

## About this guide

This brief paper is provided as a **basic introduction** to ethics around evaluation. It sets out the main things you need to think about when doing your evaluation.

You probably already think about these issues, but it's important we are all on the same page for the basics around research ethics.

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### Consent to take part in evaluation

It is important that all participants who are taking part in evaluation activity give clear and **informed consent** to do so.

#### **Informed**

Anyone who may be approached about taking part in an evaluation should be given clear and coherent information about the project and its evaluation in an accessible format (often this is a participant information sheet to read, but you may want to think about how this can be made more accessible). The distinction between project participation and project evaluation is key here, and people should be told clearly how their participation in one may or may not affect their involvement in the other. Each person should be given plenty of time to read over this information, encouraged to discuss it with their support network, and given the opportunity to ask questions, before giving consent.

#### **Consent**

Consent may be given verbally or in writing, depending on the type of evaluation activity. For anyone who may have difficulty providing informed consent, and for evaluations involving children, you may also have to seek consent from a parent or carer.

#### **Informed consent for different types of data collection**

For discussions, you should:

- Provide information in advance about what you will cover
- Make clear that participation in evaluation activity is voluntary
- Ask participants to sign a consent form (or give clear consent in another way) to make clear that they have understood what they are taking part in
- Think about whether children and young people also need consent from a parent or guardian to take part in the discussion – for example if it is an in-depth case study

For surveys you should:

- Include a clear statement at the beginning about the survey, how it will be used and what people should do if they have any questions

If you are planning to share photos or video evidence as part of your evaluation evidence, it is important to make sure you have consent for these to be taken and shared with partners. This is particularly important for photos of children and young people. It is important to be clear that if people are taking part in a video to give feedback, their response will not be anonymous. Using audio feedback can be one way to deal with this.

Example consent forms and participant information sheets can be found in the toolkit.

### Privacy and data protection

All General Data Protection Requirements still apply when you are doing research and evaluation activity. For evaluation activity, the main things to think about are:

- Only gather personal data (e.g. names, dates of birth, addresses, postcodes, phone numbers, ethnic origin) that are essential.
- Where possible, gather evaluation evidence completely anonymously.
- Wherever possible, separate any personal data from views gathered through evaluation, to preserve anonymity. So, for example, don't write up notes of discussions which include people's real names.
- If you happen to be gathering personal data through a survey, you should only store this on a survey system which hosts data within the EU.
- Be clear with people if you are using cookies as part of a survey. Cookies can help people to complete the survey over time and come back to it as and when they like, but it's important to tell people that you are collecting cookies, and why.

### Equality monitoring

You may want to know about the profile of your participants. Equality monitoring involves gathering data to better understand differences between the nine protected characteristics, often called equality groups. It is important that we include an Equalities Monitoring Form in any evaluation request to participants.

The nine protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

When gathering this information, you should:

- Be clear that it is voluntary
- Be clear how the information will be used
- Ensure that equality monitoring information is gathered anonymously – separately from any other information you hold about participants
- Offer the opportunity to 'prefer not to say' to all questions
- Only gather information that will be used

### Safeguarding

Like all other aspects of our work, you have a duty to ensure that people are kept safe from harm when conducting an evaluation. This includes the wellbeing of staff,

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volunteers, participants and anyone else involved in the project. Please follow the safeguarding policies for your organisation. If you have any queries or concerns about safeguarding in relation to your evaluation, please get in contact with See Me.

