

# A Thematic Analysis of Restorative Justice Best Practice Frameworks

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## Abstract

This paper is the first of two companion papers that analyse themes of existing best practice frameworks for restorative justice and explore the processes and experiences of the people who created them. This work is part of a broader collaboration between the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) and the National Center on Restorative Justice (NCORJ) in the United States. This paper explores publicly available guidelines for facilitating restorative justice processes in response to harm. Data for this paper come from a thematic analysis of five United States-based regional or statewide practitioner guidelines documents and seven international guidelines documents. The guidelines included in this paper pertain to facilitating responsive restorative justice dialogues that relate to or may take place in criminal legal settings. The thematic analysis explores and identifies guidelines' priorities across regions, examining common principles and practices identified as important for restorative justice facilitators.

## Keywords

restorative justice – best practice – guidelines – principles – thematic analysis

### 1 Introduction

One of the distinguishing characteristics of restorative justice is its flexibility and grassroots nature. Specific local restorative approaches often develop in response to the needs and cultural context of a given community. This grassroots development has led to a notably wide range of practices and programme models, all falling under the restorative justice umbrella. However, there is also the risk involved in promoting a set of practices without a strict definition that some practices may deviate from core restorative principles that provide important guardrails to prevent further harm from occurring within the process. Thus, while diversity and responsiveness are important tenets of restorative justice practice, processes that do not uphold core principles risk harming the individuals involved as well as the reputation and possibilities of the wider field. A number of communities around the United States and around the world have addressed this tension by developing and publishing best practice guidelines to help practitioners establish a shared understanding and commitment to how to best implement restorative justice.

This paper is one of two consecutive companion papers that analyse themes of existing best practice frameworks and explore the processes and experiences of the people who created them. As the first of the two, this paper explores publicly available guidelines for facilitating restorative justice processes in response to harm. Data for this paper come from a thematic analysis of five United States-based regional or statewide practitioner guidelines documents and seven international guidelines documents. The guidelines included in this paper pertain to facilitating responsive restorative justice dialogues that relate to or may take place in criminal legal settings. The thematic analysis explores and identifies the guidelines' priorities across regions, examining common principles and practices identified as important for restorative justice facilitators to know and be able to do in order to guide restorative processes safely and effectively. The narrow scope of the data, along the lines of a textual analysis (e.g. Stone, 2020), allows for an in-depth interpretation of the guidelines' construction, language and themes. Broad context, process considerations and an exploration of the tensions inherent in crafting best practice guidelines are then explored in the second paper through the narratives of the practitioners who wrote the guidelines.

This work is part of a broader collaboration between the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) and the National Center on Restorative Justice (NCORJ) in the United States. The focus is primarily on United States-based standards developed for applications of restorative justice in the criminal legal context, with international best practice frameworks included for comparison and grounding. The intention of both papers is to share a thematic analysis of essential ingredients across best practice frameworks, and to name the processes, complexities and opportunities uncovered through the creation of guidelines. This work grounds a collaborative process of developing a toolkit to support communities in crafting responsive and connected guidelines that meet their needs.

## 2 Conceptual Framing for Researching Best Practices in Restorative Justice

Interest in the development of best practice frameworks for restorative justice has largely been driven by a perceived need for safeguards for participants. With so many different forms of practice of restorative justice in many different contexts, it is important to have guidelines that help to ensure that the dignity and voice of those involved is upheld. Focusing on consistent and demonstrable fundamental principles of restorative justice rather than a specific programme model provides a way to ensure restorative processes meet the needs of all involved, particularly harmed parties (Bazemore & Green, 2007). In their report on exploring best practice standards in the state of Oregon, Barga, Hartman and Lyons list a number of questions that drive an interest in the development of best practice standards in the restorative justice field including (1) How does a person affected by a crime or a person responsible determine whether a restorative justice programme is trustworthy? (2) How do referral sources know that they can safely refer their vulnerable clients? (3) What dangers are there in co-optation by the conventional/adversarial system? And (4) How much and what type of training is enough? Who decides? (Barga, Hartman & Lyons, 2018). The presence of best practice standards can help to inspire confidence in restorative justice programmes for referring agents and participants, and also for the wider public (Archibald & Llewellyn, 2006).

