

ERC Proposal Preparation & Submission Process

Section 1: Overview of How it Works

The Education Research Centers are governed by the ERC Advisory Board, which is chaired by the Commissioner of Higher Education from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Effective September 1, 2015, the ERC Advisory Board was recognized as a governmental body by the state of Texas. Representatives from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission, the ERC directors, and additional appointed experts also serve on the ERC Advisory Board. The ERC Advisory Board makes policy decisions regarding the operation of the ERCs and reviews all applications/proposals for the use of ERC data and resources for research. The ERC Advisory Board meets at least quarterly (Tex. Educ. Code §1.006).

The Repository data housed at the University of Texas at Austin (UTA) ERC contains personal information about individuals protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). To protect the confidentiality of the educational records and personal information of individuals, terms and conditions are in place for everyone who accesses the data through the ERC. In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, the ERC Advisory Board approved REMOTE access to the data was approved the summer of 2020 and REMOTE access began in September 2020.

Researchers wishing to utilize the data from the UTA ERC must develop and submit a proposal to the specific UTA ERC where the data will be accessed; they should also have secured funding in place to cover the appropriate fees, should the project be approved. The UTA ERC will then review the proposal to ensure it meets a minimum standard of rigor and provides a benefit to education in Texas.

Once the UTA ERC director approves the proposal, it is forwarded to the ERC Advisory Board for consideration. If the ERC Advisory Board accepts the proposal, researchers are granted access to the Texas ERC Repository located on a secure virtual machine (VM) environment. The VM also contains statistical software for use by the researcher with ERC data. Research is conducted for a designated period of time during which interim and final data products/research results are reviewed and released to the individual researcher. When a research project terminates, researcher access to the UTA ERC data is rescinded. All pertinent data in the project's workspace is retained for five years and then destroyed as required by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974(FERPA).

Proposal Process & Approval

Prospective researcher(s) must submit both a formal research proposal and a reader's guide to the Director of the UTA ERC through the link listed on the listing of the next scheduled ERC Advisory Board meeting. The research proposal, 10-15 pages in length, should include necessary details to demonstrate that the research will contribute to theory/practice, benefits to education in the state of Texas, and is methodologically sound. Proposals must also highlight qualifications, resources, requested data, and a dissemination strategy of the researcher(s).

Researcher(s) are required to identify requested data at the record level in their proposal. As the inventory of data is in flux throughout the year, an updated list of data by agency is available on the [Texas ERC website \(www.texaserc.utexas.edu\)](http://www.texaserc.utexas.edu) titled *Texas ERC Data Inventory*. If the project requires supplemental data (defined as additional data not included in the Repository),

then the proposal must identify what supplemental data will be needed for the project. You must also include a data dictionary detailing the supplemental data requested. Below are links to resources that to familiarize yourself with available data:

- The University of Texas at Austin ERC website & data: <https://texaserc.utexas.edu/>
- TEA Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data, http://tea.texas.gov/Reports_and_Data/Data_Submission/PEIMS/Public_Education_Information_Management_System/
- TEA TAAS and TAKS assessment data and the State Board of Education data, Testing/Accountability section, <http://www.tea.state.tx.us> under the “Testing/Accountability” link
- STAAR explanations, <http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/staar>
- STAAR testing results, <http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/results/>
- THECB reports and FADS data, <http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectID=3874B639-B8B5-1533-24CEAC194113B058>
- TWC wage report data, www.twc.state.tx.us.

Details for the full research proposal and the Reader’s Guide template are located in Section 3.

Section 2: Obtaining Approval

Once the proposal is received, the first step of the approval process involves an initial screening by ERC staff, who may request revisions to the proposal. Many suggested revisions are aimed at making the process with the ERC Advisory Board run smoothly, for example, providing accurate descriptions of data required for the study. If approved at the Texas ERC level, the proposal will be placed on the agenda for next available meeting date for the ERC Advisory Board. The ERC Advisory Board limits the number of proposal slots allotted to each of the ERCs due to time limitations for Advisory Board members and meeting time allowance. The ERC Director will make every effort to get a proposal scheduled for the next meeting, but no guarantees can be made regarding the number of proposals for any given meeting date.

