


# Investigator Experience with Research Ethics Boards in British Columbia

## Survey Findings



Michael Smith Foundation for  
Health Research

Prepared by the  
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## 1. Executive Summary

In the fall of 2007, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) conducted a survey of researchers in British Columbia regarding their experiences with the research ethics review process in B.C. We invited investigators with experience conducting human subject research and familiarity with the current system of ethics review in B.C. to share their views on important characteristics of a Research Ethics Board (REB) and the perceived performance of the REB at their institution. This report presents the results of the survey.

This survey was part of a project that also included an environmental scan of ethics review structures across the province and an environmental scan of harmonized ethics review processes adopted in other countries and Canadian provinces. Five key themes emerged from these environmental scans that were considered as an analytical framework in creating the investigator survey and subsequent analysis. These themes, or dimensions, are: access, quality, efficiency, capacity, and consistency. They provide a valuable framework when considering potential modifications to the current ethics review system in B.C.

Respondents to our survey represented a wide range of researchers in different fields of research, years of experience, and institutional affiliation. Respondents were asked to assess 28 items that reflect characteristics of the REB process with two ratings: (1) How important is this to you?; and (2) How well does this describe your REB?. The aggregate results revealed the greatest difference, or 'gap', between importance to researchers and perceived performance of REBs pertain to issues around consistency followed by efficiency, capacity, quality and access, respectively.

Additionally, different populations of researchers (e.g. biomedical/clinical versus social/behavioural or less versus more experience) appeared to generally agree on the most significant 'gaps' between importance to researchers and perceived performance of REBs. Consistency of review was ranked as the largest gap among all populations compared. Researchers in a variety of specialties and settings identified similar discrepancies between importance and performance.

This report sought to give insight as to how REBs and their procedures are perceived by researchers and what barriers in the process researchers encounter that restrain them from conducting their research in an efficient and effective manner.

## 2. Introduction

Consultation among provincial health research stakeholders, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Advanced Education has revealed that the process for ethics review of research involving human subjects has presented significant barriers to effective and timely conduct of research for institutions and researchers alike across the province. While many agree that an effective and coordinated provincial approach to ethics review may improve quality, access, efficiency, consistency and capacity for ethics review, it is not clear what potential approaches may be acceptable to stakeholders.

In 2007, at the request of provincial stakeholders and with the endorsement of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Advanced Education, MSFHR agreed to facilitate a process to explore options in greater depth. This process included conducting two Environmental Scans:

- **B.C. REB Scan:** a description of mechanisms and structures for ethics review of research involving human subjects in various institutions across B.C., including identification of the issues and barriers related to ethics review and the opportunities to enhance or harmonize the B.C. system.
- **Harmonization Scan:** information gathering regarding harmonized ethics review processes and structures adopted in other jurisdictions, particularly across Canada, but also including the U.S. and selected other countries such as Australia and England.

On the advice of the Task Force for the B.C. Research Ethics Harmonization Initiative<sup>1</sup>, MSFHR was encouraged to enhance investigators' input into the Initiative. To address the researchers' views on the existence, perceived severity, and specific nature of perceived barriers to timely, effective and high quality ethics review of research in B.C., MSFHR conducted original research to capture the key areas of concern for B.C. researchers with recent experience in the application process for ethics review of research involving human subjects. This report presents the results of an anonymous, on-line survey of the investigator experience with Research Ethics Boards in B.C.

The findings of this report may help to identify what elements of the review process researchers identify as being barriers to timely, effective and high quality ethics review and give insight as to how REBs and their procedures are perceived by researchers.

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<sup>1</sup> Task Force membership provided in Appendix B

### 3. Methodology

In the course of our research relating to the ethics review process in British Columbia, MSFHR repeatedly encountered certain themes or topics that were expressed as key to consideration of any potential improvements in the provincial system. Keeping in mind the overarching goal of protecting the interests of human subjects involved in research, the Research Ethics Board approval process may be considered along the following themes: Access, Quality, Efficiency, Capacity and Consistency. We define these dimensions as follows:

#### **Access:**

This dimension relates to the perception that information is readily available to applicants in order that they may

- know to which REB to apply and how;
- have the skills and knowledge to prepare a high quality application;
- develop a clear sense of the REB processes, timelines, and decision rules;
- know how they can improve their chances of a successful outcome; and
- know when they can expect a decision from the REB.

#### **Capacity:**

This dimension relates to the perception that the REB has

- sufficient expertise to assess applications across a spectrum of health research;
- sufficient frequency of meetings to respond in a timely manner;
- continuing access to sufficient numbers of willing and qualified board members to manage the demand for ethical review; and
- resources to manage the ethics review process effectively.

#### **Consistency:**

This dimension relates to the perception that

- the REB subscribes to a recognized standard of quality process, output and outcome;
- the ethics review process is of uniform quality across the province; and
- that the same application would receive comparable review and outcome from any B.C. institution's REB.

#### **Efficiency:**

This dimension relates to the perception that REB processes are

- clear;
- straightforward;
- concluded in a timely manner; and that
- REB application activities are not unnecessarily duplicated.

**Quality:**

This dimension relates to the perception that REB decisions are

- fair;
- well-informed;
- clearly justified to applicants;
- consistent with regulatory and legal obligations of all responsible parties;
- include annual recertification of ethics approval through the course of the approved research; and
- include site monitoring for compliance through the course of the approved research.

### **3.1 Instrument Development**

Several concepts were explored and considered in selecting a method to collect the views of researchers. In developing the approach, several key objectives were identified to ensure the target researcher population was reached. These objectives were:

- Identify and prioritize the important issues and barriers for researchers with respect to ethics review.
- Include researchers from as wide a range of experience, affiliation (universities, colleges, health authorities and communities) and research areas (biomedical, clinical, social science, behavioural, and other) as possible.
- Target researchers who have had direct and as recent as possible participation in the ethics review process and who have held the principal responsibility for the preparation and submission of an application for ethics review.
- Ensure that researchers can provide their opinions in a confidential and anonymous manner. Data collect will be used in aggregate form with no personal identifiers.

Several previously used tools for REB assessment were investigated; in particular, the Harvard Institutional Review Board Researcher Assessment Tool<sup>2</sup> and the McMaster Research Ethics Quality Assurance Survey<sup>3</sup>. The former has been used in various modified forms in several academic institutions in the United States. Our online investigator survey was essentially a combination of the latter two instruments, modified with the advice and feedback of the B.C. Ethics Harmonization Task Force. We also incorporated the advice and field testing by several groups representing researchers including:

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<sup>2</sup> IRB-RAT developed at the Harvard Medical School with funding from the Office of Research Integrity and the National Institute of Health. Source: <http://www.ethicsresearch.com/IRB%20RAT%20Users%20Guide%20revised%20203-11-05.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Provided by Ms. Laurel Evans, Task Force member (Appendix B), Associate Director of Research Ethics at the University of British Columbia and former Senior Ethics Advisor and Legal Counsel at the McMaster University Office of Research Ethics

- Several volunteer experienced researchers from the University of British Columbia
- The MSFHR Research Advisory Council (RAC)
- B.C. Senior Health Research Leaders advisory group (SHRL)
- Health Services & Policy Support Research Network Steering Council

The survey was designed to gather information in four sections. The first part included a short introduction and asked the survey respondent:<sup>4</sup> “Have you ever had the principal responsibility for the preparation and submission of an application for ethics review of research involving human subjects?”

This question attempted to screen respondents to ensure that those who completed the survey had the adequate experience utilizing the research ethics review process. If they said ‘Yes’ then they were permitted to continue to the survey questions. Any respondent who said ‘No’ was forwarded to a page thanking them for their interest and ending their participation in the survey. Once they were then triaged out of the survey, the software rendered them unable to return and change their initial response.

The second part listed characteristics of the REB ethics review process in 28 items that related to the five previously identified dimensions of access, quality, efficiency, capacity, and consistency. The items appeared randomly in the actual survey and the dimensions were not explicitly presented. The response to each item was divided into two parts; the survey respondent first used a rating to indicate how important each item is to them and then a rating to describe their view of their own REB’s performance on the same items. The survey asked:

*Thinking about your experience in preparing and submitting applications for ethics review in research involving human subjects, please consider the following statements and tell us:*

- *How important is this item to you in your work?*
- *How well do you feel this item describes the Research Ethics Board (REB) at your institution?*

For example, the respondent was asked to rate the item “Information about research ethics policies and procedures is easily accessible”. They first rated how important the item is by selecting one of the following possible answers:

- Absolutely essential
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Of little importance
- Not important at all

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<sup>4</sup> Full text of the survey is available in Appendix A.

They then rated how well the item described their REB by selecting one of the following possible answers:

- Very well
- Well
- To a moderate degree
- To a small degree
- Not at all
- I don't know

The third part of the survey involved collecting basic demographic information about affiliation, experience, and area of research.<sup>5</sup> The final part of the survey allowed open-ended comments and informed the participants on how they may access the final aggregate results of the survey at a later date.

### **3.2 Dissemination**

The Task Force encouraged MSFHR to make best efforts to ensure that the survey reached active investigators who have had recent experience with the ethics review process in B.C., across a broad spectrum of research activity and institutional affiliations. To best ensure the participation of such individuals, MSFHR distributed a request to 20 institutions on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to ask for their assistance in circulating the survey participation invitation directly to researchers who had submitted an application for research ethics review within the last year.<sup>6</sup> These institutions had previously participated in the MSFHR B.C. REB Scan. The invitation stressed the serious consideration of the survey results and described the practical use to enhance the investigator's willingness to participate. For each REB, the request was sent to the senior executive contact with responsibility for research ethics review (e.g. VP Research), with a copy to the senior administrator responsible for the REB (e.g. Research Ethics Coordinator) and/or the REB Chair.

