



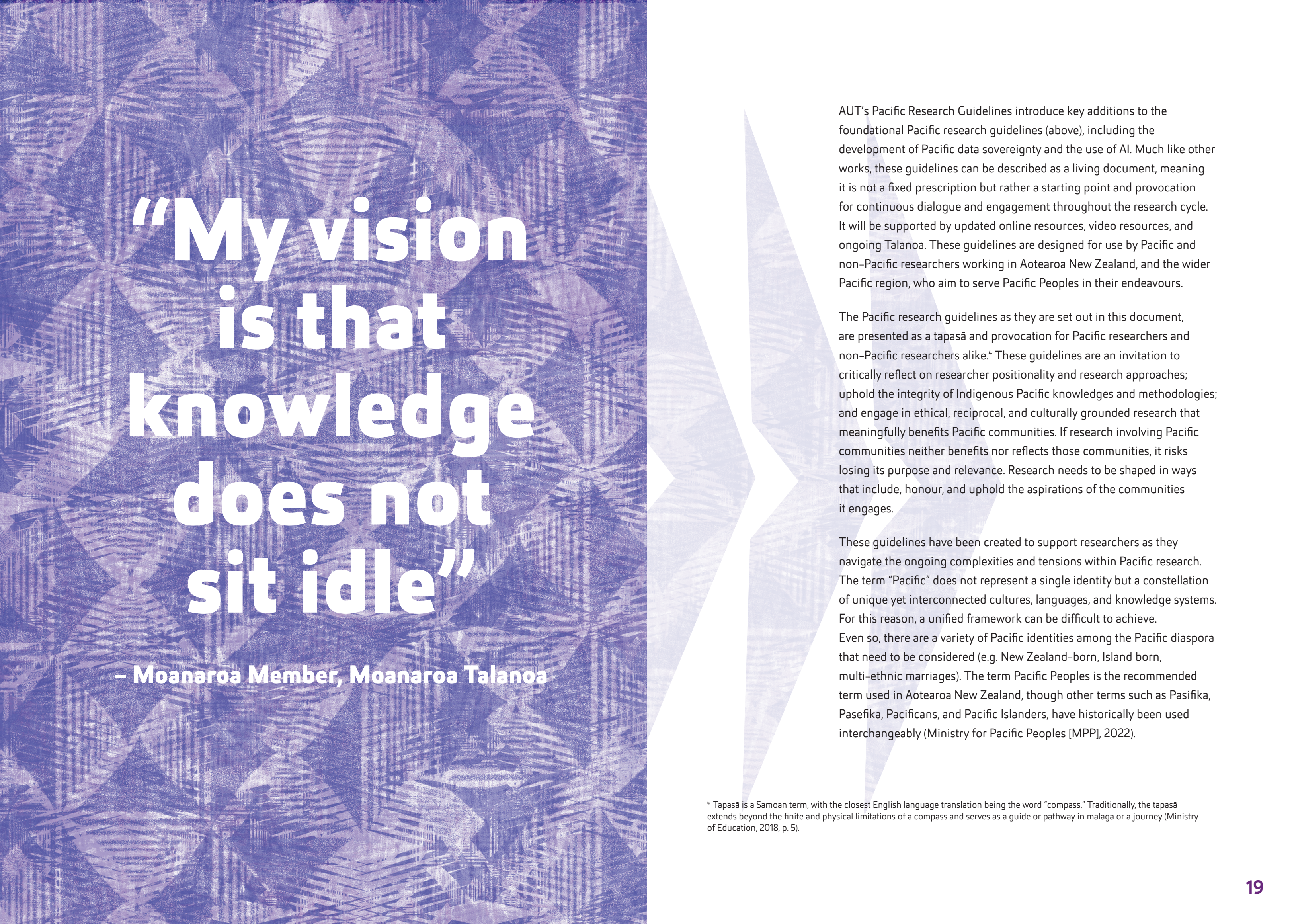
Introduction

Introduction

These Pacific research guidelines are offered as a navigational tool to guide researchers in moving ethically and respectfully with Pacific communities here in Aotearoa New Zealand and, where appropriate, across the region and internationally. Rooted in Pacific values, relational ethics, and Indigenous knowledge systems, these guidelines have been shaped by Pacific Peoples and for Pacific Peoples, with the supporting voices of our non-Pacific collaborators. They invite researchers to reflect deeply on how research is carried out to ensure this process strengthens the vā, upholds the collective mana, and contributes meaningfully to the wellbeing and aspirations of Pacific communities.

