

Research Ethics

All projects funded by the *Creating Safer Space* network must consider the ethical implications of the research, and secure appropriate ethical approval.

1. Please send us your organisation’s Research Ethics Policy, so that we can check that your organisation has appropriate processes in place for ethical review.
2. Please complete ethics review in accordance with your organisation’s policies and processes. We understand that the Research Ethics Panel may raise questions that you had not considered at the stage of writing your application. If your Research Ethics Panel asks you to make significant changes to your project plans, please contact us to discuss these changes.
3. Please send us evidence to confirm the project has received ethical approval. For example, this could be a confirmation email from the Research Ethics Panel, a signed Research Approval Form, or an email from your organisations’ Research Office or your Director of Research.

If your own organisation does not have processes for ethical approval, the project must undergo ethical review at another appropriate institution instead – this should be the institution that you identified in your application.

We understand that ethical review and approval can take a long time. Please begin this process as soon as the project has been awarded funding. Please contact us if you are concerned that ethical approval cannot be secured before the project start date, so that we can discuss if this has any implications for the project. Research involving human participants cannot begin until ethical approval has been secured.

Every project will face unique ethical challenges, so please think carefully about ethics in the context of your own research. Please consider the below guidance on research ethics, and if you are new to research, please speak with experienced academic colleagues for advice on how to address ethical challenge in the context of your own research.

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Research Ethics Guidance

This guidance is designed to help you to reflect on ethical issues that may arise from your research.

Research must be justified

- What is your justification for the research? Is the research necessary?
- What are the benefits for the participants of the study?
- Are there any potential risks to the participants?

The potential benefits for participants should be measured against any potential risks they face when designing your research study.

Informed consent

You should always ensure that you obtain informed consent from all participants.

- How will you ensure that you obtain informed consent from participants?
 - Will you obtain written consent (preferred practice), or are there situations where you feel you will need to use other methods such as oral/verbal consent?
- What processes do you have in place to obtain informed consent?
- How will you ensure that participants are fully informed about your research study and what format will you deliver this information in?
- How will you ensure that participants have understood the research objectives and procedures?
- What are your recruitment procedures?
 - For example, are you recruiting participants at physical meetings or online? Are you using a snowball sampling method? Are you targeting specific participant groups (e.g., women, Human Rights Defenders, specific types of communities)? Are you recruiting participants through a gatekeeper? Are you working with an NGO/CSO?
- Are there any incentives for the participants?
 - Is there any direct benefit the participant will gain from participating in the research? For example, a study in exercise science may provide participants with an insight into their fitness level and health.
 - Are they being paid? It is important for participants to be aware if there are any incentives; if there are not, then you should explicitly inform them of this to manage their expectations.

Participants

- What type of participants are you recruiting for the study?
- How are participants selected?
- What is your participant inclusion/exclusion criteria?
- Are you including any minors or participants who are potentially vulnerable?
 - If so, you should be aware that there are people who do not have the capacity to provide informed consent. The laws and policies on this differ between countries, so you should always ensure that you are aware of the regulations around this in the country where you are undertaking your research.
 - If your research involves minors (those under 18), vulnerable people, the elderly or people with certain medical conditions, it may be that they cannot provide informed consent themselves. You should examine whether an additional layer of consent is required, for example, parental/guardian, carer, or gatekeeper consent. Remember that the participants themselves still also need to provide informed consent.
 - If a participant is unable to provide informed consent and they have no person available to assist with the consent procedure, they should not participate in the research. You should make a judgement in these instances on the balance of the benefit of the participant participating against the risk of them participating.
- What processes do you have in place to assess participants who may be particularly vulnerable? For example, if you are working with a gatekeeper like an NGO or a CSO, are they qualified to make a judgement/assessment over whether the participant is able to give informed consent?
- Will your research potentially cause participants any upset or distress? For example, is the research of sensitive nature? Are you asking participants any questions which may upset them or cause them some distress?
 - If so, you should ensure that participants are fully aware of this before they provide consent and begin to participate in the study.
- Do you have any protection or support procedures in place for vulnerable participants or those who become upset or distressed?
 - You should inform participants about how you intend to manage the risk of distress. For example, if questions are of a sensitive nature and you may cause the participants some upset, you should advise them that they can stop at any time and you should also have some support procedures in place to support them during and after the study, if they are negatively affected (e.g., refer them to a recognised NGO that provides mental health support).
- Will you inform your participants about the results of the research?
 - For example, you can inform participants when you think the study is due to finish and provide them with the results of the research.

- What measures do you have in place to ensure that there is no burden on participants to be part of your study?
 - For example, have you considered what the best times for your participants are, so that your research does not clash with other essential commitments or activities (e.g., work, religious holidays, other scheduled community activities)?

Withdrawal

- How will you make it clear to participants that they are free to refuse to take part or can withdraw from the research at any time?
- What is the withdrawal process participants will be asked to follow if they wish to withdraw?
 - This is especially important after the research has already taken place and before any data is being published and can include the question of how participants can contact the researchers (via phone, email etc.) and how the removal of pseudonymised data will be managed.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

- Are your participants anonymous as part of your study? If so, what procedures do you have in place to ensure their anonymity (e.g. data anonymisation or pseudoanonymisation)?
- What steps do you have in place to respect confidentiality and ensure privacy?
- Are any of your participant groups particularly vulnerable, if certain information about them was disseminated? Does any of them need an increased level of confidentiality?

