Justice Centred Ethics Guide for Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use **in Research** at Live Educate Transform Society (LET'S)

(Person on laptop with AI open.)

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Created by LET'S Founder-Executive Director
Heather McCain with AI assistance

This living document will continue to evolve as technology changes, our communities guide us towards stronger justice-centred practices, and our team learns, researches, and deepens our understanding of the risks, rights, and responsibilities of using AI.

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Grounded in Disability Justice, Decolonial Practice, and Relational Accountability

Introduction: Our Commitment to Good Relationship with Technology

At Live Educate Transform Society, we approach artificial intelligence as a tool that must serve - not replace - human connection, wisdom, and community care. This guide centres the lived expertise of disabled, neurodivergent, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people while acknowledging the inherently colonial nature of current AI systems. We recognize that AI is neither neutral nor objective; it reflects the values, biases, and power structures of those who create it.

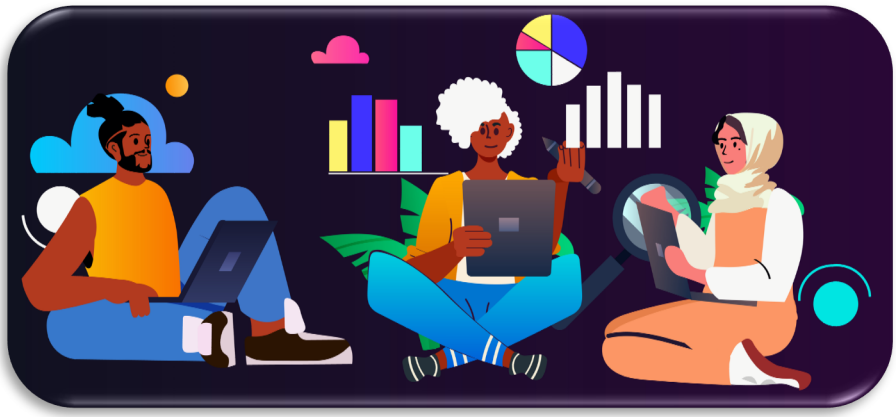
This ethics guide reimagines research integrity through a disability justice lens, recognizing that academic standards have historically privileged certain bodies, minds, and ways of knowing while marginalizing others. Drawing from Live Educate Transform Society's (LET'S) organizational values and the lived expertise of disabled, neurodivergent, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, this framework moves beyond punitive approaches to academic integrity toward a model that honors multiple ways of learning, creating knowledge, and demonstrating understanding.

Our commitment is to use AI intentionally and sparingly, always maintaining human oversight, connection, and dignity. We practice what Indigenous frameworks call relational accountability - understanding that our choices with technology affect not only impact our organizations but also the communities we serve, the workers who create these systems, and the planet itself.

SinsInvalid Disability Justice Principles

At Live Educate Transform Society (LET'S), our work is rooted in 10 Principles of Disability Justice created by Sins Invalid, which understand accessibility, equity, and community care as ongoing, everyday practice rather than a checklist to complete once. Our

guiding principles include centring lived and living expertise, actively challenging and disrupting systems that pathologize or erase disabled, neurodivergent, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people and perspectives, and prioritizing approaches that shift power and resources toward those most impacted. We engage with AI utilizing the same commitments: relational, trauma-informed, and accountable to community, which means moving at the pace of trust, naming harms clearly, and only integrating AI where it can serve collective liberation rather than expanding surveillance, extraction, and/or exclusion.



(3 researchers sitting on ground.)

Critical Tensions

AI tools serve as essential accommodations for many disabled and neurodivergent researchers, yet institutional policies often frame AI use as inherently suspicious. Simultaneously, traditional academic expectations around "standard English" and grammatical perfection disproportionately harm racialized researchers while reflecting colonial linguistic impositions. Beyond these issues, Indigenous researchers face threats to data sovereignty, low-income researchers encounter economic barriers to AI access, first-generation researchers navigate university systems without inherited cultural capital, transgender researchers manage administrative burdens that cisgender peers never face, and researchers with mental health disabilities balance surveillance concerns against support needs.