As of October 15<sup>th</sup>, dissemination was reported to MSFHR by 14 institutions to a combined total of approximately 3 460 investigators. It is important to acknowledge that many of these are duplicates and since the recipient names remain confidential with their institutions, it is not possible to determine the volume of duplicate requests. Five of the institutions who reported that they were unable to distribute the request cited lack of time and resources due to their small size, or their status as a relatively new REB (established within the last year or two). It is estimated that fewer than 50 investigators<sup>7</sup> would have been contacted through these institutions had they distributed the request. Figure 1 provides details of distribution dates and estimated number of researchers reached.

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<sup>5</sup> Full text of the survey is available in Appendix A.

<sup>6</sup> The survey participation request is shown in Appendix C.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the number of new applications to the REB per year by each institution as they reported in the MSFHR B.C. REB Environmental Scan in 2007.

In addition to the direct requests from REBs, between September 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, MSFHR invited the participation of researchers involved in advisory groups (RAC, SHRL) a group representing grant recipients (co-leaders of the eight Health of Population Networks), and the five Technology/ Methodology networking award recipient groups funded by MSFHR. These invitations reached approximately 68 individuals, although they were encouraged to distribute the survey invitation to appropriate colleagues who conduct research involving human subjects. It is likely that many of these individuals received a duplicate participation invitation through the institution distribution.

By inviting survey participation from direct invitations to individuals, the survey aimed to reach researchers who have had recent experience with the REB process and represent a wide range of institutions and disciplines. In addition, we included a screening tool as the first question in the survey in attempt to filter those without an adequate amount of experience with the ethics review process out of the survey. The survey was opened at 5:00pm on September 12<sup>th</sup> and closed at 10:00am on Monday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<b>Investigator Participation Request: Dissemination by Institutions – September 2007</b>		
<b>Institution/REB</b>	<b>Date distributed</b>	<b>Estimated number of researchers contacted</b>
Malaspina University-College	17-Sep	6
University of British Columbia • Includes: Behavioural REB, Clinical REB, B.C. Cancer Agency and Providence Health Care	18-Sep	1 949
Canadian Blood Services	13-Sep	6
Fraser Health	25-Sep	154
Interior Health	26-Sep	380
Northern Health	14-Sep	40
Royal Roads University	21-Sep	18
Simon Fraser University	10-Oct	150
Trinity Western University	21-Sep	14
UNBC	17-Sep	350
University of Victoria	20-Sep	350
University-College of the Fraser Valley	13-Sep	43
	<b>COUNT: 14</b>	<b>TOTAL: 3 460</b>

Figure 1: Survey Dissemination by Institutions

### **3.3 *Issues and Challenges***

The closing date of the survey was extended by one week to accommodate REBs that reported logistical difficulty in identifying the most recent applicants and distributing the invitation. We wanted to ensure all researchers who wished to participate in the survey were allowed an adequate amount of time to complete the survey.

An early invitation to researchers contained the greeting line: “Dear Health Researcher”. It was brought to our attention that this may prevent participation of those researchers who conduct research on human subjects but not in the specific area of health. This greeting was changed to say “Dear Researcher” for further distribution and brought to the attention of distributing institutions to remedy this possible deterrent. It is not known if this wording affected the respondent demographics in any way by deterring non-health researchers from completing the survey.

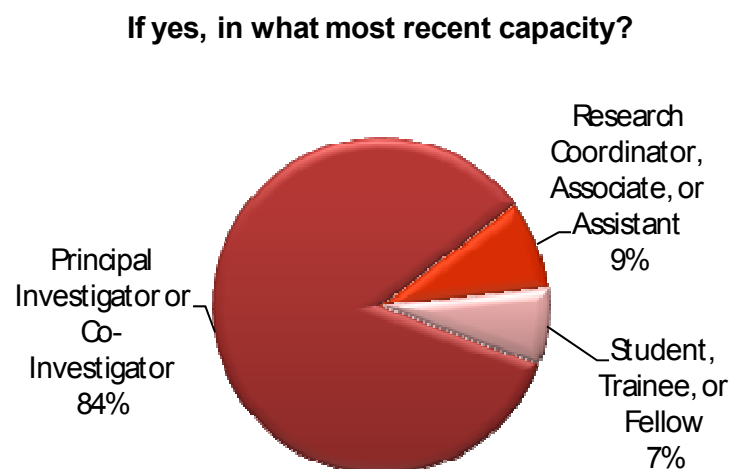
## 4. Results and Analyses

As noted above, the advisory Task Force encouraged MSFHR to make best efforts to ensure that the survey reached active investigators who have had recent experience with the ethics review process in B.C., across a broad spectrum of research activity and institutional affiliations. In addition to our dissemination strategy, the survey included a number of design features and demographic questions to support this goal.

Demographic questions were also asked to assist with sub-category analysis for this report, e.g. to explore whether there were differences in responses from researchers with different research foci or years of experience.

The first question was used as a screening method, as described above. There were 670 respondents who entered the survey. The screening question routed 55 of these respondents out of the survey because they answered that they have not ever had the principal responsibility for the preparation and submission of an application for ethics review of research involving human subjects. Therefore, 615 individuals completed the survey.

Those who continued on with the survey were asked to categorize themselves by research role as seen in the three choices in Figure 2; 84.0% identified that they have held the role of a Principal or Co-Investigator.



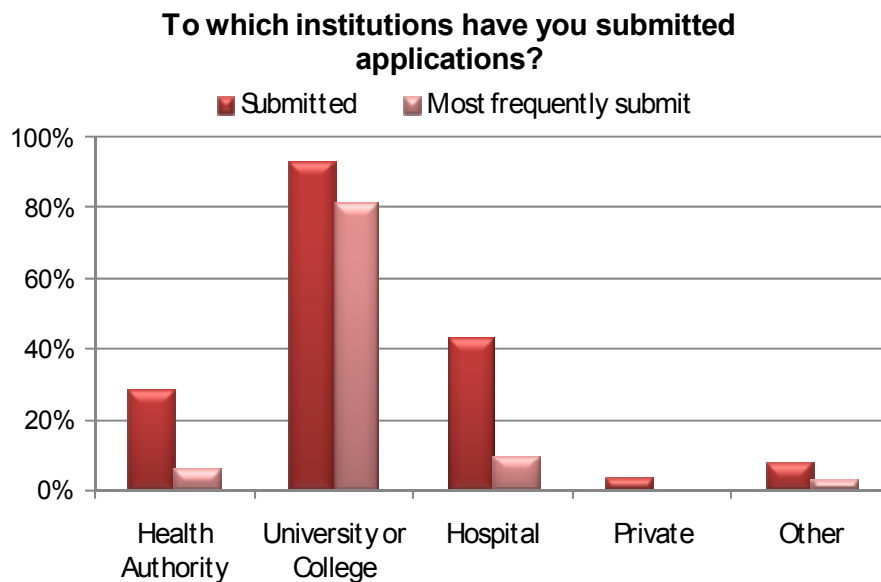
**Figure 2: Research Role of Respondents**

Respondents were not required to answer every question in order to submit the survey. For those questions that did not require an answer, out of the 615 respondents participating, between 418 and 615 individuals elected to provide answers for each question. Percentage calculations throughout this document therefore report the proportion of those who provided answers for any given question.

## 4.1 Demographics

### 4.1.1 Institutional Affiliation

The first demographic question sought to determine the type of institution(s) with which the respondent has had experience applying for ethics review. Respondents were asked to select all institutions to which they have applied for ethics review. The majority of respondents who answered this question (93.2%) had applied to an REB affiliated with a university or college, and almost half (43.1%) had applied to an REB affiliated with a hospital. These results can be seen as the 'submitted' bars in Figure 3.



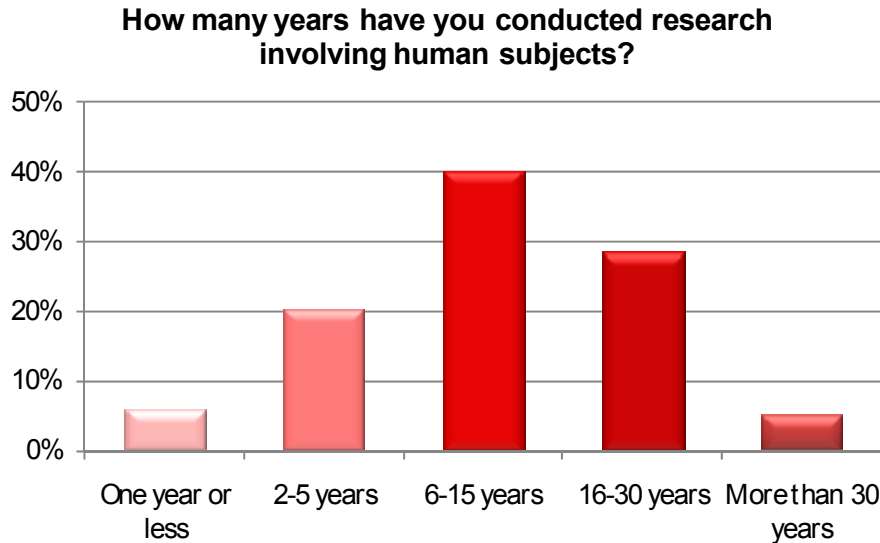
**Figure 3: Demographics - Institutions**

Respondents were also asked to select just one institutional type as that to which they most frequently submit applications for ethics review. These results can be seen as the 'most frequently submit' bars in Figure 3. Again, the majority reported applications to REBs affiliated with university or college (81.5%).

