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| Social research ethics protocol checklist [To be used as a peer reviewed or self-check process] |

**Why a checklist for social research ethics**

It is advisable for researchers to routinely check their projects to ensure they are meeting ethical requirements. Checklists both act as an ***aide****-****mémoire* to good research practice and** are frequently required procedure prior to seeking approval from ethics committees. Such protocols are likely to be increasingly employed as standard datasets to ensure compliance with research governance requirements. The following checklist and information form is intended to support ethical considerations throughout a project. Such a checklist prompts the making of clear statements of intent, mechanisms of approach and consideration of hazard arising from research in a manner which can be understood by the public and research professionals alike. While some of the items appear to be beyond the scope of ethics alone, any matter that may affect the success of research is of indirect ethical interest if it may expose respondents or researchers to exploitation or risk.

This form has been designed as a starting guide for researchers who are working independently and so do not have access to an institutional committee-based ethics process. The research ethics checklist has been designed to be particularly relevant for those undertaking participatory, community-based and action research approaches. A similar form, but tailored more specifically to evaluation, can be downloaded from <https://learningforsustainability.net/ethics/> .

**How to use this form**

It can be used as a self-check by researchers, or research teams, of their own projects. If you are looking for something more rigorous, it can serve as the basis for a peer-review of your project with one or more external social researchers named as peer reviewers. It is suggested strongly that the review be undertaken in a collegial manner with you (or your team) as project applicant working through the questions with the peer reviewers – either face to face or using Zoom or another on-line meeting tool.

Ideally, peer reviewers looking at your project will require:

1. A completed social research ethics protocol checklist (this form)
2. Copies of completed information and consent forms or scripts (if applicable)
3. A copy of your full research proposal

Finally, it is a good idea to also complete **a health and safety register** to show you have thought about these aspects of the research activities included in this application. Health and safety issues need to cover any risks for both participants and researchers. This form is free to use, and no attribution is required. However, any comments or suggested improvements would be welcomed, and incorporated into future versions. And it would be great to hear about some of the situations that you do use it in.

All the best with your ongoing projects

Will Allen – willallennz@gmail.com

Please type in the white boxes below each question. Prompts are provided to help with most questions. All boxes are to be completed. Those that don’t apply to your project should be completed with N/A.

