

## **The Ethics of Innovation and the Development of Innovative Projects**

**Ian Greene<sup>1</sup>**

Previous research has addressed the question of how to anticipate and to evaluate the ethical implications of the results of innovation.<sup>2</sup> This paper, in contrast, addresses the question of what are the basic ethical principles that ought to govern the *development* of innovative public sector programs or policies.

Innovation is by its nature experimental, and therefore there are often risks associated with the development and implementation of innovative programs. Unless serious attention is paid to ethical issues surrounding how innovative public sector programs are created and executed, the result might be a negative reaction by senior administrators and other stakeholders to the entire concept of innovation.

In coming to grips with determining what could usefully serve as the ethical principles to guide the development and implementation of innovative programs, it occurred to us that the development of innovative programs bears some similarities to the process of conducting scientific research. Both processes involve new activities that it is hoped will contribute to human progress, and both processes usually have “champions” whose enthusiasm to achieve particular goals sometimes leads to temptations to take ethical short-cuts. It is possible, therefore, that ethical principles already developed for the conduct of scientific research might suggest appropriate procedures for the development and implementation of innovative programs.

In 1998, the three major public bodies for providing research grants in Canada agreed on a joint statement on ethics involving human subjects. We argue that several of the general principles of this Tri-Council Statement on Ethics can serve as a model for thinking about ethical guidelines for innovation. We are not advocating the development of a formal code of ethics for those developing innovative programs or policies, but rather are advocating a sensitivity to ethical issues on the part of those involved in innovation which we hope will contribute to the enterprise of innovation.

The paper will first explore the meaning of the Tri-Council ethics principles, and will discuss their relevance to the process of innovation in the public sector. Next, we will discuss the relevance of some of these principles by referring specifically to two case studies.

### **Development of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Ethics**

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my appreciation to David Shugarman, who provided me with very helpful comments and suggestions with regard to parts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Eleanor Glor, “Chapter 6: The Ethics of Innovation: Making the Right Choices,” from Eleanor Glor, *The Handbook of Innovation*.

On August 24, 1992, Dr. Valery L. Fabrikant killed four of his colleagues at Concordia University in Montreal over a dispute, amongst other things, about attribution for research findings. A subsequent commission led by former York University President Harry Arthurs found that some of Fabrikant's accusations were justified, and that serious ethical problems in research were not unique to Concordia University. The Fabrikant affair was the major catalyst that prompted the three major public research funding bodies in Canada -- the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC),<sup>3</sup> and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) -- to begin a consultation process in 1994 to develop a common ethics policy statement with regard to research involving human subjects. (Prior to this time, the three funding bodies each had their own ethics guidelines, but these were somewhat sketchy and not always consistent with each other.) In 1998, the joint consultation process culminated in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: "Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans." The three councils adopted this policy as a common standard. All universities and other recipients of funding from the three councils must agree to adhere to the Tri-Council ethics statement. Regular ethics audits of institutions receiving funding from the three councils are conducted by the National Council on Ethics in Human Research.

Practical ethics involves the application of the relevant ethical principle to a particular practice. According to the Tri-Council ethics policy statement, respect for human dignity is the fundamental principle of ethics from which all the other secondary principles are derived. We agree with the Tri-Council's approach, and would argue further that respect for human dignity is also the basic principle of ethics that ought to govern democratic institutions.<sup>4</sup>

The Tri-Council policy argues that "An ethic of research involving human subjects should include two essential components: (1) the selection and achievement of morally acceptable ends, and (2) the morally acceptable means to those ends."<sup>5</sup> Morally acceptable ends ought to be judged according to the likely benefits that will accrue to a project. If we apply the Tri-Council approach to innovative projects, then what must be considered is the likely impact of innovative programs both on the target group or groups of the program, and on other groups that will be affected directly or indirectly by the program. It is important that benefits be distributed with "equal concern and respect"<sup>6</sup> for all potential beneficiaries, in accord with the basic principle of respect for human dignity. For example, it would be unethical for program staff to treat a program as a means to their own personal ends, or to be in a conflict of interest situation. Eleanor Glor argues that in considering the results of innovative projects from an ethical perspective, we should ask first whether the project is carried out with transparency, second, whether it will improve society in general both now and in the distant future, and finally, whether the innovation will "decrease suffering and increase well-being in the short-term and in

---

<sup>3</sup> In June of 2000, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) replaced the MRC as the federal funding agency for health research.

<sup>4</sup> In *Honest Politics* (Toronto, Lorimer, 1997), we referred to this principle as "mutual respect."

