

# State Education Research and Partnerships (SERAP) application guidelines



# Table of contents

Research is essential to building an outstanding and equitable public education system in NSW	4
<b>Section 1: What is SERAP and who needs to apply?</b>	<b>6</b>
Research projects requiring SERAP authorisation	8
Externally funded research	9
Sensitive topics	9
Research with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and staff	9
Requests to expedite assessment	10
<b>Section 2: The SERAP process</b>	<b>11</b>
Overview of the application process	11
2.1 Preparing a SERAP application	12
Key points	12
Align with the department’s research priorities	13
Design with students, staff and contexts in mind	13
Ethics approval required	13
Data sharing	15
2.2 Completing and submitting a SERAP application	16
Key points	16
Submitting a SERAP Expression of Interest (EOI)	16
Submitting a full SERAP application	17
Information submitted through SERAP	19
2.3 Assessment and processing of SERAP applications	20
Key points	20
Assessment process	20
Application outcomes	22

---

2.4 Requirements for authorised research	23
Key points	23
Reporting requirements across the research lifecycle	23
Modifying authorised research	25
2.5 Breaches	27
Breach of HREC approval or other data breach	27
Breach of SERAP agreement	27
2.6 Further information	27
<b>Appendix A: Factors to consider when submitting a SERAP application</b>	<b>28</b>
Information statements and consent forms	28
Information statements	28
Consent forms	30
Data management and security	31
Child safety and duty of care	31
Use of audio/video recording or photography	32
Payment of participants: incentives and reimbursements	33
Conflict of interest	34
Insurance and indemnity	34
<b>Appendix B: Summary of the full SERAP application and additional documentation</b>	<b>35</b>

---

# Research is essential to building an outstanding and equitable public education system in NSW

The NSW Department of Education (the department) encourages high-quality research that helps us identify and deliver what works best for our students and those supporting them. We encourage research that will make a difference to public education.

The department aims to build strong working relationships with both established researchers and those working towards higher degree research qualifications. We proudly recognise that many of those at the forefront of discovery and innovation were once themselves students in NSW public schools.

We also have an obligation to protect students and limit any burden or imposition on teachers, students and schools. We ask researchers who wish to conduct research in our public schools to submit a State Education Research and Partnerships (SERAP) application so we can assess whether the value of the research outweighs any inconvenience or risk to students, staff and the department. Based on their extensive experience, the SERAP team can also advise on ways to enhance the research experience and findings.

Public support, confidence and trust in research conducted in NSW public schools is reliant upon effective governance which manages the risks, optimises the benefits and ensures that all research meets the highest ethical, scientific, legislative and professional standards.

This document offers a guide to those seeking to conduct research within or through NSW public schools, preschools<sup>1</sup> and/or other educational settings.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, it provides information to researchers about how to prepare and complete the SERAP process.

If you are unsure whether your research project will require a SERAP application, please contact the Research and Partnerships team [research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au).



The definition of research used in this document is the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge to generate concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings that address timely and important gaps and issues, and can include synthesis and analysis of previous research.<sup>3</sup> Please note the term 'research' covers both research and evaluation.

1 Early childhood education and care services regulated by the NSW Department of Education.

2 For advice on research involving education support services please contact the Research and Partnerships team: [research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au).

3 Adapted from the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018](#).



The following resources should be read alongside these guidelines to assist researchers preparing to submit a SERAP application:

- [NSW Department of Education Research Statement and Research Guide](#)
- [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2023\)](#)
- [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#)
- [Australian Association for Research in Education \(AARE\) Code of Ethics.](#)

Research involving NSW public schools, and NSW public preschools must comply with all relevant regulations and laws, including but not limited to:

- [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Child Protection \(Working with Children\) Act 2012 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Crimes Act 1900 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Children \(Education and Care Services\) National Law \(NSW\)](#)
- [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#)
- Any requirements of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) where applicable.






# Section 1: What is SERAP and who needs to apply?

SERAP provides authorisation for research projects:

- conducted at NSW Government education sites; and/or
- involves participants or data<sup>4</sup> accessed through NSW Government education sites.

SERAP is not an ethics approval process, rather it is a distinct and important component of research governance. In addition to the ethical and scientific review process undertaken by a HREC, research conducted in or with NSW Government education and department sites that require participants and/or data access must be assessed under the SERAP process and be granted authorisation before commencement.

The SERAP process allows the department to assess the suitability and feasibility of proposed research. Research projects must align with the department's [Research Statement](#) and comply with relevant NSW and Commonwealth legislation, regulations and guidelines, including the department's duty of care for students and staff.

	<b>Benefits</b> The potential benefit to students, teachers, schools, the department, the researchers and the broader education and research community.
	<b>Feasibility</b> The likelihood that these benefits will be realised through the proposed research design and methods.
	<b>Risk</b> Potential risks to participants, the department and the project are effectively minimised, mitigated or managed.
	<b>Disruption and burden</b> The time and effort required of teachers, students, school and department staff as participants, co-investigators and facilitators.
	<b>Ethical conduct</b> Participants are given the respect and protection that is due to them.

SERAP considers the likely benefits and feasibility of proposed research in relation to the potential risks, disruption to learning, participation burden and ethical design and conduct.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the release of non-public data for research purposes where this is appropriate and ethical.

More specifically, the purpose of SERAP is to:


- ensure research projects are aligned with the department's evidence needs
- protect teaching and learning, wellbeing and privacy of staff and students
- ensure research projects are minimally disruptive and do not detract from the core responsibilities of schools
- weigh up potential risks and benefits of research projects seeking access to department schools
- help researchers sharpen their project designs to increase feasibility, ensuring projects can be successfully carried out in NSW public schools
- centralise due diligence checks, including verifying HREC approval and NSW Working with Children Checks (WWCC).



SERAP authorisation is required for all research projects conducted with NSW public schools and public preschools.

