

ACES Policy Document Access to Research & Research Education

Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies

Contents of the Policy

Part 1:

Purpose and Scope

Part 2:

Ethical Considerations

Part 3:

Research Collaboration and Partnerships

Part 4:

Research Proposal and Approval

Part 5:

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

Part 6:

Research Education and Capacity-Building

Part 7:

Reporting and Accountability

Part 8:

Research Funding and Financial Management

Part 9:

Compliance and Review

Part 10:

Intellectual Property and Research Outputs

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Research and Research Education Policy for the Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES) establishes guidelines and principles for conducting rigorous research and promoting research education within the organization. Its purpose is to study the impact of health and disease on society, devise prevention strategies, enhance medical care, and monitor the environment.

The policy applies to all research activities within ACES, including proposal development, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, collaboration, research education, intellectual property, financial management, and reporting. It aims to foster scientific inquiry, ethical conduct, knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and responsible research practices in the field of epidemiology in Afghanistan.

2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in research conducted by the Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES). Researchers affiliated with ACES are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards throughout the research process. Key ethical considerations include:

- **Respect for Human Rights:** Researchers must respect the fundamental rights and dignity of human subjects involved in research. This includes obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality, and protecting participants from any harm or exploitation.
- **Informed Consent:** ACES emphasizes the importance of informed consent from research participants. Researchers must provide clear and comprehensive information about the purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and voluntary nature of participation. Participants should have the autonomy to make informed decisions about their involvement.
- **Ethical Review and Approval:** Studies involving human subjects should undergo ethical review and obtain appropriate approval from relevant authorities. This ensures that the proposed research complies with ethical guidelines and safeguards the welfare and rights of participants.

2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Minimization of Harm:** Researchers should strive to minimize any potential physical, psychological, or social harm to participants. This includes conducting risk assessments, implementing appropriate safeguards, and providing necessary support or referrals when required.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** ACES emphasizes the importance of protecting the confidentiality and privacy of research participants. Researchers should handle data securely, anonymize or de-identify data when possible, and ensure that participant information remains confidential.
- **Responsible Data Handling:** Researchers should adhere to data protection regulations and guidelines, including secure storage, appropriate data sharing, and responsible data management practices. Data should be collected and analyzed with integrity and transparency.
- **Animal Welfare:** If research involves the use of animals, researchers should adhere to established guidelines for the ethical treatment and welfare of animals, minimizing any potential harm and ensuring compliance with relevant animal welfare regulations.

3. RESEARCH COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES) recognizes the value of research collaboration and partnerships in advancing scientific knowledge and addressing public health challenges. ACES encourages collaboration with national and international research institutions, academic organizations, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Key aspects of research collaboration and partnerships include:

- **Shared Objectives:** Collaborative research projects should be based on shared objectives and a common vision for advancing knowledge and addressing public health issues. Clear goals and mutual understanding among collaborators are essential for successful research partnerships.
- **Knowledge Exchange:** Collaborative research provides opportunities for knowledge exchange, sharing expertise, and leveraging diverse perspectives. ACES researchers can benefit from the insights, experiences, and resources of their partners, enhancing the quality and impact of research outcomes.

3. RESEARCH COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- **Joint Research Initiatives:** Collaboration enables the pooling of resources, skills, and infrastructure to undertake complex research initiatives. Joint projects can involve interdisciplinary approaches, innovative methodologies, and larger sample sizes, leading to more robust findings.
- **Capacity Building:** Collaborations offer opportunities for capacity building, training, and skill development among researchers involved. ACES can benefit from the expertise and knowledge transfer from partner organizations, enhancing the research capabilities of its staff and contributing to professional growth.
- **Networking and Visibility:** Collaborations broaden ACES' network and enhance its visibility within the research community. Engaging in partnerships establishes ACES as a credible and reliable research institution, facilitating future collaborations and attracting potential funding opportunities.

4. RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND APPROVAL

The Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES) emphasizes the importance of a well-developed research proposal and a rigorous approval process. A research proposal serves as a blueprint for the research study, outlining its objectives, methodology, expected outcomes, and potential impact. The proposal should adhere to a set format and provide a comprehensive overview of the research project.

