact of the research on their personnel and services. The final proposal review criteria pertain to examining the extent of the proposed project in terms of its scope and duration.

Publicly Available Data and Information: Currently, there are statistics and information available on the DCF website that do not require permission from DCF for access and

usage. Several links to these resources are found on the homepage of the DCF Website under Child Welfare Statistics and Data: <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/>

Application Process for Requests for Access to Confidential Data and/or Conducting Data Collection with Families, Children/Youth, and Staff involved with DCF:

Researchers from universities, other State or Federal agencies, research institutes, or other entities need to complete an application to apply for access to client data and/or to actively collect data from individuals involved with DCF. The instructions for these applications are available on the DCF Website. Only researchers with established Institutional Review Boards (IRB) are eligible to apply for data collection or access to data. A research project cannot be approved by DCF until IRB approval has been received.

When completing the application(s), researchers are required to discuss the rationale, approach, value, and benefits of the proposed research project. When discussing the benefits of the research proposal, they must identify the potential value to DCF, the children, the community, and to the State. Also, they are required to identify any potential obstacles and complications that could potentially arise from the proposed project.

Doctoral Student Research Requests: Doctoral students seeking data access for purposes of completing dissertation theses are eligible to apply, provided that they have documentation from their Committee Chair that he or she will oversee the handling of the data and/or data collection. Doctoral students must complete the application and follow all of the same guidelines discussed in the application **AND** must also provide a co-signer on the application proposal (e.g., dissertation committee chair).

Applications: For an application, click on the appropriate link below:

Part II, for research projects involving direct access to clients (children or adults) and/or staff:

www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/research/directaccess.doc

Part III, for research projects involving only client records or data:

www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/research/clientdata.doc