Research Ethics

Annual Report

2025-26

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Research Ethics advances Dalhousie's strategic research directions by providing knowledgeable guidance and timely research ethics review and oversight of research involving humans.

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Fast Facts

- 6,000+ reviews of research involving humans conducted by Research Ethics Boards and staff.
- 641 new project submissions, 241 amendments, 717 continuing reviews, 201 final reports received. 87 projects terminated for non-compliance. 31 projects were closed when researchers did not reply to the board's review letter.
- 21 workday median turnaround time for initial REB review to researchers for new project submissions; 3 workday median turnaround time for acknowledgement of other boards of record.
- 3 workday median turnaround time for administrative screening feedback for submissions withdrawn for quality control prior to ethical review.
- 2 Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities); 22 Board meetings scheduled.
- 50 Board members. Average of 1.4 new submissions assigned to primary reviewers each month.
- 1,664 researchers completed the TCPS online course on research ethics (16,998 researchers have completed it since 2011).
- 1,371 consultations held with researchers.
- 34% of new projects reviewed were funded research (funding held at Dalhousie); 15% were tri-agency funded.
- 89% of new submissions involved prospective research; 11% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
- 16% of new submissions to the University REBs were eligible for Board of Record Acknowledgement (multi-jurisdictional).
- 16,036 website page views.
- 78 release of funds agreements with researchers issued to permit research-related spending to proceed prior to the requirement for research ethics review.

Core Principles:

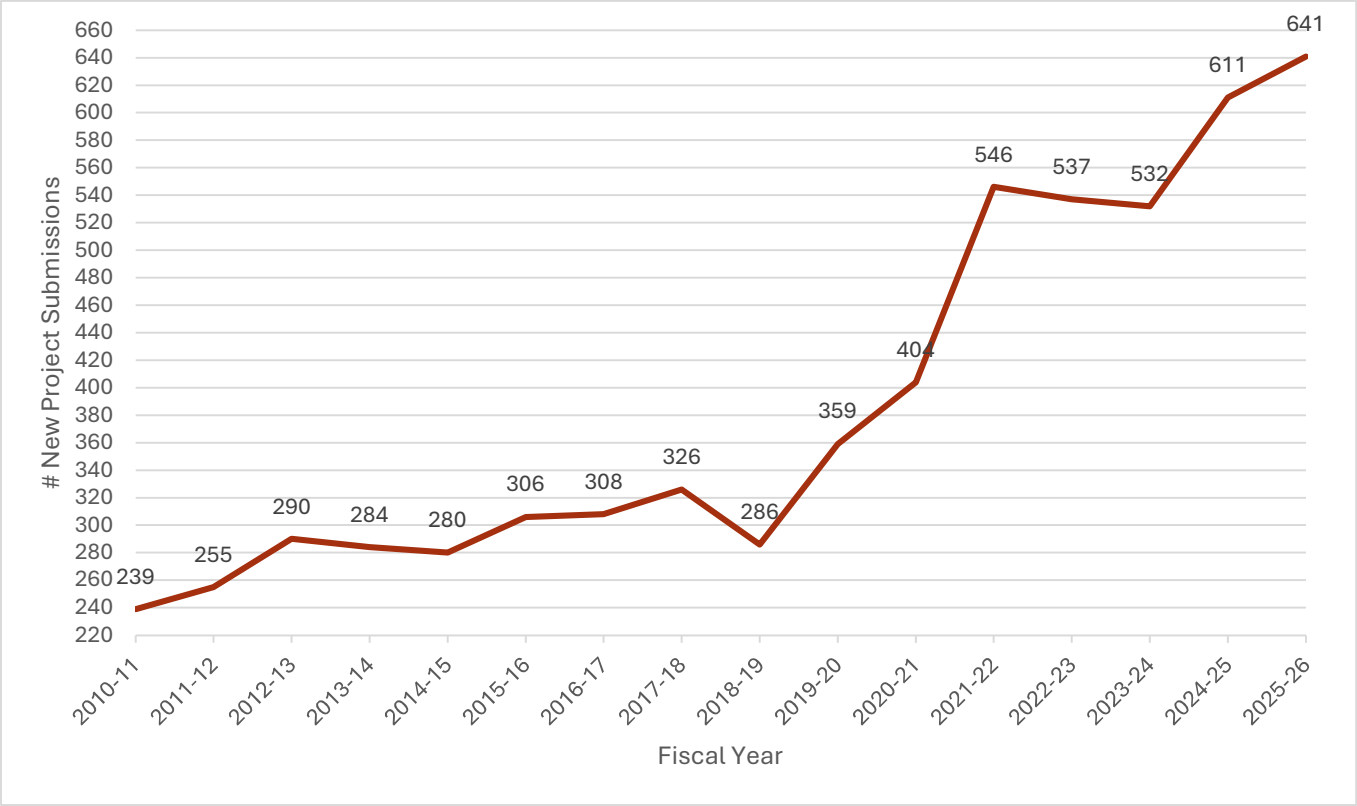
Respect for Persons
Concern for Welfare
Justice

Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 4 full-time staff: a director, two managers, and a support specialist. The staff coordinated and supported the work of two Research Ethics Boards: Health Sciences and Social Sciences & Humanities. There were 22 Board meetings scheduled (6 Health Sciences REB meetings and 6 Social Sciences & Humanities REB meetings held) and 50 Board members (40 of whom were members of the University (38 faculty and 4 students); 8 were community members). The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 6,000 reviews of project submissions, including review of 641 new research projects, 241 amendments, 717 continuing reviews, 201 final reports and 72 ethical approval terminations for non-compliance with continuing review reporting requirements, quarterly reports from research ethics boards at affiliated hospitals (IWK Health Centre, Nova Scotia Health, and Horizon Health) and annual reports from unit-level research ethics committees. Research Ethics authorized 78 release of funds agreements with researchers to permit research-related activity to proceed prior to the requirement for research ethics review; the office also coordinated the peer review process on behalf of the University Committee on Laboratory Animals.

This report offers an overview of the activity of Research Ethics for the period April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

Historical - New REB Submissions (2011-2026)



Notable this year

Board leadership. Dr. John Cameron served as chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board. Dr. Jennifer Isenor ended her term as chair of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board. Dr. Sam Stewart served as chair from July to December; Dr. Sarah Burm assumed the chair in January to begin a three-year term.

Labour disruption between Dalhousie University and the Dalhousie Faculty Association. Lockout and strike August 20 – September 16, 2025 (inclusive). REB activity was suspended and no projects involving DFA members were administratively processed. The REBs were deemed an essential service on an emergency basis only for adverse events affecting the health or welfare of participants. No such emergencies arose.

Wrote and published Research Ethics Board **Standard Operating Procedures** (adapted form national templates from the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards) to participate in a standardized Canadian framework for Research Ethics Boards (REBs) to support a single national standard, helping streamline REB processes, improve consistency, and uphold high ethical and regulatory expectations (Feb 2026).

The Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research invited staff and REB member to participate in a **targeted consultation** to review draft guidance on *Broad consent and the creation of repositories: Clarifications and considerations for researchers and REBs* (Jun 2025) and participate in a national meeting (Jan 2026).

Participation in an **internal audit** by Dalhousie's Internal Audit Services of the research participant payment process (winter 2026).

Staff engaged in substantial **records management** activity including:

- First destruction of electronic records from Romeo since its use began in 2011. Over 1,000 records destroyed pursuant to DalClass.
- Significant reduction and reorganization of electronic files on NAS (network attached storage). Reduced file storage size from 13.7 GB to 7 GB. The most significant reduction came from deletion of documents received from researchers (5 GB).
- Continued management of paper records, including destruction, pursuant to DalClass.

Quarterly meetings held with the director of information security, artificial intelligence analyst, and the privacy officer on **emerging technology** issues and implications for research involving humans.

Privacy and Romeo registration. A change to new application submission process was adopted at the instruction of the Office of Research Services Information Management unit – the addition of a privacy statement in the ROMEO Researcher Portal so researchers must register with the Portal in advance of a submission to the research ethics board (Apr 2025). Application process changes were made related to researcher registration in the Romeo Research Portal to improve transparency to users around portal privacy.

Staff participated in demonstrations **of potential software platforms** to manage research ethics administration (spring 2025)

Research Ethics staff supported the **Responsible Conduct of Research** portfolio through:

- Manger support for the working group leading the renewal of the *Scholarly Misconduct Policy*, including Dalhousie-wide consultations. The director provided feedback on a draft (in writing and in person).
- An amendment proposal to the *Policy on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.
- Writing the job description for a new administrative staff role for the responsible conduct of research portfolio.
- Participation in monthly team meetings with leaders of Responsible Conduct of Research units.