<sup>5</sup> Tri-Council Policy Report, 1998, p. i.4, found at: <http://www.sshrc.ca/english/programinfo/policies>.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, 180-2.

the long-term.”<sup>7</sup> To this list might be added what it is hoped will be learned about effective program design through evaluation of the project.

Once ethical questions about the possible or probable outcomes of innovative projects are addressed, it is then necessary consider what principles must be taken into account when developing innovative programs. This paper will deal primarily with the ethics of the development and implementation of innovative projects.

## **The Tri-Council Statement on Ethics**

The ethical principles from the Tri-Council statement that we consider to be relevant to the development of innovative programs are respect for human dignity, respect for full disclosure of goals and agenda, respect for vulnerable persons, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for justice and inclusiveness, the balancing harms and benefits, and minimizing harm. We will consider each of these in turn.

### **1. Respect for Human Dignity:**

The Tri-Council Ethics Statement explains that “the cardinal principle of modern research ethics ... is respect for human dignity. This principle aspires to protecting the multiple and interdependent interests of the person -- from bodily to psychological to cultural integrity.”<sup>8</sup> This principle means that it is “unacceptable to treat persons solely as means (mere objects or things), because doing so fails to respect their intrinsic human dignity and thus impoverishes all of humanity. Second ... the welfare and integrity of the individual remain paramount....”

We argue that this approach applies equally to innovation: the central principle ought to be respect for human dignity. It is important always to remember that “stakeholders,” “target groups,” “clients” and “sponsors” are all human beings all equally deserving of respect for their integrity and welfare.

### **2. Respect for full disclosure of goals and agenda.**

The second principle in the Tri-Council statement is “Respect for Free and Informed Consent.”<sup>9</sup> The parallel principle for the development of innovative programs is respect for full disclosure of the goals and agenda of innovative projects.

The literature on public administration is full of references to the need for clear statements of the goals and objectives of programs. One reason for this is that without clear statements of the purposes of programs, they cannot be evaluated properly.<sup>10</sup> Another reason is the ethical need to deal with people honestly. If an innovative program is billed solely as a program designed to,

---

<sup>7</sup> Glor, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> “Tri Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans,” I-5.

<sup>9</sup> “Individuals are generally presumed to have the capacity and right to make free and informed decisions. Respect for persons thus means respecting the exercise of individual consent.” *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Handbook of Program Evaluation*

for example, improve the quality of life of the physically handicapped, while a major purpose of the innovation is the cost savings, that billing is not ethically sound. The reduction of unnecessary expenditures is a legitimate goal, but if that goal is not accurately described, then there is an ethical issue is raised.

### **3. Respect for Vulnerable Persons:**

The ethical obligation of equality, stemming as it does from the principle of respect for human dignity, does not mean rigidly equal treatment. Rather, it means providing equal concern and respect, or taking into account an individual's unique situation when determining how to provide an equal measure of respect. Vulnerable persons require special consideration. According to the Tri-Council statement:

Respect for human dignity entails high ethical obligations towards vulnerable persons -- to those whose diminished competence and/or decision-making capacity make them vulnerable. Children, institutionalized persons or others who are vulnerable are entitled, on grounds of human dignity, caring and fairness, to special protection against abuse, exploitation or discrimination. Ethical obligations to vulnerable individuals in the research enterprise will often translate into special procedures to protect their interests.

Those responsible for developing innovative programs need to ask whether vulnerable persons would be affected by the program, and if so, whether appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that they are treated fairly. For example, an innovative program to provide alternative treatment to young offenders requires would require careful consideration to ensure that the young offenders who will participate will be brought to understand their legal rights and obligations to the full extent of their capabilities. A different strategy would be required to accomplish this goal with teenagers than with adults.

### **4. Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality:**

Respect for privacy and confidentiality are fundamentals of most government programs, whether or not they are innovative. Standards for privacy "help to protect mental or psychological integrity."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there are always temptations to brush aside privacy or confidentiality safeguards because of expediency, or an excess of enthusiasm to achieve particular ends.<sup>12</sup> For example, in an attempt to publicize the success of an innovative program to help social welfare recipients find steady employment, a provincial cabinet minister might say too much, and reveal the names of program participants without their permission.

### **5. Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness:**

We can adapt the Tri-Council ethics statement to the field of innovation as follows:

---

<sup>11</sup> Tri-Council Ethics Statement, I-5.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see the annual reports of the federal Privacy Commissioner.

