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## Public Review Completion Survey

How long does it take to complete a review of a research proposal for the Health Research Board (HRB)?

Survey Findings 2024

## Introduction

The Health Research Board (HRB) receives written feedback on the quality of Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in grant applications received from public reviewers. Reviews are written from the perspective of the reviewer as a member of the public or informed by their knowledge and experience as a patient, carer and or user of health services.

Public Reviewers are asked to comment on the following areas:

- The plain English summary (Lay Summary)
- Relevance of the proposed research question
- PPI in development of and throughout the project
- Making it straightforward for research participants
- Dissemination of the proposed work

We are often asked from those new to reviewing, *how long does it take to complete the review of a research application for the HRB?* We couldn't give a clear answer to this, and our public reviewers suggested to survey those who have already reviewed for us. In 2024, this is exactly what we did, with the aim to gain a better understanding of the time commitment for completion of reviews.

## Survey Findings

The survey was sent to 68 public reviewers who had recently completed reviews for the HRB. In total, 47 fully completed responses were submitted through Google forms.

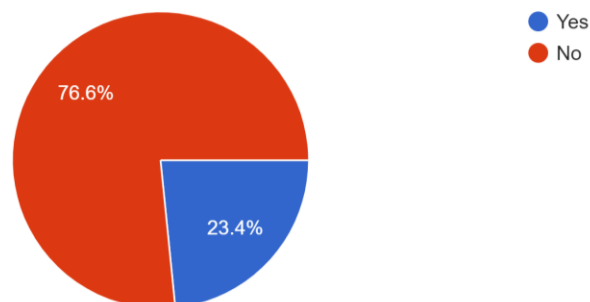
### Reviewer Description

Most survey respondents (77%) were experienced reviewers for the HRB (Figure 1). A further 23% were new to reviewing for the HRB.

**Figure 1. Respondents' self-description**

1. Was this your first time to complete a review for the HRB?

47 responses



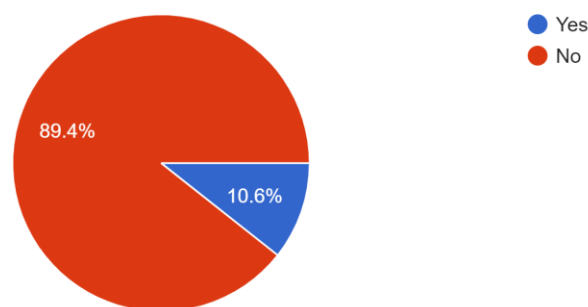
### Hours to complete a review

We asked respondents how many hours it took them to complete a single review and whether they completed the review of an application in one sitting (i.e. on the same day). The findings showed that:

- For a small percentage (8%) of reviewers, the survey suggests it took between 1 and 3 hours to complete a review.
- For many (43%) it took an average of 3 to 4 hours.
- For a further 11% of reviewers, it took 5 to 6 hours to complete their review.
- 25% of those surveyed said it took between 6 to 8 hours.
- For others (8%), it took between 8 to 12 hours.
- There was a small number of outliers (4%) that reported taking longer than 12 hours to complete their review.
- 89% of the reviewer’s surveyed (Figure 2) said that they did not complete a review in one sitting. 64% of reviewers said that they tended to complete a review in blocks of time over the course of two to three days and a further 26% completed the review over four to 6 days. A small number (10%) of people said it took them a more than one week to complete the review.
- 72% of reviewers spent one to two hours per sitting completing their review with a further 17% reviewers spending three hours per sitting. Most (8%) remaining reviewers spent between four and six hours per sitting.

**Figure 2. Completion of review in one sitting**

3. Did you complete your review of an application in one sitting (i.e. on the same day)?  
47 responses



Where respondents had reviewed more than one application, we asked them whether there was a difference in how long it took to review them. In summary, the feedback suggests:

- Some applications take longer than others to review as the content may be more complex to understand.
- Some research areas might be more familiar to reviewers due to personal experience or awareness of a condition and therefore easier to understand.
- Reviewers found that they became quicker the more applications they reviewed.

- Several respondents reported very little difference in the time it took per application.

### Feedback on the review experience

We also asked survey respondents to share with us how they found the review experience, we include some of that feedback below as it may be helpful to those new to reviewing.

- Read the lay summary first.
- There is always a bit of a shock when opening a review for the first time. However by taking time to breakdown the content into smaller sections over different sittings one's understanding begins to develop. Knowing there is help at hand does put one's mind at ease also!
- It was easier when you stick to the sections and questions in a methodical way. It's a skill to learn how to ignore the extra text and focus on PPI only.
- The more reviews I complete I find it easier to find the information I'm looking for. In most cases I find the content I need to review easy enough to find. This does vary from application to application depending on the complexity of the research project.
- Sometimes the answers to questions are more 'buried' than others! - depending on the writing style of the proposal writer.
- It's not necessary to understand all the technical aspects of the applications. If in doubt, reading the hints and tips on where to find material to answer the review questions is a good way to make progress.
- I tend to use the pdf search function to find the required information.
- You may need to re-read sections a few times for some applications.
- There is very clear guidance on how to complete the review and where the relevant section is in the application. It takes some time initially to determine the purpose of the application depending on how good the summary is, but once that's clear, it's relatively straight forward to complete.
- Re-read before you submit your review.

### Conclusion

While it's not possible to say exactly how long it will take to complete any one review overall, we found people choose to complete reviews in more than one sitting, generally across two to three days with the majority of reviewers taking up to two hours at a time reviewing.

We hope that these findings help to give those new to reviewing an indication of the time commitment based on the experience of those who have already reviewed for the HRB.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey and thanks to all of you for continuing to be part of our review process. We really do appreciate the time and effort you give to this.