However, there are also a number of risks and concerns that have been raised related to the establishment of best practice frameworks. As Gerry Johnstone explains,

On the one hand, it is felt that [standards] will enhance the quality of practice, ensure that the human rights of participants are protected, and enhance confidence in restorative justice amongst policymakers, criminal justice professionals and members of the public. On the other hand, there are fears that it can stifle the innovation necessary to discover the better and more effective ways of doing restorative justice; result in a standard practice model when what is required is a variety of models adaptable to different contexts; and lead to a 'recapture' of responsibility for handling crime by state officials and professionals. (Johnstone, 2012: 106)

The field of restorative justice is still in the relatively early stages of development, and practice is still being refined. Overly prescriptive standards may inhibit needed innovation (Braithwaite, 2002). Additionally, top-down standards developed by the state may impede Indigenous and other marginalised communities' rights to meet their unique needs in innovative ways, restricting their practice and self-determination (Tauri, 2009). There are many pressing considerations related to establishing best practice standards for restorative justice. As Barga et al. (2018: 13) note,

Numerous legitimate questions abound: Who is involved in setting the standards, how are they empowered to do so, and what is their agenda? Will standards damage the creative and flexible essence of restorative justice? Who decides whether a standard has not been met, and what are the consequences? Will standards unfairly exclude certain people or groups from practicing under the banner of restorative justice?

Considering both the need for restorative justice best practice standards and the significant risks, many attempt to hit a middle ground of clarifying core principles of restorative approaches without being overly prescriptive. As Braithwaite (2002: 565) states, 'We can craft open-textured restorative justice standards that allow a lot of space for cultural difference and innovation while giving us language for denouncing uncontroversially bad practice'. Barga et al. (2018) utilise the metaphor of a food truck to illustrate how standards can be used to assess quality without creating conformity of service. Different food trucks offer different types of food – noodles, pizza, tacos, ice cream – the type of food is not 'standardised', but Food Safety Guidelines outline minimum standards such as employees washing their hands before preparing food or safe food storage practices. Likewise, restorative justice guidelines may find a way of increasing safety and ensuring core standards are met without hindering the expression or growth of local flavour of practice.

*Best practices* is a term widely used in many fields of practice, most notably healthcare, law, education and social services. Best practices are often identified through consistent outcomes over time (Wu, Liu & Bretschneider, 2023). Bretschneider, Mark-Aurele and Wu argue that defining best practices necessarily happens by comparison, noting that '*Comparability* across actions and outcome is important to the identification process, as well as to context' (2004: 3). Andrews (2012, in Wu et al., 2023: 131) notes that best practices also function as standards within fields, defining them as 'practices that specific groups believe are more effective at delivering particular outcomes than other practices, and that these more effective practices are subsequently used as benchmarks to strive for'. Determining best practices within a field therefore is connected to desirable outcomes, situated within a collection of field-specific practices and based on continued use over time.

Despite some clarity around what constitutes a best practice in comparable fields, identifying them in any field concerned with human support and interaction is fraught and complex. There is an inherent positivistic hierarchy embedded in elevating any certain practice as 'best' (Wilson, 2008). Many powerful community-driven practices may never be the subject of research to measure outcomes in the first place. Furthermore, social science research has historically tended toward a top-down approach, stemming from researchers who may or may not be connected with and listening to practitioners. The knowledge produced by mainstream field-based research predominantly situates practices within dominant ideologies and priorities (Igwe, Madichie & Rugara, 2022; Wilson, 2008; Yosso, 2005) resulting in uplifting best practices that can perpetuate oppressive structures and ideologies (Goens-Bradley, 2020).