Justice connotes fairness and equity, and concerns the distribution of benefits and burdens [of innovative programs]. On the one hand, distributive justice means that no segment of the population should be unfairly burdened with the harms of [innovation]. It thus imposes particular obligations toward individuals who are vulnerable and unable to protect their own interests in order to ensure that they are not exploited for the advancement of [innovative program objectives]. On the other hand, distributive justice also imposes duties neither to neglect nor discriminate against individuals and groups who may benefit from advances in [program design].<sup>13</sup>

It is tempting, when developing innovative programs, to pilot test them on groups that represent the fewest obstacles to successful implementation. From an ethical perspective, we need to ask whether such choices might result in unequal exposure of similar populations to possible risks. At the same time, we need to ask whether an innovative program might result in significant benefits to some individuals or groups that will not be reasonably available to others. For example, pilot projects to test the unified family court concept became permanent fixtures of the justice system for a number of years, thus providing significant benefits to residents of the cities hosting the pilot projects and denying the same benefits to other Canadians. Distributive justice would augur not for the abolition of the pilot projects, but for a speedier implementation of the concept to the entire country once the results of the pilot projects indicated a large measure of success.

#### **6. Balancing Harms and Benefits:**

In their enthusiasm to innovate, government officials may be reluctant to ask what might be the harmful effects of the proposed new program. For example, a new program designed to reduce the recidivism rates of violent offenders by arranging for them to meet their victims might occasionally result in harmful psychological consequences for a victim, even when the victim consents to the process. Innovators need to play the devil's advocate in order to anticipate potential harmful effects of innovative programs, and ask whether in the worst case scenario, it may be that harms might outweigh benefits. According to the Tri-Council Ethics Statement, "the foreseeable harms should not outweigh anticipated benefits."<sup>14</sup> All potential harmful effects need to be considered, including some that might not be obvious at first glance. For example, the potential for "harming of the reputations of organizations or individuals"<sup>15</sup> must be taken into account.

#### **7. Minimizing Harm:**

Even if there appears to be a favourable harms-benefits balance, potential harms of innovative programs need to be anticipated and the risk of harm must be reduced as much as possible.

---

<sup>13</sup> Tri-Council ethics statement, I-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

[S]ubjects must not be subjected to unnecessary risks of harm, and their participation in [a project] must be essential to achieving ... societally important aims that cannot be realized without [their] participation ....<sup>16</sup>

It would be ethically wrong to trick “a person into participating by promising false benefits.”<sup>17</sup>

## Case Studies

### *Certificate in Practical Ethics*

The first case study we would like to consider is the development of York University’s undergraduate Certificate in Practical Ethics. The certificate was first proposed in the mid-1980s. Like many innovative proposals -- especially those involving ethics -- it ran into considerable opposition, and it was not until the mid-1990s that the certificate program received enough support from relevant stakeholders to gain approval by the Senate. It was tempting for the developers of this innovative program to take “unethical short-cuts” around the opposition in order to get the program approved more expeditiously, but it would, of course, be unacceptable for a program on ethics to be developed in an unethical fashion.

Although the Certificate was developed prior to the development of the Tri-Council Ethics Statement, respect for human dignity and its implications were concepts that the proponents of the Certificate were quite familiar with. Conscious ethical choices needed to be made along the road to the approval of the Certificate, and the seven Tri-Council principles discussed above are useful in organizing a discussion of the kinds of choices that had to be made.

#### **1. Respect for Human Dignity:**

The traditional friction between philosophers interested in pursuing pure or theoretical ethics, and those dedicated to the possible practical applications of the study of ethics, was a major source of friction in developing the new program. Two decades ago, theoretical ethicists often considered the study of “practical” ethics to be unacademic, and not worthy of pursuit at the university level. Another proposal for an undergraduate program in practical ethics had successfully been derailed ten years earlier by the “pure” ethicists, who were able to secure support both at the departmental and faculty level for their opposition to a “practical” ethics initiative.

