**SAMPLE ANSWERS TO ETHICS APPLICATION: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

**Application forms for research candidates at CDU**

For projects that include human participants or animals, CDU research candidates will need to submit an ethics application. This application is designed to assess the extent to which the benefits of your research outweigh the risks.

* For projects that include human participants, visit www.cdu.edu.au/research/ori/human-ethics and read *submission of new proposals*
* For projects that include animals, visit www.cdu.edu.au/research/ori/animal-ethics and read *all forms and documents*

**Application forms for research candidates at Menzies**

For projects that include human participants or animals, Menzies research candidates complete a slightly different ethics application. For more information, visit

* www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Ethics\_approval/

**Sample answers**

The CDU ethics application includes 14 main sections. This document illustrates some typical answers whenever the research that revolves around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their lives, their culture, and their issues. These answers could help you formulate your own responses to the various questions. Nevertheless,

* you still need to think carefully about your answers, because every project raises distinct ethical challenges
* you might also want to read the sample answers that correspond to other designs, such as surveys, depending on your research methods
* these samples include bullet points; in your applications, however, write full sentences

for more information, visit [this website](https://charlesdarwinuni.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchCDU/SitePages/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Research-Requirements.aspx) [https://charlesdarwinuni.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchCDU/SiteAssets/SitePages/Forms/atsira\_template\_2019 (1).docx?web=1](https://charlesdarwinuni.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchCDU/SiteAssets/SitePages/Forms/atsira_template_2019%20(1).docx?web=1)

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The Menzies ethics application is slightly different. Nevertheless, many of the answers in this document are relevant to research students at Menzies as well.

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| **Preliminary questions** |

**Q1a**

Yes

**Q1b, 1c, 1e**

No

**Q1d**

Yes. The project was reviewed and approved by the confirmation of candidature panel on 5 November 2019. Furthermore, a steering committee, based in the community in which the research will be conducted, also approved the research project.

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| **Question 4: Description of the project** |

**Aims**

* This project was designed in collaboration with the Junai community, located in south east Australia.
* The study will investigate the life stories of people in the Junai community, especially around attempts to support youth who had experienced trauma and substance abuse
* The study will also examine a program that was implemented, by the Department of Industry, to help youth promote their creative works to organizations around Australia and to improve their mental health and career prospects.
* Finally, the study will explore how traditional healing practices and other practices complement or contradict this program as well as how this program could be integrated with these traditions more effectively
* The overarching purpose of this research is to privilege Indigenous voice and perspectives to benefit and to serve the community, recognising and respecting traditional ways of supporting this community.

**Methodology and methods**

* The study will adopt a critical Indigenous perspective that integrates Western qualitative methods with Indigenist research approaches.
* These methods will include yarning and other culturally appropriate practices in which individuals in the community will be granted opportunities to share stories in the ways they prefer
* A steering committee, based in the community, will guide the implementation of these methods. The steering committee will comprise key elders and other relevant members of this community.
* The methods are designed to foster a space that enables stories to be shared and heard, recognising that research in many Aboriginal communities has often been a source of distress and disempowerment. The researchers will thus embrace a critical theoretical perspective to address this disempowerment.
* The researchers will treat the stories they hear with reverence and appreciation, recognising these stories will also belong to the community.

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| **Question 5: Aims and significance of this project** |

* The overall purpose of this project is to invite people in the Junai community to present life stories about healing and support of youth and how this healing and support juxtaposes with a program that was also designed to assist these youth

In particular, the research will

* collate some life stories of the people in the Junai community around youth—especially around youth who have experienced trauma and substance abuse
* establish the perspective of this community towards a program that was implemented to support this youth; this program was designed to foster confidence and career skills
* explore how this program could be improved to incorporate traditional community practices.

