

Tostan's Research Policy - Guidelines for Researchers and Students

Tostan values and supports public inquiry into its work. At the same time, we are a non-profit organization whose main goal is to implement our education programs in the mostly rural communities we serve.

The following guidelines are designed to make our priorities explicit, protect participants who choose to participate in research projects, maximize effective research practices, and avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications that divert Tostan staff from the accomplishment of the organization's mission.

Please note the already existing research on Tostan <http://tostan.org/about/tostan-cited-best-practice>

Tostan requires three months' notice as minimum for PhD or grant funded research and has a two-stage process for approval of research that requires cooperation with Tostan -

- 1) Review and acceptance of an initial proposal, and
- 2) Review and acceptance of an approved Human Subjects Application, reviewed by the researcher's Internal Review Board (IRB) or its equivalent.

During the first stage, Tostan staff will review the proposal to decide whether Tostan is in a position to contribute the resources required to carry out the research. During the second stage, Tostan will review the approved IRB proposal to ensure that it is in line with what was initially approved.

Researchers should recognize in their proposals that the majority of Tostan's participants are not literate, especially at the start of Tostan's Community Empowerment Program and most only speak local languages. Tostan currently offers its programs in 22 national languages, so researchers wishing to work with Tostan participants should be prepared to work in and with languages spoken by the local populations. This will most likely require funds for translators and interviewers, as Tostan is unable to provide such services.

Tostan has an ethical obligation to protect the rights of research subjects and participants, some of whom may not be educated about the research process or aware that their participation will lead to public dissemination of their views, stories, or opinions in peer-reviewed journals or books. Our organization does not have a review board for research proposals; thus it is a requirement that any researcher intending to publish articles, books, or thesis/dissertation manuscripts obtain permission from their own IRB or its equivalent.

If the researcher's IRB requires the permission of Tostan to conduct the research, the researcher should send all IRB-ready documents for review by Tostan staff. When all concerns are addressed by Tostan staff and the rights of subjects/participants have been assured, Tostan will write a letter of support for the research.

All documents submitted to IRBs, such as the consent/assent forms and copies of surveys and/or protocols for interviews, need to be in the language of the participants so that they can read, understand, and sign (consent) or listen and agree verbally (assent). The research instruments should also be in the language of the subject/participant. In certain cases, a translator might be required to ensure that the participant/subject understands the general research purpose and its process and how the information will be disseminated. Tostan cannot pay for translators, but it might be able to assist researchers in identifying translators for national languages. We also note that conditions in the field can be challenging.

Exception: Students doing field research for a class or program should provide the same materials required by the IRB, such as research purpose, design, instruments, and consent forms. They will be asked to sign a form agreeing not to publish the material beyond their class or program office. If the researcher wishes feedback, please give the staff enough time to review it (approximately two weeks).

We encourage all researchers to submit their final work on Tostan so it can be highlighted on Tostan's website.

Please email research@tostan.org with any questions.