



# Application for ethics Approval

## Guidelines

*Please note these guidelines are only required to be completed when requested by the ALIA Research Advisory Committee*

It is important to consider the ethical implications of conducting research, particularly when undertaking research involving humans. Much of the research conducted in library and information studies that involves humans and would be classed as 'low risk'. However, it is the responsibility of the researcher and ALIA to ensure that any research funded by the Association meets national ethical guidelines.

Research that involves low or negligible risk is research where participants have the potential to suffer no harm, but where there is potential to suffer only inconvenience or discomfort. (See [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) Section 2). There is no objective measure of risk that covers all situations. Different people interpret harm and risk in different ways. When considering the harm that may result from your research (for participants, researchers, the public etc) take into account the following types of harm: psychological, physical, privacy infringement, labelling (reputation), economic.

Recruitment of participants must not involve coercion. Participation must be voluntary. If contact details are needed, the researcher must have authorised access to the contact details of participants. See the references section to access a copy of the [NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#).

Participants must be given an information sheet, unless they are incapable of understanding written information, for example, young school children, or if it is culturally inappropriate. A consent form may not be required if participation is completely anonymous (no personal details recorded) and information is not sensitive (eg unlikely to cause embarrassment, pain, distress, emotional or spiritual discomfort).

## Informed consent

A consent form and information sheet must be provided to participants in all but exceptional circumstances. In preparing these documents reference should be made to the [NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) (see paragraph on consent 2.2).

*Respect for human beings involves giving due scope to people's capacity to make their own decisions. In the research context, this normally requires that participation be the result of a choice made by participants – commonly known as 'the requirement for consent'.*



*This requirement has the following conditions: consent should be a voluntary choice, and should be based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participation in it.*

Other main points to note from the National Statement are listed below:

- A participant may refuse to participate without giving a reason or justification (paragraph 2.2.19).
- A participant's consent must be clearly established, and the consent of all properly interested parties obtained (paragraph 2.2.12). When appropriate, consent may need to be sought at both an individual and an organisational level.
- Consent must not be the subject of coercion or to any inducement or influence which could impair its voluntary character (paragraph 2.2.9).
- Circumstances in which consent from participants may not be necessary include: the use of non-identifiable data, observational research in public places, or the use of anonymous surveys (paragraph 2.3).
- A participant must be free at any time to withdraw consent to further involvement in the research.

## Consent form

A consent form would normally include the details listed below:

- Title of project
- Statements of confirmation, such as –
  - 'I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the study.'
  - 'I have been given an opportunity to ask questions.'
  - 'I understand I can withdraw at any time without prejudice.'
  - 'Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material.'
  - 'I agree to participate in the study as outlined to me.'
- Name of participant, signature and date.

## Information sheet

The main purpose of the information sheet is to provide participants with a plain language statement that clearly describes the aims of the project and the nature of involvement of participants. Participants should be clearly informed of their rights and any risks associated with participation. At all times the researcher must observe the welfare of the participants and respect the dignity and personal privacy of the individual. An information sheet must include the following:

- The aims of the project;



- A description of what will be required of the participants (include details of amount of time required);
- A statement which addresses confidentiality and security of information.
- Details of who will have access to personal information and the purpose(s) for which participant information will be used, including whether participants would be potentially identifiable in any published material;
- A statement that advises participation is completely voluntary; participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences; non-participation will not affect an individual's rights/access to other services/care (eg in the case of patients);
- Any risks / benefits to participants;
- The contact details of the investigator(s) should the participant require further information;
- The contact details of ALIA should participants wish to make a complaint on ethical grounds;
- Confirmation that the project has been approved by the ALIA Research Advisory Committee.

## Notes for researchers

**Confidentiality** - The applicant must indicate in detail how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained. For example, what procedures and safeguards will be employed. A simple statement of intent to maintain confidentiality is not sufficient.