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| **Question 6: Location** |

* Junai is a small, remote Aboriginal community, located 200 km from Moe in Victoria.
* No permits or research visas are needed to visit or conduct research with the community.
* Visitors who conduct research, however, are encouraged to greet important community members on arrival
* One of the researchers has lived in this community during the last 24 months and was invited to collaborate with the community to conduct research
* This opportunity to visit and appreciate the community as well as articulate the purpose, ownership, and use of this research with the community ensures that appropriate values are embedded in the governance of this project

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| **Question 7: Research methods** |

**Question 7a. Research methods**

* To collect data, the researchers will adopt a critical Indigenist qualitative methodology.
* Specifically, the researchers will collaborate with a steering committee, based in the community, comprising elders and other Aboriginal individuals.
* Data will be derived from the stories that members of this community share about the lived experience of youth as well as their opinions of recent initiatives
* The stories will be shared in a natural setting, in a location that participants choose, either individuals or in groups
* Typically, one co-researcher will be present at each interview, as chosen by the steering committee but approved by the participant
* This sharing of stories is consistent with the worldviews and practices of this community
* The practices the researchers will apply to elicit and to collate these stories will utilise synergies between the approaches that tend to be adopted in this community and overlapping Western methodologies
* These approaches shares assumptions with some Western traditions such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative enquiry, participatory research, and constructivist grounded theory.
* The methods are designed to honour and privilege the worldviews of community members
* The narratives are purposeful, facilitating understanding and insight, revealing the issues that are otherwise misconstrued by Western discourse
* Furthermore, because the participants are granted opportunities to direct the conversation and stories, members of this community are empowered rather than conceptualised as objects to be studied.
* The researcher will not interrupt stories but may, occasionally, ask questions to elicit stories or insights about youth and the programs of interest.

**Question 7b. Indicative questions**

Although the stories will be shared in a natural environment, the researchers will initially prompt the participants with information that resembles the following sentences

* I am collecting the life stories of people in the Junai community especially about youth
* I would be very interested in listening deeply to you—to listen to your stories and experiences
* We can devote as much time as you need. I will not interrupt but might record a few notes to remind me of questions later

After participants share their stories, the investigator might then explore the perspectives of individuals in more detail—often by eliciting narrations that relate to issues they previously mentioned about youth.

* You mentioned…Could you tell me more about the time when…[describe an event or theme]
* How did you feel about this event?
* How did you respond to this events?
* Can you remember a time when other people talked about this event?
* How do people in the community like to manage these matters?
* I have heard about the …program. What are your experiences with this program?
* Can you recall a time in which you felt this program was unhelpful?
* Do you feel the program could be improved? How?

**Question 7c. Expertise of researchers**

* Dr Adam Burrows has completed a Master in Public Policy and developed skills in qualitative research, especially phenomenology. He has contributed to three studies around youth trauma and has worked in two Aboriginal communities for several years.
* Dr Carol Dungarurr is an Aboriginal elder, who has worked in research in the Junai community and was a school principal in a nearby community.

**Question 7d. External providers**

* No external service provider will be involved in this research.
* One possible exception is the audio recordings might be transcribed by a professional transcription service.
* Between 3 and 5 co-researchers—members of the community who would like to assist the researchers—will be identified by the steering committee. The steering committee will also suggest the level of remuneration these individuals should receive.

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| **Question 8: Potential participants** |

**Question 8a. Participant pool**

* All participants will be adults, living in the Junai community, who identify as Aboriginal and speak English.
* The number of participants will not exceed 20
* The number of male and female participants will be roughly equivalent
* Whenever possible, age, language groups, and tribal groups will be evenly distributed across the samples

**Question 8a.1. Rationale to select these participants**

* The Junai community was chosen because the principal investigator—the supervisor of this project—has lived in this community and has discussed this project with elders and other members in the past. One of the associate investigators is also a member of this community.
* If the sample is too limited and fewer than 20, the diversity of this community will not be represented properly
* However, if the sample is too large, the participants cannot be supported properly. For example, the researchers may not be able to engage in member checking to gauge whether they represented the stories and perspectives of researchers accurately.