These guidelines aim to ensure that research is culturally appropriate, effective, and ultimately beneficial to Pacific Peoples, moving beyond historical approaches that often reflect the perspectives of outsiders. These guidelines echo and build on the foundations laid by others who have called for research that:

- Maximises benefits and minimises harm to individuals and communities (Health Research Council [HRC], 2014; University of Otago, 2011);
- Generates knowledge and understanding of, and for, Pacific Peoples and their environments (Pacific Research and Policy Centre, 2017);
- Is conducted in culturally appropriate and effective ways (HRC, 2014);
- Contributes to the attainment of the highest level of health and wellbeing (HRC, 2014);
- Supports education that is for, and by Pacific Peoples (Anae et al., 2001);
- Empowers Pacific Peoples as research participants and co-owners of knowledge (Anae et al., 2001); and
- Strengthens Pacific research capacity and capability (University of Otago, 2011).



“My vision is that knowledge does not sit idle”

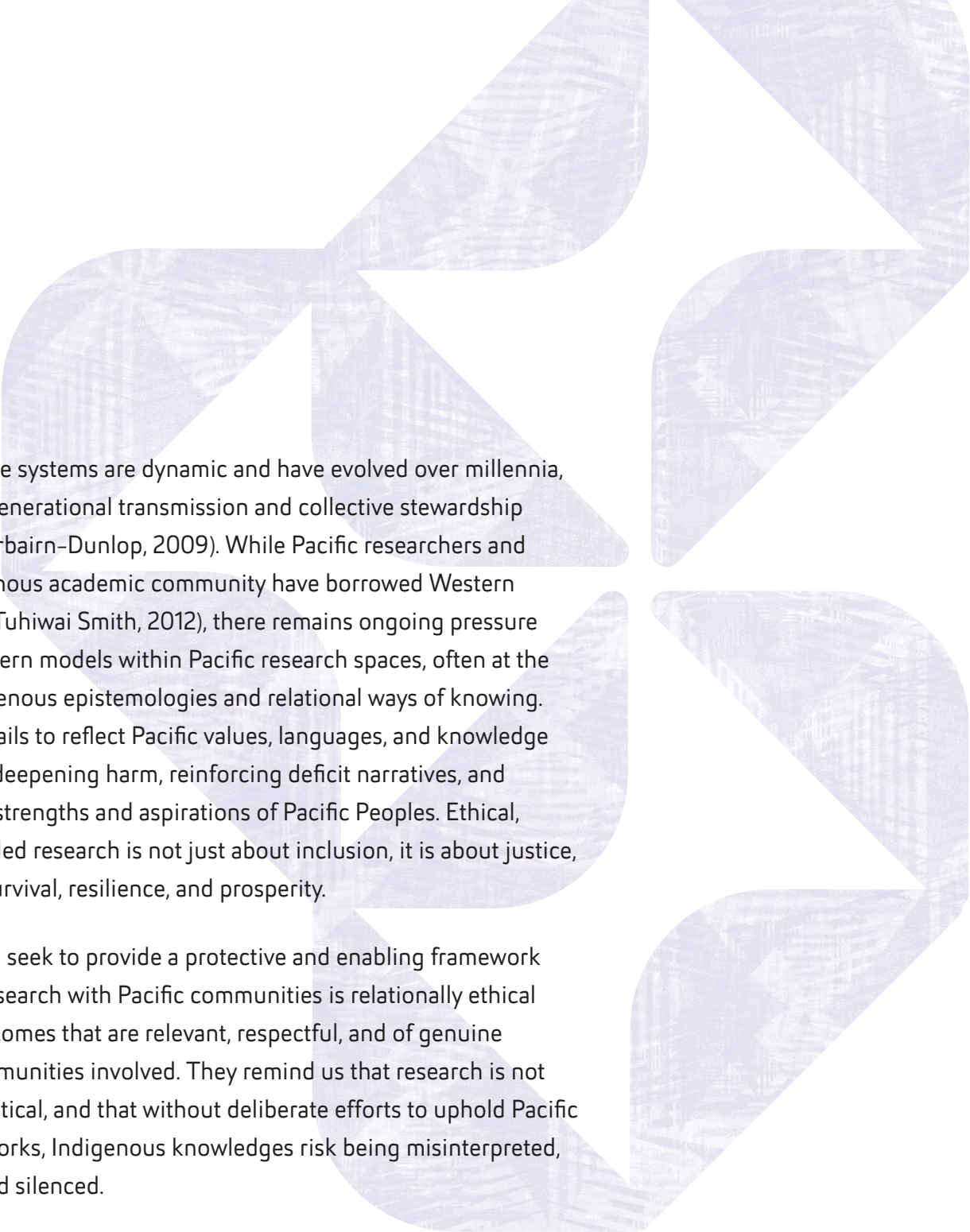
– Moanaroa Member, Moanaroa Talanoa

AUT’s Pacific Research Guidelines introduce key additions to the foundational Pacific research guidelines (above), including the development of Pacific data sovereignty and the use of AI. Much like other works, these guidelines can be described as a living document, meaning it is not a fixed prescription but rather a starting point and provocation for continuous dialogue and engagement throughout the research cycle. It will be supported by updated online resources, video resources, and ongoing Talanoa. These guidelines are designed for use by Pacific and non-Pacific researchers working in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the wider Pacific region, who aim to serve Pacific Peoples in their endeavours.

The Pacific research guidelines as they are set out in this document, are presented as a *tapasā* and provocation for Pacific researchers and non-Pacific researchers alike.⁴ These guidelines are an invitation to critically reflect on researcher positionality and research approaches; uphold the integrity of Indigenous Pacific knowledges and methodologies; and engage in ethical, reciprocal, and culturally grounded research that meaningfully benefits Pacific communities. If research involving Pacific communities neither benefits nor reflects those communities, it risks losing its purpose and relevance. Research needs to be shaped in ways that include, honour, and uphold the aspirations of the communities it engages.

