

# Doing Indigenous Research: A Collaborative Project on Ethics Review between the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and the University of Guelph

## Audio Transcript

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Hello, Welcome to "Doing Indigenous Research: A Collaborative Project on Ethics Review Between the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and the University of Guelph. My name is Sarina Perchak. I'm a person of mixed ancestry. I'm Irish, Ukrainian, and Métis, originally from Treaty One Territory. I now live in Southern Ontario on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Neutral Peoples.

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As well as on the Treaty Lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and Haldimand Tract lands of the people of Six Nations of the Grand River. I'm a second year masters student at the University of Guelph in the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, working with Dr. Kim Anderson.

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Hello everyone. My name is Olivia Franks and I'm a member of Wahta Mohawk Territory. I grew up living in Wahta, but currently live in Toronto, Ontario. I have mixed ancestry with Mohawk roots from Kanesatake on my father's side and Scottish, Irish, and English ancestry on my mother's side. I have been involved in community-engaged research for five years, and I'm currently working at the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres as a researcher for the past 2 1/2 years.

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Olivia and I are part of a collaborative team based at the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, the OFIFC, working with the University of Guelph to help review and improve institutional procedures, protocols, and policies for doing ethical research with and for Indigenous peoples and lands as part of the University's Indigenous Initiative Strategy. The goals of this webinar are to help support research with and for Indigenous Peoples that is based in prioritizing safety and responsibility for all involved;

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and to help reorient the expectations of Guelph's research ethics board members through a deeper understanding of what ethical research means from Indigenous perspectives. As such, this webinar is intended to inform research ethics board reviewers as well as researchers. In this webinar, we will first situate the project, then provide a general orientation about Indigenous research ethics, discuss the research process, and conclude with a summary.

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The OFIFC has collaborated with many members of the Indigenous community, including recognized Indigenous research experts such as Dr. Kim Anderson on many research projects over the past 20 years. The OFIFC utilizes a community driven research model and is committed to community led research that prioritizes community control over research including research processes, research priorities, resources, methodologies, decision making and any actions coming out of the research.

2:51

Community driven research refers to the historic and established relationships that exist within the Friendship Centre Movement of over 50 years with respect to the awareness and understanding of Indigenous knowledge perspectives. These relationships extend in some cases to pre-colonial times. Some of the research topics from our partnership with the 29 Friendship Centers across Ontario include poverty reduction, gender-based violence prevention, student well-being, wholistic health, traditional justice, among others.

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Within the community driven model, the OFIFC has established the USAI Research Framework, which takes its acronym from the four principles that guide it: Utility, Self-voicing, Access, and Inter-relationality. The USAI Framework and other frameworks to support the ethical conduct of Indigenous research are presented in more detail towards the end of this webinar.

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USAI is a community driven research approach that supports and encourages Friendship Centres to self-voice their own research projects in terms of design, conduct, and control. The 2nd edition of the USAI Research Framework was completed in 2016. This edition includes new sections that speak to the trauma-informed approaches to research, research collaborations and partnerships as well as the pathways to evaluation.

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Within USAI, research is done for the good of urban Indigenous communities. It is not value neutral. It speaks in community's voices and is about cultural identity and cultural confidence.

It brings back balance to all aspects of life in a holistic way and it results in action and creates meaningful change that's practical within community.

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The project of putting together this webinar had three phases as follows: The first step was an environmental scan and literature review of the latest developments and practices in Indigenous research ethics. The second step was to review the existing ethics process at the University of Guelph to identify opportunities to better support ethical Indigenous research. The third step was the creation of this webinar; a collaborative exercise between Sarina and the OFIFC team, and representatives from the University of Guelph,

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including Dr. Kim Anderson from the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, Dr. Cara Wehkamp, the Assistant Vice-President, Indigenous Initiatives, Katelyn Wadleigh, Research Ethics Manager, and Joanne Garcia-Moores, Indigenization and EDI Advisor in Research, both in the Research Services Office.

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Any questions related to the content of this webinar should be directed to the Research Services Office at the University of Guelph. Now we will present the guiding lens that came out of this collaborative process and demonstrate how it serves to help inform ethical research with and for Indigenous Peoples and lands. Then we will walk you through the research process to highlight guiding principles and important considerations for Indigenous research at every step of the way. Finally, we'll close with some questions for further consideration. Please note that a list of all the references and additional resources,

6:01

including the environmental scan that was created as a result of this project, as well as resources that have been used in relevant Indigenous research circles such as OCAP - which stands for Ownership, Control, Access and Possession - the model that was created by the First Nations Information Governance Centre; and the USAI Research Framework will be available to help support viewers in applying the principles discussed in this webinar.

