

Ethics and evaluation

Why are ethics important in evaluation?

There are a range of ethical principles and values outlined in the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* that underpin evaluations conducted for and by the Queensland Government.

Evaluations that promote ethical principles such as integrity and impartiality are more likely to receive open and honest feedback from stakeholders. This can help improve the credibility and validity of evaluation findings.

Evaluations that promote ethical principles such as accountability and transparency are more likely to build public confidence and trust in Government.

This can lead to more civic participation in government activities and policies that strengthen public value.



Why did you include the negative responses in your evaluation?



Apart from it being good ethical practice, it helps us understand what we can improve.

Source: Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2023

Key ethical principles for evaluators and how to apply them in practice

The table describes key ethical principles for evaluation with suggestions about how to apply these in practice.

Ethical principles	Practical strategies to apply the principle
Impartiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uphold human rights principles.• Encourage input and participation from as many stakeholders as is practical (including users and program implementors).• Manage any known or potential risks for bias or discrimination.
Integrity and privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use existing fit-for-purpose information to minimise unnecessary data collection. Only collect what is essential, authorised and going to be used as part of the evaluation.• Give participants enough information to make a free and informed decision about whether to take part in an evaluation.• Identify and reduce potential harm or distress for participants.• Explain why and how participant data will be collected, used, and stored in accordance with the <i>Information Privacy Act 2009</i>.
Accountability and transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be clear about why an evaluation is required and how it's findings will be used.• Use available time, money and resources as efficiently and effectively as is practical.• Inform program implementors and decision makers about unintended consequences as required during the evaluation, especially if harm occurs.• Report the methodology and results in an accurate and honest way. Include positive, negative, and unexpected findings.• Be clear about data sources and data quality. State the assumptions and limitations of methods and analyses.• Where possible, seek to publish evaluation findings.



When to seek additional advice?

Ethical advice can assist where participants may:

- experience distress, stigma, embarrassment, legal or financial harm
- be at increased risk of harm (e.g. children, those with cognitive impairment, intellectual disability, or mental illness).

Also consider ethical advice when the evaluation:

- uses data or analysis for a purpose outside the permissions it was collected under
- publishes results that may identify or lead to the identification of individuals or businesses
- seeks to gather and report on information for comparison or control groups
- requires cultural sensitivity.

How to manage ethical risk and get advice?

Evaluation governance and risk management can support ethical conduct. A governance group can identify, address, and monitor ethical challenges. It can protect the agency from reputational damage that might arise from risks such as conflicts of interest, disrespect to participants or privacy breaches.

A governance group can also be a place where people can raise concerns about ethical practices.

Some evaluations, such as those that include data collection from participants at increased risk of harm, may require formal ethical review from a Human Research Ethics Committee. These committees are guided by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct of Human Research.

There are also ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. These promote Indigenous peoples as partners in research in evaluations of programs that may impact on them.

References and further information

Australian Evaluation Society (2013). Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2020). AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research.

National Health and Medical Research Council (2023). National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

National Health and Medical Research Council (2014). Ethical Considerations in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Activities.

