



# Pacific Research: Guidelines for Social & Cultural Responsiveness

## Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance on Pacific research, what it is, what the principles are and how to consult appropriately. Pacific research may include research where the subject matter is Pacific centred, has an impact on Pacific Island communities and or includes Pacific research methodologies and methods.

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## Scope

These guidelines apply to all Unitec staff and students.

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## Guidelines

### 1. Principles

- The principles outlined in the Guidelines for Māori and Community Social and Cultural Responsiveness document are applicable to all Unitec research. The following specific guidelines should be considered in relation to Pacific Island research. Pacific research should be conducted with the following Pacific principles and values in mind:
  - Respect
  - Reciprocity
  - Cultural sensitivity and awareness (Pacific protocols)
  - Sincerity
  - Humility
  - Love
  - Service
  - Spirituality (Traditional)
  - Christianity
  - Family/Community connection (collective as opposed to individual)
- Although many of the above can be regarded as universal values, they are particularly important in the Pacific and are often the values upon which most Pacific groups live by. However, it is important to acknowledge that despite these values being common throughout various Pacific groups, they may be practiced differently by each of these groups.

## 2. Methodology

- A Pacific methodology should be used when conducting Pacific research. It is important that the Pacific research methodology is selected with the advice of the research supervisor, Pacific Research Advisor, or Pacific Research Fono (PRF).

## 3. Relationship

- Relationships are an important part of any Pacific Island society and will therefore be important for the purposes of research. The relationship between the researcher and research participants needs to be established at the beginning of the research and continue through beyond the time of the research project. It is not a contractual relationship as it is a relationship without a defined end date. Good relationships will be conducive to better and greater information sharing and assure parties to the respectful handling of the information that is being shared.

## 4. Knowledge

- Many Pacific Island cultures will view knowledge as something to be shared rather than safeguarded as in the case of intellectual property. Researchers should be made aware of this and how to manage such information so as to balance sensitive information and knowledge sharing.
- The expectation that certain agreements should be enacted prior to the research project commencing and an understanding of the fact that:
  - Cultural knowledge is considered collective knowledge.
  - That the researcher is granted use or guardianship of cultural knowledge, not ownership.
  - Benefits/outcomes of research should be agreed upon and reported back on.
  - Knowledge generated should be shared in a manner accessible to the community.
  - Engagement will be culturally appropriate, and principles and values of the group will be observed.
  - Language may feature as part of this list.
- The group and individuals involved may choose if the knowledge generated will become public or remain confidential, and if they wish to remain anonymous.

## 5. Consultation

- **5.1.1 Unitec Consultation Process**
  - The purpose of consultation is to ensure that the research practices are appropriate and that research will be conducted to ensure safety for the participants, the researcher and Unitec. Appropriate consultation endeavours to establish a foundation for a collaborative relationship between researchers, participants and the community.
  - Given that the Pacific consists of many different groups, the most appropriate consultant would be preferably one from the actual Pacific group that is being researched. For example, if research is being conducted in the Cook Islands, the most appropriate consultant would be someone from the actual island on which the research is being conducted. The Cook Islands is made up of 15 different islands each with its own dialect and variation in customs and practices.
  - It is expected that at the beginning of the proposal process, when it is identified that Pacific people will be involved in the research, that appropriate consultation will be sought.
  - Initial consultation should be made with a Unitec Pacific Research Advisor and/ or the PRF.

