# **ERCIC Application Tips and Tricks**

This document aims to help you improve the quality of your applications to the ERCIC in order to enhance the acceptance rate of your initial applications, to expedite the review of your protocols, and to improve your opportunity for attaining ERCIC approval.

## Before You Begin

* **Eligibility:** Applications must be submitted by the PI. When submitting an application on behalf of the PI, the PI must be included in CC. Only applications submitted by UM affiliated researchers with a PhD will be accepted. PhD students must contact their supervisors in order to submit an application. Applications submitted by Master's students will not be accepted. In general, ERCIC discourages applications concerning undergraduate research or Master’s theses. There is no expectation that such research be reviewed, as supervisors are responsible for the ethical conduct of their students. Such applications will only be reviewed if there is a particularly pressing reason for doing so.
* **Research Ethics:** Familiarize yourself with the Dutch '[Code of Ethics for Research in the Social and Behavioural Sciences involving Human Subjects](https://www.nethics.nl/Gedragscode-Ethical-Code/)'. This contains concrete helpful guidelines on how to approach various aspects of research. Consider potential risks to participants and other stakeholders, which may stem not only from the methodology but also the research topic.
* **International Research:** If your research will be conducted in other countries, find out about any ethical requirements or regulations in those countries. You may need ethical approval from the appropriate national or local body there too.
* **Research Data Management (RDM):** Make sure you are up to date with [UM policy and codes of conduct on RDM](https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/organisation/codes-conduct-regulations). You may find the latest information on these topics via the [UB RDM portal](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/services-tools-training/).
* **Privacy and data protection (GDPR):** If you will intend to process personal data during your research, make sure to consult with your [Faculty Data Steward](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/faculties/) prior to your ERCIC application. The ERCIC does not review the legal compliance of a protocol with the [GDPR](https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/um-general-privacy-statement/privacy-regulations). For this, you must register your project with your respective Faculty Data Steward.

## Preparing Your Application

* **Forms:** Always use the latest application form. Outdated forms will not be accepted. The latest form can be found on the [ERCIC website](https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/ethical-review-committee-inner-city-faculties-ercic). Outdated applications forms will only be accepted as part of applications for amendments of already approved protocols.
* **Example text and Templates:** Relevant templates and example texts may sometimes be made available via your [Faculty Data Steward](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/faculties/). For example, some Inner City Faculties provide faculty discipline specific templates for participant information letters and consent forms. When preparing your ERCIC application, make sure to use the latest templates provided at your Faculty.
* **Formatting:** Applications forms that contain significant formatting errors will not be accepted. For example, mis-numbering of the application form questions is a common mistake that routinely leads to delays the processing of new applications. To avoid any unnecessary delay in the processing of your application, please ensure that the ordering of the application form question numbers remains intact.
* **Signature of the PI:** The signature of the Principal Investigator (PI) is required. Applications that do not include the signature of the PI will not be approved. To avoid delays, always ensure to include the signature of the PI.
* **File Naming:** Use a clear and consistent naming convention for all your documents. We recommend the following format: *ERCIC\_[TypeOfDocument][PI’sLastName][Date]*. For example, ‘*ERCIC\_ApplicationForm\_L\_Jenkins\_20230517*’.

## Important Things to Keep In Mind

* **Legal compliance and GDPR:** It is important to understand that the ERCIC does not provide a review of the legal compliance of your protocol with [GDPR](https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/um-general-privacy-statement/privacy-regulations) or other relevant privacy legislation. Whilst the ERCIC does consider relevant privacy legislation during the review process, these are only considered within the scope of a review of research ethics and integrity. To ensure that your project is compliant with relevant privacy legislation such as the GDPR, consult with your [Faculty Data Steward](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/faculties/).
* **Participant Information Letter and Consent Forms:** It is helpful to ensure that the participant information letter and consent forms are written in a comprehensible and accessible manner, in language that is appropriate for the participants. If your research will involve more than one type of participant, then you may need additional information letters and consent forms. You should also ensure that your participant information letter and consent forms are compliant with relevant privacy and data protection legislation (e.g. GDPR). To ensure this, please consult with your [Faculty Data Steward](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/faculties/). Often, discipline specific templates and example text will be provided by your Faculty.
* **RDM, privacy and data protection, and Open Science (FAIR):** Familiarity with key concepts and definitions in RDM, privacy and data protection, and Open Science (FAIR) can benefit your application.For more information on these topics, we encourage you to review the [UB RDM guide](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/guide/) and to consult with your [Faculty Data Steward](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/rdm/faculties/) prior to application.
* **Interviews/Surveys:** When conducting interviews and surveys as part of your research, please indicate the general themes that will be addressed. Where possible, please submit your interview and survey questions as supplementary materials.
* **Communication and Consistency:** Ensure your planned activities are clearly and consistently communicated throughout the application form and all accompanying documents. Any contradictions or discrepancies within or between the documents submitted can evoke questions from the ERCIC and potentially lead to delays or rejections.

## Submitting Your Application

* **Via email**: Submit your application via email to the ERCIC inbox (<ercic@maastrichtuniversity.nl>), ensuring that all supporting documents are attachments. Clearly indicate the type of application in the email subject (e.g. Application for New Protocol Review, Application for Amendment Review, Application for Expedited BEELab Protocol Review).
* **Review:** After submission, you will receive an acknowledgement of your application and your protocol will be scheduled for review in the agenda of the next up-coming ERCIC meeting. In case of any issues with your application, you will be notified and given the opportunity for corrections.

**ERCIC response and follow-up:** Once your application has been accepted, you will next receive a response from the ERCIC about the outcomes of the review process. This will most often take the form of one of the three following outcomes: 1) An approval without revisions; 2) A request for more information and/or revisions; 3) An objection to the protocol. At this point, you will be invited to respond. Depending upon application numbers, the ERCIC can take up two weeks to provide a first response after review. During this time, we encourage researchers to refrain from making enquiries so as not to burden limited ERCIC resources.