

Procedure: IACUC-20
Date: July 10, 2025
Enabled by: PHS/AWA
Supersedes: September 7, 2023

**UC Davis
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)**

Title: *Numbers Rationale for Animals in Protocols*

I. Purpose:

This document provides guidance to researchers for determining and justifying appropriate species and animal numbers.

II. Background:

According to the U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals Used in Testing, Research, and Teaching, the animals selected for a procedure should be of an appropriate species and quantity, with the minimum number required to obtain scientifically valid results. Methods such as tissue chip, mathematical models, computer simulation, physical models, and *in vitro* biological systems should also be considered to replace the use of live animals if study objectives can be met.

III. Policy:

The Animal Welfare Act and the *Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* charge the IACUC with review of proposed rationale for the species and the number of animals selected. Investigators must demonstrate that they are using the appropriate species and the minimum number of animals necessary to obtain reproducible, scientifically valid data.

IV. Procedure:

Justification for the species must include the rationale for why the species selected is most appropriate for the study and why non-animal models will not meet the study objectives.

Investigators are encouraged to consult a statistician and bioinformatics specialist to determine the number of animals necessary for a project. In general, for most experiments, the number of animals can be determined by a power analysis (sample size estimation), which is identified by the variability in the data (e.g., Standard Error of the Mean, SEM) and the difference the investigator might anticipate between groups. The power of detecting a given difference from the control group increases by

increasing the sample size. Investigators must demonstrate that they are using the fewest number of animals necessary to achieve their scientific objectives.

Justification of animal numbers begins with a clearly stated summary of the experimental objectives, including experimental animals, donor animals if needed, live-born offspring of pregnant animals, and animals that are produced in breeding colonies but will not be used to test a specific hypothesis. This justification must include information about the proposed experiments such as:

- Purpose of each experiment or set of related experiments
- Number of experimental groups/subgroups
- Number of animals by species/strain per group/subgroup
- Number of animals necessary to provide sufficient tissues/cells
- Typical parameters used to establish statistical significance between groups (e.g., the variable used to evaluate the number of animals in the power calculation)
- Animals that will transfer from an expiring protocol to the new protocol need to be factored into the total number requested

All animals involved in the study must be addressed in the protocol table as required. List each experimental group separately, **briefly** summarize the procedures, and include the number of animals for each group. This table must account for all animals proposed for use under the submitted protocol. The total number of animals listed in this section must correspond to the total number listed in section 4 “Species” and the justification provided in section 13e “Reduction (Animal numbers justification)”.

Example of table defining groups and procedures:

Group	Species	Number of Animals	Procedures/Treatment
1	Mice	20	Blood and tissue collection
2	Mice	20	Tumor transplants
Control	Mice	20	Sham surgical procedure

Potential animal loss due to morbidity, mortality, or other challenges with the experimental procedures included must be described in order to justify the need for additional animals above the minimum required by the power analysis. If multiple timepoints are necessary to address the hypothesis or objectives, then a rationale must be provided.

The IACUC recognizes that the basis for an appropriate justification of animal numbers depends largely on the nature of the study. The statistical method and reference for which the number of animals was determined must be clearly stated.

Animal numbers **cannot** be justified on the basis of how many experiments the laboratory personnel can perform in a week or month, and the cost cannot be used as a determining factor for the use of a particular species or model or the total N.

Examples are listed below, including guidelines for justification of animal numbers.

- A. Teaching Protocols:** Animal numbers are determined by a specified student-to-animal ratio, which must be fully explained in the justification narrative. Animal numbers should be minimized to the fullest extent possible without compromising the quality of the hands-on teaching experiences for students. Please define the student groups and the number of animals per group necessary to achieve the training objective.

- B. Tissue Harvest Required for *In vitro* Studies (including antibody production):** Animal numbers are typically determined by the amount of tissue/cells required based on experimental conditions, statistical consideration, and the number of individual animals needed to provide the appropriate quantity of tissue/cells or to generate antibodies. Please define the parameter(s) or variable(s) to be statistically compared between groups when addressing the rationale for the number of animals.

- C. Exploratory or Pilot Studies:** Animals may be needed for a pilot or proof-of-concept study. Animal numbers may be justified based on the probability of observing the desired effect of the experimental procedure or the numbers needed to test a new paradigm. Justification should include potential variability that may be anticipated and how it could impact the study. Reference of a publication that includes similar experiments and evaluated comparable parameters can be used to provide an estimate of animal numbers needed and to support the rationale.

- D. Studies Requiring Inferential Statistical Analysis:** If possible, animal numbers are determined by statistical power analysis. Alternatively, appropriate numbers of animals may be determined based on comparable studies for which the desired effect sizes were shown to be statistically significant and are used as references. A power analysis or other relevant statistical tests should be included. It is good practice to refer to the software or website used to compute the power analysis if this was the method used.
Consultation with a statistician or use of statistical software during the design of the study is important to identify the animal numbers required. UC Davis statistical consultation includes the [Center for Statistical Consulting](#) for assistance in estimating animal numbers in research proposals 530-752-2361.

When justifying animal numbers based on a statistical test the IACUC will expect a description of the test used and the following information in the IACUC protocol:

- Include the p -value that is set for a statistically significant analysis of an experimental measure. This value is also often denoted the alpha significance level (or probability of a difference between two mean values).
 - The variation between animals with the same treatment and approach. The variance is often expressed as sigma, the sample standard deviation (statistical way of expressing the precision of the observed measures within a group of animals treated the same way).
 - The minimal effect size (difference in the measures between groups) of interest, and the size of the difference that would be considered biologically meaningful.
 - The statistical power one is aiming to achieve. Power is one minus beta (the probability of failing to reject the null hypothesis when it is actually false), and most researchers accept powers of 0.8.
 - The minimal number of animals per group needed to identify the minimal effect size from a power analysis appropriate to the statistical test selected using the above information.
 - Include the reference for the website or source of the statistical test.
- E. Breeding Colony:** Animal numbers are determined by the number of breeders, replacement breeders and the estimated number of pups generated. Even if only a percentage of the pups can be used for the project (e.g., only male pups or a specific genotype will be used), all sexes and genotypes must be included in the total final number required for the study and should be represented by a breeding group in Section 13f “Study Groups and Numbers Table”. A calculator for “Group size planning for breedings of gene-modified mice and other organisms following Mendelian inheritance” <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41684-023-01213-1> can be found: <https://www.ltk.uzh.ch/en/Breeding.html>

V. Resources:

1. Animal Welfare Act and Regulations
<https://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/animal-welfare-act>
2. ILAR, Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals
<http://nap.edu/12910>
3. PHS Policy
<https://olaw.nih.gov/policies-laws/phs-policy.htm>
4. Stat Lab Statistical Consultation
<https://statistics.ucdavis.edu/stat-lab>
5. Group size planning for breedings of gene-modified mice and other organisms following Mendelian inheritance
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41684-023-01213-1> can be found:
<https://www.ltk.uzh.ch/en/Breeding.html>

