

Frequently Asked Questions

Who needs to submit proposals for review by this committee?

Anyone wishing to conduct research involving FUSD resources (human, information, or otherwise) for which the purpose is primarily external. This includes but is not limited to students, individuals in cohort, academicians, research firms, non-profit or government agencies wishing to collect data for a purpose that is not part of regular district business. Anyone in doubt about the nature of his specific case should submit an inquiry to the committee chair before submitting a proposal.

For how long is FUSD IRB approval valid?

The approval is valid until a year following the date you receive approval. It is your responsibility to make sure your institutional IRB approval is current and that our FUSD IRB Committee has a copy on file.

What if I am proposing to do a study that takes longer than a year?

You may propose a multi-year study. Independent of how long your study takes to complete; you will be asked to submit an annual update. This update would consist of a summary of findings if the study is at completion or a request for an extension should the study need to continue beyond one year. So long as no substantive changes are made to the original proposal for a multi-year study, approval may be renewed via the annual update without the need for a revised proposal to be submitted each year.

Do I have to wait until my institutional review board (IRB) has completed its review before submitting to this committee?

No. Although we rely heavily on the opinions of institutional IRBs to ensure that researchers are adhering to human subjects' protection guidelines, we are willing to review proposals while they are under review by an institutional IRB in order to save time. However, the IRB review must be completed and a copy of the approval submitted to us before an approved study may move forward with data collection. (NOTE: some IRBs require an approval letter from us before they will grant their own approval. It is perfectly legitimate to submit both at once, submit a copy of your application to us, and if approved, submit a copy of your approval letter from us to the IRB so they can complete their review.)

Is the process any different for me if I happen to be an FUSD employee?

No. You must go through the proposal process if you wish to conduct research for purposes that fall outside your normal job duties. In fact, because of the potentially conflicting roles played in such a scenario, the researcher should take great care to conduct all business related to the external project as someone external to the district in order to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest (for example, a principal of a school who is conducting research for an Ed.D. thesis should not solicit participation from teachers or students at that school, using his or her title as principal, as it may compromise the extent to which individuals feel they are volunteering to participate and could even create the image that he or she is using human resources accessible to a principal for personal use).

When questions arise as to whether a district employee is potentially crossing ethical lines, it would be a good idea to consult the chair of this committee or the district's Ethics Office.

I already have access to student data as a FUSD employee. Can I extract the data myself?

No. Employees of the District often need access to sensitive information to carry out their jobs, however this access does not grant them permission to use that data for reasons other than the specific purposes for which they were granted access. Schools and school staff are generally not considered "owners" of data for purposes of determining the appropriateness of its release. A data owner is the administrator, director or supervisor of the branch or division that collects and/or uses the data on behalf of the entire District. Student information falls under the purview of the Equity and Access Department and all data requests must be directed to this office.

What do you mean by "benefits to FUSD"?

In a time of multiple district assessments, concurrent programs and initiatives, and tight resources, FUSD must prioritize its goals on student learning and achievement. All district business must be aligned with the FUSD mission and vision. External researchers must demonstrate that their study contributes to achieving the district's goals and does not only fulfill goals that are external to the district.

What are reasons why a proposal would be rejected?

There are three general reasons why a proposal would be rejected: 1) lack of relevance, 2) lack of quality, or 3) intense burden on district resources. A study is deemed to be lacking relevance if the variables are not directly related to the mission of FUSD. For example, a researcher interested in the political affiliations of public school teachers might find FUSD to be a convenient laboratory for his work but could probably not argue that the findings would be of use to the district. Thus use of FUSD teachers as a resource is not justified. A study is deemed to be lacking quality if an adequate level of scientific rigor is not demonstrated. Our office is comprised of professional researchers who observe professional standards for their work. The work of external researchers must be held to the same standards as use for our own work. If the proposal is incomplete, contains plagiarized content, and/or missing or unclear elements, the researcher will normally be invited to resubmit with changes. **In some cases, reviewers may deem that a minimum level of technical proficiency was not demonstrated (e.g., basic terms are used incorrectly, or the quality of writing is below professional standards), in which case the proposal would be rejected.** Proposals might also be rejected if reviewers determine that the study would place a greater strain on resources than the district would be able to accommodate. This would be particularly relevant during times when district assessments are occurring and/or the district's resources have been limited by budget cuts or other means.

How many proposals may I submit during an application period?

Each Principal Investigator may submit one proposal per application window. See the above section on application periods for the current year to determine the next time you may submit.

If my proposal is not accepted, will I be told the reasons why?

Yes. Our committee is interested in supporting any high quality research that could potentially benefit FUSD. When proposals are not accepted, in many cases, we will provide recommended changes and

invite the researcher to resubmit the proposal within 20 days. Proposals are only rejected without the invitation to resubmit if the reviewers determine that, even with changes, the work is not likely to yield benefits to the district.

How long does the approval process take?

Although the process generally takes about 6 to 8 weeks, it can vary depending on the volume of proposals we receive during an application period. You will be notified of the committee's decision within 6 to 8 weeks of submission. If you do not hear from us in a timely manner, please feel free to contact Dawn Psenner.

Does approval by the FUSD IRB Committee guarantee I will be able to get the data I need from FUSD?

No. Approval from this committee merely means that your proposal is methodologically sound and that it is likely to yield benefits to the district that outweigh any cost in resources. It does not require schools or offices to allow you access to their resources, nor does it negate the rights of subjects to decline participation. It might be helpful to think of this approval process as the first phase in a multiphase process.

I am on a tight schedule. To save time, may I contact people in the district to solicit their participation in my research while the proposal is undergoing review?

No. External researchers may not contact any district personnel, schools, students, or their families without having a formal letter of approval from this committee.

Okay, but I am still on a tight schedule. Is there any way to expedite the process so I can meet my deadlines?

No. We do our best to complete each review within a 6- to 8-week period, which involves separate reviews by independent members of the committee, including the chair. Depending on the volume of proposals we receive, this process may at times take longer than 6 to 8 weeks, but generally cannot be done any faster without compromising the process.

What happens after I receive approval?

You may begin outreach and recruitment of school sites by emailing the principal a copy of your FUSD IRB approval letter and the purpose of your research to ask if they are interested in participating. You must make it clear that participation is completely voluntary.