Guidance + Living Document:

Our policy provides guidance for navigating these complexities while maintaining rigorous ethical standards and centring the communities most impacted by current academic inequities. We cover our values of transparency, fairness, accountability, privacy, security, and protection of equity-denied populations. This is a living document that will evolve as we learn, as technology changes, and as our communities guide us toward more just practices.

How LET'S Approaches AI in Research

At Live Educate Transform Society (LET'S), AI is never neutral or inevitable; it is another place where power, extraction, and resistance show up. AI systems are built within and often reinforce histories of colonization, eugenics, surveillance, ableism, racism, cisheterosexism, sanism, and class violence, which means any "ethics" that pretends AI is neutral will quietly reproduce harm instead of reducing it.

This guide understands "research" broadly: community-led projects, program evaluations, academic studies, organizational learning, and knowledge-sharing work that touch the lives, data, stories, and labour of disabled, neurodivergent, 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Black, racialized, migrant, Mad, poor, and otherwise marginalized communities. Accountability is relational and collective; it is owed to participants, communities, and lands - not only to journals, funders, institutions, or professional associations.

Core Principle

Researchers, practitioners, and institutions remain fully responsible for all research decisions and outputs, including any work that involved AI tools at any stage. AI cannot carry moral responsibility, understand consent, or hold relational accountability; humans and organizations must do that work, and LET'S AI Policy treats AI as an assistive and optional tool rather than a requirement for participation or a replacement for human connection, care, or labour.

Foundational Commitments for Ethical AI Use

Instead of treating "ethics" as a 1-time checklist to get permission and proceed, LET'S starts with interconnected commitments that must be revisited throughout the project. These commitments sit alongside, and often go beyond, formal regulatory requirements such as privacy law, institutional policy, and journal or funder rules.

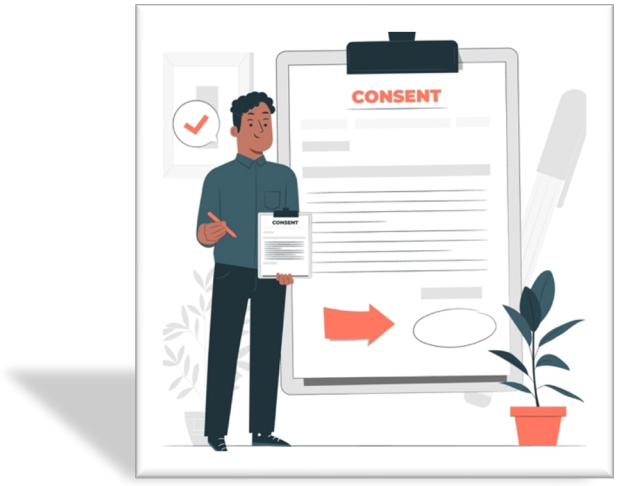
Relational Accountability and Consent

People are collaborators and knowledge-holders, not raw material. Informed consent must be ongoing, accessible, and revisited whenever AI use changes, especially for communities with long histories of research harm, surveillance, and extraction.

This includes clear, low-barrier options to:

- opt out of AI entirely
- withdraw consent later
- place specific limits on how AI can interact with their data, stories, images, or bodies

Consent in LET'S practice is not just a signature; it is a continuing conversation about risk, benefit, control, and comfort with AI involvement.



(A person holding a consent form and pen.)