Research Ethics participated in the Office of Vice President Research & Innovation initiative **Pursuing Research Excellence**. Contributed to process maps for publication for research community and in a working group.

Office of the **vice-president research and innovation changes**. Dr. Graham Gagnon was appointed as vice-president, research and innovation.

The University continued to face a significant **budget deficit**.

The demands on the REBs continue to be substantial, and some members were challenged to meet the review demands. One meeting was cancelled at the last minute because it could not meet quorum requirements. Board membership faced shortfalls; two Faculties were not able to meet their membership obligations. The **volume and complexity** of inquiries to staff has been high.

"I am really enjoying being a part of the REB committee and would love to extend my service for a 3-year term. I'm learning a lot from reviewing the proposals and it's been great to be part of such a welcoming, supportive group of people." (Faculty REB member)

Educational Activity

Dalhousie supported educational opportunities for Board members and staff. The Research Ethics Board chairs, members, and staff were involved in presentations and discussions regarding research ethics principles and the review process with members of the University research community, especially students. Staff engaged in 1,371 opportunities to support researchers, primarily through one-on-one consultations.

Boards

- REB members are required to complete the TCPS online ***Course on Research Ethics*** and *The* ***Fundamentals of OCAP®.***
- REB **orientation program** for incoming members held throughout the year by the Board Chairs and staff.
- Renewed standard operating procedures for REB member orientation (initiated a 3-month review).
- Finalized a substantially revised version of the Board Member Summary of Expertise form for health sciences research ethics board members, an initiative at the request of the new board chair.
- Renewal of board conflict of interest policy (Nov 2025).

Researchers

- 1,664 Dalhousie researchers completed the TCPS online ***Course on Research Ethics***; 16,998 researchers completed the tutorial since its inception in June 2011.
- Staff engaged in 1,371 opportunities to support researchers, primarily through **one-on-one consultations**. Online drop-in sessions held (Apr – Sep 2025).
- Research Ethics participated in Dalhousie's **new academic staff orientation.**
- **Presentations** to students by research ethics staff and board members.
- Workshop on **Engaging in Ethical SoTL** (Dr. Kate Thompson, SSH REB, Apr 2025).
- Developed consent form template for **broad consent** for data repository and/or future research and associated guidance (Sep 2025).
- Updated **Top 10 Tips** for Improving your Research Ethics Submission (Oct 2025).
- Review and suggested corrections to the Faculty of Medicine's Undergraduate Medical Education Curriculum Committee policy *Guideline for Researchers Applying for Access to Medical Students* (Jun 2025).

Staff

- Research Ethics staff attended the **Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards** national conference virtually (Apr 2025).

External

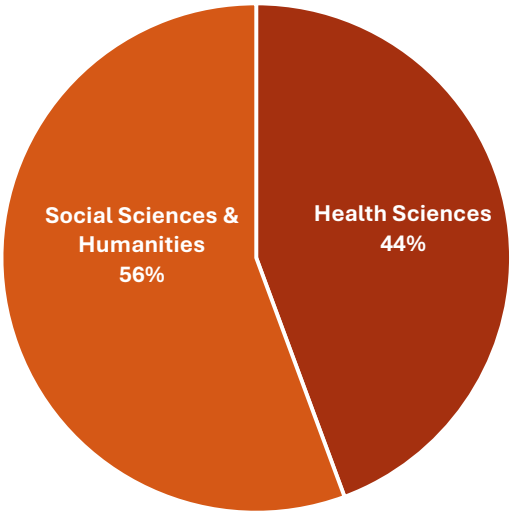
- Dalhousie organized a province-wide university/ **Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch** information-sharing meeting (Dec 2025).
- Research office from a Maritime community college consulted Research Ethics regarding sharing some of Dal's **templates and resources** to help their office (Apr 2025).

- **Outreach** to provincial non-profit organization on improvement to broad consent process for use of participant programming data in research (Sep 2025).
- Shared **consent form for broad consent** for data sharing in a repository and/or future research with another local university (Oct 2025).