## Research projects requiring SERAP authorisation

SERAP authorisation is required for the following research projects:

	<p>Research (including evaluations) led by individual researchers external to the NSW Department of Education or external organisations (for example, universities, AERO and other education organisations; consultancy or social policy and research groups/centres etc.). This includes projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commissioned by the department</li> <li>• seeking collaboration or partnership with the department on a joint research proposal.</li> </ul>
	<p>Research to be conducted in a NSW Government education or department site, which includes public schools, co-located public preschools, and Schools as Community Centres (SaCC) operating within public schools.</p>
	<p>Research including participants recruited through NSW government education sites, including but not limited to students, children, families, teachers, school executive, non-teaching school staff and education support staff.</p>
	<p>HREC-approved research seeking the disclosure of personal information (data) by the department for research purposes, with participant consent or by research exemption/waiver of consent.</p>
	<p>Research including any of the above being undertaken to fulfil the requirements for higher degree research, that is, honours, master's or PhD. This applies to all department staff, including teachers and education support or head office staff, conducting independent research as part of their higher degree research qualification.</p>

### Notes:

- Research to be conducted at schools located in Youth Justice Centres will **require additional authorisation** from [Youth Justice NSW](#).
- Research involving [TAFE NSW](#) students, customers or staff **require authorisation** from NSW TAFE instead of SERAP.
- Research to be conducted with NSW Catholic or independent schools are required to apply individually to the respective [NSW Catholic Schools Diocese](#) or the [Association of Independent Schools NSW](#) as relevant.



## Externally funded research

Researchers who wish to apply for non-department grants (for example, Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grants, or research grants from research institutions or other government agencies) for projects involving NSW Government education or department sites, participants or data, **should contact the department regarding their research proposal prior to the submission of any grant application.**

All aspects of the research proposal should be agreed to by the department prior to the funding being secured. The department reserves the right to request modifications or decline and close a SERAP application even if it is attached to a research grant.

## Sensitive topics

The department will not authorise research that is likely to cause undue stress or harm to students (including young children attending public preschools) or staff. Researchers must contact the department to discuss the feasibility of conducting research on sensitive topics prior to lodging a SERAP application. Refer to the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2023\) chapter 2.1](#) for guidance on identifying potential harms in or from research.

## Research with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and staff

Research that engages with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people must prioritise the student, their family and their community as part of their research methodology and processes. Researchers should refer to the [Re-imagining Evaluation: A Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework](#) and embed the guiding principles in their research.

Research with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and staff must also demonstrate compliance with the [AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#) the [NHMRC's Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities: Guidelines for Researchers and Stakeholders 2018](#) and [Keeping Research on Track II](#).



### Unsure if SERAP applies to your project?

The Research and Partnerships team are happy to provide more information. Submit a SERAP Expression of Interest (EOI) and we will be in touch to discuss your project. Refer to **page 12** of these guidelines for more information.

## Requests to expedite assessment

Most SERAP applications will not be considered for expedited review as a thorough assessment process is important for ensuring adherence to the department's duty of care to students and staff while minimising burden and risk to schools and the department.

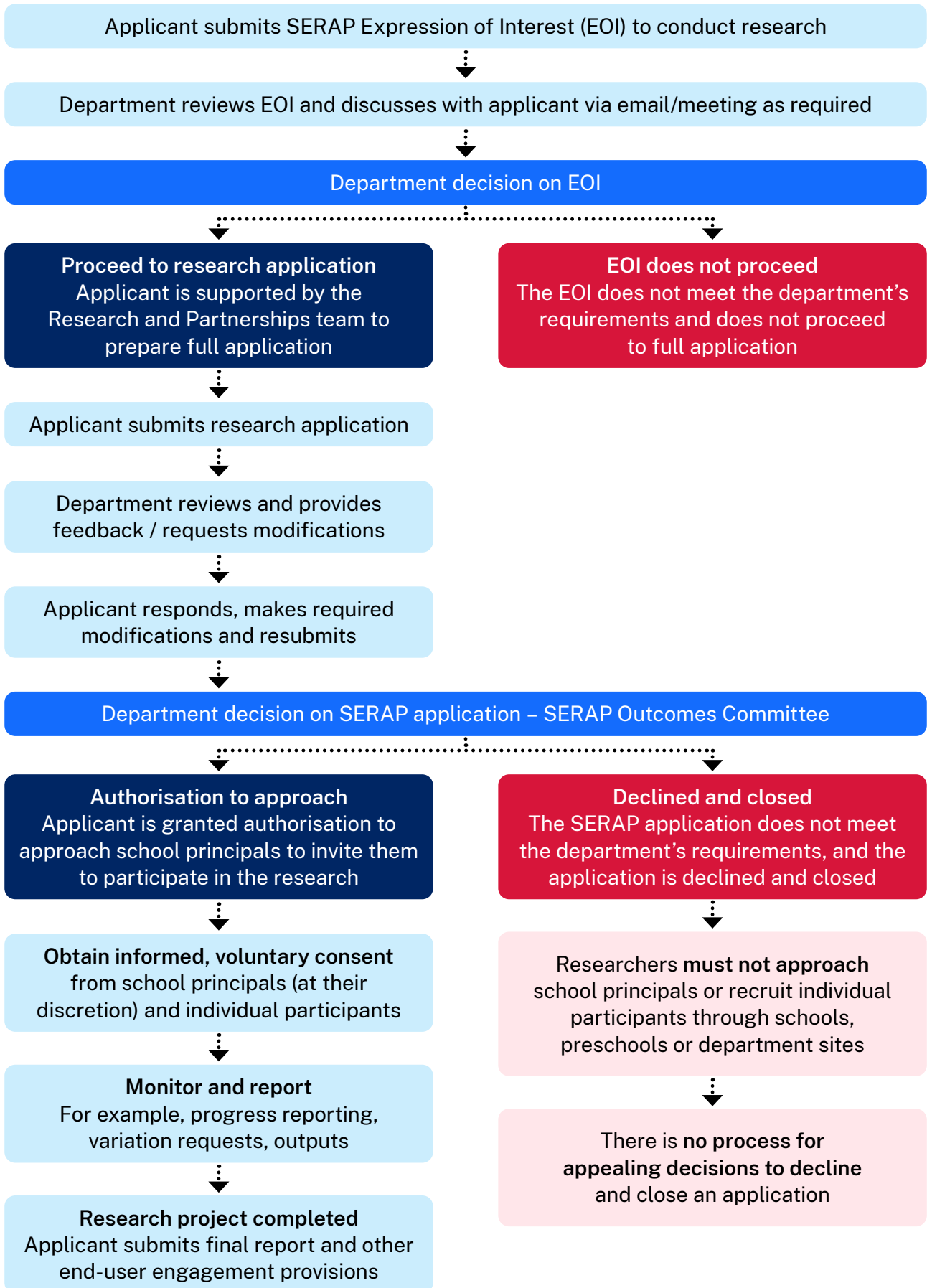
Some projects **may** be suitable for assessment through an expedited SERAP process (for example, projects in formal partnership with, or commissioned by, the department).

