

# **NORDREGIO RESEARCH CODE OF CONDUCT**

**2024**

Nordregio is a Nordic research institute focused on regional development, policy, and planning. We are committed to conducting applied, policy-relevant research and frequently engage with stakeholders to enhance its societal impact and relevance where appropriate. While traditional university-based research may not always prioritise external collaboration, we believe that stakeholder engagement enhances the societal relevance of our work.

As a non-profit research organisation, Nordregio emphasises the importance of research integrity while navigating the complexities that sometimes arise from our collaborative relationships with external partners, stakeholders, and funders. This document clarifies our approach to research integrity, our code of conduct, and the ethical guidelines we follow, ensuring that both our research staff and external partners understand how we fulfil our mission without compromising the integrity of our research.

By outlining these principles, we strive to uphold our research goals while safeguarding the integrity of our staff's work, fostering an environment where innovative and impactful research can thrive.

## **Commitment to Core Values**

At Nordregio, we are committed to honesty, transparency, accountability, and equality in all our operations and interactions, both external and internal. Our work is inspired by the six principles outlined in the Basic Values of Central Government Authorities: democracy, objectivity, rule of law, respect, free formation of opinion, efficacy, and service. While some of these principles are binding requirements—such as upholding objectivity and the rule of law—others serve as guiding ideals that inspire our efforts to contribute to a democratic and well-functioning society.

Although Nordregio operates independently, these principles provide a shared ethical framework that supports impartiality and integrity in public service. While these values are drawn from Swedish public management guidelines, they reflect universal principles that align with Nordregio's commitment to impartiality, integrity, and societal benefit across the Nordic region. All staff are expected to uphold the applicable principles in their professional conduct and be inspired by those that align with Nordregio's mission.

For more information, see the ["Basic Values of Central Government Authorities"](#) by the Swedish Agency for Public Management.

## Research Integrity

At Nordregio, we are guided by the principles of the [“European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity”](#) by ALLEA. These principles preserve research integrity and guide individuals, institutions, and organisations in navigating practical, ethical, and intellectual challenges. While these principles apply to all research, some aspects are particularly relevant to Nordregio's context. In summary:

- Nordregio researchers have full freedom in conducting research and publishing results, within the bounds of professional and societal obligations.
- This freedom carries the responsibility to follow established professional standards, including best practices in data collection, analysis, and ethics.
- Research integrity is balanced by respectful cooperation with external stakeholders.
- External stakeholders recognise the independence of researchers and commit to avoiding actions that undermine research integrity.
- Researchers and stakeholders acknowledge that overly close relationships can create conflicts of interest that may distort research outcomes.

## Practical Guidelines for Implementation

These guidelines help Nordregio researchers and stakeholders preserve research integrity and quality. As demand for evidence-informed policy-making grows, research guiding politicians and public administrators must adhere to core values such as independence, integrity, ethics, curiosity, accountability, transparency, and credibility. Research integrity is key to safeguarding these values, ensuring that research stands up to public scrutiny and serves as a valid, objective basis for policy-making.

Although these guidelines apply to all of Nordregio's research activities, they are especially relevant to projects with close relationships to policymakers. This includes research funded by public authorities that influence topics and methodologies and may involve policymakers as participants or collaborators. In commissioned research, funders may shape the research focus and deliverables, but Nordregio researchers remain responsible for upholding research integrity and professional standards and should be given the room to do so.

For projects funded by national and European research councils, frameworks for research integrity are generally well-established. However, these guidelines can still help clarify roles when engaging with policymakers or when establishing Nordregio's status as an independent applied research centre.

Researchers are encouraged to share these guidelines with external stakeholders at the start of collaborations to clarify roles and prevent misunderstandings or conflicts later in the project.

## **Three Key Stages in the Research Process**

### **a) Setting the Research Agenda**

For projects funded by national and European research councils, the research themes and topics are typically set by the call for proposals. For commissioned research funded by public authorities, there is typically a dialogue between the funding organisation and Nordregio researchers. While funders may set the overall agenda, Nordregio researchers should be involved in defining specific research questions to ensure the project aligns with academic standards and societal relevance.

### **b) Project Design, Methods, and Analysis**

For projects funded by national and European research councils, the project design and methods are usually agreed upon through a contract based on the research proposal. Any fixed parameters for the methodology are outlined in the call. For commissioned research funded by public authorities, there is typically a dialogue between Nordregio researchers and the funding organisation. In these cases, Nordregio researchers retain final decision-making power, while the funding organisation should be meaningfully involved. The level of involvement may vary and should align with fostering participatory collaboration with external stakeholders while addressing specific requests from the funding organisation when possible.

For instance, discussing methodology and case selection with the funder is a valid process that does not compromise research integrity. However, Nordregio researchers must lead the process and make the final decisions to ensure all professional and ethical standards are upheld, safeguarding the quality, credibility, and reliability of the research.

In the analysis phase, researchers maintain full autonomy in interpreting and presenting results. While stakeholders may be invited to validate or comment on drafts, it remains the researcher's decision whether to incorporate these perspectives, based on their relevance and alignment with the research standards and objectives.

### **c) Publication and Dissemination of Results**

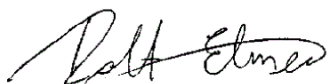
Nordregio researchers have a responsibility to inform research participants, including policymakers, about the intended outputs and dissemination of the research. It is good practice to share near-final drafts of reports or publications with participants and other stakeholders to allow for feedback. For commissioned research, allowing the funding organisation to comment on near-final drafts is a valid process and does not compromise research integrity. However, the final decision regarding the analysis and conclusions remains with Nordregio researchers, ensuring that the integrity and credibility of the research are preserved.

## **Continuous Learning and Guidelines**

At Nordregio, we are committed to fostering an environment of continuous learning and collaboration. Senior research fellows mentor and support junior colleagues, ensuring that knowledge and best practices are shared across the organisation. If researchers encounter questions or concerns regarding research practices or the Nordregio Research Code of Conduct, they should contact the Research Director, who will guide them and take any necessary steps. Additionally, we provide concise guidelines and resources, such as handling sensitive data, to support our researchers in applying the principles outlined in this document. By promoting professional growth and adherence to ethical standards, we ensure our research maintains its high quality, independence, and societal impact.

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