

POPIA FOR RESEARCHERS

The Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2018 (POPIA) applies to research activities that involve identifiable personal information of individuals or organisations. Considering the impact that research has on participants' right to privacy is not just a POPIA obligation, it is also an integral part of research ethics.

De-identify when you can

De-identification is when you store the personal information of research participants in an unidentifiable format. Here are a couple of alternatives to identifying research participants:

Collect anonymous research data

If your project does not require that you know the identity of the research participants, don't collect information that identifies them.

De-identify the information as soon as you can

Sometimes, you may need to know who the research participants are initially, but not for the duration of the project. If you permanently de-identify information, POPIA doesn't apply.

Mask the identity of the research participants (pseudonymisation)

You could also mask the research participants' identity by using pseudonyms. POPIA will still apply, but this is a great way to make the information secure.

Part B, section 1.1.2 of the Code deals with de-identification and pseudonymisation. Check whether your university has policies and processes in place for making data anonymous.

Collect as little as possible

Make sure that the personal information you collect is relevant to your project. Ask yourself:

- Why are you collecting personal information?
- How are you planning to use it?
- Can you achieve your goals without having to collect personal information?

Part B, section 7 of the Code deals with minimal processing.

Be transparent

Ensure that research participants are well informed about the purpose of the research and how you are using their personal information.

Make sure that your fellow researchers are aware of the privacy risks for the research participants and the steps they must take to mitigate those risks. Document the steps in your research data management plans in a verifiable and transparent way and make sure that everybody understands their roles.

Part B, section 9 of the Code deals with POPIA's transparency requirements.

Keep information safe

Always safeguard your research data against unauthorised access, use, loss, or destruction. For example:

- Use a secure environment for storing and sharing files.
- Make sure that you follow your university's policies and procedures for storing and retaining research data.
- Encrypt sensitive research data.
- Make sure you have secure back-ups.
- Restrict access to identifiable personal information to people on a 'need-to-know' basis.

Ask for help

Make sure that you read and understand your responsibilities. Check the following documents:

For questions on these policies or POPIA, contact:

For more information on what POPIA is about, including what is and is not personal information, see [USAf's POPIA cheat sheet](#).

USAf created a POPIA Industry Code of Conduct: Public Universities. The information in this infographic was compiled from the Code which you can find here: https://www.usaf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/USAf-POPIA-Guideline_Final-version_1-September-2020.pdf



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