For those pursuing the Certificate initiative, it might have been tempting to do an end-run around the anticipated opposition of the pure ethicists by adopting measures such as not giving them notice of the development of the new proposal, or ensuring that there would always be enough persons supporting the proposal at relevant committee and council meetings to approve the Certificate proposal in spite of any opposition. Such tactics, however, would have contradicted the ethical imperative of respect for human dignity. Therefore, a strategy was developed to inform potential critics among the “pure ethicists” of the Certificate proposal, and attempt to take

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., I-5.

into account any suggestions they might have for making the Certificate sound from a theoretical perspective. The result of this strategy was a compulsory system of advising students interested in pursuing the practical ethics certificate so that both their course work and research would be theoretically coherent. This innovation not only strengthened the proposal significantly, but also served as a model for the development of subsequent certificate programs in other areas.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Respect for full disclosure of goals and agenda

Those pursuing the Certificate proposal saw the Certificate as the first in a series of new initiatives to strengthen the pursuit of practical ethics at York University. Future initiatives might include the development of a research centre for practical ethics, and a graduate program in practical ethics. Those proposing the certificate had to choose between being open about the role they saw the Certificate playing with regard to larger goals for the pursuit of practical ethics -- and leaving themselves open to charges of “empire building” -- or refusing to discuss the broader goals in order to help get the Certificate approved more expeditiously. The certificate’s “champions” chose to be open about their broad agenda, with the result that Certificate proposal was delayed in various committees while the implications of the broader agenda could be considered. In fact, a new organized research unit, the Centre for Practical Ethics, became a reality before the Certificate proposal was eventually approved.<sup>19</sup> Although refusing to discuss the broader agenda might have speeded up the approval of the Certificate, such a strategy could ultimately have thrown monkey wrenches into the broader agenda itself.

## 3. Respect for Vulnerable Persons

One of the objections raised to the Certificate proposal by student representatives to various committees was that by reserving spaces in particular courses in practical ethics for Certificate students, non-Certificate students wishing to take these courses might be squeezed out by enrolment pressures. This was a legitimate concern, and led to a commitment to monitor the enrolments in the courses required for the Certificate to ensure that non-Certificate students would not be systematically disadvantaged by the impact of the Certificate.

## 4. Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality

---

<sup>18</sup> For example, the Certificate in Business Fundamentals and the Certificate in Nonprofit Management, both of which were developed in the late 1990s, copied some of the innovations developed by the Certificate in Practical Ethics.

<sup>19</sup> The Centre for Practical Ethics itself decided to innovate in the late 1990s by developing an Ethics Consulting Service. In the summer of 1999, an opportunity became available for the nascent consulting service because of the Supreme Court case of *Baker v Canada*, in which the Court granted the appeal of a woman who had been denied an exemption on humanitarian and compassionate grounds from the normal requirements of applying for landed status. In its decision the Court criticised the judgement and the procedures followed by the Immigration Officer who originally denied the application. In mid-October, 2000, the Centre’s Director, David Shugarman, was approached by principals from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration who were involved *inter alia* with education and training. They indicated they were interested in the Centre organising a review of the *Baker* decision and an enrichment exercise for their Citizenship and Immigration Counsellors charged with dealing with applications on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. They stated that the Supreme Court’s decision in *Baker* had caused the Department to review its Officers’ decision-making procedures, their attention to the role and importance of ethical decision making, Canadian values and the interests of affected children when dealing with such applications.

Some of those who had concerns about the original Certificate proposal approached the proposal's "champions" with their concerns, but because of their positions, wished to remain anonymous. The proponents of the proposal made every effort to respect these wishes while addressing the concerns raised by these persons.

#### 5. Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness

As a result, a one-day workshop entitled *Baker and Beyond: The New Context for CIC Counsellors' Decisions*" was organized for CIC counsellors charged with the responsibility of responding to applications on humanitarian and compassionate grounds in late February of 2001. Its goal was to help these Officers develop a more comprehensive understanding of how *Baker v Canada* and other related judgements should affect their decision-making responsibilities. The workshop also aimed to have Counsellors consider components of an operational template or a series of signposts for decision making. Amongst the ethical issues raised in the planning process for the workshop, perhaps the most significant was respect for differing expectations and expressions of problem areas that various participants wanted addressed. Prior to the workshop, meetings were held involving senior, middle-ranking and junior staff in the CIC, and faculty members at the Centre, to discuss the outcome goals for the workshop. It became evident that there were differing, if not conflicting emphases and anxieties being expressed by different stakeholders. It was felt that only by dealing with these potentially conflicting expressions of concern honestly could a workable plan for a successful workshop be operationalized. This strategy appeared to succeed, as the workshop was evaluated very positively by nearly all participants. A number mentioned that the respect, praise and support shown to them by the panelists made them feel proud of the work they did, and helped them to gain a better grasp of ethical considerations. Had it not been for the difficult process of dealing openly with conflicting goals and agendas, we doubt whether the workshop would have been as successful. See David P. Shugarman, "The Preparation and Delivery of an Ethics Education Workshop

For a Canadian Government Department," Presentation to the Teaching Ethics Conference, April 7,8 2001, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia (Centre for Practical Ethics, York University, mimeo.)

