

Tostan Independent Interviews and Research Policy

The following is official Tostan Policy. As long as you are conducting interviews and research for Tostan, the first portion need not apply. However, pay specific attention to the final paragraphs geared towards employees and interns.

Recognizing the value of research for enhancing its program, Tostan supports public inquiry into its work. The organization has many documents that can be made available to researchers. The following policies are designed to protect research participants, maximize effective research practices, and avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications that divert Tostan staff from the accomplishment of its mission.

Contact Person: Sarah Nehrling, Volunteer Program Coordinator; volunteer@tostan.org

Journalists/Reporters Seeking Interviews

Tostan administrators, staff, and community participants have generously volunteered to be interviewed for numerous stories in newspapers and magazines. All public declarations are open to journalists, reporters, and news agencies.

The Executive Director of Tostan should be notified of special requests for interviews with Tostan staff and/or program participants, including the purpose and scope of the interview. Ideally, such requests will be in writing. Tostan urges journalists/reporters interviewing participants in communities where Tostan has implemented its program to inform interviewees of the purpose of the interview and how and where the information will be reported. If journalists/reporters are going to use real names, they should seek permission of the community participant.

Formal Research Requests

While Tostan encourages research, we remind researchers that Tostan is a non-profit organization whose main goal is to implement its education programs in communities which are often in remote sites. Researchers should be prepared to spend the time necessary to understand the holistic nature of the program and to remember that the priority for Tostan staff and volunteers will be their work.

Tostan also has an ethical obligation to protect the rights of research subjects and participants, some of whom might not be educated about the research process or aware that their participation will lead to public dissemination of their views, stories, or opinions in peer-reviewed journals or books.

Tostan does not have a review board for research proposals; thus it requires any researcher aiming to publish articles, books, or thesis/dissertation manuscripts on its work to get permission from their own, local Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If the local IRB requires the permission of Tostan to conduct the research, the researcher should send all IRB-ready documents for review by Tostan staff. When all concerns are addressed by Tostan staff and the rights of subjects/participants have been assured, Tostan will write a letter of support for the research.

All documents submitted to IRBs, such as the consent/assent forms and copies of surveys and/or protocols for interviews, need to be in the language of the participants so that they can read, understand, and sign (consent) or listen and agree verbally (assent). The research instruments should also be in the language of the subject/participant. In certain cases, a translator might be required to assure that the participant/subject understands the general research purpose and its process and how the information will be disseminated. Tostan cannot pay for translators, but it might be able to assist researchers in identifying translators for national languages.

Exception: For students doing research for a class or program, they should provide the same materials required by the IRB, such as research purpose, design, instruments, and consent forms. They will also be asked to sign a form agreeing not to publish the material beyond their class or program office. Please provide Tostan with a copy of the resulting paper. If the researcher wishes feedback, please give the staff enough time to review it (usually two weeks).

Interns and Employees

Research, Public Blogs, Websites, and/or Mass Emails

Interns and employees wishing to publish research on Tostan in peer-reviewed journals or books need to follow the procedures outlined above.

Interns and employees are free to write private descriptions of work experiences in Tostan in their emails or limited-access blogs (those not searchable through the internet). Those with a desire to create public blogs and websites or send out mass mailings need to consult with the Volunteer Coordinator/Executive Director before establishing/disseminating them. The purpose and scope should be put in writing for review processes.