

# Research Values, Ethics and Data Protection

Church Army's Research Unit

This document explains how Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) seeks to conduct research in a way that is ethical, compliant with data protection legislation and principles, and consistent with Church Army's vision and values.

## Vision and Values

The vision of Church Army's Research Unit is for the Church in the British Isles and Ireland to more fully realise how God is active in mission and to grow in understanding as to why churches' participation may falter or flourish. We work towards this vision through the provision of research and consultancy services that seek to address these questions for colleagues within Church Army, our funding partners, and the wider Church. As a research team, we seek to live out the following values of Church Army:

Value	What this means to Church Army	What this means for our research
<b>Generous</b>	<i>We believe God is generous and we want to model that generosity to others.</i>	<i>As researchers, we seek to be generous to research participants, clients, and partners. Though we need to charge for some services, much of our research is subsidised by Church Army.</i>
<b>Risk-taking</b>	<i>We have a long heritage as a pioneering movement, take calculated risks, and give our staff permission to try new things.</i>	<i>Risk-taking for CARU includes trying out new methods, tailoring research processes to serve churches' participation in the mission of God, and researching pioneering and mission on the margins.</i>
<b>Accountable</b>	<i>We are accountable to God and others, and want to be reliable and responsible to high professional standards.</i>	<i>We seek to conduct research that is both rigorous and relevant to the requirements of clients, funding partners and the wider Church.</i>
<b>Collaborative</b>	<i>We are committed to partnering with others who share our values; we believe collaboration enhances the potential and outcomes of our work.</i>	<i>Within CARU, we collaboratively work alongside other Church Army colleagues, our clients and funding partners, research participants and others with an interest in our research, and we value their contributions and insights</i>
<b>Expectant</b>	<i>We are hopeful, expecting God to do new things through our frontline work and the Church Army community.</i>	<i>Like all researchers, we bring to our research certain pre-understandings, assumptions, and prior commitments. As part of a research team within a Christian organisation, we are explicit in acknowledging these and are always looking for new ways that God is at work.</i>
<b>Unconditional</b>	<i>We believe God loves everyone, and every person is significant in his eyes. We serve anyone regardless of their age, gender, race, sexuality, faith, ability, status, or circumstances.</i>	<i>For CARU, ethical research includes a commitment to ensuring that participants or researchers are not excluded or discriminated against, and their dignity and wellbeing are always upheld.</i>
<b>Prayerful</b>	<i>We listen to God through prayer and want to be obedient to him. We want to be like Jesus in all we do.</i>	<i>Alongside our commitment to rigorous and ethical research, we acknowledge our dependence on God through prayer.</i>

## Research Ethics

Flowing out of our values, the foundational ethical consideration that underpins all our work is to ensure the maximum benefit of the research project whilst reducing the risk of actual or potential harm. In CARU, this means that we are orientated in our research towards the good of others with the dignity and wellbeing of those taking part always in mind.

Our approach to research ethics is informed by the Church of England National Church Institutions' *Research Ethics Framework* (2016). This in turn has been influenced by the Economic and Social Research Council's *Framework For Research Ethics*, which is widely considered an authority on ethical research in the social sciences in the UK.<sup>1</sup> Both frameworks are informed by the following core principles, which in turn guide CARU's approach to research ethics:

- Research participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected.
- Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and minimise potential risk of harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk and harm should be mitigated by robust precautions.
- Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved.
- Individual research participants and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected, and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected.
- Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured.
- The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit.

(ESRC Framework for Research Ethics, January 2015)

These principles align well with the values of Church Army as outlined in the previous section. Church Army's Research Unit seeks to adhere to these principles through each stage of the research projects we undertake - from initial conversations with prospective clients to how we handle data after the research project has been completed and submitted. Our systems and measures for ensuring this are outlined below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics-guidance/framework-for-research-ethics/our-core-principles/#contents-list>

## Discerning which research projects to take on

Before deciding to take on a new piece of work, the CARU team are required to complete a discernment form, documenting the potential benefits of the project and any significant ethical considerations, risks, or other areas of concern. This exercise then informs the formal process of contracting. New contracts need to be agreed with and signed off by Church Army's Director of Learning and Development or another member of the Senior Leadership Team.

## Internal ethical review

For all CARU research and consultancy projects, there will be a light touch assessment of potential benefits, risks, and ethical considerations through the discernment process outlined above. Some research projects, however, may require additional scrutiny, for example in the case of:

- Research which involves novel means of data collection
- Research involving children, young people, and particularly vulnerable groups
- Research which may induce significant psychological stress
- Research where the safety of the researcher may be in question

If a research project falls into one or more of these categories, the Research Team Leader will consult with Church Army's Director of Learning and Development to determine if a fuller internal review is needed. This would require the preparation of a written proposal, structured around the key areas outlined in the National Church Institutions' Research Ethics Form. The proposal would be considered by an internal ethical review panel, consisting of:

- The Director of Learning and Development
- A Church Army Board member
- An external academic

## External ethical review

Research in particularly complex or sensitive areas may also require ethical approval from an external body. In the unlikely event that CARU is asked to conduct research in any of the following areas, advice and approval will be sought from an appropriate external body:

- A study which involves the recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or use of NHS data or premises and/or equipment.
- A study that involves participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent under the auspices of the Mental Capacity Act 2005.
- A study that relates in any way to issues of national defence or the Ministry of Defence.

## Informed consent

When inviting people to take part in a research project, CARU researchers will supply participants with appropriate information (typically via an **Information Sheet**) about:

- the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research
- what their participation in the research entails
- any risks and benefits involved

Potential participants must then be given the chance to indicate if they are willing to take part, typically via a **Consent Form**.

## Ethical research through the project lifecycle

Though obtaining appropriate approval and informed consent at the start of a project is important, we recognise that there is far more to ethical research than this. Within CARU, we want to adhere to the principles of ethical research throughout all the stages of a project lifecycle. With this in mind, we have developed a series of internal checklists and associated documents for use by project leaders and researchers at key stages of a project. This is with a view to ensuring that research ethics remain ‘on the agenda’ throughout the various stages of a project’s lifecycle, including:

- Discernment and contracting
- Research design
- Active research and data collection
- Data analysis and reporting
- Project closure

## Data Protection

CARU’s commitment to data protection compliance and best practice flows out of Church Army’s vision and values and the approach to research ethics described earlier in this document. Church Army believes in maintaining the highest professional standards in the handling of data. At all times we are committed to processing data in a fair, lawful, and transparent manner in accordance with data protection legislation. More information on our approach to data protection can be found in the [Research Privacy Notice](#) on the Church Army website.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://churcharmy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/research-privacy-notice.pdf>