Once a completed proposal has been approved by the Texas ERC and scheduled on the ERC Advisory Board’s agenda, the proposal progresses to the ERC Advisory Board meeting. Currently, most ERC Advisory Board meetings are held by teleconference and researchers are given the phone number to call into the meeting. During the meeting, researcher(s) are asked to briefly summarize their proposal and answer questions regarding elements on their proposal. At least one researcher per proposal must be present for the ERC Advisory Board meeting. The Texas ERC, however, strongly suggests that all listed researchers attend the meeting to ensure all questions posed by the board are answered fully.

The ERC Advisory Board may take several actions during the meeting review of proposals. These actions *may* include approval, approval with adjustments, resubmit, or denial of the proposal. If the ERC Advisory Board requests a resubmit or issues a denial, the research team will then need to address the concerns of the Board and may resubmit at a future ERC Advisory

Board meeting. As the authorizing entity of the Texas ERC, the ERC Advisory Board reserves the authority to take actions other than those listed above. If the proposal is approved, the researcher(s) will then be contacted with instructions on how to complete the authorized researcher requirements.

After a successful proposal approval from the ERC Advisory Board, the researcher(s) should review the ***Policies & Procedures for Approved Projects*** located on the Texas ERC website. This document details the policies and procedures involved in obtaining access, conducting research, and concluding your project.

In an effort to inform individuals interested in conducting research at UTA ERC, the following section provides a brief overview the process and conditions necessary to access, use, and conclude research at Texas ERC.

Section 3: Conducting the Research

Access - For in-person/on-site research, the Repository may be accessed only through secured Texas ERC physical workstations by authorized ERC Researchers.

Remote access may be permitted for those researchers who are geographically located within the United States and its territories, whose project is approved by the ERC Advisory Board for remote access, and who meet necessary remote security requirements.

All in-person and remote access must follow an established data and security protocol set forth by ERC staff. **There is an access limit of 4 researchers per active project.**

Review of Research Products – All research products including tables, statistical output, graphs, and more must undergo review to ensure FERPA compliance. A Texas ERC staff member, following the guidelines set forth in the Masking Guidelines and Techniques, conducts the review of research products prior to releasing items back to the researcher.

Approval Period & Extensions – The initial approval of research projects is usually two years. However, with proof of funding, initial ERC Advisory Board approval may be established for up to 5 years. Extensions for a study have to be written/submitted and must go before the ERC Advisory Board. An extension may be granted up to 3 years with secured funding.

Research Project Information – Researcher(s) must provide the Texas ERC with regular updates regarding progress, personnel/researcher changes, and extensions.

Project Amendments – If the original proposal needs amending after the approval by the ERC Advisory Board, then researcher(s) must submit a request to the Director. The project amendment for a study must be in the form of a written request and must go before the ERC Advisory Board. If the changes are major, researcher(s) may be asked to resubmit the project as a new proposal.

Section 4: Concluding the Research

Policy Brief – Researcher(s) must create and submit within 60 days of the project end date a policy brief for public dissemination. The ERC Advisory Board will not approve future projects for researchers who have not provided the required Brief for a previously-completed project . The policy brief serves to benefit the state of Texas, and it is part of the agreed-upon elements of access to the Repository data at Texas ERCs.

Other Research Products – Researcher(s) should also inform the Director of other outcomes of

the research conducted at the Texas ERC. This may include journal article or other publications that emerge from work conducted at the ERC. Copies of publications must be provided, at no cost, to the cooperating agencies.

Conclusion – Researcher(s) will have access rescinded and workspace files are archived. Project statistical code will be stored in *Code to Archive* folders for a limited amount of time by the ERC.

Section 5: Template for Reader's Guide and Full Proposal

Proposals are due to the ERC Director approximately a month prior to the next ERC Advisory Board meeting. Exact meeting & deadline dates are posted on the home page of ERC Website.

Outline and Brief Description of Required Sections for the Reader's Guide and Full Proposal

Instructions– *Below is a template for a Reader's Guide, which should be 2-3 pages and attached before your full proposal. The sections in the Reader's Guide cover the most frequently asked questions by Board members. The Reader's Guide should help inform the Board as well as frame your proposal for success.*

Following the Reader's Guide, you should attach a Full Proposal (10-15 pages) that fully outlines your project and its design. In the Full Proposal, you should detail the need for the study, the framings/underpinnings of your work based on current research, the study's design including sampling and methodology, and considerations of implications for furthering academic research and policy.

