

Oxford Policy Institute Research protocol

General

Oxford Policy Institute is regulated by the terms of the Charities Act 2006 and by the Data Protection Act 1998. In addition, the research it undertakes and supports is governed by 'good practice' provisions which are summarised below. This regulatory framework imposes similar responsibilities on its staff, on its associates and on the individuals and organisations with which it works.

Specific OPI projects are governed by the regulations covering research in the countries where the research is carried out. They are also governed by the ethical and other regulations of research funding agencies with which OPI holds contracts.

These regulations are reflected in the contracts OPI holds with its staff and non-OPI research project staff. Compliance provisions by OPI staff are incorporated into their employment contracts. This research protocol forms an attachment to OPI's contracts with non-OPI researchers.

Charities Act 2006

OPI is a registered UK educational charity. The central principle of the Charities Act is that charities' activities must pass the 'public benefit' test. OPI interprets this to mean that its work needs to be readily available in the public domain. It cannot work for private clients like a consultancy if the results are confidential.

At the very least, a summary of the results of work carried out by OPI, or by a practitioner-research community taking into account specific confidentiality requirements, should be published as soon as reasonably possible after the completion of the work. Members of a practitioner-research community and any commercial research funder will be informed of this requirement before research begins.

Data Protection Act 1998

OPI is registered as a data user under the Data Protection Act 1998. It is prohibited from passing on to a third party information of a personal or confidential nature without the permission of the subject. This is particularly relevant to survey data which, without the subject's permission, can only be held as a permanent record if the data are anonymous.

Intellectual property rights

Wherever possible, OPI will seek to retain copyright over material produced under its auspices. It will assert copyright over publications that it is wholly or primarily responsible for producing. In almost all cases it will then allow the material to be used for non-commercial purposes provided it is attributed to OPI. In some cases, copyright is retained by the research funder. In this case it is usually freely available for non-commercial purposes. OPI and its associates will be bound by the terms of any funder's copyright provisions.

OPI seeks to promote original thought. While there is no copyright in ideas, OPI will not tolerate its staff or associates passing off the ideas of others, or the expression of those ideas, as original thinking or writing.

Attribution

OPI regards the proper attribution of authorship to be an important principle upon which trust between researchers is based. It will adhere closely to this principle and will expect its associates to behave similarly.

In most cases, OPI meetings will be held under the Chatham House rule which states that information made available to the participants will not be attributed in writing to originating individual without their permission.

Good research practice provisions

The following good research principles have been adopted by the UK Economic and Social Research Council after extensive consultation. OPI commits itself to abide by them:

- avoidance of falsification of data
- avoidance of fabrication of data
- avoidance of misrepresentation
- avoidance of plagiarism
- preservation and integrity of data
- protection of confidentiality

Research ethics

Oxford Policy Institute commits to preserving the dignity and privacy of people who are the subject of its research. The purpose of the research and their role in it will be fully explained to them. Their participation will be on a voluntary basis only. A complaints procedure will be available to them if they believe OPI has behaved improperly. Such complaints will be reported to the OPI Director and to the Chairman of the OPI Trustee Board OPI Chairman and passed to OPI's Ethics Committee who will investigate them and advise on the appropriate action.

Breaches of OPI's research protocol

Where a breach of any of these principles is suspected, it should be reported to the Director and to the Chairman of the OPI Trustee Board. In this way, the Director is under equal good practice scrutiny. Any allegation of misconduct will be taken seriously with every attempt made to protect the integrity of those stepping forward and those accused. Unless such a report is frivolous or malicious, no penalty will be incurred by the reporting of a suspected breach of good research practice. However, the OPI Director is bound to report such breaches to OPI's Ethics Committee who will investigate them and advise on the appropriate action.

Promulgation of OPI research protocol

OPI will make this statement of obligations available as follows:

1. by copy to its staff, associates and research contractors
2. on its website
3. as an addendum to its research contracts and subcontracts.

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