Lived Expertise as Authority

Research ethics must center those with lived experience as primary knowledge-holders rather than subjects of study. This principle, fundamental to LET'S organizational model, requires that:

- **Community First:** Research about marginalized communities must follow "nothing about us without us" protocols
- **Integral Participation:** Disabled, neurodivergent, Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQIA+ researchers participate in developing institutional AI policies, not merely consult on them after the fact
- **Individual Access Needs:** Accommodation decisions remain with the individual researcher, who understands their own access needs

Academic Integrity Without Assimilation

Maintain rigorous ethical standards while challenging colonial and ableist assumptions embedded in traditional research norms:

- **Linguistic justice**: Grammar and style expectations must not perpetuate racialized harm or privilege "standard English" as inherently superior
- **Process transparency**: Focus on what was learned and how, rather than mandating specific processes that privilege certain cognitive styles
- **Multiple demonstration pathways**: Accept various forms of knowledge presentation that maintain intellectual rigor without requiring identical methods
- **Cultural sovereignty**: Recognize that Indigenous knowledge systems operate on fundamentally different ethical frameworks that must be respected

Intersectional Accountability

Recognize that researchers hold multiple, intersecting identities that compound both marginalization and privilege. Ethical frameworks must account for:

- **Intersecting Barriers:** How disability, race, neurodivergence, language background, socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, and gender identity intersect to create unique barriers
- **Access Friction:** That accommodations for 1 identity might create barriers for another
- **Distinctive Policies:** The importance of individualization over 1-size-fits-all policies
- **Economic Coercion:** "Free" AI tools often extract data as payment, exploiting those with few alternatives

Ethical Accountability of Data and Power

Data Sovereignty and Community Governance

Indigenous communities must maintain sovereignty over their data, knowledge systems, and research practices:

- AI systems trained on Indigenous knowledge without explicit community consent and governance constitute digital colonialism
- OCAP principles (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) extend to AI development and application
- Community-led AI initiatives that serve collective good must be supported over extractive corporate models
- Indigenous data sovereignty must be recognized as a non-negotiable ethical principle

(Data protection symbols.)

Data Care, Privacy, and Non-Extraction

Data related to disabled, neurodivergent, and other marginalized communities is not a free resource for training or testing AI models. Ethical AI use in research requires:

- refusing to upload identifiable, sensitive, or community-governed data into public or commercial tools
- using secure, approved, and explicitly non-training systems where AI is involved
- treating data stewardship as ongoing relational work - guided by community expectations, Indigenous protocols, and disability justice principles

Quality Control with Humility

AI tools can generate confident but false information, including fabricated citations, distorted summaries, and stereotyped interpretations of disability, race, gender, and queerness. Every claim, citation, and interpretation informed by AI must be checked, cross-verified, and situated in both existing literature and community knowledge before being used.

Humility here means assuming that:

- AI will hallucinate, especially in citation-heavy or emerging fields
- AI will misread or flatten the nuance in disability justice, decolonial, and community-based scholarship
- human verification, critical reading, and discussion with community partners are required, not optional

Intellectual Integrity and Voice

AI may assist with structure, clarity, or initial pattern-finding, but it cannot replace reading, thinking, or analysis rooted in lived experience, critical theory, and community wisdom. LET'S AI Policy expects researchers to:

- maintain their own voice, theoretical commitments, and political clarity
- refuse practices that quietly outsource core intellectual labour to AI

- treat AI-generated text or patterns as rough scaffolding at most, not as final analysis

Research that claims to be community-engaged while relying heavily on AI-generated interpretations risks erasing the very voices it says it centres.

How This Shows Up Across the Research Lifecycle

This guide offers concrete, justice-centred practices for different stages of research, always returning to the question: "What does safety, dignity, and agency look like for the people most impacted by this project?"

Design and Literature Review

AI may help brainstorm search terms, organize references, and map possible frameworks, but it must not replace reading, critical thinking, or synthesis.

When AI tools are used to surface literature or frameworks, researchers are expected to:

- actively counter how training data privileges Western, Global North, English-language, and dominant-paradigm scholarship
- deliberately seek out work led by disabled, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, Mad, and otherwise marginalized scholars and communities
- recognize that AI will often deprioritize or miss community-based reports, Indigenous knowledge, and non-traditional outputs
- AI can be part of access support (for example, generating summaries that are then checked against originals), but the core work of understanding and interpreting literature remains human.

