

This document outlines the process for the development, approval and execution of research projects conducted under the auspices or with the support of the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC).

BERC's MISSION is to conduct and disseminate rigorous long- and short-term strategic data analysis and research for the benefit of the children and families of Baltimore City. BERC research projects address questions of critical importance to research and practice so that school system leaders, partners, and other stakeholders will then be well positioned to use findings to move conversations forward, design strategic and practical responses to challenges that may be highlighted by the research, advocate for resources and capitalize upon promising practices or levers for positive change identified by the research. BERC has developed its data archive for the sole purpose of supporting research and analyses that allows it to execute its mission. BERC does not grant access to the data archive nor does it approve research for any other purpose.

Underlying Principles of this Process: BERC operates under the basic premise that all staff and affiliates must respect the confidentiality of information and the privacy of individuals and schools, regardless of how they gain access to this information. It is our ethical obligation to ensure that the subjects of our research are not put at any sort of risk from our work. BERC obtains or collects data for the sole purpose of executing its mission. BERC does not use this information for any other purpose, nor does it grant access to others for any other purpose.

BERC staff members and affiliates are required to adhere to ethical standards in the use of human subjects for research, following federal requirements administered by consortium member institutions through their various Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). While principal investigators are responsible for developing research protocols and the conduct of research, all co-investigators, research assistants and staff on a research project must be knowledgeable about these issues and adhere to these standards.

BERC staff members and affiliates must uphold the obligations made to agencies and individuals that have provided us with information for the purposes of BERC research. Using these data for purposes other than BERC approved research or allowing individuals outside BERC to obtain the information given to us solely for our own research, would violate those obligations. Much of this data is very sensitive, so the collecting agencies must maintain control over its distribution. Under no circumstances do we share individual-level data from these sources with researchers working outside of BERC projects, unless we have written permission from the agency that originally collected the data. Regardless of the source and whether quantitative or qualitative, these data are subject to confidentiality requirements, except when the information is publicly available.

Research Process

Develop research concept. Principal investigator develops research concept and project idea in consultation with Institutional Lead (IL), BERC directors and/or research board co-chair(s). Discussion should center on 1) fit of proposed project with BERC's mission and 2) potential City Schools sponsor(s) for the proposed project.

Develop proposal. PI develops initial draft of research proposal following the [BERC Research Proposal Template](#). The primary audience for the proposal is the City Schools' Sponsor; therefore, the proposal should be written as clearly and succinctly as possible, and technical language and jargon should be used sparingly. PI should consult with IL and BERC's executive director (ED) and Director of Research Operations (DRO) for guidance as needed during development. PI should consult the [BERC Data Guide](#) to understand data available in the archive and potential for use in the proposed study. PI may also need to have initial discussions about data archive and study feasibility with BERC's DRO.

Secure approval of City Schools' Sponsor. If necessary, the ED assists in making connections between the PI and a potential Sponsor (i.e., a district leader with relevant content research interest). PI discusses project proposal with potential Sponsor and makes iterative revisions as necessary in partnership with the Sponsor. Once the project proposal is finalized, the document should be converted to pdf to facilitate electronic signatures. The Sponsor and PI both sign the proposal to certify that they have discussed the project to sufficient detail and agree that the proposed project is aligned with the mission of BERC and has potential to inform practice in Baltimore City Public Schools.

Send proposal to Research Board. The signed, pdf version of the project proposal can be sent directly to the DRO (Marcy Davis, marcy@jhu.edu), copying their institutional lead or may be sent to the DRO by the institutional lead with PI copied. Once received, the DRO will review and send to the research board co-chairs for discussion at the next co-chair meeting. At that point the proposal will be added to the agenda of the next available research board meeting or returned to the PI with additional questions.

Research Board Meeting. In advance of the research board meeting the co-chairs will send the proposal out to all institutional leads for review. The PI will ensure that the Sponsor is able to be at the research board meeting. During the meeting, the PI and Sponsor will briefly review the proposed research and its importance to City Schools and the Sponsors' office. Following the review, the floor will be open to questions, comments, and feedback on the protocol from members in attendance (institutional leads, co-chairs, DRO). At the end of discussion, the research board will vote to approve or defer the proposed research.

