

## Code of Research Ethics

For over two decades, The Centre for Literacy of Québec has done research that relies on the use of high quality methodologies appropriate to the research undertaken, and that ensure the independence and integrity of our findings. The Centre has conducted its research according to high ethical standards. It has now developed a formal Code of Research Ethics.\* The following general principles guide the conduct of research activities at The Centre.

**Respect for human dignity.** The most important principle of modern research ethics is respect for human dignity. This principle aims to protect the many interdependent interests of the person — from bodily to psychological to cultural integrity. It is unacceptable to treat human beings solely as means (mere objects or things); doing so fails to respect their intrinsic human dignity and impoverishes all of humanity.

**Respect for free and informed consent.** Individuals are generally presumed to have the capacity and right to make free and informed decisions. This means that all participants in research must give their free and informed consent to participate, and understand that they have the right to withdraw without penalty. Every effort must be made to ensure that informed consent is presented to individuals in the clearest language possible.

**Respect for vulnerable persons.** Respect for human dignity demands high ethical obligations towards vulnerable persons — those who may have underdeveloped or diminished decision-making capacity. Children, institutionalized persons or others who are vulnerable are entitled to special protection against abuse, exploitation, or discrimination. Ethical obligations to vulnerable individuals who are involved in research require specific procedures to protect their interests.

**Respect for privacy and confidentiality.** Respect for human dignity implies respect for privacy and confidentiality. Standards of privacy and confidentiality must be applied to protect the access to, control and dissemination of personal information gathered through research. Such standards help to protect the psychological integrity of individuals.

**Respect for justice and inclusiveness.** Justice connotes fairness and equity. Related to research, it concerns the distribution of the benefits and burdens of research. Distributive justice means that no segment of the population should be unfairly burdened by the harm created by research. It therefore imposes particular obligations toward vulnerable individuals who are unable to protect their own interests to ensure that they are not exploited for the advancement of knowledge. Distributive justice also imposes the obligation to neither neglect nor discriminate against individuals and groups who may benefit from advances in research.

**Balance between harms and benefits.** Research participants must not be subjected to unnecessary risks of harm. To warrant involving humans in research, their participation must be essential to achieving important scientific and societal aims that could not be realized without involving them. Overall, risk of harm should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure scientifically valid data.

**Respect for the interests of the wider society.** Greater access to well-grounded information should serve, not threaten, the interests of society. Respecting the interests of the wider society requires that funders, operational partners, other researchers and evaluators, and all others who may be affected by those activities know and consider the consequences of all research activities. No research should be undertaken that is predisposed toward a particular outcome. Funders should be given an impartial assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of available methods for addressing each research question. Funders and operational partners should receive the protocols, standards and guidelines under which the research will be undertaken before the research begins.

**Respect for the broad dissemination of research findings.** Research contributes most to the public good and to the advancement of knowledge when it is shared with a broad audience. Therefore, consideration must be given to ways in which research data and findings can be shared with the general public, with funders, with research participants, and with colleagues. Findings should be made available through independently published and easily accessible reports. Additionally, and within the limits of confidentiality requirements, information regarding methods and data quality should be disclosed to permit procedures, techniques and findings to be assessed by other researchers and evaluators.

**Respect for high standards of evidence.** The analysis of all research data is guided by a commitment to raise the standards of evidence that are used to design and assess social policies and programs. This commitment implies the use of the best available technology, methodology, or practice appropriate to each research project.

**Respect for truth.** Data should be accurately gathered, recorded, and preserved and the results of research be reported fairly and honestly. Information will not be knowingly misinterpreted or used in inappropriate ways.

In addition, when conducting research involving Aboriginal people, The Centre will adhere to the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) principles sanctioned by the First Nations Information Governance Committee. A detailed description of these principles and the philosophy that underlies them can be found at the following Web site: <http://www.naho.ca/english/privacyPolicy.php>.

\* These principles have been adapted from a Code of Practice developed by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC).