

Guiding Values

The National Survivor Study (NSS) research team developed a set of interconnected principles (see below) that will shape the research design, methodology and the team's internal processes and practices. While acknowledging that both ethical and practical complexities may require breaking away from this aspirational vision, we strive for these decisions to be conscientiously made and documented. We operationalize each of the principles, as well as monitor and evaluate our progress by regularly checking in about our values at key decision-points and conducting regular reviews of all documentation and study materials.

Equity— We acknowledge that both historical and current systemic injustices have unfairly caused harm to some groups more than others. We will work hard to address and repair these harms through the research we conduct. We are committed to equitable research practices and aim to center and elevate the critical perspectives and expertise of those who have not typically been privileged in trafficking research.

Diversity— We recognize that there are cultural and experiential differences in the experiences of trafficking. We will strive to know more about these experiences in order to strengthen and deepen our understanding of trafficking and to cultivate more equitable research, policies, and responses. As part of this work, we further acknowledge that every person has an intersectional and multi-faceted identity, and that systemic discrimination and privileges can either block or facilitate access to opportunity across multiple aspects of identity.

Inclusion— We assert that inclusivity is a process, not an outcome. Therefore, we will work to reduce barriers to comprehensive and deep participation, for both study participants and the research team, at every stage of the study.

Strengths-based— We acknowledge that research on human trafficking has traditionally centered on only the negative experiences and consequences of trafficking. These approaches contribute to a pathologizing of the issue, reducing survivors and their experiences to a deficit-based narrative. We aim to prioritize a strengths-based approach that affirms the dignity and autonomy of survivors and leverages the strengths inherent in all communities.

Curiosity and Cultural Humility— We acknowledge that policy responses, institutional practices and research on human trafficking has typically framed the issue through a western and racialized lens and has thus, centered whiteness. We will honestly examine our own paradigms, personal beliefs and stereotypes about trafficking, and be sensitive to historical realities. We will listen, learn, be open to criticism and then adjust the work appropriately. Our goal is to center the lived experiences and community wisdom of survivors, thus shifting the historical of anti-trafficking work in the U.S.

Transparency and Accountability— We will be open about any challenges we are experiencing -- soliciting dialogue with colleagues with lived experience, as well as participants, stakeholders with an experience(s) of trafficking, and anti-trafficking partners, on how to improve. We will also work closely with these partners, staying open and responsive to all feedback. If we become aware that our actions have harmed the community or participants, we commit to acknowledge that mistake and create actionable measures to rectify that harm. Further, members of the research team are dedicated to working with each other through this lens.

Solidarity, Partnership and Trust— We acknowledge the traditionally established difference in power between researchers, the communities they study and participants. We will take time to listen to the needs of the community and do our best to better align both participant and researcher resources, skills and agendas to accomplish a common goal or purpose. We will engage in feedback loops with partners to improve our efforts and adjust strategies when needed.

Safety— We acknowledge the long history of research that has intentionally, or unintentionally, traded participant safety for data. We further acknowledge that trafficking research may include risks, including the emotional and physical safety of both participants and the research team. We are committed to developing and implementing strategies to minimize these risks while also working to support agency, so that participants and team members can make decisions for themselves as often as possible. We will be transparent about risks and work to create tangible support before, during, and after the study to best support participants.

Flexibility— In order to prioritize these principles, we will remain flexible. We are prepared to conduct research in a non-linear way, accepting that many revisions to our original plan may be necessary and also anticipating that timelines and resources may change during execution of the study.