Addressing Specific Barriers Across Equity-Denied Populations

Executive Functioning Differences

For neurodivergent researchers with ADHD, autism, or other cognitive disabilities:

- **AI tools support**: Mind mapping, task breakdown, deadline management, drafting organization, focus apps, text-to-speech for review
- **Ethical approach**: AI functions as external executive functioning support, similar to human assistants or organizational coaches
- **Documentation**: "AI-assisted project management tools supported task organization and timeline development, enabling focus on intellectual content"
- **Consideration**: These tools level the playing field rather than provide unfair advantage, as they compensate for neurological differences society created barriers around

(Person focusing on work with magnifying glass.)

Linguistic Justice for Racialized Researchers

For researchers facing disproportionate scrutiny of grammar and academic English:

- **AI tools support**: Grammar checking, style refinement, academic phrase suggestions, translation support for multilingual scholars

- **Ethical approach**: AI reduces linguistic burden imposed by colonial academic standards without changing the student's intellectual contributions
- **Institutional responsibility**: Must examine their own linguistic biases and recognize that "error-free" writing often reflects privileged linguistic backgrounds

Geographical Location (Remote and Rural in Canada)

Researchers in remote and rural communities across Canada, including many Indigenous communities, experience barriers that are fundamentally different from those on or near urban campuses, including:

- **Technology Limitations**: Remote and rural communities often have unreliable, slow, or expensive internet, which limits access to online research materials, AI tools, and real-time participation in classes and research meetings.
- **Additional Labour**: Long, costly, and sometimes unsafe commutes to campus mean that rural and remote researchers spend disproportionate time and energy simply getting to learning spaces, impacting disabled, chronically ill, caregiving, and low-income researchers most.
- **Limited Supports**: Many rural and remote campuses or satellite sites have fewer on-the-ground supports (accessibility services, counselling, writing centres, libraries), forcing researchers to "self-manage" in ways urban researchers are not asked to.
- **Reduction of Barriers**: AI tools, when provided equitably, can help reduce some of these barriers by supporting offline or low bandwidth writing assistance, transcription, translation, summarizing lectures, and organizing research tasks.
- **Economic Equity**: Institutions must not assume researchers can personally pay for AI subscriptions, upgraded devices, or higher data plans; access to AI for rural and remote researchers should be funded and treated as educational infrastructure, not a personal privilege.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Research Sovereignty

For Indigenous researchers navigating academic systems that extract knowledge while marginalizing Indigenous methodologies:

- **AI threats**: AI systems trained on Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge, and oral histories without explicit community consent constitute digital colonization, extracting collective knowledge for corporate profit while offering little benefit to source communities
- **AI opportunities**: When Indigenous communities control AI development, these tools can support language revitalization, traditional ecological knowledge preservation, and community-determined research priorities
- **Ethical framework**: OCAP principles must govern all AI applications involving Indigenous data. Research institutions must recognize collective ownership that doesn't fit colonial intellectual property frameworks
- **Implementation**: Indigenous-led governance committees should review all AI research involving Indigenous peoples, data, or territories. Community engagement must be continuous, not extractive
- **Documentation**: "This research involving Indigenous knowledge systems was conducted under the sovereign authority of [Nation/Community] through their established research governance protocols, with all data remaining under community control per OCAP principles"

First-Generation Researcher Support

For researchers navigating extractive systems without inherited access to institutional knowledge or professional networks, AI can be used as a tool for redistribution rather than advantage.

- **Naming the barriers:** First-generation researchers are structurally excluded from cultural capital, insider knowledge about norms, and intergenerational professional networks that more privileged peers often take for granted.
- **Demystifying the hidden curriculum:** When used critically, AI can help unpack academic jargon, clarify unwritten rules, and offer around-the-clock guidance when institutions fail to provide adequate human support.