### 4.1.2 Researcher Experience

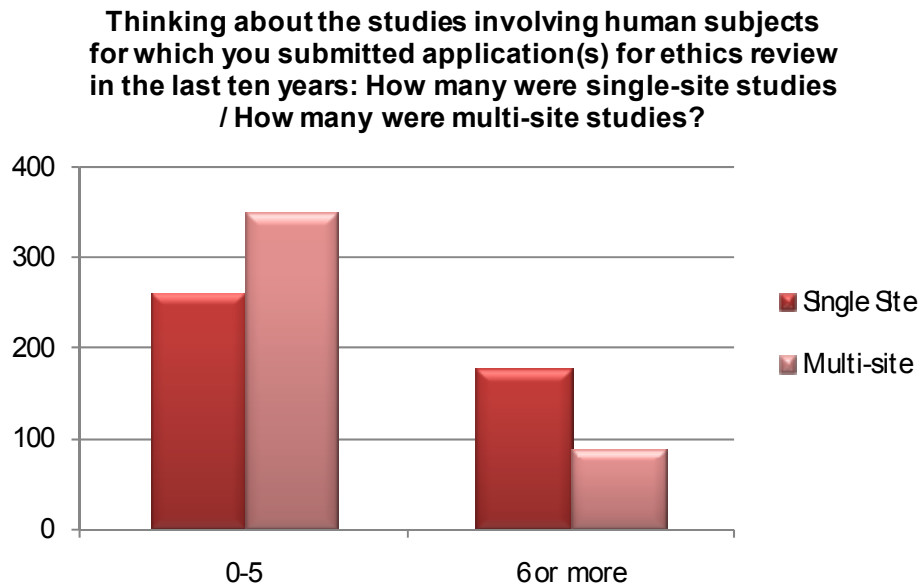
Questions in this section explored the differences in respondents with respect to their involvement in human subjects research. This segmentation allowed us to undertake analyses of differences in perceptions based on researchers' experience that are reported in Section 4.2.4.1.

The first of these enquiries related to the number of years of research experience; 73.7% of respondents reported six or more years of experience, with 33.6% reporting more than 16 years of conducting research involving human subjects (Figure 4).



**Figure 4: Demographics - Researcher Experience**

In addition to years of research activity, we also asked questions about intensity of REB application activity – that is, how many applications have they submitted during the last ten years? Two questions were asked, one addressing experience with single-site studies, and the other addressing activity involving multi-site projects (Figure 5). The majority of respondents (79.6%) reported submitting zero to five applications for REB review of single site study proposals during the past ten years (as seen in Figure 5).



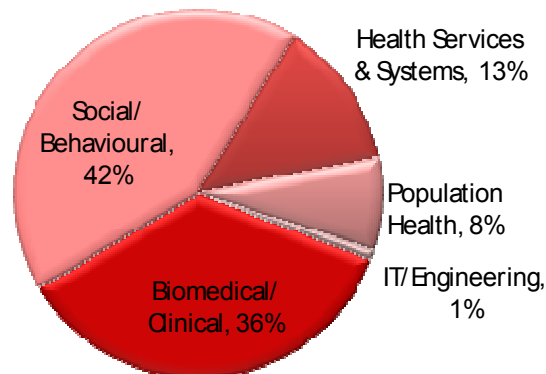
**Figure 5: Demographics - Application Frequency**

With respect to multi-centre studies, 26.8% of respondents had never submitted an application for a multi-centre study. 78.5% had submitted applications for between zero and five multi-centre studies; 12.7% had submitted more than ten applications.

### 4.1.3 Research Focus

This question provided a choice of five ‘themes’ or broad research areas, and asked respondents to select the one that best described the focus of their research (Figure 6). Survey responses indicated roughly equal representation of biomedical/clinical and social/behavioural researchers, who together accounted for 78.0% of respondents. We reviewed responses by the research focus themes to determine whether individual experiences vary amongst these different foci of research (see Section 4.2.4.2).

**Which of the following themes best describes the focus of your research?**



**Figure 6: Demographics - Research Focus**

### 4.1.4 REB Participation

Respondents were asked “Have you ever served on a Research Ethics Board?” This question sought to understand whether the respondents to the survey had experience as an REB member/reviewer, as well as from the perspective of a researcher. Only 17.3% reported such experience.

#### **4.1.5 Student Supervision**

The final demographic question asked “Do you supervise any student or trainees whose training requires the submission of applications for ethics review of their research?” A total of 64.6% respondents reported such supervisory experience.

### **4.2 Responses**

Respondents were asked to assess 28 items that reflect characteristics of the REB process on two ratings: (1) How important is this to you? and (2) How well does this describe your REB?. Responses are presented in Figures 7 through 11, where graphs display the response rate for each possible answer option for both the importance and performance questions of each item.

Answers to the survey questions are presented in the following graphs as they relate to the dimensions of access, quality, efficiency, capacity, and consistency defined in Section 3. It is important to note that several items may relate to more than one of the five dimensions. For analysis, we categorized each item according to the dimension to which it most strongly correlates.

Questions relating to access:

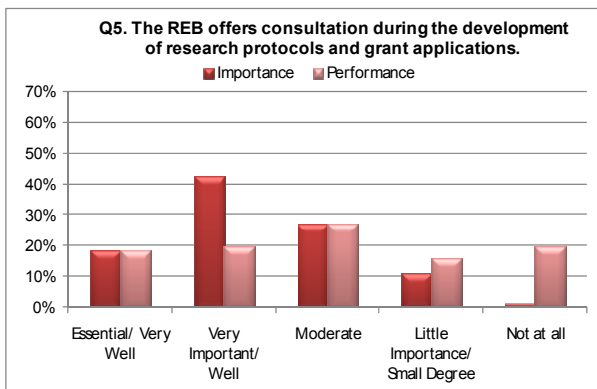
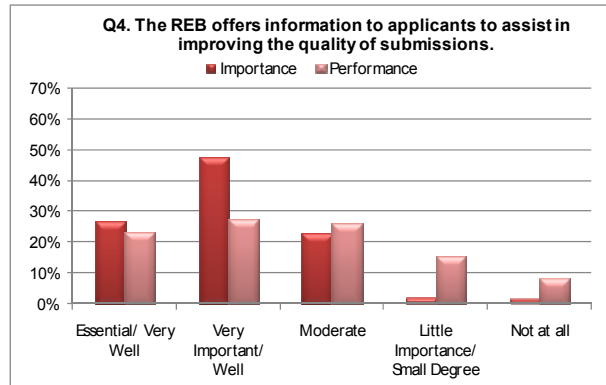
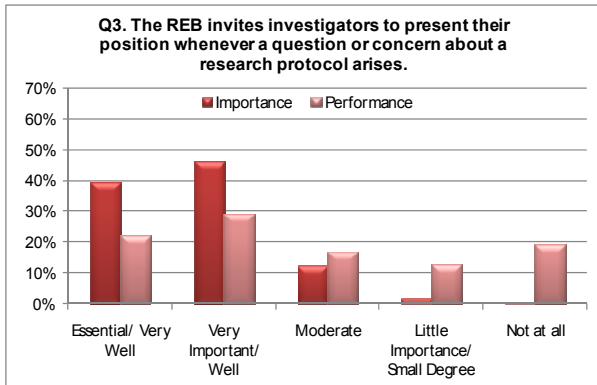
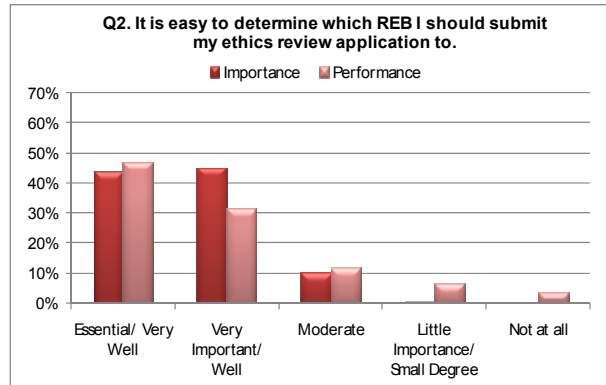
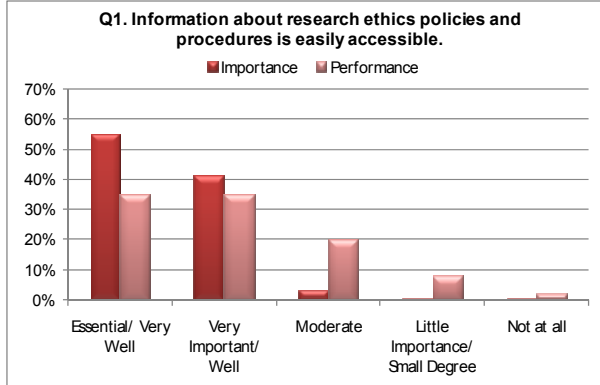


Figure 7: Results – Access

Questions relating to capacity:

