

ETHICS, INTEGRITY & BIOSAFETY RESEARCH OFFICE

Research conducted Overseas

If your research involves collecting data from participants who live outside Australia, then you are conducting research outside Australia. Research conducted outside Australia typically involves overseas travel, however it also increasingly involves remote data collection, such as online interviews or surveys.

Countries outside Australia can have very different legal, cultural, language, and research environments to Australia. Researchers collecting data from participants located outside Australia must not only ensure that their research complies with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023 \(National Statement\)](#), but also that it respects the legal, cultural, linguistic and research environment of the country in which it is conducted.

While each research project is unique and each country is different, there are some common issues to consider when planning your research. Informed by the National Statement, this document provides guidance for researchers seeking to conduct research involving participants located outside Australia.

Ethics Review

The [National Statement 4.8.1](#) requires that research conducted overseas by researchers from Australian institutions must comply with the National Statement.

Researchers should be aware of any requirements by overseas countries for requirements for local ethics review. You may need to do some searching to find out if countries you are working with have ethical review legislation/ regulations but knowing that will help you in your application process with LTU. A great place to start is the [International Compilation of Human Research Standards](#) which is updated regularly by the Office of Human Research Protections in Washington DC.

[National Statement 4.8.5](#) provides that where there are no ethics approval processes in an overseas country, the National Statement will serve as the applicable process for ethical approval. In this case, the Australian ethical review body should take account of the available resources and means to conduct the research and avoid imposing unrealistic requirements, providing always that research participants are accorded no less respect and protection than the National Statement requires.

In addition, [National Statement 4.8.8](#) states that when research is to be conducted overseas by a researcher, such as a student or HDR Candidate, who is subject to academic supervision, the ethics submission should include information that informs the Australian ethical review body of how that supervision is to be done. This ensures due respect and protection will be accorded to participants.

Local laws and regulations

Researchers working in other countries are subject to the legal and regulatory environment of those countries, including the possibility of specified visa requirements. You are responsible for meeting these requirements and ensuring your research activities are lawful in the country in which it is conducted. For instance, in some countries, criticism of government or identification of participant groups may pose risks to participants and researchers. You will need to make allowances for this.

Local customs and values

Research conducted in other countries must consider local cultural values in both the design and the conduct of the research. Where research is conducted in other countries, participants in those countries should be shown the same respect and protections that the National Statement affords participants within Australia. Research should be designed and conducted to accommodate these local values and reflect consultation with local communities.

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Where possible, you should provide participants in other countries with the details of a local contact person to field queries and complaints. A local contact person is particularly important in circumstances where participants cannot easily contact the research team or La Trobe University in Australia (e.g., participants without access to internet calling or email). **In the case of La Trobe University student researchers, a local contact person is a requirement.**

Privacy

Research conducted outside Australia invariably involves collecting data from participants, and, usually, transmitting that data back to Australia. Countries have different privacy frameworks that affect how participant data may be stored, accessed and transferred across borders. In addition to any protections that local privacy legislation affords participants, researchers also need to consider if the country in which they are collecting data has a privacy environment similar to the Victorian [Privacy Principles](#). If the privacy requirements are different, additional steps may be required to safeguard participant privacy and safety.

What other approvals are needed?

Funding: LTU also considers the impact or potential impact of foreign interference. To that end, we are looking to ensure all research has considered the funding through this lens by completing the requisite steps here at LTU by using the Foreign Engagement Risk Assessment Tool

Travel: Ethics approval for the research project does not equate to travel approval. When travelling to some countries, researchers may need additional approval. Please consider the [La Trobe University Travel Management Policy](#).

Researcher safety

If you are travelling overseas to conduct research you must consider your own safety and the risk of travelling to certain countries. [Commonwealth travel advice](#) is useful for determining the risk of research in other countries. Where the Commonwealth advises that travellers 'exercise a high degree of caution', 'reconsider your need to travel', and/or 'do not travel', you must provide a risk mitigation protocol with your ethics application.

Strategies to manage risks to researcher safety include:

- experience with the culture, language, and legal framework;
- a communication plan with co-researchers; and
- a network of local contacts.

Acknowledgement

RMIT University, Research Ethics and Governance, Research and Innovation, Guidance Note: Overseas Research.

Further information

For further advice on this topic or other human research ethics matters, please email humanethics@latrobe.edu.au. A Research Ethics & Biosafety Advisor will assist you and may connect you to one of the LEAP or HREC members in your discipline who can offer expert ethics advice.