AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

MOANAROA PACIFIC RESEARCH GUIDELINES

AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



AUT MOANAROA PACIFIC
RESEARCH NETWORK

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ISBN 978-0-473-76138-7 (pbk)
ISBN 978-0-473-76139-4 (hbk)
ISBN 978-0-473-76141-7 (pdf)
ISBN 978-0-473-76140-0 (ebook)
How to cite this book:
Moanaroa Pacific Research Network. (2025). Moanaroa Pacific Research Guidelines. Auckland University of Technology.

These Pacific Research Guidelines have been developed by Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | Auckland University of Technology's (AUT) Moanaroa Pacific Research Network to support researchers, postgraduate students, and staff engaging in Pacific research. They are intended as a living resource that reflects Pacific values, knowledge systems, and ways of being, and should be approached with care and respect.

The guidelines are the intellectual and cultural property of AUT, developed in collaboration with Pacific researchers, communities, and partners. They are to be respected as a taonga/measina that upholds the knowledge, values, and relationships of Pacific Peoples.

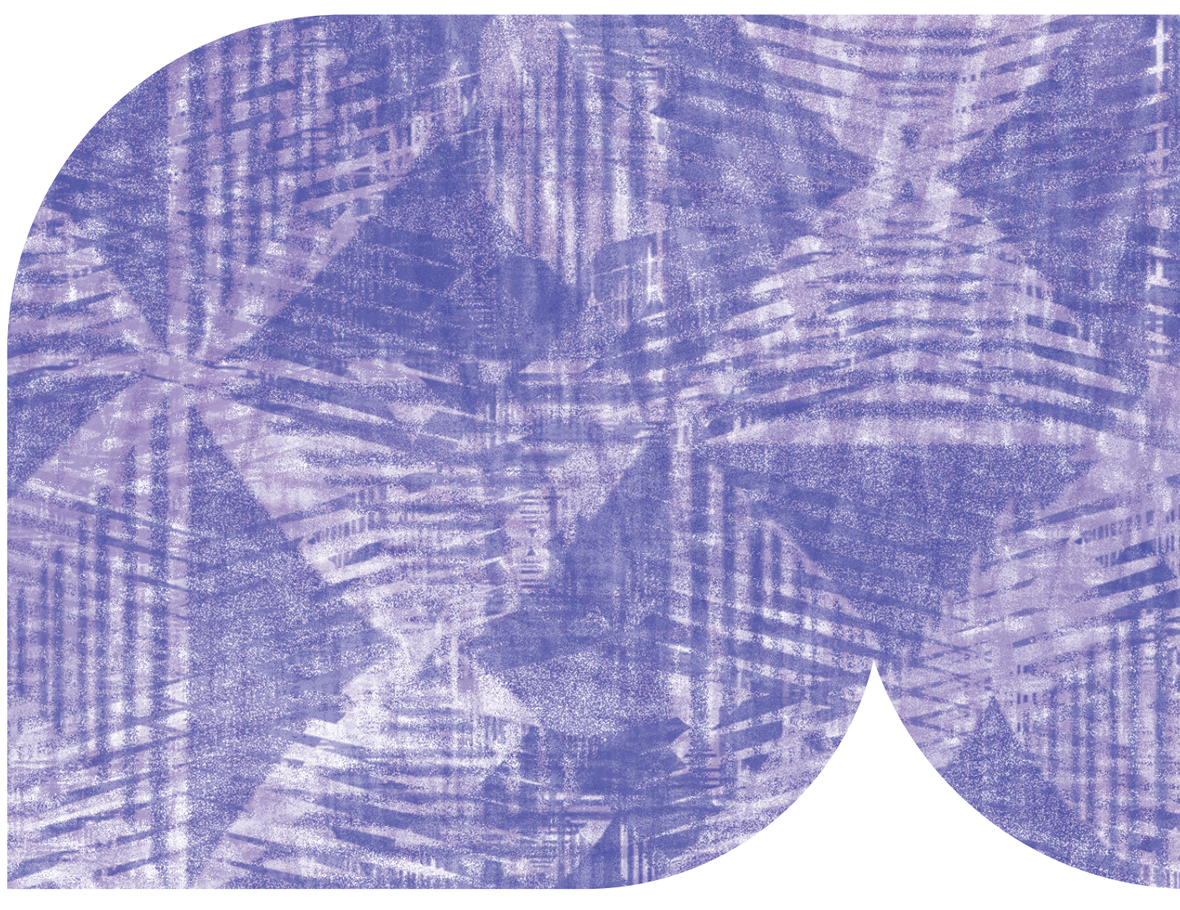
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These guidelines are designed to provide guidance on ethical and culturally grounded approaches to Pacific research. They do not substitute formal ethics approval processes, which must be undertaken through the appropriate AUT channels.

As research is dynamic, AUT reserves the right to make amendments to these guidelines without prior notice if necessary. Any updates or changes will be reflected in the online version available through the AUT website.





Acknowledgements

The AUT Moanaroa Pacific Research Network stands on the foundations laid by those who have come before us, acknowledging the profound influence of Pacific scholars, knowledge holders, and communities. Moanaroa is dedicated to advancing Pacific research by placing Pacific-led approaches, Indigenous knowledge systems, and community-rooted methodologies at the heart of this work. Its focus is on research that directly benefits Pacific communities in Aotearoa, Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, the wider region, and globally.

We extend deep gratitude to the Pacific students, community, researchers, and professionals who contributed to this work. You remind us that research is not just a method or methodology, but a relationship which is alive, responsive, and rooted in alofa (love) and tautua (service) for our people. We acknowledge the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network Governance group and its members (Pacific and non-Pacific alike) for their contributions in highlighting the key principles and guidelines expressed in this document. To the wider academic community that has contributed to the consultation process conducted across Aotearoa and within the Auckland University of Technology, thank you for your contributions and feedback on this document.

We also acknowledge the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Toeolesulusulu Professor Damon Salesa and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research Professor Mark Orams, whose sustained support and commitment has created the enabling environment in which this work could flourish.

These guidelines were made possible with much thanks to the support of the following people:

AUT Moanaroa Governance Group

- Fa'alogo Aganoa Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo (Chair)
- Dr. Radilaite Cammock (Co-Chair)
- Leali'ifano Professor Albert Refiti
- Professor El-Shadan Tautolo
- Professor Tania Ka'ai
- Dr. Hilda Port
- Leulua'iali'i Dr. Laumua Tunufa'i
- Dr. Tafili Utumapu-McBride
- Toleafoa Dr. Yvonne Ualesi
- Maulupeivao Dr. Betty Ofe-Grant
- Dr. I'uogafa Tuagalu
- Nigel Hunt
- Mr. Sione Tekiteki
- Dr. Taniela Lolohea
- Associate Professor Lefaoali'i Dion Enari

Moanaroa Working Group

- Dr. Daysha Tonumaipe'a (Moanaroa Research Manager)
- Claralynn Mariner (Research Officer)
- Waverley Taylor (Research Officer)

Editor

- Hilary van Uden

Creative Direction

- Sisi Ke Mei He Ate Panikoula
- Kyani Vira Utia

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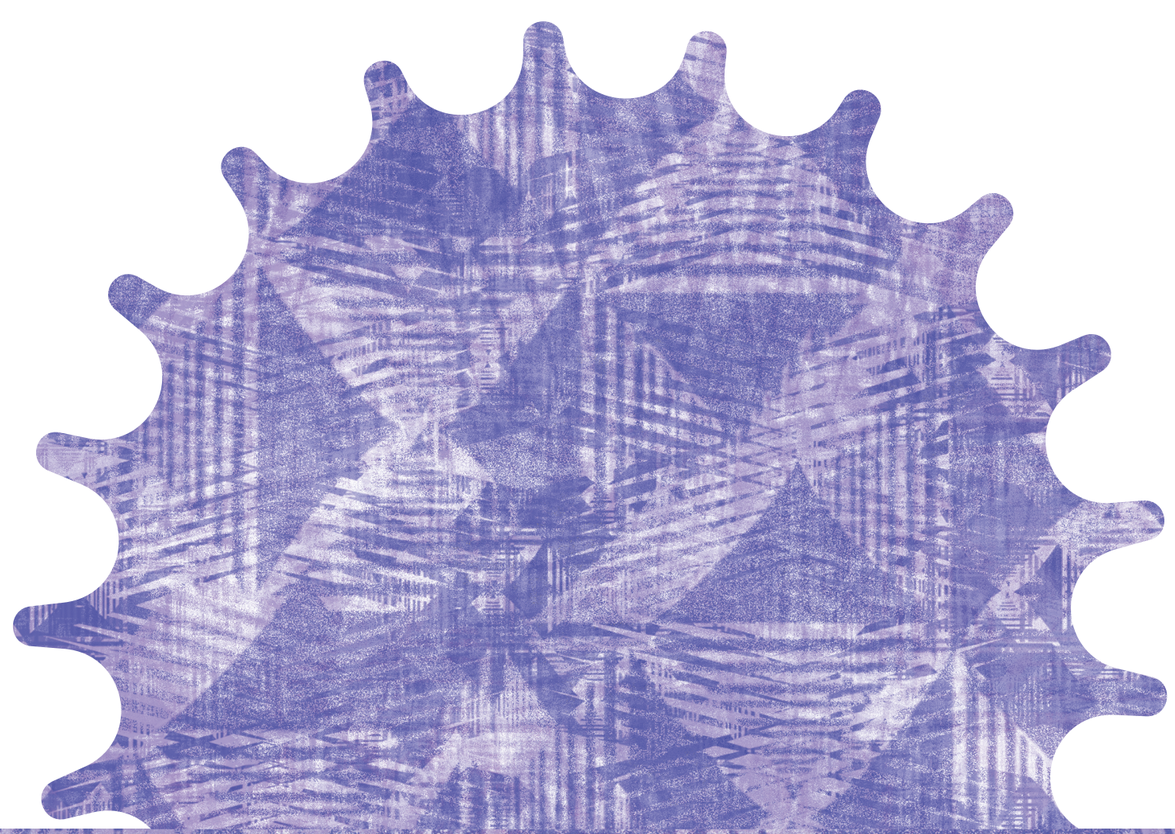
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Foreword

Tēnā koutou katoa, kia orana, talofa lava, bula vinaka, taloha ni, fakalofa lahi atu, malo e lelei, kam na mauri, ia orana, noa'ia, ekamowir omo, fakafeiloaki, halo and warm Pacific greetings.

I open this foreword with an alagā'upu shared by AUT Pacific research pioneer, Tagaloatele Professor Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, in her introduction to AUT's inaugural Profiling Pacific Research publication in 2009: **E fili i le tai se agavaa—let the sea determine the worth of the canoe**.

This alagā'upu reminds us that the measure of our research is revealed when it withstands the shifting tides of change. In Pacific research, this means preparing with care, honouring relationships, upholding values, and creating work that will inspire, sustain, and serve our communities for generations. Like a canoe proven on the open sea, the integrity of our work is tested in real-world conditions, requiring skill, collective strength, shared purpose, and the ability to navigate challenges together.



It is in this spirit that I present the AUT Pacific Research Guidelines, a living resource designed to guide and strengthen Pacific research at Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makarau, Auckland University of Technology (AUT). These guidelines sit within and are shaped by AUT's strategic commitments. They align with Te Kete, AUT's institutional strategy and seek to uphold Te Aronui, AUT's Te Tiriti o Waitangi framework, which calls us to walk in respectful relationship as Tangata Moana alongside Tangata Whenua. They are also grounded in Rautaki Rangahau, the AUT Research Strategy, which invites us to whakamana, encourage, enable, and sustain research excellence that is bold and impactful. As Aotearoa New Zealand's only university of technology, AUT holds a distinctive position. Here, Pacific research sits at the nexus of innovation, applied knowledge, and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, shaping solutions and innovations that are purposeful and of benefit to Pacific communities. These guidelines are intended for all researchers engaging in Pacific research. They provide guidance for the duration of research; from researcher positionality, research design, community engagement, data collection, analysis, and dissemination, to the long-term impact of research. Central to these guidelines is Indigenous data sovereignty, affirming the rights of Pacific Peoples to govern the collection, storage, ownership, and use of their data. While centred at AUT, these guidelines have national reach across Aotearoa, regional relevance across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, and global significance wherever Pacific research is undertaken. Looking ahead, these guidelines will strengthen Pacific research at AUT, ensuring it remains firmly grounded in Pacific values, responsive to change, and ready to meet the challenges of the future.



Fa'alogo Aganoa Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo

Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific

Executive Summary

The Pacific research guidelines are designed to uphold and advance Pacific research excellence at Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and beyond. They provide a culturally grounded framework for engaging in research for, with, and by Pacific Peoples in ways that honour Pacific worldviews, values, and knowledge systems, while meeting the highest standards of ethical practice.

The guidelines are structured to guide researchers from foundational principles to practical application. They begin by clarifying their purpose, scope, and intended audience, and offer practical advice on how to use the document effectively. They also make explicit what the guidelines do not cover, ensuring clarity of intent.

A key feature of the guidelines is the emphasis on positionality, both as a philosophical stance and as an active research practice. Researchers are encouraged to critically reflect on their identity, relationships, and place within the Pacific research space, supported by a positionality guide that offers practical prompts and considerations.

The section on Pacific research design outlines eight interconnected stages, from identifying research questions to ensuring outcomes that are meaningful for Pacific communities. It also introduces examples of Pacific conceptual frameworks and methodologies such as Talanoa, Kakala, Vanua, and Tivaevae[1], emphasising relational ethics, cultural safety, and inclusive design.

A dedicated section on Pacific data sovereignty addresses the stewardship, governance, and ethical use of Pacific data, including in emerging contexts such as artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI (GenAI). It describes what constitutes Pacific data; examines tensions around control and access; and provides guidance on policy, accountability, and the responsible integration of technology with Pacific knowledge systems.

The guidelines also set out principles of governance and accountability in Pacific research, outlining roles, structures, and mechanisms to ensure transparency, relational integrity, and community trust. Practical tools, including checklists, tables of Pacific methodologies and data types, and an ethical and cultural safety guide, are provided to support researchers in applying these principles to their work.

While rooted in AUT's commitment to Pacific-led research, these guidelines are relevant to all researchers working with Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand,[2] the wider Pacific region, and globally. They are intended as a living document responsive to change, one that evolves alongside Pacific research priorities and is grounded in enduring values of reciprocity, respect, and relational acountability.

Through these guidelines, AUT affirms its responsibility to foster research that not only meets academic excellence but strengthens the wellbeing, self-determination, and mana of Pacific Peoples now and for generations to come.

[1] Tivaevae or Tivaivai may be used depending on aka'papa (genealogical) ties to the main island or outer islands in the Cook Islands; for instance, Tivaivai is commonly used by descendants of Atiu (Maua-Hodges, personal communication, 2025).

[2] Throughout this document, the terms "Aotearoa" and "New Zealand" are used interchangeably, or together as "Aotearoa New Zealand."

Introduction

Introduction

These Pacific research guidelines are offered as a navigational tool to guide researchers in moving ethically and respectfully with Pacific communities here in Aotearoa New Zealand and, where appropriate, across the region and internationally. Rooted in Pacific values, relational ethics, and Indigenous knowledge systems, these guidelines have been shaped by Pacific Peoples and for Pacific Peoples, with the supporting voices of our non-Pacific collaborators. They invite researchers to reflect deeply on how research is carried out to ensure this process strengthens the vā, upholds the collective mana, and contributes meaningfully to the wellbeing and aspirations of Pacific communities.

These guidelines aim to ensure that research is culturally appropriate, effective, and ultimately beneficial to Pacific Peoples, moving beyond historical approaches that often reflect the perspectives of outsiders. These guidelines echo and build on the foundations laid by others who have called for research that:

- Maximises benefits and minimises harm to individuals and communities (Health Research Council [HRC], 2014; University of Otago, 2011);
- Generates knowledge and understanding of, and for, Pacific Peoples and their environments (Pacific Research and Policy Centre, 2017);
- Is conducted in culturally appropriate and effective ways (HRC, 2014);
- Contributes to the attainment of the highest level of health and wellbeing (HRC, 2014);
- Supports education that is for, and by Pacific Peoples (Anae et al., 2001);
- Empowers Pacific Peoples as research participants and co-owners of knowledge (Anae et al., 2001); and
- Strengthens Pacific research capacity and capability (University of Otago, 2011).

“My vision is that knowledge does not sit idle”

– Moanaroa Member, Moanaroa Talanoa

AUT’s Pacific Research Guidelines introduce key additions to the foundational Pacific research guidelines (above), including the development of Pacific data sovereignty and the use of AI. Much like other works, these guidelines can be described as a living document, meaning it is not a fixed prescription but rather a starting point and provocation for continuous dialogue and engagement throughout the research cycle. It will be supported by updated online resources, video resources, and ongoing Talanoa. These guidelines are designed for use by Pacific and non-Pacific researchers working in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the wider Pacific region, who aim to serve Pacific Peoples in their endeavours.

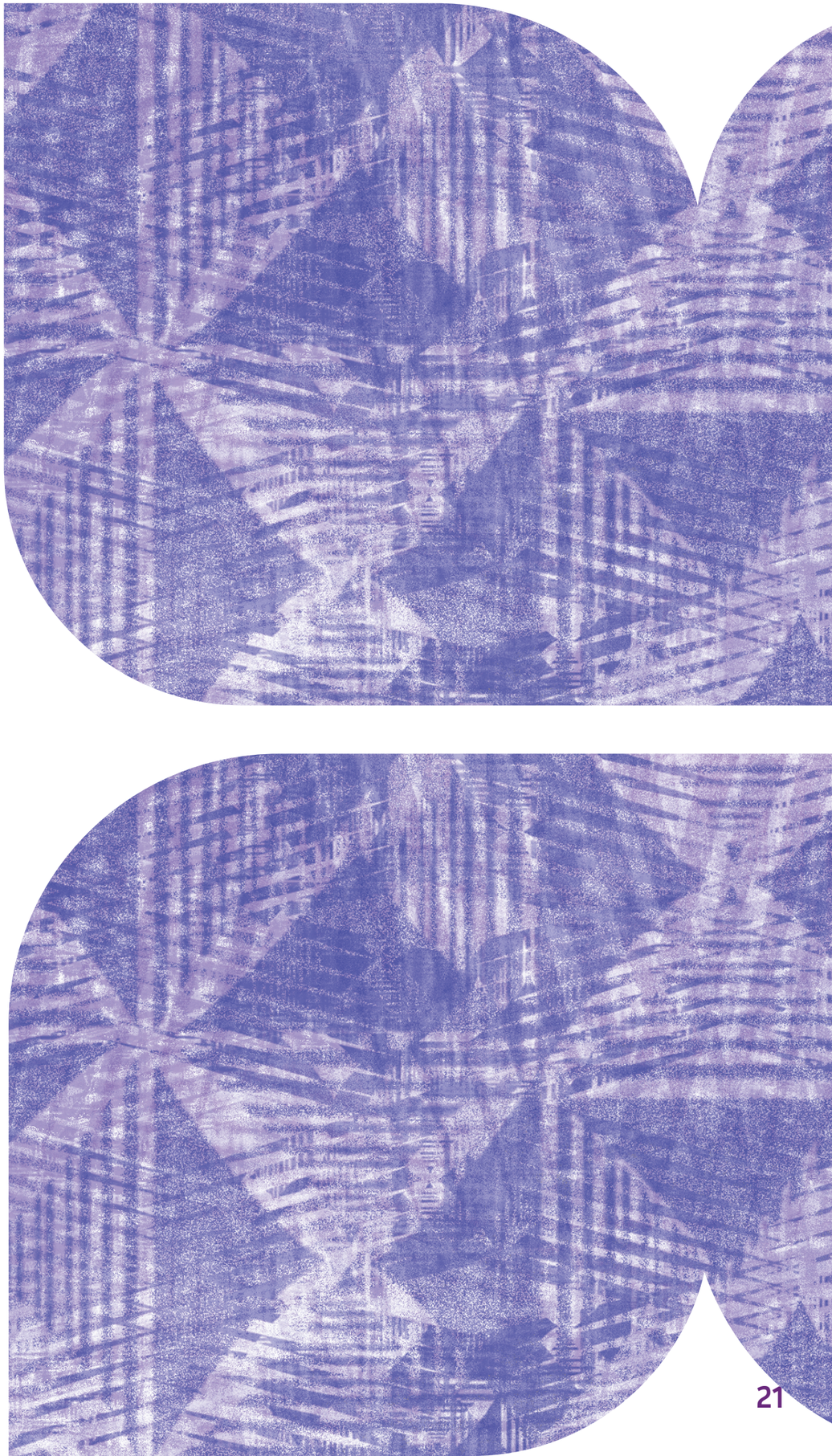
The Pacific research guidelines as they are set out in this document, are presented as a tapasā and provocation for Pacific researchers and non-Pacific researchers alike.[4] These guidelines are an invitation to critically reflect on researcher positionality and research approaches; uphold the integrity of Indigenous Pacific knowledges and methodologies; and engage in ethical, reciprocal, and culturally grounded research that meaningfully benefits Pacific communities. If research involving Pacific communities neither benefits nor reflects those communities, it risks losing its purpose and relevance. Research needs to be shaped in ways that include, honour, and uphold the aspirations of the communities it engages.

These guidelines have been created to support researchers as they navigate the ongoing complexities and tensions within Pacific research. The term “Pacific” does not represent a single identity but a constellation of unique yet interconnected cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. For this reason, a unified framework can be difficult to achieve. Even so, there are a variety of Pacific identities among the Pacific diaspora that need to be considered (e.g. New Zealand-born, Island born, multi-ethnic marriages). The term Pacific Peoples is the recommended term used in Aotearoa New Zealand, though other terms such as Pasifika, Pasefika, Pacificans, and Pacific Islanders, have historically been used interchangeably (Ministry for Pacific Peoples [MPP], 2022).

[4] Tapasā is a Samoan term, with the closest English language translation being the word “compass.” Traditionally, the tapasā extends beyond the finite and physical limitations of a compass and serves as a guide or pathway in malaga or a journey (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 5).

Pacific knowledge systems are dynamic and have evolved over millennia, shaped by intergenerational transmission and collective stewardship (Du Plessis & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009). While Pacific researchers and the wider Indigenous academic community have borrowed Western methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), there remains ongoing pressure to privilege Western models within Pacific research spaces, often at the expense of Indigenous epistemologies and relational ways of knowing. When research fails to reflect Pacific values, languages, and knowledge systems, it risks deepening harm, reinforcing deficit narratives, and overlooking the strengths and aspirations of Pacific Peoples. Ethical, culturally grounded research is not just about inclusion, it is about justice, accountability, survival, resilience, and prosperity.

These guidelines seek to provide a protective and enabling framework to ensure that research with Pacific communities is relationally ethical and leads to outcomes that are relevant, respectful, and of genuine value to the communities involved. They remind us that research is not neutral, nor apolitical, and that without deliberate efforts to uphold Pacific research frameworks, Indigenous knowledges risk being misinterpreted, commodified, and silenced.



Purpose of the Pacific Research Guidelines

AUT and the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network, under the umbrella of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research Professor Mark Orams and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo, who leads the Office of Pacific Advancement, have developed these guidelines as a key contribution to advancing Pacific research excellence at AUT, in alignment with Moanaroa's overarching objectives that include the following:

1. Enabling Pacific-Led Research
2. Building Pacific Research Excellence
3. Cultivating Pacific Research Collaborations and Advocacy

The network's guiding objectives include enabling Pacific-led research, providing capacity-building opportunities for Pacific researchers, and fostering culturally affirming collaborations, advocacy, and partnerships. Through the development of these Pacific research guidelines, Moanaroa seeks to honour and give life to the depth and breadth of Indigenous Pacific research that is grounded in the wisdom of Pacific knowledge bearers and richness of Pacific knowledge systems, these guidelines are intended to advance the decolonisation and re-indigenisation of research practice

The guidelines are written first and foremost for, by, and with Pacific Peoples, including postgraduate students and researchers working within specific disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary contexts. We hope that these guidelines will also have wider application to areas where Pacific Peoples are involved in inquiry, knowledge generation, and solutions for communities and Pacific environments. This includes fellow Indigenous researchers and scholars; non-Pacific researchers engaging in Pacific research; university leadership and institutional decision makers research ethics committees and funding bodies; Pacific research centres and knowledge hubs; policy and government agencies; and academic institutions in the Pacific region.

The consultation phase that informs the Pacific research guidelines presented in this document was informed by the following topics:

- Institutional influence and support for Pacific research
- Challenges and opportunities for doing Pacific research
- Strengthening regional collaboration and research reciprocity
- Ethical and strengths-based engagement
- Indigenous research ethics and data sovereignty
- Research impact and Indigenous knowledge sharing
- The relationship of Tangata Whenua (Māori) and Tangata Moana (Pacific Peoples) in research.

The intent of Moanaroa in publishing these guidelines is to further develop research practices that ensure that research outcomes contribute as much to improving the lives of Pacific Peoples as they do to promoting and maintaining Pacific excellence in knowledge generation and preservation.

“When I think Pacific, I think diversity, I think strength and diversity, and I think hospitality, warmth… that’s the sort of sense that we want in our research…”

– Mr. Sione Tekiteki, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Who Are These Pacific Research Guidelines Intended to Support?

For Those Who Walk With Us in Pacific Research

These guidelines are grounded in the belief that Pacific research is a shared journey, one that thrives through respectful relationships, cultural integrity, and collective responsibility. They are intended to support those who walk alongside Pacific communities, affirming knowledge systems, and aspirations including:

- Researchers working with Pacific Peoples, knowledge, and environments, whether they are Pacific or non-Pacific;
- Institutions and funders developing policies, funding opportunities, and ethical review processes that impact Pacific research;
- Pacific communities engaging with researchers, helping them to understand their rights, expectations, and opportunities for partnership; and
- Students and early-career researchers learning to conduct research that is culturally grounded and ethically responsible.

[5] Indigenous terms such as Tagata Whenua and Tangata Moana are purposefully capitalised to honour their cultural significance and bring mana to their naming—just as one would capitalise identities such as New Zealander or Rarotongan.

How to Use These Guidelines

As a Foundation, not a Prescription

These guidelines provide a framework for thinking, planning, and conducting research in ways that are culturally aligned and relationally accountable. It is important that they are adapted to the specific context, community, environment, and research question.

Alongside Other Ethical Frameworks

They need to be used in conjunction with institutional ethics requirements, field-specific guidelines (e.g., medical, educational, environmental research), and community-specific protocols.

Throughout the Research Lifecycle

They are not only for the start of a project. Use them to guide decisions from the early design stage, through data collection and analysis, to dissemination and post-project relationships.

What These Guidelines Do Not Do

- They do not replace formal ethics approvals required by universities, institutions, health boards, and funders.
- They do not provide step-by-step instructions for every research scenario.
- They do not override local community/village protocols, as it is important that these always take precedence where they apply.

Key Message for Users

It is important that these guidelines are applied as a living framework that informs each stage of the research journey. They are intended to be interpreted, adapted, reflexive and enriched by those who use them. They support researchers to act with cultural integrity and to work in partnership with Pacific communities, ensuring that research is a shared endeavour that contributes to collective wellbeing.



Plan

Begin by aligning research aims with Pacific values, identifying community partners, and understanding local protocols.



Engage

Build relationships early, seek guidance from community leaders and advisory groups and, where possible, co-design the approach.



Conduct

Carry out research using culturally safe methods, ensuring respect, reciprocity, and adherence to agreed protocols.



Share

Return the findings in meaningful ways, prioritising accessible formats and community benefit before focusing on academic outputs.



Sustain

Honour ongoing relationships, explore future collaborations, and ensure communities retain control over their knowledge and data.

Developing the Pacific Research Guidelines:

Honouring Talanoa, Values, and Voices

This body of work was shaped through the gathering and weaving of voices in Aotearoa and across the Pacific region, brought together through talanoa sessions over a 6-month period in 2025. Sixty-five participants contributed to the process, including AUT postgraduate students and staff, members of the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network, and Pacific research communities in Aotearoa and the Pacific. Throughout these Pacific research guidelines, any quotes or references derived from the talanoa sessions undertaken as part of this work will be collectively referred to as Moanaroa Talanoa. This term recognises the relational, iterative, and communal nature of these conversations, reflecting the voices and knowledges shared by participants across the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network, Pacific research communities in Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider Pacific, including researchers, lecturers, postgraduate students, and practitioners.

These Moanaroa Talanoa provided a culturally grounded space for people to speak, listen, reflect, and connect. It was not simply a method of engagement, but a way of being together, affirming relationships, values, and responsibilities. Participants shared their lived experiences as researchers, educators, students, and community members, offering insights into the realities of doing research that serves Pacific Peoples and upholds Pacific ways of knowing and being. Participants who wanted to share more insights beyond the talanoa sessions, or who were unable to attend had the option to provide written submissions and give consent for their quotes to be shared as either named or unnamed contributors.

Rather than seeking consensus or one voice, the process embraced multiplicity. The voices gathered through our Moanaroa Talanoa are woven throughout this document, informing what is written and how it is held. What emerges is not a singular set of rules, but a living expression of collective wisdom, grounded in the realities of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa and, to some extent, the Pacific region.

“Authenticity of voice is really important.... ethical engagement as well. If you are going to embark on a research project, then you've got to be able to have that inherent knowledge and understanding of who our people are.”

— Toleafoa Dr Yvonne Ualesi, Moanaroa Talanoa

Positionality

Pacific Research in Aotearoa New Zealand

Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand

Positionality Within the Pacific Research Guidelines

Pacific Migration to Aotearoa New Zealand

Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand are communities with ancestral ties to the Pacific Islands or Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, an oceanic region often referred to in colonial terms as Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. Pacific connections to Aotearoa are longstanding, grounded in deep ancestral, navigational, and cultural ties across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

More recent waves of migration, particularly from the 1950s to 1970s, were shaped by New Zealand's postwar industrial expansion. Pacific Peoples, primarily from Polynesian nations, were actively recruited by the New Zealand government to help meet labour shortages. This migration laid the foundation for strong cultural, economic, and political relationships between Pacific communities and Aotearoa.

However, as the economy slowed in the 1970s, Pacific Peoples faced increasing unemployment and racialised scrutiny. Government-supported rhetoric and biased policies portrayed Pacifc migrants as job-threatening "overstayers," despite the fact that the majority of people overstaying then were from Europe and North America (Spoonley, 2013). This hostility culminated in the infamous Dawn Raids, where Pacific families were subjected to early-morning raids by immigration officials and police, often using intimidation and racial profiling to enforce deportations. The lasting trauma and injustices of this era have only recently been formally acknowledged, with the Crown issuing an official apology in 2021 (Beehive, 2021). This history remains a critical context for understanding the experiences of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa today.

Though much of Pacific scholarship in Aotearoa relating to Pacific Peoples is based around dominant ethnic groups in terms of population size and colonial history, the Moanaroa Pacific Research Network is a home to Pacific research and researchers from a vast array of Indigenous communities within the Pacific. This document seeks to contribute to the discourse within Pacific scholarship as it relates to Aotearoa, and its place within the region and internationally.

E le uma le galuega, e fai pea.

The work is not finished; it continues.

– Samoan Proverb

The New Zealand government defines Pacific populations as encompassing over 18 diverse ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (MPP, 2020). These include, in order of population size: Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan, i-Kiribati, Tahitian, Papua New Guinean, Ni Vanuatu, Rotuman, Indigenous Australian, Solomon Islander, Hawaiian, Pitcairn Islander, Nauruan and "other" (MPP, 2020).

Each possess their own distinct languages, cultures, and unique migration and settlement histories. A significant proportion, 43%, of Pacific Peoples identified with two or more ethnicities in the 2023 census data. This figure rose to 62% for Pacific Peoples under 15 years, highlighting mixed-ethnic generations within this group. 21% of Pacific Peoples also identified as Māori, while 11% of Māori also identified as Pacific Peoples. Māori-Pacific Peoples are a small but fast-growing group in Aotearoa with nearly 5% of all children under 15 identifying as Māori-Pacific (MPP, 2025).

Hau'ofa (1994, 2000) conceptualised the Pacific not as a collection of small, isolated islands, but as Oceania, a vast, connected expanse where the ocean is a central and unifying force rather than a boundary. Hau'ofa (1994) challenged dominant narratives that framed Pacific nations as dependent and marginal, arguing instead for a view that honours the expansive, relational, and interconnected identities of Pacific Peoples. From this perspective, the ocean is not a void between lands but a space of movement, history, and belonging that affirms the mana and agency of Pacific Peoples. In these guidelines, the term Pacific Peoples is used inclusively to refer to Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, the wider Pacific region, and diasporic communities globally. The term Pacific is used to denote the collective of Pacific nations or Oceania, acknowledging the shared heritage and relationships that transcend geopolitical boundaries.

Recently, in An Indigenous Ocean, Salesa (2023) wrote of and compiled a collection of essays that explore the cultural, historical, and political dimensions of the Pacific region, or Te-Moana-nui-a-kiwa, from an Indigenous Pacific perspective. Providing an all-encompassing history of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa and the region goes beyond the scope of these guidelines. To support emerging researchers in navigating the rich and complex landscape of Pacific scholarship, the following introductory reading list offers a selection of foundational texts that illuminate key themes, thinkers, and perspectives within the field of Pacific scholarship.

An Entry Point for Pacific Research and Reflection

A starting place for those seeking to understand and honour the depth of Pacific knowledge systems

"Towards a New Oceania"

A foundational essay reimagining the Pacific as a connected sea of islands, shaping Pacific identity and literature.

Wendt (1976, 2004)

"Our Sea of Islands"

Challenges colonial views by affirming Indigenous connectivity, mobility, and sovereignty in the Pacific.

Hau'ofa (2008)

Tangata o le Moana: New Zealand and the People of the Pacific

An illustrative history of Pacific Peoples' migrations, contributions, and lived experiences in Aotearoa.

Mallon, Māhina-Tuai & Salesa (2012)

"Teu le Vā: Toward a "Native" Anthropology"

Discusses Pacific relational ethics and vā in the context of education and social structures.

Anae (2010)

Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures

Examines Aotearoa New Zealand's Pacific identity, migration, and the future of Pacific communities in Aotearoa.

Salesa (2017)

Pacific Art Niu Sila: The Pacific Dimension of Contemporary New Zealand Arts

Explores Pacific art in Aotearoa New Zealand as a medium for identity, resistance, and cultural continuity.

Mallon and Pereira (2002)

Leprosy in Samoa 1890 to 1922: Race, Colonial Politics and Disempowerment

Contributions to Pacific health histories and intersections of gender, migration, and colonialism.

Akeli (2007)

Oceans Between Us—Pacific Peoples and Racism in Aotearoa.

A paradigm-shifting volume examining systemic racism in Aotearoa New Zealand through Pacific scholarly perspectives.

Naepi (2025)

Voices of the Pacific: Climate Crisis, Adaptation and Resilience.

A comprehensive volume featuring Pacific scholars addressing climate justice, Indigenous knowledge, and resilience across the region, including Aotearoa.

Ratuva et al. (2024)

The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific

Indigenous Pacific personhood through the lens of relationality, spirituality, and decolonisation.

Vaai and Nabobo-Baba (2017)



Indigeneity in Pacific Research (Aotearoa New Zealand Context)

In the context of Pacific research, indigeneity goes beyond ethnic or geographic identifiers, and is a lived and relational condition rooted in genealogical connections (gafa, tupu'anga, 'akapapa) to sacred lands (fonua, vanua, enua), waters, and skies. It is expressed through responsibilities of care, stewardship, and reciprocity towards people and environment, interwoven with spirituality and cultural continuity (Nabobo-Baba, 2008).

For many Pacific Peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand, indigeneity is relational and layered; it is informed by ancestral homeland connections and the lived realities of being part of a broader Indigenous and diasporic community alongside Māori as tangata whenua (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). In Pacific research, indigeneity requires methodologies grounded in Pacific epistemologies, collective wellbeing, relational accountability, and service to the community rather than extraction (Thaman, 2003).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Pacific Indigenous knowledge systems are embodied in language, oral traditions, customary practices, performance, spiritual beliefs, and environmental stewardship (Hau'ofa, 1994; Vaai & Casimira, 2017). These systems are not static in the homelands they originate from, nor are they static in the diasporic communities; they adapt to diasporic realities while retaining cultural integrity. In Aotearoa, Pacific diasporic communities enact their knowledge systems in churches, village and island associations, cultural festivals, networks, talanoa, and intergenerational teaching and learning spaces.

In this sense, diasporic contributions to Pacific research sit within and alongside Indigenous knowledge, extending and re-articulating its relational geographies across time and place. For Pacific research in the diaspora, acknowledging these knowledge systems means recognising their dynamic nature and ensuring research processes honour both the continuities and innovations that diasporic life brings (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014).

Positionality as a Praxis

Positionality, in the context of Pacific research, refers to the way in which a researcher's identity, background, disciplinary epistemological reference, and relationships influence their approach to and interpretation of research. It acknowledges that researchers, whether insiders or outsiders to the communities they engage with, bring their own experiences, perspectives, and biases to the research process. These personal factors shape how research questions are formulated, data is collected, participants are engaged, and how findings are analysed, presented, and preserved.

In Pacific research, positionality is particularly important due to the unique cultural contexts and histories of Pacific Peoples in their home countries and abroad. Researchers' understanding of Pacific cultural values, experiences of migration, and relationships to their communities play a critical role in ensuring that the research process is culturally relevant, respectful, and aligned with aspirations of the communities being studied. This requires an acknowledgement of the dynamic and diverse identities of Pacific Peoples, who may have different cultural practices, languages, and beliefs shaped by their migration and diasporic experiences, and connections to their homelands.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, it is important that the research process is also situated within a Te Tiriti o Waitangi | Treaty of Waitangi context, recognising the distinct cultural and legal rights of Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people of Aotearoa) and the responsibilities outlined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In this context, positionality within Pacific research is not only about understanding and respecting the Pacific community but also engaging in meaningful relationships with Māori communities and considering how both these cultural worldviews intersect and interact in the research space. Māori and Pacific Peoples can often be part of the same research projects based on equity; however, there exists a genealogical link that goes beyond equity framing intended to address "need" or "priority."

[6] The literal meaning of Moana-nui-a-Kiwa is "the great Ocean of Kiwa". Kiwa is regarded as an ancestral guardian of the ocean. The term reflects Indigenous understandings of the Pacific as a living, interconnected space that connects lands, peoples, genealogies, emphasising connection rather than separation.

"First and foremost, positionality needs to sit at the very beginning of any research done, particularly by non-Indigenous or settler researchers."

– Moanaroa member, Moanaroa Talanoa

Māori first arrived in Aotearoa as Tangata Moana or people of our seas, later referred to as Polynesians by the coloniser (Anderson et al., 2015). Rather than a singular moment of arrival, the first millennium CE marked the gradual emergence and "becoming" of Polynesian identities (Anderson et al., 2015, p. 19). According to Anderson et al. (2015), those who initially settled in Aotearoa were primarily descendants of East Polynesia, which itself had earlier been populated by people of West Polynesia (p. 20).

The genealogical ties between Māori and other Pacific Peoples are profound and enduring. Genetic research supports a shared ancestry among the Austronesian diaspora, from which all Pacific Peoples originate (Chambers & Edinur, 2015). This deep-rooted connection is further acknowledged by the HRC of New Zealand, which describes the relationships between Māori and Pacific Peoples as an ancient whanaungatanga, a familial bond, characterised by a tuakana-teina dynamic within Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa[6], the Pacific Ocean (as cited in Naepi, 2015).

Prominent Pacific scholars such as Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau'ofa have affirmed that Māori are Pacific Peoples, emphasising the Pacific as a vast, interconnected ocean of islands rather than isolated lands in a distant sea (as cited in Somerville, 2012). Both Somerville (2012) and Anderson et al. (2015) offered compelling literature that highlights the deep interconnection between Māori and other Pacific communities. Pacific research in Aotearoa New Zealand is informed by an understanding and respect for Tangata Whenua as the Indigenous Peoples of the lands that we live in, with an emphasis on collaboration, respect, and reciprocal relationships.

It is important that positionality is understood as a foundational starting point in Pacific research, not a one-time declaration. It needs to be carried through the entire research process, guiding the researcher's engagement, methods, and interpretation. While institutional approval of a researcher's stated positionality may offer legitimacy, it does not grant unrestricted authority or autonomy. In the Pacific context, declaring positionality is a commitment to accountability, relational ethics, and cultural responsiveness. Researchers are encouraged to remain critically reflective and responsive to the communities they work with, recognising that positionality is living and needs to evolve alongside the research journey. As previously mentioned, Pacific Peoples live a way of life that encompasses nurturing shared spaces, or vā, with consistent acts of cultural respect.

6 The literal meaning of Moana-nui-a-Kiwa is "the great Ocean of Kiwa". Kiwa is regarded as an ancestral guardian of the ocean. The term reflects Indigenous understandings of the Pacific as a living, interconnected space that connects lands, peoples, genealogies, emphasising connection rather than separation.

“Why you, why now, and why this topic?”

– Fa’alogo Aganoa Assoc Prof Jacoba Matapo, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Positionality Guide for Researchers

Stage

Focus area

Guiding Questions

Context

Personal and cultural background

What are my ancestral, cultural, and academic ties?

Who are my people and places of belonging?

What relationships connect me to the community I am researching?

Motivations and influences

Purpose and drivers of research

What motivates me to pursue this research?

Why me, why now, and why this topic?

Who has influenced or guided my journey?

What privileges, biases, or knowledge gaps do I carry?

Responsibilities and ethics

Commitments and ethical stance

What responsibilities do I hold towards the community or cultural protocols?

Am I an insider, outsider, or somewhere in-between?

How will I ensure ethical and respectful engagement with Pacific knowledge?

Challenges

Complexities and limitations

What tensions or challenges do I face?

How do I navigate Western academic expectations alongside Pacific epistemologies?

What limitations or uncertainties do I need to acknowledge?

Impact and contribution

Intended outcomes and accountability

What do I hope my research will contribute to the community?

Will the outcomes be beneficial and sustainable?

How will I take responsibility for the impact of my research?

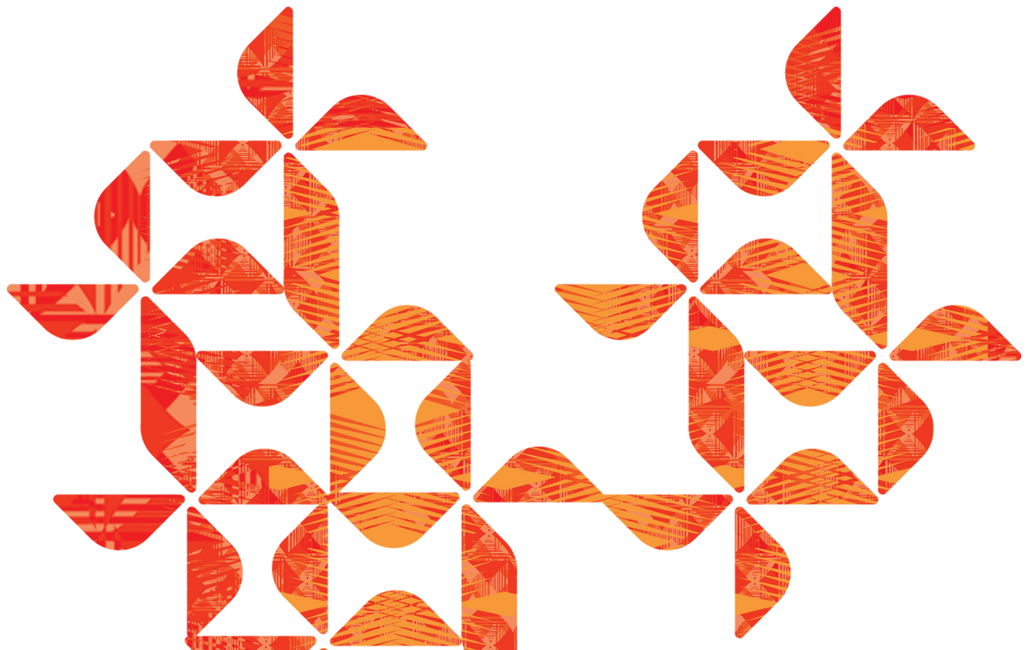
Pacific Research Design

Pacific Research Design

Introduction and Purpose of Pacific Research Design

The primary role of Pacific research is to generate knowledge and understanding about and for Pacific Peoples and their environments with their active involvement as researchers, community leaders, advisors, participants, and stakeholders. The Pacific research design approach moves away from outsider perspectives and towards Indigenous interpretations, aiming to be empowering for both researchers and the researched.

Research design is the overall strategy or blueprint for how a research study is conducted. It outlines what the researcher is trying to find out, how the researcher will approach the inquiry, and why the chosen methodologies and methods are best suited to the questions and aims of the study. In simple terms, research design is the plan for finding answers, from the beginning to the end, while honouring relationships, contexts, and responsibilities embedded in the research process.



“Pacific Research contributes to the spiritual, mental, physical and social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.”

— Moanaroa member, Moanaroa Talanoa

“Our Pasefika voices from our Pasefika communities and researchers are taonga, they have mana, and this is to be protected at all costs”

– Hoy Neng Wong Soon, AUT PhD Candidate, Moanaroa Talanoa.

For Pacific researchers, this process is never neutral or detached. Research is relational, reciprocal, and woven through ongoing ties to community, place, and ancestral knowledge. Research design, can be likened to the construction of a fale (house):

- The blueprint is the research design.
- The foundation is the methodology.
- The tools and materials are the methods.
- The peoples and relationships involved are the participants, advisors, and communities.

Pacific research is not monolithic. It is decolonial in nature (Anae et al., 2001, values-based (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014), and methodologically diverse (Naepi, 2020); it recognises that Pacific knowledge systems stand on their own without the need to reference to the West (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017); and it is anchored by community voice and wellbeing (Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019).

Key Components of the Research Design



Positionality

Locating yourself within the research; stating who are you in relation to the people, knowledges, and place(s) involved, and the obligations that follow.

Describing the knowledge traditions, communities, and lived experiences that shape how your research is interpreted and what counts as evidence.



Purpose/aims

Describing what the research is trying to explore, understand, or change



Research questions

The guiding questions your study is trying to answer.



Methodology

The philosophical and cultural framework/s guiding how you approach knowledge, relationships and ethics.

Methods

The specific techniques for data collection and analysis.



Participants

Who you are working with, and how they are involved.



Ethical framework

How you ensure relational accountability, consent, cultural safety, and reciprocity.



Data analysis

How you make sense of the information collected and interpret the findings.



Dissemination

How findings are shared with communities, policymakers, or academic audiences.

“When designing a quantitative study, Pacific values can inform the data you collect by helping to ensure you collect information that is important to Pacific communities themselves and reflects their priorities.”

– Dr Leon Iusitini, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Core Principles Guiding Pacific Research Design

It is important that all aspects of Pacific research design are underpinned by fundamental Pacific values and principles.



Respect

For relationships: Displaying humility, building trust, actively listening, and valuing participants as individuals.

For knowledge holders: Prioritising and honouring Pacific knowledge, aspirations, and wellbeing in design and processes.

For cultural protocols: Learning and adhering to cultural practices, dress codes and communication styles.

For intellectual and cultural property: Addressing ownership of knowledge and data, with primary knowledge belonging to participants.



Reciprocity

Ensuring mutual benefit for researchers and participants or communities through exchange of information, gifts, time, service, and accessible dissemination of findings.



Holism

Understanding and acknowledging the interconnectedness of physical, social, environmental, cultural, and spiritual aspects in research involving Pacific communities. Researchers are encouraged to present themselves as whole persons, engaging in community life where appropriate.



Service or research for good

Ensuring the wellbeing of Pacific Peoples and their environment is central to why and how research is conducted. Research needs to be rigorous, scholarly, and beneficial, contributing to policy and practice outcomes.



Teu le vā/ relationality

Nurturing relationships throughout the entire research process, even beyond the typical timeframes of a research process, involves displaying humility, listening, moving in a trustworthy manner, and taking time to establish genuine connections with interviewees, advisors, and communities.



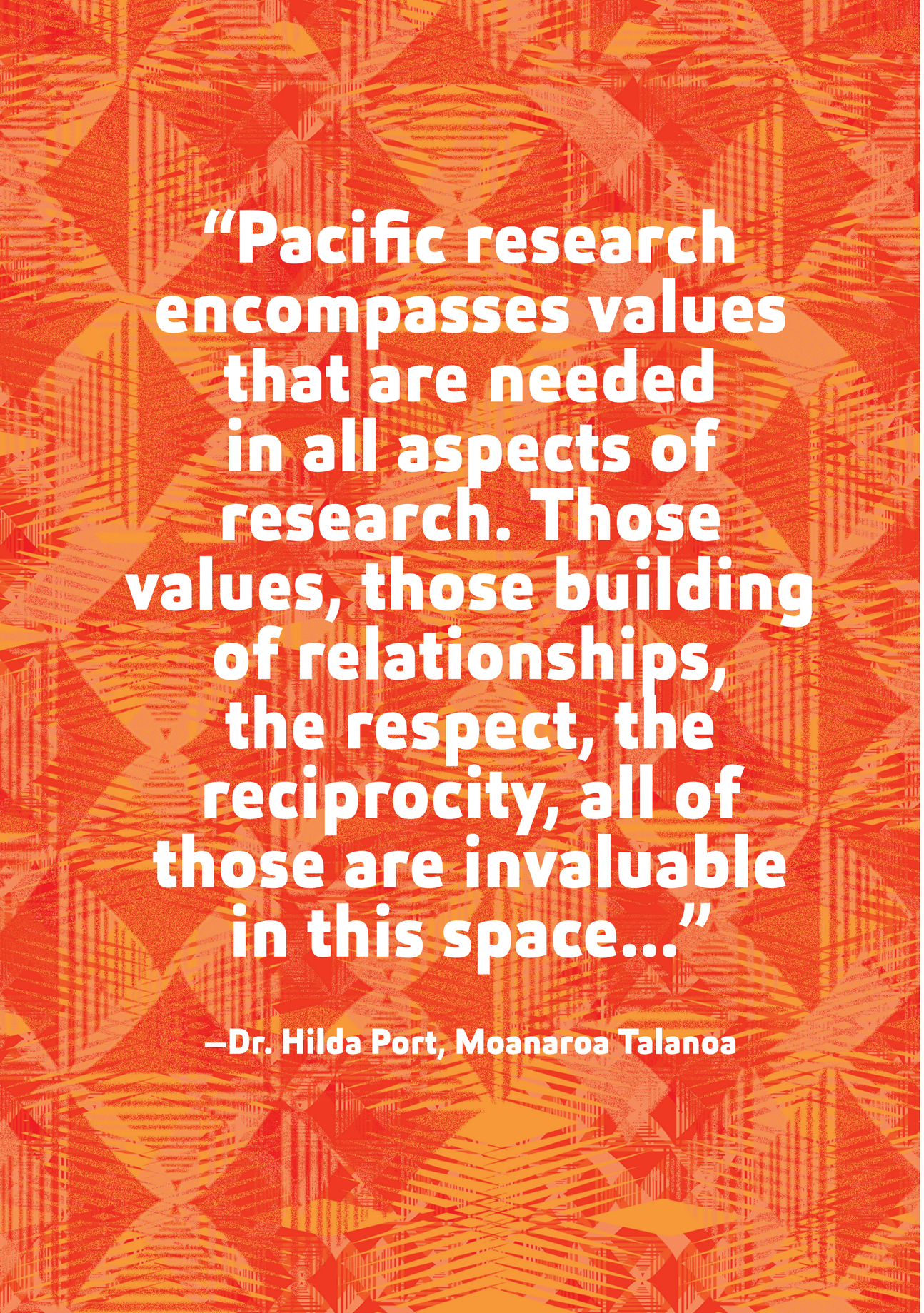
Addressing diversity

"Pacific" is not homogenous but encompasses a diverse range of cultures, languages, and histories. Research needs to advocate for ethnic-specific approaches where appropriate, while also considering intra-ethnic variations like age, gender, New Zealand-born, Island born and mixed-ethnic backgrounds.



Integrity, transparency and accountability

Maintaining an honest exchange of information, clear purpose, disclosure of potential risks, and accurate reporting. Community checks and feedback are essential.



Conceptual Frameworks and Methodologies

Researchers are encouraged to actively embed Pacific knowledge systems and conceptual frameworks in their Pacific research design to ensure perspectives of Pacific Peoples are represented in culturally appropriate ways. Importantly, Pacific methodologies are not just instruments of data collection, they are living philosophies, relational ways of knowing and expressions of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. They reflect the deep interconnectedness of people, land, ocean, spirituality, and history. During a Moanaroa Talanoa, Fa’alogo Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo described Pacific methodologies as a way of,

...bringing our ancestral wisdoms to the fore; it brings opportunities to innovate spaces where Eurocentric thinking can't go. The exciting part of Pacific Indigenous thinking is that you're able to enter into different problems or different contexts, but with a completely different lens or paradigm and ...you're able to generate new ways of understanding.

Pacific researchers in Aotearoa have had to navigate both Western and Pacific research methodologies. Pacific research is not so much about distinguishing "quantitative" from "qualitative," or "deductive" from "inductive" methods (Henry & Pene, 2001), but of recognising that Pacific research is first grounded in what is deemed real, true, and of value to Pacific Peoples. The selection of methodology and its integration needs to be fit for purpose, so it can provide the most robust research framework.

Pacific values can inform the entire research process. If you're conducting research with humans, then collecting quantitative data with research participants should be respectful, and participants' time and contribution acknowledged appropriately – Dr. Leon Iusitini, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Working with Pasifika communities is a challenge due to negative experiences that communities have had with researchers in the past. Without saying it, they see research as a waste of time given the belief that they have been part of disempowering research historically as Pacific communities – Moanaroa member, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Hau'ofa (1994) reminds us that no people are more suited to be the guardians of the world's largest oceans than those from whom it has been home to for generations (p. 158). Western academic traditions have historically framed the Pacific as isolated, primitive, and dependent, ignoring the rich histories of navigation, trade, and relational knowledge systems. One of the most cited examples of misrepresentation and stereotyping in research is Mead's 1928 anthropological work titled *Coming of Age in Samoa*, which portrayed Samoan women as sexually free and deviant and had very real and ongoing repercussions for Pacific communities, particularly in dehumanising and objectifying the lived experience of Pacific women (Naepi, 2020). Though research carried out by non-Pacific scholars can have intentions to "help" Pacific Peoples, sidelining Pacific voices and knowledge systems can lead to policies and academic narratives that misunderstand or misrepresent Pacific realities (Naepi, 2020).

A lot of the archives and the work that have been done up until maybe the year 2000 have been mainly by outsiders. We have as our responsibility to create new archives for the future – Lealiʻifano Professor Albert Refiti, Moanaroa Talanoa.

We draw from the writings of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) in her seminal work on decolonising methodologies:

What happens to research ... when the researched become the researchers? (Smith, 2012, p. 185)

"What happens to research ... when the researched become the researchers?"

(Smith, 2012, p. 185)

Drawn from wider Indigenous thought that guides the methodology as a resistance to the colonial heritage and hegemony of New Zealand's colonial past, Henry and Pene (2001) offer a foundational sense-making of philosophical paradigms that guide Indigenous research design and methodology. When applied to Pacific research design, it's important to grapple with ontology or assumptions about assumptions about human nature and being. What, then, is real for Pacific Peoples? Pacific ethics and philosophy drive Pacific epistemology; what is true according to Pacific practices and protocols? When considering axiology, the question then becomes, what is of value in Pacific knowledge and inquiry? These notions of ontology (what is real), epistemology (what counts as knowledge), and axiology (what is of value) not only inform the Pacific methodology but also shape perceptions of what is "science" and how we do it (Henry & Pene, 2001).

"Why hound me with a question when you don't care for an answer, why play for a pair when there is only one dancer?" (Vaioleti, 1999, as cited in Vaioleti, 2006, p. 21)

While this Pacific research inquiry is open to multiple perspectives, dominant frameworks shaping understandings of ontology, epistemology, and axiology in research have largely been influenced by Western and Eurocentric thought. It is risky to assume that these foundations originate from a single worldview. The common experience of Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific, is that outsiders have ignored or made light of the idea that Pacific Islands cultures have philosophies, "in part because our knowledge was oral rather than written until very lately—yet philosophy predates literacy" (Gegeo, 2001, p. 504). This assumption can lead to the use of standardised tools for data collection and analysis that, while methodologically consistent, may fall short in reflecting the lived realities, values, and ways of being specific to Pacific Peoples (Vaioleti, 2006).

Claiming universal applicability across disciplines, cultures, and historical periods, through a process of colonial imposition, can be considered as "epistemic violence" (Henry & Pene, 2001). Epistemic violence refers to the harm done through systems of knowledge that marginalise, silence, or misrepresent certain groups, especially those historically colonised or oppressed (Brunner, 2021).

This highlights how academic, political, and cultural institutions can perpetuate colonial power structures by controlling whose knowledge is considered legitimate (Henry & Pene, 2001). For emerging Pacific researchers, this highlights the importance of critically engaging with and privileging Pacific knowledge systems and methodologies that are culturally grounded, relational, and reflective of Pacific ways of knowing and being.

"It's just giving our people a voice and using our position of privilege as academics, researchers, for the people who don't have a voice ... so it's up to us to give our people that voice."

— Brianna Heremaia, AUT PhD Candidate, Moanaroa Talanoa

Though not an exhaustive list, Appendix 1 provides a selection of Pacific frameworks and methodologies developed by Pacific research communities in their repective fields. Pacific research is "on the move" (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017), and critical engagement and discourse exists within the Pacific academy that strengthens the use of each of these methodologies (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014) and researchers are encouraged to explore beyond these Pacific research guidelines. Appendix 1 is merely a presentation of different methodologies, and not a command of their use. How a researcher engages with these methodologies will depend on positionality, the context or field, and the research aims and objectives.

“Pacific methodologies are more than the method. They are more than just the practice of data collection. Pacific methodologies have a particular genealogy or whakapapa to an epistemology, to a knowledge system.”

– Assoc Prof Fa’alogo Jacoba Matapo, Moanaroa Talanoa

Over time, an evolving ecosystem of Pacific research methodologies has emerged, each grounded in specific cultural contexts yet often resonating across diverse island communities. Some of the pioneering methodologies include, but are not limited to, the Talanoa methodology (Halapua, 2000; Vaioleti, 2006); the Cook Islands Māori Tivaevae by Teremoana Maua-Hodges (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019); the Fijian Vanua Framework (Nabobo-Baba, 2008); the Tongan Kakala framework (Thaman, 2003), and the Fonua (Taufe’ulungaki, 2004); the Samoan Fa’afaletui (Tamasese et al., 2005), Ula (Sauni, 2011), and Fonofale (Pulotu-Endemann, 2009); and the Marshallese Kanne Lobal (Jim et al., 2021).

Comprehensive reviews of Pacific research development can be found in the works of Sanga and Reynolds (2017), and Naepi (2015), who highlighted the growing record of sophistication and intergenerational contributions of Pacific scholars, keeping in mind that many of these approaches have been preserved through many generations in oral knowledge traditions and transfer (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). There are also more recent emergent frameworks such as the Soalaupulega Samoa model (Taleni, 2023), Vukumuni vuku ni vanua of Fiji (Ramala & Ruwhiu, 2024), Talanoa as a methodology under the Fijian iTaukei cultural paradigm (Cammock et al., 2021), Boutokaan te mweeraoi of Kiribati (Kiribati Working Group, 2015), Hiapo of Niue (Pasisi, 2020), Mana Moana (Mila, 2017), the Masi methodology (Naepi, 2019), the Tokelauan framework Kāiga Māopoopo (Fuli, 2012), the Hihi framework (Matenga-Ikihele, 2023), and many more (see Appendix 1).

These methodologies are metaphor-rich, dialogic in nature, and prioritise ethical relationships, collective knowledge building, and the honouring of Pacific epistemologies. These methodologies do not merely serve as frameworks for data collection or analysis; they are lived philosophies and Indigenous knowledge systems that reflect the interconnectedness of people, place, spirituality, and history in the Pacific, and may extend a Pacific researcher’s involvement beyond the confines of traditional research timeframes.

Key Stages of Pacific Research Design

Effective Pacific research design and practice involve careful consideration and culturally sensitive approaches at every stage.

Stage 1

Methodologies, Research Topics and Questions

It is important that research is community-driven and responsive to the priorities voiced by Pacific Peoples and communities while still being strategic in its approach to prioritising resources and areas for investigation. Being strategic in approach is not synonymous with extractive research design; it is ensuring that methodologies are appropriate for the topic, research aims and Pacific priorities and contexts. It is critical that the research topics have the appropriate resources and collective support to accomplish key research areas and topics that are relevant to the aspirations of Pacific communities. Key practices to ensure alignment may include:

- Negotiating and refining the research topic to meet local Pacific community needs, priorities, and aspirations based on consultation, relevant literature, intra-team discussions, and input from advisory groups and funders.
- The relevance of the final research questions to the concerns and aspirations of Pacific representatives remains an area of focus throughout all stages of the research process.

Stage 2

Consultation and Engagement

Include consultation and fully immersed engagement throughout the research, from conception and initial formation of projects to outputs and dissemination of findings/learnings. Cut the tokenism that we often read about in a thesis when an Advisory group only contributed to the ethics approval phase —Moanaroa member, Moanaroa written submission.

Consultation is a vital, continuous and two-way communication process that begins early and extends throughout the project life cycle, including dissemination. It is important to recognise that Pacific knowledge seeking, knowledge creation, and validation of knowledge in terms of rigour, credibility, and measure are not limited to the academy (Matapo 2021; Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019). This requires researchers to:

- Identify and consult with appropriate stakeholders, including, for example, community leaders, health providers, women, youth, church leaders, professionals, and academic colleagues.
- Face-to-face consultation is key for establishing meaningful relationships, as is allowing sufficient time for multiple meetings and negotiations. It should be kept in mind that consultation is not meant to be a burden on those who are consulted. Allow the time commitment and mode of engagement (online or in person) for consultation to accommodate the vā (relational space) of the individual or group being consulted with (Matapo & Enari, 2020; Matapo & McFall-McCaffery, 2022).
- Consider establishing a Pacific advisory committee or reference group to enhance ongoing guidance and community checks.
- Ensure that language is not a barrier. Researchers fluent in the researched group's language(s) can enhance the richness of Pacific research. Where feasible, ensure translation services are budgeted for and provided, considering linguistic and cultural nuances.

Stage 3

Research Team Composition

Pacific management and control of the research project at all levels is important. It is preferable to include a Pacific researcher, with clear roles and limitations for non-Pacific researchers, who may also act as mentors. This requires researchers to:

- Ensure the research team reflects the communities involved in the study (this might include the involvement of New Zealand-born Pacific, Island-born Pacific etc.).
- Recruit and train culturally appropriate information collectors and analysts.
- Consider co-supervision agreements for postgraduate students undertaking research in Pacific countries.

Stage 4

Navigating Method with Cultural Care

Dr. Radilaite Cammock (Moanaroa Talanoa) reminds us that "taboo subjects often make communities or Pacific Peoples feel [cautious]... or make them more careful in what they share and require more nuanced language that reflect cultural practices associated with the topic. For example, for topics around sexual intimacy, making considerations around gender ... and cultural, religious ... or spiritual factors often require more careful wording and thinking."

When working with Pacific Peoples, research design must move beyond technical accuracy to embrace cultural sensitivity. Whether using questionnaires, surveys or qualitative topic guides, careful phrasing is essential to avoid offending cultural sensitivities, particularly for "taboo" subjects. From this foundation, several strategies can strengthen the cultural appropriateness of research tools:

- Qualitative topics need to offer flexibility for culturally sensitive framing.
- Pilot runs are recommended to test questions and gather feedback for refinement.
- In some contexts, researcher-assisted techniques may be more effective than self-administered questionnaires, ensuring approaches maintain rigour while being responsive to cultural nuances.
- To remove prejudices and stereotypes, it is important that questions are screened by people familiar with the community's culture.

Stage 5

Sampling

Sampling is critical for the overall usefulness and impact of the research findings. Over-sampling may be necessary to achieve sufficient statistical power for separate analysis of Pacific data. To uphold both rigour and cultural respect, researchers are encouraged to:

- Balance the need to adequately address research questions with the need to respect the values and culture of potential participants.
- Ensure participants are representative of all key groups and knowledge holders within the community.

Stage 6

Ethical Considerations in Design

Researchers should obtain ethics approval from relevant institutional committees, but beyond institutional approval, ethics must be lived out in the research relationship. Respect, protection and transparency should be embedded throughout the research process. This means that:

- Informed and relational consent is a two-way process grounded in dialogue and trust, and goes beyond the act of signing a form. In some contexts, "turning up" can signal consent, but it remains essential that participants are provided with accessible information and opportunities to ask questions throughout the study (HRC, 2014).
- Researchers must recognise that information in Pacific communities is often shared verbally or relationally. The participants' privacy and confidentiality must be respected, and researchers should take care to uphold participants' dignity when handling sensitive knowledge.
- Safeguarding participants' wellbeing means ensuring research does not cause harm. While additional care may be needed for children, youth, women, disabled people, or those with lived experiences of violence, it is equally important to acknowledge that Pacific Peoples have historically faced discrimination in education, health, and social services. This context makes many Pacific participants vulnerable in spaces where power is unequally exercised. As a baseline, researchers should actively uphold the safety, dignity, and mana of all Pacific participants.

Stage 7

Addressing Diversity and Context

Researchers are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of Pacific communities, approaching their work in ways that recognise the diversity and richness of Pacific identities without essentialising or reducing them to a single narrative. While many Pacific Peoples may share values such as spirituality or ancestral connection, these are not universal. Researchers can reflect this diversity in the language they use in their project, through qualifiers such as "many" or "some". They should recognise that there is a plurality of Pacific experiences shaped by migration, urbanisation, and personal beliefs. In this sense, Pacific research identities are woven into a collective, rather than representing a singular voice (Vaai & Casimira, 2017). To ensure this, researchers need to:

- Conduct literature reviews and engage with experts to understand cultural psychology, social structure, normative values, and expectations of specific communities. It is key that researchers acknowledge intra-communal diversity and practice cultural sensitivity in all interactions.
- Design questions that reflect that diversities within Pacific ethnic groups (gender, age, education, language, religion, socioeconomic class), as these shape worldviews and identities.
- Be mindful of words, mannerisms, and body language to avoid offence.

Stage 8

Outcomes and Impact of Research Design

"For me, when I go back home to Samoa … I am the outcome"
— Pacific postgraduate student, Moanaroa Talanoa

This statement speaks to the heart of Pacific research; it must be lived, embodied, and returned to our communities. Research involving Pacific Peoples must go beyond observation. It must improve lives, inform policy, and build pathways for change.

To honour this, researchers can:

- Build Pacific research capacity and capability through mentoring, training, employment, and formal qualifications.
- Ensure accessible and reciprocal dissemination, including returning to villages and communities to gift findings in meaningful formats. Organising a fono or community meeting is an effective way to share outcomes; timing, location, and budgeting for catering and dissemination must be thoughtfully planned.
- Use Pacific media and social platforms wisely, tailoring messages to each audience. Communicating findings through media, including social media, requires a clear, engaging approach that resonates with non-academic audiences. Short bursts of information paired with strong imagery can be powerful tools for engagement and storytelling.
- Embed feedback and validation from participants and advisory groups throughout the research process.
- Catalyse action, not just analysis.

Relational Ethics and Cultural Safety

“From a Pacific perspective, research outcomes are best framed not simply as deliverables or academic outputs, but as relational, collective, and intergenerational contributions to the wellbeing, empowerment and cultural continuity of Pacific communities. This framing shifts the emphasis from extraction and individual achievement to service, reciprocity, and legacy.”

— Moanaroa member, Moanaroa Talanoa

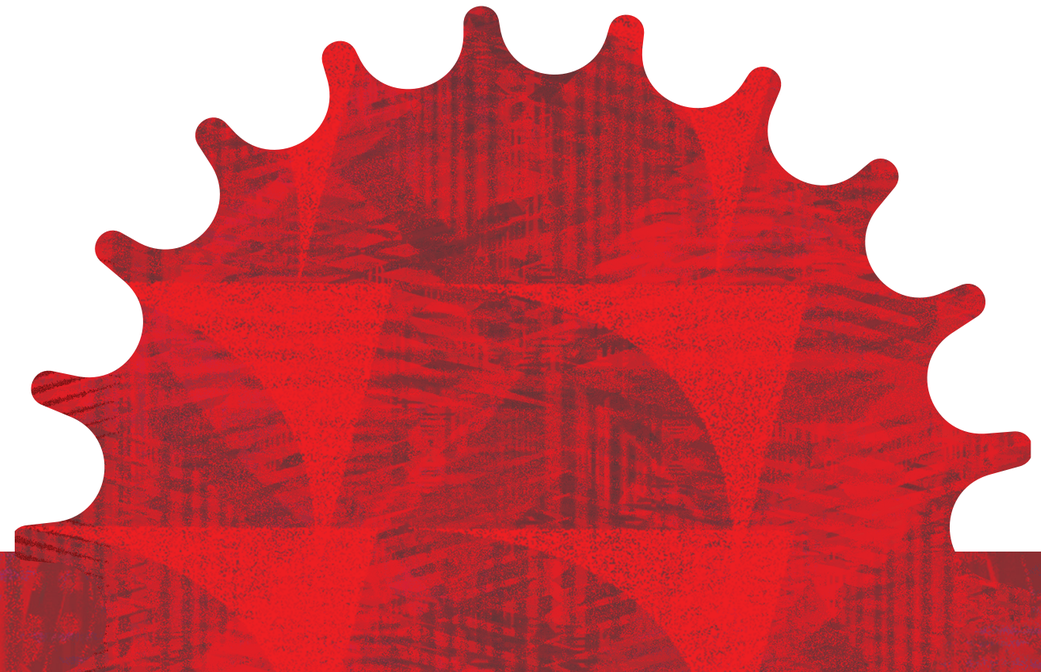
Relational Ethics and Cultural Safety

Relational ethics and cultural safety are fundamental to Indigenous and Pacific data sovereignty movements advocating for respectful, reciprocal, and culturally appropriate engagement with data and communities. These concepts actively challenge the predominant individualistic and Western-centric approaches to privacy and ethics, pushing for frameworks that prioritise collective wellbeing, dignity, and profound trust. Relational ethics extends beyond procedural ethics, placing relationships at the heart of Pacific research. Matapo and McFall-McCaffery (2022) proposed a vā knowledge ecology as a transformative framework for higher education, advocating for systemic change that has Pacific knowledge systems at the centre.

It is important to ensure that key principles and practices of Pacific data sovereignty guide the ethics process as a foundation. At its core, Pacific data sovereignty asserts the inherent rights of Pacific Peoples to determine how their data is collected, accessed, analysed, interpreted, managed, disseminated, and reused (PDSN, 2021). This ensures that data actively supports and enhances their collective wellbeing (Uasike Allen et al., 2025), directly countering historical tendencies where data was “taken” rather than controlled by Indigenous communities (Walter, 2016).

From a Pacific perspective, privacy is fundamentally collective, making sole focuus on individual privacy interests insufficient. Collective privacy stems from Pacific Peoples' inherent rights and interests in their self-determination and control over their information. This collective approach is essential for limiting potential harms to the group that could arise from invasive or discriminatory data processing. The traditional Western focus on individual data protection is considered necessary but insufficient to meet the broader needs of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa.

Acknowledging collective privacy does not diminish or negate the very real need to protect individual participants. In research areas that involve sensitive topics, for example, domestic violence, sexual health, or trauma, ensuring individual privacy, confidentiality, and safety remains paramount. It is vital that the collective and individual dimensions of privacy work in tandem, protecting the integrity of communities while upholding the rights, dignity, and security of each person involved.



Indigenous Ethical Frameworks

The Global Indigenous Data Alliance, an organisation dedicated to promoting Indigenous data sovereignty and governance, has further developed Indigenous-specific principles, known as CARE principles (Carroll et al., 2020), which extend the FAIR principles developed by Wilkinson et al. (2016). The FAIR principles were introduced by a group of scientists and data stewards, with the purpose of improving the management and stewardship of scientific data, making it easier for machines and humans to find, access, and reuse data (Wilkinson et al., 2016). While FAIR principles are valuable, they do not inherently address issues of inclusion, cultural relevance, or Indigenous data sovereignty.

CARE principles were introduced to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests are respected in data governance, complementing the FAIR principles by keeping people and purpose at the fore of any data use (Carroll et al., 2020). FAIR principles focus on data management for all research data, while CARE principles focus on Indigenous data sovereignty and the ethical use of data involving Indigenous Peoples.

The FAIR principles are:

- Findable
- Accessible
- Interoperable
- Reusable

The CARE principles are:

- Collective benefit
- Authority to control
- Responsibility
- Ethics

When applied to Pacific research and ethics, CARE principles and their supporting concepts can be realised when data ecosystems are designed to support the use and reuse of data by Pacific Peoples, utilise data for policy decisions and service evaluations, and create and use data that reflects Pacific values (Carroll et al., 2020). These CARE principles complement the FAIR principles by explicitly addressing power imbalances and historical contexts, grounding data practices in Indigenous worldviews. These principles embed Indigenous worldviews and mandate the nurturing of positive relationships (Walter et al., 2020). Within the context of Pacific research, decolonising research practice requires more than inclusion, it demands a reorientation towards Pacific knowledge systems (Matapo & McFall-McCaffery, 2022).

Empowering Pacific Participation

Cultural safety is significantly enhanced by ensuring meaningful involvement of Pacific Peoples at every stage of the data lifecycle, from conceptualisation of design to collection, analysis, interpretation, reporting and dissemination. This directly counters historical practices where Pacific communities were exploited as mere data sources, with little consideration for their specific needs or potential harm. The cost of complacency in ensuring meaningful participation of Pacific Peoples cannot be understated. Offering appropriate time and space is essential for meaningful participation in Pacific research.



“The Pacific concept of time is different to palagi research expectations, and I’ve often had to negotiate about the amount of time needed regarding research project timelines and relationship building … are we allowing sufficient time and space for relationship building, consultation, and cultural process to guide our work?”

— Dr Betty Ofe-Grant, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Addressing the "Recognition Gap"

Official statistics have historically and frequently failed to recognise or adequately measure social and cultural phenomena that are crucial to Indigenous wellbeing, often perpetuating a "deficit data/problematic people" narrative (Walter, 2016, p. 82). Relational ethics requires reframing data narratives from a Pacific perspective, focusing on strengths and the depth of Pacific knowledge systems, rather than solely on disadvantage. This is not to suggest that Indigenous statistics exist in opposition to those shaped by Western epistemologies, nor that their distinctiveness lies solely in how they differ from Western-framed approaches (Walter, 2016). Statistical techniques and ways of measuring are also not what delineate data from Indigenous-framed data. Official statistical systems have been shaped by Western frameworks, often overlooking or misrepresenting the social, cultural, spiritual, and relational aspects that are critical to Pacific wellbeing (Fa'avae et al., 2016). This mismatch is referred to as the "recognition gap" (Walter, 2016, p. 93), reflecting the persistent failure of statistical agencies to recognise and measure what truly matters to Indigenous communities.

Researchers need to ensure a paradigmatic shift that moves away from these narrow, externally imposed measures, towards approaches that acknowledge Pacific worldviews and values, capture data that reflects the lived realities and priorities of Pacific Peoples, and empower Pacific communities to define what wellbeing and success means to them (Uasike Allen et al., 2025). Expanding the "recognition space" involves creating a shared domain where Pacific and non-Pacific understandings of wellbeing coexist and inform one another (Walter, 2016, p. 93). By doing so, Pacific communities gain the capacity to respond to governments and institutions using statistical evidence that resonates in both cultural and policy contexts. This not only addresses deficit-driven narratives but also asserts Pacific authority over how their realities are represented, fostering more equitable and culturally respectful decision-making (Uasike Allen et al., 2025; Walter, 2016).

Repatriation and Control of Data

Drawing from broader scholarship on Indigenous data sovereignty, principles and practices of ownership, control, access, and possession remain critical to advancing Indigenous research locally and globally (Walter, 2016). These principles and practices will vary across Indigenous contexts. For Māori in Aotearoa, these principles include:

- rangatiratanga/authority
- whakapapa/relationships
- whanaungatanga/obligations
- kotahitanga/collective benefit
- manaakitanga/reciprocity
- kaitiakitanga/guardianship

Māori data sovereignty principles, as described by Te Mana Raraunga, emphasise the importance of respecting the rights of Māori communities in Aotearoa when it comes to their data (as cited in Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2020). These principles have informed and are supported by AUT's data management policies and guidelines. These policies and principles aim to ensure that Māori data is treated with respect, that Māori communities are actively involved in decisions regarding their data, and that the use of this data contributes positively to Māori wellbeing and development.

The PDSN (2021) has developed guiding principles that can inform Pacific research in Aotearoa, including:

- Pacific Peoples—our interests, rights, values, and knowledge
- Authority of autonomy for Pacific Peoples
- Facilitating relationships and authentic engagement
- Collective action for collective gains
- Integrity and ethics
- Influencing and informing policy and practice
- Pacific data frameworks and relevant models

Ensuring cultural safety involves addressing the ownership and location of Pacific data and ensuring that autonomy and authority are exerted, ideally through repatriation of data or through robust data governance agreements, and data-sharing contracts (Walter, 2016). This includes explicitly recognising and protecting Pacific cultural intellectual property rights. Researchers are urged to consider:

- Repatriation of data—return historical and contemporary datasets to Pacific custodians, so they can manage and use this information in ways that align with their cultural values and aspirations. If this is not possible, researchers are encouraged to consider robust data governance structures.
- Robust data governance—establish agreements and frameworks that clearly articulate Pacific authority over data, including rights to veto, negotiate terms of use, and dictate how findings are disseminated.
- Protection of cultural intellectual property—recognise that data often embodies Pacific knowledge systems, language, and cultural heritage, which need to be safeguarded against misuse or exploitation.

By embedding these practices, data becomes a tool for empowerment rather than a source of harm. It strengthens self-determination, enabling communities to shape narratives, influence policies, and safeguard their cultural legacy on their own terms.

"When it comes to statistical analysis, Pacific values can inform how you interpret the data and how you frame the results. Results that find Pacific peoples (or some Pacific subgroup) have poorer outcomes than another population or group should be interpreted in the social, economic, and historical context in which such disparities arose, not used to pathologise Pacific peoples, moralise inequalities, and individualise structural problems."

—Dr Leon Iusitini, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Growing Pacific Expertise in Research

Pacific researchers have been at the forefront of developing innovative, culturally grounded methodologies and frameworks that have reshaped research practice to better reflect Pacific values, knowledge systems, and aspirations. Despite the significant progress, innovation, and preservation of Pacific knowledge systems from a relatively small workforce pool, there is underrepresentation across research spheres, which require active support, investment, and capacity-building opportunities for current and up-and-coming Pacific researchers.

The briefing paper 'The Research Workforce of Aotearoa New Zealand' (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2020) revealed that domestic PhD graduates in recent years (2010–2020) have comprised about 71% NZ European, 9% Māori, 4% Pacific, and 17% Asian. In 2018, the 25 Pacific PhD graduates were primarily from health, society, and culture, with low participation in engineering and science (p. 14). Though Pacific representation in the research workforce continues to be relatively low (McAllister et al., 2022), engineering technology and molecular, cellular and whole organism biology have the lowest proportion of Pacific researchers, with Pacific research and public health having the highest proportion of Pacific researchers (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment [MBIE], 2021).

"Without Māori and Pacific voices, the science system will never reach its full potential."

(McAllister et al., 2020)

McAllister et al. (2022) found that any increases in the pool of Māori and Pacific PhD graduates did not lead to significant increases in their representation in the research workforce overall, and that women, Māori, and Pacific researchers are less likely to be promoted than their male, non-Pacific and non-Māori colleagues (McAllister et al., 2020). Māori and Pacific early career researchers tend to be older and tend to commence their doctoral studies later in life. Māori and Pacific researchers are often working in fields that, despite their importance, are disproportionately affected by precarious employment and workforce risk (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2020, p. 16).

"Things like humility sometimes get in the way because we don't want to push ourselves forward in this very cutthroat academic world... it's very individual and you push yourself forward ... you promote yourself ... the university is not set up for Pacific ways of being and doing" —Dr Ali Glasgow, Moanaroa Talanoa.

"Service, tautua ... we are serving our communities ...." —Dr Hilda Port, Moanaroa Talanoa

Echoing the thoughts shared in Moanaroa Talanoa, the workforce report found that Pacific PhD graduates' key motivations are service to their community rather than economic outcomes, with aspirations to seek employment that reflects this ethos (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2020). This can mean opportunities are limited if available research funding is strongly directed to achieving economic outcomes (p. 29).

"People who dish out the research funding ... need to be called to task." —Dr. Ali Glasgow, Moanaroa Talanoa

Pacific Postgraduate Research at AUT

A scoping review[7] conducted between 2020 and 2025 of Pacific Masters and Doctoral studies at AUT identified key trends and emerging priorities in postgraduate research. Five key areas of focus have emerged:

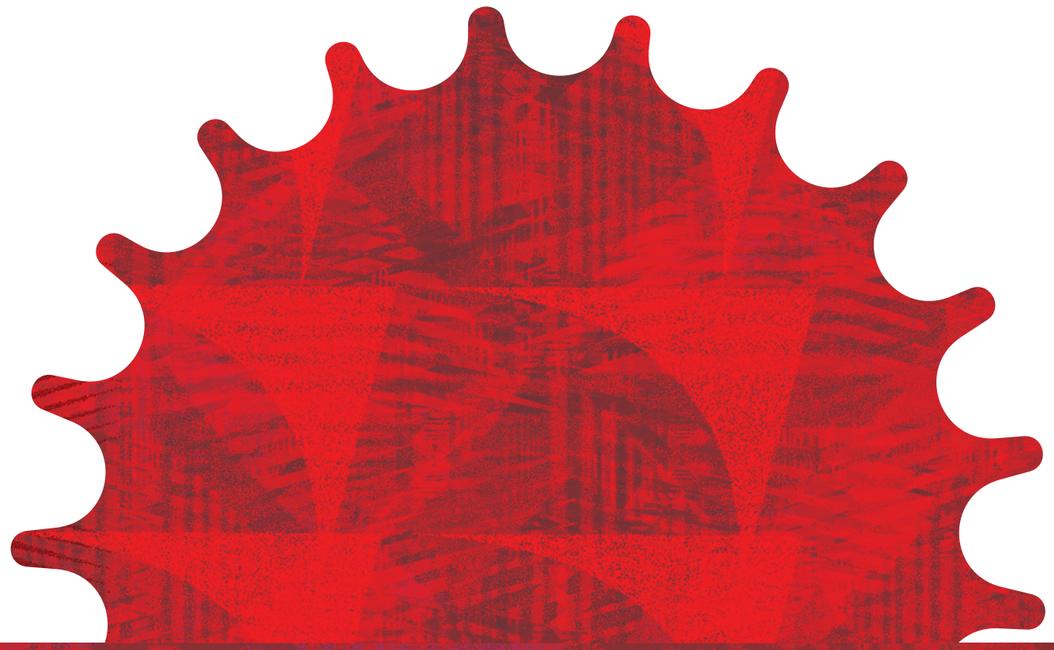
- Pacific and Indigenous Identity, Culture, and Arts – Cultural revitalisation, identity including diaspora identity, traditional knowledge systems, and heritage through traditional and contemporary lenses.
- Technology, Innovation, and Sustainability – Digital transformation, assistive technologies, sustainable design, environmental and community thriving, and the use of AI and data science.
- Education and Youth – Educational experiences, identity formation, and youth empowerment.
- Governance, Leadership & Public Sector Innovation – Leadership models, organisational transformation, and public service.

The AUT scoping review for Pacific postgraduate research has shown a fairly consistent focus on health and wellbeing, as well as culture and identity, which remain the most prominent areas of inquiry. More recently, there has been a noticeable rise in research exploring technology, innovation, and sustainability, reflecting growing interest in digital transformation, assistive technologies, and sustainable practice. There is an increasing emphasis on culturally grounded research methodologies and participatory approaches that affirm community voices and indigenous knowledge systems.

[7] Data sourced from the Office of Pacific Advancement, AUT Scoping Review of Pacific Masters and Doctoral Studies (June 2025).

Pacific Data Professionals, Statisticians, and Analysts

Over the past two decades, Pacific communities in Aotearoa have made significant strides in advancing quantitative research that is culturally grounded, community-led, and methodologically innovative. Landmark initiatives such as the Pacific Islands Family study have demonstrated the power of longitudinal, Pacific-led research to generate rich, policy-relevant insights across health, education, and social wellbeing (Paterson et al., 2013; Tautolo et al., 2020). Frameworks like Tivaivai (Kokaua et al., 2020), and Faikava (Aporosa et al., 2021) have redefined how quantitative methods can be decolonised and aligned with Pacific values. These efforts reflect a growing ecosystem of Pacific scholars, practitioners and communities who are not only participating in data conversations but shaping them (Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019). Yet despite this progress, systemic barriers remain.



There is a shortage of statistical expertise and data capacity among Indigenous and Pacific Peoples. Across the education pipeline, academic and professional landscape, we know that:

- Statistical agencies often struggle to attract, retain, and develop staff with strong statistical and technical skills (South Pacific Community, 2017).
- There is low representation of Pacific Peoples in high-skill, quantitative, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) professions (International Labour Organization, 2017).
- Educational pathways reinforce the gaps with Pacific students less likely to take advanced science and mathematics, signalling limited progression into statistics careers (Turnball & O'Neale, 2021).
- Within Pacific communities, a lack of data literacy and analytical capacity further limits control and ownership of data for health, social, and economic decision making (MPP, 2023).

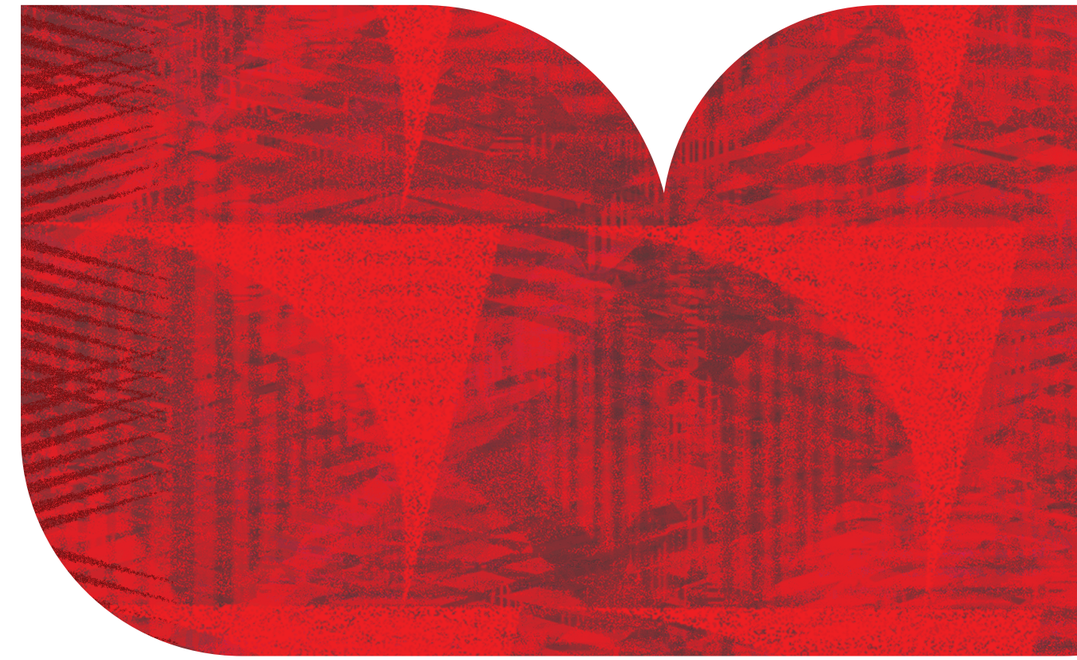
It is essential to prioritise investment in strengthening Pacific statistical capacity across the entire data ecosystem. This includes developing expertise in data production, governance, management, and culturally grounded analysis. Building this capacity is critical to ensuring that data reflects Pacific worldviews, supports self-determination, and advances Pacific priorities and aspirations rather than external agendas.
It is important that partnerships focus on capability building and knowledge transfer, while ensuring Pacific Peoples lead and define the standards of how their data is collected, interpreted, applied, reported, and disseminated.

Indicators of Relational Ethics

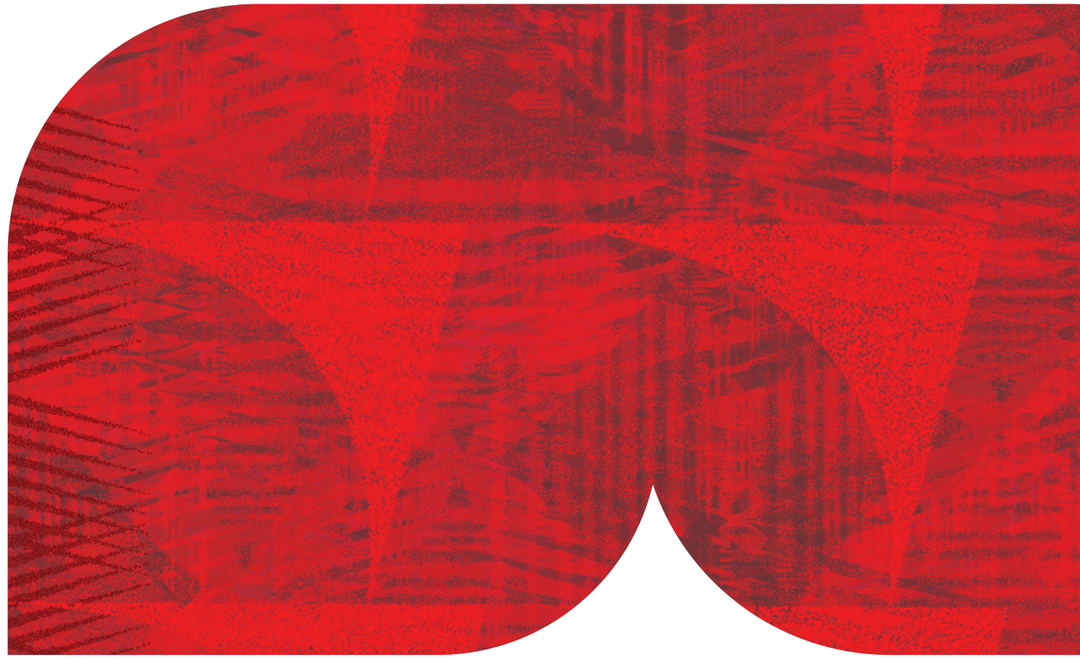
There's a real thing around being values-led, and the way that we are, we conduct our research, how we build relationships and of course, that's grounded in the way that we know to be true...that's reciprocity
— Dagmar Dyck, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Relational ethics in Pacific research is a lived practice grounded in Pacific values, upholding the dignity, sovereignty and aspirations of Pacific peoples. Accountability is expressed through respectful, enduring and reciprocal relationships and by walking alongside communities in ways that aim for lasting, positive outcomes. Indicators of relationa ethics include:

- Communities describe their relationship with researchers as trusting and respectful.
- Research processes demonstrate care for participants and cultural protocols.
- Ethical responsibilities are being met through reciprocal actions, not just compliance paperwork.
- The research contributes positively to the wellbeing of the people and places involved.







Ethical and Cultural Safety Guide for Pacific Research

Research Stage

Practical actions for researchers

Planning and design

Initial Talanoa with communities and leaders.

Include Pacific advisory groupin governance.

Co-design questions and methods.

Respect local protocols.

Data collection and relationships

Maintain open and transparent communication.

Protect both community and individual privacy.

Use culturally safe engagement (face-to-face, respectful dialogue).

Offer modes of engagement that accommodate participants' settings (phone call, video call, in person).

Offer reciprocity (koha [8]/me'alofa [9], shared learning).

Analysis and interpretation

Engage communities in interpreting findings.

Safeguard cultural intellectual property.

Apply CARE principles for data sovereignty.

Dissemination

Share findings first with communities through accessible formats.

Honour narrative ownership; this may include ongoing consent beyond initial consent forms.

Ensure policy use reflects Pacific perspectives.

Beyond the project

Formally acknowledge participants and advisors.

Maintain ongoing, rather than transactional, relationships.

Share skills and resources to build Pacific capacity.

[8] Koha (Māori) is a gift, present, offering, donation, contribution, especially one maintaining social relationships and has connotations of reciprocity (Moorfield, 2011).

[9] Me'alofa (Samoan) is a heartfelt gift or offering, often given in the spirit of alofa (love), respect (fa'aaloalo), and reciprocity (feosia'i). It is a gesture of connection, service, and cultural responsibility.

Check list for Researchers

- Are Pacific voices embedded at every stage of the research?
- Have CARE principles been applied alongside FAIR principles?
- Does the project strengthen Pacific knowledge, affirming collective aspirations and responsibility of data?
- Are outcomes designed to serve communities and uphold their intergenerational aspirations?
- Does the project allow enough time and space for deeper, reciprocal relational engagement with the participant communities?

Governance and Accountability

Governance and Accountability

Governance and accountability ensure that Pacific research is guided by strong ethical stewardship, transparent decision-making, and responsibilities that honour relationships with communities, knowledge holders, and future generations. For too long, the initiation of research and decisions about its benefits, representation, legitimation, and accountability have been shaped by the researchers' own interests or institutional concerns. However, within the context of Pacific research, researchers are invited into a different rhythm, one that embodies relationships, reciprocity, and cultural consciousness (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2023). Research becomes a co-constructed story, grounded in ongoing connection. It asks researchers to show up somatically (physically, ethically, morally, and spiritually), not as distant observers, but as present and accountable participants (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

To engage with Pacific knowledge systems, often carefully held and protected within families, it is essential that researchers demonstrate genuine ethical integrity to build trust. While institutional ethics protocols from universities or governments may formally permit entry into the field, they are only one part of the equation. What truly opens the door to meaningful and authentic knowledge is the relationship cultivated between the researcher and the community. It is this relational trust, not just procedural approval, that grants access to the depth and richness of lived experience (Johansson-Fua, 2023). In Pacific research governance, accountability goes beyond compliance; it is about honouring the vā, the sacred relational space, and ensuring that research is guided by community-defined values, responsibilities, and expectations.



Principles of Governance in Pacific Research

Collective Stewardship

Governance is shared, recognising the collective voices of Pacific communities, elders, cultural leaders, and research participants. Decision-making needs to reflect communal values, not just institutional priorities.

Cultural Legitimacy

It is important that governance structures reflect Pacific cultural protocols and leadership systems. This includes respecting Pacific leadership (e.g., Matai, Ariki, Ta'unga, minister, bishop, reverend) and acknowledging the authority of community-led advisory groups.

Relational Ethics

Governance is relational, grounded in trust, reciprocity, and care. Accountability mechanisms need to be designed to maintain these relationships.

Role and Structure

Advisory Groups

Comprising of Pacific elders, leaders, community representatives, and research experts, advisory groups guide ethical decisions, oversee project alignment with Pacific values, and ensure outcomes serve community interests.

Community Oversight

Community-based governance allows for local validation of research activities, particularly where data sovereignty or cultural knowledge is concerned.

Institutional Support

It is important that universities and research institutions provide resources, uphold agreements, and respect Pacific governance decisions.

Indicators of Good Governance

- Communities are involved at every stage of the research lifecycle.
- Decision-making structures are inclusive and grounded on Pacific values, principles, and practices.
- Accountability measures are transparent, ongoing, and mutually agreed on.
- Researchers and institutions are held accountable to the commitments made to Pacific communities.

Pacific Data Sovereignty

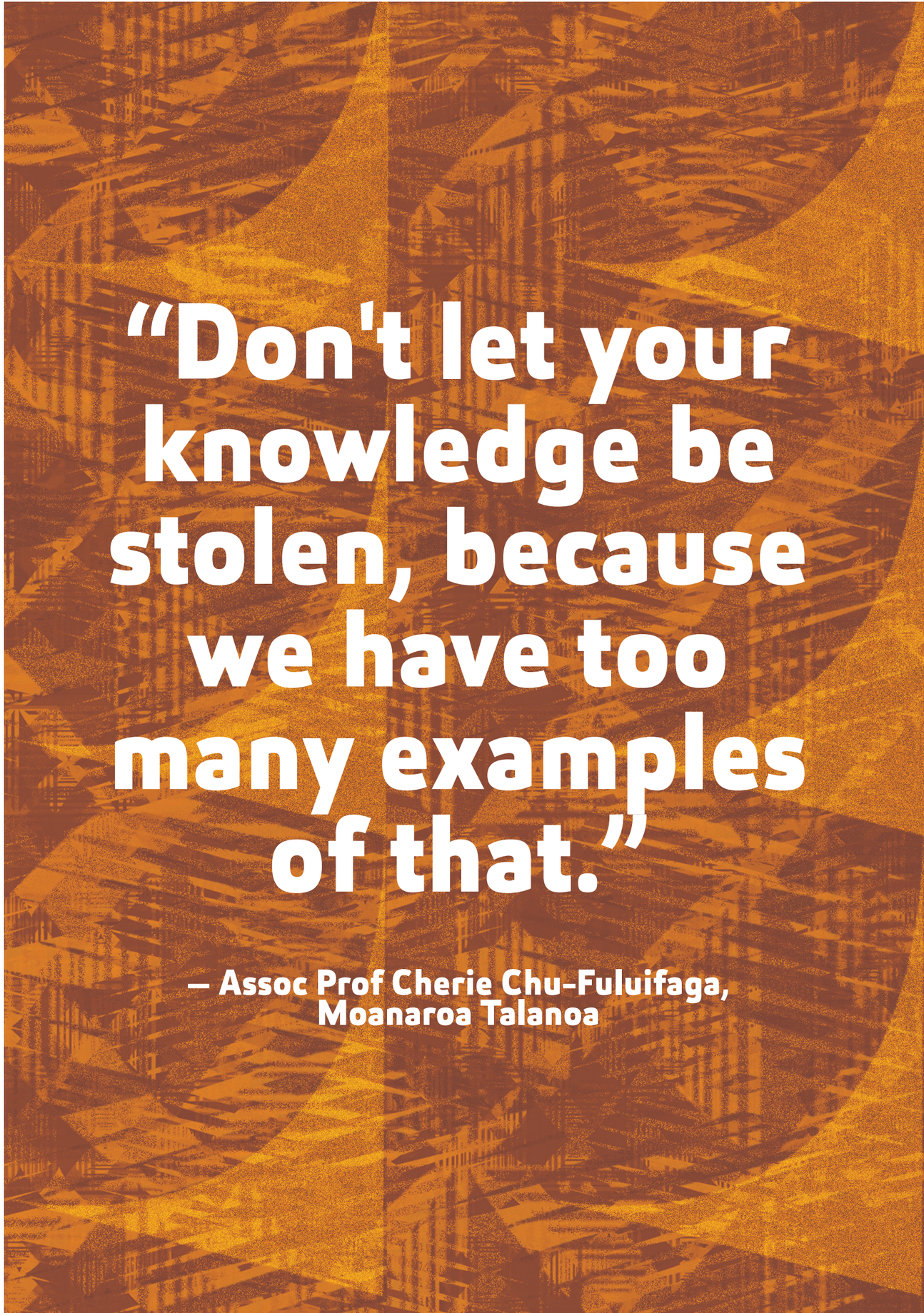
Pacific Data Sovereignty

Introduction

Pacific data is a vital part of Pacific ways of being and holds the potential to deepen understanding of Pacific lands, oceans, communities, histories, migration patterns, and the interconnection that shapes our wellbeing. It informs decision making across critical areas such as climate resilience, health, education, science, migration, and cultural revitalisation. In today's digital era, data is not only abundant but also increasingly commodified and circulated globally, often without regard for Pacific Peoples' rights and values. Tech giants profit from data as a key economic asset, reinforcing systems of power and control. From social media algorithms to policy development, data now influences how we think, behave, and relate to each other.

Historically, surveillance has been a tool of colonial control, used to monitor, classify, and manage Indigenous populations, including Pacific Peoples. In Aotearoa and other settler-colonial contexts, state institutions have long subjected Māori and Pacific communities to surveillance practices that reinforce racialised social divisions and colonial hierarchies. These practices have evolved from physical monitoring to digital datafication, where biometric and algorithmic surveillance now deepens power asymmetries and perpetuates harm. As Cormack and Kukutai (2022) argue, contemporary data environments continue the legacy of colonialism by extracting and commodifying Indigenous data without consent, often under the guise of neutrality and objectivity.

Safeguarding Pacific data is not just about protecting information, it is about upholding the mana of our stories, knowledge systems, and collective futures. Pacific data sovereignty affirms the right of Pacific communities to control how Pacific data is generated, collected, stored, used, and shared, in ways that are accountable to Pacific Peoples and grounded in their Indigenous knowledge systems (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017).





As a region, the Pacific Islands face rapid digital transformation and growing pressures around climate change, health, economic development, and governance. The concept of data sovereignty in the Pacific encompasses the cultural, social, and political aspects of data management, recognising the region's unique priorities in the face of external pressures, such as global data flows and international agreements.

The MPP has acknowledged advancements in government data systems since the 1990s, when Pacific Peoples gained the ability to self-identify with certain Pacific ethnicities (MPP, 2023). However, the MPP (2023) briefing also highlighted the significant inequity that persists concerning Pacific data, ultimately impacting Pacific wellbeing, and the misalignment between government decisions and Pacific knowledge systems.

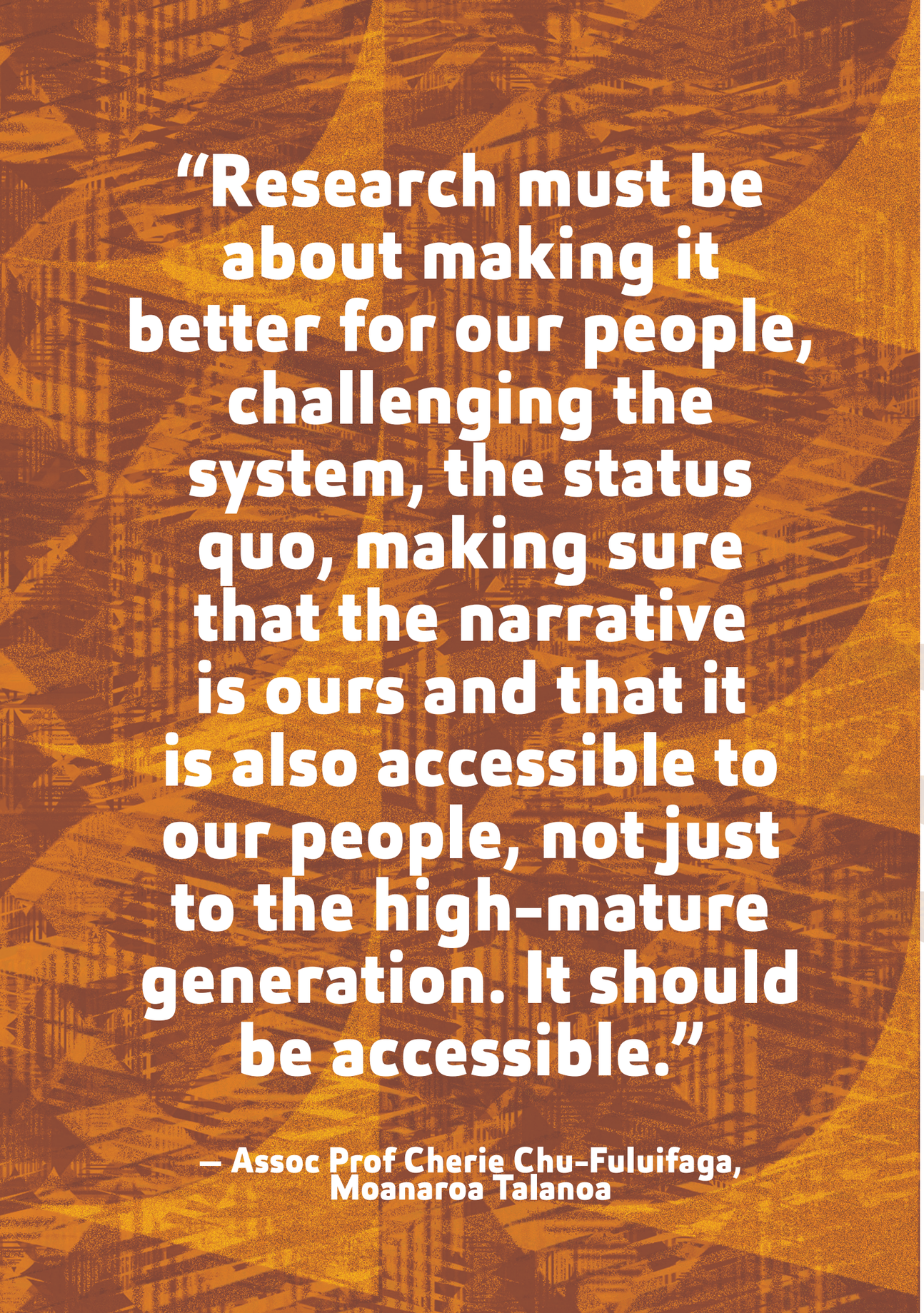
"Ensuring ethical practice around data sovereignty, especially in the context of Indigenous and Pacific communities, means respecting their right to own, control, access, and govern data that relates to their people, cultures, lands, and knowledges. Ethical data sovereignty practice centres on self-determination, accountability, and relational responsibility."

— Moanaroa member, Moanaroa written submission

The need for Pacific data sovereignty has historic and ongoing challenges that relate to postcolonial practices where outsiders, including government, businesses, researchers and institutions, have collected, interpreted, and disseminated information about Pacific Peoples without their full participation or consent.

Data, in the broadest sense, is defined as any type of information recorded or collected in a variety of forms to be categorised, analysed, and/or used to help decision-making (MPP, 2023). This includes, for example, information about people, land, water, and animals (Lovett et al., 2019; Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2023). In everyday usage, data are things given or granted; things known or assumed as facts; and can make the basis of reasoning or calculation (Kukutai et al., 2023). Data is a powerful way to tell the story of peoples (MPP, 2023). It is important to recognise that, from the outset, Indigenous Peoples and Pacific Peoples have their own vibrant, meaningful bodies of data, over which they have sovereignty (Gegeo, 2001; Pool, 2016).

Drawing from broader Indigenous data sovereignty discussions, Pacific data refers to digital or digitisable information or knowledge that is for, by, or about Pacific Peoples and their connections to places and spaces (Kukutai et al., 2023; PDSN, 2021). The use of Pacific data in research encompasses, but is not limited to, qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, theoretical/philosophical, evaluative, and applied practices. Within the context of government, Pacific data includes information categorised, classified, and counted about Pacific Peoples; indicators and measures defining their lived experiences and wellbeing; methods and tools for data collection; and the interpretation and use of this data for policy and service delivery (MPP, 2023).



PDSN (2021) not only defined Pacific data as emphasising Pacific-specific cultural frameworks but also recognised that Pacific data is dynamic, interconnected, and inherently tied to Pacific knowledge systems, values, and identities. This understanding of Pacific data echoes the work of Indigenous data sovereignty (Walter, 2016) and Māori data sovereignty movements (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2023). Pacific data includes, but is not limited to:

- data about Pacific Peoples that is used to describe or compare Pacific collectives and individuals;
- data about Pacific Indigenous knowledge systems that emerges from research and exists beyond the bounds of the research timeframe;
- Pacific environmental data from fanua, vanua or land, moana or seas and oceans, skies and atmosphere, interconnected ecologies, and Indigenous environmental knowledge;
- Pacific material culture including tangible expressions of Pacific identities, histories, and knowledge systems including artefacts or objects, architecture and built environments, clothing and adornment, artworks and visual expressions, performance-related items, and cultural technologies; and
- data about Pacific Peoples from organisations and businesses.

Pacific data is a living expression of Pacific knowledge, relationships, and identity. When data is collected for Pacific Peoples, it often serves external agendas such as policy, funding, or academic outputs, without necessarily reflecting community priorities. When data is collected by Pacific researchers, it carries the potential for cultural integrity and relational accountability, yet may still be constrained by institutional ownership, ethical frameworks, or funding conditions that privilege Western paradigms. Data with Pacific Peoples implies co-design, shared governance, and reciprocal benefit, but this ideal is often challenged by systemic power imbalances, histories of surveillance, and the commodification of Indigenous knowledge.

Key Tensions Relating to Data For, By, With, and About Pacific Peoples

Data for Pacific Peoples Intended for benefit, but still with external control

Key Tensions	Detail	Potential for harm
Lack of access and timeliness	Pacific communities and government agencies find it difficult to access their own data held by government agencies.	Government can have a limited understanding of what is working for whom and why, leading to less effective policy and service design.
Absence of feedback loop	The feedback loop of data is often absent, and data is not shared well or presented in accessible ways (e.g. long reports, charts).	Government can have a limited understanding of what is working for whom and why, leading to less effective policy and service design.
Erosion of trust and misinformation	The lack of access and poor data sharing impact trust and confidence in government data systems.	Limited access to and inadequate sharing of data can undermine public trust in government systems, fostering misinformation, as seen during COVID-19 (MPP, 2023). This misinformation has had lasting impacts on Indigenous communities and is linked to negative perceptions of children's immunisations (Charania et al., 2024), coinciding with record lows in immunisation rates (Rice, 2024). Pacific preschoolers, for instance, experience higher hospitalisation rates from infectious diseases (Lewycka et al., 2023). Moreover, the information environment itself can significantly influence health-related beliefs, behaviours, and outcomes (Palmer & Gorman, 2025).
"Done to" vs. "done by"	Without Pacific involvement in the design phase, data has not been designed for Pacific Peoples. Markers of success that do not reflect Pacific values are often measured against mainstream ideals, such as individualism.	Measures and indicators do not meaningfully reflect the wellbeing and aspirations of Pacific Peoples, and are often deficit-focused, further perpetuating negative stereotypes (MPP, 2023).
Open data vs. Indigenous Pacific control	The global shift towards open data and open science can create tension as it can overlook existing power imbalances and historical contexts (PDSN, 2021).	Open data can lead to Indigenous data being extracted and exploited for profit by researchers, governments, and organisations (Cormack & Kukutai, 2022).

Data about Pacific Peoples

Key Tensions	Detail	Potential for harm
Deficit-based narratives and misrepresentation	Government data-collection practices and systems tend to reflect mainstream worldviews of success, which can result in deficit-based narratives of Pacific Peoples and a "misleading impression that Pacific communities are underachieving" (MPP, 2023, p. 22).	Data can fail to capture the realities, voices, and values of Pacific Peoples. It can also fail to reflect Pacific individual, family, and community perspectives and ignore the past as it relates to the present (MPP, 2023)
Inaccurate accounting and undercounting	Pacific Peoples have lower participation rates in census and national surveys, leading to collective undercounting and reliance on administrative data of variable quality. To illustrate, the 2018 census data collection process failed to address how digital inequity would impact census returns. As a result, lack of consideration for digital inequity saw a 4.9% undercount for Pacific Peoples, translating to around 19,600 people (MPP, 2023).	The census data of 2018 saw a 70% response rate for Pacific Peoples, with the rest of Pacific data being derived from administrative and imputed methods. This means that 54,000 Pacific Peoples could not be placed in households (MPP, 2023). Pacific Peoples are underrepresented in the household data and data from responding households was also reported as being potentially biased. For example, data may not adequately capture household size, such as those consisting of larger families, or two or more families, and sole-parent households (Stats NZ, 2020).
Lack of disaggregation	Government agencies often use a high-level ethnic classification for the Pacific population, which perpetuates the homogenisation of Pacific Peoples and limits meaningful disaggregated analysis.	Lack of disaggregation ignores the diversity across over 18 Pacific ethnic groups, each with unique languages, cultures, and migration stories, as well as geographic differences within Aotearoa (MPP, 2023). This can add to misguided policy and resource allocation. Without disaggregated data, resources might not be equitably directed.
Dominant Western lens and methods	Current data processes are typically not informed by Pacific norms, leading to missing data and an undervaluation of Pacific-focused data methodologies, such as qualitative data or Talanoa.	Conventional Western data collection methodologies frequently employ standardised and decontextualised tools, which may not adequately account for the cultural, spiritual, and collective dimensions that are integral to Pacific epistemologies and ontologies. This can result in significant aspects of Pacific wellbeing being underrepresented in datasets, thereby limiting the extent to which Indigenous knowledge systems are recognised within research.
Limited access and accountability	Both government agencies and Pacific communities find it difficult to access Pacific data, and the feedback loop between agencies and communities is often insufficient or absent.	Limited access to Pacific data can result in less effective policy and service design. This also influences trust and confidence in the data process and government.
Data serving external agendas	Data collection on Indigenous Peoples, including Pacific Peoples, has historically been viewed as primarily serving government requirements rather than supporting Indigenous development agendas.	Data reflects the needs, priorities, and concerns of government rather than Pacific Peoples.

Data with Pacific Peoples

Key Tensions	Detail	Potential for harm
Power imbalance	It can be difficult to maintain meaningful partnership and influence when external entities hold primary decision-making power and resources.	Even when Pacific communities are relegated to advisory roles or consultation, a significant power imbalance can emerge. This can undermine the ability of Pacific Peoples to exercise data sovereignty, shape narratives, and influence decisions that directly impact their wellbeing. There is a risk of data being used to reinforce deficit-based framings and misaligned policies, and to exclude Pacific priorities, values, and lived experiences.
Methodological mismatch	Inadequacy of conventional data collection and analysis methods to capture Pacific realities and diversity.	Important aspects of wellbeing, identity, and community experience are either misinterpreted or excluded altogether, resulting in interventions and policies that do not reflect the needs or strengths of Pacific communities.
Expertise and capability	Lack of statisticians or researchers to provide cultural lens over data systems (MPP, 2023).	Pacific staff within agencies are being asked to provide cultural services and support over and above their roles, without proper remuneration or recognition.
Data accessibility and feedback	Data production and dissemination is either inaccessible to Pacific communities, or available in long reports and charts.	Data sharing across government agencies is often inconsistent, ad hoc, and misses the insights of Pacific Peoples that influence policy and decision making (MPP, 2023).

Key Tensions	Detail	Potential for harm
Control and ownership	Even when Pacific data is collected by Pacific Peoples, their rights to control and ownership of that data may be constrained by existing regulations, institutional policies, and the requirements of external funders.	When external regulations, institutional policies, or funding requirements take precedence over community priorities, there is a risk that colonial dynamics may be unintentionally reinforced. For example, data collected by Pacific Peoples can still be governed by frameworks that privilege institutional or external funder interests, rather than recognising Pacific rights of ownership, control, and use. Such dynamics can limit the ability of Pacific communities to determine how their knowledge and data are represented, shared, and protected.
Collective rights vs. individual privacy	The communal nature of Pacific communities in which data may have collective significance with Western frameworks that emphasise individual consent and privacy. Pacific data may carry cultural and genealogical knowledge that belongs to f amilies, villages, clans, or entire islands, and is not meant for wide dissemination.	Inappropriate exposure of personal and/or family information can lead to familial and personal shame, especially given the small, overlapping nature of Pacific communities (Anae et al., 2001). Information shared is considered taonga (treasured) and, in some settings, considered taboo to share widely. Researchers have the responsibility to discern, protect, and validate the appropriateness of sharing such information.
Capacity and resources	Collecting data that can be turned into information and later organised into meaningful information is a costly process (Snipp, 2016).	Research can sometimes place additional pressure on Pacific communities, many of whom are already navigating limited resources and competing demands. Without careful attention, there is a risk that Pacific knowledge systems may be overlooked, and that decisions affecting Pacific Peoples continue to be shaped without their full authority or self-determination. This highlights the importance of approaches that value Pacific expertise, respect cultural protocols, and create space for Pacific voices to lead and guide research processes.
System compatibility	Indigenous worldviews and methodologies need to be reconciled with established Western statistical systems (Walter, 2016; Walter et al., 2020).	Data can be used to further perpetuate negative narratives and stereotypes, often leading to Indigenous Peoples being blamed for their own inequality. When data is presented through this deficit lens, it is far more likely to perpetuate these narratives than to solve complex Indigenous policy issues (Walter et al., 2020).
Underrepresentation of Pacific statisticians or researchers in some settings.	Pacific staff are often informally relied upon to provide a cultural lens over data without proper remuneration or recognition.	Pacific underrepresentation in some contexts may contribute to risks such as the over-reliance on a small number of cultural experts, tokenistic engagement, and added cultural burden. It can also affect the protection of data sovereignty, create challenges for ensuring quality and integrity in data interpretation, and lead to reduced trust from Pacific communities.

What Is Pacific Data Sovereignty?

The use of Pacific data needs to be self-determining and relational, and demonstrate an interconnectedness with Pacific communities and their environments. Data relating to Pacific Peoples can originate from individuals, communities, organisations, cultural practices, and resources (MPP, 2023). This includes traditional, customary, and contemporary cultural knowledge and practices; oral stories; ancestral wisdom; Pacific ways of knowing; language; and histories of tribes, villages, families, or clans. Data collected by government agencies and nongovernment organisations encompasses, but is not limited to, commercial, demographic, legal, health, and social information. Pacific data also covers resources and environments, such as land histories, migration stories, and voyages (PDSN, 2021).

For Pacific Peoples, data represents the tangata (a person), ʻaiga (family), or community, from the past and the present (MPP, 2023). There are clear distinctions between data for Pacific Peoples, data about Pacific Peoples, data by Pacific Peoples, and data with Pacific Peoples.

Pacific data is considered a living taonga (treasure) that reflects and derives from Pacific Peoples' history, present realities, and future aspirations (PDSN, 2021). Data sovereignty, in this sense, is of key importance in preserving and protecting taonga. Pacific data is inherently influential, shaping lives at both the individual and collective level (PDSN, 2021). It is important that it is conceptualised and understood from emic (insider) Pacific perspectives and within Pacific frameworks rather than etic (outsider) frameworks. Preferably, these frameworks are collated, analysed, accessed, managed, and shared by Pacific Peoples through a Pacific lens (PDSN, 2021); although we recognise and acknowledge the importance of protective measures that are actively upheld by non-Pacific collaborators in the use of Pacific data.

Pacific data sovereignty is the inherent right to govern the generation, collection, ownership, application, and sharing of data pertaining to Pacific Peoples. It ensures control and decision-making over data that reflects the diverse cultures, histories, and future aspirations that are grounded in shared Indigenous research principles that ensure nothing is done about us, as Pacific Peoples, without us (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2023, p. 27).

Pacific Data Sovereignty for Policy

This policy guide responds to calls for Pacific data sovereignty, or the right of Pacific Peoples to govern the collection, access, use, and stewardship of their data in ways that uphold cultural integrity, community wellbeing, and self-determination. Grounded in Pacific philosophies and Indigenous research ethics, this guide offers policy makers practical insights to support data governance that is for, by, and with Pacific communities.

A Note on Pacific Advisory Roles: When Pacific Expertise is Invited but not Centred

For studies that do not explicitly prioritise Pacific Peoples, but seek out Pacific advisory support, it remains important to hold both the integrity of Pacific ethical practices and the practical realities of being in a supportive advisory role. In this setting, it is important to make clear that these roles are not to endorse the study, but rather to offer guidance on how the research might minimise harm to Pacific Peoples, encourage alignment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, advocate for mana-enhancing practices, and clarify the limits of what can be claimed in terms of Pacific responsiveness.

Pacific Data Sovereignty Policy Guide

Pacific Peoples—Our Interests, Rights, Values, and Knowledge

Key Actions

Protect: Safeguard Pacific data from misuse, ensuring its use remains under the control of Pacific communities.

Promote: Reinforce Pacific voices by supporting data practices that reflect and serve Pacific knowledge systems.

Honour: Recognise the sacredness of Pacific data by affirming cultural values, protocols, and relational accountability.

Points to consider

- Are the outcomes of data use beneficial and equitable for Pacific Peoples?
- Does the data reflect Pacific knowledge systems, experiences, and aspirations?
- Are Pacific values, such as collectivism, humility and service embedded into the data design?

Authority of Autonomy for Pacific Peoples

Key Actions

Stewardship: Pacific Peoples are the rightful custodians of their own information.

Authority: Pacific Peoples have the authority to control data through governance.

Control: Pacific Peoples have the inherent right to govern data collection, ownership, application, and sharing of data about their communities.

Points to consider

- By whose authority are you engaging in this research or data collection?
- ·Do you have a clear mandate from the Pacific community you are working with?
- Are Pacific leaders/experts involved in decisions about data definition, generation, collection, use, and sharing?
- Have Pacific communities agreed to engage with the data process, and do they understand how their data will be used over time?
- Does the approach enable Pacific-led and Pacific-driven data collection?

Facilitating Relationships and Authentic Engagement

Key Actions

Strengthen relationships: Actively build and nurture meaningful, trust-based connections within Pacific communities and with trusted non-Pacific collaborators who respect Pacific leadership, values, and relational ways of working.

Engage authentically: Participate with honesty, humility, and respect for Pacific values and ways of being.

Elevate together: Mobilise and honour Pacific communities through leadership, knowledge, and action.

Points to consider

- Is there meaningful involvement of Pacific communities at all stages of the data use, including design, collection, analysis, access, and dissemination?
- Are strong, reciprocal relationships being built with Pacific communities?
- Are there deliberate, long-term partnerships in place between institutions, organisations, and Pacific communities/experts?
- How are communication and feedback loops ensured to share data findings back to community?

Collective Action for Collective Gains

Key Actions

Centre wellbeing: Ensure Pacific Peoples' wellbeing remain the core purpose throughout the entire data life cycle.

Empower: Ensure data ecosystems are designed to empower Pacific Peoples to derive benefit.

Reciprocate value and benefit: Ensure that data initiatives actively produce tangible benefits, inclusive development, innovation, improved governance, and equitable outcomes for Pacific Peoples, rather than just observing or documenting their circumstances.

Points to consider

- Are Pacific communities and researchers able to readily access the data and findings generated?
- How are data initiatives contributing to the development of Pacific researchers and data professionals?
- Are there Pacific data analysts on the research team, or is capability being built within the Indigenous community for data analysis?
- Are connections between Pacific Peoples and other Indigenous Peoples being supported to enable the sharing of strategies, resources, and ideas for common goals?
- Does the initiative support the development of a Pacific workforce in data creation, collection, management, security, governance, and application?

Integrity and Ethics

Key Actions

Respect protocols: Honour Pacific knowledge systems, leadership structures, and community values in every part of the data journey.

Share benefits: Ensure that the research meaningfully contributes to Pacific communities, not just in outcomes, but in process and relationships.

Protect mana: Safeguard the dignity, identity, and authority of Pacific Peoples by ensuring data is interpreted, governed, and stored in ways that affirm Pacific ownership and control.

Points to consider

- How might this data support or harm Pacific Peoples, now, and into the future?
- Are Pacific cultural ways guiding how data is accessed, protected, and used?
- Does this uphold the mana and dignity of Pacific communities?
- Is harmful or deficit-based analysis being avoided?
- Has free, prior, and informed consent been truly honoured?
- If consent is unclear, is strong Pacific-led governance in place?
- Is there a trusted Pacific data space this can be returned to?

Influencing and Informing Policy and Practice

Key Actions

Actively transform: Shift from deficit-framing to strengths-based, aspirational approach, and acknowledge lived realities shaped by Pacific knowledge systems. Ensure data tells the story of what Pacific communities prioritise, and not what the system prefers to measure. Ensure diversity in Pacific-led governance and systems.

Genuine partnership: Engage Pacific communities as genuine advisors, and co-leads, across all stages of the data journey. Seek permissions, build trust, and honour community leadership and decision-making throughout.

Reciprocate: Be transparent about how data is used, by whom, and for what, always grounded in community benefit. Share findings in culturally safe ways that honour those who have contributed to it. Invest in Pacific workforce development so Pacific Peoples shape their own data futures.

Points to consider

- Does data reflect Pacific strengths, nuances, resilience, goals, successes, aspirations, lived realities, and not just disparities or disadvantage?
- Is the data driving policies and services that truly improve Pacific outcomes?
- Is it supporting Pacific-led data systems and secure infrastructures?
- How is accountability to Pacific Peoples shown in the use of their data?

Pacific Data Frameworks and Relevant Models

Key Actions

Cultural resonance: Data collection and analysis needs to align with Pacific values, culture, and existing Pacific frameworks.

Holistic narrative: It is important that data captures the full experience and lived reality of Pacific Peoples, offering more than statistics of disadvantage to encompass their resilience, goals, and successes. Data collection needs to reflect the diversity of Pacific subgroups and geographical contexts, moving beyond homogenising approaches to provide nuanced insights at the community level.

Holistic methodologies: While quantitative data may show scale, qualitative methodologies like Talanoa reveal context, culture, and meaning. Seek completeness and balance when designing the use of data, ensuring data serves both policymakers and communities.

Points to consider

- Do the chosen data collection and analysis methods align with Pacific values, culture, and existing Pacific frameworks?
- Is data being collected using concepts and methods that capture Pacific Peoples' experiences and lived realities, including diverse subgroups and geographical contexts?
- How can different methods be combined to provide meaningful insights within practical constraints?
- What approaches best capture the key aspects of the research topic?
- In what ways can qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other to build a coherent narrative?

Artificial Intelligence and Pacific Research

Artificial Intelligence and Pacific Research

AI refers to machines that are programmed to mimic human intelligence, analyse data to recognise patterns and make predictions based on those patterns (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2025). MBIE defined AI as a machine-based system's ability to infer from inputs and generate outputs for explicit or implicit objectives, with varying levels of autonomy and adaptiveness (MBIE, 2025).

GenAI is a subset of AI. In response to human instructions or "prompts," GenAI can create new content such as text, images, video, audio, and code (MBIE, 2025). This is achieved by training on very large collections of existing content, often scraped from the internet and other sources. GenAI has been described as revolutionary due to the high quality of its context, which can be difficult to distinguish from human-generated material (MBIE, 2025).

"We have many examples of technologies that have taken the traditional knowledge, right through to the knowledge of today … so AI is about empowering our Indigenous wisdom which we have had for thousands and thousands of years … through AI innovation."

– Dr Tania Wolfgramm, Moanaroa Talanoa

GenAI expands the scope of what organisations and institutions can achieve, accelerating content creation, enhancing consumer engagement through personalisation at scale, and supporting rapid prototyping. It enhances productivity not just by doing more, but by enabling insights, experiences, and outcomes that are arguably better (MBIE, 2025). As GenAI continues to evolve, it is becoming a foundational capability for businesses seeking to lead in a digital, data-rich economy.

While AI offers transformative opportunities for Pacific research, it is critical to be aware of the data shared with these systems. Any information entered into AI tools and platforms are transmitted to their servers and may be stored, processed, or used to further train the models. Researchers are encouraged to exercise caution when using such tools (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2025), particularly when prompts or inputs involve Pacific data, culturally sensitive knowledge, or personally identifiable information. Protecting the privacy, cultural integrity, and sovereignty of Pacific data requires careful consideration of what is entered into these systems, adherence to institutional and community data governance protocols, and transparent decision-making about AI use.

Examples of AI Use

The exponential growth of AI has seen the use of, and recognition of its potential use in settings such as:

- judicial systems and law enforcement (Morris, 2023; Tapu & Fa'agau, 2022); –
- curriculum development in language programmes (Mhasakar et al., 2025);
- employment, healthcare, climate change mitigation and preservation of cultural heritage (AI Asia Pacific Institute, 2024);
- analysing satellite imagery and weather patterns in the Pacific (Raj et al., 2025);
- environmental studies to identify species and measurements in fisheries (Shedrawi et al., 2024);
- Indigenous language revitalisation (Dueck, 2024).

These examples highlight several opportunities in the use of AI with the ability to

- draft litigation, perform contract analysis, predict case outcomes, assist with court proceedings (Tapu & Fa'agau, 2022);
- develop curriculum, draft and design lesson plans, create culturally relevant learning resources (Mhasakar et al., 2025);
- be used for "smart policing" to aid crime prevention, accountability, and de-escalate high-risk situations (Morris, 2023);
- identify weather patterns, identify stranded marine life, and forecast potential threats (Raj et al., 2025); and
- enhance healthcare delivery to Indigenous communities (Khan et al., 2025).

AI, GenAI, and Pacific Knowledge Systems and Data

Current AI systems often reflect the dominant Western, capitalist, and colonial values present in the contexts in which they were developed (Munn, 2024). This inherent bias means predictive analytics in AI often embed colonial narratives that risk perpetuating harmful stereotypes and discrimination (Tapu & Fa'agau, 2022) and perpetuate cultural inaccuracies in training and education models (Mhasakar et al., 2025). A significant concern with GenAI tools is their ability to draw on Pacific knowledge, languages, and data without prior knowledge or consent. This practice can circumvent established protocols and principles and disregard the crucial concept of Pacific data sovereignty. While existing tools might generate content that appears to be from a culturally appropriate perspective, it often lacks cultural and linguistic nuance, dialect, and specific community perspectives. These tools may operate by overlooking principles of data sovereignty relevant to Indigenous and Pacific Peoples. As Dr Tania Wolfgramm suggested in our Moanaroa Talanoa, these technologies are not value free.

"Technologies are not value free … whether the …the taiaha [long wooden weapon], a pou [pillar], a whare [house] … it's embedded with our own values … and all the new technologies including the digital technologies are embedded with the values of the designers … Technologies have to be values-centric … about preservation … about intergenerational wellbeing, about nourishment and respect for each other … not something we consume because someone up in Silicon Valley decided that's what they were going to do."

—Dr Tania Wolfgramm, Moanaroa Talanoa.

Researchers who intend to use GenAI tools that might incorporate Pacific knowledge, data, or languages are urged to carefully consider their obligations and the inherent limitations of these tools. Research needs to be conducted in a manner that upholds Pacific research approaches and priorities, ensuring it is people-centric and benefits and respects the mana of Pacific communities. Though GenAI and AI are evolving at an exponential rate, there is widespread emphasis on using AI in a responsible and ethical manner.

It is essential to ensure ethical use with "humans in control" when leveraging the benefits of AI for research (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2025). Talanoa with Moanaroa members and Pacific academics revealed that while AI is a powerful tool, it is important that it does not replace critical thinking, Indigenous ways of knowing, deep engagement with knowledge, personal interpretation, and the application of learning.

"Critical thinking will be a highly valuable skill in the future … with the increasing use of AI, we risk washing critical thinking out of our thinking processes."

– Moanaroa member, Moanaroa Talanoa

Members also cautioned that AI might provide generic, potentially biased answers, and replace deep learning and research processes.

Feelings among Pacific academics were mixed, seeing opportunities for AI in research as a tool to develop digital literacy and teach students to critically evaluate AI-generated content. In broader Indigenous discussions, AI may become a tool for decolonisation if it is imprinted with Indigenous values, history, legal systems, and culture (Tapu & Fa'agau, 2022).

Core Principles and Values for AI Use in Research

Current efforts to develop and use AI governance frameworks are largely exploratory, which emphasises an urgent need for bespoke ethical guidelines rooted in Pacific ways of knowing and relational ethics. Adapted from global and Pacific-centred frameworks, these principles offer a foundation for ethical AI research and use in Pacific contexts:

- Human rights and justice: AI must uphold human dignity, prevent harm, and promote fairness.
- Relational stewardship: There needs to be accountability throughout the AI lifecycle, embedded with Pacific values of vā, reciprocity, and care.
- Transparency and explainability: Systems should be respectful of local languages and Pacific contexts.
- Human oversight: Researchers and communities need to retain ultimate control and responsibility.
- Sustainability and equity: AI systems should promote long-term environments and social wellbeing for Pacific Peoples.

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Appendix

Appendix

Table 1. Examples of Pacific Methodologies[10]

Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Kakala	Presents a philosophy for teaching, learning and research that acknowledges social relationships and the interconnection of the physical, spiritual, and mental.	Tui kalala (garland making)	Tongan origin. However, the value of reciprocal gifting and relational ethics is shared across Pacific cultures.	Education	Thaman (1992).
Kaupapa Māori	A Māori-led research approach grounded in tikanga, self-determination, and Indigenous knowledge, serving Māori aspirations and community empowerment.	N/A	Research often referred to as for, by, and with Māori.	Education and Māori development	G. Smith (1997); Tuhiwai Smith (1999).
Fa'afaletui	Weaves together knowledges from across community groups through a collaborative process. Considers three key perspectives: the wider and contextual view of authority figures ("top of the mountain" and "top of the tree") and the closer view of those directly affected (the "persons in the canoe").	Fale (Samoan house), tui (weaving)	Samoan origin. Core idea is adaptable but needs to be done with respect for differing cultural contexts	Mental health	Tamasese et al. (1997).
Na'auao framework	Based on the cosmic centre or gut in Hawaiian culture. Draws upon Indigenous ideas about the sacred self as it relates to people, environment and the cosmos.	Na'au (the gut)	Developed for use with native Hawaiian communities.	Education	Meyer (1998).
Tivaevae	A Cook Islands research framework that borrows from the traditions of tivaevae making. This process informs research processes and data analysis, guiding research in culturally responsive ways.	Tivaevae (Cook Island quilt)	Cook Islands origin. Can serve as an adaptable model for other Pacific contexts.	Education	Maua-Hodges (1999)
Vā	Understood as the relational space that mediates peoples' relationships with one another and their environments. Involves the spiritual and social connections between people, context, culture and environment.	N/A	A concept shared across the Pacific.	Education, architecture, digital studies	Wendt (1999).
Talanoa	A relational dialogue process creating a space for honest, respectful conversation to build consensus, particularly in the context of conflict and community decision making. Emphasises speaking from the heart, relational trust, and cultural protocols.	N/A	Applied in Tonga, Fiji, Samoa. Can be applied across the Pacific.	Regional conflict, governance	Halapua (2003).

[10] The methodology table is ordered chronologically by year of publication to reflect the historical development of Pacific research approaches.

Table 1. Examples of Pacific Methodologies

Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Vaka	This framework brings Indigenous values and knowledges to pedagogy. Centres around the metaphor of the vaka. Was the first specifically Niue framework, prompting the development of other Niue models.	Vaka (indigenous Pacific navigational vessel)	Niuean origin.	Education	Nelisi (2004).
Tree of Opportunity	Reimagines Pacific education that is rooted in Pacific cultures, languages, values, and knowledges. Presents a flexible and multifaceted approach to education.	Tree	A Pan-Pacific framework. While deeply rooted in Pacific cultures, it can incorporate external elements.	Education	Pene et al. (2002).
Tauhi vā	Centres on the Tongan concept of nurturing sociospatial ties with kin through reciprocal exchanges and a deep understanding of genealogy and fonua. Allows researchers to gain deeper insights into Tongan practices/culture and avoid misinterpretations.	N/A	Tongan origin. Designed for use with Tongan communities.	General research	Ka'ili (2005).
Talanoa[11] research methodology	Draws upon an oratory tradition and cultural practice across the Pacific. Involves face-to-face exchange of dialogue and stories, allowing for the co-construction of knowledge, breaking down the researcher/participant binary.	N/A	Developed from a Tongan cultural perspective, but a shared practice across the Pacific. Can be used in different Pacific cultural contexts.	Education	Vaioleti (2006).
Fonua	A holistic wellbeing framework. Presents people and environment, and the individual and the collective, as interdependent. Guided by the sacred connection between land, people and all life.	Fonua (land)	Tongan origin. Can inform wider Pacific work but should be adapted to cultural contexts.	Health	Tu'itahi (2007).
Fijian Vanua research framework	Embeds Fijian research in Indigenous world views, knowledges, cultures, and values. Argues that research should inform practice leading to transformation within the researched community, where appropriate.	N/A	Although a Fiji-specific methodology, its underlying values can be applied to other Pacific contexts.	Education	Nabobo-Baba (2008).

[11] There is a growing body of literature that critically engages with talanoa as a research approach, reflecting the evolution of Pacific research. Scholars have explored both its cultural significance and the further development of it its academic application (e.g., Tunufa'i, 2016).

Table 1. Examples of Pacific Methodologies

Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Fonofale	Offers a holistic approach to health in which each aspect of an individual's wellbeing is interconnected	Fale	Samoan origin. Used as a Pan-Pacific model in health and social services.	Health	Pulotu-Endemann, (2009).
Popao model	Tongan framework for mental health service users and professionals. Presents the treatment process as a "journey" towards recovery in which the strengthening of Tongan cultural heritage and identity plays in important role.	Popao (Tongan outrigger canoe)	Tongan origin developed for Tongan research communities.	Mental health	Fotu and Tafa (2009).
Te Vaka Atafaga	A Tokelauan holistic mental health assessment model. Provides an assessment framework using the paopao, or outrigger canoe, to represent the interconnected aspects of a wellbeing.	Popao (Tokelauan outrigger canoe)	Tokelau origin. Developed for use with the Tokelauan community in Aotearoa.	Mental health	Kupa (2009).
Ta Vā	An Indigenous theory of reality, where time and space are continuously intertwined, inseparable and harmonious with one another, and all phenomena exist in perpetual relationships of exchange.	N/A	Draws upon the Tongan concept of ta and vā, but other Pacific cultures share these. Can be applied across the Moana.	Education, art, anthropology, governance	Meyer (1998).
Teu Le Vā	Based upon Samoan concept of teu le vā (to nourish and nurture the vā). Advocates for reciprocal relationships and respect for Pacific social intricacies, nuances and worldviews in education. Aims to create meaningful translations of research to policy.	N/A	Rooted in a Samoan concept but designed as a Pan-Pacific strategy.	Education, policy development	Anae (2010).
Fei'umu	Research approach based on the cultural practice of preparing an umu (earth oven). Emphasises collaborative, respectful, and relational ways of generating and sharing knowledge.	Umu (earth oven)	Tongan origin. Developed for a study on research fatigue among Tongan communities.	Health	Finau et al. (2011).

Table 1. Examples of Pacific Methodologies

Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Founga Ako	An integrated learning framework. Links culture and schooling through Tongan concepts such as ako, 'ofa, 'ilo, poto, fatongia, and fonua. Values each student's cultural identity.	Kakala (flower garland)	Tongan origin. Designed for Tongan students	Education	Vaioleti (2011).
Manulua	Offers a holistic model of education/human development, focusing on the interconnections between self, family and place.	Manulua (ancient kupesi design)	Tongan origin	Education	Vaioleti (2011).
Ula	A Samoan-led research paradigm underpinned by Samoan principles such as fa'aaloalo (respect), alofa (love), and tautua (service). Presents a model or engagement between researcher and participants using the steps of crafting an ula (garland).	Ula (Samoan garland)	Samoan origin and designed for use among Samoan communities.	Education, early childhood education	Sauni (2011).
'Iluvatu	Connects the researcher to the community, positioning Indigenous people as knowledge holders and equal partners in research. Recognises that knowledge is inseparable from vuravura (territory) and the spiritual world.	'Iluvatu (woven Cu'u mat)	Indigenous Fijian origin; developed for use with the Cu'u community.	Education	Naisilisili (2012).
Uputaua approach	Recognises healing as a relational practice that embraces environment, ancestral wisdom and spiritual beliefs. A culturally grounded therapeutic model for engaging with Samoan communities in research and clinical settings.	Faletalimalo (Samoan meeting house)	Samoan origin; developed for use with Samoan communities.	Mental health, counselling	Seiuli (2012).
Nga Vaka o Kainga Tapu cultural framework	A set of eight cultural frameworks developed with Pacific communities and the New Zealand government to address family violence and support Pacific families. Strengths based and grounded in cultural values and practices.	La tapu (sacred canoe sail)	For use with Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Tuvaluan, Tokelauan, Niuean, Cook Island and Kiribati families.	Family violence	Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families (2012).
Toungāue	Toungāue is a Tongan cooperative work model that means that work can be completed faster. This process serves as a metaphor for the research process, in which researcher and research participants work collectively and collaboratively to achieve a common goal.	Toungāue (Tongan collaborative work model)	Tongan origin.	General research	Kalavite (2014)

Table 1. Examples of Pacific Methodologies

Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Tuli	A pedagogical tool that advocates for a decolonised, culturally grounded educational approach. Structured around four interrelated dimensions: knowing ('ilo/iloa), learning (ako/a'o), being (ko au/o a'u), belonging (kainga/'aiga).	Tuli (golden plover)	Conceptually rooted in Samoan and Tongan cosmology; designed for use with students from across Pacific cultures.	Education, sustainability	Koya-Vaka'uta (2013).
Va'atele	Pedagogical framework that likens the journey of Pacific students through school to the building and sailing of a canoe. Argues that a culturally responsive environment that privileges bilingual and biliterate goals will lead to more effective outcomes.	Va'atele (Samoan double-hulled canoe)	Samoan origin.	Education	Si'ilata (2014).
Bu ni Ovalau	Foregrounds nurturing relationships and the connection between people and place. Emphasises people as custodians of the land.	Coconut tree, endemic to one part of Fiji.	For use in Indigenous Fijian communities.	Environment	Lagi (2015).
Tofā'a'anolasi	Provides a framework for investigating educational practices from the perspectives of Samoan research participants. Challenges dominant assumptions that disadvantage Samoan students and subjugate Samoan knowledge.	N/A	Samoan origin. For use with Samoan students, particularly those in the diaspora.	Education	Galuvao (2016).
Ūloa	An Indigenous model of care based on a Tongan communal fishing technique. Seeks to integrate Tongan concepts into mental health services to create a collaborative approach to care.	Ūloa (Tongan communal fishing technique)	Rooted in Tongan culture. Potentially adaptable to other Pacific communities.	Mental health	Vaka (2016).
Kapasa framework	A tool for integrating data and information about Pacific Peoples into the analysis of policy and the policy development process. Provides a set of Pan-Pacific values for policy makers.	Kapasa (compass)	Uses Tongan term (kapasa), intended as a Pan-Pacific framework. Can be used in public or private sector.	Policy	Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2017).

Table 1. Examples of Pacific Methodologies

Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Lili model	Developed for revitalisation of Vagahau Niue. Emphasises values of unity and interconnectedness in the analysis of research data. Ensures that voices of participants are woven into the research project.	Lili (Niuean pandanus mat)	Niuean origin. Developed for Niuean communities.	Language	Tukimata (2017).
Mana Moana	A relational model of care that explores how culturally grounded practices are vital to healing. Presents a repository of 70 Pacific words, prefaced on the belief that words have the power to unlock cultural healing.	N/A	Tongan origin; developed as a Pan-Pacific framework.	Mental health	Mila (2017).
Talaloto	Rooted in Tongan oral tradition. Involves an individual providing a personal testimony of their lived experiences. Aims to generate meaningful data by allowing authentic expression.	N/A	Talaloto is a Tongan practice, but this methodology can be used in other Pacific cultural contexts.	Education	Naufahu (2018).
Tanoa ni Veiqaravi	Framework that integrates Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into Pacific social work, helping students recognise the strengths of their community and challenge potential biases.	Tanoa (traditional Fijian wooden bowl for serving kava)	Fijian origin. Designed for use across the Pacific region.	Social work	Ravulo (2018).
Tapasā	A cultural competency guide for educators engaging with Pacific learners, their parents, families, and communities. Supports teachers in ensuring Pacific students are empowered to achieve their full potential.	Tapasā (Samoan term for compass)	Designed for use with all Pacific learners.	Education	Ministry of Education (2018).
Yavu	A model for Pacific engagement based on strong and reciprocal partnerships. Identifies four principles to apply to the engagement process: "understanding context," "understanding environment," "understanding responsibility" and "teu le vā'."	Yavu (Fijian concept, signifying one's origins and roots to ancestral land and family)	Pan-Pacific policy development and community engagement. Can be used in public and private sector.	Policy development	Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2018).
Hiapo	Niue-specific approach that centres women's voices, knowledge, and lived experience. Uses the hiapo-making process as a guide for research design.	Hiapo (Niuean barkcloth)	Niue-specific research designed for Niuean women.	General research	Pasisi (2020).
		Masi (Fijian tapa cloth)	Fijian origin; developed for use with Fijian women. Can be both Pan-Pacific and regionally specific.	Research centred on Pacific women	Naepi (2019).

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Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Tafatolu	Synthesises contemporary academic approaches with a cultural approach (this could be the integration of a metaphor or proverb). Places importance on the researcher's positioning within the project.	N/A	Samoan origin.	Pastoral care	Pala'amo (2018).
Kanne Lobal framework	A culturally informed, Marshallese pedagogical approach. Recognises the value of Indigenous knowledge in educational practices.	Kanne lobal (Marshallese navigational practice)	For use within Marshallese communities.	Education	Jim et al. (2021).
Ola Lei framework	A wellbeing framework built around Tuvaluan concepts and practices. Identifies four aspects of health—filemuu (harmoniousness), fiafia (happiness), malosi (fitness), and ola leva (longevity)—and the actions/environmental factors that affect them.	Feke (octopus)	Tuvaluan origin and designed specifically for Tuvaluan contexts.	Health	Panapa et al. (2021).
Tok Stori	A Melanesian oral tradition where reflections on issues are undertaken through sharing of stories and experiences. Fosters a safe, relational space where participants can develop mutual understanding by connecting their lived experiences.	N/A	Solomon Islands origin. Designed for use in Melanesian communities.	Education	Sanga et al. (2021).
Vā-Kā	An Oceanic methodology that recognises the connections between Māori and Pacific through whakapapa, language and traditional stories, while still acknowledging our heterogenous identities.	N/A	A Māori–Pacific cross-cultural methodology.	Education	H. Smith and Wolfgramm-Foliaki (2020).
PARcific approach	Draws from the participatory action research framework. Synthesises elements of Kakala and Talanoa to create a methodology for cross-cultural, capacity-building research.	N/A	A Pan-Pacific model for use in cross-cultural contexts.	Health	Rumsey et al. (2022).
Talatalaga	Qualitative research approach that draws from Samoan talatalaga (gatherings for deep analysis of issues). Designed to disentangle issues by trying to understand what lies beneath them.	N/A	Samoan origin but can be replicated across Pacific cultures.	Security in the Pacific	Toelupe Tago (2022).

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Methodology	Key Ideas	Metaphor	Application	Field	Source
Togo Chasm	A Niue-specific adaptation of Fa'afaletui. Replaces the first perspective from the "top of the mountain" with the view from a "coastal cliff-top" to more accurately reflect the Niue landscape.	N/A	Niuean origin; designed and developed for Niuean communities.	Health	Tiakia (2022).
Hihi	Framework for understanding cardiovascular disease and health among Niue women. Consists of five phases: Amaamanakiaga (plan), Oko (collect), Tauteuteaga (prepare), Tui (thread), Fakaalofa (gift with love).	N/A	Niuean origin; designed and developed for Niuean communities.	Health	Matenga-Ikihele (2023).
Matalili	Niuean wellbeing framework. Anchored by three principles—vahā loto-agaagaofania (spirit of care), fakafetuiaga (inclusive relationship), and fakamalolo (empowerment). Guides future Niue-centred research that seeks to enhance health outcomes.	Matalili (woven Niuean pattern)	Niuean origin, developed from the lived experience of Niuean Elders.	Health	Lau et al. (2023).
Soalaupulega Samoa framework	Rooted in Samoan culture and epistemology. Developed to enrich the researcher's "cultural soul" and connect them to their nu'u (village). Designed to find solutions for issues that threaten the wellbeing of a community.	N/A	Deeply rooted in Samoan culture. Can be applied to other Pacific contexts and integrated with other Pacific methodologies.	Education, health, community development	Taleni (2023).
Umu	A Niue-specific methodology where each step of the research process corresponds to the preparing of an umu. Highlights research as a relational and communal practice.	Umu (earth oven)	Niuean origin; adaptable to other Pacific contexts.	Language	Tukimata (2024).
Vakumuni vuku ni vanua	An Indigenous methodology centred on iTaukei perspectives. Emphasises that the knowledge acquired in research should be returned to the community. Addresses the ethical dilemma of knowledge acquisition and its application.	N/A	Fijian origin. For use with Fijian communities.	Sustainability, environment	Ramala & Ruwhiu (2024).
Afa framework	Framework for bilingual learning that interweaves four key aspects: leadership, curriculum, whānau, and stewardship. Provides indicators to guide schools in designing, evaluating, and improving Pacific bilingual programmes.	Afa/kafa (sennit)		Education	Education Review Office (2025).



0800 AUT AUT (0800 288 288)
Auckland University of Technology
Auckland, New Zealand
aut.ac.nz

Enquire now
aut.ac.nz/enquire

MOANAROA PACIFIC RESEARCH NETWORK
moanaroa@aut.ac.nz

CITY CAMPUS
55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

NORTH CAMPUS
90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

SOUTH CAMPUS
640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland