**REB Guidelines for Community-Based Research**

# An ethical basis for community-based research

At its core, community-based research is intended to build reciprocal, trusting relationships that result in relevant research driven by the needs and desires of communities. This includes supporting intentional research design and practice based in discussion with and inclusion of community members while planning and implementing research in the community. Central to community-based research is consent that is freely given prior to commencing research, consent that is informed, and consent that is ongoing throughout the research lifecycle.

[Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2014)](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/) provides guidelines for conducting ethical community-based research. In this chapter, a community is defined as “a collectivity with shared identity or interests, that has the capacity to act or express itself as a collective…[A] community may include members from multiple cultural groups” (TCPS, Chapter 9, Section2).

While Chapter 9 is designed for and described in relation to research with Indigenous communities in Canada, it outlines best practices for all research that may have implications for communities locally and internationally. The REB therefore encourages researchers to consult Chapter 9 when their research may have implications for the communities to which participants belong. Moreover, research involving Indigenous communities or focused on Indigenous peoples, whether in Canada or internationally, must adhere to the principles and practices described in Chapter 9.

# What kind of community engagement is required?

Community-based research involves researchers developing their research project with communities. This can take the form of consultation, where representatives of communities are invited to comment and provide feedback on projects; to collaboration, where project goals and outcomes are designed with research communities; to communities having full control over all aspects of the research. The extent of community engagement recommended depends on the nature of the research and the researcher’s relationship with the community. TCPS2 Article 9.2 describes various scenarios with corresponding levels of engagement recommended as a key reference.

# How to demonstrate community engagement

TPCS2 Article 9.10 requires researchers to demonstrate the steps they have taken to engage with their research communities. Ideally, such demonstration includes documents from the community acknowledging the project and establishing research terms, such as a Memorandum of Understanding, Protocol Agreement or Research Permit. Many community organizations, particularly First Nation governments, have processes for establishing these formal relationships. Other organizations may simply provide a letter of support for the research project.

Engagement with the community should take place *before* researchers submit their REB applications, as this enables the community to contribute to the research design and allows a research relationship to be developed before research commences. There should be no assumption on the part of researchers that a community will automatically approve of any research projects that are brought to them. Demonstration of engagement with the community (as part of the preparatory phase/planning) should be addressed in VIU’s REB application.

# Community vs. individual

Article 1.1 of the TPCS identifies the primary ethical concern of respect for persons as the moral obligation to respect the autonomy of people; that is, the right and ability of individuals to decide for themselves whether or not to participate in research. However, research with a community requires the researcher to balance the collective interests of the group with the autonomy of individuals. With community-based research, the researcher is to consider whether the participation of individuals would have an impact on the larger community, and consider the goals of the community and the risk of harm to the community alongside individual autonomy.

Additionally, it is incumbent upon the researcher to be aware of the multiple sites of authority in any community. For example, Indigenous communities may have several levels of authority including elected officials at the Band Council, hereditary leaders, Elders and special knowledge holders, multi-Nation tribal councils etc. Which group(s) are engaged and the extent of the engagement depends on the nature and context of the research, and particularly the risks involved.

# What NOT to do

Historically and today, researchers have a reputation of pursuing their own research agendas with little consideration for the impacts or implications of their research on the people they study. Lack of respect for the well-being of participant communities is reflected in parachute research, where a researcher drops into a community with little background knowledge or sensitivity, primarily for the purpose of advancing their own agenda while producing little benefit for participants. These projects are typically short-term and result in only temporary relationships between a researcher and community members.

# What to do instead

## 1. Prioritize benefits for the community

The First Nations Information Governance Centre provides a document describing OCAP principles: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. Community-based research involves working with community representatives and members to develop the research plan that benefits the community, and defines such things as who will be involved, who will control funding, protocol for research with human participants, what products will be produced, who will have access to products, intellectual property rights, and protocol for information sharing. Ultimately, research should be both relevant and responsible to the community, include elements of reciprocity, and be founded on a relationship of respect.

Benefits of research should be considered in relation to the core TCPS principal of *Concern for Welfare*. In the context of Indigenous research, projects may be designed to enhance community capacity to maintain their cultures, languages, and identities, rather than produce knowledge that is generalizable across cultural contexts. At a minimum, final reports should be made available to communities, and communities should be properly acknowledged for their contributions.

## 2. Prioritize community perspectives

In community-based research, the researcher is not necessarily “the expert” but rather is one party amongst many who are invested in the project. Perspectives from community members should be prioritized and privileged as the views of those most closely associated with and affected by the research. Where there are inconsistencies between conventional research practice and those espoused by the community, these should be identified during the planning process and addressed in advance of research commencing. Ethical standards of the community will take priority; however, approval through the REB is always also required.

## 3. Foresee risks for the community

Research may involve risk of harm to a community. In some situations, researchers are required to engage with a community’s or an institution’s governance structures, and sometimes gain the consent of the community or an institution involved. This is particularly the case where research is intended to articulate the views or position of a community or institution concerning particular issues. For example, if the purpose of the research is to ascertain and articulate the position of a First Nations community on, say, land development, the researcher would be required to engage with the governance structure of the First Nation, and, depending on the risks involved, would in some cases need to gain the consent of First Nation.

Risk is always assessed in the particular context of the research. For communities that have historically been marginalized or not actively engaged in research but intensively researched, such as Indigenous communities worldwide, risks need to be assess in relation to their historical, social, cultural, and political contexts. For example, research on education with First Nation communities may trigger past traumas relating to abuse at residential schools. To provide another example, research on the preferences of a community, if inaccurate or misrepresentative, may in fact be harmful to a community.

The core TCPS principal of Justice requires that research be designed in ways that take historical and present-day inequality, disparity of social power, and cultural difference into account. This requires researchers to be aware of their own social, political, cultural, and economic locations and positions of privilege and consider how these may influence the research. Efforts should be made to ensure participants have agency in the research process and products. For example, participants of community-based research should be given the opportunity to review and approve collected data, which is essential to validate findings, correct any inaccuracies or misunderstandings, respect the knowledge shared, and manage risk. This is not to suggest any community is inherently vulnerable, but rather to be aware of the complicated context in which research participants and communities reside. For these reasons the researcher needs to be aware of the risks involved, and communicate these risks to both the community and the REB. Risks relevant to a community level should be addressed in VIU REB application.

## Research outside of Canada

The TCPS applies to all researchers working under the aegis of VIU, even when working outside Canada. Exceptions to this standard arise only when they inconsistent with the cultural contexts in which research is taking place. Any such exception should be negotiated with the community, and explained clearly to the REB in the application submission.

# Resources

Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans

<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>

Assembly of First Nations Guide on Research and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge

[www.afn.ca/uploads/files/fn\_ethics\_guide\_on\_research\_and\_atk.pdf](http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/fn_ethics_guide_on_research_and_atk.pdf)

OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession

<http://fnigc.ca/ocap.html>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports

<http://nctr.ca/reports.php>

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

[www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)