TIPS FOR OBTAINING ANIMAL ETHICS APPROVAL

The following tips will assist you in developing a clear ethics application and, therefore, in obtaining ethics approval in the minimum timeframe.

**Work out which ethics committee should review your application**
You should first confirm that the University of Sydney is the most appropriate AEC to review your application by consulting the Ethics Office [website](#). If in doubt, contact the Ethics Office to ask them for advice.

**Obtain access to the University’s online application system**
All application, modification, adverse event, response and annual/completion report forms for the University of Sydney AEC are submitted and managed online in the IRMA system. Paper copies and emailed versions are no longer required or accepted. This means that if you are going to get ethics approval from the University AEC, you will need a Unikey and access to the online system (IRMA). If you don’t have a Unikey, you can [request one online](#). If you don’t have IRMA access, complete this [online form](#).

**Start early and allow enough time**
Don’t leave ethics to the last minute. You should start thinking about ethics as soon as you start thinking about and planning for your project, because ethics should be integrated into all stages of the research process.

Once you have submitted your application, you will also need to allow time for all co-investigators, the Chief Investigator, faculty approver, and facility supervisor to sign the declaration to “approve” the application (in place of a physical signature) in the online system. All of these declarations must be in place before the outcome/approval letter can be sent to you following the AEC meeting. External investigators who do not have access to IRMA can sign the external investigator approval form available for download on the Ethics Office [website](#). The application will need to be reviewed by the AEC. All up, gaining ethics approval will usually take at least 4 - 6 weeks from submission to final approval. In some circumstances, it will take longer.

**Think critically about ethical issues**
The ethical review process gives you a valuable opportunity to think through all the potential ethical implications of your research. Some key ethical issues for you to consider are termed the 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction & Refinement):

- **Replacement** – Methods which avoid or replace the use of animals. If you are unable to avoid replacing animals in this protocol then please state the reasoning for this
- **Reduction** – Methods which minimise the number of animals used per experiment
- **Refinement** – Methods which minimise suffering and improve animal welfare

If you would like further information regarding the 3Rs then please refer to the following links:

- [http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs](http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs)

Be your own most critical audience and use your mentors, supervisors, and colleagues to help you think through the potential ethical issues. In most fields there are texts that outline common ethical issues in relation to particular methodologies and data collection methods. You might also want to ask some people who know nothing about your research to get the perspective of a lay person. Ask them how they would react and if they comprehend the project you have written. What kinds of concerns might they have? What questions would they have? Be sure to consider these perspectives when you write your application as there are also lay people on the AEC who review your project.
You should also be familiar with the guidelines, codes and legislation that govern research in the places where you intend to do it. In Australia, it is crucial that you understand and apply the ethical principles for research that are set out in the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8th edition 2013*. It is also crucial that you act in accordance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (NHMRC, 2007). You also need to consider whether there are any other specific codes, guidelines or legislation that are relevant to your project. Some of these are outlined on the Ethics Office website.

The Ethics Office has developed a number of guidelines to assist you in considering ethical issues, developing solutions, designing your research project and preparing your supporting documentation. You are encouraged to use these guidelines and seek advice from the Ethics Office at all stages of conducting your research.

**Know your research and methodology**

Your research question must be clear in your mind before you can communicate it to others, particularly those who have limited specific knowledge or experience in the area. In the application questionnaire, make sure you explain your methodology clearly and in lay terms, including details about how you determined the number of animals required (e.g. power analysis), the 3Rs, the sequence of events, monitoring of animals, facility standard operating procedures (e.g. the use of drugs, WH&S, animal handling/trapping, anaesthetic regime and euthanasia) and environmental enrichment and housing.

**Communicate clearly in lay language**

It is important that you communicate clearly with the AEC. Use plain language in the application questionnaire and your supporting documents. The ethics committee members reviewing your project may not be experts in your specific research field. Where your research participants include animal owners, you will need information to be expressed to them in lay terms in order to provide informed consent. If you have questions about how to communicate clearly with the AEC, you can contact the Ethics Office.

**Use the correct templates for supporting documentation and adapt them to your project**

Once you have completed the application questionnaire, you will need to upload all required supporting documentation for your application in the “Documents” tab. The type of supporting documents you need will depend on the nature of your project, but might include any of the following: monitoring/record sheet, power analysis calculation, phenotype report, information statements and consent forms (animal owners), drug/anaesthesia regime including dose rates, photos of equipment, photos of farm/field work, signed external investigator approval forms (for researchers external to the University) and safety protocols.

The Ethics Office provides templates for certain supporting documentation which are revised from time to time. Make sure you are using the most current version by obtaining these templates from the Ethics Office website each time you do an application.

**Ensure your application is complete and any attached documents are labelled correctly**

Ensure you submit all required supporting documents with your application, because missing documents delay the ethics review process. Your ethics application and the supporting documents must be capable of being read, reviewed and approved as self-explanatory documents that justify the research proposal. Please clearly label each document when you save it to your computer and then upload it to the “Documents” tab in IRMA. This is important not only because clearly labelled documents help in reducing processing time for your application, but also because these labels will appear on your ethics approval letter.
Summary

• Review the questions (PDF) that will be on the application and prepare your answers.
• Review the Guidelines for help with specific topics
• Consult the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8th edition (2013)*
• Consult state/territory legislation
• Make sure you have a Unikey and access to IRMA.
  If you don’t have a Unikey, request one online. To request access to IRMA, complete this online form.
• Create a new application online in IRMA and complete the application questionnaire in the “Questionnaire” tab of your application.
• Prepare your supporting documentation, using the templates available online.
• Upload all of your supporting documentation in the “Documents” tab of your application.
• Submit your application early to allow enough time for all researchers on the application (including yourself), as well as your Faculty Approver, to “approve” it online in IRMA.