**Question 8a.2. Initial contact**

Initial contact

* The steering committee will design and approve the strategies that will be applied to contact the potential participants
* In particular, the steering committee can implement strategies that are culturally sensitive and diminish the power imbalance between the researchers and participants.
* To illustrate, this initial contact, if approved by the steering committee, may proceed during community engagement events, such as sporting activities, cultural activities, or BBQs.

Screening and informing participants

* The steering committee will also promote awareness of this project using traditional communication channels. They will, for example, inform the community about the nature of this research.
* The steering committee will also assist in identifying which community members may be interested in participating
* The participants might also recommend other members who could be interested in sharing their stories, comparable to traditional snowball sampling.

**Questions 8b, 8c**

NA

**Question 8d**

* To guarantee the plain language statement and consent form are comprehendible to potential participants, these documents will be designed by the CDU researchers in collaboration with the steering committee.
* Furthermore, the steering committee and co-researchers from the community may also read these documents to potential participants and address concerns.
* Participants will be informed the study will be conducted in English. Most individuals in the community speak English fluently.
* Nevertheless, at times, participants may prefer to elaborate responses in their preferred language. Co-researchers will attend as many interviews as possible to help translate words or phrases if needed.

**Question 8e.**

* The principal researcher has lived in the community as a teacher over the last year.
* The researchers will clarify, in the plain language statement and other forums, their role is as a researcher only and the research is unrelated to the school
* To reinforce this independence, none of the conversations will proceed on school grounds

**Question 8f.**

* To respect the Aboriginal value of reciprocity, participants will receive a small reimbursement, such as a meal.

**Question 8g.**

See answer to Question 8e

**Question 8h.**

NA

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| **Question 9: Benefits and potential risks** |

**Question 9a. Benefits**

* This research could help the community and other agencies improve the services they offer youth in this community
* These services could diminish the incidence of harmful practices, improve the wellbeing of these youth, as well as attract some income and career opportunities
* The research could also empower the community, integrating traditional practices with possible services.
* The sharing of life stories can also benefit participants and diminish their own feelings of distress or frustration because of challenges their youth experience
* Finally, some community members may develop additional skills because of their involvement in the steering committee or acting as co-researchers.

**Question 9b.**

* These benefits will tend to be directed to the participants and the community more broadly.
* Some of the insights gleaned from this project could also benefit other proximal communities in the future.

**Question 9c.**

* Psychological risk
* Social risk

**Question 9d. Risks**

* Sharing stories about the past can facilitate healing and improve wellbeing but, at least initially, can also elicit unpleasant memories and emotions.
* Hearing the stories of other members may also elicit unpleasant memories and emotions
* Although the data will be confidential, the interviews themselves may not always be anonymous. For example, some participants might choose to share their stories in circles rather than alone. However, all participants will be granted opportunities to share their stories in privacy, with only one researcher and co-researcher present.
* The researchers may also experience some vicarious trauma if the stories are especially upsetting.
* All the researchers are familiar with the community; a co-researcher will attend all interviews, and hence physical risks are unlikely.

**Question 9e.**

* The risks apply to the participants and potentially other members of this community

**Question 9f. Approaches to manage risks**

The interviews

* Before the interviews, the researcher will meet with the steering committee and co-researchers to learn about the signs or signals of distress and to clarify how they should respond appropriately.
* During the interviews, breaks will be scheduled regularly to monitor the emotions of participants
* The researcher will indicate the interview can be deferred or stopped at any time
* If the participant exhibits signs of negative emotions, the researcher will refrain from prompting further information about the topic and ask participants whether they would like to continue, pause, or cease the interview.
* The co-researchers will help monitor and address the emotions of participants.
* The researcher will also prompt the participants to consider how the programs offered to the community could be better—and these positive stories of hope have been shown to temper the effects of trauma.

