# CIK 8 Approval of Research Policy

## BACKGROUND

Uniting Communities seeks to improve the lives of people in the communities we serve. To do this we undertake or participate in a broad range of research activities. Many projects are conducted in partnership with Universities. Proper research ethics procedures must be in place to protect the interests, dignity and privacy of research subjects.

## POLICY

Uniting Communities is strongly committed to:

- The development of knowledge for the benefit of the people who access our services and the wider community.
- The development of service delivery and social and political advocacy based upon sound research and analysis.
- Sharing the knowledge we develop for the benefit of the wider community

In undertaking this we will:

- Protect the confidentiality and dignity of people in undertaking research and data collection activities.
- Implement procedures to guard against clients or staff feeling compelled or under duress to participate in research projects.
- Ensure strict guidelines are in place for the collection, storage, and access to client information for research purposes.
- Ensure that original research undertaken within our services is approved by the Research Ethics Committee.
- Ensure that research undertaken within our services is conducted according to written guidelines and procedures.
- Ensure that the findings of research undertaken within our services are made available to the Organisation and programs of people involved.
- Consider all requests to undertake research within our services in relation to the impact and demands they make on the resources and capacity of those involved.

## LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Privacy Act 1988

National Statement on Ethical conduct in Human Research, Australian Government, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

## PROCEDURES (refer page 3)

1. Plan the Research Project
2. Identifying the need for Ethics Approval
3. Apply for Ethics Approval
4. Submit the Application
5. Approval Notification
6. Conduct the Research Project

7. Report on the Research
8. Publication of Research

## GUIDELINES (refer page 6)

1. Conduct of the Research Ethics Committee
2. Composition of the Research Ethics Committee
3. Complaints
4. Contacts

## LINKS TO OTHER POLICY

1. Project Management
2. Privacy and Information Sharing
3. Complaints and Feedback
4. Communications

Endorsed by:

**SIMON SCHRAPEL**
Chief Executive
06 January 2014

## PROCEDURES

### 1. Plan the Research Project

It is advised that staff planning to conduct a research project seek advice from the Minister of Uniting Communities or the Executive Manager Information and Knowledge Management. Copies of the relevant policies and applications forms are available on our website.

### 2. Identifying the need for Ethics Approval

All research projects (as specified in the Scope section of this document) must be approved by the Uniting Communities Research Ethics Committee prior to commencing. This includes projects that have been assessed by ethics committees external to Uniting Communities.

### 3. Apply for Ethics Approval

The Uniting communities Research Ethics Committee will accept applications for research ethics approval at any time and will usually make their assessment within 3 weeks of receiving the application.

#### 3.1 The application form

CIK 11-1 Application for Approval of Research Form can be obtained on our website. The completed application form must be signed by

- the Researcher
- the Manager of the program or service in which the research will take place
- the relevant Executive or Group Manager

#### 3.2 Additional documents

All documentation used in the recruitment of participants and in data collection must be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee with the completed CIK 8-1 Application for Approval of Research Form and Research Risk Matrix. Examples of the documentation that should also be included:

- A letter from the researcher introducing themselves and the research project to potential participants;
- Promotional or participant recruitment flyers;
- Consent form;
- Questionnaire or list of interview questions;
- Letter from any other Ethics Committee from whom approval is being/has been sought/approved and/or denied.

### 4. Submit the Application

The original and two copies of the application form and copies of all accompanying documents should be submitted to the Uniting Communities Minister who will then distribute copies to the members of the Research Ethics Committee.

### 5. Approval Notification

A letter outlining the Committee's decision, including any recommended or required changes to the original research proposal, will be sent to the applicant as soon as possible (and usually within 3-4 weeks of receiving the application).

If approval is not given, a redrafted research application may be submitted to the Committee for consideration and approval.

The decisions and requirements stipulated by the Committee must be adhered to otherwise the research will not be permitted to proceed.

### 5.1 Rejection of application

In the event that a research request is refused the Ethics Committee shall consider notifying the University HREC and other relevant bodies of our concerns regarding the proposed research.

## 6. Conduct the Research Project

In conducting a research project, there are specific guidelines that must be adhered to in relation to identifying risks, obtaining informed consent, participation, data collection and storage, and publishing the research findings.

### 6.1 Managing risks

The researcher must describe the way in which the risks of the research are being managed by the project. A risk matrix is provided for the purpose of identifying and describing foreseeable risks. The risk descriptors are from the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (NSEHCR).*

Risk in research is graded into three levels

> Negligible Risk - Research in which there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort. Any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience (NSEHCR 2.1.7).
>
> Low Risk - Research in which the only foreseeable risk is discomfort (NSECHR 2.1.6).
>
> High Risk - Where the risk, even if unlikely, is more serious than discomfort, the research is not low risk (NSECHR 2.1.6)

The Uniting Communities research ethics committee will only approve Negligible and Low Risk research.

### 6.2 Obtain informed consent

The researcher must provide potential participants at their level of comprehension, sufficient information about the purposes, methods and time involved in participating in the research and the foreseeable risks that may be associated with participation.

Potential participants should also be informed about the use that will be made of the findings.