In response to this tension, we have prioritised a research process that centres the voices and experiences of the people who developed the guidelines that are the subject of our analysis. We have attempted to avoid hierarchies and binaries in our analysis of practices, instead focusing on making complexities visible and inviting conversation on the topic. Our process has included multiple checkpoints with restorative justice practitioners, including sharing findings in a dialogic space and, in some cases, conducting multiple interviews with practitioners to gain more insight and clarity on their experiences.

What makes for good facilitation of restorative justice is a central question to a field that strives to balance contextual responsiveness and fundamental consistency of values. As in other highly relational roles such as teaching or counselling, good facilitation seems to be part science, part experience and what is often described as almost magic. In their qualitative study involving

restorative justice facilitators, Bolitho and Bruce constructed a model of successful facilitation consisting of

(i) a set of core beliefs that form a particular worldview, (ii) specific knowledge and skills that develop with experience, and (iii) 'synthesis' which merges art with science so that facilitators can intuitively, consistently and knowingly shape the alchemy of RJ in real-time to successfully meet the needs of participants. (Bolitho & Bruce, 2017: 337)

Within each component of the model, participants named traits including comfort with conflict, non-judgement and belief that people can make good decisions when given the resources. They also named skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication, appearing neutral and impartial, and the ability to use traits and skills to respond in real time to complex needs in a restorative space. Kirkwood (2022) suggests a framework for practice that defines two types of values: ethical and prudential, as well as principles that practitioners use as a basis for practice. Ethical values are defined as broad commitments that ground practice – for example, a commitment to safety and dignity. Prudential values are defined as how a practitioner might influence a restorative process based on the desired outcomes – for example, building mutual understanding and repairing harm. Principles are defined as a practitioner's beliefs about the purposes of restorative justice – for example, that harm creates relational needs that restorative justice seeks to fill and repair. The final part of this framework pertains to intervention guidelines, which are the actions and decisions facilitators might make based on their ethical and prudential values, as well as the guiding principles they adhere to.

Restorative justice practitioners have been doing the challenging work in their communities of putting on paper what is involved in effective facilitation of restorative justice. In several jurisdictions, this has taken the form of the best practice standards to which we now turn.

### 3 Thematic Analysis of Frameworks by Regional Collectives

#### 3.1 *Background*

In 2022, the National Center on Restorative Justice (NCORJ) and the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) began collaborating on a project to facilitate dialogues among practitioners, researchers and advocates in the field about best practices for restorative justice. A small work-

ing group of team members from the NCORJ and NACRJ was formed to advance the project. At the NACRJ conference in summer 2022, working group members Sheryl Wilson and Greg Paul facilitated an initial dialogue with a small group of restorative justice leaders to identify core issues, considerations and needs related to the broader question of how to ensure best practice of restorative justice. In debriefing the conference dialogue, one need identified by the working group was that for a thematic analysis of existing best practice frameworks in order to build subsequent dialogues on a shared understanding of what restorative justice communities around the United States and the world had decided to include in their own best practice frameworks. The working group decided to create a student research assistant role to lead this effort. Nastasia Lawton-Sticklor was ultimately hired for the role, bringing expertise from the field of education where she has focused on qualitative methodology, particularly practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015) as a method of collaboratively exploring practice.

### 3.2 *Data Collection*

#### 3.2.1 US-Based Regional Collectives

The data for this paper are drawn from guidelines documents produced by regional collective entities pertaining to best practice guidance for facilitators leading restorative justice processes in direct response to harm in legal contexts. Lawton-Sticklor led the data collection and analysis, regularly collaborating with working group members to check analytical assumptions and bring in additional context. Lawton-Sticklor used a two-step criterion, or purposeful sampling method (Suri, 2011). The first step identified criteria for the type of entity creating the guidelines, and the second step set criteria for identifying the guidelines documents themselves. This analysis focused on guidelines that were designed to reach fairly wide regional or state-wide audiences, rather than guidelines that were narrowly focused on one organisation or context. Therefore, the working group co-constructed the following criteria for entities whose guidelines would be included:

- Entity is a regional collective providing overarching services such as training, coalition-building, etc.
- Geographical scope is statewide, national and/or international.
- Collective entity works at least in part within general legal contexts (not solely educational, faith-based or community settings).

