

Research Ethics Board Annual Report to the BCIT Board of Governors (2025)

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Executive Summary

In 2025, the REB reviewed a total of 64 applications, the second highest number of applications since the REB was created in 2005. This number includes new applications, renewals and amendments.

We were pleased to mention in our report for 2023 that 45 new researchers from Providence Health have joined BCIT. When they start regularly outputting research and submitting what we expect will be particularly complex applications, this may double or triple our workload. Despite applications at historic rates, BCIT has provided no increase in staffing level since the REB was created in 2005. We cannot process our new application volume to the same standard of timeliness if REB's staffing level remains the same. A particularly pressing issue is that we currently do not process applications for a total of two months over the summer due to the chair's vacation, and Research Ethics BC limited support for understaffed boards during those months (removing BCIT from multi-institution harmonized applications) ends in 2026.

Without an additional administrator we continue to struggle to fulfill our duties. This position would ideally be full-time, but an administrator at 50% FTE would already greatly improve our response time. We do understand the funding pressures at BCIT and currently aim for additional efficiencies whenever feasible, but if any peaks in application volume occur, as we expect, we are unable to respond. We note that competent administrative staff will require six months to a year of training before they are able to process applications effectively.

Our request is supported by a data-driven examination of other institutions similarly situated. A study conducted by our Chair in 2023 revealed that Vancouver Island University, probably the worst-funded comparable institution in BC, had 50% more full-time equivalent paid staff than BCIT per 100 applications. KPU and Emily Carr had 6 times more funding than BCIT for REB staff per 100 applications. Of these comparable boards, BCIT was also the only institution not accepting or processing any applications for two months over the summer (the other boards always process at least harmonized applications). **Per 100 applications, BCIT has the lowest staffing of all comparable institutions in the province.**

The REB's view is that changes to our funding model are required to carry out BCIT's strategic plan, values, and mission effectively. Funding deadlines will eventually be missed if nothing is done. Additional support is the only way to ensure that we maintain researchers, their associated funding, and avoid reputational loss. **A decisive response from the Board of Governors will ensure the continued success of BCIT's research community.**

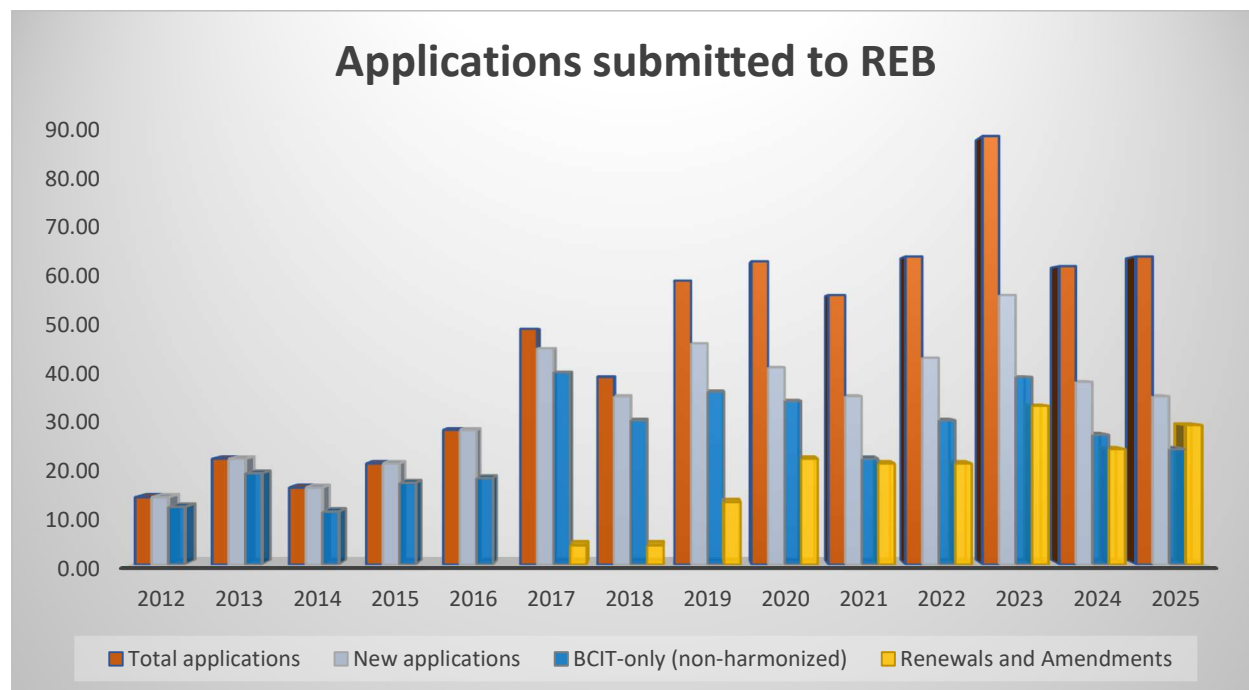
Introduction

BCIT's Research Ethics Board (REB) operates under BCIT Policy 6500^(1,2). All research projects involving human participants or human biological materials undertaken by members of the BCIT community fall within the jurisdiction of BCIT's REB. Projects conducted by researchers from outside the BCIT community who access Institute resources (equipment, facilities, personnel, or participants) also fall within the jurisdiction of BCIT's REB when those projects involve human participants or human biological materials. The REB reports directly to the Board of Governors and is administratively responsible to the Vice President, Academic.

