

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307

www.ferris.edu/irb

IRB Guidance on Obtaining Letters of Permission

When investigators seek to invite individuals into their study or use site resources (e.g., data sources, email lists, etc.), the IRB application may ask for documentation that permission to do so has been obtained from that site.

Permission is when the investigator(s) is granted access to a specific population or data set for their study from someone who is authorized to act on this behalf, also known as an authorized official. IRB approval does not authorize permission for sites; therefore, it must come from the authorized official. The following guidance in the form of questions and answers can aid researchers in understanding when and why permission is needed.

What is a Letter of Permission?

A Letter of Permission is a letter of support or statement from the authorized official to act on behalf of that site which outlines their support of the research activities proposed in the IRB application. Letters of Permission are most typically required for sites where access would be considered “private” and not open for public use. Letters of Permission must be obtained from the site’s authorized official prior to IRB approval.

What is the purpose of a Letter of Permission?

The purpose of the Letter of Permission is to provide the IRB with documentation that the site is aware of the study activities and has agreed to the plan for carrying out those activities.

When is a Letter of Permission needed?

In the absence of documentation from another IRB or ethics committee at the site of recruitment or for data use, a Letter of Permission and/or other supplemental documentation may be needed from the site. Ferris State University (FSU) IRB may request that investigators provide this documentation within their research application prior to approval to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place, that the study is feasible, or the research plan is culturally appropriate.

Examples of external sites without IRBs where permission may be needed include, but are not limited to:

- Schools/educational departments
- Medical offices or clinics
- Private companies, Non-Profits, or Non-Government Organizations
- Religious institutions
- Federal, state, or local governance institutions or offices
- Closed/private social media groups
- Other universities

Is a Letter of Permission needed if my project is occurring at Ferris State and not an external site?

Depending on the study recruitment or procedure methods, it is possible that permission from the specific department, college, or administration is needed. For example, researchers wishing to email the entire student body will need permission from the Office of Student Life; researchers wishing to analyze specific institutional data will need permission from the Institutional Research and Testing office.

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Who writes and signs Letters of Permission?

Letters of Permission should come from an individual in a position of authority to provide permission for using that site, or data, at the requested level of access. The Letter of Permission cannot come from a member of the study team, or from anyone who may have a conflict of interest relative to the study.

What is the format for a Letter of Permission?

A Letter of Permission can be documented in a hard copy letter or by electronic mail (email) and must contain the address site, professional title and contact information of the person providing permission.

What should be in a Letter of Permission?

The letter should contain enough information to enable the FSU IRB to assess whether the site understands and supports the study plan. See Page 3 for an example template. *As applicable*, common elements include:

- Address to Ferris State Institutional Review Board
- Title and IRB number of research project
- Research procedures or resources that will be facilitated by or occur at the site
- Sent from an authorized official (i.e., school principal, site manager, director, owner)
- Written on institutional/departmental letterhead or sent from the institutional email account
- Title and contact information (phone, address, and email) of person providing permission

Depending on the site and the study population, additional information may be required, such as:

- Confirmation that the approach to recruitment, the method and timing for obtaining consent, and data collection activities are appropriate for the setting and the study participants
- Confirmation that additional local review is not required, and other local requirements have been met
- Confirmation that the research plan does not expose study participants to unnecessary risk
- Other stipulations as required by the site, such as requests to review research findings
- Any explicit restrictions to agreement/permission by the site

What is the responsibility of the investigator(s)?

1. Inform the site of the need for a letter of permission/support for their IRB application
2. Inform the site of the proposed study features so that the site's authorized official can make an informed decision regarding site involvement
3. Obtain the letter of permission prior to beginning any research activities at the site
4. Upload the letter into the study application and maintain the permission letter with study documentation
5. The IRB reserves the right to require a copy of the letter before IRB approval, at the time of continuing review, or as part of a routine quality improvement review

Once I obtain the Letter of Permission, can I conduct my research?

No, not until IRB approval is obtained. Site permission for a research project under IRB review does not grant the researcher permission to conduct their project at that site; rather, site permission grants support/permission to conduct the proposed activities once IRB approval has been obtained. Projects subject to IRB review must obtain IRB approval before research can occur.

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What should a Letter of Permission look like?

See below template for a sample Letter of Permission; edit as appropriate for your project.

[INSTITUTIONAL/DEPARTMENTAL LETTERHEAD]

DATE

DEPARTMENT

SITE NAME

ADDRESS

To the Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB):

I am writing this letter at the request of [Prime Investigator's Name] to confirm that we support their research project, "Title".

I am aware that the project involves [list procedures and/or resources that will be facilitated by or occur at the site]. I have been provided with the study information and will support the project under the proposed guidelines put forth in the IRB application [for a specified time frame; etc.].

If any unanticipated problems or adverse events are to occur, it is up to [Primary Investigator's name] to report these events to the IRB as promptly as possible.

This research will be a valuable contribution to [area of study/goal of study] and we will be happy to support this endeavor.

Sincerely,

[Authorized official,
school principal,
site manager,
director, owner, etc.]

**As adopted by UCI IRB (<https://research.uci.edu/human-research-protections/>)*