Always ensure that you can deliver on any promises made to participants in respect of anonymity and confidentiality.

Anonymisation is the process of removing personal identifiers, both direct and indirect, that may lead to an individual being identified. Direct identifiers include name and address. Indirect identifiers include information that, when linked with other publicly available information sources, could identify someone (e.g. information on workplace, occupation, age).

Pseudonymisation involves replacing names or other identifiers which are easily attributed to individuals with, for example, a reference number. Whilst you can tie that reference number back to the individual if you have access to the relevant information, you put technical and organisational measures in place to ensure that this additional information is held separately.

Whether anonymizing or pseudonymising data, it is important to consider the possibility of inadvertent disclosure or whether a 'motivated intruder' could link information to identify an individual. Please see the [UK Data Service](#) and the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information.

Community engagement

- How do you ensure that your research respects local communities, values, culture, traditions and social practices?
- Reporting back to communities/participants on the results of your research is a really useful community engagement practice. How will you report your results back to communities?

Accountability and Responsibility

- How can you ensure that your project is accountable and accepts responsibility for any actions taken?

How to write a Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

It is best practice to issue potential participants with a “Participant Information Sheet” (PIS) before obtaining consent. This information sheet will contain all the information that a potential participant should be aware of before making the decision to consent. It should give them the understanding for the motivation of the study and answer any questions they may have which allows them to give informed consent.

The PIS should be a clear and simple document set out in lay terms. It should be on headed/crest paper, if relevant.

You should ensure that you give participants enough time to read and digest the information in the PIS before obtaining consent. You can also read it out to participants (e.g., in case of limited literacy). Once you are satisfied that participants have read/heard and understood everything in the PIS and wish to participate in the study, you can collect consent.

This is not an exhaustive list, but the PIS could include information under these example headings:

- **Study Title**

Include the title of the research project.

- **Purpose of the study/brief summary – outlining the aims of the study**

A brief introduction; for example: Before you decide to take part in this study it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. A member of the team can be contacted if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

- **Purpose of the study**

Include information about the background of the study, the aims of the study and any future plans for the study/results. When will the study be completed?

- **Why have I been selected?**

Explain why the potential participant has been approached. For example, if you are researching the role of women in community self-protection, you can explicitly state that the participant has been approached because they are female and have experience with community self-protection.

- **Do I have to take part?**

Explain that it is entirely voluntary whether they choose to participate in the study. Make clear that there are no negative consequences, if they refuse to participate or withdraw.

- **What will happen to me if I take part?**

Clearly outline here what is expected of the participant. What do they need to do? Are you conducting interviews? A survey? Do they complete an assessment? How much time will this take? Participants need to be aware of exactly what is expected of them and what their responsibilities are.

- **Are there any risks/disadvantages of participating?**

Describe if there are any risks of taking part in the study? For example, are any of the questions upsetting? If there are any risks, you can explain how you will mitigate/manage them. You should also use this section to advise if there are any people who you advise to not participate.

- **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

If there are any benefits to participating, this can be outlined here. However, if there are no benefits to taking part in the study then this should be explicitly stated here.

- **How is my data used?**

What steps will you take to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant (if applicable)? How will information be recorded, stored and protected? Will the data be used for further research?

- **What will happen to the results of the research?**

When are the results likely to be published? Can participants obtain a copy of the results? Will participants receive any information about their participation?

- **Ethics Review**

Provide information of the ethical review process the study has been through. Confirm who has approved this study.

- **Withdrawal Process**

Inform the participant on the withdrawal process. All participants have a right to withdraw, and you must inform them that they can withdraw during or after the study. You should confirm how the participant can withdraw if they choose to, and also confirm what happens to their data if they choose to withdraw. For example, if the study was anonymous, you will not be able to remove their data once submitted.

- **Contact Information**

Provide information about the lead contact for the project who participants can contact if they have any further questions.

Consent

Written consent:

It is good practice to ask participants to sign a consent form.

A consent form should be no longer than one page and should be on headed/crest paper, where appropriate.

The Consent Form covers the main points of the Participant Information Sheet phrased as statements with which potential participants can agree or disagree. It is advised that the form is set out as statements with a tick box next to each statement giving the participant the option of ticking yes/no in response to the statement.

Some example statements include:

- *I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet.*

- *I have had the opportunity to ask further questions about the study.*
- *I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified.*
- *I agree that data gathered in this study may be stored anonymously and securely, and may be used for future research.*
- *I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.*
- *I agree to take part in this study.*

The participant should sign at the bottom of the form, confirming their response to the above statements. They should sign and print their name and date the information.

Oral/verbal consent:

In some situations, it may not be possible to obtain written consent (e.g. literacy issues, political issues, or if the interview will be conducted online). In these cases, participants' consent should be obtained orally.

This document prepared by Oxford University provides some useful information on this process: <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/templateoralconsentdocx>