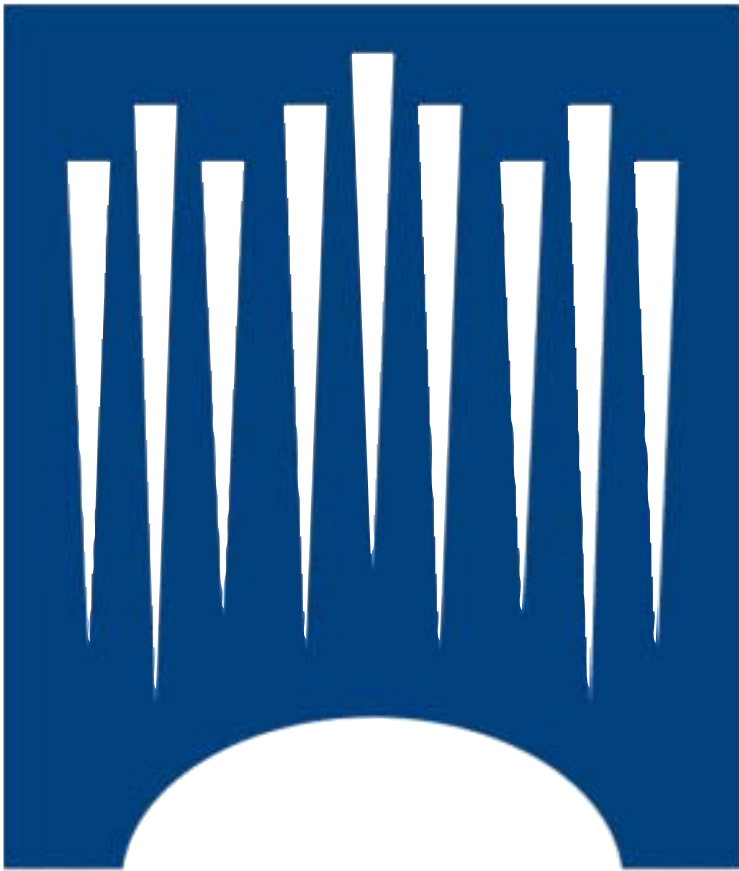


## ***Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North***





**Association  
of Canadian  
Universities for  
Northern Studies**

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Preface .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Principles .....	6
Definitions .....	8
Applying the principles .....	9
Document history .....	10

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405-17 York Street,  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9J6  
Tel: (613) 562-0515 Fax: (613) 562-0533  
E-mail: [acuns@cyberus.ca](mailto:acuns@cyberus.ca)  
Web site: <http://www.cyberus.ca/~acuns>

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## **Preface**

Since 1982, the Association's statement of ethical principles for the conduct of research in the North has become one of the most widely disseminated and reproduced in Canada. Times, however, have changed in the North. Northern communities, governments, groups and individuals have pointed out that the principles need adjustment to reflect developments in the North since then. We believe that the revised statement more accurately reflects the needs and concerns of northern communities and of the researchers who work there.

ACUNS maintains its commitment to the advancement of northern scholarship but recognizes that such scholarship and research take place among people with a stake in the work being done. Partnership is the by-word. Partnerships, however, must be founded on mutual understanding and trust. We see this revised statement of principles contributing to establishing that atmosphere. Many people helped to develop this revised statement and we wish to thank them all.

*Amanda Graham,  
Yukon College*

*Jim McDonald,  
University of Northern British Columbia*

*ACUNS Board Committee on Revising the Ethical  
Principles*

## Introduction

Since the publication of the Ethical Principles in 1982, they have proven their worth by becoming the most widely cited and adopted among northern researchers in Canada. Since then, however, the situation in the North has changed significantly. Many First Nations, the Inuvialuit, and the Inuit have settled land claims and, in many cases, related Self-Government Agreements. Land and other regimes have altered. Researchers now find the research context shifting, often unpredictably. Communities have sometimes found themselves and their concerns disregarded by researchers. A renewed research relationship has been called for and is emerging.

