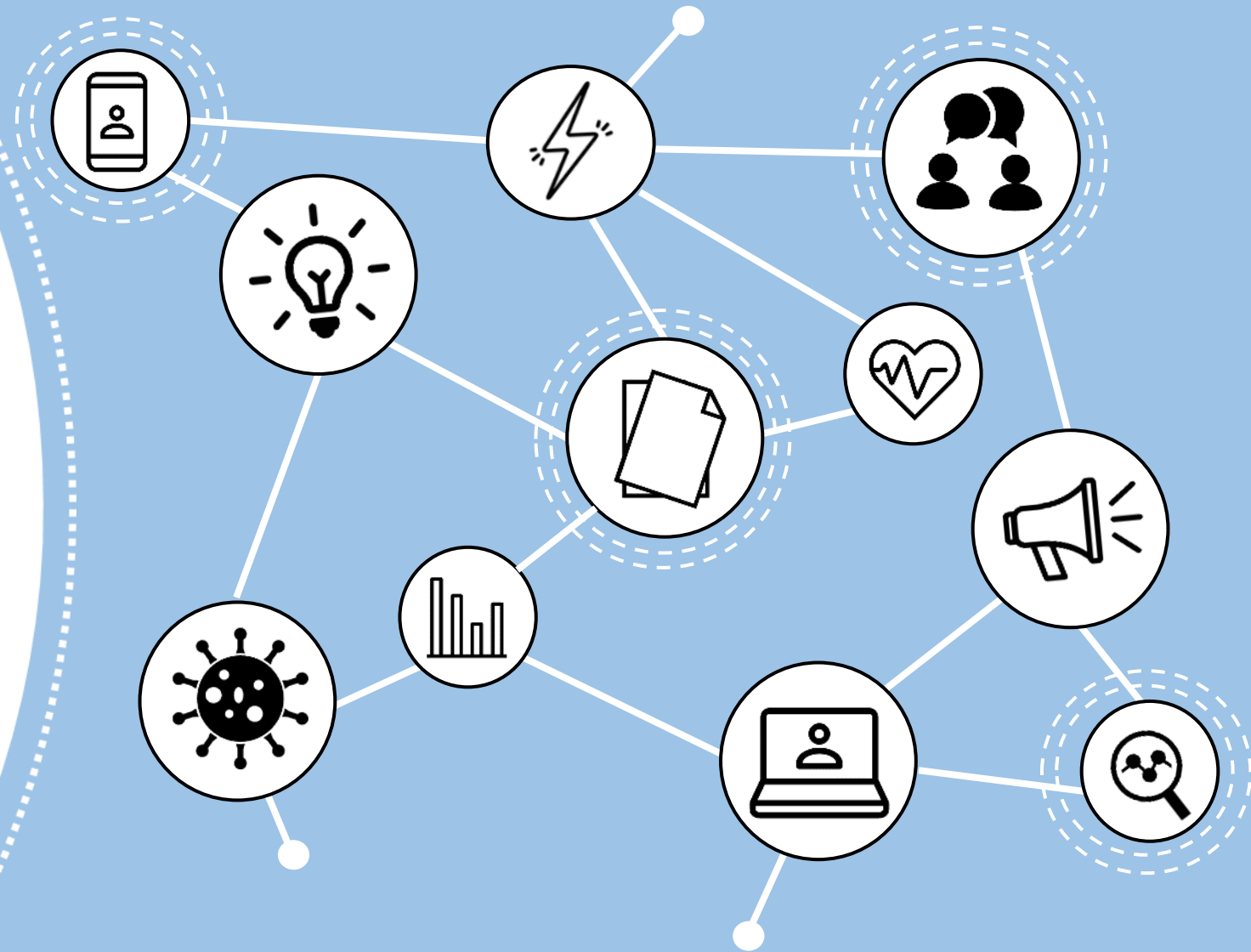


Ethical Community Insights for Local Decision Making

An Ethical and Responsible Journey:
A Simple Guide to Gaining Accurate
Community Insights for Local Policy Support



An Ethical and Responsible Journey

Collecting and using community insights helps local authorities make informed, impactful decisions.

Following ethical standards and accountability guidelines ensures this process respects community values, protects personal information, and builds trust.



What a good Health and Social Care Research look like?

[The UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research](#)

sets out [19 important principles](#) to gain community insights on health and social care in the UK.

This simple checklist is developed to help you plan and reflect on your data collection journey. It is neither exhaustive or definitive.

Instead, it highlights common issues encountered during data collection and directs you to key resources to support you in embarking on an ethical and responsible journey:

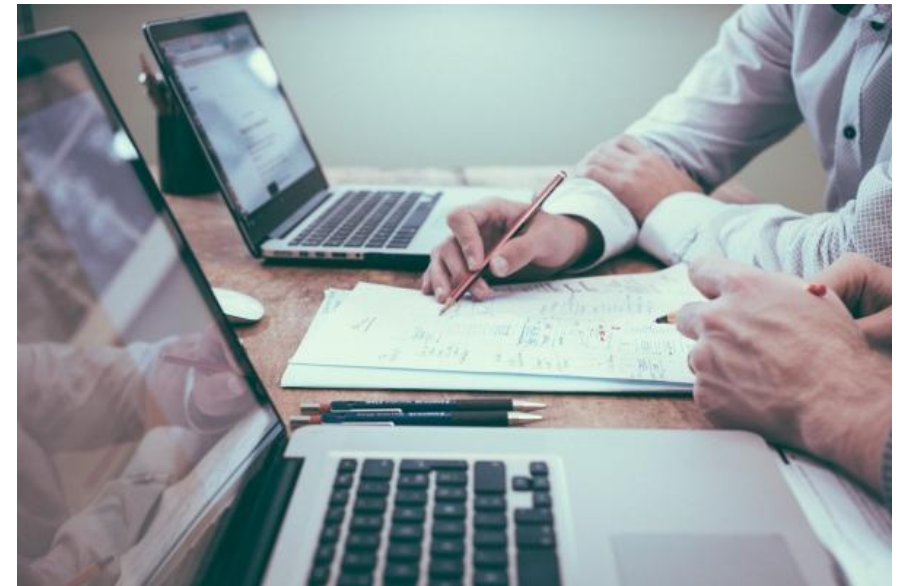


1. Purpose and Planning

Clearly defining the purpose, scope, and intended use of results is critical. Determine if the project focuses on behavioural outcomes, social attitudes, health data, or another domain, as this influences the ethical considerations and design.

Checklist:

- What are the objectives of your data collection?
- How will the data support policy or programme decisions?
- Are there potential risks, ethical concerns or sensitivities specific to this population or topic?



2. Community Engagement and Trust

Participant rights, well-being, and dignity must be maintained at all stages. Address the possibility of physical or emotional harm and ensure respectful and transparent engagement with community members. Ensure participants are fully informed of risks.

Checklist:

- Have you communicated the purpose of data collection clearly to participants?
- Are you engaging community representatives or groups to build trust and mutual understanding?
- How will participants' rights and safety be prioritized throughout the study?
- What safeguards are in place for privacy, especially for vulnerable groups?
- Are you planning for ways to share findings back with the community?



3. Informed Consent

Gaining informed consent involves explaining the study's purpose, methods, and participant rights. Ensure that participants understand and agree to their involvement and they are joining on voluntary basis. Consider methods for obtaining consent from non-English speakers or those with limited literacy.

Checklist:

- Are participants fully aware of the study's aims, methods, and any potential risks?
- Do participants understand what information is being collected and why?
- How will consent be obtained, documented, and maintained?
- Have you provided a simple consent form or agreement?
- Are you ensuring that participation is voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any stage?



Learn more: [Informing participants and seeking consent - Health Research Authority](#)

4. Data Privacy and Confidentiality

Implement strong data management practices to secure personal and sensitive data, meeting legal and ethical standards to maintain confidentiality.

Checklist:

- How will personal data be collected, stored, and managed securely?
- Do you have secure storage methods for sensitive data?
- Have you minimized the amount of personally identifiable information collected?
- Are there clear guidelines on data access and sharing within the research team?
- Are data handling procedures compliant with GDPR or other relevant privacy regulations?

Learn more: [UK GDPR Guidelines on Consent and Data Handling](#)



5. Fairness and Inclusivity

Ensure diverse voices are included, especially from underrepresented groups. Vulnerable populations require additional protections, including specialized consent procedures and considerations for potential risks to their health or safety.

Checklist:

- Are you including a representative sample of the community?
- Have you considered barriers that might prevent some groups from participating?
- Are you ensuring that all participants feel safe and respected?
- What measures are in place to protect vulnerable participants?
- Have risk assessments been conducted specific to these groups?

Learn more: [UKRI Research with potentially vulnerable people](#)



6. Transparency and Accountability

Document the process and share your findings responsibly.

Checklist:

- Are you keeping clear records of your data collection methods and decisions?
- Have you planned to communicate findings in a clear and accessible way?
- Are you open to feedback on the process from community stakeholders?
- Have you disclosed potential conflicts of interest, and is there a plan for public communication of results?



7. Who Should Apply for Review

Ethical review is often necessary for collecting sensitive data or involving vulnerable populations. Depending on the scope, authorities may decide between an internal ethics review or an external review from a certified board.

Different levels of review (expedited, exempt, or full) are based on risk level. Projects with low-risk data may qualify for a quicker, less intensive review, while higher-risk projects require full committee examination.

Checklist:

- Does the research involve minimal risk to participants?
- Could any part of the research cause psychological or social distress?

Learn more:

- Sample Ethics Review Checklist: [ESRC-200721-EthicsReviewExampleChecklist.docx](#)
- Health Research Authority: [Ethics Review of Social Care Research](#)
- UKRI funded research: [UKRI Funding Service – Ethical Review Processes](#)

Research ethics and governance principles are not just technical requirements:

They are essential tools for local authorities to engage communities meaningfully, gather accurate insights, and create policies that reflect the community's needs. By following these guidelines, local authorities can ensure their research is trustworthy, safe, and impactful, ultimately contributing to a healthier, more resilient community.

Further Resources:

Good Practice in Research:

- UK Research Integrity Office produced this [one page non-technical checklist summarising good practise in data collection](#).

Overview of Research Process:

- Are you thinking of partnering with an institution to apply for research grant?
- The [research process overview](#) would provide you an overview of process and links to relevant steps and process.

Other Research Ethics Guidance:

- [Research ethics guidance – ESRC – UKRI](#)
- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) also provides [Research Ethics Guidance](#) to help you consider ethics issues during the entire lifecycle of projects.
- **Guidance on Ethics in Social Insights Activities:**
 - [Research ethics guidance by Social Research Association](#)
 - [Government Social Research Code - GOV.UK](#)
- a. Economic and Social Research: [UKRI Ethics Review Checklist](#).

