

CBPR and ethics

What is ethics?

Ethics is a topic that covers questions relating to what kinds of lives we should lead, what counts as a good society, what actions are right and wrong, what qualities of character we should develop and what responsibilities humans have for each other and the ecosystem. In the context of research, ethics as a subject area traditionally covers topics such as the overall harms and benefits of research, the rights of participants to information, privacy, anonymity, and the responsibilities of researchers to act with integrity.

An 'ethical principle' is a general standard or norm that promotes what is regarded as worthy or valuable for the flourishing of humans and/ or the whole ecosystem. Ethical principles may relate to right/wrong conduct, good/bad qualities of character and responsibilities attached to relationships. A principle does not tell us how to act in each situation we encounter, but is broad in scope, and needs interpreting in the light of particular circumstances. Following the ethical principles in Section I of the document, some more detailed practice principles and guidelines are offered in Section II. The practice principles suggest how the ethical principles can be put into practice in the doing of research. Under each practice principle there are some guidelines that give more detail of what might need to be thought about or done to promote ethical research practice. The guidelines provide suggestions or advice.

The aims and purposes of the ethical principles and guidelines

- raise ethical awareness amongst all research partners and participants
- encourage discussion about ethical issues that can arise in CBPR
- offer ethical guidance to partners and participants in CBPR inform research institutions (including universities), research funders and sponsors about what ethical issues might come up so they can ensure CBPR is conducted according to the highest standards
- inform research institutions, research funders and sponsors about the complexities and nuances of CBPR to ensure they do not impose ethical standards that are impractical, patronizing to community researchers or partners or inappropriate in other ways
- improve ethical practice in CBPR

Ethical Principles

1. **Mutual respect:** developing research relationships based on mutual respect, including a commitment to:
 - agreeing what counts as mutual respect in particular contexts
 - everyone involved being prepared to listen to the voices of others
 - accepting that there are diverse perspectives

2. **Equality and inclusion:** encouraging and enabling people from a range of backgrounds and identities (e.g. ethnicity, faith, class, education, gender, (dis)ability, age) to lead, design and take part in the research, including a commitment to:
 - seeking actively to include people whose voices are often ignored
 - challenging discriminatory and oppressive attitudes and behaviors
 - ensuring information, venues and formats for meetings are accessible to all
3. **Democratic participation:** encouraging and enabling all participants to contribute meaningfully to decision-making and other aspects of the research process according to skill, interest and collective need, including a commitment to:
 - acknowledging and discussing differences in the status and power of research participants, and working towards sharing power more equally
 - communicating clearly using language everyone can understand
 - using participatory research methods that build on, share and develop different skills and expertise
4. **Active learning:** viewing research collaboration and the process of research as an opportunity to learn from each other, including a commitment to:
 - ensuring there is time to identify and reflect on learning during the research, and the on ways people learn, both together and individually
 - offering all participants the chance to learn from each other and share their learning with wider audiences
 - sharing responsibility for interpreting the research findings and their implications for practice
5. **Making a difference:** promoting research that creates positive changes for communities of place, interest or identity, including:
 - engaging in debates about what counts as 'positive' change, including broader environmental sustainability as well as human needs or spiritual development, and being open to the possibility of not knowing in advance what making a 'positive difference' might mean
 - valuing the learning and other benefits for individuals and groups from the research process as well as the outputs and outcomes of the research
 - building the goal of positive change into every stage of the research
6. **Collective action:** individuals and groups working together to achieve change, including a commitment to:
 - identifying common and complementary goals that meet partners' differing needs for the research
 - working for agreed visions of how to share knowledge and power more equitably and promote social change and social justice
 - recognizing and working with conflicting rights and interests expressed by different sections of communities or by different communities
7. **Personal integrity:** participants behaving reliably, honestly and in a trustworthy fashion, including a commitment to:
 - working within the principles of community based participatory research
 - ensuring accurate and honest analysis and reporting of research
 - being open to challenge and change and prepared to work with conflict.