Expedited assessment will be determined on a case-by-case basis through the research EOI process and following discussion with the researcher. In determining whether to grant expedited assessment, several factors will be considered, including but not limited to:

- the department's relationship with the researcher/research team (for example, whether it is established or developing) and the project (for example, a formal partnership or commissioned)
- the project's alignment to department strategic priorities, potential benefit/impact to participants, education practice, programs and policy
- the level of burden involved with participation, including disruption to learning
- the project's complexity, including design, scale, novelty and interdependencies
- the likelihood, severity and consequences of risks associated with the project
- what measures have been put in place to minimise, mitigate and manage these risks.

# Section 2: The SERAP process

## Overview of the application process



## 2.1 Preparing a SERAP application



### Communicate with the department early

To minimise delays during processing and assessment, we encourage all researchers to contact the Research and Partnerships team during the initial planning stages of a project.

This is particularly important for research projects:

- applying for external funding
- involving sensitive topics or topics deemed to be high risk
- incorporating large or complex designs
- commissioned by the department
- being completed as part of a time-limited research degree (for example, honours, master's or PhD).

Researchers are required to submit a [SERAP Expression of Interest \(EOI\)](#) for review and feedback from the Research and Partnerships team before completing and submitting the full SERAP application.

For further information, please contact the Research and Partnerships team: [research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au).

### Key points

1. Consider how your research project:
  - aligns with the department's [Research for NSW Public Education: A Guide to Our Evidence Needs](#)
  - reduces disruption to learning for students and minimises time and administration burden on teachers and staff when designing methods and materials
  - can be supported by data that is already available.
2. Apply for the following before submitting your SERAP application for assessment:
  - ethics approval from a NHMRC-registered HREC
  - department authorisation to access unpublished department-held data
  - WWCC verification through the department's Probity Unit.
3. Important points on HREC approval:
  - researchers may submit a SERAP application to initiate the process while waiting for HREC approval. However, SERAP authorisation will not be granted until HREC approval is obtained.
  - SERAP applications in which research is self-assessed as 'negligible risk' or exempt from ethics approval will be declined and closed without further consideration.

## Align with the department's research priorities

Researchers must consider the department's research priorities, outlined in [Research for NSW Public Education: A Guide to Our Evidence Needs](#), when developing research looking to engage the NSW public education system. Guidance is also provided on our preferred research approaches and key design features to ensure research is high quality, beneficial and conducted with care and integrity for all staff, students, families and school communities.

As the department is unable to authorise every application submitted through SERAP, priority will be given to SERAP applications that align most strongly with the department's research priorities and preferred research approaches identified in [Research for NSW Public Education: A Guide to Our Evidence Needs](#).

## Design with students, staff and school contexts in mind

Recommendations for preparing your application with students, staff and contexts in mind:

- applications should consider the time impost on students, teachers, school executive, early childhood educators and education support staff
- applications are more likely to be successful when research methods and materials are designed from the very outset to be feasible within department contexts and minimise disruption to students, teachers and staff
- early consultation with the Research and Partnerships team can help strengthen research designs, increasing the likelihood of successfully carrying out research in NSW public schools.

## Ethics approval required

The department requires research to be ethically designed and conducted. Applicants are required to demonstrate that their proposed research will be carried out in accordance with:

- the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018](#)
- the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#)
- [Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders](#)
- the Code of Conduct of their university or research institution including the principles and responsibilities that promote a culture of responsible and ethical research practices and research integrity
- the [NSW Department of Education Code of Conduct 2024](#)
- the [NSW Government Supplier Code of Conduct 2024](#) (for example, applicable for commissioned or procured research projects).

Authorisation to approach department schools and preschools is contingent on written ethics approval from a NHMRC-registered HREC.

**SERAP applications in which research is self-assessed as ‘negligible risk’ or exempt from ethics approval will be declined and closed without further consideration.**

Researchers may submit their SERAP application at the same time as an application to a HREC. However, authorisation to approach will not be granted until the Research and Partnerships team receives copies of the **final versions approved by HREC** of the:

- HREC approval letter
- ethics application and any approved amendments
- peer review reports completed as part of HREC requirements (if applicable)
- research protocol or project description
- project collateral (for example, participant information and consent forms; recruitment flyers or email text; school information package)
- research and data collection materials (for example, surveys, focus group or interview questions, observation tools, copies of standardised measures or assessments).

All research methods, materials and personnel outlined in the SERAP application must be included in the final approved versions of the ethics application or amendments. If the department or HREC request amendments to the research protocol, project collateral or research materials, the researcher will be required to update SERAP and their institution’s HREC accordingly.

**Research personnel must have NSW WWCC clearance.**

- NSW WWCC clearance is a mandatory legislative requirement for people in child-related work, including contractors and volunteers.
- SERAP authorisation will only be granted for projects that have met the department’s probity checks, including any additional screening checks requested by the department.
- All research personnel listed in the SERAP application should match those listed in the HREC approval letter. Research personnel are required to have a valid and verified **NSW WWCC for paid employment** (not volunteer activity) if they are planning to engage with children or young people directly or indirectly, in-person or online or access any identifiable or re-identifiable student data (including consultant statisticians).



A SERAP application can be submitted before or after applying for WWCC clearance, however it is recommended that all personnel have clearance before submission to avoid unnecessary delays.

Please refer to the guidance document [Probity check requirements for SERAP](#) for further information.

## Data sharing

The department's public education data is now located at Data.NSW, the NSW Department of Customer Service's open data portal. Data.NSW provides access to the department's datasets related to NSW public preschools, schools and vocational education and training (VET). New datasets will be added in the future once they are identified and assessed to be suitable for publication in line with the [NSW Open Data Policy](#).

Wherever possible, researchers are encouraged to use existing, publicly accessible department data as this will be less time-consuming than collecting prospective data or requesting a custom dataset.

