



## Guidelines for research with former refugees in New Zealand

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with ChangeMakers' *Standards for Engagement*.

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### Who we are

ChangeMakers Refugee Forum is a rights-based, community development and advocacy organisation representing refugee-background communities in Wellington New Zealand.

While we want to encourage interest in and interaction with our communities, we also want ensure that our communities are respected and that interviewers assist us to strengthen the wellbeing of our communities.

People who arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand as refugees have one thing in common – they have been forced to leave their homes and flee. They are seldom able to return safely to their own country. New Zealand becomes their only home.

### The research issue

Researchers increasingly ask ChangeMakers to take part in research activities and to link researchers with refugee communities. While we want to encourage interest in, and interaction with our communities, we also want to ensure that our communities are respected and that researchers assist us meet the needs of our communities.

These guidelines are designed to assist you in your interactions with refugee background communities; to reduce demands on our communities and to ensure that the outcomes of any research benefit our communities.

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## Working with former refugees

### Values and attitudes

If you:

- Work *with* us, not *on* us,
- Respect us,
- Build on our strengths,
- Contribute to our wellbeing as individuals and communities,
- Recognise and accept that we former refugees come from a very wide range of countries, cultures and religions; that we come from a wide range of educational and employment backgrounds; that we have all suffered trauma; and that our experiences of settlement in New Zealand are varied,

And accept:

- That while some of us have always spoken English, others have had to learn English on arrival in New Zealand, and even those of us for whom English is a first language struggle with your accents,
- That many of us have had bad experiences with authorities that make us suspicious and nervous about answering some questions,
- That written forms are extremely difficult if not impossible for many of us,
- That most of our communities are small and our day to day lives are demanding, and
- That while we may look and sound different to you, we are human beings just like you,

We have a good chance of working together well.

## Questions for planning research

Can you contribute to our identified research needs? If not:

- Can you help us do the research rather than doing it yourself, or work in partnership with us?
- Who else is currently conducting research on your target groups and is there a way you can work with them to reduce the demands on research participants?
- How can you ensure the research process and outcome contribute to strengthening the wellbeing of former refugees and our communities?
- How will you ensure that our knowledge remains our intellectual property?
- How will you check with us that you have understood us?
- How will you build trust?
- How will you find the people you want to involve in the research?
- How will you validate our experiences and worldviews?
- How much time do you need from subjects, organisers and translators?
- Are there creative methodologies you can use that benefit participants in the process of the research as well as in the outcomes?
- How can you ensure that you give more than you take?

## Considerations

- Language: Do you need interpreters?  
*How will you ensure the interpreter understands you and that there is a relationship of trust with participants? If you are interviewing, what questions can you ask to ensure you have understood the person?*

- Trust: do you have relationships within refugee-background communities so that people can talk to each other about who you are and what you want?

*Refugees have generally been in situations where telling the truth to authority figures is very dangerous. Learning to trust people who come in asking questions or people in authority in New Zealand takes time and care.*

*The nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched is critical. Activities such as attending refugee background community events and taking part in refugee forums can help you learn how we live and work, make you more familiar and open up dialogue.*

*When working with people from very different backgrounds to you, for whom English is a second language, and with people who have very good reasons not to trust authority figures, standard survey techniques are unreliable. For example, a 'straightforward' question such as 'how many children do you have?' can be problematic because there may be children left behind in camps and their fate is unknown.*

- Feedback: Consider how you will check the results or draft of your research with participants and their communities.

*This will help ensure that your research can benefit the communities you work with, and ensure that you are accurately representing people's voices and experiences.*

- Ethics: How are you going to express each of the values listed above?

*Most researchers who are funded have formal ethical requirements to fulfil. We ask that you add to your ethical considerations our list of values.*

*Balance the need to give participants and/or communities control over what we give you with the need to minimise demands on us.*

- Prior knowledge: How can you approach your research with open minds and hearts?

*We find that those who hear us best – and most accurately – are those who come with open minds and hearts. This includes being humble, admitting how little you know about those from whom you are seeking information, taking time to listen, and being aware of your own preconceptions, attitudes, beliefs and cultural assumptions.*

*What you have read about us may be distorted or reflect the experiences and views of some of us but not all of us. Even if you are a former refugee your background and current experiences can be significantly different to others.*

*Watch body language as well as listening to speech. But suspend judgement; body language can have different meanings. Watch people's eyes for indications of engagement and interest. Respect silence – some things are too hard to share.*

- Focus groups: Consider how these are arranged.  
*Age, gender, ethnicity, family and clan relationships are all things that can affect what people will and won't say in focus groups or other group research situations.*
- Costs: Can you allow for organisers, translators and transport into your budget?  
*Consider allowing for koha when preparing your research budget; these communities are generally very poorly resourced. It takes time to establish relationships with individuals and/or communities. Consider paying a former refugee who is trusted by proposed participants to introduce your project and to give feedback on the process.*
- Methodology: What methodologies are most likely to enhance the wellbeing of participants in the process of collecting as well as in the outcome?  
*Most of New Zealand's refugee communities come from non-western backgrounds. The western individualistic and linear styles of research are not effective means of collecting information. More effective methods are active listening, story-telling, creative exercises such as ChangeMakers drama, 'Strong Families, Strong Children,' and other types of participatory research. These are more holistic in approach and gather more reliable information.*
- Topics: Can you find a way of keeping your focus but within a holistic framework? Can you frame topics to build on our strengths?  
*Topics are interrelated. For example, research on health can tell a lot about housing and employment. How can you take this into account in your research design? Can you produce results that acknowledge our issues and needs in a way that strengthens us, and perceptions of our communities?*

## Help Us Help You

1. Check our research priorities on our website before you plan your research. Can you assist us meet our aims?  
*If we can work together to achieve our joint aims we can ensure best use is made of limited funding, and the process helps build constructive relationships between refugee communities and the rest of New Zealand society.*
2. Register your research in our directory: <http://nzrefugeereseach.wikispaces.com/>  
*This helps to ensure that your area of research is not already being undertaken (so that communities are not overburdened with researchers) and allows us to provide you with the support you need.*
3. Consider methodologies that contribute to our lives in the process of the research as well as the outcome. Sharing appropriate parts of your life and your experience is part of building rapport and trust. Give as well as take in the research interaction.
4. If you need assistance from ChangeMakers give recognition of this in some way and ensure there is adequate time for ChangeMakers to respond to you. Commenting on proposals takes time.