**Anonymity and identifiable** - Researchers have a responsibility to take all reasonable steps to protect participants' privacy and to inform participants fully, prior to participation, of any possible risks regarding identification in published material. Researchers should give participants the opportunity to review draft material before it is published, including interview transcripts, to further ensure that the rights and privacy of participants are protected.

**Recruitment** – The applicant must demonstrate that there is no possibility of undue influence on potential participants (eg power relations such as that between librarian and client).

**Risks/benefits** - The proposed benefits of the study must outweigh any potential risk, and any such risks to participants must be minimised and fully communicated to participants before consent is obtained.

**Adequacy of method** - Applicants should ensure that proposals provide sufficient detail in order to demonstrate to the Committee that the project is justified, relevant and that all methods are clearly outlined.

**Invasive surveys and other techniques** – Any proposals involving invasive surveys and other techniques should automatically be referred to ALIA in order to be vetted by a suitably qualified expert.

**External institutional approval** - Proposals that require external institutional approval (eg approval from institutions associated with the research) must attach confirmation of that institution's ethics approval.



## Use of sensitive tests

- Researchers have a duty of care if their research uncovers information about individual subjects that has a bearing on their wellbeing. If the data is valid at the individual level, the researcher has a duty of care to those discovered to be at risk.
- Diagnostic tests (eg IQ tests) should only be used if they are specific to the research questions asked. Diagnostic tests should only be analysed by persons with the appropriate qualifications and competence to interpret the results. If the instrument used in collecting information from the participant is a diagnostic test, and has been collected by someone professionally able to interpret it diagnostically, then the duty of care may require feedback to the individual concerned or to someone responsible for the individual (eg in the case of school children, the school principal) if the individual is identified as being at risk.
- If the instrument is not diagnostic, but is still indicative or raises concerns about the individual's wellbeing (eg traits, states, conditions or tendencies) then feedback may still be necessary if a participant's score is extreme.
- If the instrument is non-diagnostic or non-indicative, it is recommended that data should be collected in ways that would not allow an individual's score to be identified (eg collected anonymously).
- The information sheet to participants should clearly state whether the information is to be collected anonymously. If collected anonymously, it should state clearly that individual scores will not be identifiable or made available for any purpose. If not collected anonymously, the researcher should 'inform potential subjects of the possibility of diagnosis and the way the results will be handled. In particular, the researcher must outline to whom and how results, which indicate that the subject of the research is at risk, will be communicated.'
- Where feedback to an individual or carer of the individual is warranted, extreme care is necessary to avoid possible negative consequences such as 'false alarms'.
- The researcher's duty of care to participants pertains only to the information that is central to the purpose of the research.

## Reference publications and websites

Applicants should refer to the following publications where applicable to assist with their application:

- [NHMRC, "National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research"](#)
- [Joint NHMRC/Universities Australia "Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research"](#)

Where a researcher would like to use data that has already been collected by a Commonwealth agency, the researcher will need to consult the following publication:

- [NHMRC "Guidelines under Section 95 of the Privacy Act 1988"](#)

Other resources

- [The Australian Privacy Commissioners Website](#)
- [Australian Association for Research in Education \(AARE\), Code of Ethics \(pp1-5\)](#)
- [NHMRC “Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research”](#)
- [Oral History Association of Australia “Guidelines of Ethical Practice”](#)

## Ethical issues checklist research involving humans

Research involving humans should always comply with current ethical standards. In Australia, the ethical standards for such research are set by the National Health and Medical Research Council (the NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and those proposing to carry out research should be familiar with publications of the [NHMRC](#).

The aim of ethical review of human research is to ensure that participants in research are not put at risk of harm, are not disadvantaged and are made aware that they may withdraw without prejudice. Broadly, the process of ethical review concentrates on two main areas:

- A. Gathering informed consent to participate in research projects
- B. Protection of privacy and confidentiality of records

In the following section you are asked to answer a number of questions under each of these two headings in order to identify any ethical considerations that may arise from your proposed research. Following this set of questions there is a further check list relating to types of research that have previously been identified as likely to raise ethical questions. In the second check list each of the types of research is cross referenced to a chapter of the NHMRC guidelines for you to read.

