



Action Research Guidance

This guidance is undergoing review in Fall 2021. If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback or suggestions, please contact maria.valente@ubc.ca.

Safeguarding and protecting the rights of participants in research may be particularly challenging in participatory, action or practitioner research when:

- The researcher is investigating their own practice, or communities are investigating issues of concern to them.
- The researcher is in a dual relationship with participants, especially when established roles and responsibilities put them in a position of power or status.
- Information and results obtained regarding “practice” are made public through research presentations, publications, etc.

When submitting a research ethics application under these conditions, researchers will need to address two issues.

The first issue concerns the relationship between the researcher and participant

The right of voluntary participation may be jeopardized in cases where dual relationships exist (e.g., the researcher is also the participant’s employer or teacher or in another position of power), and/or where a power differential exists between researcher and participant. See Article 3.1 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement for details: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2018_chapter3-chapitre3.html#intro.

Given the unique researcher-participant relationship that exists in action/participatory/practitioner research, it is especially important to explain – both in the ethics application and in documents shared with participants – how the possibility of participant coercion will be avoided. This is often addressed through arms-length recruitment and informed consent procedures. An example illustrates how this might be accomplished.

Assume that you want to conduct a school-based, practitioner research project in which a teacher uses their own classroom to investigate their method of teaching or practice. The researcher should consider the following before finalizing their documentation and protocols:

- How will they assure parents/guardians that students are able to decline participation without consequences?
- How will they assure students that their participation is entirely voluntary?
- How will they assure parents/guardians that students who refuse to participate or who do not receive adult consent for their participation will not be disadvantaged in any way?

In the consenting procedures and documentation:

- Assure parents/guardians and students that they have the right to refuse or withdraw participation in the research without consequence or penalty of any kind.



- Acknowledge in the consent form that parents/guardians may feel pressure to agree to their child's participation because the researcher is also the child's teacher, and assure them that this is not the case.
- If incentives are being offered to participate, confirm that students who decline to participate will also be eligible for the benefit (e.g. a prize draw or classroom benefit).
- As in all consent forms, include the required Research Participant Complaint Line text:
 - **UBC Vancouver:** *"If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598."*
 - **UBC Okanagan:** *"If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics toll free at 1-877-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. It is also possible to contact the Research Complaint Line by email (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca)."*
- Consider the impact of the experience on those who are not participating, as well as on those who participate. Explain that students will still be productively occupied during the research activity, emphasising that there is no disadvantage to not participating. This may be especially important when the researcher and participants have an ongoing relationship (e.g., teacher, employer).

The second issue concerns the privacy of participants and potential risks to confidentiality.

It is important that researchers who may have a dual role and ongoing relationship with participants explain the degree to which confidentiality will be affected. The principle of free and informed consent requires that the researcher acknowledge their dual role to participants and that participants are informed of (1) any limitations to confidentiality and (2) the methods that will be used to ensure confidentiality. As in all research, an explanation is needed of how the researcher will interact with the research data. For clarification, consider:

- How will individuals and their responses (in discussions, interviews, surveys, videos, etc.) be protected as research data (as distinct from information that may be collected outside the research context)?
- How will data be stored?
- Who will have access to the data? How will participants be informed of who has access?
- How will the confidentiality of participants be protected when the findings are disseminated?
- Does the identity of the group, school, community, etc., need to be protected? If so, specify how this will be done.
- In cases where research participants are acting as co-researchers or collaborators, they may want to be identified and receive credit for their contribution. Researchers should verify at the start of the engagement how these participants wish to be identified and whether they will waive confidentiality.