

Research Ethics and Policy

Objective:

The objective of the policy is to support the Foundation's commitments to intellectual freedom and research/study excellence. It is important to understand that the ethical standards are a pre-requisite for excellent research/study. It is also important that the research ethics policy and procedure is holistic and is not disproportionate, over-burdensome and narrowly framed which can be an obstacle to excellent research and create an ethical challenge.

Guidelines:

1. Researchers and Individuals in the Foundation have responsibilities towards:
 - Society at large;
 - Organisations/Agencies/Institutions who fund the research;
 - Organisations/Agencies/Institutions that employ the Foundation to conduct research or study;
 - Colleagues and the wider academic and research community;
 - People who take part in their research;
 - Government and local laws.
2. The policy relates to research - whether funded or unfunded - involving human participants, or involving data relating to directly identifiable human subjects (whether living or recently deceased), conducted by researchers. It does not relate to other ethical judgements.
3. A term researcher for this policy would mean any of the following:
 - Staff of the Foundation (on rolls & on contract)
 - Masters/Ph.D. Students
 - Any agency to which the study/research has been outsourced
 - Any agency/organisation for joint research or in collaboration
4. The procedures instituted in pursuit of this policy are intended:
 - to facilitate, not inhibit, research/study;
 - to promote a culture within the Foundation whereby researchers conscientiously reflect on the ethical implications of their research/study;
 - to apply a principle of subsidiarity whereby responsibility for research ethics will be embraced by researchers, supervisors, departments, programmes or institutes at a level as close as appropriately possible to the actual conduct of the research.

(Subsidiarity is an organizing principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. Political decisions should be taken at a local level if possible, rather than by a central authority.)

5. The policy is implemented, monitored and reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee.

6. The policy is available to potential research funding agencies in the interests of transparency and to avoid possible pre-contractual misunderstandings. This document has been drawn up with regard to ethical guidelines relevant to research within the Foundation.

The researchers are expected to follow the guidelines provided below, wherever applicable:

- The participants (in research/study) must be informed in advance about the objective and the method of study.
- Care must be taken to minimise in all instances harm or burden to those involved in or affected by research.
- Consider the ethical risk of any procedure within a research project which involves human participants or personal data.
- It is mandatory that the **Research Ethics Committee** approves any research/study which is undertaken.
- Researchers must respect the participant's right to withdraw from research at any time without adverse consequences to the participant.
- Free and informed consent must be obtained from all participants in research/study at an appropriate point in the research/study process. Projects in which this cannot be obtained, due to the nature of the research, the participants must be informed. Participants and research staff should be informed of the purpose, methods and intended use of the research.
- Research/study must be designed, reviewed and undertaken in a way that maintains academic independence, integrity and quality.
- Research/study methods and the process of ethical review should be open, independent and transparent.
- Research/study must comply with all current legislative requirements.
- When the research is carried out overseas the Foundation's ethical standards, Standards of Conduct and Research Ethics Policy should be followed. Research must also be in cognisance of local expectations, practices and laws, without compromising Foundation's standards.
- Confidentiality of information given by participants, and the anonymity of subjects, must be respected at all times and documentation protected accordingly.
- Research /study evidence should be retained for review or as defined by the funding agency or legal regulations.
- All research/study data should be effectively protected; however, it may not be possible in most cases to guarantee privacy.
- Research involving individuals under the age of 18, vulnerable groups and those lacking the capacity or opportunity to consent requires specifically considered protection, including appropriate ethical review. Research involving vulnerable groups should only be undertaken when a project cannot be carried out with a non-vulnerable group or where the research has the potential to benefit that vulnerable group.

Process for Ethical Review

- The Research Ethics Committee is constituted with four internal members and one external member. The external member may be selected as per the expertise of the project/study.
- The Research Ethics Committee shall conduct ethical review for all research/study proposals and give approval before the commencement of the research.
- It is the responsibility of the Committee to seek clarifications from the Project Head.
- After the approval is given by the Committee it is the responsibility of the Project Head to train his/her team on the specifics of the approval and the ethical issues of the research and to the participants, wherever applicable.
- At the time of recruitment of any researcher whether on roles or on contract, he/she is trained on the policy this by the Programme Head.
- The Research Ethics Committee may periodically conduct a selective audit of current research projects.
- Where significant concerns have been raised about the ethical conduct of a study, the Research Ethics Committee can request a full and detailed account of the research for a further ethical review.
- Where the Research Ethics Committee considers that a study is being conducted in a way which is not in accordance with the conditions of its original approval it may consider withdrawal of its approval and require that the research be suspended or discontinued. It is the duty of the Research Ethics Committee to inform the appropriate funding body that ethical approval has been revoked.