*‘Safeguarding’ refers to protecting people in situations where there is a risk of, or actual, significant harm/abuse being perpetrated on a person by themselves, others and/ or an organisation. ‘Safeguarding’ does not refer to situations where someone is at risk of becoming distressed because of their own mental health problems, disabilities, or health conditions.*

Here is a useful directory of tools for some of the key issues you may need to consider for your evaluation:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/healthsciences/documents/safeguarding-researcher-guidelines.pdf>

For more information about safeguarding and for help creating or amending your child safeguarding policy, please see: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/writing-a-safeguarding-policy-statement>

For information about safeguarding adults, please see:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/adult-pocket-guide.pdf>

### Creating a safe and comfortable environment

Whether you are collecting information from people in person or remotely, it is important to think about the environment you are creating, and the impact that it may have on participants. People are more likely to share their thoughts and feelings with you if they feel safe and comfortable. Here are some key things to think about:

- Privacy
  - Whether you are meeting with someone in person or remotely, it is important to consider whether anyone else can hear your conversation. Think about any potential breaches of confidentiality this may cause, how this may impact on your participant and what they choose to share. Whilst some people may feel more comfortable meeting you in a public space – particularly if you are not someone they already know, other people may be put off sharing private information in public. This applies both when you meet someone individually, and when the participant chooses to attend with someone else (e.g. bringing a family member along for support). Think about how you would approach data collection in both of these scenarios, and any challenges that may arise.
  - If you are planning to conduct a focus group, how may this affect people participating in the group? Whilst some may feel comfortable sharing in a group environment, others will not. Can you offer alternative ways to talk with participants? If not, how will you approach the focus group to help encourage people to talk? Some tips you may find helpful include:
    - Limit group sizes. Large groups can feel daunting, and it can be hard to ensure that everyone is heard. Depending on the subject

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and time available, you might want to aim for between 5-8 participants, and generally no more than 12.

- Setting ground rules. Before you begin, it can be a good idea to work with the group to set some ground rules for the session
  - Having two facilitators present can help to guide the conversation – whilst one person asks a question, the other can observe who responds (and who looks like they want to, but doesn't) and encourage them to take part.
- Location and accessibility – think about:
    - How will participants travel to this location?
    - Is the surrounding area safe?
    - Is it a location that participants will be familiar with?
    - Are there any downsides to hosting this data collection event in a familiar setting?
    - If this is a long event, are there places close by that participants can go to get refreshments or just some fresh air?
    - How easy is it to access this space? How can you accommodate for people who may have difficulty moving around
  - Physical surroundings – think about:
    - Light levels and availability of natural light
    - Where will participants sit, and where will evaluation staff sit? (Worth considering power dynamics and any safety precautions here)
    - Size of the space – is it big enough to be comfortable but not cavernous?
    - Temperature – think about the temperature in relation to any activities you are planning. For example, if the participants will be sitting for a long time, then you may want a warmer space than if they will be moving around.
    - Decoration – is this a neutral-feeling space or are there decorations and/or furnishings that may distract or otherwise impact your participants
    - Noise levels – is there any background noise that participants may find distracting
    - Health & safety and fire safety – do you know what to do in this space in an emergency?
    - Toilets – where are they?
  - Associations with the space you are using
    - Whilst familiarity with a place may help people feel comfortable coming along to a session, this isn't always the case. Some spaces, particularly buildings such as hospitals and schools, may have negative connotations for some of your participants. Is the space you are using neutral enough, or can you plan for any negative reactions from participants?
  - Offering alternatives
    - Will you be running the data collection in just one format, or will you be able to offer a more flexible range of options (e.g. in person, on the phone or online)?
  - Remote

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- Remote options such as phone calls, video calls and online chat can be convenient, and at times necessary, ways of collecting data. Not everyone will be comfortable using these technologies however, so it is worth bearing this in mind and talking it through with participants before you begin, to identify any potential issues.
- It can be a good idea to have a 'if we get disconnected' chat prepared, so that you can have an alternative way of getting in touch with your participants should anything happen to disrupt the call. This is particularly important if you plan to collect data that people may find distressing or difficult to discuss.

### Further Information

For further information on evaluation ethics best practice, please see the following links:

<https://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/tsrf/tsrf-resources/resources-on-ethics-and-good-practice-in-research/>

<https://arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/Wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Full-guidelines-for-Best-Practice-in-the-Ethics-and-Governance-of-Service-Evaluation-Final02.pdf>