

Ohio University

Office of Research Compliance guidance on the letter of support

Research protocols will require a letter of support or other documentation of permission when the study will be conducted at a site outside of Ohio University, e.g., Athens City Schools, Planned Parenthood, etc., or whenever the IRB deems a letter of support is necessary. In general, the purpose of a letter of support is to provide the IRB with documentation that the site or entity is aware of the study activities and has agreed to the plan for conducting the research. The letter of support helps the IRB ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place, that the study is feasible, and the research is culturally appropriate.

A letter of support must meet the following guidelines.

- Must be on letterhead from the entity providing it
- Must contain a date
- Must be signed by an appropriate authority (for example, research in schools requires the letter of support come from the principal or higher)
- Must specifically state what the agency is agreeing to, including name of the PI and a brief description of the activities to be conducted

Depending on the site and the study population, additional information may be required. For example, for educational research in schools with minors, the letter of support should state whether parental consent is required by the school administration.

To avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, a letter of support must not be signed by a member of the study team. If the research includes activities or records that are governed by another authority, e.g., FERPA, PPRA, HIPAA, the letter of support must state that the research protocol complies with the applicable regulations.

In some cases, an approval from an IRB or ethics board at the site may be substituted for a letter of support. For example, IRB approval from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections would be sufficient for research conducted in an Ohio prison. Acceptability of such approvals is at the discretion of the IRB.

When a letter of support is required for a research protocol, it is a prerequisite for IRB approval.