



COL Policy on *Research*

Introduction

The Strategic Plan 2015-2021 states that COL “will put a stronger focus on research using results to contribute to development discourse and provide evidence for advocacy.” While COL is not in a position to undertake or fund large-scale research, it must foster a culture of research and development among governments, institutions and practitioners, and incorporate action research principles into its own monitoring and evaluation processes. Action research will be critical to strengthening COL’s role as a thought leader and advocate for ODL. Research related activities include:

1. Operational research to assess and improve COL projects/programmes as part of its monitoring and evaluation approach.
2. Model testing to assess the feasibility of new strategies, and interventions and proof of concept and impact studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of tested models and approaches.
3. Research to support evidence-based advocacy to encourage changes in policy and practice.

The purpose of the policy is to provide COL staff, partners and consultants guidance in undertaking research related activities.

Field of application of the policy

This policy applies to COL staff undertaking research related activities, as well as consultants conducting research-related activities on behalf of COL. Where institutional partners are involved in research with COL, their institutional research policies and procedures, where available, may be applied. Where these are not available, COL policies will apply.

COL’s objectives and research priorities

The objectives of COL's research policy are to:

- sustain the leadership role of COL as a specialist organisation in the application of ODL to sustainable development
- maintain its competitive edge as a provider of policy advice and know-how to Governments, intergovernmental bodies and institutions
- strengthen its role by investing proactively in research relevant to the development and growth of ODL
- stay ahead of developments in ODL in order to respond to the needs of Member States at various stages of development in their use of ODL
- inform project/programme development and course-correction, as part of COL’s M&E approach
- develop a robust evidence base that demonstrates the efficiency and effectiveness of COL’s models
- sustain a culture of research appropriate to a learning organisation

Organisational framework and support available for research activities

COL will pursue the following strategies to conduct research:

- Collaborative research that involves project-based or institution-based research programmes and activities jointly implemented in cooperation with partner institutions and organisations
- Sponsored research that involves specific research projects to be undertaken by appropriate institutions with COL support



- Needs-based studies and investigations sponsored by COL through consultancies and other forms of outsourcing
- Regional mechanisms through collaboration or affiliation (e.g. Distance Education Associations) to pursue research on an ongoing basis.
- Longitudinal research, including baseline and end line data collection, to help COL better understand the efficiency and effectiveness of its models and interventions.
- Research through the COL Chairs programme, to enhance COL's academic and intellectual presence in the fields of ODL, open educational resources (OER), technology-enabled learning (TEL) and learning for sustainable development.

COL will confine its research initiatives to areas related to its corporate mission, areas of expertise and programmes/projects.

Guidelines and Ethical Considerations

COL is committed to the ethical conduct of research involving humans. It has been informed, in part, by leading international ethics norms. This entails seeking informed and voluntary consent; disclosure of information regarding studies in order for participants to give informed consent; offering of confidentiality/anonymity where possible; identification and mitigation of privacy risks; safeguarding of data; and inclusive selection of participants, where feasible.

For further information see [COL's Staff Policies and Procedures](#) document and [COL's Policy on Online Data Collection](#).

Dissemination of research results

If research is to inform policy and practice it must be disseminated. Publishing of research results in external publications, like academic journals, is encouraged. Publications facilitate international dissemination and access to information and can enhance COL's reputation and influence as a global thought leader.

Dissemination of the results of the research or other materials employees have completed for COL through lectures, publications, and other appropriate means should be consistent with COL policies and procedures, including staff policies and publications guidelines. Employees are encouraged to publish in open access journals.

Means of dissemination will include:

- o Presentation at conferences, meetings, fora and other gatherings;
- o Publications (internal and external);
- o Website/social media dissemination; and
- o Training activities.

Employees who are involved in outside research and/or publishing, must establish and observe clear boundaries that separate their COL and outside activities to avoid conflicts about the appropriate use of resources and attributions of products of their work.

Revision History

Version	Date	Author (s)	Revision Notes
Revised policy	24 February 2021	Alexis Carr and Balaji Venkataraman	Approved by SMM
Extant policy	August 2004	Not stated	N/A