

Pacific Data Sovereignty Policy Guide

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Pacific data is a living expression of Pacific identity, knowledge, and relationships, grounded in cultural values and ways of knowing. It encompasses information for, by, or about Pacific Peoples, affirming their sovereignty over its use and governance.

Pacific Peoples—Our Interests, Rights, Values, & Knowledge

PROTECT

Safeguard Pacific data from misuse, ensuring its use remains under the control of Pacific communities.

PROMOTE

Reinforce Pacific voices by supporting data practices that reflect and serve Pacific knowledge systems.

HONOUR

Research the sacredness of Pacific data by affirming cultural values, protocols, and relational accountability.

- Are the outcomes of data use beneficial and equitable for Pacific Peoples?
- Does the data reflect Pacific knowledge systems, experiences, and aspirations?
- Are Pacific values, such as collectivism, humility and service embedded into the data design?

Authority of Autonomy for Pacific Peoples

STEWARDSHIP

Pacific Peoples are the rightful custodians of their own information.

AUTHORITY

Pacific Peoples have the authority to control data through governance.

CONTROL

Pacific Peoples have the inherent right to govern data collection, ownership, application, and sharing of data about their communities.

- By whose authority are you engaging in this research or data collection?
- Do you have a clear mandate from the Pacific community you are working with?
- Are Pacific leaders/experts involved in decisions about data definition, generation, collection, use, and sharing?
- Have Pacific communities agreed to engage with the data process, and do they understand how their data will be used over time?
- Does the approach enable Pacific-led and Pacific-driven data collection?

Influencing & Informing Policy & Practice

ACTIVELY TRANSFORM

Shift from deficit-framing to strengths-based, aspirational approach, and acknowledge lived realities shaped by Pacific knowledge systems. Ensure data tells the story of what Pacific communities prioritise, and not what the system prefers to measure. Ensure diversity in Pacific-led governance and systems.

GENUINE PARTNERSHIP

Engage Pacific communities as genuine advisors, as co-leads, across all stages of the data journey. Seek permissions, build trust, and honour community leadership and decision making throughout.

RECIPROCATE

Be transparent about how data is used, by whom, and for what, always grounded in community benefit. Share findings in culturally safe ways that honour those who have contributed to it. Invest in Pacific workforce development so Pacific Peoples shape their own data futures.

- Does data reflect Pacific strengths, nuances, resilience, goals, successes, aspirations, lived realities, and not just disparities or disadvantage?
- Is the data driving policies and services that truly improve Pacific outcomes?
- Is it supporting Pacific-led data systems and secure infrastructures?
- How is accountability to Pacific Peoples shown in the use of their data?

Facilitating Relationships & Authentic Engagement

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

Actively build and nurture meaningful, trust-based connections within Pacific communities and with trusted non-Pacific collaborators who respect Pacific leadership, values, and relational ways of working.

ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY

Participate with honesty, humility, and respect for Pacific values and ways of being.

ELEVATE TOGETHER

Mobilise and honour Pacific communities through leadership, knowledge, and action.

- Is there meaningful involvement of Pacific communities at all stages of the data use, including design, collection, analysis, access, and dissemination?
- Are strong, reciprocal relationships being built with Pacific communities?
- Are there deliberate, long-term partnerships in place between institutions, organisations, and Pacific communities/experts?
- How are communication and feedback loops ensured to share data findings back to community?

Integrity & Ethics

RESPECT PROTOCOLS

Honour Pacific knowledge systems, leadership structures, and community values in every part of the data journey.

SHARE BENEFITS

Ensure that the research meaningfully contributes to Pacific communities, not just in outcomes, but in process and relationships.

PROTECT MANA

Safeguard the dignity, identity, and authority of Pacific Peoples by ensuring data is interpreted, governed, and stored in ways that affirm Pacific ownership and control.

- How might this data support or harm Pacific Peoples, now, and into the future?
- Are Pacific cultural ways guiding how data is accessed, protected, and used?
- Does this uphold the mana and dignity of Pacific communities?
- Is harmful or deficit-based analysis being avoided?
- Has free, prior, and informed consent been truly honoured?
- If consent is unclear, is strong Pacific-led governance in place?
- Is there a trusted Pacific data space this can be returned to?

Pacific Research Essentials

These guidelines are intended for all researchers engaging with Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand, across the wider Pacific region, and internationally. They are designed to provide support as researchers navigate the ongoing complexities, tensions, and responsibilities that shape Pacific research. Grounded in Pacific values, principles and knowledge systems, the guidelines offer a framework for conducting research that is culturally responsive, relational, and ethical, ensuring that Pacific Peoples' voices, aspirations, and ways of knowing are honoured throughout the research process.

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CORE PRINCIPLES & VALUES

RESPECT

For relationships, knowledge holders, cultural protocols, and intellectual and cultural property.