- **Bridging gatekept networks:** AI can support research into career paths, suggest potential professional contacts, and help draft outreach messages, offering information and scripts that many non–first-gen researchers receive through family and social networks.
- **Ethical framing:** In a justice context, AI is not an "unfair shortcut" for first-generation researchers; it functions as compensatory social and informational capital, partially countering entrenched inequities rather than creating new privileges.

(Line of 7 university students.)

Challenges and Limitations

Surveillance Capitalism

- Most AI tools operate on surveillance capitalism models, extracting data as payment. This creates particular risks for marginalized communities whose data may be used to further discriminate against them. Community-governed, open-source alternatives remain underdeveloped and underfunded.

Intersectional Complexity

- Researchers hold multiple marginalized identities simultaneously, creating unique barriers that single-axis policies miss. A low-income, transgender, Indigenous student with ADHD faces compounding barriers that require individualized, holistic support rather than segmented accommodations.

Resistance and Backlash

- Institutions and staff may view these guidelines as "lowering standards" or "politicizing" academic integrity. This resistance often reflects unexamined privilege and internalized ableism, racism, and classism. Transformation requires ongoing education, community testimony, and leadership commitment.

Technological Determinism

- AI is not inherently liberatory. Without justice-centred frameworks, AI tools will replicate and amplify existing inequities. These guidelines attempt to shape AI toward equity, but structural transformation requires continued vigilance and community accountability.

(Group of protestors with signs.)

Data collection and participant relationships

Any use of AI in recruitment, transcription, translation, or data management must be:

- clearly disclosed in accessible language, formats, and languages that reflect the communities involved
- nested within consent processes that are culturally, linguistically, and disability-accessible

Community partners and participants should:

- co-design safeguards for how their words, images, bodies, and stories are processed and stored
- set boundaries around what must never enter AI systems, including particular stories, teachings, or community knowledge
- never be screened out by AI as "undesirable" participants
- not have their eligibility or credibility automated by AI

(Colourful word "Stop" with hand being held up in middle of O.)

When AI Should Not Be Used

A justice-centred approach includes naming clear boundaries. There are situations where the ethical choice is to not use AI at all, even if it would be faster, cheaper, or more convenient. LET'S AI Policy names these as "do not use" zones.

When confidentiality and safety cannot be guaranteed

Sensitive health, legal, immigration, or community-governed information should not be processed by public or unvetted AI tools - especially those that retain inputs for training or cannot explain how data is stored and protected.

When AI Would Replace - Not Support - Core Intellectual or Relational Work

Using AI to generate main arguments, research questions, or qualitative interpretations without deep human engagement undermines intellectual integrity and erodes trust.

This is particularly harmful in research involving communities already over-studied and under-respected, where research has often been used to justify policy or clinical harm. In LET'S practice, core thinking, analysis, and interpretation must remain human and accountable.

When Community Protocols, Indigenous Laws, or Data Sovereignty Principles Conflict with AI Use

If a Nation, community, or collective has stated that their data, stories, or knowledge are not to be used in commercial systems or external infrastructures, those protocols must be treated as binding. Compliance with state or institutional rules does not override Indigenous or community law.

In these contexts, "no AI" is not a technical limitation; it is a legal, ethical, and relational commitment.

When You Cannot Explain or Defend AI Outputs

If the research team lacks the expertise, time, or infrastructure to meaningfully verify AI-generated analysis or claims, then using those outputs in decision-making or publication is not ethical.

If you cannot explain why a particular AI-generated theme, model, or phrasing was accepted, you cannot honestly stand behind it. LET'S AI Policy treats this as a clear signal to scale back or stop AI use.