A new spirit of partnership between northerners and researchers is emerging in northern research. Of course, the nature of any particular partnership will depend on the specific project. The new partnership ethic, however, emphasizes the need to create meaningful relationships with the people and communities affected by research.

Another change is the increasing involvement of northerners not only as subjects or passive observers of research but in all aspects of the research process. Northerners are actively involved in research from conception to reporting, from funding to licensing. For all parties to benefit fully from research partnerships, mutual understanding is critical. High quality research depends both on communities understanding the needs and concerns of researchers and on researchers understanding the needs and concerns of communities.

Guidelines, or principles, are needed to provide a foundation for and to foster a mutual understanding of community and researcher needs and goals and to ensure that research is carried out with the least friction and social disruption and the most co-operation and support.

The 20 principles presented here are intended to encourage the development of co-operation and mutual respect between researchers and the people of the North. They are also intended to encourage partnership between northern peoples and researchers that, in turn, will promote and enhance northern scholarship.

Northerners are involved with research in many different ways:

1. As researchers;
2. As members of a research team;
3. As partners in a research collaboration;
4. As research subjects;
5. As sources of information;
6. As users of completed research;
7. As clients;
8. As funders;
9. As licensors; or
10. As individuals experiencing and living with the impact of research.

If research is to be a positive component of the northern social and physical environment, it must respect and involve, where practical, northern residents in appropriate ways. To do so, the research must not only be explained clearly, conducted ethically, and used constructively, it must be guided by principles that consider all of the above-mentioned ways in which northerners may be involved in research activities.

Researchers must be aware that good intentions are not always sufficient for avoiding adverse reactions or effects of research. Mutual respect will develop from meaningful consultation and partnerships, and will work to advance northern scholarship of all sorts.

## Principles

1. Researchers should abide by any local laws, regulations or protocols that may be in place in the region(s) in which they work.
2. There should be appropriate community consultation at all stages of research, including its design and practice. In determining the extent of appropriate consultation, researchers and communities should consider the relevant cross-cultural contexts, if any, and the type of research involved. However, incorporation of local research needs into research projects is encouraged.
3. Mutual respect is important for successful partnerships. In the case of northern research, there should be respect for the language, traditions, and standards of the community and respect for the highest standards of scholarly research.
4. The research must respect the privacy and dignity of the people. Researchers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the cultures and traditions of local communities.

5. The research should take into account the knowledge and experience of the people, and respect that knowledge and experience in the research process. The incorporation of relevant traditional knowledge into all stages of research is encouraged.
6. For all parties to benefit fully from research, efforts should be made, where practical, to enhance local benefits that could result from research.
7. The person in charge of the research is accountable for all decisions on the project, including the decisions of subordinates.
8. No research involving living people or extant environments should begin before obtaining the informed consent of those who might be unreasonably affected or of their legal guardian.
9. In seeking informed consent, researchers should clearly identify sponsors, purposes of the research, sources of financial support, and investigators responsible for the research.
10. In seeking informed consent, researchers should explain the potential beneficial and harmful effects of the research on individuals, on the community and/or on the environment.
11. The informed consent of participants in research involving human subjects should be obtained for any information-gathering techniques to be used (tape and video recordings, photographs, physiological measures, etc.), for the uses of information gathered from participants, and for the format in which that information will be displayed or made accessible.
12. The informed consent of participants should be obtained if they are going to be identified; if confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the subject must be informed of the possible consequences of this before becoming involved in the research.
13. No undue pressure should be applied to obtain consent for participation in a research project.
14. A community or an individual has the right to withdraw from the research at any point.
15. On-going explanations of research objectives, methods, findings and their interpretation should be made available to the community.

16. Subject to the requirements for confidentiality, descriptions of the data should be left on file in the communities from which it was gathered, along with descriptions of the methods used and the place of data storage. Local data storage is encouraged.
17. Research summaries in the local language and research reports should be made available to the communities involved. Consideration also should be given to providing reports in the language of the community and to otherwise enhance access.
18. All research publications should refer to informed consent and community participation, where applicable.
19. Subject to requirements for confidentiality, publications should give appropriate credit to everyone who contributes to the research.
20. Greater consideration should be placed on the risks to physical, psychological, humane, proprietary, and cultural values than to potential contribution of the research to knowledge.