The following checklist is designed to alert you to the major types of ethical issues in your research. If you answer yes to any of these questions, be sure to explain and clarify the issue elsewhere in the document.

### A: Informed consent.

Research subjects must be able to give consent to their participation in research in such a way that ensures that they are fully informed of relevant aspects of the research and that they are confident to give consent for the research to be undertaken.

Researchers should ensure that individuals are not directly or indirectly pressured or coerced into participation through unequal power relationships or payments or inducements. The use of deception in any form in a research protocol has the potential to prevent the subject from giving consent that is truly well-informed.



Does your research involve: (please tick)

Processes that potentially exclude and/or disadvantage a person or group, such as the collection of information which may expose the person/group to discrimination or misrepresentation?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Collection or disclosure of personal information by a Commonwealth, State or Territory agency that might involve a breach of an Information Privacy Principle (as defined by the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Standard)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Collection or disclosure of personal information by a private sector organisation [that might involve a breach of a National Privacy Principle (as defined by the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988)]?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Payments or inducements, other than reasonable recompense, to participants for their participation?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Deception of the participants including concealment and covert observation?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Disclosure of the response outside the research which could place the participants at risk of criminal prosecution or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, professional or personal relationships?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Any form of passive consent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>



## B: Risks to privacy and confidentiality.

The privacy of individuals and the confidentiality of data are both vital. The research must take special care to protect the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and the data obtained from them:

Does your research involve: (please tick)

The participation of minors (under 18 years), other than in the observation of normal school activity?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Participants who are in a dependent situation, such as students or residents of an institution (such as a hospital, nursing home or prison or patients highly dependent on medical care), other than those who are being observed in their normal environment where such observation is considered innocuous?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Participants who may be unable to give or are incapable of giving informed consent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
The participation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, or other peoples from identifiable cultural, ethnic or minority groups?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
A. Acquisition of data about organisations or individuals through any form of database at any stage of the research?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
B. Organisations or individuals who are directly or indirectly identifiable by the researcher within the database?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Use of questionnaires or interviews which may be linked either directly (eg through recording of names) or indirectly (eg through a cross-linked code) to the individual/participant/researcher at any stage of the research, including	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>



the obtaining of data?	
Use of questionnaires, interviews, or procedures, irrespective of the recording of the individual's identity, which might reasonably be expected to cause discomfort, embarrassment, or psychological or spiritual harm to the participants?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>



# Final checklist

As a final check, please respond to the following list of research areas that commonly raise ethical concerns. Research involving any of the categories listed below is subject to compliance with the provisions of the [NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#). If you answer yes, or possibly, please ensure that you have explained and clarified each item elsewhere in the document and that you have both read the relevant chapter of the [National Statement](#) and addressed the specific considerations therein.

## Does this proposal involve?

*Please tick answers to ALL questions*

	Yes	Possibly	No
Minors i.e., under the age of 18 (chapter 4.2)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons with an intellectual or mental impairment (chapter 4.5)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons highly dependent on medical care (chapter 4.4)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons in dependent or unequal relationships (chapter 4.3)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collectivities (such as other specified racial groups)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



(chapter 4.8)?*			
Separate identification of, or focus on, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (chapter 4.7)?*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any perceived, possible or actual conflicts of interest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\*If you answered yes to questions 5 or 6, have you consulted the [Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research?](#)

Yes  No

*This provides good guidance on dealing with cultural groups and their sensitivities.*

Please indicate the National Statement chapters you have consulted.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

For each item to which you have ticked yes or possibly, please state briefly how your research complies with the relevant section of the National Statement.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Investigator Signature: 

[Click here to enter a date.](#)

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