### Access to unpublished data

- A [custom data request form](#) must be submitted to Data Services if you wish to access department data that is **not publicly available**.
- The custom data request must be submitted prior to gaining SERAP authorisation.

## 2.2 Completing and submitting a SERAP application

### Key points

Before commencing a new SERAP application:

- submit a SERAP Expression of Interest (EOI) covering high-level project details
- meet with the Research and Partnerships team to discuss EOI if required
- prepare and allow for sufficient time for SERAP assessment and authorisation.

After an EOI is approved to proceed:

- you may proceed with preparing a full SERAP application taking into consideration department guidance provided during the EOI process
- ensure the application includes sufficient information on aims, methodology, time and effort required of participants and the department, potential benefits, and risks of the research
- submit the completed application with all required documentation listed in [Appendix B](#).

### Submitting a SERAP Expression of Interest (EOI)

- Prior to commencing a full application, researchers are required to submit a brief [SERAP EOI](#).
- The purpose of the EOI is to streamline the application process by providing feedback on the proposed research early in the planning and design phase, before researchers commit to a full SERAP application.
- Researchers may also wish to submit an EOI to seek initial feedback or advice before submitting an ethics application to their institution's HREC.

The SERAP EOI form takes approximately 30 minutes to complete by providing information about the proposed research, including:

- a short abstract referencing the project's alignment with [Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#)
- the participant groups proposed to take part in the project and the activities they will be asked to do
- plans to use data available through Data.NSW or plans to request access to un-published data from the department
- potential sensitivities or contentious issues
- whether the project is part of a collaboration, partnership or funding arrangement with the department (if relevant).



Proceeding to a full SERAP application does not guarantee that you will be granted authorisation to approach schools. The department may decline and close an application at this point.



## EOI timeframe

- The Research and Partnerships team will aim to respond to the Principal Researcher within 2 weeks of receiving a completed EOI, pending staff capacity to provide initial feedback.
- If required, the Research and Partnerships team will organise an initial meeting with the research team and representatives from relevant business units within the department (for example, subject matter or methodological experts). This meeting will provide researchers with an early opportunity to incorporate pragmatic design considerations from the department's perspective.
- Following this initial contact, and if needed, the Research and Partnerships team will consult internally with subject matter experts or relevant business units to inform advice and recommendations for the SERAP Outcomes Committee Chair (or their delegate) on whether the proposed research should proceed (or not proceed) to a full SERAP application. Researchers will be notified of the outcome via email.

## Submitting a full SERAP application

### Overview of application

The information provided in the full SERAP application must demonstrate clear links between the research questions, methodology, research instruments, information and consent forms and the broader purposes to which the research contributes.

Appendix B summarises the details covered in each of the following sections of the full SERAP application:

- overview of the proposed research
- researcher and contact details and conflicts of interest
- strategic alignment with key department priorities, policies and evidence needs
- research design and methodology
- anticipated benefits and impact
- potential risks, burden and associated mitigants
- funding and support
- ethics approval and ethical considerations
- data and information privacy, confidentiality and security
- timeline and milestones
- reporting, dissemination and knowledge translation
- required checks, approvals and certifications
- relevant project documentation
- declaration/signatures.

## Alignment with human research ethics application

Information provided in the SERAP application and corresponding human research ethics documents should align. However, the nature of this information will be different. This is because human research ethics applications require researchers to address the ethical values and principles found in national research standards in relation to their research for example, the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(NHMRC 2023\)](#).

A SERAP application is concerned with:

- the potential implications of the proposed research on the day-to-day operations of NSW education sites
- prioritising the safety and wellbeing of all participants
- the potential risks to students and the department
- the degree to which the proposed research aligns with strategic priorities and the benefit to the department and its stakeholders
- how researchers will work with the department and the participating schools and/or education sites to translate research into practical outcomes.

## Guidance on writing your application

- It is important that your SERAP application is self-explanatory and provides sufficient information for an assessment to be made and for the department to make decisions about the proposed research.
- The applicant is responsible for submitting all supporting documentation with the application. Insufficient detail, inconsistencies in the application, and not submitting the project documentation will delay the review process.
- The application should be written in plain English with consistent terminology, and details of the proposed research should be interconnected across all documents. If technical language is needed, please include a brief definition following the first use of the term. It may be helpful to include a glossary of terms as an attachment if the application requires the use of multiple technical terms.

## Supporting documents

The following supporting documents must be included with your SERAP application:

- proof of HREC approval (or exemption), the complete ethics application and any subsequent approved ethics amendments
- NSW WWCC for all researchers involved in the research project. WWCC from other Australian jurisdictions **will not** be accepted
- final research instruments and materials, such as interview schedules, questionnaires or other data collection instruments (including tests, stimulus materials and focus group questions)
- a participant engagement plan detailing how stakeholders will be engaged throughout all stages of the research project

- a letter to principals/directors seeking permission for their school or preschool to participate in the research project
- information sheets and consent forms for participants and/or their parents/guardians, written in plain English and tailored for the intended audience's understanding, that explain the research project to potential participants and invite their participation.

### **Information submitted through SERAP**

- The department does not necessarily have any intellectual property rights in materials submitted through SERAP, unless the conditions of another agreement require otherwise.
- Project titles, the names of researchers and their affiliations as well as a brief summary of the project (that is, abstract) may appear on the department's website. All other information provided by applicants will not be shared outside of the department without the permission of the applicant or their organisation.

## 2.3 Assessment and processing of SERAP applications

### Key points

Assessment of applications:

- The Research and Partnerships team manage the assessment process, involving subject matter experts and technical and methodological guidance as needed
- the SERAP Outcome Committee reviews, discusses and make decisions on application outcomes.

Outcome decision:

- researchers will be informed of the outcome decision usually within 12 weeks of submitting a full SERAP application
- the department reserves the right to decline and close applications with no appeal process.

