



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

FACTSHEET

PROTECTING IDENTITIES

What does 'protecting identities' mean?

Publishing sensitive information about people can cause them harm and distress. To protect people, it's sometimes necessary to conceal their identity when sharing their stories. When protecting someone's identity, you may need to remove some aspects of their identity from their story. Key elements of someone's identity include:

- 1. Physical identity:** The image of their face and body; and the sound of their voice
- 2. Name:** Their first name, family name and nicknames
- 3. Personal information:** Any identifying information about them, such as their history, religion, language and personal preferences
- 4. Location:** Where they live, work, study and play

Why it's so important

All people – but especially vulnerable people – need to be adequately protected when sharing and publishing their story with your organisation.

Not adequately protecting people can lead to harm. For example, asylum seekers may be targeted for sharing stories about human rights abuses. Children may be targeted by people seeking to abuse them. Or, the personal reputation of people who've shared their stories may be damaged if their stories are misused.

What does the Code say about it?

Ensuring those we work with are protected, especially the most vulnerable, is an integral part of the Code. Members are **expected to have** a policy, statement or guidance document that requires that the collection of information, images and stories does not harm people, and protects their safety and rights.

How can we do this in practice?

Carefully consider a contributor's context before collecting or publishing stories featuring them. When no risk is perceived by your organisation or the people you're documenting, use their original first name when telling their story. This helps them tell their story authentically.

However, always protect people's identities when their safety is at risk. Consider protecting people's identities when sharing stories in the following situations:

1. Ongoing conflict or any communications that relate to involvement in a conflict
2. People who have said something their government or military could believe is offensive
3. Sexual violence
4. Children associated with armed groups
5. People seeking asylum
6. HIV and/or AIDS, TB, Ebola or other serious health conditions.
7. Trafficking
8. Child labour
9. Unaccompanied minors
10. People who are suffering family violence or facing criminal or family law orders and proceedings
11. Those engaged in sex work.

General tips

- **Turn geo-tagging off** when taking photos and videos.
- **Ensure file labels do not reveal identifying information** when sending images electronically, particularly for children.
- **Store information and images safely** (both digital and print versions) and limit access to authorised personnel.
- **Discuss potential risks with contributors** as part of the consent and planning process, and explain options for protecting their identity, e.g. using a pseudonym.
- **Identify and seek to comply with local traditions or restrictions** for reproducing personal images.

Protecting children

For reasons of **child safety**, images and stories of children should not be accompanied by any identifying information. This includes:

- Their full name
- Personal information that may identify their location, e.g. school name, village, full names of family members.

Note that a school uniform or signage can be used to easily identify a child's location.

At times it may not be appropriate to show the face or any other identifying factors of children who are particularly vulnerable or at-risk.

Learn more

ACFID's [child protection guidance materials](#)

DFAT's Child Protection Guidance Note – [Use of images and social media](#)

Privacy Law [factsheet](#)

Storytelling Risks [factsheet](#)

Informed Consent [factsheet](#)

Learn more about [EDMFs](#)