



# **AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee Charter**

AIATSIS Council  
November 2016





## **PREAMBLE**

The AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee (the “Committee”) is concerned with reviewing the ethical aspects of research projects, including ethical suitability and oversight as appropriate during the course of a project.

The quality of research projects in other respects is the responsibility of the AIATSIS Research Advisory Committee and Council.

## **1. THE COMMITTEE**

### **(a) Membership**

Council may appoint members of the Committee.

The Committee must be constituted by a minimum of eight members, comprising at least:

- a) a chairperson;
- b) a deputy chairperson;
- c) a lay man and lay woman;
- d) at least four members with knowledge of, and current experience in, the areas of research that are regularly considered by the Committee;
- e) at least one member with knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care, counselling or treatment of people;
- f) at least one member who is a minister of religion or a person who performs a similar role in the community such as an Indigenous elder; and
- g) at least one member who is a lawyer.

Membership must include at least five Indigenous members and, as far as practicable, should reflect a gender and age balance.

The Committee may be assisted by such other persons as it considers appropriate. AIATSIS staff members are ineligible for membership of the Committee.

### **(b) Remuneration**

Members of the Committee are entitled to payment of fees and reimbursement of expenses under the same arrangements as apply to members of the Research Advisory Committee as determined from time to time by the Remuneration Tribunal.

### **(c) Documents**

On their initial appointment and subsequently at meetings, members of the Committee, must be provided with copies of: the AIATSIS Induction Manual for Committee Members; the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research; AIATSIS Conflict of Interest policy; the Information Privacy Principles; and the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies.

## **2. TERM OF OFFICE**

### **(a) Appointments**

Members normally serve for three year terms. Members may be reappointed by Council.

**(b) Absences**

If a member is unable to attend a meeting, the AIATSIS Chair may appoint another person to stand in for that member, for whatever number of meetings the AIATSIS Chair considers appropriate.

The Committee members present at a scheduled meeting may appoint an Acting Chairperson for the meeting in the event of the REC Chairperson being unavailable. If a member misses more than two consecutive meetings without good reason, the AIATSIS Council may decide to nominate a replacement for that member for the remainder of that Member's term.

Members are generally expected to attend the whole of a scheduled meeting.

**3. THE COMMITTEE'S WORK**

The Committee may consider research proposals where at least one of the researchers is:

- professionally associated with the Institute including staff, visitors, contractors and consultants.
- professionally associated with an external organization which has an agreement with the Institute for the purpose of reviewing applications for research ethics clearance.

**4. MEETINGS**

**(a) Frequency of meetings**

Meetings of the Committee will be held at least twice each year and additionally as required. The Committee may decide to hold meetings in Canberra, or by any convenient electronic / online medium.

The Committee may meet for half day sessions with remuneration calculated on the basis of two consecutive half day meetings equating to a full day of meeting.

Members unable to attend a meeting may submit their comments on any agenda item to the Chairperson before a meeting.

**(b) Quorum**

Four members constitute the quorum for a meeting of the Committee.

**(c) Preparation of agendas**

The agenda for the meeting will be prepared by Research staff in consultation with the Chairperson and the Director of Research. Members may submit notice of agenda items which they wish to have considered.

**(d) Minutes**

The proceedings of the Research Ethics Committee must be properly minuted. Minutes must be presented to the Council, for information, at the next convenient Council meeting.

**(e) Conflict of interest**

A member must not consider any matter in which that member has any conflict of interest as outlined in the AIATSIS conflict of interest policy, unless the Committee agrees otherwise. Where conflicts of interest exist, such conflict should be dealt with in accordance with the policy and recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

**(f) Distribution of papers**

Papers will be circulated to members of the Committee at least seven days prior to meetings.

The Chair may decide whether late papers can be considered at a meeting.

**(g) Confidentiality of Committee proceedings**

The Committee operates under the confidentiality provisions of the Australian Public Service (APS), including the APS Code of Conduct. All Committee proceedings are confidential. Information about discussions will be made available only to members of the Research Advisory Committee, Council and relevant AIATSIS staff members.

**5. PROCEDURES:**

**(a) Review of research proposals**

The Committee may invite researcher(s) to be present for discussion of their research proposals, and may request amendments to, or additional information in relation to, those proposals.

In the case of proposals where the Committee does not give unqualified approval, the Committee may decide a convenient process to deal with subsequent information received.

**(b) Methods of decision making**

Members of the Committee must endeavour to reach decisions by consensus. Decisions must take into account any comments provided by members not able to be present.

If the Committee is unable to reach consensus, decisions must be made by vote. The Chair has a deliberative and, if necessary, a casting vote.

**(c) Prompt notification of decisions**

Decisions made by the Committee on applications for research grants will be conveyed in writing for consideration by the next convenient meeting of Council.

Decisions made by the Committee on other research proposals will be conveyed to the Director of Research and the principal researcher(s) in a timely way.

**(d) Privacy**

The Committee must satisfy itself that people carrying out research involving the collection, storage, interpretation, evaluation or other use of personal information are aware of, and compliant with, the Guidelines approved under Section 95 and 95A of the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Information Privacy Principles to ensure that the privacy of persons to whom personal information relates is protected.

**(e) Out of Session review of applications**

The Chair will make a decision to allow the review of a research ethics clearance application out of session under special circumstances

**(f) Formal Approval of Ethics Clearance**

The Chair will formally advise the Director of Research Business of the committee decision to approve a Research Ethics Clearance Application by means of a signed form indicating the conditions of approval.

**6. RESEARCH IN PROGRESS**

**(a) Monitoring**

Written reports detailing progress on research, maintenance and security of records, compliance with the approved protocols and compliance with any conditions of approval must be provided by grantees, AIATSIS associates, or researchers from external organizations doing research on a six-monthly basis, for assessment by the Director of Research and referral, if necessary, to the Committee.

**(b) Reporting of adverse occurrences**

Any adverse occurrences in an approved research project will be reported by the Director of Research to the Committee.

**(c) Receiving complaints**

All complaints will be dealt with, in the first instance, by the Director of Research, who will endeavour to resolve them in a timely and satisfactory manner. Should the complainant wish to take his or her complaint further, they will be advised to contact the AIATSIS Principal or the REC Chairperson.

The Director of Research will inform members of the Committee of any complaint received that is relevant to the ethical aspects of the research and all steps taken to address such complaint.

**(d) Discontinuing a research project**

Where circumstances have arisen such that a research project is not being or cannot be conducted in accordance with the approved ethical protocols, the Director of Research may direct the researchers to suspend the project until ethics concerns have been adequately dealt with. The Director must draw the matter to the Committee's attention, including subsequent actions and any sanctions.

Last amended November 2016