HOLISM

Understand the interconnectedness of physical, social, environmental, cultural, and spiritual aspects. Bring your whole-self, engage in community life where appropriate.

RECIPROCITY

Ensure mutual benefit for researchers and participant communities.

SERVICE & RESEARCH FOR GOOD

Ensuring wellbeing of Pacific Peoples and their environment is crucial.

TEU LE VĀ

Nurture relationships throughout the entire research process.

INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY, & ACCOUNTABILITY

Maintaining honest exchange of information, clear purpose, disclosure of potential risks, and accurate reporting. Seek feedback.

ADDRESS DIVERSITY

Advocate for ethnic specific approaches where appropriate while considering intra-ethnic variations like age, gender, mixed-ethnicity, New Zealand born and island-born.

POSITIONALITY WHY YOU, WHY NOW, WHY THIS TOPIC? A REFLECTIVE FRAMEWORK

CONTEXT What are my ancestral, cultural, and academic ties? Who are my people and places of belonging? What relationships connect me to the community I am researching?

RESPONSIBILITIES & ETHICS

- What responsibilities do I hold towards the community or cultural protocols?
- Am I an insider, outsider, or in-between?
- How will I ensure ethical & respectful engagement

CHALLENGES

- What tensions or challenges do I face?
- How do I navigate Western academic expectations alongside Pacific worldviews?
- What limitations or uncertainties do I need to acknowledge?

IMPACT & CONTRIBUTION

- What do I hope my research will contribute to the community?
- Will the outcomes be beneficial & sustainable?
- How will I take responsibility for the impact of my research?

MOTIVATION & INFLUENCES

- What motivates me to pursue this research?
- Why me, why now, and why this topic?
- Who has influenced or guided my journey?
- What privileges, biases, or knowledge gaps do I carry?

RELATIONAL ETHICS GUIDE

PLANNING & DESIGN

- Initial Talanoa with communities and leaders.
- Include Pacific advisory group in governance.
- Co-design questions and methods.
- Respect local protocols.

DISSEMINATION

- Share findings first with communities through accessible formats.
- Honour narrative ownership; this may include ongoing consent beyond initial consent forms.
- Ensure policy use reflects Pacific perspectives.

DATA COLLECTION & RELATIONSHIPS

- Maintain open and transparent communication.
- Protect both community and individual privacy.
- Use culturally safe engagement (face-to-face, respectful dialogue).
- Offer modes of engagement that accommodate participants' settings (phone call, video call, in person).
- Offer reciprocity (e.g. koha/me'alofo, shared learning).

BEYOND THE PROJECTS

- Formally acknowledge participants and advisors.
- Maintain ongoing, rather than transactional, relationships.
- Share skills and resources to build Pacific capacity.

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

- Engage communities in interpreting findings.
- Safeguard cultural intellectual property.
- Apply CARE & FARE principles for data sovereignty.

KEY STAGES OF PACIFIC RESEARCH DESIGN

SELECTION OF RESEARCH TOPIC

- Begin with community priorities.
- Balance rigour with aspirations.
- Embed Pacific representation across the life cycle of the research.
- Revisit priorities throughout the journey.

CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT

- This is a living relationship, not a tick box.
- Start early, continue often.
- Talanoa with diverse stakeholders.
- Weave relationships across the Vā.
- Face-to-face preferred, offer options.
- Advisory/reference groups can add guidance. Any translation must carry mana.
- Be transparent about purpose, process, and outcomes.

NAVIGATING METHOD WITH CULTURAL CARE

- Move beyond accuracy to also embed cultural sensitivity.
- Phrase carefully around sensitive topics.
- Pilot tools, refine with feedback.
- Offer researcher-assisted methods when needed.
- Screen questions for bias and stereotypes from people familiar with the culture of the participant community.

SAMPLING

- Oversample if needed for Pacific analysis.
- Balance rigour with cultural respect.
- Include all key groups, and knowledge holders.

RESEARCH TEAM COMPOSITION

- Pacific leadership at all levels.
- Include Pacific researchers: define roles for non-Pacific allies.
- Reflect community diversity.
- Train data collectors with cultural safety.
- Encourage co-supervision for Pacific postgraduate students.

ETHICS IN PRACTICE

- Obtain ethics approval.
- Live ethics: respect, protection, transparency.
- Consent includes dialogue & trust, not just signature.
- Respect relational privacy.
- Protect vulnerable groups; uphold dignity & mana.

DIVERSITY & CONTEXT

- Recognise Pacific diversity.
- Avoid essentialising.
- Attend to intra-community worldviews.
- Be mindful of words, mannerisms, and body language to avoid offence.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT OF RESEARCH DESIGN

- Transformative, not extractive.
- Build Pacific capacity and mentoring.
- Share findings back to community.
- Plan dissemination with care.
- Use Pacific media/social platforms.
- Embed feedback and validation.
- Catalyse action beyond analysis.