REQUIRED SECTIONS FOR A NEW ERC PROPOSAL

Reader's Guide

Proposed Project:

Title

Researcher Name(s) Researcher Affiliation(s)

Requesting Remote Access

Abstract

Keywords:

Purpose**Research Questions****Data Elements from ERC Database**

Explore available data by using the tabs and different agency data in the [Full Data Inventory](#) spreadsheet document available on the ERC website. Attach the table to your proposal.

FOR EXAMPLE - We are requesting the following files from ERC data for the years 2003 to present:

TEA – Enrollment

TEA – Attendance

TEA – Dropout and exit reason

TEA – Graduates

TEA – Course completion and Class Roster files (if need student teacher link add the following:
p_stud_class_enroll, p_teacher_class_assign, and p_course_section)

TEA – Class and Employ files

TEA – Organizational data (campus and district)

TEA – Assessments

SBEC – Teacher Certification files

THECB – Student Enrollment Reports

THECB – TASP/TSI Reports

THECB – Graduation Report

THECB – Admissions Report

THECB – Student Schedules

TWC – UI Wage data

NSC – College Attendance Outside Texas

(Specific files may be found in Table 1)

Supplemental Data

Please describe the data and why it is necessary. You can also write “see Table 2: Data Dictionary for Supplemental Data”

If supplemental data is requested: Which research questions can be answered without the supplemental data?

Research Methods

Share briefly your analytic approach without bogging down the reader in jargon (you may get more specific in your full proposal).

Researcher(s) Qualifications

Share a small amount of pertinent information for all researchers who will be involved with the project and/or data.

Benefit to Texas

Specify not only what you intend to examine, but how the research will benefit education in the state. Consider including implications such as broadening the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, rural, etc.), enhancing the infrastructure for research and education, and benefiting and/or informing educational policy and practice.

Related Policy

Identify probable areas that the predicted results and outcomes will be able to influence or address.

FERPA Exemption

Researchers should add a FERPA exception statement in their proposal that includes the specific FERPA exception met, and how. See below the explanation and instructions.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR ACCESS TO INDIVIDUAL DATA

Studies	Audit or Evaluation
34 CFR § 99.31(a)(6).	34 CFR §§ 99.31(a)(3) and 99.35.
<i>The disclosure of PII from student education records must be for, or on behalf of, an educational agency or institution, in order to a. Develop, validate, or administer predictive tests; b. Administer student aid programs; or c. Improve instruction</i>	<i>The disclosure of PII from education records must be to a. Audit or evaluate a Federal- or State-supported education program; or b. Enforce or comply with Federal legal requirements related to the program.</i>

Researchers should add a FERPA exception statement in their proposal that includes the specific FERPA exception met, and how. In many cases, the write-up provided by the researcher in the “Benefit to Texas” section may already provide the ‘how,’ so the researcher can just add a sentence within that section that specifies the FERPA exception itself.

- ERC projects must fall under either the Audit/Evaluation exception, or the Studies exception (to develop, validate, or administer predictive tests; to administer student aid programs; to improve instruction)
- The statement does not necessarily need to be long – in a case where there is an easily identifiable FERPA exception that applies, the statement might only be one sentence.

For example: This project meets the requirements of the Audit/Evaluations FERPA exception because it will evaluate the XXXX program <<enter the name of the Federal- or State- supported educational program>>.

- Projects where the connection to a FERPA exception is not obvious may require a longer statement. For example, if the research is very broad and isn’t specifically measuring the mechanisms linking an independent variable to the outcome, the researcher may need to explain the path from their findings to a possible actionable change in education policy, practice, or instruction.
 - This may not be much different than when the Board asks researchers to explain on how their work can be of benefit to education policy in Texas (for this reason, it might make sense for the FERPA statement to be included in the benefit to Texas section of the proposal).
 - For example (in a project looking at the relationship between experiencing poverty in K-12, and postsecondary outcomes/workforce outcomes): This project meets the requirements of the Studies FERPA exemption because the findings can help improve instruction for K-12 students in Texas. Understanding the extent that experiencing poverty in K-12 affects later life education and workforce outcomes can inform targeted social and education policies to ensure Texas K-12 students are given the resources needed to meet key educational milestones.
- Resource:
 - https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/FERPA%20Exceptions_HANOUT_horizontal_0_0.pdf

Dissemination Strategy

It is a requirement upon completion of the project that you complete a short, implication-geared paper (Policy Brief) that links your findings to Texas policy or practice (4-6 pages). First, speak to what audience you intend to write your policy brief towards (policymakers, practitioners, etc.). Then share the rest of your dissemination plans including presentations, conferences, peer review journals, and other strategies for publishing and sharing findings.