The approval process ensures that proposed research aligns with ACES' mission and ethical guidelines. It typically involves a review by relevant authorities within ACES, including scientific, ethical, and feasibility assessments. The approval process may also include external review and consultation with experts in the field.

4. RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND APPROVAL

Key components of a research proposal include:

- **Research Objectives:** Clearly define the research goals, research questions, or hypotheses that the study aims to address. These objectives should align with ACES' research priorities and contribute to the field of epidemiology.
- **Methodology:** Describe the research design, data collection methods, sample size determination, and statistical analysis plan. Justify the chosen methods and demonstrate their suitability for addressing the research objectives.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Outline the steps taken to ensure the ethical conduct of the study. This includes obtaining informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality and privacy, and addressing potential risks and benefits to participants.
- **Expected Outcomes and Impact:** Specify the expected outcomes and their potential impact on public health or epidemiological knowledge. Highlight the significance of the research and its relevance to the Afghan context.

4. RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND APPROVAL

- **Resources and Feasibility:** Demonstrate the availability of resources, including personnel, equipment, and facilities, necessary to conduct the research. Consider the feasibility of the study, including time constraints and potential challenges.

The research proposal should undergo a thorough review process, involving experts within ACES and potentially external reviewers. Feedback and suggestions received during the review should be incorporated into the final proposal.

By emphasizing a robust research proposal and a rigorous approval process, ACES ensures that research studies align with its mission, adhere to ethical standards, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in epidemiology. It promotes transparency, scientific rigor, and the generation of meaningful research outcomes that can guide evidence-based public health interventions in Afghanistan.

5. DATA COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT, AND ANALYSIS

Data collection, management, and analysis are crucial components of the research process conducted by the Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES). Proper handling of data ensures the reliability, accuracy, and integrity of research findings. Here are key considerations for each stage:

- **Data Collection:** Researchers should employ rigorous and standardized methods for data collection. This includes defining variables, developing data collection tools, and implementing appropriate data collection techniques. ACES emphasizes the use of validated instruments and adherence to established protocols to ensure data consistency and comparability.
- **Data Management:** Effective data management involves the secure storage, organization, and documentation of research data. ACES researchers should establish appropriate data management systems that maintain confidentiality, protect against loss or unauthorized access, and ensure data integrity. Data should be labeled, coded, and securely stored to facilitate future analysis and potential data sharing.

5. DATA COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT, AND ANALYSIS

- **Data Analysis:** Data analysis encompasses the application of statistical techniques to extract meaningful insights from collected data. ACES researchers should use appropriate statistical methods relevant to their research questions and study design. Analysis should be conducted with transparency, ensuring that the methods are well-documented, replicable, and include appropriate statistical inference.

Researchers should exercise caution in drawing conclusions and interpretations from the analysis, considering the limitations and potential biases of the data.

ACES encourages researchers to employ data quality assurance measures, such as data validation and cross-checking, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. Additionally, researchers should consider ethical considerations related to data, such as de-identification or anonymization of personal information, to protect participant confidentiality.

By adhering to rigorous data collection, management, and analysis practices, ACES ensures that research findings are robust, reliable, and contribute to evidence-based decision-making in the field of epidemiology. The organization maintains a commitment to transparency, data integrity, and adherence to established guidelines and best practices in data handling.

6. RESEARCH EDUCATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

The Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES) recognizes the importance of research education and capacity-building in fostering a culture of scientific inquiry and enhancing research capabilities. ACES is committed to providing opportunities for researchers to develop their skills, knowledge, and competencies in conducting high-quality research. Here are key aspects of research education and capacity-building:

- **Training Programs:** ACES offers training programs, workshops, and seminars that cover various aspects of research, including research methodology, data analysis, ethical considerations, and research dissemination. These programs aim to enhance researchers' understanding of research principles and equip them with the necessary skills to conduct rigorous and ethical studies.