Red Flags for AI Use

Do Not Use AI When:

Confidentiality is at Risk:

- Participant data requires protection that the AI tool cannot guarantee
- Research with undocumented migrants, sex workers, drug users, or criminalized protesters, where re-identification could lead to arrest, detention, deportation, or loss of child custody.
- Studies involving people targeted by police, border services, or child welfare systems, particularly Indigenous, Black, racialized, or street-involved communities whose data has historically been misused for profiling and surveillance.
- Participants who are trans, non-binary, queer, or in non-normative relationships in hostile jurisdictions, where outing someone could lead to family violence, job loss, forced institutionalization, or criminal charges.
- Research on HIV status, reproductive health (including abortions), psychiatric histories, or undocumented disabilities, especially in places where this information can be weaponized by insurers, employers, schools, or the state.
- Work with human rights defenders, land and water protectors, anti-colonial organizers, or whistleblowers whose political activity is monitored; any leak could result in harassment, imprisonment, or intensified surveillance.
- Studies with Indigenous communities, sex worker collectives, mutual aid networks, or disability justice groups where data represents relational, communal, or ceremonial knowledge that must not be copied into corporate systems.
- Research with incarcerated people, people in immigration detention, psychiatric facilities, foster care, or group homes, where staff or authorities could retaliate if critical disclosures become identifiable.

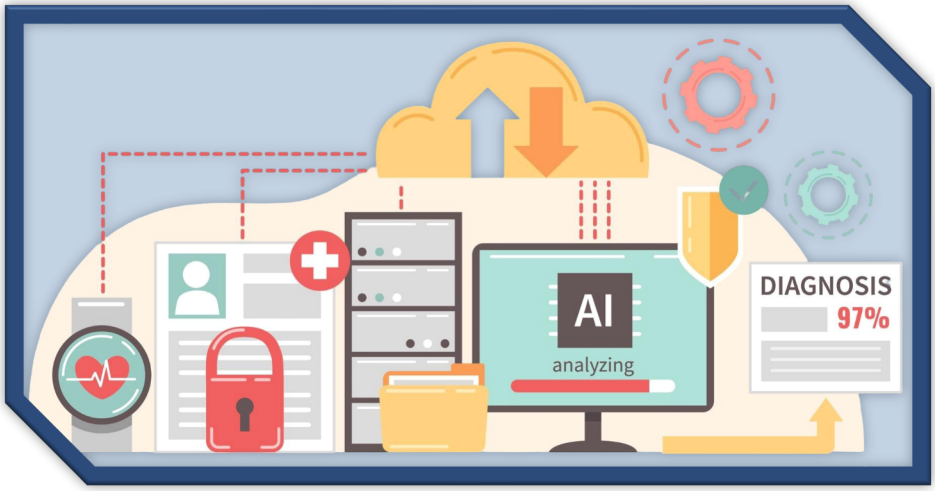
Participant rights would be violated:

- Using participant data without explicit consent for AI processing
- Using AI in ways that would harm vulnerable populations

- AI analysis that diminishes respect for human participants as collaborators

Integrity would be compromised:

- The AI tool is known to produce frequent false information (hallucinations) in your research area
- You would be unable or unwilling to disclose to reviewers/readers that AI was used
- The tool lacks adequate bias testing or fairness safeguards



(Medical illustrations for AI health data.)

Warning Signs of Problematic AI Use:

- Concealing from your supervisor or institution that you used AI
- Hesitating to disclose AI use to peer reviewers or readers
- Being unable to explain or defend the AI's output
- Taking shortcuts, you wouldn't normally take, justified only by AI convenience
- Assuming the AI is more objective or accurate than it actually is
- Feeling that the AI has "made the decision" rather than you using it as a tool

Practical Implementation Steps

(Checklist and pen surrounded by O's an X's.)