### Assessment process

#### Step 1: Acknowledge receipt of application; ensure application is complete

- On receiving the SERAP application, the Research and Partnerships team will confirm receipt of the application, ensuring each application has been allocated a reference number. **The reference number should be used in all subsequent correspondence about the research application.**
- Applications will be reviewed initially by a member of the Research and Partnerships team to ensure all relevant sections are completed and all the supporting documentation has been included.
- After the initial review, researchers may be contacted for the following reasons:
  - the application is incomplete, further information is required or project documents contain multiple typographical errors or grammatical mistakes. If extensive sections of the application are incomplete or contain errors, researchers will be asked to withdraw or resubmit the application
  - a supporting document is missing, illegible or out-of-date and is required to be submitted for the application to progress
  - to check researchers have commenced or completed the department's WWCC verification process through the Probity Unit.

#### Step 2: Assess application

- Applications are assessed on the likely benefits and feasibility of proposed research in relation to the likely risks, disruption to learning, participation burden and ethical design and conduct.
- Where proposed research is identified as overlapping with existing or planned department research or evaluations, the department's work will be prioritised to avoid unnecessary burden on schools.

- Applications will be assessed by a Research and Partnerships team member as well as subject matter experts (SME) within the department. Technical or methodology experts will be consulted as needed.
- Assessment feedback will be collated by the Research and Partnerships team before seeking clarification from the researcher. Specifically, researchers will need to provide additional information that has been requested and respond satisfactorily to any amendments before the application can progress further.

### **Step 3: SERAP Outcomes Committee decision**

- Following the assessment process, the Research and Partnerships team will make a recommendation on the application to inform decision-making of the SERAP Outcomes Committee.
- The SERAP Outcomes Committee will meet regularly to review, discuss and make decisions on application outcomes ('authorised to approach' or 'declined and closed').

### **Step 4: Communicate the application outcome**

- An application will either be granted **authorisation to approach** or **declined and closed**. The outcome decision will be communicated via email to the Principal Researcher (that is the researcher named on the HREC approval letter).
- The department may choose to impose additional conditions and requirements beyond those outlined in these guidelines. Any additional conditions may be negotiated with the applicant as part of the assessment process.
- The Research and Partnerships team aim to provide an outcome decision within 12 weeks of the date the full SERAP application was submitted pending department capacity and other factors such as the number of applications being processed.
- **Applications involving sensitive topics, research designs that are large scale or complex or projects deemed to be high risk will take longer to be assessed.**

## Application outcomes

### 1. Authorisation to approach

- Authorisation to approach provides researchers with permission to approach principals to invite them to participate in the research. A copy of the SERAP authorisation letter must be provided to the principal of any NSW public school or preschool approached for participation in the research.
- There is no obligation for a principal to permit the researcher(s) to enter the site or access their staff, students or preschoolers. Participation in the research is completely voluntary and is at the discretion of the principal and the individuals who are invited to participate, even when authorisation to approach has been granted.
- Authorisation by the department does not signify endorsement of the project, its outcomes or recommendations. It does not imply that the department endorses or supports the development or evaluation of a program or intervention as part of the research.
- SERAP authorisation is valid for the approval period granted by a HREC, with a maximum cap of 3 years' duration. It is conditional on satisfactory progress reports being submitted to the Research and Partnerships team annually. Research projects exceeding 3 years in duration must apply for an extension (see below) if researchers wish to revisit sites and/or participants for any follow-up or new activities.

### 2. Declined and closed

- The department reserves the right to decline applications for any reason. Applications that do not meet the assessment criteria and cannot be reasonably modified to do so, will be declined.
- Researchers must not approach school principals to invite them to participate in the research if an application has been declined by the department.
- The department will provide reasons for declining an application in the outcome decision letter. However, there is no appeals process for declined applications.

## 2.4 Requirements for authorised research

### Key points

- Researchers are required to maintain communication with the department across the research lifecycle.
- Further authorisation is required for any significant variation of a research project or if the period of authorisation needs to be extended.

### Reporting requirements across the research lifecycle

Researchers **must** meet the following reporting requirements across the research lifecycle:

#### 1. Confirm participating sites (2 months post-authorisation)

Researchers must provide the department with a list of **confirmed participating sites within 2 months** of receiving SERAP authorisation. **This is critical information for the department in managing research fatigue and overburden associated with research projects.** If recruitment remains ongoing or needs to extend beyond the 2-month period, researchers must update the Research and Partnerships team as new schools are recruited.

#### 2. Provide progress reports (every 12 months post-authorisation)

Researchers must provide annual progress reports for research projects that are longer than 12 months to the Research and Partnerships team.

Progress reports must include sufficient information outlining:

- the project status and progress to date (including milestones achieved)
- any anticipated delays or challenges which may impact the project being completed on time
- whether any further direct engagement with schools and/or preschools is required
- an update on how stakeholders and/or participants are being engaged in the research in accordance with the stakeholder engagement plan.

#### 3. Provide final report (on completion of the research)

Researchers must provide a final report to the Research and Partnerships team on completion of the research. In addition, researchers are required to provide the department with:

- a copy of the final publication relating to the research project (for example, report, journal article, thesis)
- a concise non-technical 2 to 3-page summary report written in plain English identifying key findings.

Researchers must also:

- provide a summary report to the participating schools/preschools and participants in a format agreed to by the principal(s) of each participating site
- consider providing an information or debriefing session with participants.



#### **Important: failure to fulfil reporting requirements**

- Failure to satisfactorily meet any of the reporting requirements in a timely manner will result in termination of the current research authorisation granted through SERAP.
- The department also reserves the right to refuse any future or additional SERAP applications if a researcher has outstanding reporting obligations for a current or prior project.

## **4. Dissemination and knowledge translation**

Researchers should carry out all dissemination and knowledge translation plans in accordance with the project's stakeholder engagement plan.

The Research and Partnerships team may also ask researchers to present their findings to a department audience as a way of supporting the use of research evidence to inform policy, programs and practice.

## **5. Submit draft research outputs**

Researchers are required to submit drafts of proposed publications arising from their research to the department, for feedback and consideration at least 4 weeks prior to being publicly released. This should be seen as a courtesy or act of reciprocity for the department's facilitation of the research in its schools/preschools and is in line with researcher responsibilities set out in the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and the accompanying guidance documents.

Sharing draft research outputs with the department will minimise potential misunderstandings about the research outcomes and provide the department with the opportunity to confirm the research complies with SERAP terms and conditions (for example, names and locations of participating schools are not disclosed; participant data is de-identified; publication is culturally sensitive and appropriate).

