Instructions on submitting an application

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The Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Faculty of Social Sciences at LMU Munich supports researchers applying for and carrying out social science research projects by advising them on and/or assessing the ethical aspects of their planned project. This does not affect the researchers' responsibility for their research projects.

Using the services of the REC is voluntary and provided on the researchers' requests. Applications will be treated confidentially.

Please use the application form provided for this purpose.

Below you will find (A) general information on how to apply, (B) specific information and explanations concerning the application form, and (C) a checklist to ensure that your application is complete.

A) General information

Who is eligible to apply?

All members of the Faculty of Social Sciences at LMU Munich are eligible to apply. This includes all employees, persons within a supervisory relationship, and persons writing qualification theses (habilitation candidates, doctoral candidates, and students). The applicant should be the researcher who is primarily responsible for carrying out the research project on site. If the application is made in the context of a qualification thesis up to and including a doctorate (BA, MA, dissertation), a statement by the supervisor should be attached. This statement should explain whether the application has any ethical concerns and to what extent the information provided in the application was agreed upon with the supervisor.

How to apply?

An application shall be submitted in writing. The application form provided for this purpose (see website) is to be completed, signed, and submitted to the REC chairperson along with the relevant supporting documents in the appendix. To facilitate and accelerate the work of the REC, please also submit the complete application electronically (in pdf-format) via email (the application form is available in both German and English).

Fast-track or full review?

Most applications can be processed as part of a fast-track procedure. **All applications are first reviewed by the members of the REC by way of circulation**. If there are increased risks or fundamental concerns, the application is also assessed in a REC meeting (*full review*).

The applicant makes an initial assessment of the classification as fast-track or full review in the application form (10.1). The REC reserves the right to assess whether an application can be appropriately assessed within the framework of a fast-track procedure. Classification as fast-track or full review and the approval or rejection of applications are

based on the individual case and are not automatic.

Time Management: When should an application be submitted?

Applications can be submitted at any time. Please submit the application in good time before starting your research activities and note the processing times: **Reviews in the fast-track procedure usually require 5 to 8 weeks**. Reviews that cannot be processed using the fast-track procedure are discussed at the regular REC meeting. The REC meets once per semester. To ensure that your application can be considered at the meeting, the complete application must be received by the REC 4 to 6 weeks before the meeting.

Please inform yourself about the next REC meeting date (on the REC website) and contact the REC chairperson in advance. Despite complete and conscientious submission of the application, not all questions can always be clarified at the meeting. You should therefore allow sufficient time for a full review (approx. 2 to 3 months). As the applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that the REC's review procedure is initiated in good time.

If you require an REC opinion for an ongoing research project (e.g. because the project is developing in an unforeseen direction), the REC's vote only relates to future research. A retrospective assessment of research that has already taken place is only possible in justified individual cases. In this case, please contact the chairperson personally.

For which type of research projects can an application be made?

In principle, it is permissible to submit an application for empirical social science research conducted by members of the faculty. Both external reasons (e.g. requirements from third-party funding sources or journals) or reasons inherent to the research process itself (e.g. ethical concerns/questions of the researchers) can lead to the submission of an application. Deciding whether to apply for an ethical review for a research project is in the hands of the applicant.

On what basis will your application be assessed?

In its work, the committee complies with the legal provisions regarding the protection of personal data, primarily in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR) and the Bavarian Data Protection Law (BayDSG), the provisions for the protection of personal rights and the right to informational self-determination (Art. 1 (1) in conjunction with Article 2 (1) GG) as well as the currently valid versions of the code of ethics and recommendations of the national professional associations (e.g. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie, Berufsverband Deutscher Soziologinnen und Soziologen, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Politikwissenschaft).

The members of the committee assess the applications to the best of their knowledge and, if necessary, consult additional expertise (see rules of procedure of the REC of the Faculty of Social Sciences – German only).

B) Remarks on the application form

Please fill in the application form electronically and sign it. If necessary, boxes for explanations will expand. Open responses in the form are limited to a maximum of 250 words – if you need more space, please attach the explanation as an annex to the application.