Financial Resources/Funding & Project Length of Time

Indicate where the funds will come from to cover the cost of data access. Researchers should have secured funding in place prior to submitting a project proposal in order to cover the appropriate fees, should their project be approved.

Indicate how many years you anticipate needing to complete your research/project. Projects are typically initially approved for a two-year period, but may be approved for up to 5 years with proof of secured funding.

ATTACH FULL PROPOSAL AFTER READER'S GUIDE.

Full Proposal

Proposals should be no longer than 15 pages in length, excluding references and the Reader's Guide. They may take the format most suited to the researcher(s), but should adequately address and fully explain the following:

Potential contribution to theory and/or practice

Theoretical and/or empirical support for the proposed project is stated

The practical importance of the project is clear

Benefits to education in the state of Texas

The proposal makes a strong case for benefiting education in the state of Texas

Related Policy

FERPA Exemption

Researchers should add a FERPA exception statement in their proposal that includes the specific FERPA exception met, and how. See explanations and instructions in the Reader's Guide section above.

Strength and appropriateness of methodology

Proposal contains clear, concise hypotheses or research questions

Data selected are appropriate for addressing the research questions

- Clearly identify data at the record not the variable level using the ERC Inventory document
- If supplemental data is needed, provide justification and attach the appropriate supplemental external data request form.

The type of analysis being proposed is appropriate given the research objectives

If the project involves evaluating an intervention, the type of intervention being evaluated (e.g. curriculum, teacher professional development, policy) is described

Participants and/or student population is described

If the project requires the collection of primary supplemental data, the instruments to be used in the project are described

Researcher(s) qualifications

The researcher, research team or doctoral student (or advisor) demonstrates expertise in the relevant content area and other related research activities (e.g. data analyses)

Broader impact of the proposed project, whereby the proposed project is likely to:

Broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, geographic, etc.)

Enhance the infrastructure for research and education

Benefit and/or inform educational policy or practice

Dissemination strategy

The proposal lays out an effective strategy for disseminating results

Access to adequate funding/financial resources

The researcher(s) must have adequate funding resources to complete the project in a timely manner. Indicate where the funds will come from to cover the cost of data access. Researchers should have secured funding in place prior to submitting a project proposal in order to cover the appropriate fees, should their project be approved.

Researchers should attach/submit a copy of their secured funding agreement/notification as part of their original project proposal (or project extension proposal) to assist the ERC and Advisory Board determine the appropriate approval period for the project.

Refer back to the Fee Schedule on our website or Appendix B in this document for project costs. Fees per project are for each year of access, so please consider this when obtaining your funding and completing this section of the proposal.

Project Length of Time

Specify how many years you anticipate needing to complete your research/project.

EXAMPLE Table 1. Data sources from the Education Research Center

Source	Data Set	Variables	Years Requested
TEA	p_enroll_demog(yy)	Demographic information on students to be aggregated at the campus level (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, etc.)	2003 to present
TEA	p_attend_demog(yy)	Information on students to be aggregated at the campus level (e.g., attendance, program participation).	2003 to present
TEA	p_attend_RS_student (yy) p_attend_RA_student(yy)	Information on students to be aggregated at the campus level (e.g., attendance, program participation).	2021 to present
TEA	p_attend_student(yy)	Attendance data, by 6-week grading period, for all students reported in school attendance	2003 to present
TEA	p_drop_official(yy) p_dropout(yy)	Information for students who have withdrawn or dropped out	2003 to present

