

ALEF Data Ethics Policy

Introduction

As part of our continual work to improve the quality of adult literacy empowerment programmes and to measure, evaluate and communicate their impact, ALEF may ask local implementing partners to assist in gathering data about programme participants. Most commonly, this data-gathering takes the form of participant surveys, and of informal interviews conducted in connection with coaches' observational visits. As the data may include potentially sensitive information related to participants' health, personal and family life, or civic participation, it is extremely important that data is collected and stored with due regard to participants' privacy, integrity and safety.

1 Consent

1.1 Data may only be collected with the **express, informed consent** of the participant.

1.1.1 This means that participation in surveys and interviews is always voluntary. Nobody will be threatened with negative consequences or punishment for non-participation in interviews/surveys or for failing to volunteer information. It will be clearly explained to participants that they can choose not to answer any question for any reason, and that they can choose to end the interview at any time.

1.1.2 "*Express*" means that the person giving information must explicitly state, orally or in writing, that they freely agree to take part in the survey/interview and to information being shared with ALEF. It is never sufficient for the collector to assume consent or make their own judgment about what is in the participants' interest. Since participants in ALEF courses have low levels of literacy and formal education, it is rarely meaningful to provide printed consent forms. In most cases, verbal consent is not only acceptable but preferable.

1.1.3 "*Informed*" means that the collector shall explain to the person providing information as clearly as possible, in simple everyday vocabulary and in a language which they understand, for which purposes the information is being collected and how it will be used. The collector shall ensure to the best of their ability that the person providing information is able to understand this explanation, and that they have the capacity to consent (for instance they are not under duress, inebriated, or otherwise unable to meaningfully consent).

2. Anonymity

2.1 Names of participants or equally identifying information (such as ID numbers or home addresses) should not be collected or recorded except where necessary for project administration, monitoring, or reporting.

2.2 Statistical surveys are conducted anonymously. Survey records which include sensitive information (e.g. concerning health, family life, civic participation) must never include the names of interviewees. Where it is necessary to maintain a record of which individuals have participated in surveys, this information should be stored separately, never shared with third parties, and deleted as soon as no longer required.

2.3 ALEF's partner organisations regularly conduct interviews with participants about their lives and experiences. Participants' stories form an important part of ALEF's communication with members, partners, donors and the public, at the same time being a valuable source of information for research and evaluation.

- 2.3.1 Names of participants providing information may only be recorded with their express, informed consent. Participants shall always have the option to provide information anonymously.
- 2.3.2 Data collectors shall take care to record participants' own words as exactly as possible even in translation, and not to put the words or opinions of others into participants' mouths.
- 2.3.3 In communicating participants' stories via internet and social media, special care will be taken not to include any sensitive or identifying information that might put the person providing information or their family at risk.

3. Data Use and Storage

- 3.1 Information gathered from participants may only be used by ALEF, our partners or our designated agents for the following purposes:
 - Planning, administration or organization of adult literacy empowerment programmes;
 - Developing or improving curricula and learning materials;
 - Monitoring, measuring, evaluating and/or communicating the outcomes and impact of adult literacy empowerment programmes;
 - Conducting scientific research.
- 3.2 Participant data, whether in physical or digital form, must be stored securely in such a way that no unauthorised persons have access to it.
- 3.3 No employee, consultant, advisor, or volunteer will have access to potentially sensitive participant information except that needed to carry out work towards one of the purposes listed above.
- 3.4 Potentially sensitive information about individual participants shall never be shared with or made available to any third parties except in the following cases:
 - Where compelled to do so by law;
 - When the third party is a researcher or evaluator who needs access to the information as part of an evaluation or scientific study approved by ALEF and has agreed to abide by this Data Ethics Policy.

4. Photography

- 4.1 ALEF and partner staff or volunteers may sometimes record photos or video recordings of study groups, individual participants, or local community members. These visual data can make an important contribution to monitoring, evaluating and communicating the outcomes and impact of our work. It is important that recording is carried out with respect for participants' privacy and dignity.
- 4.2 All individuals being photographed or filmed must give express (written or verbal), informed consent. Consent will always be obtained *before* filming/photographing. It is particularly important that individuals understand, before giving consent, that film or photographs may be used on the internet or social media.
- 4.3 Those responsible for such photos or recordings will always aim to portray participants and their communities in a positive light, emphasising their agency and empowerment, and avoiding images which might be interpreted as depicting participants or their communities as abject or pitiable.

- 4.4 In the case of children under 15, both they and their parent or guardian must give consent. Children should not be photographed or filmed unless there is a good reason to do so (eg: to illustrate a story about participants supporting their children's schooling). Children should never be photographed or filmed, even with parental consent, in any situation that might be considered undignified or embarrassing.
- 4.5 Image files should not include the names of any individuals depicted. If this information is needed, it should be recorded and stored separately.

5. Implementation

5.1 The General Secretary shall ensure that:

- 5.1.1 All ALEF employees and volunteers involved in gathering sensitive information about programme participants or with access to this data are familiar with and abide by this Data Ethics Policy.
- 5.1.2 All ALEF partner organisations are familiar with, and agree to abide by, this Data Ethics Policy.
- 5.1.3 Any third-party individuals or organisations involved in data collection in connection with an ALEF programme or given access to potentially sensitive data gathered from ALEF programme participants are familiar with, and agree to abide by, this Data Ethics Policy.
- 5.2 Partner organisations shall ensure that all staff involved in collection of data about programme participants , or with access to this data, are familiar with and abide by this Data Ethics Policy.