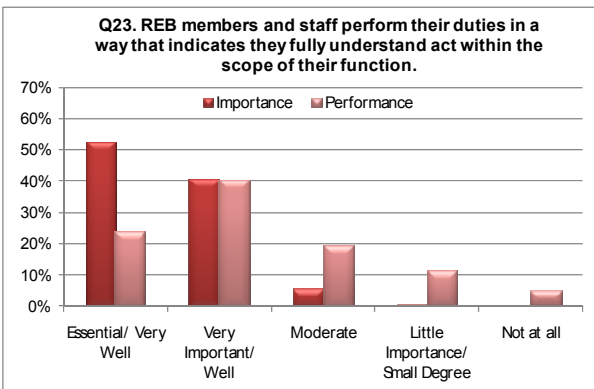
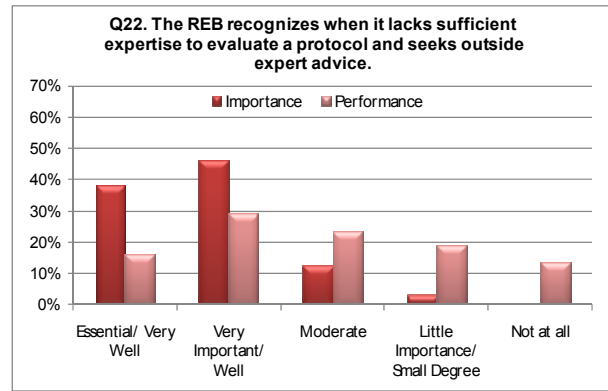
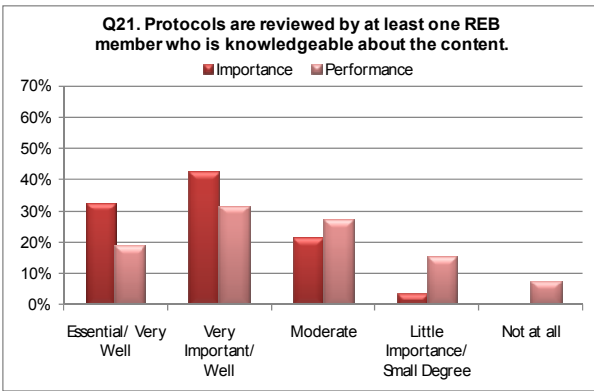


Figure 8: Results – Capacity

Questions relating to consistency:

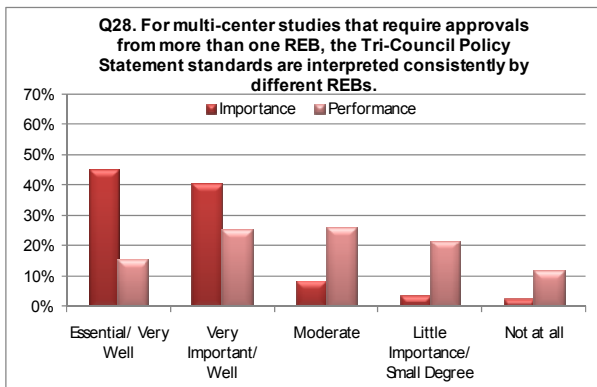
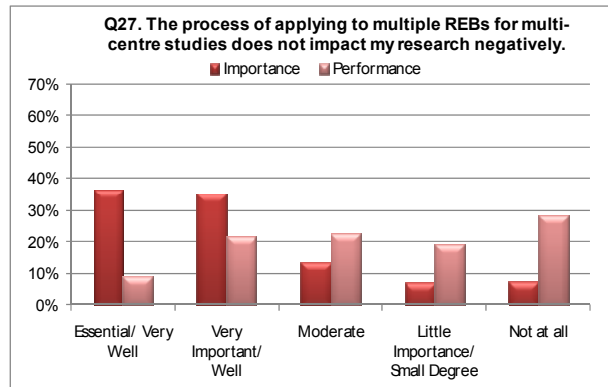
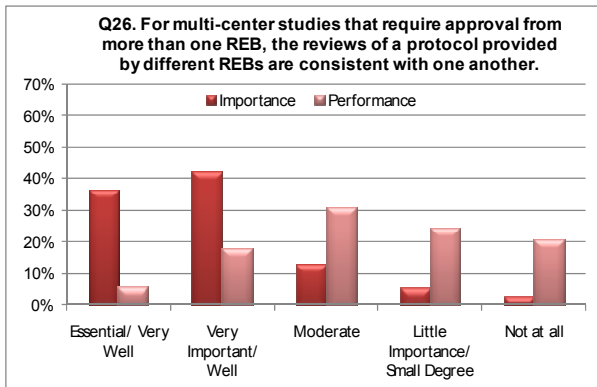
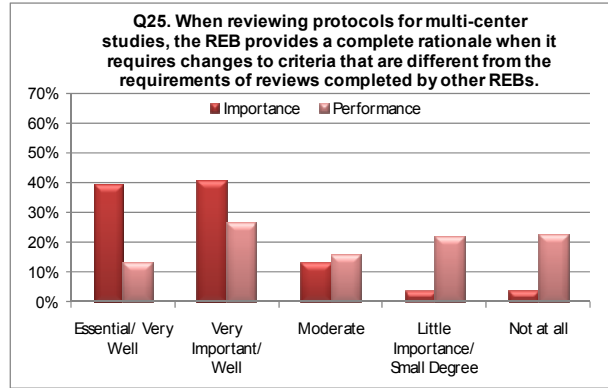
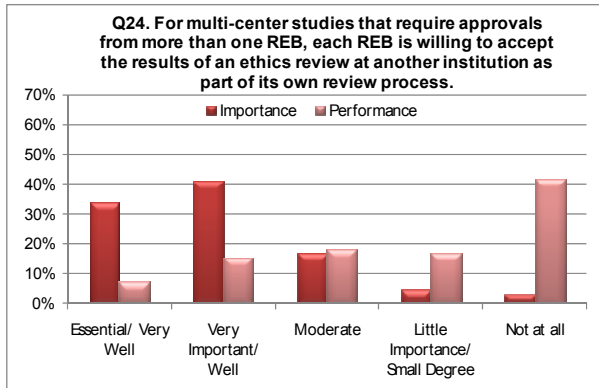
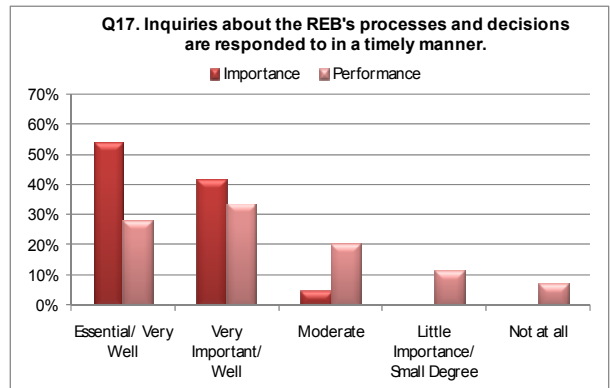
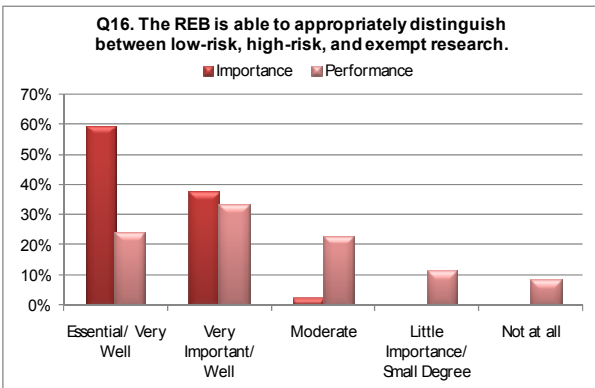
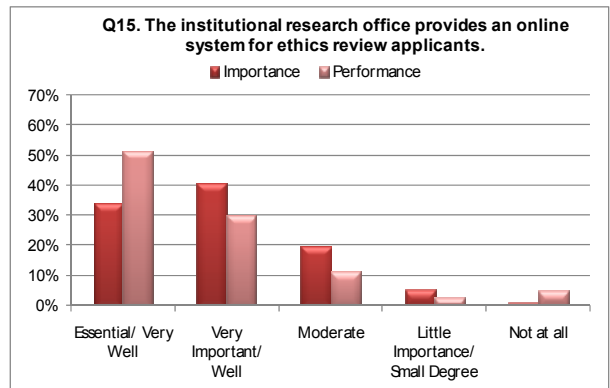
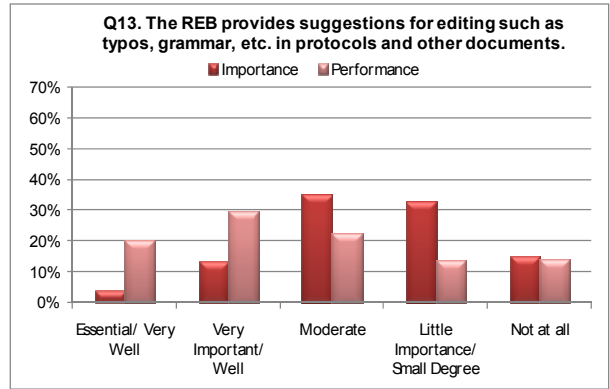
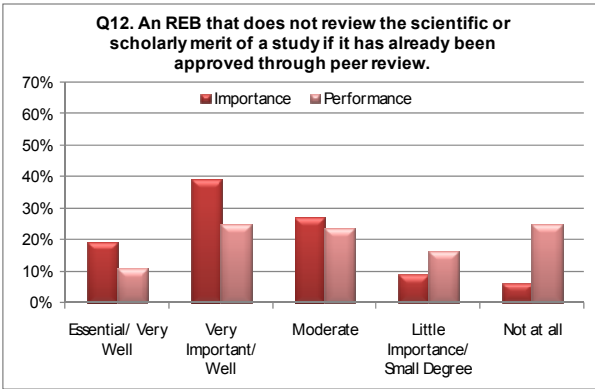


