



AASW Guidelines for Research

Introduction

Research is key to the continued development of the theory and knowledge base of social work practice. Research is a key area of social work practice and is one of the six objectives included in the AASW Practice Standards for Social Workers which identifies that “*client needs, organisational goals and social policy are addressed through the application of the social worker’s values, knowledge and skills in the research process*” (AASW, 2003, p 6.).¹

The purpose of the AASW Research Committee is to provide leadership, coordination and strategic focus in research that promotes the mission of the Association. The Research Committee has identified three key areas of focus to achieve this:

1. Regulation: Developing, maintaining and reviewing policies and procedures that enable ethical and robust research.
2. Consultation/Coordination: Providing consultation to individuals, branches and committees and the coordination of research initiatives involving the AASW.
3. Promotion of culture of research: Building linkages and networks in research, positioning the AASW as an important stakeholder in research and contributing to the development of the evidence base for social work practice and policy.

What is the purpose of the guidelines?

The following guidelines have been established to:

- ❖ Provide information to researchers seeking engagement of the AASW in their research; and,
- ❖ Provide advice to branches and staff within the AASW about the process for having research activities approved.

The guidelines also provide information on:

- ❖ The process for applying to the AASW to conduct research that involves the AASW;
- ❖ The criteria for AASW decision-making about research support; and,
- ❖ AASW expectation about reporting of progress and completion of projects with which it is engaged.

Who administers the guidelines?

The Research Committee is a National Committee of the AASW and consists of members of the AASW with a particular interest and expertise in research. Members include academics, researchers and practitioners in the field from across Australia. The Research Committee reports to the Board of Directors, and has a close relationship with the Chief Executive Officer of the AASW. The Research

¹ Australian Association of Social Workers (2003) **Practice Standards for Social Workers**. Australian Association of Social Workers: Canberra



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Committee works in collaboration with the other national committees. The Research Committee meets once a month.

The Research Committee provides consultation, coordination, review applications, monitor progress and report back to AASW.

Who needs to seek approval?

Approval must be sought for all Branch and National research activities. This includes, but is not limited to, internal evaluation or research projects; research projects conducted by undergraduate or post-graduate students; research involving AASW members; and, research undertaken by AASW in collaboration with external agencies or research institutions.

With regards to internal quality assurance projects, the Research Committee provides a consultation role in reviewing the integrity of projects.

How do I get started?

Speak to the Research Committee Secretariat at National Office, Will Mollison, Public Affairs Officer: Telephone (02) 6232 3900, willm@asw.asn.au

Can the AASW provide ethics clearance?

No, it is expected that researchers will arrange their own ethics approval.

The AASW research approval process is complementary to Ethics approval processes that researchers will undertake. The AASW will only give final approval for research when it has been provided with a copy of the formal ethics approval documentation from the sponsoring institution. If you require any assistance please contact the Research Committee Convenor. Details are available on the AASW website.

Ethics approval is important to protect research participants from discomfort, distress or harm and protect their rights and dignity; to safeguard the AASW's reputation for the research that it conducts and/or sponsors; and to minimise the potential for breaches of legislation and for claims of negligence that might be brought against AASW.

What do I need to submit?

Prospective Researchers are required to download the Research Application documentation, available from the AASW website, which details the AASW's requirements for research proposals. Requests for further information can be sought directly from the Research Committee Secretariat.

All completed applications for research approval are to be submitted to the AASW Research Committee through the secretariat based at the National Office. The application will then be referred to the Research Committee who will require a minimum of four weeks to respond.

All Research applications must include the following, as specified in the Research Application Form:

- ❖ A clear outline of the purpose of the research, the research methodology and the proposed role of the AASW;
- ❖ Consent process and forms including participant information sheets and consent forms, where applicable, for the project;



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- ❖ Exemplars of the types of questions that may be posed in data collection and any finalised questionnaires, interview schedules or tests that will be used in the conduct of the research;
- ❖ A copy of an ethics approval, or application for approval from affiliated research institution, government department; and,
- ❖ A brief CV of the principal investigator or student supervisor.

How are the applications approved?

Applicants are reviewed by the Research secretariat and then considered in full by the Research Committee.

Approval will be based on the project's purposefulness, ethical integrity, quality of the research design, the track record of the researchers and organisational considerations.

Specifically, projects will be reviewed against the following criteria in order for approval to be given:

- ❖ consistent with the AASW strategic plan, principles and missions;
- ❖ demonstrate a value to the AASW and/or the Social Work field;
- ❖ have Ethics approval;
- ❖ meet acceptable standards of research design;
- ❖ demonstrate the capacity to undertake and complete the project; and
- ❖ can be supported within the resources and activities of the AASW at the time of application.

Dissemination

The AASW expects acknowledgement of their support in any research publications. Intellectual property, copywrite and publication arrangements will be negotiated on a case by case basis.

Are there any fees?

There is no application fee, however, researchers are expected to make provision in their research budget for costs associated with the AASW's involvement in the research.

Can the AASW provide any support, financial or in-kind, to the project?

Yes. The Research Committee is able to provide limited financial support and in kind support for projects that meet the AASW National strategic priorities.

How is the progress of approved research monitored?

The AASW Research Committee has an overall monitoring, quality assurance and coordinating function in relation to all research projects carried out within the AASW. To this end, the following are required of prospective Researchers:

- ❖ Progress reports be provided to the AASW Research Committee at set intervals (as per the proforma available in the Research Guidelines);



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- ❖ The prospective Researcher advises the AASW Research Committee immediately of any changes which might affect AASW approval of the research project, including changes in research design or methodology or any adverse physical or psychological effects on participants;
- ❖ Advice to the Research Committee if a project is to be discontinued; and,
- ❖ Provision of a final report to AASW Research Committee at the conclusion of the project.

Are there any circumstances in which the AASW will Suspend or Discontinue research that has been approved?

The AASW may withdraw approval for a research project if not satisfied that the project is being conducted in accordance with the guidelines, established process and timelines or ethical standards. The AASW will inform the researcher, the institution or organisation involved, if suspension or discontinuation of the research project is deemed necessary.

Does the AASW have a Complaints Procedure for participants involved in an AASW-approved research project?

Research participants, staff, researchers or other interested persons who have complaints about research being undertaken involving the AASW may contact the AASW National Office:

PO Box 4956
Kingston
ACT 2604
Phone: (02) 6232 3900
Fax: (02) 6230 4399
Email: wilm@aasw.asn.au

The Research Committee requires that all researchers include this contact information in the 'Participant Information Sheet' provided for research participants.