The department reserves the right to request reasonable amendments to be made to draft research outputs, to ensure compliance with relevant policies and guidelines, and it is expected that researchers will accommodate these amendments prior to publishing their research.





### Types of research outputs stemming from SERAP authorised projects

The department takes a broad view of the term publications and consider this to include, but not limited to:

- a journal article being submitted to a publisher
- submission of a conference abstract or paper presentation
- a report (interim, final or summary) being made publicly available in any format
- a blog or social media post going live
- online commentary, debate or analysis (for example, article for The Conversation) being published
- a master's or PhD thesis being made publicly available through TROVE or a university's thesis repository

## Modifying authorised research

Principal researchers are responsible for ensuring:

- all relevant research details, including design, processes and personnel are current and up to date
- the research is conducted according to the protocol approved by the HREC and authorised by SERAP.

Any modifications to the research project or research personnel must be submitted to the department for authorisation and cannot be implemented until authorisation has been granted.

Significant changes to the authorised protocol or if the SERAP authorisation period (3 years) lapses, will require the submission of a new SERAP application.

### Variations

Further approval must be sought for any significant variation to authorised research. Generally, the department requires researchers to submit a variation request for any changes that also require HREC approval, such as changes to the:

- protocol, including recruitment strategies or data collection
- participant information and consent forms (PICF) and other participant recruitment material such as letters and flyers
- data collection tools and activities
- research personnel, including WWCC details
- participating sites (for example, addition of new sites).

Researchers submitting a variation request need to clearly and briefly describe the intended changes and provide any associated documentation such as revised or new research instruments, changes around intended site visits, information for participants and consent letters. A copy of the variation request, the approved new or revised research documentation (including the research protocol) and the HREC's variation approval letter must be provided to the Research and Partnerships team for processing.

Variation requests that change the risk profile of the project are likely to require additional scrutiny and will likely take longer to process and may require the submission of a new SERAP application. This may include (but is not limited to) the following examples:

- adding or changing the scope of a waiver of consent or opt-out approach to consent
- adding measures that pose a risk to participants that has not yet been considered
- adding measures that have additional ethical issues associated with them that have not yet been considered.

The variations must not be implemented until SERAP authorisation and any other permissions and consents required in relation to the variation have been obtained.

### **Extensions**

SERAP authorised projects exceeding 3 years in duration must apply for an extension if the research remains ongoing or if there are plans to revisit sites and/or participants for any follow-up or new activities. Researchers may also be required to seek new participant consent if revisiting sites and/or participants. Researchers must obtain HREC approval for extensions.

An updated HREC approval letter must be provided to the Research and Partnerships team along with an explanation for why the extension is being requested. SERAP authorisation will not be extended beyond the duration of the HREC approval period.

## 2.5 Breaches

### Breach of HREC approval or other data breach

Researchers **must immediately inform** the department if they have breached the conditions of their SERAP agreement, HREC approval, Data Release Agreement or any other breach related to the research or use of department data. The department will inform the researcher of next steps.

### Breach of SERAP agreement

A researcher will have breached their SERAP agreement if any of the following occur:

- the researcher amends any part of their research design without authorisation from the department
- the researcher fails to comply with any of their legislative obligations
- the researcher fails to comply with any of the conditions listed in the SERAP authorisation letter
- the researcher breaches the conditions of their HREC approval
- the researcher, in the department's opinion, engages in any conduct that brings the department into disrepute.

A researcher's SERAP authorisation will be suspended where the department is aware of, or reasonably suspects, that a breach of the SERAP agreement has occurred. If SERAP authorisation is suspended, researchers cannot continue with the research and must not approach sites or participants.

The department will inform the Principal Researcher in writing of any decision to suspend the SERAP authorisation while further information is gathered and considered, and will also contact the relevant HREC.

## 2.6 Further information




If you require further information regarding SERAP, you can:

- visit the [Research with us](#) page of the department's website
- email the Research and Partnerships team: [research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au).

# Appendix A: Factors to consider when submitting a SERAP application

## Information statements and consent forms

Key points when designing the consent process:

	In almost all circumstances, research participation requires voluntary, active, ongoing and informed consent.
	All participants (including teachers, staff, students, children and their parents/guardians) must be informed about the research in a manner that is accessible and understandable. All information statements and consent forms must be age and developmentally appropriate and/or provide translations where necessary.
	Consent must be obtained from both students and their parents/carers to participate in research. Students over the age of 18 may provide their own consent.

## Information statements

Participants should be provided with sufficient information so that they can fully understand the aspects of the research and any implications of participation before consent is sought.

Researchers collecting personal information must comply with the requirements for a collection notice under NSW privacy legislation: section 10 of the [Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#). Researchers can also refer to the department's [bulletin on collecting personal and health information](#).

All research participants (including parents/carers) must be provided with an information statement that describes key aspects of the research including:

- the purpose of the research
- the methods (what participants will be asked to do) and demands (including the time it will take each participant to complete each of research or data collection activity to be completed)
- any risks, harms or discomfort (including distress, third party identification, social or legal harm) that might arise because of the subject or methods involved in the research and the mitigation strategies in place to support participants and how they can access the support (for example, contact details of a counselling service or a help line such as Kids Helpline or Lifeline)
- expected benefits of the research
- how their privacy and confidentiality will be protected

- the participant’s right to withdraw from further participation at any stage of the project, along with any implications of withdrawal, and whether it will be possible to withdraw data from your project
- the likelihood and form of dissemination of the research results, including publication
- the amounts and sources of funding (if applicable)
- information on how to make a complaint and HREC complaint contact details
- contact details of the researchers and a statement informing participants that they can ask any questions before making their decision
- a privacy collection notice with the following information:
  - who the intended recipients are of personal information
  - the type of information being collected
  - whether the supply of the information by the individual is required by law or is voluntary
  - any consequences for the participant if the information (or any part of it) is not provided
  - the existence of any right of access to, and correction of, the information
  - the name and address of the agency that is collecting the information and the agency that is to hold the information.

Participants must also be informed that a decision not to participate in the research will not adversely affect their right to participate in regular activities (for example, school curricula, work professional development), their academic achievement, or their relationship with their teachers, schools, the department, and the research institution.

Where research involves multiple cohorts of participants (for example, teachers and students), each participant group must be provided with a tailored information statement and consent form. These forms should use language, document titles and format appropriate for the age/cohort of the participant and address the specific role and obligations of that group in the research.