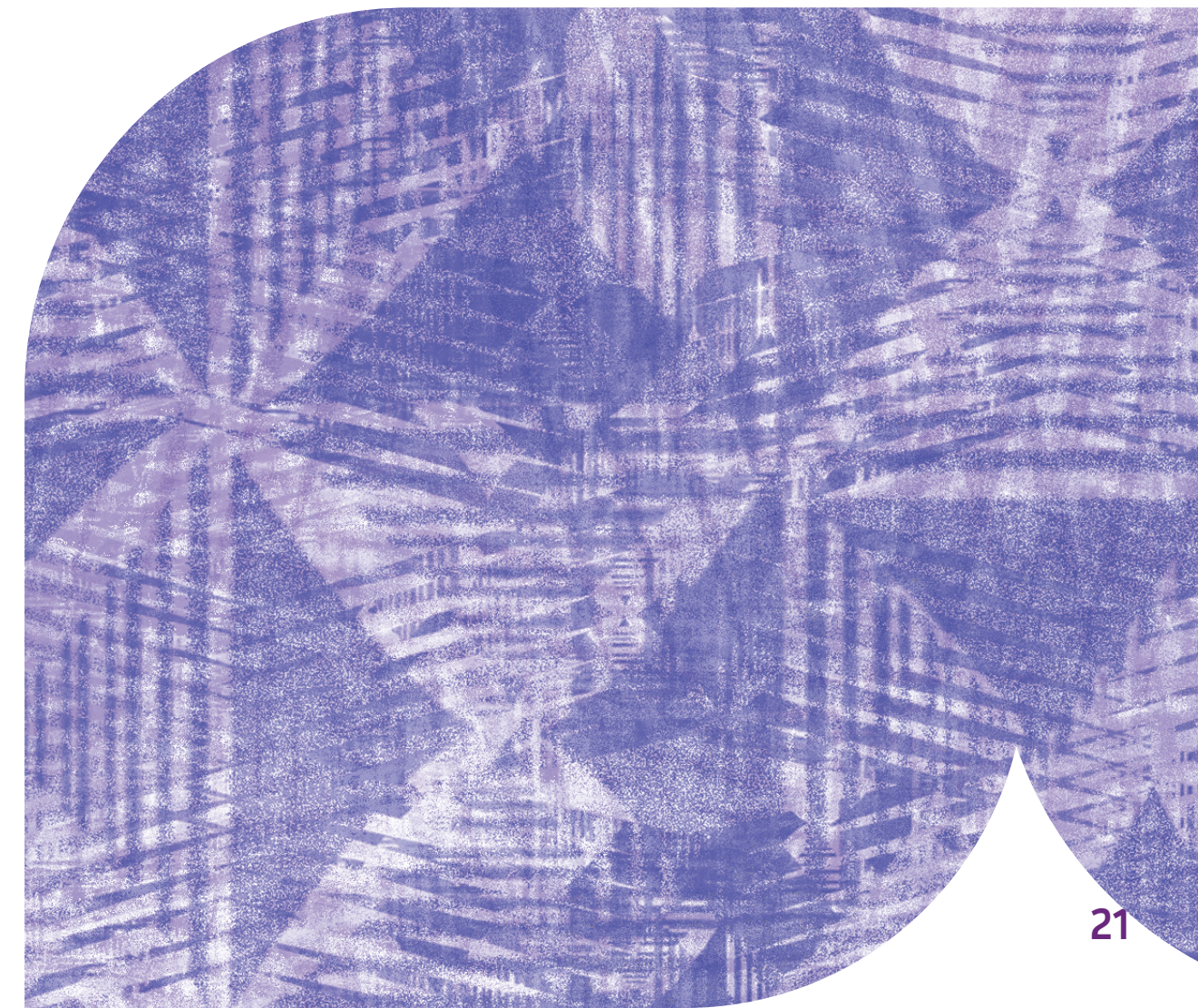
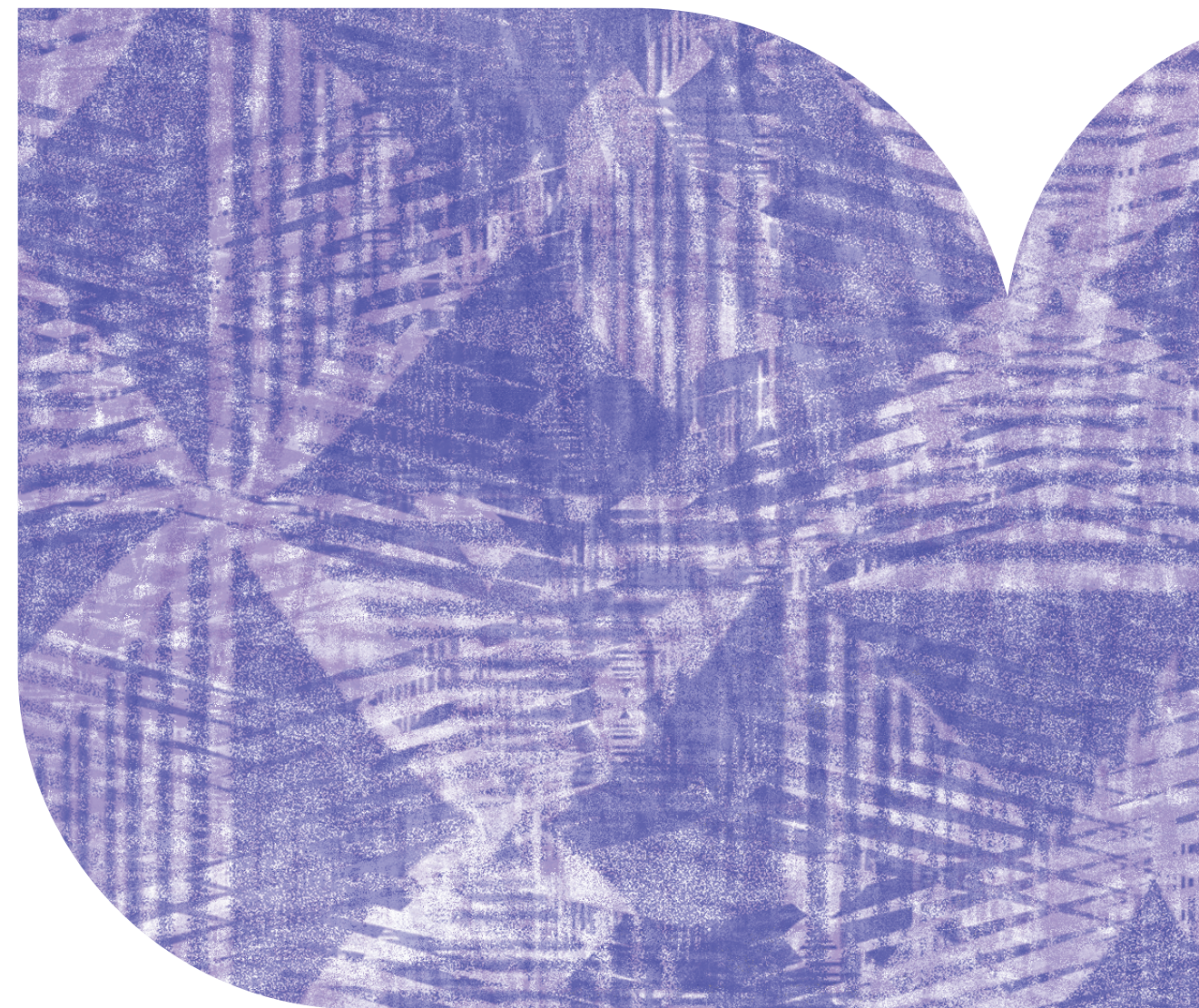
These guidelines have been created to support researchers as they navigate the ongoing complexities and tensions within Pacific research. The term “Pacific” does not represent a single identity but a constellation of unique yet interconnected cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. For this reason, a unified framework can be difficult to achieve. Even so, there are a variety of Pacific identities among the Pacific diaspora that need to be considered (e.g. New Zealand-born, Island born, multi-ethnic marriages). The term Pacific Peoples is the recommended term used in Aotearoa New Zealand, though other terms such as Pasifika, Pasefika, Pacificans, and Pacific Islanders, have historically been used interchangeably (Ministry for Pacific Peoples [MPP], 2022).

