



# The Housing Agency

## Ethical Framework 2022

### 1. Introduction

This document aims to provide guidance to researchers, consultants, external organisations and The Housing Agency staff to identify and address ethical dimensions when involved in research funded or commissioned by The Housing Agency. All Housing Agency staff and external consultants commissioned to undertake research on behalf of the Agency must fully adhere to these guidelines. The guidelines below are intended to ensure that rights, privacy and confidentiality is maintained, that all research is conducted with integrity and transparency and that the well-being of all participants is fully respected.

The Housing Agency acknowledges that these guidelines do not provide a complete set of rules for resolving ethical choices or dilemmas. New situations constantly emerge within the housing arena which require creative approaches to ethics issues. The Ethical Framework offers guidance – it cannot replace the need for self-critical, imaginative and responsible ethical reflection about issues which may arise in the course of research, but it can help guide and illustrate how to proceed. It is the responsibility of individual researchers to ensure that all research upholds the ethical standards cited within this framework.

### 2. General principles

Basic ethical principles apply to all fields of research in which humans participate by contributing time, effort, insights and personal data for use by researchers. The Housing Agency's key principles for ethical research include:

1. Minimising harm and maximising benefit
2. Respecting the rights and dignity of individuals and groups
3. Respecting individual autonomy and obtaining free and informed consent
4. Ensuring integrity and transparency in research
5. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality with regard to data protection
6. Maintain independence of research and make explicit conflicts of interest when they cannot be avoided



### 3. Ethical standards

Before commencement of the project, all research proposals will be assessed for any ethical issues that may arise during or following the research. If any potential ethical issues are identified, the successful bidder will be asked to provide an ethical statement which sets out assurances on how the research meets the ethical standards required. With regard to the Research Support Programme, an ethical statement is required at application stage. The Housing Agency can provide guidelines on submission of an Ethical Statement.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Minimising Risk and Harm

In carrying out their research, researchers should take every possible measure to minimise the risk of harm to any individual. In particular, they must be fully cognisant of the implications of research involving “vulnerable” groups. A vulnerable group may be defined as (but not limited to):

- Children
- Older people
- Refugees
- Migrants
- People with disabilities
- People with cognitive impairment
- Minority ethnic groups
- People in a dependent relationship with the researcher

### 5. Rights of individuals and groups

Researchers should maintain respect for participants in all manners, and pay particular attention to minority ethnic groups, traditions and practices, and ensure knowledge of these practices before conducting research.

### 6. Informed Consent

In research involving participants, contribution should be based on the freely given informed consent of participants.<sup>2</sup> This implies a responsibility on the researcher to explain in appropriate detail (both in writing and verbally), in a language they can understand, and in

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix One

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix Two



terms meaningful to participants (keep jargon and technical terms to a minimum). This explanation should include the following:

- What the research is about;
  - The nature of their participation;
  - Who is undertaking and financing the research;
  - Implications in terms of risks and benefits of participating in the research;
  - Why it is being undertaken/purpose of the research;
  - The name and contact details of the Principal Investigator;
  - Data management plan detailing the collection of data, the purposes it will be used for, and a statement of how data will be stored securely and when it will be destroyed
  - That their participation is entirely voluntary, and that a decision not to consent will have no adverse consequences;
  - That participants have the right to withdraw from the study and withhold information at any time without affecting their use of services or need for assistance.
  - That the researcher will be bound by any confidential agreement, except in cases where information disclosed by the participant indicates a serious risk to self or to others. Where such issues requiring disclosure arise, the research will inform the relevant body and report the incident to a Housing Agency Researcher.
  - Any intended follow-up contact as part of the current or future research.
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- Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality; researchers should be explicit in their limits of confidentiality.
  - Research participants should understand that they can reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras. Research data, records or films should not be communicated or used other than for the agreed purposes and with participants' written consent. When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, researchers should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording.
  - Special care should be taken where research participants are particularly vulnerable (see p. 2). Researchers will need to take into account the legal and ethical complexities involved in those circumstances where there are particular difficulties in eliciting fully informed consent.
  - In cases where written consent cannot be obtained, such as with recorded telephone interviews or where the subjects are illiterate, informed oral consent should be obtained by documenting on the consent form. Where participants have impairments that limit understanding and/or communication to the extent that they are unable to give informed written consent, permission where possible should be obtained from a family member or other responsible adult, such as a caregiver or guardian, before



proceeding with the research. The option to have another person accompany the research participant should also be provided.

**The signed consent form and the information sheet together are proof of the process of informed consent.**

## 7. Anonymity, Data Protection and Confidentiality

Data Protection Legislation applies to The Housing Agency and accordingly any work undertaken must fall within the remit of the General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018. Accordingly, a Data Processing Agreement will be entered specifying the requirements to operate within the bounds of the legislation and regulations. This shall include (but not limited to) obligations in obtaining, securing and retention of personal data.

## 8. The Housing Agency Commitment

- Research that is unlikely to contribute to The Housing Agency's purpose, or is in contradiction with the organisation's values, will not be undertaken or commissioned.
- We will only fund research which has an adequate and appropriate ethics statement, and which takes seriously the ethics dimensions of the research.
- Ensure that a review of proposals considers ethics issues and whether the information provided by the applicant adequately addresses ethics issues that may be encountered during or following the research
- Consider reviewer disagreement with the suggested project approach to ethics as either grounds for a conditional grant or rejection of a proposal (where it calls into question researcher competence or the feasibility or validity of a proposal).
- Consider suspension of payments if The Housing Agency review shows that a project requires major changes which will alter it so much that it can no longer retain support.
- The relationship between funders and social researchers should be such as to enable social enquiry to be undertaken as objectively as possible. Research will be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation, rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action

## Appendix One: Considerations for Ethical Statement



The purpose of an Ethical Statement is to make all parties aware of the ethical issues which may arise as a result of the research and the necessary obligations a researcher will fulfil to minimise the issues. The Statement demonstrates that the researcher has given due diligence to the ethical implications of their research.

If an ethical statement is required for a research project, the following details should be included:

- Details of the project
- Methodology of the project
- Extent of human participation
- Details of any vulnerabilities the participants may have
- Ethical risks that either the research or research methodology may present throughout the lifecycle of the project
- Steps the researcher will take to minimise the risks as far as possible

\*This is not an exhaustive list and should be used as a guide only.



## Appendix Two: Example of Consent Form for Research Participants

Please read the following statements:

- I understand the information outlined in the information leaflet given to me (if applicable).
- I agree to take part in this research project [INSERT NAME OF PROJECT].
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and the information that I will provide.
- I have had any questions answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that I may decline to respond to any question within the research process
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research at any time without consequence
- I understand the importance of providing a true account of the issues covered.
- I understand that the information I give will be treated as confidential and it will not be attributed to me in any way.
- I agree to my interview being recorded and once the research is completed the tape will be deleted. (If applicable)
- I agree to my data being stored on a secure server for the duration of the project.
- I have received information and contact details of the relevant ethics representative/ethics committee (if applicable)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_