TEA	p_other_exit(yy) p_othr_exit_reason(yy) p_exitreason(yy)	Information for exited, non-graduated, non-dropout students (e.g., leave status...	2003 to present
TEA	p_graduate(yy)	Information for students who have graduated	2003 to present
TEA	p_course_complete	Student course completion file	2003 to present
TEA	p_stud_class_enroll(yy)	Course completion information; contains information on courses	2003 to present
TEA	p_teacher_class_assign(yy)	Information for classroom employees and classes (classroom teachers only),	2003 to present
TEA	p_class_roster_wntryy p_class_roster_staff_wntr p_class_roster_student_wntr	New form of file to link students and teachers	2020 to 2021 2022 to present 2022 to present
TEA	P_class(yy)	Information for classroom employees including student-teacher link variables 'service' and 'class_id' and	2003 to present
TEA	p_employ(yy)	Information for all school district employees, (e.g., degree, experience, base and supplemental pay, etc.),	2003 to present
TEA	P_employ_cp_tchr	Information for teachers (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, degrees, experience, days employed, % day...)	2023 to present
TEA	p_demog_employssn(yy)/p_d emog_employ(yy))	Information for all school district employees (e.g., race/ethnicity,	2003 to present
TEA	TAKS and STAAR	TAKS, all grades, all exams STAAR, all grades, all exams	2003 -2014 2012 to present
TEA	p_campus(yy)	Campus level variables	2003 to present
TEA	p_district(yy)	District level variables	2003 to present
SBEC	sbec_yy	Educator certification data (e.g., degree, degree date, place of degree, alternative vs regular certification, program name)	2003 to present
SBEC	sbec_cert_test_score_yy_data	Information on certification scores for educators (e.g., test type, administration year, test raw scores, test result)	2003 to present
SBEC	sbec_non teach_certs_yy	Information on educators, holding a certification in areas other than teaching (e.g., degree, alternative vs. regular certification, program name,	2003 to present
THECB	p_cbm001_(yy, qtr) p_cbm0C1_yy	College enrollment, grades, completion campus type; p=c,i,u	2003 to present
THECB	TSI & p_cbm002_yy	Texas Success Initiative - college readiness in reading, writing and math	2004 to present
THECB	p_cbm009_yy	College Graduate; p=c,i,u	2003 to present

THECB	p_cbm00b_yy	College Admissions' p=c,i,u	2003 to present
THECB	p_cbm00s_(yy qtr) p_cbm0CS	Student Schedule; p=c,i,u	2011 to present
TWC	ui(yyyy, qtr)	Quarterly wage data for Texas employees	2003 to present
NSC	nscyy_ihe	Information about college attendance outside of Texas	2008 to present

References

Data Dictionary for Supplemental Data – This must be submitted as an additional file, not attached to the proposal.

Please Find the Template in the Supplemental Tab on the UT ERC Website at: <https://texaserc.utexas.edu/supplemental-data-information/>

Variable Name	Definition	Data Type	Source (including details: years, entity)	Value Range/Possible Values and Definitions for Code Values or Ranges	Research Questions	Purpose	Research Possible without this Variable?	Send to ERC?	Pre-approved or Additional Data Request	Notes
<i>FirstName</i>	<i>Individual's first name</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Texas Birth Index file from Texas State Department of Health Services (TDHS) (2000-2021), obtained by researchers</i>	<i>25 characters</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Matching</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PA-Data variables approved by the Board with proposal. AD-Data variables approved through 'Additional Data Request'</i>	
<i>LastName</i>	<i>Individual's last name</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Texas Birth Index</i>	<i>15 characters</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Matching</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PA</i>	
<i>Birthdate</i>	<i>Individual's date of birth</i>	<i>Numeric</i>	<i>Texas Birth Index</i>	<i>YYYYMMDD</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Matching</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PA</i>	
<i>trmt</i>	<i>Designates if individual was in the treatment group</i>	<i>Num/Binary</i>	<i>Researcher-created</i>	<i>0 Untreated 1 Treated</i>	<i>RQ1</i>	<i>Used to split sample into two groups; determine effect of treatment</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>PA</i>	<i>Ensure group assignment accuracy.</i>
<i>HSGPA</i>	<i>High School cumulative GPA</i>	<i>Numeric (Float)</i>	<i>Survey</i>	<i>0.0 - 4.0 (from lowest to highest)</i>	<i>RQ2</i>	<i>Measure prior academic performance</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>Rounded to decimal places. Standardize GPA scales only.</i>