⁴ *Tapasā* is a Samoan term, with the closest English language translation being the word “compass.” Traditionally, the *tapasā* extends beyond the finite and physical limitations of a compass and serves as a guide or pathway in *malaga* or a journey (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 5).



Pacific knowledge systems are dynamic and have evolved over millennia, shaped by intergenerational transmission and collective stewardship (Du Plessis & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009). While Pacific researchers and the wider Indigenous academic community have borrowed Western methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), there remains ongoing pressure to privilege Western models within Pacific research spaces, often at the expense of Indigenous epistemologies and relational ways of knowing. When research fails to reflect Pacific values, languages, and knowledge systems, it risks deepening harm, reinforcing deficit narratives, and overlooking the strengths and aspirations of Pacific Peoples. Ethical, culturally grounded research is not just about inclusion, it is about justice, accountability, survival, resilience, and prosperity.

These guidelines seek to provide a protective and enabling framework to ensure that research with Pacific communities is relationally ethical and leads to outcomes that are relevant, respectful, and of genuine value to the communities involved. They remind us that research is not neutral, nor apolitical, and that without deliberate efforts to uphold Pacific research frameworks, Indigenous knowledges risk being misinterpreted, commodified, and silenced.



Purpose of the Pacific Research Guidelines

AUT and the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network, under the umbrella of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research Professor Mark Orams and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo, who leads the Office of Pacific Advancement, have developed these guidelines as a key contribution to advancing Pacific research excellence at AUT, in alignment with Moanaroa's overarching objectives that include the following:

1. Enabling Pacific-Led Research
2. Building Pacific Research Excellence
3. Cultivating Pacific Research Collaborations and Advocacy

The network's guiding objectives include enabling Pacific-led research, providing capacity-building opportunities for Pacific researchers, and fostering culturally affirming collaborations, advocacy, and partnerships. Through the development of these Pacific research guidelines, Moanaroa seeks to honour and give life to the depth and breadth of Indigenous Pacific research that is grounded in the wisdom of Pacific knowledge bearers and richness of Pacific knowledge systems, these guidelines are intended to advance the decolonisation and re-indigenisation of research practice

The guidelines are written first and foremost for, by, and with Pacific Peoples, including postgraduate students and researchers working within specific disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary contexts. We hope that these guidelines will also have wider application to areas where Pacific Peoples are involved in inquiry, knowledge generation, and solutions for communities and Pacific environments. This includes fellow Indigenous researchers and scholars; non-Pacific researchers engaging in Pacific research; university leadership and institutional decision makers research ethics committees and funding bodies; Pacific research centres and knowledge hubs; policy and government agencies; and academic institutions in the Pacific region.