Figure 9: Results – Consistency

Questions relating to efficiency:



## Investigator Experience with Research Ethics Boards in British Columbia

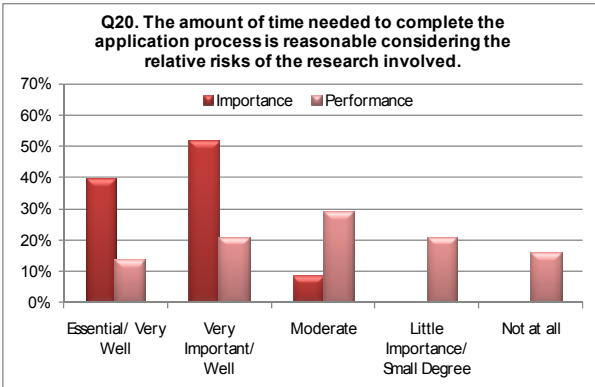
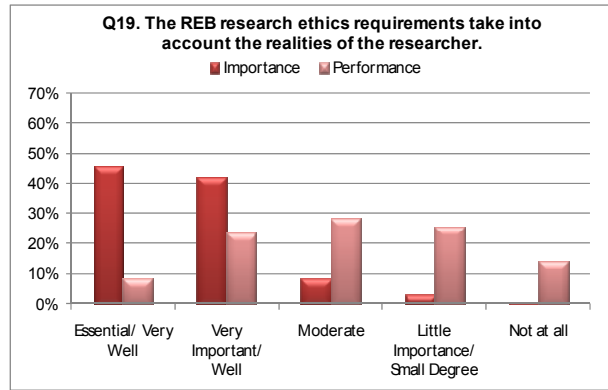
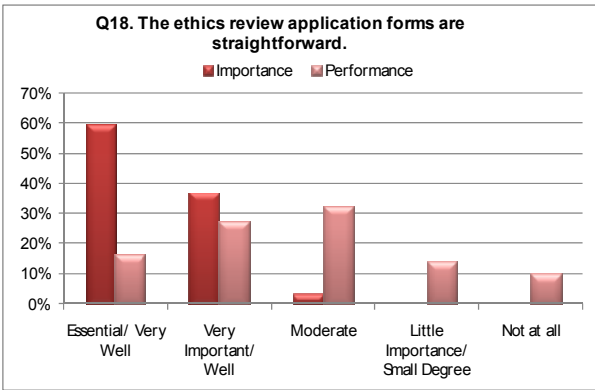


Figure 10: Results - Efficiency

Questions relating to quality:

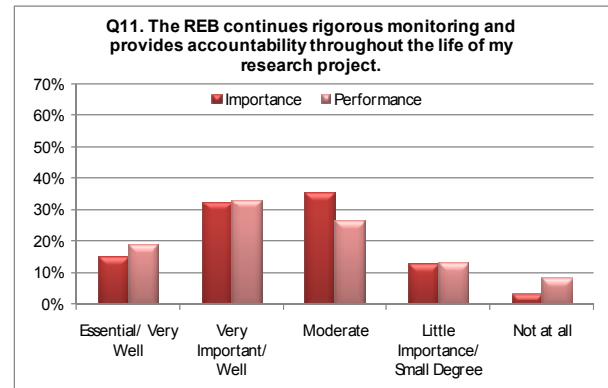
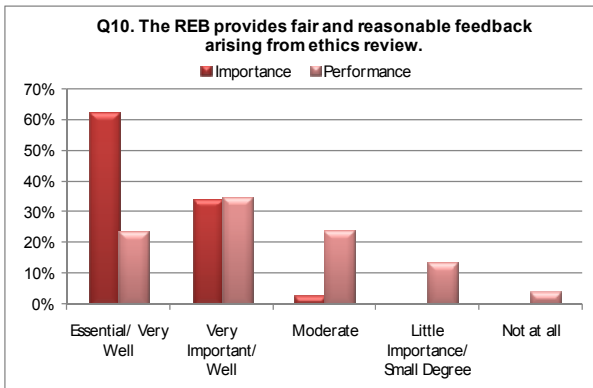
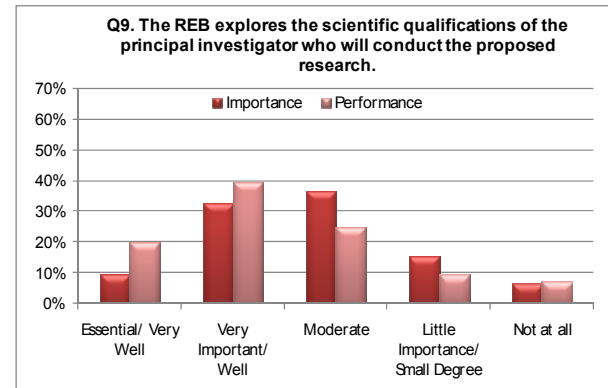
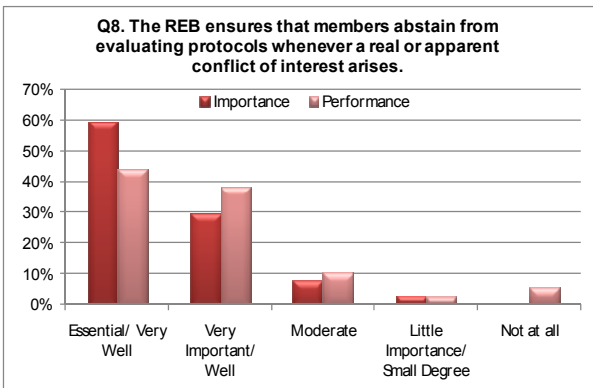
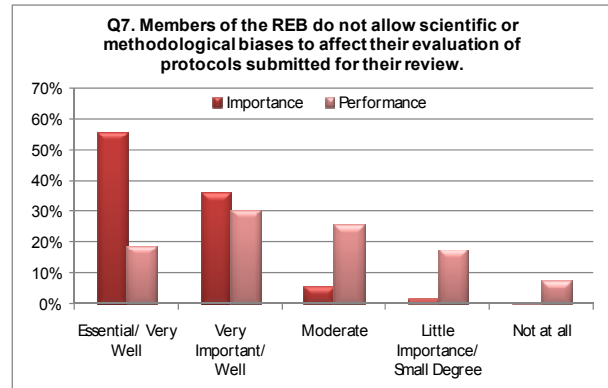
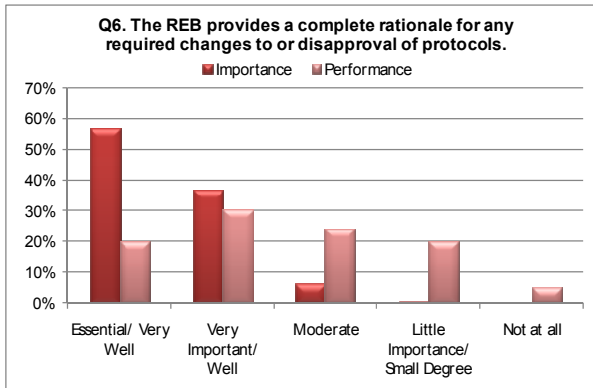


Figure 11: Results - Quality

#### 4.2.1 Researchers' Ranking of Issues by Importance

Respondents were asked to rate each of 28 characteristics on the importance of that item in their work from 'Not important at all' to 'Absolutely essential'.<sup>8</sup> To determine which of the items were reported as being the most important to researchers in their work, we calculated weighted averages.<sup>9</sup> These were calculated such that the higher the weighted average score, the more important the characteristic. A score greater than 4.0 indicates that the majority of respondents rated the characteristics as 'Very important' or 'Absolutely essential'. The rankings are shown in Figure 12. "The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable" was ranked as the most important REB characteristic, while "The REB provides suggestions for editing such as typos, grammar, etc. in protocols and other documents" was ranked as least important.

Important Issues Reported By Researchers						
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:		Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question					Weighted average
1.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.					4.64
2.	Q10 - The REB provides fair and reasonable feedback arising from ethics review.					4.57
3.	Q16 - The REB is able to appropriately distinguish between low-risk, high-risk, and exempt research.					4.56
4.	Q18 - The ethics review application forms are straightforward.					4.56
5.	Q06 - The REB provides a complete rationale for any required changes to or disapproval of protocols.					4.50
6.	Q01 - Information about research ethics policies and procedures is easily accessible.					4.50
7.	Q17 - Inquiries about the REB's processes and decisions are responded to in a timely manner.					4.49
8.	Q23 - REB members and staff perform their duties in a way that indicates they fully understand act within the scope of their function.					4.46
9.	Q07 - Members of the REB do not allow scientific or methodological biases to affect their evaluation of protocols submitted for their review.					4.46
10.	Q08 - The REB ensures that members abstain from evaluating protocols whenever a real or apparent conflict of interest arises.					4.45
11.	Q02 - It is easy to determine which REB I should submit my ethics review application to.					4.31

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A for full answer options to each question.