6:29

Through a look at the latest developments and practices in Indigenous research ethics, it is evident that there are several guiding principles that are commonly highlighted as integral to the ethical practice of research with Indigenous communities and peoples that we find important to reiterate here. Most frequently mentioned principles are as follows: benefits to and capacity building for communities and participants; community involvement and engagement;

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;respect; honouring of Indigenous sovereignty; and relevance in both a research and cultural sense. Other principles that are equally as important include reciprocity between researchers and research communities; responsibility to research participants; free, prior, and informed consent; transparency in research;

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building trust and meaningful relationships with research participants, communities and environments; and protection of the natural world. Literature surrounding Indigenous ethics

processes offer important considerations and context to the dialogue surrounding Indigenous research ethics, existing within a larger narrative that compares Indigenous and institutional understandings of ethics and research more broadly.

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It is from this place of comparison that we came to see a fundamental difference between these two standpoints: institutional understandings of ethics are based in ideas of risk, while Indigenous understandings of ethics are based in ideas of responsibility. This is how we have chosen to frame the rest of this presentation, to move away from ideas of risk mitigation to better think about how the research ethics process can instead centre responsibilities to research participants, communities, and environments.

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Let's look at what a comparison of a risk lens versus a responsibility lens looks like with support from the literature. From a risk lens, reputations and legal matters are narrowly focused on. But instead, from a responsibility lens, we should be ensuring researchers and institutions are meeting their responsibilities to research participants, communities, and environments.

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Focusing on a risk lens can segregate certain groups from the general population based on their "risk behaviours," resulting in them being labeled as problematic or vulnerable. If we think about this from a responsibility lens instead, we should be promoting continued collaboration between researchers, communities, and environments.

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A risk lens understands risk to be inevitable, which is inherently deficit based, disharmonious, paternalistic, promotes alienation, and limits autonomy. Instead of this, from a responsibility lens, there should be a relational accountability focus anchored in respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and community.

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From a risk lens, language and actions are solely centred on deliverables and outcomes; whereas, from a responsibility lens, we should be continually asking ourselves questions about trust, respect and the axiological position of cultures and places throughout the entire research process. Ultimately, a shift from risk centred to responsibility centred research is a transition based in care and support and is intended to humanize the research process from one focused on research mechanics to one based in living research practices.

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For the purpose of this presentation, we have simplified the stages of an Indigenous research project into before the research begins, during research, as well as after research. As we walk through these stages, we have pulled some of our lessons learned and recommendations from our work with the University of Guelph regarding the ethics process and hope that this presentation helps inform and provide further knowledge about Indigenous research projects.

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Indigenous research, whether it's proposals, conference presentations, ethics - it begins with the researcher stating their positionality and connection to the project and those involved.

Before an Indigenous research project arrives at the ethics review board, there have been potentially weeks to months to years of groundwork that has been done to set the foundation of the project, including relationship-building and organizing and creating the research project that benefits the communities involved.

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Local research ethics processes may need to be considered and embedded within the project. This is typically on a case-by-case basis if these processes are established within communities, but it must be discussed and completed with the community prior to completing the university ethics application. It's important to address if a Memorandum of Understanding or an MOU is needed within the project. This is context specific and should be determined in collaboration with the community.

11:45

Shared from First Nations University (2022), when creating an agreement, factors such as timeline, ownership of data, methods of communication, knowledge, translation, and reciprocity must be considered. Additionally, within many ethics applications, there is no explicit room in the introductory section for the applicant to share their positionality.

Thinking about self in relation to ethics, community, and the research project is important for any researcher, and is essential within Indigenous research.

12:14

It is a common misunderstanding of ethics review board members to interpret relationship-building within Indigenous communities as a potential conflict of interest rather than a basic requirement to the project. For instance, asking if researchers, members of the research team,



and or their partners or immediate family will receive any personal benefits contradicts with Indigenous research practices,

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as it is fundamental for the projects to include community members and it is necessary for the project to benefit the community. Often when Indigenous researchers are working within their home communities, it is common for participants and/or community members to be related and or considered family.

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While conflicts of interest can exist in any research project, it is important to keep these aspects of Indigenous research in mind and understanding that there must be benefits to participants and communities. Based on the intricate web of relationships that often make up Indigenous communities, these participants may be considered as relatives. So, instead of labeling these as conflicts of interest, these relationships should be understood as necessary pieces of the research process.

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Here are some guiding questions relating to the "before the research" segment. What is the positionality of the researcher or researchers? Are their connections to the research project clear? Has the researcher developed a relationship with the research participants, communities and/or environments prior to starting the project?

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Have the proper agreements, applications, and understandings been pursued based on what the research community has voiced? Are the benefits to participants and community relevant, evident, and centralized? Have these benefits come from participants and communities themselves?

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Let us now move on to during the research project. In terms of consent, verbal consent should always be welcome. While we are aware that verbal consent options are increasingly accepted by research review boards, this is an option that should be actively encouraged when it comes to Indigenous research processes. Overall, flexibility and open-mindedness must be prioritized in terms of possibilities for consent based on contextual circumstances. Given the history of wrongful research and Indigenous peoples across the globe, greater sensitivity and care

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must be prioritized in the acceptance of certain consent methods. For example, when including Elders in research, it may be more appropriate to sit with them and verbally discuss consent compared to the formal signing of consent forms. For Indigenous researchers, asking an Elder to sign a consent form often runs counter to the processes of respect and responsibility that we are taught in our communities and ways of knowing.