There is always the danger that a new interdisciplinary program like the Certificate might be inadvertently billed as the preserve of the disciplines primarily involved in developing the Certificate, that is, philosophy and political science. Students who might benefit from the certificate in disciplines as diverse as psychology, physical education, and business might, through neglect, be excluded from the potential benefits of the certificate. As a result, every effort was made, both during the development and implementation stage, to involve faculty and students from as broad a range of disciplines as possible. Again, this effort meant that the approval process took longer, but the Certificate's proponents considered the additional wait worth the potential results in terms of inclusiveness.

#### 6. Balancing Harms and Benefits, and 7. Minimizing Harm

Potential harms that might result from the Certificate, if implemented, were considered not only because of concerns raised by opponents to the Certificate, but also as a result of brain-storming sessions by proponents of the Certificate. We would like to mention one potential harm in

particular -- the possibility that students graduating with the Certificate might present themselves to potential employers as more “expert” in practical ethics than they really were. The proponents considered this possibility as a serious risk, and therefore built both into the Certificate’s official description, and into the student advising component, were disclaimers to try to prevent the possible miss-use of the Certificate.

In conclusion, the way in which the ethical issues raised in the process of development of the Certificate in Practical Ethics were handled resulted in the process of approval for the Certificate taking one or two years longer than the Certificate’s proponents would have liked. However, the result of a slower but more ethically sound process was near unanimous support for the Certificate when it was eventually approved, and a much stronger proposal than the one originally submitted.

### ***Participative Planning in Social Services***

The second case study we will refer to is the an innovative participative planning project that occurred in the South Region of Alberta Social Services in the mid-1980s. Like the first case study, because of the innovative nature of this project it encountered considerable opposition. And like the first case study, it occurred prior to the development of the Tri-Council Ethics Statement. However, two of the key participants<sup>20</sup> in the planning process were very familiar with research ethics, and therefore took an ethical approach to the innovation.

In 1984, the Deputy Minister of Social Services for Alberta, Mike Ozerkevich, chose the South Region of the province for an innovative participative community planning project that involved Alberta Social Services, more than twenty privately-run child welfare organizations or service providers, a survey of clients, and related community agencies such as schools and police forces.<sup>21</sup> Most of the recommendations of this planning project, including reallocations in a one-million dollar budget, were implemented in 1985. Thirteen years later, in 1998, research indicated that most of the changes that were implemented remained in effect and were perceived by service providers as continuing to have a positive impact.

The mandate of the process was to review the child welfare resources in the region, and to make innovative recommendations regarding the re-allocation of existing funds to better serve the needs of children.<sup>22</sup> Ozerkevich stipulated that all relevant private and public agencies must be invited to participate; as a result, forty social services agencies (government and private) were represented on the steering group for the process, and an additional 30 agencies were included in a survey of heads of child welfare agencies. As well, the process had to involve a strong research component. It was not easy to involve so many groups in an innovative planning process, especially in a situation in which, over the years, a certain amount of distrust had built

---

<sup>20</sup> They were Peter Gabor, who has since authored a guide to program evaluation in the social services that includes a chapter on ethics, and Ian Greene, who is co-author, with David Shugarman, of *Honest Politics*.

<sup>21</sup> This case study is more fully described in Ian Greene and Peter Gabor, “Factors for success in participative planning,” which will be published in 2002 a case study in the *Innovation Journal*.

<sup>22</sup> Child Welfare Planning Committee, “Child Welfare Planning Report for Alberta Social Services and Community Health, South Region,” mimeo., April, 1985.

up between government and private agencies, and between some of the private agencies. Nevertheless, the process resulted in research that included interviews with nearly 100 children in care, their social workers, child care workers, and where relevant their parents and/or foster parents. A report resulted that made sixteen major recommendations, three-quarters of which were fully or partly implemented by the government. The process was judged, by most participants and clients, to have been a quite successful. Part of the reason for the success was a sensitivity to ethical issues. We will consider these issues under the headings developed through the Tri-Council Ethics Statement.

### 1. Respect for Human Dignity

Respect for human dignity was front and centre of the planning process, partly because of the sensitivity of several of the key participants to ethical concerns, and partly because some of the child welfare agencies viewed other agencies with suspicion -- as running programs more to provide a source of employment to their staff than to serve the basic needs of children. Thus, the planning process stressed the welfare of the children as an “end in itself,” and possible attempts to use the children as a “means to an end” -- such as to attempt to enrich some programs -- were flagged and dismissed.