Support

* Many support services will be offered to participants in this study as well as other members.
* These services entail community members who adopt traditional healing practices as well as community service providers, including counsellors and other health professionals
* The steering committee will contribute to the arrangement of these services.
* If participants feel upset or distressed, the researcher, steering committee, or both can help these individuals access these services
* To preclude social risks, the stories will always be treated with confidentiality.
* Furthermore, all participants will be granted opportunities to read or to listen to how their stories were written by the researchers—and these opportunities will help participants confirm they cannot be identified in these reports
* To prevent or to manage vicarious trauma, the researchers will regularly seek debriefing from a network of individuals, including the steering committee, supervisors, and trained health workers in the community
* Mental health practitioners have agreed to offer this services, as demonstrated in the attached letters of support
* Similar networks will be available to support the co-researchers with services that are culturally appropriate

**Question 9g. Benefits versus risks**

* The community has expressed support towards this project, indicating that members perceive the benefits as outweighing the risks to this community.
* The steering committee, based in the community, and the concomitant services in the community should also minimize the risk of harm, distress, or discomfort.

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| **Question 10: Benefits and potential risks** |

**10a.**

* Signed consent
* The plain language statement and consent form were designed in collaboration with the steering committee.
* The steering committee and snowball sampling will help identify participants—a technique that is deemed as culturally appropriate in this community.

**10b. 10c. 10e**

No

**10d. Additional consent strategies**

* A co-researcher will be present to help participants understand the plain language statement and consent forms.

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| **Question 11: Benefits and potential risks** |

**11a**

No.

**11b, 11c**

Re-identifiable

**11d**

Non-identifiable or identifiable

**11e. Procedures to ensure confidentiality**

Storage

* The data will be stored on paper and as an audio recording, if participants agree to this recording.
* Some objects may be photographed if participants agree.
* Data on paper will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university as soon as possible.
* Electronic data will be stored on a laptop and external hard drive, both of which are protected by passwords.

Codes to represent identity

* All the data will be assigned a code to represent the identity of participants.
* These codes will be stored together with the names of participants in a data file, and this file will be stored on two separate USB sticks.
* These codes will be maintained only to enable the researchers to check the transcript and stories with each participant.
* After the stories are checked, the files that contain these codes will be erased.
* The data, then, will no longer be identifiable.

**11f**

Not applicable

**11g. Identifiability in reports**

Member checking

* Participants will not be identifiable in reports or publications, unless they chose otherwise.
* Furthermore, participants will be granted opportunities to read the representations of their stories in publications—both to assess the accuracy of these descriptions and the anonymity of these descriptions.
* If needed, co-researchers can help participants understand these descriptions

Preference to be identified

* In some instances, participants may want their names to be identified in reports. In these instances, their wishes will be granted.
* Alternatively, instead of their name, participants might prefer their role, affiliation to another organization, or some other information about their identity specified in reports.
* If they do not want to be identified, participants can choose the pseudonyms that will be used in reports.
* The preferences of participants will be identified in the consent form but then clarified in subsequent interviews.

**11h. Purposes of recording**

* The audio recording fulfils two purposes. First, the audio recording enables the researchers and co-researchers to fully immerse themselves in the interviews, and thus listen deeply, rather than distract themselves by recording notes.
* Second, the audio recording offers researchers an opportunity to clarify the comments of participants. For example, if researchers cannot understand a response, they can replay these responses to the participants and seek clarification.
* While arranging consent, and then immediately before every interview, participants will be asked whether they consent to the recording. If they do not consent, their preference will be respected. The researchers and co-researchers will then record notes as succinctly as possible

**11i**

* The recordings will be erased as soon as the transcription is completed.

**11j. Disclosure of crime**

* The research is not designed to elicit information about undisclosed or imminent crimes.
* The stories, however, might revolve around some elicit behaviours in the past.
* Participants, however, will be informed that none of the information they share will be disclosed to a third party, unless this information revolves around harming themselves or other people. In this instance, the researchers will seek information from the steering committee about how to proceed but will not disclose the identity of this participant.