Ad 2.3
A review of studies that have already been completed is usually not possible respectively only possible in justified exceptional cases. If the project includes several data collection phases, please indicate the total duration of the data collection. If the research process has already begun, please indicate the project period to which the review relates in the field provided and attach a project schedule if applicable. If you are unable to plan all project phases at the time of application, please consult with the chairperson and submit further documents later.

Ad 2.7
Please list all persons who are involved in the research project as research associates, cooperation partners or who interact with participants in a research function, collect data or work with the collected data (e.g., conduct interviews/observations, instruct research participants, conduct experimental manipulation in experiments, transcribe, (re)code/anonymise or analyse data). Also, groups of individuals (e.g. students) or organisations (e.g. external agencies to which certain research tasks are delegated) that are to be involved in research activities need to be listed.

Persons who do not fulfil a research function at any time (e.g. technical staff for laboratory studies, IT support) are not to be included.

Ad 3.1
Regarding the table: *Social media data* refers to data taken from social media (e.g. Facebook, X, YouTube, etc.). Social media data is often characterised by a link between authors appearing in person (sometimes under a pseudonym) and content in digital media/networks. This date thus acquires a social quality that can raise ethical questions in the context of social science research. It should be noted that postings on social media platforms do not automatically imply permission to use this material for research purposes. The linkage of the data with individually identifiable avatars/online identities may require measures to protect the authors' personal rights.

In contrast, information obtained from public, openly accessible sources, such as websites of organisations, institutions, or news media, is usually recognisably addressed to the public. Using these sources for research purposes is generally ethically unobjectionable. Nevertheless, depending on the topic, the protection of the authors' personal rights must also be taken into consideration for homepages and personal data from public sources.

The third form of data, from non-public, restricted sources, refers, for example, to data obtained from files or archives or from research conducted under the information law. In this case, ethical questions may arise because information that was previously not publicly

available is now made accessible to the public through research.

As to the annex: Present your methodological approach in detail and describe the setting for data collection. Explain the extent to which audio and/or video recordings, transcriptions, etc. are planned. Please attach copies of the survey instruments (e.g. observation sheet, interview guideline/introductory question/narrative question, invitation text, questionnaire (link if applicable), questionnaire versions/survey experiment, stimulus, and additional material).

In principle, the assessment of a research project requires that the REC has information about concrete research instruments or sufficiently detailed procedural descriptions. If in individual cases, compiling the set of study instruments is not yet complete, the REC may also vote based on the description of the planned instruments. This description must provide comprehensive information on the type of data collected (e.g. list of topics as well as exemplary items) and should describe those aspects which could give rise to ethical concerns. In case of doubt, the REC reserves the right to request information on the instruments not yet attached to the application or, if necessary, to request the final research instrument before a vote is given.

Ad 3.2.2

Socially disadvantaged or particularly vulnerable persons (groups) include those whose participation in society (social, cultural, economic, and political) is restricted. This includes persons (or groups) who are affected by poverty or discrimination (e.g. due to an actual or ascribed identity in connection with gender, ethnic, religious, political or sexual characteristics) as well as those who are subject to legal or economic restrictions or are exposed to risks in this regard (e.g. long-term unemployed persons, asylum seekers, persons with limited residence rights and without a work permit, prison inmates). Who is considered vulnerable can depend on the lifeworld and social context, e.g. sexual orientation or political conviction can give rise to discrimination in certain contexts but be largely accepted and unproblematic in others.

Ad 3.5

Please describe to what extent compensation (reimbursements) of the participants or special incentives for participation are intended and explain the reasons for this. The compensation may be in terms of financial or material reimbursements (e.g. reimbursement of travel expenses, childcare, etc.). Incentives may include financial/material incentives (e.g. participation in a lottery or raffle) as well as indirect, not necessarily material benefits (e.g. privileged access to information, networks, or research results). The mere reimbursement of costs arising from study participation is not considered an incentive (e.g. travel expenses to group interviews). If applicable, please indicate the sponsor and the amount of compensation or incentives.