Principals are gatekeepers who can provide or deny access to the site and require dedicated gatekeeper information sheets and consent forms. Even if principals are not participants in the proposed research, they are the decision maker regarding the activities that occur at their school including activities that may impact on students and teaching staff.

## Consent forms

Consent to participate in research must be voluntary and based on sufficient information. The information must provide an adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participating, and include a privacy collection notice in compliance with [NSW privacy legislation](#).

Current, opt-in, voluntary informed consent is the preferred form of consent. In very limited circumstances, alternative forms of consent (for example, opt-out; waiver of consent) may be considered on a case-by-case basis where lawful (for example, HREC approval is obtained for waiver of consent) and if the consent process does not conflict with department policy or impact on duty of care standards and the weight given to it. Refer to the [Information and Privacy Commission Fact Sheet – Consent](#) for guidance in understanding the issue of consent in the context of privacy laws in NSW.

In most circumstances the department **will not authorise** research that only seeks to obtain consent from the student (for example, mature minor) and not also from the parent/carer (Table 1). The decision to not authorise student-only consent will be made by the department independently of HREC approval of the consent process.

In situations where it would be inappropriate to obtain consent of a parent/carer, and in line with department policy (that is, the participant is living independently of parent/carer), the department may consider requests for consent to only be obtained from the student, provided they have capacity to consent.

Informed consent must be obtained from the appropriate people as set out in Table 1.

**Table 1: Consent procedure for students over and under the age of 18 years**

Participant	Consent procedure
Adult or student (over the age of 18)	Consent must be obtained from the participant provided they have capacity to consent. If the participant does not have capacity, consent must be obtained by a person or body with legal authority to make decisions for the participant.
Student (under the age of 18)	Consent must be obtained from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a person who meets the definition of parent/carer (namely a person with the legal authority to make decisions in relation to the long-term care, welfare and development of the child)</li> <li>the participant (student) after consent has been given by the parent/carer.</li> </ul>

Researchers intending to secure work samples from students for data collection purposes must include this in the information statement and consent form and obtain consent from the participant and their parent/carer. Intellectual property from student work samples remains with the student. Explicit consent must be obtained to reproduce or publish student work in research reports and other publications.

## Data management and security

**Researchers must submit a HREC-approved Data Management Plan with their application.**

Unless otherwise approved by the department or required by law, all identifying information must be deleted and data management procedures implemented to ensure anonymity of participants and department sites (including schools).

Researchers must provide details of the data management procedures they will use to ensure this protection in their SERAP application, for example, strategies for information collection, storage, use/access, disclosure and disposal of data.

Data collected for an authorised research project can only be used for the purpose of that project, unless extended consent has been obtained from the participants during the consent process and authorised by the department. For data that is intended to be made available for future research use or be included in a larger dataset or databank, the information sheet should clearly explain the parameters of access and possible uses of the data. In addition, the consent form must provide a tick box (or similar) for participants (and parents/carers if applicable) to provide their consent for their data to be used in this way. If consent is not given, the data collected must only be used for the purpose of the original research project.

Researchers remain solely responsible for ensuring data is collected, stored, used/ accessed, disclosed and disposed of in compliance with all relevant laws and ethical standards.

## Child safety and duty of care



**Refer to the department's child protection policy:**  
[Child protection – responding to and reporting students at risk of harm.](#)

- The department must be satisfied that research involving the participation of students is not contrary to their best interests. Any research that involves students must provide for their emotional, psychological, and physical security and wellbeing. At all times, the safety of students must be prioritised.
- To minimise risk to students, the applicant must provide adequate information in the SERAP application so that the department can gauge the competency of the researchers working with children and young people, specifically the expertise and skills of researchers/team members:
  - training, qualifications and experience to indicate knowledge, principles and skills in research with children
  - sensitivity to issues when researching with children and young people
  - the protocols and processes in place to mitigate risks, identify issues and handle any adverse impacts.

- Level of supervision and support provided to the researcher(s) by their supervisor and/or experts in the field.
- Processes in place for sufficient follow-up support for students if required, in consultation with the school principal or other relevant personnel.
- It is expected that researchers conducting research in schools or preschools with children, or conducting research with children or young people that were recruited through a school or preschool, will have processes in place to ensure appropriate and immediate reporting to school principals, and (in consultation with the school principal) to other relevant agencies, when they reasonably suspect a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm. Risk of harm also includes if a student is at risk of harm from themselves (for example, self-harm or suicide). For further guidance, refer to the department policy and procedures: [Child protection – responding to and reporting students at risk of harm](#).
- Information statements must include information on when confidential information may be disclosed, such as when there are safety concerns (including suspected risk of harm), and explain the actions that will follow any intentional or inadvertent disclosure, including who will be involved.
- Information statements must comply with NSW legislation for collecting personal information under section 10 of the [Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#).
- At the time of disclosure or if researchers suspect a student is at risk of harm, researchers should tell students they will be reporting their concerns to the school principal, and where possible, plan the safest and most effective ways to act in line with department and school policy.
- Researchers must also immediately report to the school principal any incident or occurrence where it is identified that a student may benefit from follow up support. This may be as a result of direct participation in the research, or from information disclosed to the researcher, that may not constitute harm or risk of harm, but does indicate the student may benefit from additional support.
- The department **does not allow** researchers to interact with individual students on a one-on-one basis.
  - Where research requires interviews with students, a group interview should be conducted in the presence of a teacher or another adult with legal duty of care.
  - If a group interview is not possible, the interview should be conducted in the presence of a teacher or another adult with legal duty of care or in an open space in line of sight of school staff.

## Use of audio/video recording or photography

- Information sheets must identify where photography, video and/or audio recording will be used to collect data and explain how such data will be used, including how participant anonymity will be preserved.
- The researcher should also detail the approach to be used for any non-consenting individuals, to ensure they are not captured in any recordings without consent.



