

Ethical principles and guidelines for Indigenous research

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The AHURI Ethical principles and guidelines for Indigenous research were compiled by Roz Walker, Deputy Director of the Curtin Indigenous Research Centre, Curtin University of Technology at the request of AHURI Limited, supported by funding through the Commonwealth of Australia and the Australian states and territories.

Purpose

The aim of this document is to assist researchers to recognise and take the rights and interests of Indigenous Australians into account in the development of proposals and conduct of research; to outline the main ethical issues and principles involved, and to help researchers access the literature on the conduct of research with Indigenous people.

This document is a starting point for ongoing discussions among the research community, Indigenous stakeholders and AHURI. It is hoped that it will continue to evolve over time, as appropriate, as further relevant protocols and Indigenous research approaches are articulated.

Research priorities

AHURI is committed to supporting research endeavours that address the strategic priorities in Indigenous housing as identified in the AHURI National Housing Research Program Research Agenda 2010.

Research principles

In research focussed upon Indigenous housing issues, AHURI embraces the implementation of Recommendation 51, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody:

That research funding bodies reviewing proposals for further research on programs and policies affecting Aboriginal people adopt as principal criteria for the funding of those programs:

- The extent to which the problem or process being investigated has been defined by Aboriginal people of the relevant community or group.
- The extent to which Aboriginal people from the relevant community or group have substantial control over the conduct of the research.
- The requirement that Aboriginal people from the relevant community or group receive the results of the research delivered in a form which can be understood by them.
- The requirement that the research include the formulation of proposals for further action by the Aboriginal community and local Aboriginal organisations.' (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, p.167).

AHURI also endorses an additional principle:

- That the research should support education and training to increase the capacity of Indigenous researchers, communities and organisations.

The principles, processes and protocols adopted by AHURI are not intended to create a barrier to research. Implementation of the principles can be handled efficiently.

Consultation with the Housing and Homelessness Policy Research Working Group (HHPRWG) will assist researchers to understand the requirements of the first three principles. The HHPRWG may also assist to undertake consultation or provide advice on appropriate consultation mechanisms. AHURI National Office can provide contact details for members of the HHPRWG in each State and Territory, as required.

The principles aim to achieve a more inclusive and just distribution of the direct and indirect benefits of research for Indigenous people than has historically been the case, in a manner that is acceptable to Indigenous people and that will minimise harm, burden or misuse for individuals and groups. It is important that, to the best of the researcher's ability, the community or group benefit from the research activity.

Research protocols

There are now several valuable statements on principles for the conduct of ethical research involving Indigenous people.

A particularly good example of these is Guidelines for ethical research in Indigenous studies, by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), which can be found at: http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/10534/GERIS_2007.pdf.

Also see: Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy protocols for consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal people: <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/everybodys-business/protocols-aboriginal/documents/protocols-for-consultation.pdf>.

The AHURI funded Positioning Paper, Investigating appropriate evaluation methods and indicators for Indigenous housing programs by Walker, Ballard, and Taylor provides a comprehensive discussion of principles and methodologies for conducting research and evaluation in Indigenous housing.

Protocols for the conduct of research encompassing these principles have been developed at the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), which can be found at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e52syn.htm>.

Researchers will also find these additional guidelines valuable for the ethics approval process: Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), Code of ethics (pp.1–5) <http://www.aare.edu.au/ethics/ethcfull.htm>.

Keeping research on track: a guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e65syn.htm>.

NHMRC Guidelines under Section 95 of the Privacy Act 1988, Section 2 Procedures to be followed by researchers <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e26syn.htm>.

NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans <http://nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e35syn.htm>.

Project funding application process

Development of proposals

The following questions are important for applicants to consider:

- Does the project have relevant/appropriate Indigenous community support given the nature of the research?
- Have the most relevant people been consulted?
- Have face-to-face discussions been the major form of consultations between the researchers and the Indigenous communities?
- What is the purpose and scope of the research?
- Does it contribute to one or more of the four priority areas in the vision and priorities?
- How is it going to benefit Indigenous groups, organisations and/or communities?
- What is the experience of the researchers (project leader/ of the research team) in working in Indigenous contexts?
- If new or emerging researchers are involved, what training and support processes are in place?
- Is the timeframe adequate and realistic to allow for genuine consultation with, or involvement, of the community? Additionally, in the case of remote area research, have the distance and seasons, been taken into account?
- What feedback mechanisms are in place to ensure the Indigenous community receive the results in an understandable form?

AHURI and representatives of Indigenous housing jurisdictions recognise that there may be tensions in meeting local community needs as well as national level priorities, despite attempts to reflect and incorporate local, regional, and state Indigenous housing needs and issues into the national research agenda setting process. Therefore, it is important for research teams to undertake extensive consultation with relevant Indigenous groups in developing proposals to identify how and where community groups needs are most likely to link with government policy and national Indigenous housing priorities.

