

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLKIT

HOW TO USE THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Code is a handy guide to navigating ethical challenges that arise during fieldwork. It addresses the gap left by existing institutional ethics review processes, including interpersonal power dynamics, conflicts of interest and working with field teams. The Code is for any researcher who does fieldwork, across different disciplines, country contexts and career stages.

The Code is designed to be a living document, adapted to your specific fieldwork context by you and your research partners. It is not a mandatory part of any formal ethics review process. We encourage you to use the prompts as a starting point for self-reflection and conversation with your fieldwork teams. In larger teams, an ethics champion could ensure the group upholds ethical behaviours whilst recognising each individual's responsibility. Students may use the Code to facilitate discussions with supervisors and set expectations around support before they embark on fieldwork.

The Code is deliberately ambitious in scope to prompt researchers to think critically about their fieldwork practices and how they interact with people during the course of their research. Not all points may apply to your specific fieldwork or be possible to implement within your time and financial constraints. We encourage researchers, particularly students and early career researchers, to focus on what you can do. Experienced researchers and those with large research projects and budgets may aim to be more ambitious. It is important to note that researchers' own positionality and intersectional identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.) will affect ethical dynamics in the field.

Universities and research organisations have an institutional responsibility to support fieldworkers in their endeavours towards ethical practice. In addition to the Code and the resources listed below, we encourage researchers to take full advantage of training offered by your department, division or research institution. We also recommend learning from other researchers from your institution and the host country who have conducted fieldwork in the same area.

PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Code was commissioned by the School of Geography and the Environment, as suggested by the Graduate Collective's template for change on dismantling systemic racism. Currently, University of Oxford researchers are only required to complete Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) processes if they are conducting research with human participants, and CUREC is limited to issues such as gaining participants' consent and secure storage of personal data. However, a wide range of ethical issues and interpersonal dynamics can arise through interactions with research partners, participants or local communities during fieldwork, regardless of the type of research being conducted. This Code of Conduct addresses that gap.

We started by searching for best practice examples of guides for ethical fieldwork and found a lack of relevant or comprehensive examples from other universities, research institutions, funding bodies or NGOs. We, therefore, expanded our literature review to include grey papers, academic networks/blogs and some peer-reviewed articles. We also consulted researchers working on similar initiatives in other institutions. Using this information, we compiled a set of ethical issues that can arise during fieldwork. We gathered feedback on the draft Code of Conduct and additional recommendations document through focus group discussions with field researchers, at different career stages, living in the Global North and the Global South.

LANGUAGE AROUND “FIELDWORK” AND “FIELD ASSISTANTS”

There are debates concerning the problematic use of the term “fieldwork” (see this [blog post](#) by Rachel Strohm) and “field assistants”. It has been argued that “field” is a neo-colonial term that ‘others’ those that participate in research studies and perpetuates the unequal power relations between Northern researchers and Southern citizens. Where there is a colonial history to contend with, we encourage field researchers to also reflect on this language. Our Code is intended to be used by any researcher, of any country, in any country, hence we have decided to retain use of the generalisable term “field”. However, we discourage the term “field assistants” and suggest a shift towards more empowering and equalising language such as “field researchers” or “field research staff”.

LINKS TO RESOURCES

University of Oxford research integrity and ethics

These open-access documents are particularly useful for researchers who do not have established ethics procedures at their research institution.

- › **University policies and codes of practice** (e.g. collecting personal data from participants)
- › **Best practice guidance** (e.g. **Social science research conducted outside of the UK**)

Free online research ethics training courses

- › **Global Health Training Centre: Social Science, Ethics & Communities**
- › **Introduction to Research Ethics: Working with People**
- › **People Studying People: Research Ethics in Society**
- › **Community Based Research: Getting Started**

The ethics of care in field data collection

- › **The ethics of care**
- › **Compassionate research**

Working with vulnerable groups

- › **Research with Refugees in Fragile Political Contexts**
- › **Ethical guidelines for research with displaced people**
- › **Research with children: ethics, safety and avoiding harm**