Ad 4.1

Voluntary participation in research is a research-ethical principle that must be respected. The voluntary nature of participation is also reflected in the possibility to decline/stop to take part in the project without fear of negative consequences. If, beyond the research

process, there is a social or professional relationship with a certain degree of dependency between researchers and potential participants (e.g., lecturer – student; doctor – patient; employer – employee) please describe here what arrangements are made to ensure that participation is voluntary. Please state whether the participants are given the opportunity to terminate their participation at any time and without negative consequences or to withdraw their consent.

Ad 4.2

Informed consent is a research-ethical principle that is closely linked to the voluntary nature of participation. It states that participation in social science studies should be based a) on information about the objectives and methods of the relevant research project that is as detailed and comprehensible as possible and b) on the explicit consent of the participants. Please explain to what extent you will obtain informed consent from the participants and how this will be done (verbally, in writing, electronically). Describe what information will be disseminated or attach a copy of the consent form. Specify whether the participants sign a declaration of consent (or, for example, click on it electronically) and explain where and how the declarations of consent are stored securely. If no declaration of consent will be obtained, please explain.
For templates for designing declarations of consent, see for example: https://www.qualiservice.org/de/datenschutz.html (accessed: June 9, 2023)

Please note that the GDPR requires the declaration of consent to refer to the rights of the participants and the responsible data protection officer as well as the supervisory authority:

Within the framework of the legal requirements, I as a participant am generally entitled to:

- Confirmation as to whether personal data concerning me is being processed,
- Information about this data and the circumstances of the processing,
- Rectification if this data is incorrect,
- Erasure, insofar as there is no justification for the processing and no (further) obligation to store the data,
- Restriction of processing in specific cases determined by law, and
- Transmission of my personal data – insofar as I have provided it – to me or a third party in a structured, commonly used, and machine-readable format.

This means that I have the right to receive information about the personal data concerning me and to request that it be corrected or deleted if the data can be linked to my person. If anonymization is successful, this may no longer be possible.

Data protection officer at LMU Munich:

LMU Munich
Official data protection officer
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, 80539 Munich
datenschutz@lmu.de

Data protection supervisory authority:

Bavarian State Commissioner for Data Protection

Prof. Dr. Thomas Petri
Wagmüllerstr.1, 80538 Munich
(089) 212672-0

Ad 5.1

Potential risks to participants: Emotional and psychological distress are understood to be strains that cause considerable discomfort for participants and may lead them to terminate their participation or acutely feel the desire to terminate. Potential triggers vary from person to person. Examples of research projects that may cause stress are studies on suppressed topics or objects on which the participants provide information only unwillingly; designs that confront participants with unsettling information (in experiments also unsettling false information); studies in which participants are supposed to take on roles or make decisions that they are rather reluctant to accept, or in which they must perform strenuous or unpleasant activities. Restrictions on personal freedom of action and choice can also cause stress, especially if they persist for a long time (e.g. longer stay in a laboratory, interventions in daily routine at home).

However, minor challenges and inconveniences to which the participants are also otherwise exposed in their daily lives, and which are not generally perceived as overburdening are not considered stress in the sense of this statement.

Active deception or misleading information occurs when false purposes are feigned, or false information is given to mask the purpose of a study (e.g. feigning a study on a different topic in order not to sensitize participants, feigning a false personality in observation studies). Cases that do not disclose the hypotheses of the study, provide information only sequentially, for example in multi-stage studies in which it is clear to participants that they are receiving hypothetical/non-realistic information (e.g. case vignette information about fictitious persons to be evaluated, experiments with media stimuli), in which correct information is only given in a deliberately vague and general manner, or in which false information is seen through and corrected by the participants in the course of the research without further explanation, are not considered deception.

Sensitive data is any information that, if made public, could have negative consequences for the participants (e.g. loss of reputation, discrimination, (insurance) legal consequences, up to criminal prosecution).