Lawton-Sticklor conducted an extensive search for regional collectives meeting these criteria, both identifying the entities themselves, as well as using guidelines documents to trace the affiliations of their authors. The search included gathering lists of regional collectives and guidelines known by the

working group members and their networks, using the Map of Restorative Justice Programmes created by the NACRJ and NCORJ<sup>1</sup> and conducting online searches using Google and the Vermont Law and Graduate School library.

There is a wide range of resources and documents that support restorative justice processes and practices. The criteria for defining documents as *guidelines* and including them in this analysis were as follows:

- A stated or implied primary audience of individual practitioners/facilitators.
- Direct guidance on skills and knowledge recommended for facilitating restorative justice processes (circles, conferences, dialogues, etc.) in response to harm caused.

The search identified thirteen entities that met the criteria of regional collectives. Of the thirteen total collectives, the following five produced supportive documents that met the criteria of guidelines:

- Restorative Justice Colorado (RJCO), 2012: *Restorative Justice Facilitator Code of Conduct and Standards of Training and Practice*, and 2024: *Colorado Restorative Justice Practitioner Guidelines*
- Alaska Tribal Resource Center (ATRC), 2019: *Tips on Facilitating Restorative Justice Circles*
- Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution (NODR), 2020: *Nebraska Restorative Justice Facilitator Standards of Practice*
- Restorative Rainbow Alliance (RRA), 2022: *Elevating LGBTQIA2S+ Needs in Restorative Justice Practices: Restorative Rainbow Alliance Restorative Justice Facilitator Code of Conduct*
- Florida Restorative Justice Association (FRJA), 2022: *Guidelines in Facilitation and Training in Restorative Justice Practices*

During the time that this research was being conducted, Restorative Justice Colorado engaged in a collaborative and thorough process of revising their 2012 guidelines. The final document was published after the analysis of the five documents had been completed. We found the new guidelines to be a valuable opportunity to learn both from the evolution of practitioner guidance over time and from the real time collective process of decision-making leading to a public guidance document. As such, we incorporated this new document into our thematic analysis in this paper and included the stories and experiences of practitioners involved in the creation process in the second paper.

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<sup>1</sup> The Map of Restorative Justice Programmes can be viewed at <https://members.nacry.org/rj-map> (last accessed 23 November 2025).

### 3.2.2 International Entities

The following guidelines from international entities were included using the same procedures outlined above. The majority of the guidelines included in this analysis were created by provincial or national entities, many with a seemingly broader scope than American regional collectives:

- Victorian Association for Restorative Justice (VARJ), Australia, 2009: *Best Practice Standards for Restorative Justice Facilitators*
- Restorative Justice Council (RJC), United Kingdom, 2016: *Restorative Justice Council Practitioners Handbook*
- Scottish Government (SG), 2017: *Guidance for the Delivery of Restorative Justice in Scotland*
- Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS), 2018: *Principles and Guidelines for Restorative Justice Practice in Criminal Matters*
- New Zealand Ministry of Justice (NZMJ), 2019: *Restorative Justice Practice Framework*
- European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ), 2021: *Manual on Restorative Justice Values and Standards for Practice*
- New Brunswick Restorative Justice Working Group (NBRJ), Canada, 2022: *Framework for Restorative Justice Practices in Conflict and Crime*

We recognise that this is not a comprehensive list of relevant guidelines and some documents that fit the criteria may have been missed, including those published in languages other than English. Moreover, there are several significant international documents, including the European Union Victims' Rights Directive (2012), the Council of Europe Recommendation Concerning Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters (2018) and the United Nations *Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes* (2nd ed., 2020), which are notable due to their impact on validating and supporting the global field of restorative justice practice, but did not fit our sampling criteria of being directed primarily at an audience of individual practitioners.