In carrying out its responsibility to review and approve research projects, the REB ensures that research involving human participants under the auspices of BCIT is done with due regard for ethical principles. BCIT's REB adheres to the principles set out in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)⁽⁴⁾ which sets the national standards that are followed across Canada. REB members are aware that research done under the auspices of BCIT carries an implied liability, and must therefore meet the highest ethical standards.

Besides protecting the interests of human participants, REB review enables BCIT researchers to maintain their eligibility for national and international research funding. In addition, the REB contributes to education in research ethics for faculty, staff and students.

Applications submitted to the REB in 2025



In 2025, BCIT's REB reviewed a total of 64 applications. This total includes:

1. 35 new applications – 24 of which are internal BCIT applications to our REB only. The rest (11) were harmonized (multi-institution) applications that included BCIT as a partner. Since we do not accept applications where BCIT is merely used for participant recruitment, all harmonized applications genuinely count as involving BCIT research and include BCIT researchers.
2. 29 amendments and renewals

Details on 2025 applications

Applicants seeking ethics approval completed a comprehensive application form⁽³⁾ and submitted all relevant supporting documentation. The review process involves first determining whether the project was “minimal risk.” To be deemed minimal risk, the project cannot expose the participants to greater harm than they would normally encounter in their daily lives. Projects that exceed minimal risk are reviewed by the full REB, whereas minimal risk projects where BCIT is the primary board are reviewed by a delegated review panel of two REB members. All of the applications reviewed in 2025 were deemed to be of minimal risk by the chair in consultation with the board.

Of the 35 new applications, 24 were submitted by faculty/staff. 11 student projects were submitted (a peak of 25 student projects were submitted in 2023). For added efficiency, student projects are now in many cases subject to a departmental pre-review and then reviewed only by the chair for a speedier approval. The student groups submitting more studies this year were Environmental Health (6 studies) and Prosthetics and Orthotics (4 studies).

Following REB review, applicants were informed of any revisions required, once revisions were made, projects were approved for a period of one year. BCIT applicants were members of faculty conducting research, students, faculty and staff working towards postgraduate degrees at other institutions, and researchers in Applied Research conducting contract research projects for external clients. The remaining outside applications came from researchers completing graduate work at other institutions and others conducting research involving students or faculty as participants.

BCIT faculty and students participated in 11 collaborative studies with other BC institutions, submitted through the Research Ethics BC platform hosted by UBC (RISe/PREP). Applicants had the opportunity to complete just a single online application for all relevant institutions, which was reviewed in parallel by the participating REBs—simplifying approval for REBs and researchers.

Several requests were received for information on REB applications, and there were meetings with prospective applicants when appropriate. 29 studies from the current year or previous years were renewed or amended.

Departmental pre-reviews for student applications

Departmental pre-reviews were implemented in 2022 for departments that tend to submit a high-volume of applications, such as Environmental Health. This is done at several other institutions, and has had a noticeable positive effect in peak periods (such as Jan-Feb) in speeding up the processing of student applications, which in previous years was becoming unmanageable.

It is worthy of note that this speed comes at the cost of having only the chair look at student applications. Although they do tend to be very similar and simpler than other studies, having a single person review applications does increase the risk that something is missed.

We also fear that the transfer of the workload from the REB to the students’ departments may be at least partially responsible for the decrease in student applications (from 25 in 2023 to 13 in 2024 and 11 in

2025), as faculty may be tempted to lower their own workload by not having students submit projects to the REB.

Reviewing REB Policy and Procedures

Application, informed consent, member guides, and policy are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The BCIT REB website was updated in collaboration with Antoinette Jackson in Applied Research.⁽³⁾ Former REB member Meena Amlani volunteered to create an REB application course on Learning Hub to walk students and faculty/staff through the process, adding to the suite of REB portals. This course is now complete and available directly from our website.

Continuing education

To keep the board's knowledge of privacy and research ethics current, one or more board members are given the opportunity to attend national or regional ethics meetings and report back to the board.

REB Membership

The members of the REB at the close of 2025 were: Michael Bourke (Member knowledgeable in ethics; Program Head, Liberal Studies), Nic Fillion (SFU Faculty, Community member), Michelle House-Kokan (Faculty Development Lead, Specialty Nursing), Yvette Jones (Project Leader, Applied Research MAKE+), Robert Munro (Member knowledgeable in law, Faculty), Shiva Mostafavi (Senior Analyst, Institutional Research and Planning), Megan Murphy (Member knowledgeable in law; Faculty, Basic Health Sciences), Borna Nouredin (Faculty, Computer Systems Technology), Harroop Sharda (Faculty, Nursing)

In 2025, the board was supported by Jenna Clews, ARLO-Administrative Assistant Liaison Office/REB administrator, and Antoinette Jackson, Project Leader, Applied Research Liaison Office, who updated our website on the Applied Research pages.

The REB meets regularly every second month, except over the summer during the chair's vacation (typically May and June). Minutes of the meetings are kept.

Final remarks

Although BCIT's research community is small, it is vibrant and expanding. When additional funding becomes available, the REB will need increased resources to support this growth.

Signed

Vasco Castela
REB Chair

References

- (1) <http://www.bcit.ca/files/pdf/policies/6500.pdf>
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- (3) <https://www.bcit.ca/applied-research/research-support/research-ethics/>
- (4) <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>

- (5) https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2022_chapter6-chapitre6.html