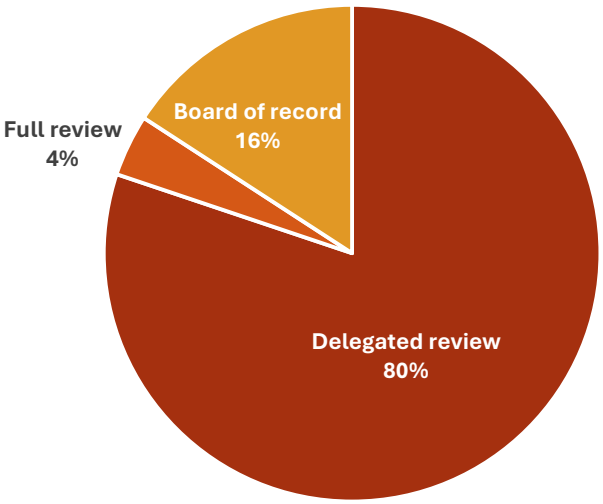
"I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude for your review of my research proposal submitted to the Research Ethics Board. Your valuable feedback and suggestions have significantly contributed to the ethical considerations of my study. I appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to reviewing my proposal during the summer term... Once again, thank you for your contribution, your suggestions are much appreciated in improving the integrity of my research."
(Student researcher)

Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

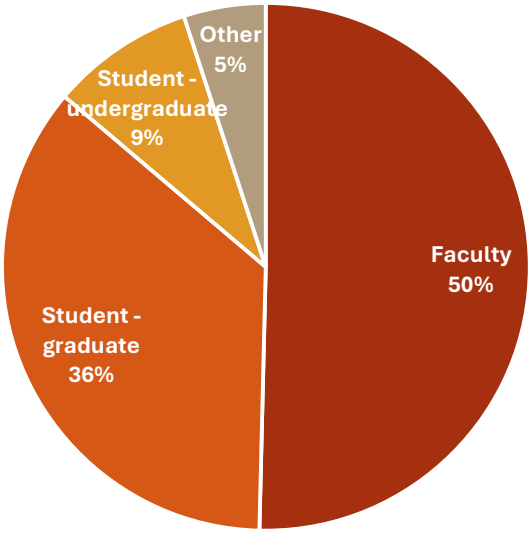
Board Assignment



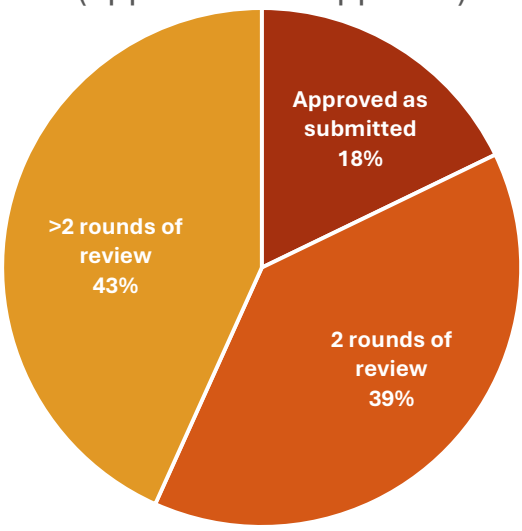
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Researcher Profile

