SFU School for Contemporary Arts
Research and Community Engagement Policy

University researchers and students enjoy special freedoms and privileges, which include freedom of inquiry, freedom to challenge conventional thoughts, freedom from institutional censorship, and the privilege of conducting research and other academic pursuits with human participants with the trust and support of the community. With these freedoms come responsibilities to ensure that the research and academic pursuits meet high scholarly and ethical standards, is honest and thoughtful, and complies with professional and disciplinary standards for the protection of privacy and for methodological approaches.

Objective: The purpose of this policy is to ensure that researchers and students can excel in an environment that is conducive to creative production, while maintaining high ethical, professional, and scholarly standards. As the work of students regularly involves community engagement and communities are becoming better informed about the risks and benefits of research participation, it is imperative that Faculty and students adhere to a code of ethics that reflects their professional and disciplinary obligations. SFU Faculty and students should feel empowered to take artistic risks, challenge cultural norms and preconceptions while respecting community values and expectations.

This document is a policy that is meant to serve as a framework for conducting research in and with communities; it is not intended as a rigid list of procedures and requirements. This policy should help Faculty and students consider ethical issues and their potential impacts on other individuals or the community as a whole; and this framework should be integrated in the students’ learning process. The consultation process discussed at the end of the policy, should be viewed as a way to engage students and their supervisors in a wider discussion regarding the ethical issues in a particular study to better prepare for research conducted in the community.

No single document can provide definitive answers to all ethical issues that may arise during the conduct of research; however, this policy aims to assist researchers and students to identify potential ethical issues in the design, conduct, and dissemination of research and to point the way to arriving at reasoned, ethical responses to these issues rather than providing a list of specific solutions to specific problems. This policy is based on the following principles.

Principles:

- Creative work that seeks to challenge its audience and interrogate social values will be supported at SFU.
- It is the responsibility of Faculty to discuss with students the ethical, legal and moral issues concerning artists’ relationships to their subjects.
- Students have the right to freedom of expression, but must take responsibility for the impact their art and artistic production may have on individuals, communities,
and the environment. The work done by students should not harm human beings, communities, animals or the environment.

- Students working at SFU must abide by all the policies of the university, including those in relation to plagiarism, academic integrity, the use of live animals, the use of human beings as subjects of study, policies of harassment and discrimination, and conflicts of interest. It is the responsibility of Faculty and students to determine if research ethics review¹ is required before conducting this work.
- Students should obtain consent for capturing the likeness of individuals.
- Students have copyright over their creative production and as a result control over the display and presentation of their work unless an alternative arrangement is made with communities they are working with.

Creative work involving communities require researchers to think about how they respond to key ethical issues, including confidentiality, ownership, informed consent, decisions about how visual work will be displayed and published, and managing collaborative processes. The following practical guidelines should provide assistance to students engaged in this type of work and prompt students to carefully consider the specific implications of their projects. The guiding questions for each ethical concept below should alert students to potential issues that need to be considered, but are not meant to be exhaustive nor to work as a checklist.

**Confidentiality**
Confidentiality can be defined as an obligation to protect entrusted information. Breaching confidentiality without permission from the participants can lead to a breach of trust and limit participant’s or a communities’ willingness to continue participation in the future. Maintaining confidentiality may not always be appropriate; however, it is the right of a community or individual participants to be made aware of this prior to agreeing to participate.

**Questions to Consider**
- How will participants’ confidentiality be protected? In the context of your project, is anonymity an appropriate strategy to maintain privacy and protect confidentiality?
- Will participants be given a choice whether they will be identified or not? Is there a way to incorporate that in the project?
- If participants are identified, could there be any implications for participants or communities being identified?
- Does anyone need to be consulted about privacy and confidentiality?
- Are there cultural differences between the student and the participants/community that could affect each group’s understanding of privacy?

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¹ For research involving human participants, contact the SFU Office of Research Ethics at dore@sfu.ca
For research involving animals, contact the SFU Animal Care Office at sfu-uacc@sfu.ca
• There are Canadian provincial laws that limit commercialization of identifiable images without the consent of those whose person or property is identified. Could the project infringe on any laws regarding privacy?