6. RESEARCH EDUCATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

- **Mentorship:** ACES promotes mentorship programs where experienced researchers provide guidance, support, and expertise to early-career researchers. Mentorship facilitates knowledge transfer, skill development, and career advancement.
- **Access to Resources:** ACES ensures that researchers have access to relevant resources, such as scientific literature, databases, and software tools necessary for conducting research. Access to these resources enables researchers to stay updated with the latest developments in their field and facilitates evidence-based decision-making.
- **Collaboration Opportunities:** ACES encourages researchers to collaborate with national and international partners, facilitating knowledge exchange, joint research initiatives, and networking. Collaborations enhance researchers' exposure to diverse perspectives and expertise, contributing to their professional growth.
- **Research Dissemination:** ACES promotes the dissemination of research findings through publications, conferences, and other scholarly activities. Researchers are encouraged to present their work, share knowledge, and contribute to the broader scientific community.

6. RESEARCH EDUCATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

- **Research Ethics Education:** ACES emphasizes the importance of research ethics and provides education and training on ethical considerations in research. This includes topics such as informed consent, confidentiality, protection of human subjects, and responsible conduct of research.

By investing in research education and capacity-building, ACES aims to strengthen the research capabilities of its staff and affiliated researchers. Enhancing research skills, fostering collaboration, and promoting ethical research practices contribute to the generation of high-quality evidence, advancements in epidemiological knowledge, and improved public health outcomes in Afghanistan.

7. REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Reporting and accountability are essential components of the research process within the Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES). These aspects ensure transparency, communicate research findings, and promote responsible research conduct. Here are key considerations for reporting and accountability:

- **Research Reporting:** ACES researchers are expected to prepare comprehensive research reports that document the study's objectives, methodology, data analysis, results, and conclusions. Reports should be clear, concise, and accessible to a diverse audience, including policymakers, healthcare professionals, and the general public.
- **Publication:** ACES encourages researchers to disseminate their findings through peer-reviewed scientific journals and other reputable outlets. Publication allows for scrutiny, peer review, and wider accessibility of research outcomes, contributing to the body of knowledge in epidemiology.
- **Research Ethics and Compliance:** ACES researchers must adhere to ethical guidelines, regulations, and institutional policies governing research conduct. This includes obtaining proper ethical approvals, maintaining participant confidentiality, and conducting research with integrity.

7. REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Financial Accountability:** Researchers are accountable for the appropriate and transparent use of research funds. ACES promotes responsible financial management, ensuring that research grants and resources are utilized for their intended purposes and are in compliance with financial regulations and reporting requirements.
- **Quality Assurance:** ACES emphasizes the importance of quality assurance in research. Researchers should implement measures to verify data accuracy, conduct validation checks, and ensure research procedures align with best practices and standards.
- **Research Impact and Evaluation:** ACES encourages researchers to assess and evaluate the impact of their research outcomes on public health and policy. Understanding the practical implications of research findings enhances accountability and informs future research directions.
- **Institutional Oversight:** ACES provides institutional oversight to monitor and evaluate research activities. This includes review committees, research governance structures, and internal audits to ensure compliance, adherence to policies, and quality assurance.

8. RESEARCH FUNDING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Research funding and financial management are essential components of the Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES) to support and sustain its research activities. Here are key considerations regarding research funding and financial management:

- **Funding Sources:** ACES actively seeks funding from various sources, including government grants, international organizations, philanthropic foundations, and collaborative partnerships. Diversifying funding sources helps ensure financial stability and independence.
- **Grant Applications:** ACES researchers are encouraged to prepare comprehensive grant applications that align with the organization's research priorities and funding opportunities. Applications should clearly articulate the research objectives, methodology, expected outcomes, and budgetary requirements.
- **Budgeting:** ACES emphasizes responsible budgeting, ensuring that research funds are allocated efficiently and effectively. Researchers should develop realistic budgets that account for personnel, equipment, supplies, travel, and other necessary expenses.

8. RESEARCH FUNDING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- **Financial Oversight:** ACES establishes financial oversight mechanisms to monitor and track research expenditures. This includes regular financial reporting, internal audits, and compliance with financial regulations and guidelines.
- **Financial Sustainability:** ACES endeavors to establish long-term financial sustainability by pursuing diverse funding streams, fostering partnerships, and engaging in strategic financial planning.