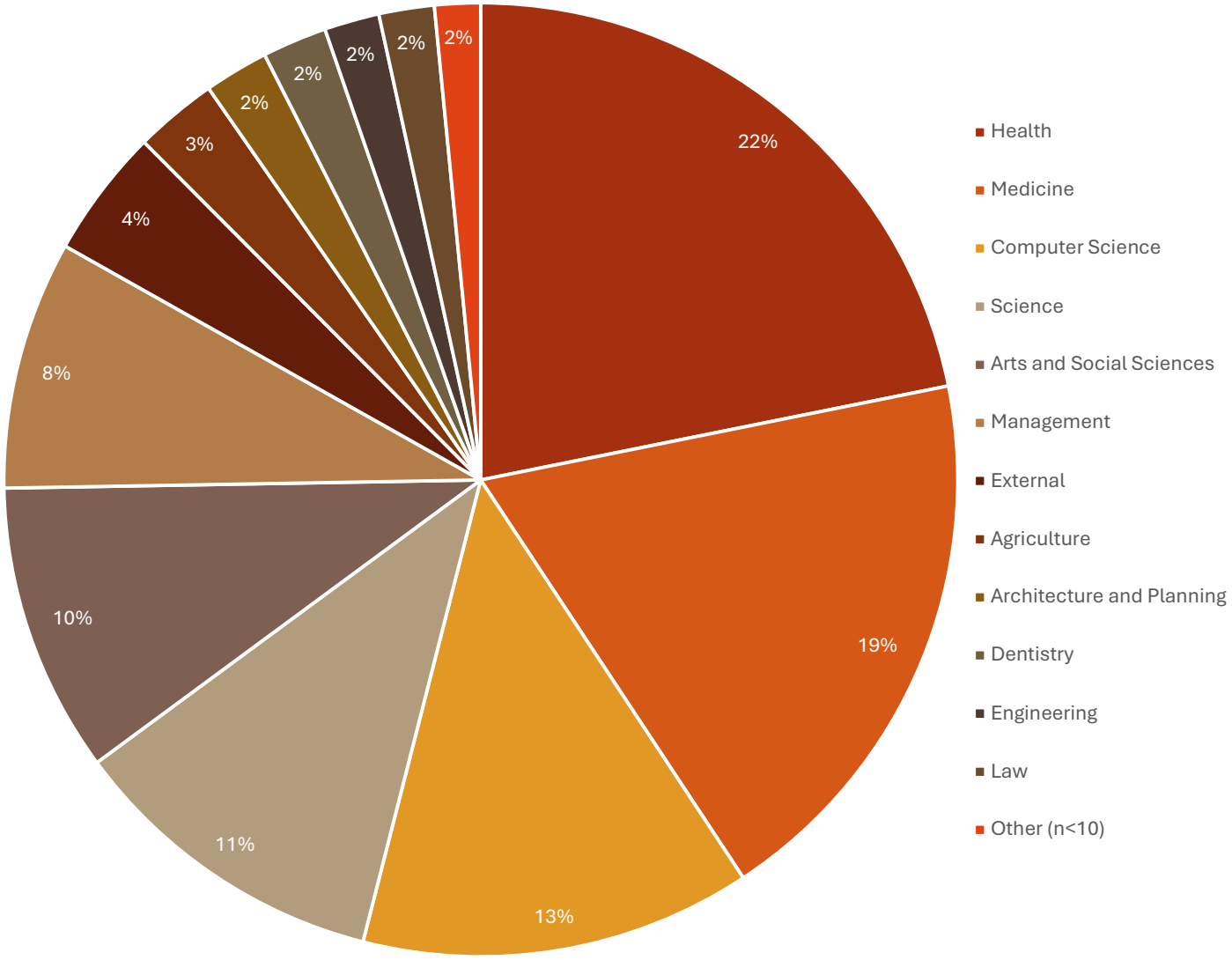


Rounds of Review (application to approval)



Note: 38% of submissions were withdrawn for quality control prior to review by the REBs

Submissions by Faculty



"The outcomes for this project were fantastic, resulting in two top tier publications in different (if related) fields. I would like to thank the REB for their support through the process. It is now time to finally put the study to rest." (Faculty researcher)

Board Membership*

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

Sarah Burm (Chair)

Julie Campbell
Ben Capps
Heather Casavechia
Graham Dellaire
Lizbeth Escobedo Bravo
Sean Farmer
Theresa Gaughan
Adrian Gee
Jess Gibson
Louise Gillis
Melanie Keats
Natalie Kennie-Kaulbach
Derek Kimmerly
Ruth Lavergne
Suzanne Morris
Stephana Moss
Vicki Munro
Chiranjeev Sanyal
Simon Sherry
Dan Stevens
Nicholas Stewart
Samuel Stewart
Michelle Stone
Jeff Waugh
Lori Wozney
Ashley Zahavich

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

John Cameron (Chair)

Catherine Bryan
Rachel Cadman
Luc Cousineau
Michael Fournier
Christopher Giacomantonio
Paola Gonzalez
Hannah Harrison
Dana Kabat-Farr
Niki Kiepek
Sara Kirk
Joanna Kocsis
Marta Kryven
Ji Lu
Lisa MacDougall
Sean Mackinnon
Keahna Margeson
Fiona Martin
Paul Meade
Libby Myles
Hanieh Shakeri
Yujie Tang
Kate M. Thompson

Staff*

Catherine Connors (Director)
Hillary Ferguson (Manager)
Angela Hersey (Manager)
Jaime Pike (Support Specialist)

*** as of March 31, 2026**

Special acknowledgement

The health sciences research ethics board and staff wish to publicly acknowledge **Dr. Gord Gubitz** for his distinguished service. Gord ended his term on the board this year after 23 ½ years of dedicated service. Dr. Gubitz's first meeting was July 26, 2002 and he was instrumental in fostering a culture of collegiality, humour and rigour at board meetings. Often serving as the board's only physician member, Gord was regularly relied upon for his expert knowledge, his conscientious reviews and his concern for research participants.