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| **Question 12: Data storage** |

**12a. Yes**

**12b. Storage**

* Data on paper, or other tangible data and information, will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university as soon as possible. Keys will be stored in a separate location.
* Electronic data will be stored on a laptop and external hard drive, both of which are protected by passwords.

**12c. How will data become non-identifiable**

* The interview transcripts will be assigned codes or pseudonyms the participants choose
* These codes or pseudonyms will be stored together with the names of participants in a data file, and this data file will be stored on two separate USB sticks.
* These codes or pseudonyms will be maintained only to enable the researchers to check the transcript and stories with each participant.
* After the stories are checked, the files that contain these codes will be erased.

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| **Question 13: Indigenous research** |

**13a. Yes**

Consultation

* The research was designed in collaboration with the community.
* Indeed, members had requested this research to address a need that had been identified by the community.
* This consultation had proceeded over 12 months.
* The consultation began with two contacts of the principal researcher. These contacts introduced the researcher to several other elders
* The elders established a steering committee to discuss the research and to seek the opinions of members.
* The steering committee organised meetings with individuals as well as yarning circles to achieve this goal
* Many distinct demographics had contributed to this consultation, including various language groups, tribal groups, age groups, and genders.
* The steering committee also offered the researcher advice on how to approach potential members and to answer questions if concerns arise
* One supervisor, all members of the steering committee, and the co-researchers are Indigenous.
* Many stakeholders in the community, including board members of the Aboriginal corporations in the community, managers of two service providers, as well as elders of both sexes, wrote letters to support this study

Availability of the research

* After identifying information is removed, all reports will be distributed to the steering committee.
* The steering committee will utilise several culturally appropriate routes to distribute this information to members
* They will, for example, convene a function to discuss the results. They might also ask the researchers to construct a shortened report.

Guidelines

* To design this project, we followed the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the [NHMRC Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities), and the companion document called [Keeping research on track ll](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/keeping-research-track-ii)

**13b. Spirit and integrity**

* After living in this community and similar communities, and listening to members about their stories and perspectives, the researchers felt motivated to share the insights of these individuals to other stakeholders—such as service providers and local government.
* The aim of this project is to develop programs, such as youth programs, that embrace the systems of values and beliefs in this community, epitomising respect towards the cultural and spiritual identify of the members.
* Because a diversity of language, tribal, age, and gender groups were consulted and will be interviewed, the findings of this research should be attuned to the spiritual values and beliefs of the various demographics in this community.

**13c. Cultural continuity**

Promotion and integration of Aboriginal traditions

* This study fulfils a need that was identified by the community, designed to strengthen this community
* Indeed, this study was designed to privilege the voices, stories, and worldviews of Aboriginal people in this community rather than encroach on the autonomy and traditions of Aboriginal peoples.
* In particular, the community approved this study to help stakeholders, such as health agencies, integrate the traditional practices of Aboriginal communities into Western practices
* This project is designed to increase the likelihood that one specific program more accurately reflects the history and values of this community and complies with laws and protocols that protect Indigenous knowledge.

Promulgation of Aboriginal works

* The ensuing program might enable young Aboriginal individuals to disseminate their creative works, promulgating their perspectives and values.
* The publication of these stories could also instil feelings of pride across the community, inspiring younger members to embrace the cultural values.

Recognition of distinct identities

* The research will also represent the perspectives of distinct tribal groups within the community—and thus facilitate the continuity and identity of these groups

**13d. Equity**

* Several practices and strategies have been applied to stem power imbalances and to foster equity

Involvement of the community

* First, the research questions, methods, standards, and procedures were guided by the community rather than imposed by researchers—especially the steering committee, comprising elders and other members of this community.
* Second, participants were granted opportunities to choose the time, duration, and location of interviews as well as the topics discussed.