Working with indigenous communities

- › **Guidelines for approaching research in indigenous settings**
- › **Code of Ethics for research with indigenous communities**

Compensation for research assistants, participants and local communities

- › **Participant compensation in global health research: a case study**
- › **Ethical and practical considerations of paying research participants**

Relationships in the field

- › **Sex, romance, and research subjects: an ethical exploration**
- › **The field as a landscape of desire: sex and sexuality in geographical fieldwork**
- › **Masculinity and frank consideration of sexual attraction in fieldwork**

Wellbeing of field research staff (including women, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ staff)

- › **“This isn’t getting easier”: Valuing emotion in development research**
- › **Vicarious [secondary] trauma training, University of Oxford**
- › **Preventing Harassment in Fieldwork Situations Report, University of Washington**
- › **Sexual(ized) harassment and ethnographic fieldwork: A silenced aspect of social research**
- › **The fieldwork initiative (sexual trauma in fieldwork)**
- › **Sexual violence during research**
- › **Protecting BIPOC scholars in the field**
- › **Advice for women travelling abroad**
- › **LGBTQIA+ foreign travel advice**
- › **Safe Overseas Travel Guidance for Staff with Protected Characteristics**
- › **Fieldwork and disability: an overview for an inclusive experience**

Conflicts with your own ethical value system

- › Concealing researcher identity in fieldwork
- › Everyday risks and professional dilemmas: fieldwork with alcohol-based subcultures

Flexibility in the field

- › Getting prepared to be prepared: How interpersonal skills aid fieldwork in challenging contexts
- › Mediating messiness: expanding ideas of flexibility, reflexivity, and embodiment in fieldwork
- › Remote [management of] field data collection: Doing fieldwork in a pandemic

Guidelines for ethical photography

- › Upholding the rights of the people in the pictures
- › Bond's Ethical Guidelines for the collection and use of content

Comics about fieldwork challenges

- › MDG Comics
- › Bukavu Comic Series

References

The following documents were drawn upon in developing the Code of Conduct.

Existing Ethics Guidelines

- › **A Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships: 11 Principles** (KFPE, 2012)
- › **Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics** (Decolonidad Europa, 2013)
- › **Ethical considerations when conservation research involves people** (S Brittain et al. in *Conservation Biology*, 2020)
- › **Ethical Guidelines for Community/Ecology Fieldwork & Research** (Mary Watkins, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2017)
- › **Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings** (TRUST, 2018)
- › **Guidance for research in response to humanitarian emergencies** (Wellcome Centre for Ethics and Humanities, 2020)
- › **Guidelines for healthy global scientific collaborations** (D Armenteras in *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 2021)
- › **Power, Prestige & Forgotten Values: A Disaster Studies Manifesto** (JC Gaillard et al., 2021)
- › **Research Ethics: A practical guide** (Oxfam, 2020)
- › **Research Ethics Guidance** (Social Research Association, 2021)
- › **San Code of Research Ethics** (South African San Institute, 2017)
- › **Six fieldwork expectations: Code of conduct for teams on field projects** (Sara Perry, 2020)
- › **Statement on Ethics** (American Anthropological Association, 2012)
- › **Statement on Professional Ethics** (Association of American Geographers, 2009)
- › **Ten simple rules for Global North researchers to stop perpetuating helicopter research in the Global South** (Haelewaters et al. in *PLOS Comput. Biol.*, 2021)

Blogs, networks and opinion pieces

- › **Africa's next decolonisation battle should be about knowledge** (David Mwambari, 2019)
- › **Ethics in development research: 'doing no harm' when conducting research in the global South** (German Development Institute (DIE), 2021)
- › **Field Research Methods Lab** (London School of Economics, 2021)
- › **How to truly decolonise the study of Africa** (Robtel Neajai Pailey, 2019)
- › **(Silent) Voices blog – Bukavu Series** (Governance in Conflict Network, 2020)