- The consultation process will begin at proposal stage, and the consultant will agree with the researcher as to the next steps and if further consultation is required.
- Part of the consultation process will be to ensure the researcher understands the Pacific principles and values above, develops relationships appropriately, ensures cultural competency and meaningful engagement.
- **5.1.2 Unitec Pacific Research Advisors**
  - The Unitec Pacific Research Advisors are:
    - Daisy Bentley-Gray; [dbentleygray@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:dbentleygray@unitec.ac.nz)
    - Associate Professor Dion Enari; [denari@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:denari@unitec.ac.nz)
    - Dr James Prescott; [jprescott@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:jprescott@unitec.ac.nz)
- **5.1.3 External Unitec consultation options**
  - Some Pacific education organisations that could be useful for consultation:
    - The Centre for Pacific Studies – University of Auckland.
    - The Office of Pacific Advancement – AUT University
    - The Pacific Research & Policy Centre – Massey University
    - The Māori & Pacific Development Office – University of Waikato
    - Va'aomanū Pasifika – Victoria University
    - Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies – University of Canterbury
    - School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies – University of Otago

## 6. Supervision

- Where research is identified as Pacific research, it is ideal for a supervisor to be experienced in Pacific research. In the event that the main supervisor has no experience in Pacific, it is recommended that the student has a secondary supervisor or advisor who is.

## 7. Confidentiality, Informed Consent and Cultural Knowledge

- Given the relatively small Pacific community in New Zealand and the closeness of the community, the need for anonymity may be required in order to protect confidentiality.
- Informed consent is generally required in written form. Given that oral traditions are very important in Pacific communities, it may be more appropriate to acquire verbal consent from individuals, family members, members of the community. This is acceptable as evidence for informed consent provided this is clearly detailed within the researcher's ethics application.
- The process of knowledge transfer during the interview process does not give the researcher ownership of cultural knowledge. The researcher is a guardian of this knowledge and consideration must be given to how the knowledge is processed and presented. Part of the consultation process is to ensure ethnic-specific, culturally sensitive practice.

## 8. For more information about engagement with Pacific research see:

- Enari, D., Matapo, J., Ualesi, Y., Cammock, R., Port, H., Boon, J., ... Faleolo, R. (Lute). (2024). Indigenising research: Moanaroa a philosophy for practice. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 56(11), 1044–1053. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2323565>
- Bentley-Gray, D. (2023). *Talanoa: Pushing boundaries to promote Pacific ways of being in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Unitec ePress Occasional and Discussion Paper Series (1). 1-20. Unitec ePress

- [Enari D. \(2021\). Methodology marriage: Merging Western and Pacific research design. Pacific Dynamics, 5\(1\), 61–73](#)
- [Pacific Health Research Guidelines \(2014\). The Health Research Council of New Zealand.](#)
- [Human Research Ethics: A Handbook for USP Researchers \(2009\). The University of the South Pacific.](#)
- [Mahina, O., Williams, N., & Nabobo-Baba, U. \(2004\). Researching Pacific and indigenous peoples: Issues and perspectives \(pp. 159-67\). T. Baba \(Ed.\). Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies, The University of Auckland.](#)
- [Pasifika Education Research Guidelines \(2001\). Report to the Ministry of Education. Auckland Uniservices Ltd.](#)

## Definitions

Term	Means
Pacific	A collective term which includes groups of islands located in three regions of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. Note that New Zealand is also part of the Pacific.
Pacific People	For the purposes of research, this applies to people with genealogical ties to any of the Island groups located within the Pacific boundary. It may also consider people who identify with the ethnicity and cultures of the island nations of the Pacific.
Pacific Research	Research to generate knowledge and understanding about, and for, Pacific peoples and their physical, social and spiritual environments. This includes the use of Pacific Island research methodologies and methods.
Pacific Research Fono (PRF)	The Pacific Research Fono is a collective of Pacific staff engaged in research, possessing cultural knowledge and/ or connections to cultural experts.

## Reference Documents

- [AC 4.3 Research Ethics Policy](#)
- [Human Research Ethics Guidelines](#)
- [Pacific Research Protocol, University of Otago`](#)
- [Guidelines for Māori and Community Social and Cultural Responsiveness](#)
- [AC 4.0 Conduct of Research Policy](#)
- [AC 4.2 Conduct of Student Research Policy](#)

## Approval Details

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## Pacific Research: Guidelines for Social & Cultural Responsiveness

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<b>Contact Person</b>	Manager Pacific Success	<b>Date of Next Review</b> August 2028