Ad 5.2

Please describe which strategies you are taking to minimise potential risks. This includes, for example, indicating when and how possible study participants are addressed and informed about the study in a way that avoids social risks or psychological distress (e.g. not addressing someone as a person suffering from alcoholism, for example, in the presence of other people or children). Please describe here strategies that go beyond appropriate study information and informed consent (see 3.4 and 4). Possible strategies for minimising risks include, for example, a special sensitivity when formulating interview questions on sensitive topics or research-economic parsimony in data collection (e.g. sensitive data are only collected if they are really necessary for the research process). In the case of risks of emotional distress and psychological stress, participants can be offered information on appropriate support options after the interview is completed (e.g. support for mentally stressed persons, a hotline for victims of sexual violence, etc.). Strategies for

the protection of privacy and confidentiality can also be presented – yet note that questions of data protection and anonymisation are to be explained in more detail under point 6.

If a study contains deceptions, misleading information or other interventions, debriefings may be an appropriate measure. Debriefing means informing the participants after the survey/participation in the study about (1) any possible deceptions/false information, omissions, (2) the true purpose of the study and, if applicable, (3) other relevant information in the context of the study (e.g. reference to further information and offers or demand for for further discussion). Feedback on the research process could first be obtained from the participants themselves and then be answered, contextualised, corrected and supplemented by the researchers. In other cases, the participants are only informed about those topics that might have remained as questions or misleading impressions from participation.

Ad 5.3 and 5.4

If the study involves risks for the researchers (i.e. those conducting the study, such as interviewers, see 2.6) that go beyond what is commonplace and acceptable, list the strategies used to minimise the risks for those conducting the study. These may include, for example, training and coaching measures to prepare researchers for potentially difficult situations. Those conducting the study should know whom to turn to if unforeseen problems arise (e.g. there may be a hotline during data collection in the field, clear contact persons for support needs, or permanent partners/teamwork in the field phase). Inter- and supervisions as well as regular meetings to discuss problematic research experiences are also possible. In principle, possible risks should be discussed with the persons conducting the research, and it is recommended that suitable measures to minimise the risks be (further) developed together.

Ad 6.1

Deidentified data are those where it is not possible to assign the data to specific persons based on the data set. However, so-called identifiers do exist, i.e., information that makes it possible to restore the link between the data set and persons. This key is stored at a separate place.

Anonymised data are those for which no key exists (i.e., no identifiers), and data can no longer be assigned to individual persons.

Moreover, the strategy of using generalised descriptions also allows for further protection. For example, the exact job title of an official in connection with the annual turnover of the company might enable identifying the company and thus the person via internet research. Therefore, such data should also be replaced by more general descriptions, i.e., detailed information should be assigned to superordinate categories (e.g. instead of “managing director” → “person in a leading position”; instead of “country of origin: Burkina Faso” → “region of origin: West Africa”). The necessity to anonymise and, if necessary, to generalise data also applies to respondents' information about third parties (e.g. partners, children, etc.). The technique of generalising descriptions is particularly important regarding qualitative data, where contextual information cannot be completely deleted without losing meaning and thus making research absurd.

Ad 6.2.1
Please explain where and how data is stored. Which organisation/institution/persons are responsible for the storage of data? Are identifiers and other data kept separately? To what extent is data stored on a private computer? Where and how are copies of the data stored (e.g. on LMU premises, at the cooperation partner's premises)? To what extent are digital data password-protected and to what extent are paper printouts stored securely, for instance, in a lockable cabinet?

Ad 6.2.3
Personal information refers to data by which a person can be identified. If personal information is collected, please describe when and how this data will be eventually destroyed. Research-relevant data refers to all data collected in the context of the research project. Please describe the long-term storage (e.g. digital archiving) or destruction of research-relevant data.

To 7.1.1
Issues of digital archiving and reusability of qualitative data are controversial. For example, certain data (such as ethnographic field notes or other detailed raw data that cannot be sufficiently anonymized) may not be suitable for sharing for reasons of confidentiality and the need to protect the privacy of the researchers (see Stefan Hirschauer “Sinn im Archiv?” in Soziologie 3/2014). There may therefore be good reasons against making qualitative raw data available. For information on data protection in the digital archiving of qualitative interview data, see the above-mentioned RatSWD Working Paper 238; available online at: http://www.ratswd.de/dl/RatSWD_WP_238.pdf (accessed June 9, 2023)

If researchers decide *for* providing their data, the collected data can be made available to the research community for replication and future evaluation (secondary analysis) in various ways. Data can be provided, for example, to a data archive (e.g. Gesis/Mannheim, Qualiservice/Bremen) or passed on following a request or formal application if there is a justified scientific interest. The data can be made accessible in full or only in part. The steps of quantitative data analysis can be made accessible in detail (syntax).