- **Accountability and Transparency:** ACES maintains transparency and accountability in financial management by adhering to ethical and legal standards, accurately reporting research expenditures, and ensuring that funds are used for their intended purposes.

By effectively managing research funding, adhering to financial regulations, and maintaining transparency, ACES ensures the efficient utilization of resources and the successful implementation of research projects. Sound financial management practices enable ACES to continue its mission of advancing epidemiological knowledge, improving public health outcomes, and contributing to evidence-based decision-making in Afghanistan.

9. COMPLIANCE AND REVIEW

Compliance and review processes are crucial aspects of research conducted within the Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES). These processes ensure that research activities align with ethical standards, regulatory requirements, and organizational policies. Here are key considerations for compliance and review:

- **Ethical Compliance:** ACES researchers must adhere to ethical guidelines and principles governing research involving human subjects or animals. This includes obtaining informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality, and ensuring the welfare and rights of research participants.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** ACES researchers should comply with relevant regulatory requirements, such as data protection regulations, intellectual property rights, and any specific guidelines related to the study population or research setting.
- **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval:** Studies involving human subjects must undergo review and approval by an IRB or equivalent ethical review body. The IRB assesses the ethical implications of the research, ensuring participant protection, and compliance with ethical guidelines.

9. COMPLIANCE AND REVIEW

- **Data Security and Privacy:** ACES researchers must comply with data security and privacy regulations to protect the confidentiality and integrity of research data. This includes secure data storage, appropriate data sharing protocols, and adherence to data protection laws.
- **Financial Compliance:** Researchers are expected to comply with financial regulations, including proper use of research funds, accurate financial reporting, and adherence to grant requirements.

- **Internal and External Review:** ACES may have internal review processes in place to evaluate research proposals, progress, and outcomes. External review, such as peer review of research manuscripts, adds an additional layer of scrutiny, ensuring the quality and credibility of the research.

Compliance and review processes within ACES contribute to maintaining ethical standards, ensuring legal compliance, and upholding the organization's reputation. These processes also foster transparency, accountability, and quality assurance in research activities, ultimately promoting the integrity and reliability of epidemiological research conducted by ACES.

10. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND RESEARCH OUTPUTS

The Afghanistan Center for Epidemiological Studies (ACES) recognizes the importance of intellectual property (IP) rights and the effective management of research outputs. Intellectual property refers to the legal rights that protect the creations of the mind, including inventions, research findings, data, and publications. Here are key considerations regarding intellectual property and research outputs:

- **Ownership:** ACES respects the intellectual property rights of its researchers and collaborators. Researchers are generally considered the owners of their individual contributions, including inventions, research data, and scholarly works, subject to any contractual agreements or funding arrangements.
- **Protection:** ACES encourages researchers to protect their intellectual property through appropriate means, such as patent applications, copyright registration, or other forms of IP protection, where applicable and beneficial. This ensures that valuable research outputs are safeguarded and can be utilized for commercialization or further research purposes.
- **Collaboration and Licensing:** ACES supports collaboration and licensing agreements to facilitate the transfer and utilization of intellectual property. Collaborators may agree on shared ownership or licensing arrangements that allow for the dissemination and utilization of research outputs while respecting the rights and interests of all parties involved.

10. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND RESEARCH OUTPUTS

- **Research Outputs and Dissemination:** ACES promotes the dissemination of research outputs through various channels, including peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and open-access platforms. Sharing research findings contributes to the advancement of knowledge, encourages collaboration, and promotes evidence-based decision-making.
- **Attribution and Recognition:** ACES emphasizes proper attribution and recognition of researchers' contributions in research outputs. Researchers should be appropriately acknowledged for their intellectual contributions in publications, presentations, and other forms of dissemination.

By fostering an environment that values intellectual property and research outputs, ACES encourages innovation, knowledge exchange, and the responsible utilization of research findings. It supports researchers in protecting their intellectual contributions and facilitates the dissemination of valuable research outputs for the benefit of public health and the advancement of epidemiological knowledge.