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| 1. Project name: |
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| 1. Applicant name(s): |
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| 1. Date by which a decision on this application is required in order that the project can proceed as planned, if approval is required: |
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| 1. Expected date of completion: |
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| 1. Identity, skills and experience of field researchers:   [Provides an indication of whether the team has the appropriate social research knowledge and experience to undertake the project, or if not, how they will be supported by people with appropriate skills.] |
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| 1. Purpose of study:   [Aims and objectives might indicate hypothesis testing, policy evaluation, and any potential “value” added to the subject group and/or society in general.] |
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| 1. Does the project require ethical/cultural approval by other bodies? If yes please name the other bodies, and confirm that you have appropriate permissions:   [This question asks the proposal writers to identify the relationships that are appropriate. In the first instance researchers should ascertain that there is no established ethics approval process operating within the organizational/institutional environment they are operating in, and that they are required to use. Particular attention needs to be paid to ensure that consideration has been given to the appropriate involvement of indigenous people and other (occasionally left out) groups. It is important to note that, increasingly, these groups may have their own ethics protocols that need to be complied with.] |
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| 1. Will the project require the researchers to be aware of, and use, cultural safety practices? If yes, outline how this will be managed:   [Applicants may wish to think beyond national cultures and identities, to also consider how they would engage with other distinct social and professional cultures.] |
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| 1. Sources of funding:   [The organization, individual or group providing the finance for the study.] |
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| 1. Investigators and their organisation’s financial interests, if any, in the outcome of the project: |
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| 1. Scientific rationale:   [Some rationale for conducting the study should be offered. If this investigation has been done previously, why repeat it?] |
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| 1. Design of study – including methodology and methods:   [Describe briefly what will be done and how the subjects are to be expected to participate. What will be required of them? All procedural matters should be clarified. Depending on the methodology, steps may be detailed in advance, or set out through a process-led framework. Time commitments and data-collection settings should be revealed. Data analysis methods and procedures should also be clarified. If this study is part of a wider body of work, explain how it links with the wider inquiry including any implications required for ethics consideration. ] |
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| 1. Types of person(s) taking part as participants:   [Who will take part? Why and how will the subject/respondent group be chosen? What sampling techniques will be deployed? Outline selection method, including the approach to stakeholder analysis where appropriate.] |
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| 1. Recruitment procedures:   [Is there any sense in which subjects might be “obliged” to participate – or are volunteers being recruited? If participation is compulsory, the potential consequences of non-compliance must be indicated to subjects; if voluntary, entitlement to withdraw consent must be indicated and when that entitlement lapses.] |
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| 1. How much time will participants have to give to the project?   [Need to ensure that this is considerate of stakeholders input and realistic.] |
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| 1. Potential benefits and hazards – for participants:   [What risks to the subject are entailed in involvement in the research? Are there any potential physical, psychological or disclosure dangers that can be anticipated? What is the possible benefit or harm to the subject or society from their participation or from the project as a whole? What procedures have been established for the care and protection of subjects (e.g. insurance, medical cover) and the control of any information gained from them or about them? Are the target group or community in any danger of being over-researched?] |
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| 1. Potential benefits and hazards – for researchers:   [What risks to the researcher are entailed in involvement in the research? Are there any potential physical, psychological or disclosure dangers that can be anticipated? What procedures have been established for the safety and protection of researchers?] |
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| 1. Is any deception involved in the study?   [This will not be applicable to many studies. It covers things such as the use of placebos in medical research] |
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| 1. Confidentiality and anonymity:   [Identify how and why decisions about the degree of confidentiality and anonymity to be provided to participants in the project were reached. If the project is promising confidentiality and anonymity detail the steps taken to safeguard the confidentiality of records and any potential identifying information about the subject.] |
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| 1. IP Protection – for participants and researchers:   [Consideration must be given to ownership of the information, and this should be documented. Care must be taken to identify where local and traditional knowledge are being provided, and how their owners’ rights are protected. Also document how the researchers concerned will be using the information, and what the researchers - or wider research team in the case of more inclusive initiatives - will own from the process.] |
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| 1. Informed consent:   [Consent may be provided in a number of forms depending on the research context. These can include written, oral, and proxy. Justification must be provided on what form is appropriate and why. Where written information is being provided and written consent is required, consent forms must be provided. Where oral consent is asked the basic script should be provided.] |
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| 1. How and where will consent forms (if used) be stored? |
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| 1. Data protection and storage:   [The project should comply with the requirements of current data protection legislation and how this is accomplished should be disclosed to participating subjects and those monitoring the research procedure. This should include how and where the consent forms and data will be stored pre- and post-project completion; proposed data storage arrangements, degree of security etc. and whether material facts have been withheld (and when, or if, such facts will be disclosed).] |
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| 1. Dissemination of findings:   [What is the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication and dissemination of findings etc? In areas where information is jointly owned by participants as co-researchers attention should be paid to how they want to use the data.] |
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| 1. Are there any plans for future use of the data beyond those already described?   [This should detail whether the data can be stored and used again in the future. Care needs to be taken that any data used in the future can appropriately be understood “in context”. Consideration also needs to be given to participants, and how to articulate this in the consent process.] |
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| 1. Have you considered how to ensure that ethics considerations are reviewed as the project proceeds?   [This is particularly relevant for projects that go on over a longer time period.] |
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| 1. Is there any other information, which you think would be relevant to the reviewers’, or your own, consideration of the ethical issues raised in this documentation? |
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NOTE and DISCLAIMER: This form is provided as a starting guide only for researchers that find themselves having to operate without the benefits of established ethical processes that are commonly found within larger organisations and institutions. It has been designed to cover common social research ethics questions but is provided here on the basis that it may not cover all ethical eventualities. Those undertaking the research that is the subject of this form need to undertake their own further assessment of ethical considerations for their particular project and add other issues as appropriate. Similarly, peer reviewers, if used, may also suggest additional considerations.

DECLARATION

The information supplied above is to the best of my knowledge and belief accurate.

Signature of Applicant(s):

Date:

PEER ASSESSMENT (If applicable - Social research peer reviewers to complete)

We *………(Names of peer reviewer*s)……………… have reviewed the above project in discussion with *………(Name of proposer)………………* and in our view:

□ Approval is given for the project to proceed as documented

□ The proposal requires further consideration of ethics issues

Signature(s):

Date:

[Note: This review has been jointly conducted by those named above, with the reviewer asking questions and prompting the researchers to reflect upon, clarify and expand upon the responses in an earlier draft of this application. The researchers remain responsible for ensuring that appropriate procedures are followed.]

Other considerations:

1. If you wish to use this peer review formally then some thought will have to be given to ensure the credentials and independence of your reviewers. Other people will at the least need some way of verifying the reviewers – perhaps through their website pages. If it is to be used formally, as well as being a supportive peer review process, then the reviewers also need to be comfortable with being contacted about their review.