

## **Innocence Network Research Review Committee**

### **Application Guide**

#### **Role of the Review Committee**

The Innocence Network is comprised of more than 60 organizations in the United States and other countries working to exonerate people who have been wrongfully convicted. Each organization is an independent entity, typically serving clients in a particular geographic area.

The Research Review Committee was set up to provide a single review process to alleviate the burden on individual Innocence Network organizations with respect to requests to conduct research with exonerees or staff. Specifically, this review is required for research that collects information from clients or people working for an organization in the Innocence Network. Research that uses secondary data sources, such as data from the National Registry of Exonerations, does not need to undergo this review process.

By undergoing this review, the researcher can benefit from the insights of those who are part of or have worked with people who have been wrongfully convicted. The suggestions offered may facilitate outreach and participation and reduce potential confusion and inadvertent misunderstandings.

Organizations in the Innocence Network have agreed that they will not participate in research projects that have not been reviewed by the Innocence Network Research Review Committee. It is important to note, however, that approval by the Committee does not confer an agreement to provide contact information for exonerees. Once a study has been approved, the decision of whether or how to provide information about the study to clients is made by each individual organization.

We request that any approved research include a statement in participant recruitment and consent materials indicating that the research proposal was reviewed and approved by the Innocence Network Research Review Committee.

#### **Criteria Used to Review a Research Proposal**

The Research Review Committee's review is meant to address the 1) potential risks or burden on study participants, and 2) potential benefit of the research:

- 1) Risk-Burden-Informed Consent. To address this component, we review the consent procedures and materials, and the data collection instrument(s). We bring to this process an awareness and understanding of specifics of the experience of exonerees that may not be adequately addressed by other review bodies (e.g., a university Institutional Review Board that may not be familiar with this population).
  - A key consideration is the potential stress, anxiety, or harm generated by participating in a study (even by filling out a questionnaire). We also seek to assure that the researchers can provide an appropriate resource that could be responsive to what might be experienced by study participants.

2) Potential Benefit (“value added”). To address this component, we consider the study question, how the question fits into existing research, and reasonableness of the methods to address the question. Because the number of exonerees is relatively small and many research proposals address similar questions, we are seeking to assure that the proposed research has the potential to add to our knowledge base. It is important to us that the background material provided by the research demonstrates a solid understanding of the state of research pertaining to the specific question that is the focus of the proposed project.

- Dissertation proposals for which at least one committee member works in the area of wrongful conviction are assumed to have undergone this kind of review, but typically other proposals would be examined in more detail.