<sup>9</sup> Example calculations can be seen in Appendix D.

Important Issues Reported By Researchers						
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:		Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question					Weighted average
12.	Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.					4.30
13.	Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.					4.28
14.	Q03 - The REB invites investigators to present their position whenever a question or concern about a research protocol arises.					4.23
15.	Q28 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, the Tri-Council Policy Statement standards are interpreted consistently by different REBs.					4.22
16.	Q22 - The REB recognizes when it lacks sufficient expertise to evaluate a protocol and seeks outside expert advice.					4.19
17.	Q25 - When reviewing protocols for multi-centre studies, the REB provides a complete rationale when it requires changes to criteria that are different from the requirements of reviews completed by other REBs.					4.08
18.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.					4.04
19.	Q21 - Protocols are reviewed by at least one REB member who is knowledgeable about the content.					4.04
20.	Q15 - The institutional research office provides an online system for ethics review applicants.					4.00
21.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.					3.97
22.	Q04 - The REB offers information to applicants to assist in improving the quality of submissions.					3.96
23.	Q27 - The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.					3.87
24.	Q05 - The REB offers consultation during the development of research protocols and grant applications.					3.66
25.	Q12 - An REB that does not review the scientific or scholarly merit of a study if it has already been approved through peer review.					3.56

Important Issues Reported By Researchers						
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:		Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question					Weighted average
26.	Q11 - The REB continues rigorous monitoring and provides accountability throughout the life of my research project.					3.43
27.	Q09 - The REB explores the scientific qualifications of the principal investigator who will conduct the proposed research.					3.23
28.	Q13 - The REB provides suggestions for editing such as typos, grammar, etc. in protocols and other documents.					2.58

Figure 12: Ranking of issues by importance as reported by researchers.

In general, when categorizing each item by its strongest relation<sup>10</sup> to the five dimensions of an REB as described in sections, efficiency was ranked as the most important to researchers followed by quality, capacity, access, and consistency, respectively. Among the five most important issues, three were related to efficiency of the process (Q14, Q16, Q18) and two related to the quality of review (Q10, Q6). The ease of completing applications and the timeliness in receiving feedback and approval from the REB were ranked consistently high in importance. Additional aspects of review such as: reviewing the scientific merit of a peer reviewed study; exploring PI qualifications; offering consultation; and editing for typos and grammar were reported by researchers as less important to their work.

While there is a large difference in the weighted average between the most important and least important issues, 96.4% of the items were ranked with a weighted average greater than three, which correlates to a response of 'of moderate importance'. There was only one item with a weighted average ranking it as 'of little importance'. In fact, 71.4% of the items were ranked with a weighted average between four and five correlating to between 'very important' to 'absolutely essential'.

#### 4.2.2 REB Performance as Reported by Researchers

Respondents were asked to rate each of 28 characteristics on how descriptive they are of the REB at their institution from 'Not at all' to 'Very well'.<sup>11</sup> Respondents were also given the option to select 'I don't know' and the latter responses were not included in the final rankings and calculations. To determine which of the characteristics were best reflected in the REB process as reported by researchers, we calculated weighted averages.<sup>12</sup> As before, these were calculated such that the higher the weighted average score, the more the REB was deemed to display the characteristic. A

<sup>10</sup> Several items may relate to more than one of the five dimensions. For analysis, we categorized each item to the dimension it most strongly correlates to.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A for full answer options to each question.

<sup>12</sup> Example calculation can be seen in Appendix D.

score greater than 4.0 demonstrates that the majority of respondents indicated this characteristic describes their REB 'Well' or 'Very well'. The rankings are shown in Figure 13. "The institutional research office provides an online system for ethics review applicants" was ranked as the best performed REB function, while "For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process" was ranked as the most poorly performed REB function.

Issues That Reflect the REB Process as Reported By Researchers						
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:		Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question					Weighted average
1.	Q15 - The institutional research office provides an online system for ethics review applicants.					4.21
2.	Q08 - The REB ensures that members abstain from evaluating protocols whenever a real or apparent conflict of interest arises.					4.11
3.	Q02 - It is easy to determine which REB I should submit my ethics review application to.					4.11
4.	Q01 - Information about research ethics policies and procedures is easily accessible.					3.92
5.	Q23 - REB members and staff perform their duties in a way that indicates they fully understand act within the scope of their function.					3.66
6.	Q17 - Inquiries about the REB's processes and decisions are responded to in a timely manner.					3.64
7.	Q10 - The REB provides fair and reasonable feedback arising from ethics review.					3.60
8.	Q09 - The REB explores the scientific qualifications of the principal investigator who will conduct the proposed research.					3.55
9.	Q16 - The REB is able to appropriately distinguish between low-risk, high-risk, and exempt research.					3.54
10.	Q04 - The REB offers information to applicants to assist in improving the quality of submissions.					3.42
11.	Q11 - The REB continues rigorous monitoring and provides accountability throughout the life of my research project.					3.41
12.	Q06 - The REB provides a complete rationale for any required changes to or disapproval of protocols.					3.40
13.	Q21 - Protocols are reviewed by at least one REB member who is knowledgeable about the content.					3.38

Issues That Reflect the REB Process as Reported By Researchers						
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:		Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question					Weighted average
14.	Q07 - Members of the REB do not allow scientific or methodological biases to affect their evaluation of protocols submitted for their review.					3.36
15.	Q13 - The REB provides suggestions for editing such as typos, grammar, etc. in protocols and other documents.					3.29
16.	Q18 - The ethics review application forms are straightforward.					3.27
17.	Q03 - The REB invites investigators to present their position whenever a question or concern about a research protocol arises.					3.22
18.	Q22 - The REB recognizes when it lacks sufficient expertise to evaluate a protocol and seeks outside expert advice.					3.15
19.	Q28 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, the Tri-Council Policy Statement standards are interpreted consistently by different REBs.					3.10
20.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.					3.02
21.	Q05 - The REB offers consultation during the development of research protocols and grant applications.					3.01
22.	Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.					2.95
23.	Q25 - When reviewing protocols for multi-centre studies, the REB provides a complete rationale when it requires changes to criteria that are different from the requirements of reviews completed by other REBs.					2.86
24.	Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.					2.86
25.	Q12 - An REB that does not review the scientific or scholarly merit of a study if it has already been approved through peer review.					2.81
26.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.					2.64
27.	Q27 - The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.					2.63
28.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.					2.29

Figure 13: Ranking of issues by how well they describe REBs.

Among the five issues for which researchers felt REBs performed best, two were related to access to the review process (Q02, Q01), one to efficiency (Q15), one to quality (Q09) and one to capacity (23). In general, when categorizing each item by its strongest relation<sup>13</sup> to the five dimensions of an REB as described in Section 3, issues relating to high quality of review were ranked as best describing the REB process followed by access, capacity, efficiency, and consistency. Overall, researchers did not consider issues relating to consistency as strongly reflective of the REB process.

The thoroughness of the review process and accessibility of information were ranked consistently high in how well they described the REB. The time taken to obtain approval and duplication of the review effort were consistently ranked low in how well they described the REB.

### 4.2.3 Discrepancies between Importance and Performance

In the previous two sections, we reported the responses when researchers were asked to rate each item on both how important it is to their work and how well it describes the REB at their institution. The difference between the weighted averages of *importance* and the weighted average of *performance* as perceived by researchers provides a measure of the corresponding gap. Items with a large gap are of particular interest as they represent characteristics whose importance to researchers is not matched by the researchers' perception of REB performance. Items with negative gaps represent characteristics whose importance to researchers is exceeded by the REB performance. The ranking of the weighted average differences are shown in Figure 14.

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<sup>13</sup> Several items may relate to more than one of the five dimensions. For analysis, we categorized each item to the dimension to which it most strongly correlates.

Differences Between Researchers' Perception of Importance and Performance					
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:	Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question				Gap
1.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.				1.68
2.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.				1.62
3.	Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.				1.42
4.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.				1.41
5.	Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.				1.35
6.	Q18 - The ethics review application forms are straightforward.				1.29
7.	Q27 - The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.				1.24
8.	Q25 - When reviewing protocols for multi-centre studies, the REB provides a complete rationale when it requires changes to criteria that are different from the requirements of reviews completed by other REBs.				1.22
9.	Q28 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, the Tri-Council Policy Statement standards are interpreted consistently by different REBs.				1.11
10.	Q07 - Members of the REB do not allow scientific or methodological biases to affect their evaluation of protocols submitted for their review.				1.10
11.	Q06 - The REB provides a complete rationale for any required changes to or disapproval of protocols.				1.10
12.	Q22 - The REB recognizes when it lacks sufficient expertise to evaluate a protocol and seeks outside expert advice.				1.04
13.	Q16 - The REB is able to appropriately distinguish between low-risk, high-risk, and exempt research.				1.02
14.	Q03 - The REB invites investigators to present their position whenever a question or concern about a research protocol arises.				1.00
15.	Q10 - The REB provides fair and reasonable feedback arising from ethics review.				0.97

Differences Between Researchers' Perception of Importance and Performance					
Dimensions related to rank colour codes:	Access	Quality	Efficiency	Capacity	Consistency
Rank	Question				Gap
16.	Q17 - Inquiries about the REB's processes and decisions are responded to in a timely manner.				0.86
17.	Q23 - REB members and staff perform their duties in a way that indicates they fully understand act within the scope of their function.				0.79
18.	Q12 - An REB that does not review the scientific or scholarly merit of a study if it has already been approved through peer review.				0.76
19.	Q21 - Protocols are reviewed by at least one REB member who is knowledgeable about the content.				0.66
20.	Q05 - The REB offers consultation during the development of research protocols and grant applications.				0.65
21.	Q01 - Information about research ethics policies and procedures is easily accessible.				0.58
22.	Q04 - The REB offers information to applicants to assist in improving the quality of submissions.				0.54
23.	Q08 - The REB ensures that members abstain from evaluating protocols whenever a real or apparent conflict of interest arises.				0.34
24.	Q02 - It is easy to determine which REB I should submit my ethics review application to.				0.20
25.	Q11 - The REB continues rigorous monitoring and provides accountability throughout the life of my research project.				0.02
26.	Q15 - The institutional research office provides an online system for ethics review applicants.				-0.20
27.	Q09 - The REB explores the scientific qualifications of the principal investigator who will conduct the proposed research.				-0.32
28.	Q13 - The REB provides suggestions for editing such as typos, grammar, etc. in protocols and other documents.				-0.70

**Figure 14: Differences between Researchers' Perception of Importance and Performance.**

The greatest difference, or 'gap', between importance to researchers and perceived performance of REBs pertains to the item: "For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process". Among the five issues with the largest gaps, three were related to efficiency of the process (Q14, Q19, Q20) and two were related to consistency of review in multi-centre research (Q1, Q4). All questions related to the dimension of consistency revealed large differences.