The qualitative nature of this study aimed to deepen our understanding of the commonalities and variabilities of defining and guiding powerful practice, rather than seeking to use a sampling of guidelines to generalise toward a population as a whole as is often the aim of quantitative studies (Levitt, 2021). Qualitative studies include an inherent invitation for further study and analysis, this one included. We can continue to deepen our understanding of how to guide restorative justice practice with further thematic research, uncovering a wide array of methods by which guidance is offered to practitioners.

### 3.3 *Analytical Procedure*

US-based regional collectives were analysed separately from international entities. A textual, primarily inductive analytical procedure (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Kuckartz, 2019; Stone, 2020) was used for analysing the guidelines in aggregate, beginning with reading each full document individually, noting broad themes, interesting cases and emerging questions. From that first reading and conversations between members of the NACRJ/NCORJ working group to check for reliability, a few tentative themes were created. A second closer read of each document followed, this time with an eye for explicit and implied content that aligned with the themes, as well as content that did not fit into the themes, either belonging to a new theme (in cases where there was some consistency across documents), or emerging as a unique case (appearing in one document, but not others). In general, analysis followed an emergent process, allowing for adaptations to themes based on the content in each document. Each of the members in the working group also prioritised staying mindful of their own lenses and interpretations of each document, recognising that their stances and priorities influence how themes are created as well as the decisions about whether and how data align with them. The research team engaged in regular check-ins to discuss the analysis. A draft of this paper was shared with a group of practitioners including individuals involved in drafting the guidelines who were interviewed as part of this project and others at the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice conference in August 2024. Their feedback was incorporated into the final draft. The data are organised into five broad themes, each with several codes describing aspects of that theme with examples from the documents. Themes and codes are not mutually exclusive, meaning there are several standards and markers within guidelines that appear in more than one code and/or theme. International guidelines were analysed as a second group, comparing content to the themes created from the US-based collectives.

All analysis of the contents and priorities of each guidelines document is offered in deep appreciation and respect for the knowledge, experience and collaborative labour that has been put into creating each document. Our research is grounded in the principles of curiosity and iterative learning with a goal to present data and observations in a way that sparks critical and creative dialogue. We recognise the importance of centring and uplifting the voices of the people most impacted and that restorative justice processes contain layers: participants who have caused harm and experienced harm, facilitators who are putting themselves into powerful and intense spaces to guide healing, organisations supporting this work, and many sociocultural factors that support, or inhibit, the work of repair and healing while challenging a mainstream carceral

approach to crime and harm. We offer this analysis in ongoing commitment to be in relationship with practitioners and fellow researchers grappling with this important work.

## 4 Findings: US-Based Regional Collectives

### 4.1 *Descriptive Overview*

The first published Restorative Justice Colorado guidelines document (RJCO-12) appears to be the framework from which many others stem: the Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution (NODR)'s guidelines are very similar, the Florida Restorative Justice Association (FRJA) acknowledges RJCO in their introduction as inspiring their guidelines, and the Restorative Rainbow Alliance (RRA) was designed to enhance any general guidelines using RJCO's standards as a model. It is also the oldest framework, published over ten years before undergoing the collective revision process resulting in the revised guidelines (RJCO-24). RJCO-12, FRJA and NODR have significant overlap as comprehensive guidelines for practice and training, while RRA and the Alaska Tribal Resource Council (ATRC) are less comprehensive and more narrowly focused: RRA on specific practices and knowledge to benefit LGBTIQ2S+ folks, and ATRC on how to create space within a restorative justice circle, specifically for Indigenous circle leaders.

There is variability in language and formality across documents. RJCO-12 and NODR contain more formal language and differentiate between *shall*, meaning that the practice or standard is required, and *should*, meaning that the practice or standard is encouraged. FRJA, RRA, ATRC and RJCO-24's language is more informal and conversational.

The ATRC guidelines are the most distinct from the other four. This document appears to be built on several implicit collective understandings about consent, process and relationships that are not mentioned directly. The document appears to be directed towards facilitators that are already skilled practitioners in their communities/tribes, and the guidelines are focused more on helpful ideas of ways to hold circles (aligned with the fact that the document title identifies 'tips' rather than guidelines). In the case of this document, we have included supporting language in codes comparable to other guidelines' standards while recognising that there are no 'standards' in these guidelines.

