

60 _decibels

Ethical Research Policy

- Research ethics is about the protection and respect of people in the planning, conduct, and reporting of research.
- The purpose of the 60 Decibels Ethical Research Policy is to outline the principles and responsibilities for ethical conduct in research conducted by, or on behalf of, the 60 Decibels team. This helps us to embed a best practice culture, strengthening our commitment to high quality, transparent, and accountable research practices.
- The 60 Decibels team values and protects our freedom to provide insights and results to the best of our ability, while following ethical principles in research such as respect for research participants, their welfare and justice.
- It is the responsibility of all in the 60 Decibels team to be familiar and confident with this policy and what it entails, and to follow the guidelines when designing, delivering, and reporting results, and to do so in a way that represents our ethics policy.
- It is the responsibility of the 60 Decibels team to also ensure those conducting research on behalf of 60 Decibels (researchers) are similarly aware and well-versed of this policy, and that they too conduct their work in a way that represents our ethics policy, where relevant.
- 60 Decibels is committed to best practice in relation to standards of ethics in our research activities and are committed to reviewing our work and this policy regularly.

Good research practice

- Upholding recognised ethical principles in research requires an acceptance of and respect for principles of integrity, honesty and openness and a commitment to intellectual honesty and personal responsibility.
- We believe research involving participants must be undertaken to gain knowledge and understanding and to ultimately provide insights for improved operations, movement of capital, and for better meeting the needs of participants and broader communities.
- Prior to, during, and following the completion of research activities, the 60 Decibels team and 60 Decibels researchers are expected to consider the ethical implications of their research and any of its consequences for the participants involved. In addition, the teams are expected to consider the research from the perspective of the participant.
- The utmost care is taken when designing each 60 Decibels Lean Data project research to consider potential risks and vulnerability for participants and researchers. The design is shaped by a consideration of this to avoid, mitigate, or reduce any such risks through our project delivery practices.
- In case ethical issues are identified in relation to a research project, the project design will be reviewed, adjusted, and approved by the senior team.
- No member of the 60 Decibels team, including our researchers or others who conduct research on our behalf, should be compelled or compel others to undertake or participate in research that conflicts with either the researchers' or the participants' individual ethical principles.

Protection of researcher/research teams

- On occasion, researchers will face potential risks to their safety when conducting certain types of research. For example, there is higher risk to personal safety when conducting in-person research in areas that research teams are unfamiliar with, compared to phone interviews conducted by researchers in their homes.

- Design and conduct of research and procedures will be adopted to minimise any risk to researchers. In addition, it is advised that researchers consult appropriate health and safety guidelines and procedures relevant to their area of research before commencing work.

Protection of participants

- Researchers have a responsibility to protect participants from any harm arising from research. As a general rule, people participating in research must not be exposed to risks that are greater than or additional to those they encounter in their normal lifestyles.
- In the case of interviews and surveys, the content and line of questioning may be sensitive, raise confidential, personal issues and intrude, or be perceived to intrude, upon the participants comfort and privacy. The initial judgement on whether or not questions are sensitive and likely to cause harm rests with the 60 Decibels Lean Data project lead. All team members are encouraged to seek advice if they are unsure of how to identify or mitigate potential risks.

Prevention of harm

- The 60 Decibels team and those who conduct research on our behalf seek to protect participants from physical and psychological harm during, and related to, the research process.
- We also want to ensure that researchers are supported to take steps to protect their own physical and psychological wellbeing during the research process.

Research with children and vulnerable people

- Some participants should automatically be considered vulnerable because of a limited ability to provide consent to take part in a research project e.g. young children, people who are ill or bereaved, those with mental health issues.
- Other groups may be considered vulnerable because of the context, e.g. unemployed, migrants, refugees.
- Extra safeguards and consent procedures will be designed and followed if working with vulnerable participants in research projects.
- For 60 Decibels research conducted with children under the age of 18, or with those deemed to be vulnerable due to mental health, or for other reasons, particular care will be taken over design and consent, paying particular attention to the special circumstances that may affect a person's ability to freely and voluntarily give informed consent.
- Parents (and others with parental responsibility) may agree to their children taking part in research, but where a child is able to understand sufficiently to give informed consent, their consent should be obtained in addition to parents'.
- It is the researcher's responsibility to assess whether the child has sufficient understanding to consent to the research, and to share information about the research clearly and simply. Children's capacity to consent to research depends on their understanding of the research to be undertaken.
- Where children are considered competent by a researcher to participate they should be accorded the confidentiality as would an adult. There are however two areas of concern where the same level of confidentiality cannot be promised to a child: where a child discloses that they are being seriously harmed or ill-treated, or where the researcher discovers a condition about which the parents could take action to benefit the child. In these instances researchers could be seen to have a duty of care to disclose such information to relevant third parties.

- Researchers will endeavour to ensure that research is conducted with respect for under-represented social groups and that attempts are made to avoid their marginalisation or exclusion, where relevant and/or possible.