- Consent forms must explicitly seek permission to engage in these forms of data collection, providing a separate tick box (or similar) for each activity allowing participants to give consent (or not) for each activity.
- If photographs, video or audio recordings are intended for use beyond data analysis (for example, dissemination in reports or presentations) the researcher must obtain consent from participants (or parents/carers where applicable) on a separate media release form.
- In addition to written consent, researchers are required to reconfirm consent verbally from participants to capture their voice or image prior to commencing the recording. Participants and their parents/carers where applicable must be informed that they can withdraw their consent to be recorded at any time.
- The use of third-party services, such as transcription services, will require department authorisation and their use must be indicated in the SERAP application or in a variation request. The third-party service must be able to guarantee data security and confidentiality and should be expected to sign a confidentiality agreement with the researcher's institution. Services that retain data for any purpose will not be permitted.
- Refer to the department's [Photographs and recordings](#) bulletin for more information.

## Payment of participants: incentives and reimbursements

- Any payment (for example, incentive; reimbursement) offered to individual participants **will not be authorised**.
- Collective, rather than individual, payments or reimbursement to the school for its participation may be authorised in certain situations and on a case-by-case basis in line with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(NHMRC 2023\)](#).

For example:

- Reimbursements may be authorised where there is an administrative cost associated with research participation, including:
  - reimbursing schools for the cost of employing casual teachers to cover classes while teachers are involved in research activities
  - reimbursing schools for the cost of administrative support due to tasks involved in research participation (for example, printing and disseminating information statements; school staff being present during student interviews/focus groups).
- Donations of an equivalent lump sum amount may be authorised when used towards:
  - school resources
  - the cost of implementation of initiatives stemming from student-led, participatory and co-design research projects.

## Conflict of interest

All potential or actual conflicts of interest (for example, the researcher is evaluating their own program/intervention/service; funder has commercial interest in research outcomes; employees of the department, including teachers, are researching a part of the organisation directly related to their work) must be identified in the SERAP application and ethics application, and the conflict must be mitigated or managed in advance. Mitigation strategies include changes to the research design, especially the procedure for participant recruitment, the way data is collected and the provision of information.

Employees of the department who are conducting independent research (for example, as a student to fulfil the requirements of a research degree such as a PhD) in schools or a business unit within the department are strongly encouraged to contact the Research and Partnerships team to discuss appropriate management of their conflicts of interest.

## Insurance and indemnity

The department expects that research activity will not expose students, staff or the department to any unreasonable risk. Accordingly, the department requires researchers to hold public liability and workers compensation insurance for the term of the research project. Usually, the researcher will be covered either by the institution in which they are enrolled or by their employer.

Specifically, the researcher must have, or be covered by:

- public liability insurance in the amount of not less than \$10 million for every occurrence and unlimited in the aggregate for the period of the project
- professional indemnity insurance in the amount of not less than \$10 million for any one occurrence
- workers' compensation insurance in accordance with NSW legislation for all research staff.

The researcher's institution must indemnify and keep indemnified the department and its officers, employees, and agents from and against any claim, loss or damage arising in connection with this research.

The researcher's institution's obligation to indemnify the department will be reduced proportionately to the extent that any negligent or unlawful act or omission by the department, its officers, employees or agents contributed to the relevant loss or damage.

# Appendix B: Summary of the full SERAP application and additional documentation

Application section	Details
<b>Overview of research</b>	Brief description of the logistical and practical activities involved in the research
<b>Researcher and contact details including conflict of interest</b>	All individuals who will have a role in the conduct of the research are to be listed, including those who are working in collaboration across different organisations. Where applicable, NSW Working with Children Check for all researchers need to be included. Working with Children Checks from other Australian jurisdictions will not be accepted.
<b>Strategic alignment</b>	The project's alignment with key policies and department priorities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Research for NSW Public Education: Our Research Statement</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Research for NSW Public Education: A Guide to Our Evidence Needs</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Our Plan for NSW Public Education</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Research design and methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background (aims and rationale) and research questions</li> <li>• Proposed design and methodology (including where possible, a list of schools that are mostly likely to be approached)</li> <li>• Participants and recruitment strategy</li> <li>• Explanation of consent processes</li> <li>• Research participation and data collection activities and administrative tasks related to the project (accurate detail of time required)</li> <li>• Data collection tools and methods</li> <li>• Access to existing data/information</li> <li>• Research involving Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, staff and their school communities</li> </ul>
<b>Anticipated benefits and impact</b>	Short-term and long-term benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how research will contribute to the work of education authorities (e.g., inform policy, teaching practices, etc.)</li> <li>• the progression of theoretical understanding (e.g., from practitioners to other education researchers)</li> <li>• opportunities for the broader public and/or education communities to benefit.</li> </ul>
<b>Possible risks, burdens and associated mitigants</b>	Measures in place to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure participant safety and wellbeing, including site-specific protocols for incident management and mandatory reporting</li> <li>• manage and mitigate risks related to each participant group</li> <li>• address imposts and burden for all participant groups</li> <li>• minimise disruption to day-to-day school operations and student learning.</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: Summary of the full SERAP application and additional documentation

Application section	Details
<b>Funding and support</b>	Funding amount and sources
<b>Ethics approval and ethical considerations</b>	HREC application and approval information
<b>Data and information privacy, confidentiality and security</b>	Data and information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ownership and custodianship</li> <li>• storage, access, and transfer</li> <li>• use and sharing</li> <li>• retention, destruction and archiving.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeline and milestones</b>	Anticipated timelines and dates for recruitment and consent, data collection, and key research milestones
<b>Reporting, dissemination and knowledge translation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planned outputs and dissemination activities</li> <li>• Implementation of research and knowledge translation activities</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant project documentation</b>	Project collateral and research materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participant information sheet and consent forms</li> <li>• recruitment flyers and email templates</li> <li>• gatekeeper information package (including a letter to the principal seeking permission for their school's or preschool's participation in the research as well as accurate information outlining the time and resources expected to be committed)</li> <li>• data collection tools and measures (interview schedules, questionnaires or other data collection instruments)</li> <li>• proof of HREC approval, the complete and approved ethics application and any subsequent approved ethics amendments</li> <li>• a stakeholder engagement plan detailing how stakeholders will be engaged throughout all stages of the research project</li> <li>• a data management plan (HREC-approved version)</li> <li>• copies of insurance certificates.</li> </ul>

### NSW Department of Education

GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001, Australia

✉ [research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:research.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au)

🌐 [education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/research-with-us](http://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/research-with-us)

Licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)