Guidelines for External Research and Data Requests

Toronto Community Housing

The following provides guidance for external researchers seeking to conduct studies involving TCH staff or tenants. This applies to any externally initiated research that will either involve these groups or will take place on TCH property.

As a non-profit corporation owned by the City of Toronto, we value educational and institutional research, but must remain cognisant of the trust placed in us by our tenants and staff; any external research conducted on TCH property or involving TCH staff or tenants must therefore not interfere with reasonable rights to privacy and must take into consideration any vulnerable populations involved. All applications will be reviewed in accordance with the External Research Request process, which will carefully assess projects according to the criteria outlined in the following pages.

Applications are generally accepted from:
- Undergraduate/Postgraduate Major Research Project students
- Master's thesis candidates
- Doctoral thesis candidates
- Institutionally funded projects
- Externally funded projects (i.e., the project is being conducted by a research institution, but is being funded by a third-party organization, which will benefit from the research)

How to Apply:
- Obtain approval/sponsorship from institutional supervisor or agency representative
- Obtain approval from institutional Research Ethics Board
- Complete the TCH External Research Request and Proposal Application form
- Attach all relevant documentation:
    - Research Ethics Board decision documentation
    - Project proposal or outline
    - Information and consent documents for participants
    - Risk mitigation plan for interacting with any applicable vulnerable populations
    - Data collection tools
- Send your completed application with all supporting documentation to:

    policy@torontohousing.ca

- Applications may be expedited in the event that data collection activities and/or participant group involvement is minimal
- Applications may require greater scrutiny, and/or additional documentation on the part of investigators, where a study involves vulnerable populations, extensive interaction with participants, and/or several data collection activities

The Review Process

Criteria Considered by Toronto Community Housing:

Note: it is highly recommended that applicants consider and plan for these criteria while completing their applications (not all criteria will be relevant to every research project); complete and well-planned External Research and Data Request applications are more likely to be approved and are more likely to be expedited.

Relevance to TCH:
- Is the study relevant to social housing in Toronto?
- Do the research objectives fall in line with the strategic objectives of TCH?
- What is the value/benefit to TCH's service delivery or planning?
- Is the study consistent with TCH's values and policies?

Research Methodology:
- Are the study objectives clear and well-defined?
- Is the methodology appropriate considering the purpose of the study?
- Has the theory been clearly detailed?
- Are the proposed research questions clear and concise?
- Are sample selection procedures clear (i.e., is there a clear method for selecting appropriate participants for the study)?
- Are the data collection tools adequate for the scope of the project?

Protection of Staff and Tenants:
- Are the time demands placed on staff and/or tenants realistic?
- Are there sensitive or intrusive topics involved?
- Is the confidentiality of participant data reasonably protected?
- Are the rights of participants reasonably accommodated?
- Are there any power dynamics to be accounted for with regards to the participation of TCH employees or tenants?
- Is the safety and well-being of participants ensured?
- Are the procedures for obtaining informed consent clear?
- Are there reasonable protocols in place to deal with sensitive issues which may arise in the course of data collection (e.g., participants wishing to withdraw, the disclosure of sensitive information by participants, debriefing participants)?

Documentation and Protocols:
- Is all relevant documentation present?
- Have all required external approvals been granted?
- Have all protocols been adequately explained?
- Have inherent risks been planned for and adequately mitigated?
- Is there an incentive for participants, and if so is it appropriate?
- Is there a clear process for disseminating actionable results or providing feedback to relevant TCH divisions?

Approval Process

Possible Decisions:
Note: in all cases, a rationale and appropriate follow-up process will be provided to the applicant

Approved- the research project can continue to the initiation phase, with scheduling, security permissions, and internal contact coordinated between the principal investigator and the relevant TCH staff

Conditionally Approved- specific revisions are to be made to the project implementation, or additional documentation is required; pending these conditions being met, the research project can continue to the initiation phase, with scheduling, security permissions, and internal contact coordinated between the principal investigator and the relevant TCH staff

Deferred- not enough information has been provided to make a decision; the principal investigator is to provide further documentation or explanation of the project, following which point the approval status can be reassessed

Not Approved- the project in its current form cannot be initiated

Next Steps:
The decision will be conveyed to the applicant in a timely manner, once all considerations have been deliberated and an actionable plan has been put in place. Should there be a need for additional documentation, this request will be sent as soon as possible to the applicant to ensure the process is not unduly delayed.

Assuming all criteria are sufficiently satisfied and the project is approved, the project initiation process will begin. In-person or remote meetings will be scheduled between the principal investigator and/or research team and the designated TCH contact to discuss next steps. Any involved staff will be put in touch with the investigator and/or research team, and any necessary security permissions will be established. Other organizational priorities will be discussed and planned collaboratively on a case by case basis.