Final approval. Following approval by the research board, the co-chairs sign the research proposal and send to the PI and Sponsor.

The final approval letter may be used by the PI for funding and IRB proposals as verification of the project's approved status.

Specify analytic file. PI meets with to discuss the data and analytic needs of the project.

Funding. As a result of this consultation BERC will provide an estimate of costs associated with supporting the project.

Data use agreement (DUA). BERC will work with the Johns Hopkins University Research Administration (JHURA) to develop a Data Use Agreement that will govern data use, access and funding arraignments. The PI will work with the BERC DRO to coordinate execution of the DUA with the appropriate research administration office at their home institution. The PI must provide proof of their institution's IRB approval prior to receiving data access. Upon execution of the DUA, BERC will set up and provision the project specific secure environment and data access.

Access to data in secure environment. All access to and analysis of BERC data will take place in a secure, remote environment. This environment includes basic statistical (Stata, R) and word-processing software. PIs and project team members will be given access to a project specific folder in which they can store code, results, and other relevant documents. Nothing may be removed from this environment without written permission from the DRO. All requests to remove products from the secure environment must be made in writing by emailing the DRO. All reported results must comply with the district's data masking and privacy policies. The DRO will review the products for compliance with these policies and return approved products via email.

Board Updates. Researchers with approved projects are requested to provide an update on the progress of their research at two points during the year. Please note that the timeline for these updates begins when the project is approved by the Research Board regardless of the status of the project and a project is not considered "complete" until all dissemination activities have concluded as specified in the Proposal. Updates are due on September 1st and March 1st of each year PIs should provide a written update via email to the Research Board co-chairs that should minimally include:

Status of research activities. In what stage is the research? E.g., applying for funding, data collection if applicable, data analysis, meeting with stakeholders, manuscript/report preparation, etc.

Current list of project personnel. Please include all Sponsors, PIs, Co-PIs, and graduate student team members, and note if there have been changes in personnel since approval.

Findings to-date. If analyses are still underway, describe any challenges encountered. If possible, provide a few paragraphs summarizing preliminary or completed findings.

Current plans for dissemination. Provide the type(s) of products in planning or draft (e.g., manuscript and specific journal/outlet, BERC report or white paper, conference

submissions, etc.) Please also provide relevant information about the timing or deadlines for these activities.

The Research Board co-chairs will determine whether the update requires full board review on a case-by-case basis. Should a full board review be required, research board co-chairs will work with PIs to schedule updates to occur at either the November or December research board meeting.

Research Board co-chairs will send a reminder to each PI with an approved project before the deadline, but it is the PI's responsibility to get the update in on time. Researchers who fail to update the board on their progress may see their access to the data restricted.

Public Presentation of Research Products. The PI must notify the DRO and City Schools Sponsor at least 35 days prior to presenting any findings in a public forum. (See the [BERC Research Findings Review Process](#) for more details.) This includes but is not limited to conference presentations and journal publication. Internal working group discussions do not require notification, but when in doubt the PI should discuss the details with the DRO. Findings for review should minimally include the key empirical findings and a preliminary narrative and interpretation. A full, manuscript-length document is not necessary.

Project wrap up and archiving. The project PI will notify the DRO once all research and dissemination activities have been completed and the project is ready to be wrapped up and archived. BERC will maintain all code used by BERC staff to generate the initial analytic dataset(s) derived from the BERC data archive as specified by the PI and approved for the project. BERC, however, does not archive any subsequent research datasets that are derived from the initial analytic dataset provided to the project. Maintaining code used to generate a final research dataset(s) and/or analyses for replication purposes is the responsibility of the PI and research team. The PI will work with BERC data managers to identify all non-data products (e.g., code used to conduct analyses, writing products) that the study team wishes to retain and remove from the project folder prior to archiving. Once approved by the DRO, relevant files will be removed and transmitted to the PI. Upon project closure, BERC will remove access to the project folder and analytic environment for all study team members.

Final research data derived from the BERC data archive cannot be shared or made publicly available per the requirements of BERC's Memorandum of Understanding with Baltimore City Public Schools. Researchers who wish to be granted access to BERC archival data for use in any research project, including replication of prior projects that have used BERC archival data, must obtain their own research approval following the standard BERC approval process.