

Advice and processes for conducting research in the Kimberley

If you are seeking to undertake research in the Kimberley, it is essential that you allow time for proper consultation and ensure that you receive support from the communities involved prior to applying for ethics approval. Communities / organisations have the right to choose not to participate in your research or to negotiate changes to methodology or priorities in line with community needs and values.

It is strongly recommended that you have at least one contact in the community you seek to work in prior to preparing a proposal. If you are a student, we recommend that you have at least one supervisor who is based in the Kimberley and has experience in carrying out research in the Kimberley. Otherwise, you may wish to consider collaborating with an organisation with local contacts or consider conducting your research elsewhere.

- The first step in seeking community support is generally to contact the CEO of the relevant Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) and/or the community Chairperson. The CEO / Chairperson will be able to advise whether the research is supported by the community. Support from the CEO of the ACCHS involved will be required by the Western Australia Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) before ethics approval is granted.
- ACCHS CEOs are busy and often travelling and it may take longer than you anticipate to receive a response. Having local contacts, particularly within the ACCHS, and visiting in person during the consultation phase is likely to make this process easier.

What is the KAHPF Research Subcommittee?

The Research Subcommittee is part of the **Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum**. The Subcommittee is not part of any organisation and has representation from organisations across the region (including KAMS, WACHS, UWA, NCSH – current members are listed on the Subcommittee website). It is a body set up to review all health research conducted in the region. This includes all undergraduate and postgraduate student projects (e.g. Honours, MD student projects, Masters, PhD).

The Subcommittee is not an ethics committee.

Steps for proposal development; community, organisation and KAHPF Research Subcommittee support; and ethics approval

Preliminary community consultation: find out what the priorities of the community / organisation are

Develop your proposal with Kimberley communities / organisations based on their priorities

Obtain letters of support from appropriate community members (you will need to explain why you think they are the appropriate person)

Submit your proposal to the KAHPF Research Subcommittee (it will assess: 1) how useful the project is; 2) how much of a burden it will be; and 3) methods: if there are concerns or suggestions for improvement)

After receiving Subcommittee support, submit your proposal to WAAHEC & other relevant ethics committees (e.g. WACHS, University)

Some helpful advice from current and past researchers in the Kimberley

Allow sufficient time for ethics approval and consultation processes

Ethics approval can take longer than some researchers anticipate. It is also recommended that you allow at least three months for community consultation. Consider that local organisations are very busy and have many competing demands. This may limit the available time that staff have to meet and talk with you. There is also high staff turnover in the Kimberley, which may affect your consultation. You may need to consult with multiple people and obtain additional letters of support if key staff change. The letters of support you will require depends on which ethics committee you are submitting your project to (these letters of support need to be provided to the Subcommittee along with the project form):

- **WAAHEC:** you will need letters of support from the community and/or ACCHS. Prior to providing approval WAAHEC will check that the Subcommittee has provided support for projects to be conducted in the Kimberley. The Subcommittee will copy the WAAHEC Secretariat into the response to researchers.
- **WACHS:** the Governance Review/Approval process requires Regional Director approval (for each region). Providing confirmation of support from the Subcommittee (this is necessary for Kimberley regional approval) will facilitate Regional Director approval.

Employ local Aboriginal people in research projects where possible

Employing local Aboriginal people in research projects – as investigators, researchers, translators, community liaison or mentor roles – will benefit your project and the communities involved. The value of local knowledge should not be underestimated in both preventing and managing barriers that may affect your project. For researchers with limited local contacts, community members can provide the necessary liaison and advice about cultural issues and the appropriate processes to follow. It is also important to ensure benefits for the communities involved, which may include providing training and/or qualifications to community members employed on your project.

Travelling to the Kimberley is expensive and time-consuming

Face to face visits with community representatives are essential for conducting research in the Kimberley. It is important to budget for the necessary trips for consultation, data collection and community feedback. Flights, fuel and accommodation are expensive in the Kimberley; particularly during the dry season (April-October). Many researchers in the past have found themselves limited in their ability to effectively consult with local communities or undertake the planned data collection due to an insufficient budget for travel.

Be flexible in your timelines and data collection methods

The nature of conducting research in the Kimberley is that strict timelines are unlikely to be the most effective way to carry out projects. It is important to allow extra time to account for potential issues such as adverse weather (road closures are common during the wet) or participants being away from the community. Cultural reasons, such as sorry business, may also limit access to communities at certain times. A helpful guide is to allow for double the amount of time you think you will need for data collection, including interviews. While planning is important to research, it is likely that your plans will need to be revised during your study to take in to account unexpected obstacles and unforeseen circumstances.

Allow time and budget for community feedback

The communities in the Kimberley have the right to be informed of the results of any research in which they were involved. Face to face visits are generally the most effective way to communicate feedback about research results, however liaising with the community will assist you to determine the most appropriate dissemination strategy. It is important to consider community feedback when preparing budgets and timelines.

The following article may also be helpful in providing further context and understanding: Aboriginal health research in the remote Kimberley: an exploration of perceptions, attitudes and concerns of stakeholders. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-014-0517-1>.

If you have any questions about these processes, the KAHPF Research Subcommittee can assist. **Contact:** Associate Professor Julia Marley on (08) 9194 3200 or Julia.Marley@rcswa.edu.au