All researchers are strongly encouraged to contact their state/territory representative of HPRWG, prior to formulating a proposal. The representative will provide advice on the appropriate points of entry and the various Indigenous organisations or bodies that will need to be consulted or at least informed of the research.

Further, Indigenous newspapers, bulletins and journals are an important supplement to traditional literature sources to gain an understanding of important and contemporary housing issues from Indigenous perspectives.

Selection criteria

Applications that include a focus on Indigenous people will be assessed using the standard AHURI assessment criteria:

1. Policy relevance of projects—proposals must demonstrate that the project will assist policy development.
2. The research approach—methods and timeline must be realistic and appropriate.
3. Research teams must demonstrate capability to do the research on time to a high standard and to build future research capacity.

4. Research budgets must be realistic, justified, cost-effective and commensurate with achieving the methods outlined.

It is important to note, however, that Criteria 2 and 3 have particular interpretations in the context of research that includes a focus on Indigenous people.

In relation to Criterion 2 (the realism and appropriateness of the research design and methodology), adherence to the guidelines, as specified in Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS) will be particularly important.

Criterion 3 (the capability of the Project Team) will be particularly important. It will be expected that the people in these roles will demonstrate:

- Experience in working (or undertaking research) with Indigenous people.\
- Understanding of ethical issues in Indigenous research and a commitment to conduct research in accordance with principles and protocols.
- Experience in working as part of a multi-disciplinary research team.
- Scholarship and publications.

Where the applicant has no or little experience in Indigenous research—i.e. a new researcher—or the majority of the team are new researchers, the level of support you will establish to undertake the research effectively needs to be described.

Also in relation to Criterion 3, the research should, as much as possible, support education and training to increase the capacity of, and economic participation by, Indigenous researchers, communities and organisations.

Assessment and approval procedure

Each research proposal is considered by the AHURI Research Panel, using the above selection criteria. The Research Panel, reporting to AHURI's Executive Board, has been established to assist with identifying research priorities and to advise which project funding applications should be funded.

Applications may be sent out for external peer review if it is felt that a particular application is beyond the expertise of the Research Panel.

Final approval of applications is by the AHURI Board.

Ethics approval

Applications recommended for funding are required to obtain ethics approval from their university ethics committee immediately upon advice of the success of their application. Approval should be sought from the university at which the project leader(s) is/are based.

The AHURI Board reserves the right to seek specific advice or to provide comment for further consideration prior to approval. Where ethics approval is conditional upon changes to the project, these changes must be finally agreed by the relevant ethics committee and then presented to the AHURI Assistant Director Research for final consideration.

Once ethics approval has been obtained, the applicants must provide evidence of certification to the AHURI Assistant Director Research. Any delays (beyond three months) in obtaining this approval may result in the funding offer being withdrawn.

Project Reference Groups/User Group

AHURI Limited will establish a user group for each AHURI project (see National Housing Research Program Funding guidelines for applicants). In relation to Indigenous research the

User Group will include: Indigenous community representatives, policy makers, project collaborators, and other key stakeholders.

The role of a User Group is to provide:

- Advice and support for the work as a whole.
- Help with focussing the policy relevance of the research.
- Providing information about the progress of policy development.
- Reviewing the progress of the project, its timetable and future plans.
- Providing a forum to focus on dissemination.

In relation to work with Indigenous people, User Groups may also provide:

- Key linkages to community networks, services and/or research institutes.
- Community/consumer viewpoints.
- Management of community expectations regarding the project outcomes.
- Advice about the responsibility to consider principles such as sustainability, capacity building, and the transformative potential of the research project.
- Advice on protocols and consultation.

Dissemination processes and protocols

AHURI gives high priority to effective dissemination of research findings and works closely with research teams to ensure that findings are of value to policy makers and practitioners. With respect to research with Indigenous people AHURI is committed to ensure that:

the [Indigenous people] from the relevant community or group receive the results of the research delivered in a form which can be understood by them (RCIADIC).

This may require the use of alternative reporting formats including poster presentations, focus groups, meetings with individuals or small groups or community forums. Publishing research findings in Indigenous newspapers, newsletters or through Koorinet or Indigenous Online Networks (ION) at the University of South Australia will ensure a broader coverage within the Indigenous academic and community arena.

Existing AHURI outputs identified in the AHURI National Housing Research Program Funding guidelines for applicants may need to be renegotiated to ensure a more appropriate dissemination strategy to meet both Indigenous community and national policy requirements in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

Projects that work with Indigenous peoples should include dissemination costs in their budgets to the extent required to enable the Indigenous people from the relevant community or group to receive the results of the research in a form that can be understood by them.

Several of the existing protocols highlight the importance of providing feedback in an appropriate manner to relevant Indigenous groups, communities and organisations at all stages of the research. These dissemination requirements may have implications for the dissemination processes (and budget) identified in the project proposal. Costings appropriate to the scope and nature of the research need to allow for this.

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