The consultation phase that informs the Pacific research guidelines presented in this document was informed by the following topics:

- Institutional influence and support for Pacific research
- Challenges and opportunities for doing Pacific research
- Strengthening regional collaboration and research reciprocity
- Ethical and strengths-based engagement
- Indigenous research ethics and data sovereignty
- Research impact and Indigenous knowledge sharing
- The relationship of Tangata Whenua (Māori) and Tangata Moana (Pacific Peoples) in research.

The intent of Moanaroa in publishing these guidelines is to further develop research practices that ensure that research outcomes contribute as much to improving the lives of Pacific Peoples as they do to promoting and maintaining Pacific excellence in knowledge generation and preservation.



**“When I think Pacific,
I think diversity,
I think strength and
diversity, and I think
hospitality, warmth...
that’s the sort of sense
that we want in our
research...”**

– Mr. Sione Tekiteki, Moanaroa Talanoa.

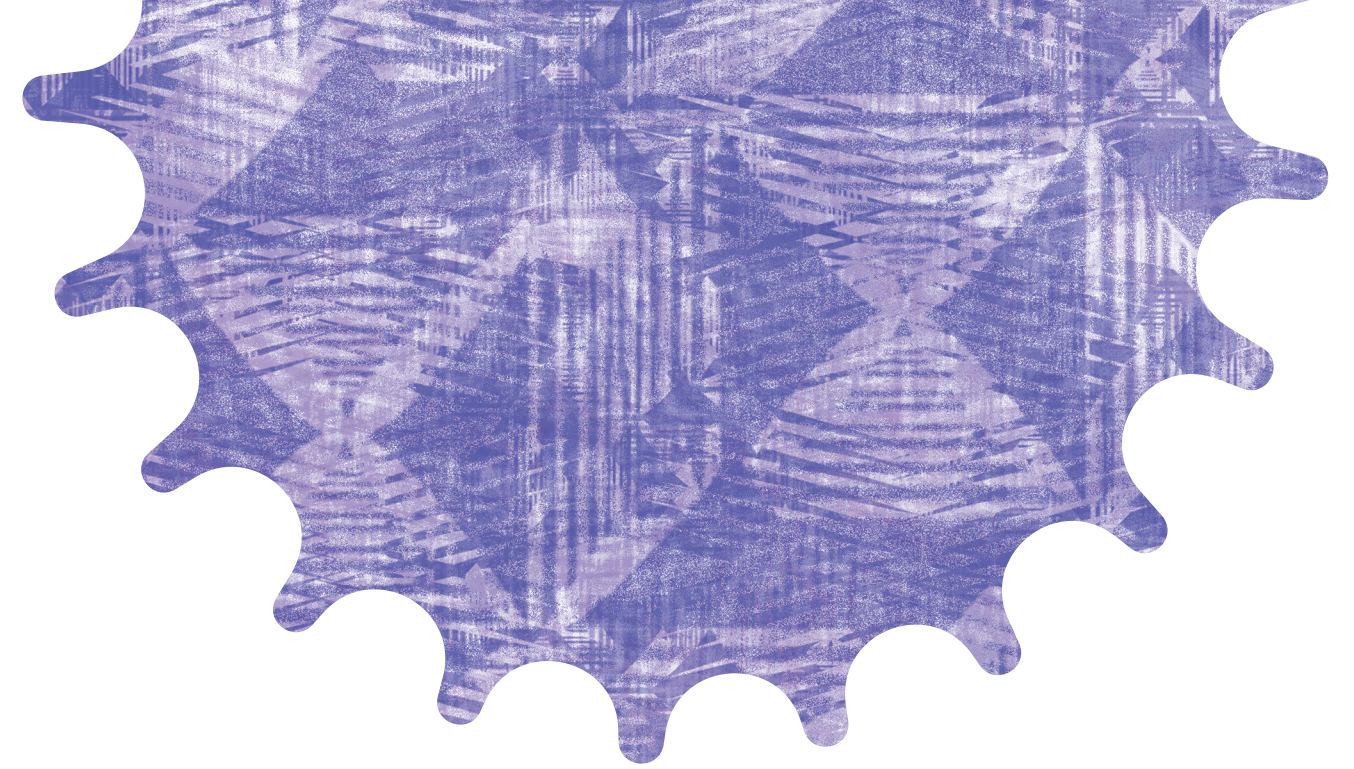
Who Are These Pacific Research Guidelines Intended to Support?

