



Research Ethics Board

Standard Operating Procedure

Document Number	REB.SOP.901
Title	Quality Assurance Inspections
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1. Purpose

This standard operating procedure (SOP) describes the processes for evaluating and improving the effectiveness of the human research protection program.

2. Definitions

See the MSVU **REB Glossary of Terms (REB.INFO.001)**

3. Scope

This SOP pertains to Research Ethics Boards (REB) that review human participant research in compliance with applicable policies and guidelines.

4. Responsibilities

All REB members, REB Office Personnel and the QA Officer, if separate from the REB Office Personnel, are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this SOP are met.

5. Procedures and/or Specific Policies

Quality Assurance (QA) activities, such as periodic assessments of REB and research activities, allow for a continuous evaluation and subsequent assurance of the human research protection enterprise

Findings are measured against established policies and procedures and all the applicable ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements. When areas for improvement are identified, corrective action is taken including training, education, and the revision of SOPs.

5.1. Quality Assurance Assessments of the REB

- 5.1.1. The QA Officer will develop a schedule for routine QA assessments of the REB and REB Office in response to requests from the REB, Researcher or Organizational representatives;
- 5.1.2. QA assessments may be conducted by members of the REB Office, or by other organizational personnel. REB members may be directly or indirectly involved;

- 5.1.3. When the QA Officer conducts a QA assessment of the REB and the REB Office the evaluation may including the following:
- An assessment of the SOPs and compliance with applicable policies, guidelines and regulatory requirements,
 - A review of research files, REB membership rosters, REB attendance records, and REB agendas and minutes,
 - A review of workload, performance metrics and annual reports,
 - A review of stakeholder satisfaction surveys,
 - An assessment of quality control procedures for compliance with the SOPs,
 - A review of checklists, forms, and templates,
 - Interviews with REB members, REB Office Personnel and Researchers,
 - A review of training/education records,
 - A review of all continuous improvement activities,
 - An assessment of whether any new requirements (ethical, legal, or regulatory) were incorporated into the policies and procedures,
 - A review of the status of any corrective action items from previous reviews,
 - A review of any deviations from ethical, legal, or regulatory requirements, or deviations from the Organization’s policies, and whether the deviations require remediation,
 - An assessment of compliance with all applicable requirements;
- 5.1.4. The QA Officer compares the findings against established policies, SOPs, and applicable ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements;
- 5.1.5. The QA Officer prepares a written summary of the assessment, including areas requiring improvement;
- 5.1.6. The QA Officer reports the findings to the REB Chair or designee, and to the REB and/or to the appropriate Organizational Official as required;
- 5.1.7. The QA Officer works with the REB Chair or designee to implement improvements (e.g., new or revised SOPs or forms, training, education, additional resources or modifications to existing resources).

5.2. Researcher Quality Assurance Visits

- 5.2.1. The QA Officer will develop a schedule for routine QA visits and implement visits in response to Researcher requests;
- 5.2.2. The QA Officer will work with the REB and the Organization at which the research is being conducted to determine if and when a for-cause visit of a Researcher is warranted;
- 5.2.3. The REB may direct the QA Officer to conduct for-cause visits;
- 5.2.4. The QA Officer or designee may request that a pre-visit questionnaire is completed by the Researcher;
- 5.2.5. The criteria for selecting researchers or research projects for visit may include:
- The results of a previous QA visit,
 - Studies that involve a potentially high risk to participants,
 - Studies that involve vulnerable populations (in the context of research),
 - Studies in which researchers are enrolling large numbers of participants,

- Suspected non-compliance,
 - Unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others,
 - Suspected or reported protocol deviations,
 - Participant complaints,
 - Research staff complaints,
 - Any other situation that the REB deems appropriate;
- 5.2.6. The QA Officer or designee will notify the Researcher of the visit to review the research project and a mutually acceptable time will be scheduled. It may be necessary to schedule a visit without first obtaining the formal consent of a Researcher (e.g., participant safety or suspected non-compliance);
- 5.2.7. The QA Officer or designee will conduct a review of the research project using designated/appropriate evaluation tools;
- 5.2.8. When the QA Officer conducts a review of the research project, the review may include some or all of the following (as applicable):
- An assessment of the SOPs and compliance with applicable policies and guidance,
 - A review of REB approved documentation,
 - Interviews with the Researcher and research team,
 - A review of specimens and associated collection processes,
 - A review of computer hardware and/or software associated with the research,
 - A review of the consent documents and/or processes including eligibility requirements,
 - A review of data collection mechanisms,
 - A review of appropriate source material (e.g., participant medical records), and
 - A review of other documentation, as relevant and available;
- 5.2.9. The REB or the QA Officer may choose to have a qualified impartial observer to monitor the consent process or to interview research participants;
- 5.2.10. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the QA Officer or designee will discuss the findings with the Researcher;
- 5.2.11. The QA Officer or designee will draft a report or provide a summary of the inspection including positive findings, areas for improvement and recommendations for corrective action, and submit the report to the REB Chair or designee for review;
- 5.2.12. The Researcher will be given an opportunity to respond to the report with responses and/or corrective action plans within a time specified by the REB;
- 5.2.13. The QA Officer or designee will send a copy of the final report to the Researcher and the REB. When applicable, the REB Chair or designee will provide the findings to the local Organizational Official.

5.3. Corrective Action

- 5.3.1. The QA Officer may recommend corrective action based on the findings;
- 5.3.2. Corrective action may include a recommendation for the provision of additional resources, training, or education, the development of, or revisions to the SOPs, and changes to forms, checklists, or templates;

- 5.3.3. The QA Officer will evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented improvements and adjust processes accordingly;
- 5.3.4. The QA Officer will follow-up with the Researcher in a timely manner to determine if the corrective actions have been implemented by the Researcher following a research project QA visit.

5.4. Documentation

- 5.4.1. The QA Officer or designee files all reports and correspondence concerning QA visits in the appropriate QA Files.

6. References

See References listed (if applicable)

7. Acknowledgements

The development of this document has benefited directly from similar documents made public by the Tri-Council, as well as several Canadian universities. In some instances, specific formulations drawn from these sources have been incorporated into this document. Specific iterations were drawn from the following:

- Standard Operating Procedures for Observational Health and Non-Clinical Trial Research Ethics Boards - [N2/CAREB-ACCER REB SOPs – Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards](#) (retrieved June 2021)
- N2/CAREB-ACCER REB SOPs - N2 Network of Networks - [Resources - N2 Canada](#) (retrieved May 2021)

8. SOP History

SOP Number	Key Changes	Effective Date
REB.SOP.901	Original version	September 2021