

The background of the slide is a complex, abstract pattern. It features a dense, overlapping plaid or tartan design in shades of blue and red. A large, white, semi-transparent 'X' shape is superimposed over the entire background, creating a prominent visual element. The text is positioned on the right side of the slide, within the white 'X' area.

Governance and Accountability

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Governance and accountability ensure that Pacific research is guided by strong ethical stewardship, transparent decision-making, and responsibilities that honour relationships with communities, knowledge holders, and future generations. For too long, the initiation of research and decisions about its benefits, representation, legitimation, and accountability have been shaped by the researchers' own interests or institutional concerns. However, within the context of Pacific research, researchers are invited into a different rhythm, one that embodies relationships, reciprocity, and cultural consciousness (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2023). Research becomes a co-constructed story, grounded in ongoing connection. It asks researchers to show up somatically (physically, ethically, morally, and spiritually), not as distant observers, but as present and accountable participants (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

To engage with Pacific knowledge systems, often carefully held and protected within families, it is essential that researchers demonstrate genuine ethical integrity to build trust. While institutional ethics protocols from universities or governments may formally permit entry into the field, they are only one part of the equation. What truly opens the door to meaningful and authentic knowledge is the relationship cultivated between the researcher and the community. It is this relational trust, not just procedural approval, that grants access to the depth and richness of lived experience (Johansson-Fua, 2023). In Pacific research governance, accountability goes beyond compliance; it is about honouring the *vā*, the sacred relational space, and ensuring that research is guided by community-defined values, responsibilities, and expectations.

Principles of Governance in Pacific Research

Collective Stewardship

Governance is shared, recognising the collective voices of Pacific communities, elders, cultural leaders, and research participants. Decision-making needs to reflect communal values, not just institutional priorities.

Cultural Legitimacy

It is important that governance structures reflect Pacific cultural protocols and leadership systems. This includes respecting Pacific leadership (e.g., Matai, Ariki, Ta'unga, minister, bishop, reverend) and acknowledging the authority of community-led advisory groups.

Relational Ethics

Governance is relational, grounded in trust, reciprocity, and care. Accountability mechanisms need to be designed to maintain these relationships.

Role and Structure

Advisory Groups

Comprising of Pacific elders, leaders, community representatives, and research experts, advisory groups guide ethical decisions, oversee project alignment with Pacific values, and ensure outcomes serve community interests.

Community Oversight

Community-based governance allows for local validation of research activities, particularly where data sovereignty or cultural knowledge is concerned.

Institutional Support

It is important that universities and research institutions provide resources, uphold agreements, and respect Pacific governance decisions.

Indicators of Good Governance

- Communities are involved at every stage of the research lifecycle.
- Decision-making structures are inclusive and grounded on Pacific values, principles, and practices.
- Accountability measures are transparent, ongoing, and mutually agreed on.
- Researchers and institutions are held accountable to the commitments made to Pacific communities.