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## Aboriginal research and study protocols

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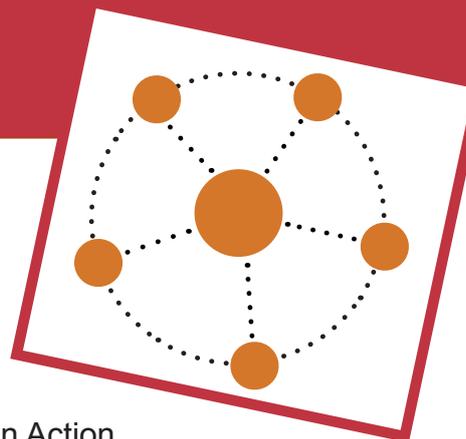
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# ABORIGINAL RESEARCH AND STUDY PROTOCOLS

The *Aboriginal Research and Study Protocols* have been developed as a guide for ECU staff and students undertaking research, projects or fieldwork that involve Indigenous Australian issues, people or knowledge or that impact on Indigenous people or communities.



These protocols fulfil a strategic priority of ECU's Reconciliation Action Plan: *Develop clear and agreed protocols around Indigenous Australian research to ensure that research activity is informed by thorough cultural awareness and respect.*

They also reflect the requirements of key documents that must be addressed by applicants as required by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. If the proposed project relates to health, it will also require submission to the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC).

The protocols have been developed under the auspices of Kurongkurl Katitjin, ECU's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research and are based on two key elements, namely ethics and consultation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ECU acknowledges and respects the continuing association with Nyoongar people, the traditional custodians of the land, upon which its campuses stand and programs operate.

This acknowledgment and respect extends to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in which ECU staff and students will study and work.

ECU is and remains committed to working collaboratively and in partnership with the Indigenous Australian Community in a spirit of cooperation and reconciliation.

This commitment extends to Indigenous students and staff of the University, the broader Indigenous community and to raising awareness of Indigenous cultures and issues amongst the general community.

# ETHICS

The first essential is to ensure that the proposed research is ethical. It is also important to think about ensuring that ethical values inform staff and students when conducting a project that may not be considered research.

To facilitate, there are a number of key documents that staff and students should read and be prepared to address as required by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). If the proposed project relates to health, then it will also require submission to the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC).

## Key Documents

### 1. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2007)

The *National Statement* is the authoritative statement on research involving humans. It provides guidance on the responsibilities of institutions and researchers for the ethical design, conduct and dissemination of results of human research; and review bodies in the ethical review of research.

The statement is based on the core values and principles of respect, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence.

### 2. Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (NHMRC, 2003)

The *Values and Ethics* document is the authoritative statement on health research involving Indigenous Australian Peoples.

These guidelines provide guidance to researchers in the conception, design, and conduct of research, as well as to HRECs, including Aboriginal specific HRECs or sub-committees. The six values that lie at the heart of these guidelines are:

#### **Reciprocity**

In the research context, reciprocity implies inclusion and means recognising partners' contributions, and ensuring that research outcomes include equitable benefits of value to Indigenous Australian communities or individuals. Reciprocity requires the researcher to demonstrate a return (or benefit) to the community that is valued by the community and which contributes to cohesion and survival.

#### **Respect**

Respectful relationships require that agreements are made at the outset of any research project which make clear when, how and who will engage in the research process. Researchers should inform themselves about local structures and seek to engage with these in a spirit of respect and integrity. It is critical that respect underlies all aspects of the research process, especially sensitive negotiations such as those related to the publication of research findings.

#### **Equality**

Research should seek to advance the elimination of inequalities. Equality is also a feature of the fundamental dignity of humanity. To treat people less favourably is not only unethical, but discriminatory.



## **Responsibility**

When engaging Indigenous Australian peoples in the research enterprise, researchers carry responsibilities in addition to the science of their inquiry. Ethical research occurs when harmony between sets of responsibilities is established, participants are protected, trust is maintained and accountability is clear.

## **Survival and Protection**

Researchers will need to make particular effort to deal with the perception of research held by many Indigenous Australian communities as an exploitative exercise. Researchers will need to demonstrate through ethical negotiation, the conduct of research and dissemination of research findings that they are trustworthy and will not repeat the mistakes of the past.

## **Spirit and Integrity**

Researchers are perceived as owing an obligation to the spirit and integrity of communities not just to individuals. It is clear that Indigenous Australian communities will look to see if what is proposed is consistent with their values. However, the responsibility to demonstrate consistency falls to those proposing and conducting the research.

The guidelines articulate the meaning, the implications of each value for research, and how researchers and research proposals might demonstrate engagement and consistency with each value.

### **3. Keeping Research on Track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics (NHMRC, 2005)**

*Keeping Research on Track* is a practical guide that aims to provide information relevant to Indigenous Australian peoples to ensure research undertaken is respectful, relevant and contributes to the development of long term ethical relationships with researchers.

This document is also useful for researchers who need guidance in working and researching with Indigenous Australian communities.

### **4. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (NHMRC, 2007)**

The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* is a guide for institutions and researchers in responsible research practices.

### **5. Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS, 2011)**

The *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* comprise 14 principles grouped under the broad categories of rights, respect and recognition; negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding; participation, collaboration and partnership; benefits, outcomes and giving back; managing research: use, storage and access; and reporting and compliance.

These guidelines are useful for those research projects that lie outside of health.

## **ECU Ethics Approval**

ECU has specific instructions for staff or students applying for ethical approval. These can be found at [www.ecu.edu.au/GPPS/ethics](http://www.ecu.edu.au/GPPS/ethics).

## CONSULTATION

The second essential is that prior to conducting research or project work, staff and students must ensure that they have consulted with key agencies and/or people within the scope of the proposed project.

The purpose of this approach is to ensure that Indigenous Australian peoples and communities are consulted on the purpose of the project, approach, the ownership of the outcomes and intended use of the findings.

### Strategy

The project should consider including a consultation strategy, which aims to ensure that all appropriate and relevant community organisations are consulted about the project and given an opportunity to provide comment.

The first consultation should seek people's views about the proposed project, the nature of, and the suggested approach to be used. This includes outlining the type of questions and protocols to be used and seeking from the community what other issues they may want included in the methods.

In the initial consultation stage, it is also necessary to raise the issue of who will have ownership of and access to the results. Researchers should be quite open regarding design until they have participated in an initial consultation.

An integral aspect of the consultation process is the relevance of the project to Indigenous Australian people and communities. Staff and students need to consider how the project and outcomes will incorporate and work with the priorities and needs of communities.

### Mutual understanding and benefit

Consultation should achieve a mutual understanding of what each party regards as the purpose of the project and expects from the process, as well as the way in which the project will be conducted. It should also establish how the outcomes will be disseminated to the community and participants.

This process includes identifying what benefits or returns the community wants from the process and whether these can or will be met by the outcomes.

Staff and students need to consider how they will ensure that a return or benefit valued by the community is provided.

## NEXT STEPS

To assist staff and students in their endeavour, ECU's Office of Research and Innovation and Kurongkurl Katitjin are able to advise and comment on proposed research topics, proposal drafts, who should be consulted and possible next steps.

### Contact

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