During Your Research:

Keep Records
Document when you used AI, what tasks it performed, and what the outputs were

Verify Rigorously
Check all AI-generated citations, analyses, and interpretations

Maintain Intellectual Engagement
Ensure you're doing substantive thinking, not just accepting AI suggestions

Get Consent
For research with people, ensure participants know about and consent to AI use

Monitor for Bias:
Watch for problematic patterns in AI outputs

Conclusion

Using AI in research responsibly requires balancing innovation with integrity. AI tools can genuinely support researchers - helping with literature organization, writing clarity, initial data exploration, and administrative tasks. However, this support must be transparent, carefully validated, and always subject to human intellectual judgment and moral responsibility.

The fundamental principle that should guide all your decisions is simple: **You remain fully accountable for your research.** AI is a tool that serves your research; it does not replace your expertise, judgment, or responsibility.

By following the principles and practices outlined in this guide, you can harness the benefits of AI while maintaining the highest standards of research ethics and integrity. Your commitment to ethical AI use strengthens not only your own research but also the trustworthiness of the broader scientific enterprise.

Positioning This Guide Within LET'S AI Policy

This Ethics Guide for Using AI in Research is a living companion to LET'S AI Policy: it does not stand alone as a technical add-on, but is woven into how LET'S understands research, community relationships, and accountability. It will continue to shift as technologies change, communities share feedback, and more guidance emerges from disability justice organizers, Indigenous-led frameworks, and global ethics bodies.

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, COPE and ICMJE policies, and other international standards provide important baselines around transparency, accountability, and human rights. LET'S builds on these by explicitly centring the people and communities most targeted by ableism, colonialism, racism, cisheterosexism, sanism, and class oppression in decisions about if,

when, and how AI belongs in research, rather than assuming AI must be used and then managing the fallout.

The aim is not to make AI feel safe or harmless, but to:

- make its risks visible and name them plainly
- reduce avoidable harm, especially for those already made most vulnerable by systems of oppression
- support researchers in using AI—when it is used at all—in ways that honour consent, uphold community-defined benefit, and keep responsibility firmly with people and institutions instead of machines

In every project, the guiding questions aligned with LET'S AI Policy are the same: Who is at risk? Who decides? Who benefits? And how can AI, if used, be directed toward collective access and liberation rather than control and extraction?

AI Use Disclosure for Justice Centred Ethics Guide for Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use **in Research** at Live Educate Transform Society

This resource was created original content and assistance from artificial intelligence as follows:

AI Tool(s) Used

Perplexity Pro, Best mode, which uses "Perplexity's own Sonar model and other advanced models like GPT-5.x or Claude Sonnet 4.x, depending on what fits the query best.", accessed January 2026

Purpose and Scope of AI Use:

AI was used to assist in drafting, organizing, and formatting the LET'S Ethics and Integrity Responsibility Guide.

The detailed prompt for this guide described utilizing "LET'S speak", what we've been training our AI in, which includes a commitment to decolonial, anti-oppressive practices, utilizing a disability justice

framework, and neurodiversity-affirming and 2SLGBTQIA+ centred values.

All content generated with AI was reviewed, verified**,** revised, and supplemented by original content by LET'S to align with our mission, contextual knowledge, and community accountability practices.

Human Oversight

All AI was read, reviewed, fact-checked against primary sources, and revised to align with LET'S voice and values by Heather McCain, Founder-Executive Director of Live Educate Transform Society. Original content supplemented this guide, and content was rewritten by Heather to ensure it upholds the ethics and voice of Live Educate Transform Society.

Environmental Consideration

We used AI sparingly for this task, limiting queries to minimize environmental impact. In addition, for the fact-checking, DuckDuckGo search engine was used to avoid AI searches. Google, for example, automatically uses AI for their searches whereas DuckDuckGo allows you to turn that function off, saving on negative environmental impacts.

All images were sourced from FreePik with the "Exclude" AI option turned off.

Feedback Welcome

If you have concerns about our use of AI in this material, please contact Heather McCain at heather@ConnectWithLets.org. We acknowledge that information about AI is constantly evolving, and we are seeking out opportunities to actively learn about AI, its impacts, its abilities, ethical considerations, and the responsibility we have as disability justice advocates.