Ad 7.1.2
At this point, no detailed publication plan is required, but the question is whether scientific presentations and publications are planned. Do you plan scientific publications without significant omissions also in the case of contract research?

Ad 8.1
A conflict of interest is defined as any situation that could motivate researchers, participants, project leaders, or other parties involved (e.g. third-party funders) to infuse non-research-related interests in the research project.

These include, for example,

- financial interests (e.g. researchers with a financial stake in, or with an honoured lecturing activity at companies affected by the study could be motivated to conceal unwelcome findings; too high incentives for participants could lead to increased willingness to take risks and/or provide socially desirable answers)
- private interests (e.g. romantic relationships, kinship),

- other forms of conflicting interests (e.g. if researchers are also members of committees of commissioning organisations or third-party funding bodies).

A conflict of interest cannot be assumed if it is obvious that the behaviour in the research project does not have any negative consequences for such other interests (e.g. membership in DFG committees does not constitute a conflict of interest with conducting DFG-funded projects, whereas a position on the Siemens Supervisory Board would constitute a conflict of interest with research that could reveal findings that are unwelcome to Siemens).

Ad 8.2
At this point, it is possible, for example, to refer to previous experience of the persons responsible and/or involved, for instance, if this demonstrates that risks can be adequately assessed or that they have experience and competence in dealing with research-ethical issues.

Ad 9
Concluding assessment: Please briefly summarise the extent to which the procedure as a whole and the associated risks are justifiable from the perspective of research ethics and are in a balanced relationship to the expected benefits of the study. Please weigh up to what extent the risks that may arise for the participants are adequately reduced by the strategies described and whether and to what extent the expected gain in knowledge of the research project justifies potentially increased risks.

To 10.1
"Fast-track" procedures are accelerated procedures for the review of studies that pose only minimal risks. An accelerated procedure is possible, for example, if data is to be analysed that is already available and has been collected elsewhere in compliance with research ethical and data protection standards (e.g. secondary analyses of data from the Socio-Economic Panel). Surveys with low-risk potential (e.g. interviews with experts) or analyses of documents without individual-related data may also be suitable for a fast-track procedure. Similarly, the existing assessment of another REC (e.g. in the case of multi-centre or international research projects) may indicate that a fast-track procedure is applicable.

A fast-track procedure is not possible if at least one of the following criteria applies:

- Is participation associated with high risks? For example, does the method of data collection cause severe emotional/psychological stress or does some other aspect of the study impair the well-being of the persons involved to more than a minimal degree (i.e. do the anticipated risks go beyond what can be considered "usual" and reasonable in everyday life)?
- Does the research design contain deceptions and/or misinformation?
- Are the participants not informed about the possible risks and the measures to protect them from these risks, and are they unable to take the decision to participate independently, uninfluenced, and informed and, if necessary, revoke it without negative consequences?

Please indicate whether you believe that the application should be considered for a regular

or fast-track procedure and, if necessary, consult with the REC chairperson. The final decision on whether an application will be assessed as part of a fast-track procedure or as part of a regular review is the responsibility of the REC.

Ad 10.2
If you have previously or simultaneously submitted applications with the same content (e.g. to data protection officers and/or other RECs), please attach a declaration and the respective votes or results of the reviews to the application.

C) Pre-submission checklist

- Have you answered all questions?
- Have you attached all annexes? e.g.
  1. Description of methodology
  2. Study information sheet, agreements with third parties, permission from institution
  3. Consent form/s
  4. Additional attachments, such as strategies for risk minimisation
  5. Further votes/ ethics reviews by other RECs or data protection officers; if applicable
  6. Statement of support from supervisor; if applicable
- Have you signed the application?
- Have you submitted the application in hard copy *AND* electronically (in pdf-format)? For the electronic submission:

  Please submit 2 pdfs (1 application, 2 all annexes merged into one).