



AIATSIS

AIATSIS
Research Ethics Committee
Standard Operating Procedures

June 2025

Research Ethics Committee

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Research Ethics Committee (REC) is responsible for reviewing all AIATSIS research projects which involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to ensure that appropriate ethical standards have been met.

The AIATSIS REC also accepts external research projects for ethical review.

The REC is registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and reviews projects in accordance with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#) (National Statement or NS) and the [AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#) (the AIATSIS Code or the Code).

The REC is governed by the National Statement and the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee Charter (the Charter).

The Charter and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are subject to change without notice to continually reflect best practice in the reviewing of ethics applications, in line with the National Statement and the Code.

Member Induction

The Charter details the policies and procedures around membership, appointment, termination and remuneration of REC members.

Prior to their first meeting, new REC members will be provided with a digital copy or link to the following documents:

1. [The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)
2. [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#)
3. [AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#)
4. [A Guide to Applying the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#)
5. [AIATSIS Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
6. [The Information Privacy Principles](#)
7. [Payment of participants in research: Information for researchers, HRECs and other ethics review bodies](#)
8. [Ethical considerations in quality assurance and evaluation activities](#)
9. [Authorship: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

New REC members will undertake appropriate induction (National Statement 5.1.28 b). New REC members will attend one meeting where they are not assigned applications for assessment, to observe REC deliberations and learn REC processes.

Applying for Ethics Approval

Application Pricing Structure

The AIATSIS REC welcomes applications from external organisations. External applications and internal applications that have external funding will be charged a fee.

The pricing structure is published on the AIATSIS website. Pricing is subject to change without notice.

Application Process

Application deadlines are published on the AIATSIS website. Meeting dates and deadlines are subject to change.

All submissions are due by 3:00pm Canberra time on the closing date. Due to the timeframes required for the distribution and review of papers by the REC, the Secretariat is unable to grant extensions to deadlines.

All applications must go through a preliminary review process. In this process, the Secretariat will suggest feedback on the completeness and structure of the application. In addition, preliminary review screens applications to ensure that application requirements are met and the applications are suitable for review by the REC.

Meeting Preparation

REC members are required to prepare for meetings. This includes:

- Completing the conflict-of-interest declaration for each application in the AIATSIS Ethics Portal
- Reading all applications tabled for the meeting
- Providing comments on the AIATSIS Ethics Portal
- Providing the Secretariat with proposed agenda items for inclusion in the meeting
- Informing the Secretariat if members are unable to attend a meeting
- Informing the Secretariat of conflicts of interest
- If unable to attend a meeting, providing comments for each application on the AIATSIS Ethics Portal prior to the meeting.

The AIATSIS Ethics Portal

The AIATSIS Ethics Portal is a digital platform used by the Secretariat to process ethics applications. Users are also able to work on ethics applications simultaneously.

Lead assessors are expected to submit their comments on assigned applications at least five days prior to the scheduled meeting. As noted in the REC Charter, all meeting attendees are required to read all applications tabled for the meeting. If lead assessors comment early, this allows other members to consider both the application and the assessor comments in advance of the meeting.

Meeting Documents

Prior to each meeting the Secretariat will prepare a meeting for REC Members to view and add comments on applications in the AIATSIS Ethics Portal:

- Meeting Agenda
 - The agenda lists the lead assessors for each application. Lead assessors are chosen based on skills and strengths, and to ensure a balance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers on applications, wherever possible.
 - All members are expected to read all applications.
- Lead assessors must provide comments:
 - That guide discussion constructively
 - To a standard that can be communicated to the applicants.

Application Outcomes

Members must endeavour to reach decisions by consensus. Decisions must take into account any comments provided by members not able to be present. Application outcomes include:

Approved

The application meets the expectations of the REC and the applicant is sent a letter of approval (NS 5.2.19)

Not approved

The application doesn't meet the basic requirements of the National Statement and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics. The letter must include a statement providing the applicant with the basic requirements not met in the application, as per the National Statement 5.2.19.

Approved with conditions

The application meets the basic requirements of the National Statement and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics. Modifications and/or clarifications are required prior to full approval being granted by the REC. During the meeting in which this decision is made, the REC must advise the Secretariat if the review of the applicant's response to conditions is to be

delegated to the lead assessors, Secretariat, Co-Chair/s and/or Executive Member/s, or the whole REC.

A letter is sent out with a REC feedback document containing questions and/or suggested modifications (NS 5.2.19). Applicants must respond to conditions within four weeks, otherwise the application will be considered withdrawn.