For Those Who Walk With Us in Pacific Research

These guidelines are grounded in the belief that Pacific research is a shared journey, one that thrives through respectful relationships, cultural integrity, and collective responsibility. They are intended to support those who walk alongside Pacific communities, affirming knowledge systems, and aspirations including:

- Researchers working with Pacific Peoples, knowledge, and environments, whether they are Pacific or non-Pacific;
- Institutions and funders developing policies, funding opportunities, and ethical review processes that impact Pacific research;
- Pacific communities engaging with researchers, helping them to understand their rights, expectations, and opportunities for partnership; and
- Students and early-career researchers learning to conduct research that is culturally grounded and ethically responsible.

⁵ Indigenous terms such as Tagata Whenua and Tangata Moana are purposefully capitalised to honour their cultural significance and bring mana to their naming—just as one would capitalise identities such as New Zealander or Rarotongan.



How to Use These Guidelines

As a Foundation, not a Prescription

These guidelines provide a framework for thinking, planning, and conducting research in ways that are culturally aligned and relationally accountable. It is important that they are adapted to the specific context, community, environment, and research question.

Alongside Other Ethical Frameworks

They need to be used in conjunction with institutional ethics requirements, field-specific guidelines (e.g., medical, educational, environmental research), and community-specific protocols.

Throughout the Research Lifecycle

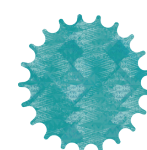
They are not only for the start of a project. Use them to guide decisions from the early design stage, through data collection and analysis, to dissemination and post-project relationships.

What These Guidelines Do Not Do

- They do not replace formal ethics approvals required by universities, institutions, health boards, and funders.
- They do not provide step-by-step instructions for every research scenario.
- They do not override local community/village protocols, as it is important that these always take precedence where they apply.

Key Message for Users

It is important that these guidelines are applied as a living framework that informs each stage of the research journey. They are intended to be interpreted, adapted, reflexive and enriched by those who use them. They support researchers to act with cultural integrity and to work in partnership with Pacific communities, ensuring that research is a shared endeavour that contributes to collective wellbeing.



Plan

Begin by aligning research aims with Pacific values, identifying community partners, and understanding local protocols.



Engage

Build relationships early, seek guidance from community leaders and advisory groups and, where possible, co-design the approach.



Conduct

Carry out research using culturally safe methods, ensuring respect, reciprocity, and adherence to agreed protocols.



Share

Return the findings in meaningful ways, prioritising accessible formats and community benefit before focusing on academic outputs.



Sustain

Honour ongoing relationships, explore future collaborations, and ensure communities retain control over their knowledge and data.

Developing the Pacific Research Guidelines:

Honouring Talanoa, Values, and Voices

This body of work was shaped through the gathering and weaving of voices in Aotearoa and across the Pacific region, brought together through talanoa sessions over a 6-month period in 2025. Sixty-five participants contributed to the process, including AUT postgraduate students and staff, members of the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network, and Pacific research communities in Aotearoa and the Pacific. Throughout these Pacific research guidelines, any quotes or references derived from the talanoa sessions undertaken as part of this work will be collectively referred to as Moanaroa Talanoa. This term recognises the relational, iterative, and communal nature of these conversations, reflecting the voices and knowledges shared by participants across the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network, Pacific research communities in Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider Pacific, including researchers, lecturers, postgraduate students, and practitioners.

These Moanaroa Talanoa provided a culturally grounded space for people to speak, listen, reflect, and connect. It was not simply a method of engagement, but a way of being together, affirming relationships, values, and responsibilities. Participants shared their lived experiences as researchers, educators, students, and community members, offering insights into the realities of doing research that serves Pacific Peoples and upholds Pacific ways of knowing and being. Participants who wanted to share more insights beyond the talanoa sessions, or who were unable to attend had the option to provide written submissions and give consent for their quotes to be shared as either named or unnamed contributors.

Rather than seeking consensus or one voice, the process embraced multiplicity. The voices gathered through our Moanaroa Talanoa are woven throughout this document, informing what is written and how it is held. What emerges is not a singular set of rules, but a living expression of collective wisdom, grounded in the realities of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa and, to some extent, the Pacific region.

“Authenticity of voice is really important.... ethical engagement as well. If you are going to embark on a research project, then you've got to be able to have that inherent knowledge and understanding of who our people are.”

**— Toleafoa Dr Yvonne Ualesi,
Moanaroa Talanoa**