Guide to A Plain English Research Statement

Guide to a Plain English Research Statement v0.2.docx

Research Business Team
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Guide to a Plain English Research Statement v1.0
1. **What is a plain English research statement?**

A Plain English Research Statement is a clear and concise explanation of your research project. It doesn’t need to be provided in writing – you could explain your project by making a short video about it to show to research subjects or participants. The plain English Research Statement must be distributed to all research subjects and participants, and can be used more widely for community information purposes. It is important that the Statement is recorded in some way, and has been acknowledged by the participants on the informed consent form.

No two research projects are the same, and there can be several ways of explaining what a project is designed to do and how it will be carried out. Nonetheless, this guide is designed to prompt you to include important information in your Plain English Research Statement. This includes information which may be obvious to you but less obvious to the research subjects or participants.

This guide is not a pro forma. While you will need to include some statements from the template—e.g. about who will be conducting the research—into your Plain English Research Statement, other statements are options which will be appropriate to some projects but not others.

You should change the English in the template, or translate it into indigenous languages, to suit your audience. The Template is written in fairly colloquial English, because many Indigenous Australians have limited education in formal, complex English, and it can be easy for researchers to underestimate the gap between this level of formal education and their own level of education in English. For people with limited formal education, complex written English may be even more difficult to understand than complex spoken English. If your audience has a higher level of English proficiency than that used in the template, you should use more complex English to avoid insulting them. It should be noted that the kind of plain English used in this template is now widely used in other contexts for general audiences—e.g. in bank credit applications.
2. Important information

The plain English research statement can be broken into 4 key questions, the answers to which can take any form. We have listed below a set of answers that may help guide you in the production of the statement.

- **Who is involved in the Project?**
  - The research will be conducted by...
  - who work for...
  - The research is supported by...
  - These key organisations will be helping us...
  - We have grant funding from...
  - This research has approval from...

- **What will the researcher(s) do, and when?**
  - We are trying to find out...
  - We are interested in hearing/talking about other related issues or topics...
  - We will be using these research methods....
  - The research will happen during...

- **What will the researchers do with the information they collect?**
  - The information will be used to create a report / book / film...
  - We will discuss with you how your information will be recorded and if it will be kept...
  - We will negotiate Intellectual Property with research participants

- **What will happen to the results of the research?**
  - We will store your information with the research results...
  - You may access this information...
  - We aim to find a solution to... but we may not be successfull...
3. Summary

It is important to note that a plain English research statement such as this should be used in conjunction with an Informed Consent Form. These two documents are an important part of any ethical research practice. Not only are you fully informing the intended participant of their role in the research, but you are ensuring that they understand and agree to the conditions, methods and ultimate aims of the research project. The statement also informs them of their rights as participants / contributors to the research project.

When used together, there should be no ambiguity between the researcher and the participant(s), as to the roles, responsibilities and intended outcomes of the research project.

Attached to this guide is a template for the creation of a plain English research statement.
A. Appendices

This appendix contains a plain text format of further suggested examples of answers to the key questions in section 2.

[Use appropriate letterhead or provide up-to-date contact details and space for a date]

[NAME OF RESEARCH PROJECT]

Who is involved in the project?

This research project is being conducted by me/us, [insert name(s) of researcher(s)].
I am/we are [insert qualifications, e.g. anthropologists] who work(s) for [insert name of employer or organisation paying for the work to be done].
The research is supported by [insert name of people or organisation providing community support]. I/We can show you the letter of support if you want to see it.
(And where relevant)
[Insert name of organisation] is helping with this research by [insert details, eg letting us look at their records or database.]
I/We have/I am/we are trying to get some grant money from AIATSIS [or other source] to do this research.
This research project has been approved by the [insert name of any relevant institution, e.g. a university] Human Research Ethics Committee [and/or by the AIATSIS Human Research Ethics Committee]

What will the researcher(s) do?

I/We are trying to find out [set out here your research objectives clearly, e.g.]:
- what messages about culture or Aboriginality people are sending through their paintings,
- what people do to feel better when they get sick with diabetes,
- what helps [Koori] kids to learn better at school,
- how old the rock art at X place is
- whether some bush medicines might be useful for cancer treatment.
(You may like to compile an additional list of ‘things we are interested in hearing/talking about/seeing/finding out’ etc.)

I/We will [set out your research methods here, explaining anything that may not be obvious, e.g.:

- interview people one by one about Y topic, writing down/videoing what they say;
- ask you to be part of a ‘focus group’. This means that you sit in a group and talk to other people while the researcher(s) listen/video the session so they can study it later. I/we will ask you to promise not to tell people outside the group what other people say inside the group;
- ask you to come out to X site with us and look for axes or other things that people may have left there long ago.
- ask you to tell us what you know about bush medicines, and to help us to find other people who know about them.]

These descriptions need to conform with the descriptions of research method which appear on the Informed Consent Form.

The research will happen around about [insert dates]. And it will require the following time commitments from the participant [detail time commitments]

(If appropriate) In case of conflict the resolution process will be as follows [explain this process e.g. mediation by an outside party

What will the researchers do with the information they collect?

(Choose or draft as appropriate):

The information will be used to [e.g. write a book, make a video etc.] about [research subject].

I/will have copyright in the book/video etc. OR I/we will share copyright in the book/video with [name appropriate organisation or small number of individuals].

I/we will ask you what personal/culturally restricted information can be mentioned in the book and what should be left out. OR I/we won’t include personal or culturally restricted information without your consent.

OR (for scientific research which might result in a patentable discovery):
I/we will use the information to write articles in scientific journals. If, during our research, we make a patentable discovery, we will/will not include the; name(s) of [appropriate indigenous organisation or research participants] on our patent application. (Being named on a patent application means that, if the discovery can make money, [appropriate indigenous organisation or research participants] could share in any money made from the patent.)

OR (for research based on de-identified data):

I/we won’t use any names to identify people who participate in this research. [It may be appropriate to mention blinding strategies here, e.g. we will only use names on cover pages of questionnaires, we will identify people by numbers only.]

AND (if appropriate, e.g. where date is de-identified but raw materials stored during the project):

I/we will keep the notes/(video) tapes of the interview/focus groups in a locked filing cabinet at my house in [insert at least town or suburb address} for {insert appropriate period, noting the requirements of National Privacy Principle 4.2 where information is no longer needed}. After that, I/we will either destroy them, give them back to you or ask you whether you want me to give them to an appropriate indigenous organisation.

**Giving material to AIATSIS**

If you agree, I/we propose to give all of the notes/(video)tapes to AIATSIS for safekeeping. Please note that:

If I/we give personal information which identifies you to AIATSIS, the Privacy Act 1989 (Cth) says that other people can only have access to it if you agree that they can. I/we will talk to you about who should be allowed to have access to this information, and how AIATSIS should keep it.

If I/we ask AIATSIS to keep culturally restricted information confidential, the communicated AIATSIS Act 1989 says that AIATSIS must do so. I/we will talk to you about what to ask AIATSIS to do with culturally restricted information.

If you have decided to describe the benefits of the project you must also describe the risks.