



Corporate Policy

Communication - Conducting Research Regarding City projects, Initiatives, and Services

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| Approved by: | Council | on | April 13, 2004 |
| Report No.: | CL-3-04 | Effective: | April 13, 2004 |
| Reviewed: | April 13, 2012 | Amended: | Dec 12, 2005 |
| Next Review: | 2013 | Note: | Merge in 2012 of Research Ethics into this policy (approved June 24, 2002) |

Purpose:

This policy sets the direction and scope in conducting research activities for the City of Burlington and establishes an ethical code of conduct to be used by all internal and external bodies when conducting research on behalf of the City of Burlington.

Policy Statement:

Conducting Research

- 1) Research activities are appropriate to determine opinion, satisfaction, and needed or desired service levels, prior to and during major capital projects and City initiatives as well as at scheduled intervals for normal service delivery.
- 2) Research is normally a planned activity. Research to be conducted in major City initiatives and programs will be reviewed and determined in the early stages. Planned research will be detailed in the Communications Matters section of Committee and Council reports.
- 3) New issues may arise through the regular course of business. The City may initiate research to help determine public opinion on these new issues. The feasibility of conducting this type of research will take into consideration both staff impact and hard costs. When costs will be incurred that exceed what is already approved in capital and current operational budgets, a report will be brought to Committee and Council for consideration.
- 4) Community Relations (Clerks Department) will provide coordination and advisory services for public opinion research, providing guidance to client departments and ensuring policies and guidelines are respected.



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- 5) Community Relations staff will ensure that Council is notified and informed about research activities that may be of potential interest to the residents of Burlington.
- 6) Any member of council identifying a need for research beyond that recommended by staff will do so through a Council approved staff direction

Research Ethics

Free and Informed Consent can be obtained by various means. These means can include:

- having subjects sign a Letter of Free and Informed Consent,
- by an explanatory letter accompanying a questionnaire, or
- by an introductory statement at the beginning of the questionnaire.

To ensure that potential subjects have the proper information needed to give their Free and Informed Consent the following information must be provided:

- 1) Title or Name of Project and information clearly stating that the individual is being invited to participate in a research project.
- 2) Identification of Researcher and the affiliation with the City of Burlington. Identification shall include contact information (name and contact telephone number).
- 3) Clear research purpose statement.
- 4) Requirements and expected duration of subject's involvement.
- 5) Nature of questions to be asked.
- 6) Statement about how information will be recorded and stored.
- 7) Statement about how subject confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.
- 8) Disclosure of any foreseeable harms, benefits or inconveniences to the subject.
- 9) Statement of assurance that a subject is free not to participate and can withdraw from participation at anytime without fear of repercussions or



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penalties and will be given continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate.

- 10) The possibility of commercialization of research findings, and the presence of any apparent or actual or potential conflict of interest on the part of researchers, their institutions or sponsors.

Following these requirements research may only begin when:

- 1) Prospective subjects, or authorized third parties, have been given the opportunity to give free and informed consent about participation.
- 2) Their free and informed consent has been given and is maintained throughout their participation in the research.
- 3) Free and informed consent must be voluntarily given, without manipulation, undue influence or coercion.
- 4) Researchers shall provide, to prospective subjects or authorized third parties, full and frank disclosure of all information relevant to free and informed consent.
- 5) Throughout the free and informed consent process, the researcher must ensure that prospective subjects are given adequate opportunities to discuss and contemplate their participation.
- 6) Respect for Vulnerable Persons requires that subject to applicable legal requirements, individuals who are not legally competent shall only be asked to become research subjects when:
 - i. the research question can only be addressed using individuals within the identified group(s)
 - ii. free and informed consent will be sought from their authorized representative(s)
 - iii. the research does not expose them to more than minimal risks without the potential for direct benefits for them

To protect **Privacy and Confidentiality** rights, researchers will uphold the highest standards of protection for access, control and dissemination of personal information subject to the provisions of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

- 1) Research participants will be informed of:

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- i. The type of data to be collected
 - ii. The purpose for which the data will be used
 - iii. Limits on the use, disclosure and retention of the data
 - iv. Appropriate safeguards for security and confidentiality
 - v. Any modes of observation (e.g., photographs or videos) or access to information (e.g., sound recordings) in the research that allow identification of particular subjects
 - vi. Any anticipated secondary uses of identifiable data from the research
 - vii. Any anticipated linkage of data gathered in the research with other data about subjects, whether those data are contained in public or personal records
 - viii. Provisions for confidentiality of data resulting from the research
- 2) Information that is disclosed in the context of a professional or research relationship shall be held confidential.
 - 3) Information will only be shared with the subjects free and informed consent.
 - 4) Collected research results will be stored separately from personal identifiable information in order to protect the privacy of participants.
 - i. Personal information should be stored in a locked, secure area
 - 5) Where possible, survey research should be conducted in a way to ensure participant anonymity.
 - 6) When this is not possible research information should be designed in such a way that personal information is replaced with a special code so that personal information and research results can only be linked when necessary.
 - 7) Research should be designed to limit the amount of personal information required to the minimum.
 - 8) Small cells of information should not be reported where specific individuals could be identified.
 - 9) In order to maintain Respect and Justice and Inclusiveness, Where research is designed to survey a number of living research subjects involved in generic activities not specific to identifiable groups, researchers

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shall not exclude prospective or actual research subjects on the basis of culture, religion, race, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sex or age, unless there is a valid reason for doing so. This is in order to maintain respect and justice and inclusiveness.

Scope:

This policy applies to members of staff who are responsible for managing and/or implementing research with members of the public. Community Relations will ensure that staff and departments involved in conducting research are aware of and adhere to this policy. External consultants and researchers who conduct research on behalf of the City of Burlington will be bound by this policy.

Definitions:

For the purpose of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

| Term | Definition |
|--------------------|---|
| Research | a systematic approach to establishing facts, or generalized knowledge and to reach conclusions. For the purposes of this policy, research refers to primary research that is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. |
| Primary research | Information gathered through interaction with other people as research subjects. Primary research can be gathered through one-on-one interviews, focus groups and survey methods. |
| Secondary research | Information about individuals based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works, archival materials or third-party interviews. |
| Research Methods | Research can be conducted through various means and include focus groups, public opinion surveys, telephone surveys, online surveys, personal interviews and polls. Research may be conducted by city staff or through external consulting services. |
| Qualitative | A qualitative approach is widely used to provide insight into people's behaviour, perceptions and opinions. It |

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| Term | Definition |
|-----------------------|--|
| approach | provides more depth than is possible in a survey and will often include focus groups and in-depth individual interviews. |
| Quantitative approach | A quantitative approach is a systematic method of collecting and analyzing information that provides statistically valid results, usually reported in percentages. The most widely used method for administering survey questionnaires is the telephone. |

Principles for Conduction Research:

- 1) Research may be undertaken when there is a need to increase understanding of public opinion on priorities, program delivery, major City initiatives or services.
- 2) This policy will be applied to projects that involve research subjects (people) for which there is direct contact (primary research). This policy does not apply to research that is secondary research.
- 3) This policy will be applied to both qualitative and quantitative research projects.
- 4) Research will be undertaken following established codes of conduct whether it is conducted with members of the public or members of staff.
- 5) Choosing the most appropriate method for conducting research depends on a number of factors:
 - Purpose and objectives;
 - Cost considerations;
 - Time constraints;
 - Level of accuracy required;
 - Sensitivity of the information;
 - Other logistic and project-specific considerations.

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Principles for Research Ethics:

- **Respect For Human Dignity**

The core principle of research ethics is the respect for human dignity. This principle seeks to protect the multiple interests of the person and includes the protection from bodily and psychological harm, and the respect for cultural dignity and integrity.

- **Free And Informed Consent**

Individuals have the right and are assumed to have the capacity to make free and informed decisions.

- **Respect For Vulnerable Persons**

Respect for human dignity entails high ethical obligations towards vulnerable persons - to those whose diminished competence and/or decision-making capacity make them vulnerable. Children, institutionalized persons or others who are vulnerable are entitled, on grounds of human dignity, caring, solidarity and fairness, to special protection against abuse, exploitation or discrimination.

- **Privacy And Confidentiality**

Respect for human dignity also implies respect for privacy and confidentiality. Privacy and confidentiality are fundamental rights of research participants.

- **Minimizing Harm**

It is the researchers' duty to minimize, avoid and in all cases where possible prevent harm to research participants and others. Researchers shall disclose actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest.

- **Respect For Law**

Researchers will follow and obey all existing laws governing the research of humans. All research shall obey and consider the rights of citizens under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

- **Respect For Justice And Inclusiveness**

No segment of the population should be unfairly burdened or discriminated against by any segment of research.

References:



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- Compliance with Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)

Roles:

Accountable:

The Manager of Public Affairs is responsible for the timely review, updating and dissemination of the policy to the functional areas.

Responsible:

Staff who are responsible for managing and /or implementing research with members of the public.