



POLICY ON ETHICS, SAFEGUARDING, AND DATA PROTECTION



1.0 Statement of Organizational Commitment

At **Enlightened India Foundation (EIF)**, every program, field survey, and advocacy campaign is built on trust, community consent, and accountability. As a women led organization working directly inside rural villages, households, and schools, we recognize that generating evidence requires a strict ethical duty to the people sharing their lives with us. Our governance framework ensures that our 5 stage operational model, from our **Evidence & Insights Unit** to our **Civic & Governance Lab**, operates under rigorous standards of participant safety, research integrity, and responsible data management.

2.0 Core Operational and Ethical Principles

- **Community Respect & Equity:** We engage with children, young women, educators, and local leaders with complete fairness and respect, regardless of caste, religion, gender, economic status, or disability.
- **Proactive Safeguarding:** We maintain a zero tolerance policy for abuse, exploitation, harassment, or misconduct of any kind across our Learning Hubs, field teams, and partner spaces.
- **Informed & Voluntary Participation:** Every household survey, learning assessment, and civic workshop is strictly voluntary. Participants can decline to answer questions or withdraw at any stage without losing access to EIF programs or community resources.
- **Data Stewardship & Anonymity:** Personal information collected during field research is treated as a trust. We collect only what is necessary, store it securely, and anonymize datasets before publication or presentation to local authorities.
- **Research Integrity & Openness:** Our research outputs are built on verified field data. We publish findings under open access frameworks (CC BY 4.0) to ensure transparency while strictly protecting individual participant identities.
- **Inclusive Local Leadership:** Our field operations are run by local young women who understand front-line realities firsthand, ensuring our methods are culturally grounded and community sensitive
- **Ethical Storytelling & Media:** We only capture and share photographs, videos, or personal narratives of community members with explicit, informed consent. We prioritize the dignity of our participants and never use identifiable media of minors without the direct permission of a parent or guardian.
- **Political Neutrality & Independence:** EIF is a strictly non-partisan, independent organization. We do not engage in electoral politics, endorse political candidates, or align our advocacy or programs with any political party. Our sole focus is the welfare and empowerment of the communities we serve.

3.0 Safeguarding Standards in Field Operations

Given our extensive work with school children, adolescent girls, and rural households, safeguarding is embedded directly into our daily routines:

- **Safe Spaces:** Our Learning Hubs and school sessions are designed to be safe, supportive environments managed by trained local women leads.
- **Conduct Standards:** All EIF field associates, project coordinators, and executive team members operate under a strict code of conduct governing interactions with minors and vulnerable community members.
- **Digital & On Ground Protection:** During digital literacy workshops and field surveys, we actively enforce safety protocols to protect participants' physical and digital well-being.
- **Reporting Mechanisms:** We provide clear, confidential channels for participants, parents, and community members to report any safety or conduct concerns
- **In-Field Consent & Documentation:** Personnel are strictly required to obtain explicit, informed consent prior to capturing any visual media or conducting interviews, applying enhanced, localized protective measures during all interactions with adolescent girls and minors.
- **Personnel Security & Pre-Deployment Readiness:** The physical and psychological safety of our field teams is paramount. Prior to any community engagement, all personnel undergo mandatory training on situational safety and risk mitigation protocols. Furthermore, active field units are required to maintain continuous, real-time connectivity with a designated central staff liaison to ensure immediate support, guidance, and security while operating in off-site or rural locations.

4.0 Research Integrity and Open Evidence Framework

Field research conducted through our Evidence & Insights Unit directly informs public policy advocacy and our curriculum design. To ensure our research serves the public good responsibly:

- **Consent & Assent:** We obtain informed consent from adult participants and parental or guardian consent alongside child assent for all educational diagnostic assessments.
- **Anonymization at Source:** Identifiers such as individual names and exact house numbers are stripped from research data before analysis, report generation, or repository archiving (such as Zenodo / DOI indexing).
- **Objective Reporting:** We report field realities accurately, including systemic gaps in foundational learning, digital access, and local governance, without distorting data for narrative effect.
- **Actionable Return:** We loop research insights back into the community through our Civic & Governance Lab, ensuring data is used to equip local women and Panchayats rather than just remaining in academic reports.

5.0 Privacy & Global Data Protection Standards

EIF collects and manages data gathered through household surveys, digital safety sessions, and institutional partnerships. Our data management practices strictly align with India's **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, while simultaneously adhering to the core tenets of the **EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** and the **UN Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles**. We process all personal data to ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms:

- **Purpose Limitation:** We collect personal data strictly for legitimate programmatic, diagnostic, and research purposes.
- **Minimization:** We gather only the specific data fields required to evaluate program impact and support government dialogue.
- **Access Control:** Field data is restricted to authorized project coordinators and research leads.
- **Storage & Destruction:** Raw field sheets and survey records are stored securely, retained only for necessary verification periods, and permanently deleted or fully anonymized once project loops close.
- **Protection of Minors:** Under the DPDP Act, any individual under the age of 18 is classified as a child. We strictly mandate obtaining verifiable consent from a parent or lawful guardian before processing a minor's personal data. Furthermore, we categorically prohibit any digital tracking, behavioral monitoring, or targeted profiling of children under our care.

6.0 Institutional Partnership Ethics

Whether EIF is collaborating with local community stakeholders, government bodies, or international and academic partners, we do so on the explicit condition that our core ethics, participant privacy, and safeguarding commitments are upheld across all joint activities.

7.0 Grievance Redressal and Reporting Mechanisms

We encourage staff, partners, volunteers, and community members to raise any concerns regarding safeguarding, research ethics, data misuse, or organizational conduct.

Reports are handled confidentially and reviewed through EIF's internal governance team.

Official Contact Channels:

- General & Privacy Inquiries: contact@enlightenedindia.org
- Partnerships & Governance: president@enlightenedindia.org
- Field HQ: Near Norbulingka Temple, Village Sidhpur, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh – 176057

Policy Review: This Ethics, Safeguarding, & Privacy Policy is reviewed annually by the EIF executive team to ensure continuous alignment with legal standards and community needs.