

Summary

Due to our size, geographical diversity and wide range of services provided, Life Without Barriers is in a unique position to partner with others to contribute to the research and evidence base for the community services sector. Doing so has the potential to provide benefits to our clients, LWB as an organisation and to the broader sector.

This policy describes our approach to the conduct of research partnerships that involve our clients and staff. Our fundamental responsibility and priority remains the welfare and dignity of our clients – to ensure this, it is critical that a clear and consistent policy and supporting procedures are in place.

This policy guideline will also ensure that research partnerships undertaken at LWB is in line with:

- LWB's Values and Pillars of Practice
- Accepted guidelines for the conduct of ethical research, including the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) and the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

Note: Routine internal evaluations such as feedback surveys for practice improvement, the use of internal data to identify trends and opportunities, Client Outcomes Reporting and other BAU activities do not require approval by the Practice Committee. If you are unsure whether approval is required please contact the Strategy and Support Officer in the Practice and Quality team.

Who should read this document?

Any and all staff involved (including those already involved) in the assessment, approval, implementation, oversight and/or conduct of research partnerships involving LWB clients and/or staff.

Members of research teams proposing and/or involved in a research partnerships at LWB.

Staff completing Honours, Research Master's or PhD programs as part of their employment with LWB.

What is our aim?

For LWB to contribute to the evidence base for community service practice and programs while maintaining the integrity of our client services.

As good citizens in the community services sector we have a responsibility to contribute to improved practice, expand the evidence base and engage with research in our field.

However, our responsibility to our clients remains paramount. LWB must not partner in any research that presents an unreasonable or unnecessary level of risk to our clients. All reasonable steps must be taken to that research is conducted in line with best practice and is not undertaken in an exploitative manner.

Guiding Principles for Research Projects at LWB

Client Benefits

The primary evaluation criteria for approval of research to be conducted at LWB is whether the research will deliver a tangible benefit to our clients or to similar groups. Examples of benefits include improved service delivery, policy change, a better understanding of client needs and strengths and/or a more responsive use of resources. Each application to conduct a research project at LWB must include a client benefit statement, and LWB will not approve research projects that are unlikely to improve the circumstances of our clients or those in similar groups.

Knowledge Transfer

With privacy and confidentiality requirements in mind, the findings, results and any other pertinent information to arise from research partnerships should be communicated directly to all participants, particularly clients and client groups.

Ethics Approval

It is important to remember that LWB **is not** equipped to provide ethics approval for research partnerships. It is a non-negotiable precondition that all research proposals submitted to LWB have already received written approval from a recognised human research ethics committee¹ at a university or other appropriately accredited research institution. Where relevant, proposals may also require approval from safety or other regulatory bodies.

If the research project involves working with children and/or young people under the age of 18 then a Working With Children Clearance **must** be provided for all relevant project team members.

Informed Consent

All people directly participating in research must provide informed consent prior to participation in research projects. Consent can only be considered informed where the participant has been provided with a 'plain-language' information sheet that provides, at minimum, the following:

- The purpose of the research or evaluation
- What they will be asked to provide, or do
- Who will have access to their data
- What will be done with the results
- Their right to withdraw and have their data deleted prior to the completion of the study without adverse consequences
- How their privacy will be protected
- A point of contact for complaints, clarifications and any other information they may require

¹ List of HRE committees registered with NHMRC http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/file/health_ethics/hrecs/att_2_-_list_of_human_research_ethics_committees_registered_with_nhmrc_february_2016.pdf

Any additional barriers to providing informed consent must also be taken into account, such as those possibly faced by children, people with a disability and others. These consent forms must be appropriately stored and made available to the LWB Executive and/or Board upon request.

Participant Confidentiality and Wellbeing

The wellbeing, privacy, confidentiality and dignity of participants in research is of the utmost importance. Any breaches by any member of the project team may result in the immediate termination of the project with all data to be returned and/or destroyed. Further disciplinary action will be at the discretion of the National Director, Practice and Quality.

Time Commitment

While LWB is committed to partnering in research, we need to respect the time of our staff and clients. Projects with unreasonably onerous time commitments will not be approved.

