Exercise 5: Identifying Potential Harms and Benefits

Discussion Prompts

Use the prompts below to guide your group's conversation.
You can focus on a real research project or make one up for this exercise.

➔ **If you are an oversight committee member,** consider how you might use or adapt these questions in your review process—for example, by including them in application materials for researchers.

Note: You can use this exercise at different stages of your work.

- If you're in the **planning** or **analysis** stage of your project, think about the possible best- and worst-case outcomes of your *potential findings* (based on your research question, etc.)

- If you've **already completed** your study, focus on the best- and worst-case scenarios of *communicating your specific findings*.

Best–Case Scenarios

1. **Below is a list of potential benefits from research.** In the best case scenario, which could you imagine being a result of this research project?

   Are there any benefits you can think of that are NOT on this list?

   My research…

   a. Could benefit my career or reputation as a researcher

   b. Could benefit the general public

   c. Could benefit one or more specific communities

   d. Could benefit people who are less privileged (economically and/or socially)

   e. Could improve scientific understanding of a problem

    f.   Could better understand the roles of genetics, environment, or social factors in an issue

    g.   Could find or improve treatment for a health issue

    h.   Could improve clinical care for a health issue

    i.   Could guide public policy or law making

    j.   Could respond to a priority raised by one or more communities

    k.   Could build trust in science or scientific institutions

2. **Write a brief statement that explains the potential best-case scenarios you identified.** Consider:

    a.   Who is the community(ies) that might benefit?

    b.   In what way(s) could they benefit?

    c.   What would need to happen for this benefit to actually take place?

Worst-Case Scenarios

3. **Below is a list of potential harms from research.** In the worst case scenario, which could you imagine being a result of this research project?

Are there any harms you can think of that are NOT on this list?

My research…

    a.   Could harm my career or reputation as a researcher

    b.   Could stigmatize or stereotype certain marginalized group(s)

    c.   Could benefit more privileged people (economically and/or socially) at the expense of people who are less privileged

    d.   Could put participant privacy or data security at risk

    e.   Oversimplifies a complex problem

    f.   Focuses too much on genetics while ignoring other factors

g. Leaves out the role of social factors in health (like income, housing, or education)

h. Leaves out the role of environmental factors in health (like pollution or climate)

i. Clashes with how a group sees or defines itself

j. May go against what participants originally agreed to when they gave consent

k. May reduce trust in science or scientific institutions

l. Might be misinterpreted by the public or specific community(ies)

m. Might be overinterpreted (findings taken further than supported) by the public or specific community(ies)

n. Might be dismissed or disputed by the public or specific community(ies)

o. Might be difficult for the public or specific communities to interpret without professional support (e.g., from doctors or genetic counselors)

p. Might influence how members of a community relate to each other*

> *Examples:
> - New treatments like gene therapy might create divisions between those who can afford to pursue it and those who can not.
> - Similarly, options like pre-implantation genetic diagnosis can shape how people relate to one another, depending on whether they choose to use it or not.

4. **Write a brief statement explaining the main worst-case risks you identified.**
   Consider:
   a. Who is the community(ies) that might be harmed?

   b. In what way(s) could they be harmed?

   c. What specifically could happen to cause this harm?

5. **What steps could you take to reduce these risks?** Jot down a brief statement or bullet points (e.g., including context with findings, building partnerships with communities, pre-testing messaging with relevant parties).