# Executive Summary for the Report on the Alternative Indigenous-focused Research Ethics Application Pilot Project

*We acknowledge with gratitude, respect and humility that our offices are located on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.*

## Overview of the Pilot Project

In response to UBC's Indigenous Strategic Plan, the Office of Research Ethics assessed its review practices for Indigenous-focused research and identified goals and actions from the Strategic Plan that could be supported by our office. The self-assessment and ongoing discussions reinforced our understanding that ethics review processes used by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) are not aligned with the values and approaches of Indigenous-focused research.

To respond to ISP goals, the BREB applied for and received funding through the Office of Indigenous Strategic Initiatives (OISI) to build an Indigenous Research Ethics website (linking to resources for students and faculty, as well as to community members who are engaged in Indigenous-focused research or who are interested in working with researchers at UBC). The website design work involved discussions with Indigenous faculty and students at UBC. Our discussions with them clarified that an alternative Indigenous-focused ethics application would be needed to address the gaps. We were able to use some of the funding for the website project to develop a pilot Indigenous-focused ethics application. The pilot involved a mix of UBC faculty and student research projects with participation from a core group of BREB reviewers and staff.

## Pilot participants

Pilot participants were mostly from UBC's Vancouver campus, with several from UBC-Okanagan. Research projects covered topics from Anthropology, Curriculum and Pedagogy, Education, Engineering, Environmental Science, Forestry, Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, Land and Food Systems, Language and Literacy, Law, Linguistics, Occupational Therapy, Oceans and Fisheries, and Resources, Environment and Sustainability.

Place-based research projects involved research in or with participants in the following locations:

1. Cheakamus River, Squamish Nation
2. Kahnawà:ke, Southern Quebec
1. Kalche, Nuwakot District (Central Nepal)
2. Katzie First Nation (Pitt Meadows, BC)
3. Ktunaxa homelands in southeastern British Columbia, parts of Alberta, Montana, Washington, and Idaho.
4. Nova Scotia/Cape Breton (Mi'kmaw communities of Eskasoni, Membertou, Potlotek, Wagmatcook, and We'koqma'q)
5. Nunuvut (Devon Island and Igloolik)
6. Peguis/Red River region, Manitoba
7. Peruvian Upper Amazon
8. Treaty Three Territory – Northwestern Ontario
9. Upper Nicola/Quilchena, BC
10. W̱SÁNEĆ (Saanich, BC), SISȻENEM (Halibut Island, BC)

Other pilot applications that were not place based, involved:

1. Alberta and Ottawa Archives (Métis settlement law)
2. BC Forest Fire services
3. Environmental Collectives in BC
4. Occupational Therapy Indigenous Clients in BC / Northern BC
5. UBC Engineering program
6. Urban Métis (Lower Mainland)

## Pilot Findings and Next Steps

The pilot was met with a high level of acceptance from researchers and the review team. The application questions were deemed to be more relevant for Indigenous-focused research and most researchers reported that it was therefore easier for them to fill in the ethics application and address review comments. The pre-submission meetings were productive and gave researchers a chance to raise ethical and procedural concerns about their research projects and to ask for clarification on pilot application questions.

There is additional work to be done based on researcher and reviewer feedback:

1. Revising language in the application materials to clarify expectations and address some points of confusion about terminology.
2. Reformatting and simplifying some of the questions to improve clarity.
3. Finding ways to underscore that the BREB accepts a wide range of research scenarios and is not favouring one way of conducting Indigenous-focused research over other, equally valid approaches.
4. Expanding guidance to represent a broader range of research contexts and remove prescriptive language.

In response to the positive outcomes of the pilot project, work is underway to create a separate Indigenous-focused ethics application and guidance in RISe using the branch-off model deployed in other applications (e.g., Survey-only application form).

## Conclusions

The pilot introduced changes in the way BREB staff and reviewers engage with researchers. It offered a more personalized, less institutional experience that contributed to researchers' comfort and confidence in the ethics review process. The importance of having a way to build trust cannot be overstated, even if the cost implications are substantial. Time and resources are needed to continue the work of providing greater transparency about BREB practices and clarifying expectations. Ideally, there will be ways to measure progress towards these less-tangible goals and to ensure that there are meaningful changes in the ethics-review culture for Indigenous research over time.

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For more details, including a summary of the feedback received, please see the full report: https://researchethics.ubc.ca/behavioural-research-ethics/indigenous-research-and-ethics-review.