In all cases, the information provided must be sufficient to enable potential participants to make an informed decision about whether or not to take part in the research.

People who agree to take part in the research must sign a consent form.

The research project must demonstrate the manner in which they judge the capacity of a child or young person to provide informed consent.

If the participant is an adult who does not have testamentary capacity, consent must also be obtained from a next of kin or legal guardian.

### 6.3 Participation

The participant must not be subjected to any coercion to participate in the research. Participants need to be informed that disclosures of illegal activities, including child or elder abuse made in the course of obtaining information for research purposes, will be notified to the relevant authorities and that confidentiality provisions will not apply in such circumstances.

If requested, the participant shall be given the name and telephone number of the research supervisor and offered the opportunity to check the authenticity of the project and the credentials of the researcher before the interview proceeds.

### 6.4 Data storage

If the research is initiated by Uniting Communities staff data shall be kept according to the UFile data filing protocols and disposal schedules.

## 7. Report on the Research

The researcher is required to provide Senior Records Officer of Information and Knowledge Management, a final report at the completion of their research project. The Records Officer will ensure that the report is posted on the Intranet so that it is accessible to all staff.

### 7.1 Final Report

The final report should include a summary of the research project, a brief summary of the research findings, implications for Uniting Communities and any recommendations for action.

## 8. Publication of Research

For the publications of research conducted by Uniting Communities refer to the Communications policy.

## GUIDELINES

### 1. Conduct of the Research Ethics Committee

The Research Ethics Committee will normally require the approval of research involving research subjects by existing University-based Ethics Committees. The Research Ethics Committee may impose additional requirements to University-based committees at its discretion.

1. The Research Ethics Committee will record the reasons for its decisions on CIK 8-2 Ethics Committee Research Application and Records Form.
2. The Research Ethics Committee will communicate the reasons for its decisions to applicants.
3. The Research Ethics Committee will require the signed agreement of researchers to the conditions laid down by the Committee prior to the commencement of approved research projects.
4. Where a conflict of interest arises for a Committee member, that conflict will be declared, and the member will absent themselves from the decision making process on that matter.

### 2. Composition of the Research Ethics Committee

The Research Ethics Committee shall consist of a minimum;

The Minister of Uniting Communities (Chair)

Two senior staff members / Managers

The committee may also include outside representation. Appointments to the committee will be by the Executive.

### 3. Complaints

Complaints regarding the application of research or decisions of the Research Ethics Committee shall be managed according to the Complaints and Feedback Policy.

### 4. Contacts

Questions about research design should be directed to the Executive Manager, Information and Knowledge Management.

Questions about research ethics approval should be directed to the Chair of the Ethics Committee EthicsCommittee@Unitingcommunities.org.

# Research Risk Matrix

*To be read in conjunction with item 6.1 Managing Risks. Example provided in Research Risk Matrix Guidelines*

| Risk Reference | THE RISK<br>*What Can Happen?* | SOURCE<br>*How can this Happen?* | IMPACT<br>*from the risk occuring* | MITIGATION<br>*describe the effectiveness of any intervention (include researcher qualifications and experience in undertaking any intervention should be described)* | **Likely hood** Unlikely / Forseeable | **Consequence –** *inconvience, discomfort, distress* | Office Use: **Risk Rating** *Neglible/ Low / High* | Office Use: **Outcome** Acceptable or Unacceptable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | ***Example scenario:***<br>*Client becomes uncomfortable or distressed* | *The interview raises issues which causes discomfort or distress to the client* | *Client may leave the interview feeling distressed* | *Questions are written respectfully*<br>*Clients are free to decline answering any questions*<br>*The researcher has qualifications in and experience (specify) in dealing with distressed clients.* | *F* | *Distress* | | |

For each identified risk:

- Describe the risks, its source and the potential impact on clients
- Describe the effectiveness of any mitigation or intervention which lowers the likelihood and/or consequence of the risk.
- Determine the overall risk rating and acceptable and unacceptable using table 3

**Table 2 Risk Analysis Matrix**

| Likelihood | Consequences | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Inconvenience NSECHR 2.1.7 | Discomfort NSECHR 2.1.6 | More than discomfort |
| Unlikely | **N** | **L** | **H** |
| Foreseeable | **N** | **L** | **H** |

**Key to Risk Analysis Matrix**

| | **Risk Descriptors** |
|---|---|
| N = Negligible risk | Research in which there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort.<br>Any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience (NSEHCR 2.1.7). |
| L = Low Risk | Research in which the only foreseeable risk is discomfort (NSECHR 2.1.6). |
| H = High Risk | Where the risk, even if unlikely, is more serious than discomfort, the research is not low risk (NSECHR 2.1.6).<br>There are a range of potential harms which must be considered including psychological harm include "feelings of worthlessness, distress, guilt, anger or fear…" NSECHR p.16. |

**Table 3: Outcome from Risk Rating**

| | |
|---|---|
| Negligible Risk | Acceptable Risk |
| Low Risk | Acceptable Risk |
| High Risk | Unacceptable Risk |

For a full description of the risk descriptors and the differences between harm, discomfort and inconvenience refer to the "National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research" (Australian Government 2007) www.nhmrc.gov.au/