

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

*Ethical Guidelines for Research (1993) **

Purpose

These guidelines have been developed to help ensure that, in all research sponsored by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, appropriate respect is given to the cultures, languages, knowledge and values of Aboriginal peoples, and to the standards used by Aboriginal peoples to legitimate knowledge.

These guidelines represent the standard of “best practice” adopted by the Commission.

Principles

Aboriginal peoples have distinctive perspectives and understandings, deriving from their cultures and histories and embodied in Aboriginal languages. Research that has Aboriginal experience as its subject matter must reflect these perspectives and understandings.

In the past, research concerning Aboriginal peoples has usually been initiated outside the Aboriginal community and carried out by non-Aboriginal personnel. Aboriginal people have had almost no opportunity to correct misinformation or to challenge ethnocentric and racist interpretations. Consequently, the existing body of research, which normally provides a reference point for new research, must be open to reassessment.

Knowledge that is transmitted orally in the cultures of Aboriginal peoples must be acknowledged as a valuable research resource along with documentary and other sources. The means of validating knowledge in the particular traditions under study should normally be applied to establish authenticity of orally transmitted knowledge.

* Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. *Integrated Research Plan: Ethical Guidelines for Research*, pp. 37-40 (Appendix B). Ottawa: The Commission, 1993. Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2002, and Courtesy of the Privy Council Office. **Copyright Notice:** This publication may be reproduced for internal use (one copy) only without permission provided the source is fully acknowledged. However, multiple copy reproduction of this publication in whole or in part for purposes of resale or redistribution requires prior written consent from the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Crown copyright and Licensing Office, 350 Albert Street, 4th floor, Ottawa, Canada K1A 1M4 or copyright.droitdauteur@communication.gc.ca

In research portraying community life, the multiplicity of viewpoints present within Aboriginal communities should be represented fairly, including viewpoints specific to age and gender groups.

Researchers have an obligation to understand and observe the protocol concerning communications within any Aboriginal community.

Researchers have an obligation to observe ethical and professional practices relevant to their respective disciplines.

The Commission and its researchers undertake to accord fair treatment to all persons participating in Commission research.

Guidelines

Aboriginal Knowledge

In all research sponsored by the Commission, researchers shall conscientiously address themselves to the following questions:

- Are there perspectives on the subject of inquiry that are distinctively Aboriginal?
- What Aboriginal sources are appropriate to shed light on those perspectives?
- Is proficiency in an Aboriginal language required to explore these perspectives and sources?
- Are there particular protocols or approaches required to access the relevant knowledge?
- Does Aboriginal knowledge challenge in any way assumptions brought to the subject from previous research?
- How will Aboriginal knowledge or perspectives portrayed in research products be validated?

Consent

Informed consent shall be obtained from all persons and groups participating in research. Such consent may be given by individuals whose personal experience is being portrayed, by groups in assembly, or by authorized representatives of communities or organizations.

Consent should ordinarily be obtained in writing. Where this is not practical, the procedures used in obtaining consent should be recorded.

Individuals or groups participating in research shall be provided with information about the purpose and nature of the research activities, including expected benefits and risks.

No pressure shall be applied to induce participation in research.

Participants should be informed that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Participants should be informed of the degree of confidentiality that will be maintained in the study.

Informed consent of parents or guardian and, where practical, of children should be obtained in research involving children.

Collaborative Research

In studies located principally in Aboriginal communities, researchers shall establish collaborative procedures to enable community representatives to participate in the planning, execution and evaluation of research results.

In studies that are carried out in the general community and that are likely to affect particular Aboriginal communities, consultation on planning, execution and evaluation of results shall be sought through appropriate Aboriginal bodies.

In community-based studies, researchers shall ensure that a representative cross-section of community experiences and perceptions is included.

The convening of advisory groups to provide guidance on the conduct of research shall not pre-empt the procedures laid down in this part but shall supplement them.

Review Procedures

Review of research results shall be solicited both in the Aboriginal community and in the scholarly community prior to publication.

Access to Research Results

The Commission shall maintain a policy of open public access to final reports of research activities. Reports may be circulated in draft form, where scholarly and Aboriginal community response at this stage is deemed useful for Commission purposes.

Research reports or parts thereof shall not be published where there are reasonable grounds for thinking that publication will violate the privacy of individuals or cause significant harm to participating Aboriginal communities or organizations.

Results of community research shall be distributed as widely as possible within participating communities, and reasonable efforts shall be made to present results in non-technical language and Aboriginal languages where appropriate.

Community Benefit

In setting research priorities and objectives for community-based research, the Commission and the researchers it engages shall give serious and due consideration to the benefit of the community concerned.

In assessing community benefit, regard shall be given to the widest possible range of community interests, whether the groups in question be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, and also to the impact of research at the local, regional or national level. Wherever possible, conflicts between interests within the community should be identified and resolved in advance of commencing the project. Researchers should be equipped to draw on a range of problem-solving strategies to resolve such conflicts as may arise in the course of research.

Whenever possible research should support the transfer of skills to individuals and increase the capacity of the community to manage its own research.

Implementation

These guidelines shall be included in all research contracts with individuals, groups, agencies, organizations and communities conducting research sponsored by the Commission.

It shall be the responsibility, in the first instance, of all researchers to observe these guidelines conscientiously. It shall be the responsibility, in ascending order, of research managers, the Co-Directors of Research, and the Commission itself to monitor the implementation of the guidelines and to make decisions regarding their interpretation and application.

Where, in the opinion of the researcher or the research manager, the nature of the research or local circumstances make these guidelines or any part of them inapplicable, such exception shall be reported to the Commission through the Co-Directors of Research, and the exception shall be noted in the research contract or contract amendments as well as in any publication resulting from the research.