Confidentiality and data protection

- An important part of informed consent is that participants should be aware of what will happen to the data that is collected during the study, what arrangements will be made to keep participants' identities secret and the data confidential. If it is proposed to share data with other entities, participants must be fully informed.
- The collection, storage, disclosure and use of personal data by researchers will comply with all relevant legislation relating to data protection and arrangements are in place by researchers to carefully protect the confidentiality of participants and their data. Details that would allow individuals to be identified must not be published or made available to anybody not involved in the research unless explicit consent is given by the individuals concerned.
- For Kenya, to be data protection compliant, if a respondent chooses to stay anonymous, we will not use their quotation in any presentations/decks, even with 'anonymous' written beside it.
- No one besides the 60 Decibels team and [company] will ever see customer personal information. When sharing raw data with investors/clients who are not the company, personal contact information (name, contact number) will be removed.

Respect for participants

- The 60 Decibels team and researchers will aim to conduct research that is respectful of national and international law, gender differences, all groups in society, and marginalised/disadvantaged groups.

Appropriate use of rewards and incentives

- Incentivising participation in research projects will only be on the basis of encouraging people to take part, rather than only taking part because of the reward.
- Payments made to participants will not be so large as to create additional risk, or indeed, introduce bias in response.

Independence

- The 60 Decibels team will not distort research design and/or findings to suit funder or sponsor requirements or requests.

Informed consent

- Informed consent is a critical part of ethical practice in research that involves human participants or personal data. It is about providing participants with clear information about the purpose of the study, what their participation will involve, and how their data will be stored and used.
- The informed consent process should stress that participation is voluntary and can be ended at any point during the research.
- Researchers must make every effort to ensure that participants are genuinely informed about the study and that they have freely consented to take part.
- Consent should be attained by researchers informing participants in advance of all necessary information expected to influence willingness to take part in the study.
- Participants should be given the opportunity to ask questions about their involvement in the research before confirming consent.

Obtaining consent

- Research will only be carried out with valid consent of participants, having taken all reasonable and practicable steps to ensure that they have understood the nature of the research and how the data will be used. Under no circumstances will coercion be used to obtain a person's consent to participate in research.
- As the 60 Decibels team sometimes interview those who may not be literate, or for whom requesting written consent may cause discomfort, in general, research teams obtain verbal consent. This is also most appropriate for phone-based research.
- To ensure informed consent is given, researchers will ensure the participant is fully informed about aspects of the research project which might influence willingness to participate – in simple, clear language.
- The researcher will explain other aspects of the research should the participant enquire.
- To the best of their knowledge, the researcher will ensure the participant has freely and voluntarily given consent to participate.
- Some aspects may include:
 - What: the nature and objectives of the project, and what participation in the research will require
 - This normally includes an estimate for how long the engagement/interview will take.
 - Where the research involves sensitive issues (e.g. ethnicity, sexual behaviour, health, political beliefs, or illegal behaviour), then special attention should clearly be paid to ensuring that the participants are fully informed of the nature of the research and are given ample time to think before deciding whether or not to become involved. They should also be reminded during the study that they are free to discontinue their participation at any point.
 - How: the method of the project and conditions under which it is to be conducted
 - Who: is undertaking and sponsoring the research, and who will have access to personally identifiable information about participants
 - Note, for nearly all Lean Data projects, participants are offered anonymity, unless they have explicitly given consent at the end of the interview, when they are in a better position to agree/disagree, as they know what they have shared. If, for any reason, the researcher does not obtain this consent, anonymity will automatically be applied.
 - Where: research results will be published or communicated, and in what form
 - When: whether it is possible, and at what point, to withdraw from participation in research
 - All Lean Data research is entirely voluntary, which means participants have the right to change their minds and withdraw consent at any time.
- Where possible, the 60 Decibels team will send SMS primers which provide some of this information before a call (see end for template text).

Questions considered prior, during, and after research

It is encouraged that the 60 Decibels researchers be given this list to consider themselves, and to ask questions and/or share thoughts with the 60 Decibels team on any projects they work on.

1. Does the research involve people, and how?
 - a. Who will participate in the research?
 - b. How will the respondent group be chosen?

- c. What sampling techniques will be deployed?
 - d. In what ways will participants be involved?
2. Are there potential benefits or hazards for the participants?
 - a. Are there risks to the participants by being involved in the research?
 - b. Have procedures been established for the care and protection of subjects?
3. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics? For example (but not limited to): sexual activity, illegal behaviour, experience of violence or abuse, drug use, etc.).
4. Does the research involve any risks or pose any danger to the researcher(s)?
 - a. If yes, what procedures will be adopted to minimise risks?
5. Have all procedures to ensure informed consent been considered and will be followed?
 - a. Have they been clearly shared with the research team?
6. Are the recruitment procedures of participants well planned, and risks of coercion considered?
 - a. Might participants feel compelled or obliged to participate?
 - b. How is voluntariness ensured?
 - c. Does the participation of research involve any financial or other remuneration?
7. Are there payments to researchers/participants that may have an impact on the objectivity of the research?
8. Does the research involve vulnerable groups?
 - a. If yes, which consent procedures will be applied instead?
9. How will confidentiality and anonymity be secured?
10. How will data protection and storage requirements be followed?
11. What is the anticipated use of the data, form of publication and dissemination of findings?
12. How will you ensure that ethics considerations are made throughout the project?

For any questions on this policy or our research, please reach out to Kat Harrison, Director, 60 Decibels at kat@60decibels.com