Conversely, the item “The REB provides suggestions for editing such as typos, grammar, etc. in protocols and other documents” was the item for which REB performance exceeded importance to researchers by the greatest amount.

In general, when categorizing each item by its strongest relation<sup>14</sup> to the five dimensions of an REB as described in Section 3, the greatest discrepancy between items that researchers feel are important and the performance of the REB on that issue is consistency followed by efficiency, capacity, quality and access, respectively.

#### 4.2.4 Types of Researchers

The responses of researchers on important REB characteristics and how they are reflected in the REB process may vary between different types of researchers. We explored difference in responses between:

- investigators with research focusing on biomedical/clinical versus social/behavioural and other;
- investigators with more versus less research experience;
- and investigators with experience in the ethics review process at different types of institutions.

To determine how significant these differences are and how they may have affect survey responses, we identified the most significant gaps for specific populations within various demographic categories. For each of the following sections we compare the greatest five gaps within each category.

Additionally, we compared significant gaps between those researchers who have conducted multi-centre research versus those who have not to identify difference of opinion on issues related to consistency and the conduct of multi-centre studies.

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<sup>14</sup> Several items may relate to more than one of the five dimensions. For analysis, we categorized each item according to the dimension it most strongly correlates to.

#### 4.2.4.1 Researcher Experience

To determine if researchers with more or less research experience differ in their views, we compared the five greatest gaps between researchers with five or less years of experience versus those with greater than five years of experience.

Five or less years	Gap rank	Greater than five years
Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.	1.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.
Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.	2.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.
Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.	3.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.
Q27 - The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.	4.	Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.
Q18 - The ethics review application forms are straightforward.	5.	Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.

**Figure 15: Years of researcher experience – a comparison of weighted average differences.**

Of the five greatest weighted average differences for researchers with less versus more years of experience, three were related to efficiency and two to consistency in both groups (although only three of the five in each group were identical to the other). The two greatest gaps were identical between the groups and considered duplication among REBs for multi-centre research, and lengthy approval processes. The greatest gaps also revealed that the researchers had the view that the REBs fell short when taking into account the realities of their work.

For those researchers with more years of experience, they had further concern with the time taken to gain approval, and consistency of review among REBs. Those with fewer years of experience were concerned about the ease of understanding and completing the application forms.

#### 4.2.4.2 Area of Research

We asked respondents to select a theme that best describes the focus of their research (responses can be seen in Figure 6) Here we compare the five greatest gaps of those researchers who conduct biomedical or clinical research versus those who conduct Social/Behavioural, Population Health, Health Services and Systems and IT/Engineering ('Other' in Figure 16).

Biomedical/Clinical	Gap rank	Social/Behavioural and Other
Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.	1.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.
Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.	2.	Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.
Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.	3.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.
Q27 - The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.	4.	Q18 - The ethics review application forms are straightforward.
Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.	5.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.

**Figure 16: Area of research – a comparison of weighted average differences.**

Of the five greatest weighted average differences for researchers in Biomedical/Clinical, three were related to consistency and two to efficiency, while for researchers in Social/Behavioural and Other two were related to efficiency and one to consistency. Both groups were concerned about the lengthy approval processes, and consistency of review among REBs. Responses from Social/Behavioural and Other researchers revealed that they do not view REBs as taking into account the realities of their work. They also revealed a large gap in understanding and completing the application forms with ease. Biomedical/Clinical researchers had additional concerns on the negative impact of the multi-centre review process on their work, and felt that the risk involved with their research did not always warrant such a lengthy review process.

#### 4.2.4.3 Type of Institution

We asked respondents to select the institution to which they have most frequently submitted an application for ethics review (responses can be seen in Figure 3). The majority of respondents (81.5%) most frequently apply to a university or college REB, therefore we compared the greatest gaps differences between these researchers versus those who most frequently apply to other types of REBs (i.e. Health Authority, Hospital, Private or other ('Other' in Figure 17)).

University	Gap rank	Other
Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.	1.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.
Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.	2.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.
Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.	3.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.
Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.	4.	Q27 - The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.
Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.	5.	Q25 - When reviewing protocols for multi-centre studies, the REB provides a complete rationale when it requires changes to criteria that are different from the requirements of reviews completed by other REBs.

Figure 17: Type of institution – a comparison of weighted average differences.

Researchers who most frequently apply for ethics review at universities are most concerned with efficiency; three of the five greatest gaps are related to efficiency. Researchers who most frequently apply to institutions other than universities were more concerned with consistency; four of the five greatest gaps are related to consistency. For both groups, the two greatest gaps related to the lengthy review process and consistency among REBs.

#### 4.2.4.4 Multi-centre Research Experience

To determine if researchers with more or less multi-centre research experience differ in their views, we compared the five greatest gaps of those researchers who have conducted multi-centre research versus those who have not.

Zero Multi-centre studies conducted	Gap rank	One or more Multi-centre studies conducted
Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.	1.	Q24 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, each REB is willing to accept the results of an ethics review at another institution as part of its own review process.
Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.	2.	Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.
Q28 - For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, the Tri-Council Policy Statement standards are interpreted consistently by different REBs.	3.	Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another.
Q18 - The ethics review application forms are straightforward.	4.	Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.
Q19 - The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.	5.	Q20 - The amount of time needed to complete the application process is reasonable considering the relative risks of the research involved.

**Figure 18: Multi-centre research experience - a comparison of weighted average differences.**

The amount of experience in submitting multi-centre study applications does not appear to significantly influence the greatest gaps. Of the five greatest weighted average differences for researchers who have not conducted multi-centre research versus those who have, three were related to efficiency and two to consistency in both groups (although only three of the five in each group were identical to the other). Those researchers who have not conducted multi-centre research identified a large gap between how important consistent Tri-Council Policy standards are and how well REBs consistently utilize these standards. They also revealed a large gap in understanding and completing the application forms with ease.

Responses from researchers who have conducted multi-centre research revealed that acceptance of approvals from different REBs is important to them, but not sufficiently addressed by the REBs. They also revealed a large gap in efficiency of the approval process as their perception is that REBs processes do not appropriately address different levels of risk in research.

It is noteworthy in the foregoing analyses that two items were consistently among the five largest gaps for every sub-analysis presented. These were Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics

approval is reasonable; and Q26 - For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another. These two items were consistently ranked in the top five in terms of the gap between importance and performance by both junior and senior researchers, by both biomedical/clinical researchers and those who conduct social/behavioural and other types of research, by both university researchers and those in other types of settings, and by researchers both with and without experience with multi-centre trials.

### 4.2.5 Potential Survey Bias

With any study, it is important to identify potential sources of bias. In surveys, the most important of these is response bias or self-selection bias. A total of 3 460 invitations were sent out resulting in 615 completed surveys. This information cannot be used to estimate a response rate because of the fact that many invitations were duplicates. Nevertheless, it is clear that a minority of human subjects researchers completed the survey. Response bias occurs when those who complete a survey differ systematically from the population being studied. It was reassuring that the respondents reflected all the different types of research, institutions and experience. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that respondents differed systematically from all researchers in their perceptions of REB characteristics. This would occur, for example, if those researchers most critical of REB performance were more likely to complete the survey than their less critical counterparts.

The survey was offered in an online format which may have restricted the responses from individuals who may either not have adequate access or ability to complete the survey in that format or are concerned about providing information over the internet. We provided the option of completing and mailing a paper copy of the survey, but it was only requested and returned by one respondent. For any information that is transmitted across the internet, there is never a complete guarantee of its protection. The survey responses were completely anonymous and confidential and MSFHR did not ask for or track any personal identifying information. All results were used in aggregate form.