Organisational Approval

All research partnerships with external groups **must** receive approval in principle from the National Director, Practice and Quality and then proceed to the LWB Practice Committee for approval prior to commencement. The process for obtaining this approval is outlined in the supporting procedure document in the LWB policy centre.

Client Involvement as Co-Researchers

Where possible, it is preferable for clients to be involved in research projects as co-designers and/or co-researchers rather than simply participants. LWB will give priority to research projects co-designed by LWB clients.

Regular and Transparent Oversight

Within reason, the research project should be conducted in a manner that allows Executive and/or Board review of progress, conduct, participant wellbeing and other relevant elements where they relate to participants with a connection to LWB. This may include review of written documents, ongoing results, correspondence and any other relevant information.

A list of all participants and their preferred contact details should be maintained and, except where confidentiality requirements dictate otherwise, made available to the Executive and/or Board as requested.

These stipulations apply only to participants with a connection to LWB, including but not limited to clients, staff and carers.

Accountability

This RACI chart outlines the responsibility matrix for this policy guideline. It provides a snapshot of the expected actions for defined roles against the required task.

Task		Research Team/LWB Rep	Executive Lead	Manager, Quality and Risk	Practice Committee	Board
1.	Submitting and Approving Research Proposals	R	C		A	I
2.	Obtaining Ethical Approval	RA				
3.	Preparing Risk Assessment (if required)	R	A	C	I	
4.	Executing Research Agreement	R	A			
5.	Conducting Research Project	R	A			
6.	Interim/Milestone Reporting (if required)	R	A			
7.	Issues Reporting	R	A	C		
8.	Final Report (if stipulated in Research Agreement)	R	A		I	I

R = Responsible = Owns the project / problem
A = Accountable = Who must sign off / approve on work before it is effective
C = Consult = Who has the information and/or capability necessary to complete the work
I = Inform = Must be notified of results, but does not need to be consulted

Audit / Evaluation

Regular Reporting to Practice Committee

Unless otherwise specified, updates on the progress of the research project will be provided to the Practice Committee in the Practice Activity Paper, a standing Agenda item.

Risk Assessment and Auditing

Depending on the nature of the project, a risk assessment approved by the Manager, Quality and Risk may accompany research proposals submitted to the Practice Committee. These risks (and accompanying mitigation strategies) should be regularly monitored and an audit schedule devised.

It is the responsibility of the research team to report any and all emergent risks to the Executive Director, Practice and Quality. If an emergent risk is deemed unacceptable then LWB retains the right to terminate the project and request all data be returned or destroyed.

Maintenance of a Research Register

A register of all current and completed research projects at LWB will be maintained by the Strategy and Support Office, Practice and Quality. This will at a minimum include:

- The title of the project and a brief summary of its methodology, purpose and benefits
- The names and organisations of the project team and contact details for the project lead
- The name and contact details of the LWB Executive lead
- The date of commencement and completion of the project
- When published, the location of the results of the project

Final Report to Practice Committee

If stipulated as part of the Research Agreement, a final report to the Practice Committee will be made and should contain an evaluation of the study itself as well as the results of the study as they are to be published.

Publication of Results

The anticipated publication of results should be stated in the research application form prior to the commencement of the project.

Other Resources

Research Partnership Procedures

Research Partnership Application Form

Research Register

DOCUMENT NAME	Policy Guideline – Research Partnerships at LWB		
DOCUMENT TYPE	Policy Guideline		
SERVICE SECTOR/S	All Service Sectors		
VERSION	1.0		
APPROVAL DATE	02/02/2017	REVIEW FREQUENCY	3
APPROVED BY	Mary McKinnon		
	The signatory (lead Executive) is accountable to implement, maintain and monitor appropriate systems to achieve the objectives of this document.		
BUSINESS PORTFOLIO	Practice and Quality		
CONTACT FOR QUERIES	Chris Hadfield		
RELATED TOPIC/S	Research Partnership Procedures Research Partnership Application Form Research Register Evidence Based Strategy Building a Learning Practice Culture		