Ownership

* Third, the stories that emanate from this research are owned by the community
* The aim of this research is to privilege traditional practices, values, and stories.

Representation of all groups

* Fourth, the researchers and steering committee will attempt to represent all demographics in the community—to guarantee equity across tribal groups, language groups, and genders.
* Finally, participants will be granted opportunities to communicate in modes they prefer. For example, they can express some of their perspectives in their preferred language; information can be presented in various formats, such as pictorially. These provisions increase the likelihood the research can represent all demographics in the community as equitably as possible.

**13e. Reciprocity**

Shared development of capabilities

* During one of the meetings between the researchers and steering committee, individuals will discuss their research methods and perspectives.
* Hopefully, both parties will learn from this exchange of information
* Although the steering committee will ultimately approve the research, the final plan will most likely assimilate traditional practices with some Western methods.
* Likewise, the researchers and co-researchers will also work together. This collaboration should also facilitate the exchange of ideas between both parties, potentially extending the knowledge and skills of both the researchers and co-researchers.

Reimbursement

* All participants will receive a small reimbursement, such as a meal, to recognise their efforts. The steering committee will recommend suitable reimbursements

**13f. Respect**

Respect towards all voices

* The project was designed to privilege the voices, perspectives, and values of this community—striving to integrate traditional healing practices and preferences with existing programs that are designed to facilitate wellbeing and career progress in youth.
* The aim of this research is not to uncover a unified conclusion but to represent the range of perspectives and insights across the community

Respect towards property

* Furthermore, the researchers, participants, and community in general all appreciate the stories, knowledge, insights, and methods remain the intellectual and cultural property of the community.
* To demonstrate respect towards this property, the researchers have sought official agreement from diverse stakeholders to conduct this research and to utilise this property.
* To construct these agreements, we adapted the ATSIRA template, from [this website](https://charlesdarwinuni.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/ResearchCDU/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B6812744E-6306-4CE2-B910-B741D9E7BCF8%7D&file=atsira_template_2019%20(1).docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true)

Acknowledgement

* Finally, the community and steering committee will be acknowledged in all publications, as requested.
* The co-researchers will be co-authors of all publications that emanate from this research.
* Which other individuals or collectives should be acknowledged, and how these individuals or collectives should be acknowledged, will be revisited at regular times, in consultation with the steering committee.

**13g. Responsibility**

* The steering committee will guide and approve all key decisions to minimize the risk of harm and to align the research practices with cultural values and customs.
* To prevent unintended complications or insensitivities, the steering committee will also seek feedback from participants, as well as the community in general, about the research throughout the project. Consequently, the researchers will be accountable to the community.
* The co-researchers will also monitor the conduct of the research project and the interactions with community members
* The researchers will utilise the advice of this steering committee and the co-researchers to abstain from requests that could limit the capacity of members to fulfil their cultural responsibilities. For example, participants will be informed they can participate in the interviews at any time—and can defer interviews if they would like
* The contact details of the researchers will be available to all participants and community members who would like to seek more feedback, and offer more insights, about the project
* A preliminary report of the results and conclusions will be distributed to the community as soon as possible—preferably within 6 months after the last interview.

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| **Questions 14: Other ethical issues** |

**14a. Debriefing**.

* The researchers, in collaboration with the steering committee, will decide the best approach to disseminate the results. These approaches are likely to include a community event as well as the distribution of reports. The reports may include modes of communication that members prefer, such as pictorial representations, summaries, and art work
* The researchers and steering committee will also inform participants of the services they can utilise if they feel at all concerned, upset, or distressed about the results. These services include traditional healing practices as well as counsellors and other health professionals.
* The contact details of the researchers will be available to all participants and community members who would like to seek more feedback, and offer more insights, about the project

**14b Feedback to participants**

See 14a .

**14c to 14g**. No