### 2. Respect for full disclosure of goals and agenda

To begin with, both private and public agencies viewed the planning process suggested by the Deputy Minister with suspicion because of possible hidden agendas. For example, there were suspicions that the government’s real agenda was to use the exercise to cut costs, or that government agencies would use the process to take work from some of the private agencies. The willingness of the Deputy Minister to attend an early meeting of the steering committee to address these concerns, and his personal guarantee that the planning process would not result in a decrease of the global budget for child welfare in the region and that the Minister was open to all innovations that were backed both by a substantial number of agencies and by research, resulted in the creation of the level of trust necessary for pursuit of the project.

As well, the research component of the project ensured that no one would be interviewed without informed consent in writing. This was relatively straightforward with regard to the adults being interviewed, but the question of how to obtain informed consent from children aged nine to seventeen was a difficult one to resolve. It was important to provide the children with an description of the goals of the project and privacy guarantees that they could understand, and to ensure that they felt free not to participate if they preferred not to. Several different approaches were considered before the research team felt confident that real informed consent could be obtained from the children.

### 3. Respect for Vulnerable Persons

Children are vulnerable. Their special needs had to be addressed both with regard to their participation in the research component of the project, and with regard to proposed innovations the intent of which would provide more effective child welfare services in the future. With regard to the research component, interviews with children receiving child welfare services were conducted by social work students who already had extensive child welfare treatment, and who received intensive additional training intended to help them interview children in a way that

would not result in trauma for them, and which would also produce results that were as accurate as possible. With regard to the proposed innovations in child welfare services, our opinion is that the involvement of all child welfare agencies in the planning process created a series of “checks and balances” to ensure that the best interests of the children remained paramount, rather than the institutional needs of particular agencies.

#### 4. Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality

The research component of the project dealt with confidential matters, and privacy was mandated by relevant child welfare legislation. A number of steps needed to be taken to ensure that the analysis of aggregate data would not inadvertently result in a leak of confidential information. These goals were addressed partly through procedures designed to prevent the matching of particular names with the data,<sup>23</sup> and partly through oaths of confidentiality taken by all members of the research team. As well, the writers of the final report were sensitive to the way in which they presented the data so that confidences would not be inadvertently revealed or suggested.

#### 5. Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness

The research component of the project would have been much more straightforward if a decision had been taken not to interview children receiving child welfare services. Several members of the steering committee, in fact, suggested that children not be interviewed both because of the problems raised in including them, and because the children were presumed not to have views that could benefit the planning project. In the end, it was decided to include the children out of respect for what their particular perspectives could contribute to the planning process.<sup>24</sup> Without the interviews with the children, a great deal of essential information would have been lost, such as the extent to which the children and their care givers differed about the reasons for their involvement with social services.<sup>25</sup>

#### 6. Balancing Harms and Benefits, and 7. Minimizing Harm

The steering committee considered a number of factors that might result in potential harms outweighing potential benefits. Services might be re-organized in a way that would make them less effective. Worse still, the process of gathering information from children and their often troubled families might result in even more personal trauma. A major part of the planning process was to attempt to consider all possible potential harmful results, and to take steps to minimize the risk of these as much as possible.

---

<sup>23</sup> The procedures were so stringent that at one point, the retrieval of a back-up data file after the primary file was accidentally destroyed proved nearly impossible.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in a parallel planning process concerning services for the handicapped, mentally handicapped persons were interviewed as part of the planning process.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Gabor and Ian Greene, “Views from the inside: young people’s perceptions of residential treatment,” VII (1991) *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*, 6-19.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has considered the ethical issues that need to be taken into account when planning and implementing an innovative program. We suggested that the ethical guidelines developed by Canada's three public research funding agencies, known as the Tri-Council Statement on Ethics, might serve as a model for thinking about relevant ethical principles for innovation. We considered two case studies in which we considered the ethical implications of seven of the Tri-Council guidelines, and it appears that the guidelines can serve as a useful ethical guide when planning and implementing an innovative program.

Because innovations are usually controversial and even divisive, it is important to pay attention to ethical issues. Without careful consideration of these issues -- a process which might well result in slowing down the process of innovation -- the innovation might risk failure. It is not always easy to honour respect for human dignity, but it is well worth the effort.

## **About the Author**

*Ian Greene*, University Professor of Public Policy and Administration, York University, Toronto, Canada Email <http://www.yorku.ca/igreene>