## Definitions

The principles refer to research in its broadest sense, including fundamental or applied research in the physical, biological, or social sciences. Surveys or monitoring studies would also be included. In general, research includes all technological activities in the North. Even mineral and petroleum exploration surveys would be expected to honour the general principles. However, the more detailed principles on informed consent are meant specifically for researchers whose work involves human subjects and might not apply to purely technological activities. The principles, however, hold that, where such activities might affect individuals or communities, there be consultation because the principles focus on the practical aspects of science that can affect local people, communities and the environment. Even where research does not involve local people in an obvious way, it may still have effects on the land, water or wildlife of the region, and may thus affect the people indirectly.

The word “community” is not restricted to a limited area of settlement. The surrounding land that supplies resources for the settlement and the people who live there are viewed as part of the community. In addition, there are communities of interest within geographical communities. These, too, should be considered where research activities might affect them.

The geographic area of concern includes the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories and its successors, Nunavut and the currently

unnamed Western Territory, Northern Québec, Labrador, and the northern parts of the provinces from Ontario to British Columbia (the Extreme North, Far North and Middle North as defined by Louis-Edmond Hamelin (1975). Although the emphasis is on isolated northern communities, the general principles are not unique to the North and most of them could be applied elsewhere.

### **Applying the Principles**

In applying these principles to actual research, it is important to understand what they are not intended to do. They are not intended to regulate northern research—that is the responsibility of sponsoring organizations, northern governments or communities whose laws, guidelines and protocols will compel certain behaviour. And they are certainly not intended to be the last word on this matter. They are, instead, intended to guide the conduct of research in the North in general ways. They are conceived as general principles that will encourage research that is fair, honest, open and, where necessary, conducted with the consent and cooperation of whatever people or communities will be involved or affected or who might benefit or suffer harm from the research.

Some types of physical science or exploratory research might not appear to require the researcher to consider all the principles included here. This is a particularly important point. Research on physical phenomena at a distance from communities, traplines, hunting territories or traditional lands, might need nothing beyond the applicable permits. In other areas, the situation might require discussion of a project with a community. A researcher might not need to secure, for example, the informed consent of an individual as a participant or a subject in the research project. Nevertheless, the researcher might have to consider securing informed consent or an individual who might be a partner, a collaborator, or an informant, or of an individual or a community that might have to live with the effects of the research results or of its actual conduct (on community relations, game, land, water, etc.).

The situation in the North has changed considerably in the 21 years since these Principles were first articulated and published. Both those who ask questions and those who help to supply the answers have new needs. Respect is vital in all aspects of the research enterprise. Respect for knowledge, expertise, world views, ways of life must flow in all directions. Genuine respect will enhance the research enterprise in the North and benefit all who live and work there.

### **Document History**

These principles are based on “Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North” prepared by the Working Group on



Canada/MAB Sub-Program 4 (Science for the North), March 1977. The ACUNS Committee on Relations with Northern Peoples studied the MAB document as well as ethical guidelines prepared by other groups, and presented its recommendations to the Association's Annual General Meeting in May 1981. The Committee's document was accepted by the ACUNS Council, subject to some amendment, responsibility for which was delegated to the Board of Directors. At a meeting on September 22, 1981, the ACUNS Board of Directors gave approval to the 1982 document.

In November 1995, the newly elected Board of ACUNS undertook to review the principles and to make recommendations for its change to the ACUNS Council. In November 1996, a two-person Board committee presented a discussion document to the Council at the Annual General Meeting. Comments on the document and, later, on a series of draft principles by researchers, academics, government officials, Aboriginal organizations, and research bodies as well as research into a variety of ethical guidelines produced by a host of other groups, associations, regulatory and research agencies, led to a draft of the revised document. It was presented to and accepted, with minor amendments, by the ACUNS Council at its November 1997 Annual General Meeting.