Consent
Fully informed consent has three basic principles: (1) consent is free and voluntary; (2) sufficient information is provided to make an informed choice; and (3) consent is ongoing. When working with communities, consent should be viewed as a process of negotiation and relationship building. There are specific ethical issues around consent to consider when conducting creative practice projects, particularly with vulnerable communities.

Questions to Consider
• Does the project involve the creation of images that could potentially trigger participants and result in discomfort or emotional harm?
• Participants may feel exposed or vulnerable when images or information about them is shared. Have participants/communities been fully informed about how their information or images will be used? Could participants or communities be made vulnerable through dissemination? Has the dignity of those who appear in images or visual art projects been considered?
• Consent is a process and is ongoing. It may be necessary to revisit consent during different points of the project. What steps will be taken to establish informed consent at different stages of the project?
• Different cultural contexts will have different requirements and norms regarding consent and ongoing consent. Collective or community consent may be applicable in some projects. What are the local policies and cultural traditions that may apply to this project? Are your consent procedures culturally appropriate?
• What happens if a participant or community withdraws their consent? What will happen to the information already collected? Is there a point where withdrawal is not possible? How will any limitations be communicated?

Authorship and Ownership
Creative practice work can be generated in many different ways: by the student alone, the student in collaboration with individuals or communities, the student in collaboration with other students, artists or Faculty etc. This type of work can often face complicated questions around authorship and ownership.

Questions to Consider
• Has ownership and authorship been negotiated with the participants or communities? Should this be in the informed consent process or in a separate agreement?
• Different cultural contexts will have different requirements regarding ownership. Collective or community ownership may be applicable in some projects. What are the understandings and agreements that may apply to this project?
• Does the project involve any commercial partners? What are the requirements related to working with these partners?
• What, if any, processes are in place for the withdrawal of participants or contributing partners?
• What agreements are in place about use of the information or project?
• How will authorship and ownership be acknowledged in publication and dissemination?
• Are there any issues to consider related to storage and display of art that may have implications for privacy?

Representation

Questions to Consider
• How can audio/visual findings be represented to avoid stigmatizing or distressing participants or communities?
• Has future use of the project been considered? What might be planned? Could an outsider appropriate use of the projects (e.g. images or artistic works disseminated on the internet could be duplicated and reused by others)?
• Has consent been sought from participants and communities for this representation and dissemination?
• Has any consideration been made to revisit consent if the dissemination plan changes?

Consultation Process
If a graduate student or the student’s supervisor feels that there is a need for wider consultation regarding the student’s project due to the ethical implications of conducting this work in the community, the student may consult with the School of Contemporary Arts Research Development Committee (SCA RDC). The goal of the committee is to support the student and supervisor in flagging potential ethical issues and providing solutions to address these issues prior to the student conducting their work.

The SCA RDC will consist of at least 5 members. The membership will be constituted as follows:
• Director, School of Contemporary Arts
• Director, SFU’s Vancity Office of Community Engagement
• At least one Faculty member from the SCA
• At least one member of the community
• At least one staff member from the SFU Office of Research Ethics

If the student or student’s supervisor wishes to meet with the SCA RDC, the student should provide the SCA RDC with a clear description of the project, its intentions, and what specifically constitutes the possible ethical problem(s). The student and supervisor should provide a plan to mitigate any risks to the community, any engagement that has occurred or will occur with the community prior to conducting the work, and any plans to deal with possible ramifications due to potentially controversial issues that arise.

The student must provide a reasonable amount of time for a response from the SCA RDC.
The committee will provide suggestions in writing or in a meeting with the student(s) and supervisor(s) about how to improve the plan to mitigate risks or to deal with possible ramifications. In addition, the committee may identify additional ethical issues that were not addressed by the student and supervisor; they may also suggest to the student to engage with specific community members before conducting their project.

**Conclusion**

This policy and guidelines are meant to support students and their supervisors in the development of their projects. There may be other ethical issues not described here that students should consider when developing their projects especially when working with distinct and vulnerable communities. Collaboration and consultation with communities during the project development phase may address many ethical issues that may not be apparent to a person from outside the community.