### 4.3 *Researcher Comments*

The majority of comments from researchers indicated that the ethics review process is time-consuming, particularly for research that is relatively low risk, such as quality assurance studies, hospital chart surveys, biographical interviews and program evaluation. They also showed interest in more consistent guidelines and standards both within and among REBs, but also more staff support to give advice throughout the application process. A number of researchers questioned the necessity of REBs reviewing the scientific merit of studies that had already been approved by peer-review agencies. Many of the researchers also expressed appreciation for the work of the REB members and acknowledged the workload they assume. Researchers also commented appreciatively on the opportunity to share their experiences and asked for REBs to consult with researchers when considering new methods of improving efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

Aspects of the process on which researchers commented that were not reflected in the survey questions included: inconsistent and variable review standards for special populations (e.g. children, Aboriginal communities, and specific religious groups); the importance of maintaining an open and friendly relationship with the REB staff and members; and the additional effort required for institutional-specific administrative and feasibility review that is independent (but often duplicates aspects) of ethics review.

## Appendix A: Survey Instrument

### Welcome!

**As an individual conducting research involving human subjects in British Columbia, we invite you to share your experiences using the ethics review process at your institution.**

**Information gathered through this survey will be compiled in a report to inform a larger consultative initiative. All responses to this survey will be anonymous. Any comments that you provide may be cited anonymously. The final results will be available to all participants on the MSHFR website.**

**Please tell us a bit about yourself:**

**Have you ever had the principal responsibility for the preparation and submission of an application for ethics review of research involving human subjects?**

- Yes
- No

**If yes, in what most recent capacity?**

- Principal or Co-Investigator
- Research Coordinator, Associate, or Assistant
- Student, Trainee, or Fellow

Note: Respondents will only be routed to this Thank You if they respond 'No' on the first question. If they respond 'Yes' they will continue on with the survey.

### Thank you!

Thank you for your interest in responding to the B.C. Research Ethics Review Board Experience Survey.

At this time, we are only looking for responses from individuals who are experienced in the ethics review process by having been principally responsible for ethics review submissions.

You are welcome to review the results of this survey which will be available on the MSFHR website.

### Questions

**Thinking about your experience in preparing and submitting applications for ethics review in research involving human subjects, please consider the following statements and tell us:**

-How important is this item to you in your work?

-How well do you feel this item describes the Research Ethics Board (REB) at your institution?

Please only respond regarding your primary institution: the REB to which you most frequently apply for ethics review. Respond with respect to REB review only; please do not consider Hospital Administrative Reviews or Privacy Impact Assessments in your answers.

	How important is this to you?	How well does this describe your REB?
The REB ensures that members abstain from evaluating protocols whenever a real or apparent conflict of interest arises.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The REB ensures that members abstain from evaluating protocols whenever a real or apparent conflict of interest arises.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The REB provides suggestions for editing such as typos, grammar, etc. in protocols and other documents.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
When reviewing protocols for multi-centre studies, the REB provides a complete rationale when it requires changes to criteria that are different from the requirements of reviews completed by other REBs.	<input type="text"/> Absolutely essential <b>Very important</b> Of moderate importance Of little importance Not at all important	<input type="text"/> <b>Very well</b> Well To a moderate degree To a small degree Not at all I don't know
Members of the REB do not allow scientific or methodological biases to affect their evaluation of protocols submitted for their review.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Information about research ethics policies and procedures is easily accessible.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The REB provides a complete rationale for any required changes or disapproval of protocols.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The institutional research office provides an online system for ethics review applicants.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The REB offers consultation during the development of research protocols and grant applications.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The REB research ethics requirements take into account the realities of the researcher.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
For multi-centre studies that require approvals from more than one REB, the Tri-Council Policy Statement standards	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Note: These response choices apply to all corresponding drop-down menus in this section.



about the content.

For multi-centre studies that require approval from more than one REB, the reviews of a protocol provided by different REBs are consistent with one another

REB members and staff perform their duties in a way that indicates they fully understand act within the scope of their function.

The REB offers information to applicants to assist in improving the quality of submissions.

The process of applying to multiple REBs for multi-centre studies does not impact my research negatively.

The REB recognizes when it lacks sufficient expertise to evaluate a protocol and seeks outside expert advice.

## Questions

Please provide us with some additional information about you and your research. All responses to this survey will be anonymous.

To which institutions have you submitted an application for ethics review? Please select all that apply.

- Health Authority
- University or College
- Hospital
- Private
- Other (please specify)

To which institution do you most frequently submit an application for ethics review? Please select one.

- Health Authority
- University or College
- Hospital
- Private
- Other (please specify)

**How many years have you conducted research involving human subjects?**

- One year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-15 years
- 16-30 years
- More than 30 years

**Thinking about the studies involving human subjects for which you submitted application(s) for ethics review in the last ten years:**

**How many were single-site studies?**

- Zero
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more

**Thinking about the studies involving human subjects for which you submitted application(s) for ethics review in the last ten years:**

**How many were single-site studies?**

- Zero
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more

**Which of the following themes best describes the focus of your research?**

- Biomedical/Clinical
- Social/Behavioural
- Health Services and Systems
- Population Health
- IT/Engineering

**Have you ever served on a Research Ethics Board?**

- Yes
- No

**Do you supervise any students or trainees whose training requires the submission of applications for ethics review of their research?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, could you please comment on any issues or concerns that you have relating to the student/trainee application process for ethics review of their research:

Note: Response length was not limited

## Comments

### Optional Comments

**Please provide any additional comments regarding your experience with Research Ethics Boards and the ethics review process including concerns or suggestions for improvements. All responses will be anonymous.**

Note: Response length was not limited

## Thank you!

**Thank you for participating in our survey. Check our website to see the final results, which will be posted in late fall, 2007.**

[Submit survey >>](#)

Note: Respondents were directed to the MSFHR website upon submission of the survey. Further information regarding the BC Ethics Harmonization Initiative is posted there.

## Appendix B: B.C. Harmonization Initiative: Task Force Members

**Dr. Anne Marie Broemeling**

Director, Information Support and Research  
Interior Health Authority

**Dr. George Browman**

Research Ethics Board Chair  
BC Cancer Agency

**Dr. Joe Connors**

Research Ethics Board Vice-Chair  
BC Cancer Agency

**Ms. Eva Cheung Robinson**

Program Director  
BC Medical Services Foundation (Vancouver  
Foundation)

**Ms. Laurel Evans**

Associate Director of Research Ethics  
University of British Columbia

**Dr. Sarah Hartley**

Society & Ethics Advisor  
Genome BC

**Dr. Richard Keeler**

Associate Vice-President of Research  
University of Victoria

**Dr. Yvonne Lefebvre**

Vice President of Research & Academic Affairs  
Providence Health Care

**Dr. Linda Peritz**

Associate Director  
Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute

**Dr. Deborah Poff**

Board Member and Chair, Research Ethics  
Board  
BC Medical Services Foundation (Vancouver  
Foundation)

**Mr. Brent Sauder**

Assistant Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Advanced Education

**Ms. Patricia Tait**

Coordinator of Internal Funding and Strategic  
Initiatives  
Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute

**Ms. Elisabeth Wagner**

Executive Director  
Strategic Policy and Research  
Ministry of Health

**Dr. Hal Weinberg**

Director of Research Ethics  
Simon Fraser University

## Appendix C: Invitation for Researcher Participation

Dear Researcher,

I am writing to ask you for a ten-minute contribution to a process intended to improve research ethics review in B.C., based on your experience as a researcher.

**We are conducting an online survey to gather the views of B.C. based investigators regarding their experience with applications for ethics review of research projects involving human subjects.**

**To complete the anonymous survey, please go to: <<URL>>**

The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) has heard from health research stakeholders across B.C. about the need for an improved and provincially coordinated approach to research ethics approval. Now, with the endorsement and support of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Advanced Education, MSFHR has agreed to facilitate a process to explore options in greater depth. To learn more, please go to our website at

[http://www.msfhr.org/sub-media-publications-presidents-article.asp?story\\_id=197#b](http://www.msfhr.org/sub-media-publications-presidents-article.asp?story_id=197#b).

We also invite you to forward this invitation to any colleagues who conduct research involving human subjects in B.C., who you believe might be interested in participating. Aggregate results will be published on the MSFHR website later this fall.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Patricia Evans, Project Lead, B.C. Research Ethics Harmonization Initiative at [pevans@msfhr.org](mailto:pevans@msfhr.org) or 604-714-2773.

This is an important initiative for British Columbia. Your support as a participant in the survey will ensure the investigator experience is accurately reflected and informs our process.

With thanks and best wishes,

Martin T. Schechter OBC, MD, FRSC, FCAHS  
Chief Scientific Officer

## Appendix D: Sample Calculations

### Weighted Averages:

Example: Q14 - The time taken to obtain research ethics approval is reasonable.

Importance					
Answer options	Essential	Very important	Moderate	Little Importance	Not at all
Assigned weighting	5	4	3	2	1
Number of respondents:	300	139	11	0	0
Total number of respondents: 450					
Weighted average calculation: $[(5*300)+(4*139)+(3*11)+(2*0)+(1*0)]/450 = 4.64$					
A higher weighted average indicates higher importance.					

Performance					
Answer options	Very Well	Well	Moderate	Small Degree	Not at all
Assigned weighting	5	4	3	2	1
Number of respondents:	73	105	110	77	82
Total number of respondents: 447 <sup>15</sup>					
Weighted average calculation: $[(5*73)+(4*105)+(3*110)+(2*77)+(1*82)]/447 = 3.02$					
A higher weighted average indicates higher REB performance.					

### Gap Analysis:

What is the difference between weighted averages for how important an item is to a researcher, and how well they feel that item describes their REB?

Importance (as above): 4.64

Performance: 3.02

Weighted average difference (Gap):  $4.64 - 3.02 = 1.62$

<sup>15</sup> Respondents who answered "I don't know" were not included in this total



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