If delegated to do so by the REC, the Secretariat will review the response to conditions provided by the applicant. In all other instances, the Secretariat will provide the relevant delegate/s the applicant's response to conditions for review.

Where a response is to be reviewed by the lead assessors, upon review the lead assessors may determine that the responses need to be reviewed by the whole REC in session.

The time agreed for a response of the review of the response to conditions from the relevant delegate/s is ten (10) working days.

In the circumstance whereby the lead assessors are the agreed delegates and do not provide a final response within ten (10) working days, the Secretariat will escalate the final decision to the Co-Chair/s and/or Executive Member/s.

The agreed delegate/s may request additional responses to conditions, if it is deemed that the applicant has not addressed or justified their position against the questions and/or suggested modifications sufficiently.

If the agreed delegate/s are satisfied the applicant's response to conditions have met the expectations of the REC and the requirements of the National Statement and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics, then final approval can be granted. The applicant is sent a letter of approval (NS 5.2.19).

Resubmission

The application doesn't meet the basic requirements of the National Statement and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics and requires substantial reworking. A resubmission letter is sent out with a document containing questions and/or suggested modifications. The applicant will need to resubmit the application to the entire REC. Applicants are allowed three months to resubmit applications, otherwise the application is considered withdrawn.

Outcome Notification

A letter of outcome is sent ten (10) business days following the REC meeting. The letter of outcome will include any relevant feedback in an accompanying REC feedback document.

Variations

Variations are required when the details of a project are amended.

When submitting variations to the Secretariat, the applicant must include:

- A letter addressed to the Co-Chairs with the details of the variation, including all amendments made to the project.

- The original ethics application form with tracked changes, including all amendments made to the project.
- Any supporting documents that may have changed because of the amendments, with tracked changes.

The Co-Chair/s and/or Executive Member/s will review variations. The time agreed for a final response is ten (10) working days. The Co-Chair/s and/or Executive Member/s may request additional information and/or clarification on the variation before providing a final decision.

In line with the REC Charter, the Secretariat will review and approve variations that are primarily administrative in nature (administrative variations).

Compliance Reports

The Secretariat will review annual and final reports from applicants. The REC will receive a summary of annual and final reports and will be notified if variations are required or requested.

Travel & Remuneration

Members of the REC are entitled to payment of fees and reimbursement of expenses related to REC activities.

Remuneration is detailed in the AIATSIS REC Charter. The following guidelines on remuneration apply:

Under the REC Charter the time taken for lead assessors to read and provide written comments for assigned applications is considered **authority business**.

- **Authority business** will be billable per the non-meeting day rates in Schedule 1 of the Charter.
- The following REC duties that normally occur out of session are also considered **authority business** and will be billable per the non-meeting day rates in Schedule 1 of the REC Charter:
 - Review of complex responses to Approval with Conditions
 - Review of complex variations
 - Meetings with applicants (as scheduled by the Secretariat)
- “Complexity” is defined by the threshold of 30 minutes. Work requiring under 30 minutes to complete is considered “normal Committee business” and is not subject to remuneration. Work requiring greater than 30 minutes to complete is considered complex and will be billable per the non-meeting day rates in Schedule 1.
- Members must make a declaration that the time billed is an accurate and true reflection of the time spent on lead assessor duties. The Secretariat will provide more information on the declaration process.

Members will be required to have their own ABN and invoice AIATSIS for payment. Members can apply for an ABN through the Australia Business Register website.

In order for an invoice to be processed by AIATSIS, it must contain the following information:

- Australian Business Number (ABN)
- Contact details
- Date of issue
- Bank details
- A brief description of services rendered
- Addressee: AIATSIS, GPO Box 533, Canberra, ACT 2601

Costs for attending face-to-face meetings are covered, including:

- Flights
- Accommodation
- Transport
- Travel Allowance and incidentals

Complaints

All complaints will be dealt with in the first instance by the Executive Director of Research and Education Group, who will endeavour to resolve them in a timely and satisfactory manner. This includes complaints about the conduct of research projects and complaints about the REC review process.

In the case that there is a conflict of interest between the complainant and the Executive Director of Research and Education Group, the complaint will be referred to the AIATSIS Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

The Executive Director of Research and Education Group will inform members of the REC of any complaint received that is relevant to the ethical aspects of the research and all steps taken to address such complaint. The complainant will be advised of the outcome in writing.