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Another thing to consider when being flexible and sensitive to community needs is the consideration of collective consent. While different in any community, this may be an avenue of obtaining consent that needs to be pursued based on the governance systems and

preferences of the community that will be worked with. Within Indigenous understandings of ethics, a foundational difference from that of Western understandings

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is who is considered as being involved in the research process. While non-Indigenous ideas of ethics focus primarily on the individual, Indigenous understandings of the self cannot be so easily bound to the individual. Indigenous notions of self include past, present, and future generations of community as well as interconnections with humans, other spiritual entities, the land, ancestors and more-than-human relations.

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Thus, individual consent becomes a point of contention when working with Indigenous peoples that understand their positionality as being intimately connected to others. This has implications for conflict of interest as well. This is further complicated by the concept of pluralism, as the diversity among and within Indigenous communities makes it even more difficult to develop widely applicable ethical decision-making processes.

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This is particularly why relevance is a foundational tenet of Indigenous research. Not only should the research questions be appropriate, but so too should the ethical practices that govern it. Another thing to be reminded of is if the benefits are clear by the community's standards and not the researcher's perception of a benefit.

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While important, throughout the entire research process, the underpinning knowledges,

principles, and ways of knowing that are prioritized within a research project need to be evident and specifically practiced throughout the entire project. So here are a few questions to consider from First Nations University of Canada (2022), that we find helpful. Has the research team committed to using and privileging Indigenous methodologies in the project? Are Knowledge Keepers, and our other prominent community members involved in the process? And are cultural protocols being considered and implemented, such as the use of tobacco and ceremony?

17:41

Some questions to consider from the "during research" phase are: Are the benefits of the research project as indicated by the community being prioritized? How are responsibilities to research participants, communities, and environments being upheld throughout the research process? Is consent ongoing? And, is collaboration with the research participants and/or communities ongoing and community-based?

18:08

Ownership and storage of data is a crucial element of Indigenous research. Within a project, we need to ensure that there is proper respect and care for the data generated by community. We cannot rely on the understanding that Indigenous research can be stored and stewarded in universal way.

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There are several frameworks that are used for helping guide ethical research with Indigenous communities, but these should be treated as a starting point in thinking about what principles researchers need to follow. Each case will be different depending on the Indigenous peoples,

communities and lands involved. Nevertheless, similar to the guiding principles from the environmental scan, these frameworks provide a good orientation that helps support Indigenous research that is ethical.

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For the storage of data, this needs to be determined alongside community and their identified needs and preferences. Within many ethics applications, it is unclear whether ethics boards require destruction of project data. Within Indigenous research, it's vital to prioritize the archiving and longevity of Indigenous knowledge and data. Destruction of data can be seen as counterintuitive if you understand knowledge as a gift.

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This raises the question: Why would you destroy a gift that has been shared with you? And what about ownership of data? If participants are the owners of their own knowledge, then our responsibility is to protect them and their intellectual property. This data may be important for teaching future generations and documenting these teachings and stories for the community is important. As Indigenous researchers, we have a responsibility to maintain our relationships beyond the project timeline.

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The trust, friendship, and reciprocity we hold with one another does not dissipate once the project funding is completed. And lastly, we also hold the responsibility to ensure that whatever is created, whether it's products, resources, or tools are maintained in a good way.

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Some questions to consider from the "after research" phase include: Does ownership of data fall with research participants and/or communities? Where is the data housed after the research project is complete? How does the researcher stay connected to the research participants, communities and environments after the project is complete? In summary, this presentation has outlined the process that the OFIFC and the University of Guelph have been on as a team for this project; informed you of the guiding lens that came out of this process;

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and walked through the general research process to highlight guiding principles and important considerations for Indigenous research. Here are two overarching reminders from these slides. First, we must prioritize shifting from a risk conceptualization of research ethics to one based in responsibility. And two, this must be integrated throughout the entire research process, beginning in the planning stage and continuing beyond the research project to prioritize continued relationships.

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Lastly, we'd like to leave you some questions to consider as we finish this webinar that we hope you will carry with you as you continue your work with Indigenous research ethics. You may find that you may not know the answers to each of these questions at the moment, but we hope that with a further commitment to better understanding the context of Indigenous research and learning, you'll continue to consider these questions within your work.

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Why is it important to prioritize benefits to participants in community within Indigenous research? In what ways can this be seen in practice? Why is it integral to uphold the principle of responsibility within Indigenous research instead of utilizing a risk based perspective? What is the significance of encouraging and supporting Indigenous research within the University of Guelph?

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We would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in our webinar. We hope that you take the time to review the supporting documents that are associated with this webinar. And as a reminder, any questions related to the content of this webinar should be directed to the Research Services Office at the University of Guelph.