The analysis comprises four themes, each with several supporting codes. Analysis is responsive to each theme and described in more detail below. Themes I and II can be defined as a content analysis, categorising information contained in document introductions pertaining to context, purpose and scope

(Theme I), as well as the standards that are featured, noting frequency and consistency (Theme II). Where we include the term *standard*, we are referring only to standards of practice across documents. RJCO-12 and FRJA contain additional sections for standards of training (RJCO-12) and training topics (FRJA). Where included, these sections are defined as such.

Themes III and IV contain an interpretive and thematic analysis, highlighting emergent concepts that appear in guidelines both at the standard, or heading, level as well as the narrative or descriptive level. The concepts explored in these themes highlight some of the complexities present in the field of restorative justice, such as addressing trauma, systemic inequities, self-awareness, sustainability and accountability, both on the part of participants, as well as for facilitators. These themes are intended to invite dialogue and grappling around the purpose and responsibilities of frameworks to address and offer guidance on navigating these complexities.

## 4.2 Themes

### 4.2.1 Theme I: Purpose, Expectations for Use and Organisation

Each document has an introduction outlining its purpose and audience, acknowledging its authors and inspirations and, in a few cases, offering a framing for how to engage with the standards. Codes in this theme highlight prominent characteristics of these introductions, such as acknowledging that standards should grow and evolve over time. The majority of guidelines are also intended to reach audiences beyond facilitators, notably a wide public audience with the goal of building trust and investment in restorative justice as a field. Several documents mention that their guidelines are designed to encourage and support ethical and effective practices in restorative justice facilitation and are not enforceable.

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#### Theme I: purpose, expectations for use and organisation

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Code	Frequency	Description	Examples from text
Living Document Framing	Included in 4 docs	Acknowledging the importance of changing through continued learning, noting the importance of community input.	'We intend this to be a living document, open to input and revision on a regular basis in collaboration with the community of practitioners in a spirit of shared best interests and solidarity' (FRJA, 2022: 5). '[...] a link for feedback to help inform the next iteration of this living document can be found [...]' (RJCO, 2024: 1).

(cont.)

**Theme 1: purpose, expectations for use and organisation**

Code	Frequency	Description	Examples from text
Non-Enforceable Guidance	Included in 3 docs	Intention of document to be used as guidance with varying expectations of adherence.	“These Standards are designed to serve as fundamental ethical guidelines for persons facilitating restorative justice processes in all practice contexts [...] unless and until adopted by a court or other regulatory authority do not have the force of law. Nonetheless, the fact that these Standards have been adopted by the respective sponsoring entities, should alert Restorative Justice Facilitators and referring agencies to the fact that the Standards might be viewed as establishing a standard of care for Restorative Justice Facilitators’ (RJCO, 2012: 1).
Intention to Build Public Trust in Restorative Justice	Included in 4 docs	Intended audiences extend beyond facilitators with the goal to promote the importance of restorative justice and trust in the process.	“The purpose of these Nebraska Restorative Justice Facilitator Standards is fourfold [including ...] to provide confidence to the participants in restorative processes; and [...] to promote public confidence in these practices’ (NODR, 2020: 1).  “These Guidelines are designed to update and replace Colorado’s 2012 Standards of Practice, while advancing their original purpose to [...] promote public confidence in restorative processes to repair harm, foster accountability and healing, and strengthen relationships and communities’ (RJCO, 2024: 1).
Distinguishing Standards of Practice from Knowledge and Training	Included in 2 docs	Documents include distinct sections for standards of practice and areas of knowledge/training for facilitators.	FRJA: Section 1: Principles and Practices in RJP Facilitation Section 11: Essential Training Topics for RJP Facilitators  RJCO-12: Section 1: Model Standards of Conduct for Restorative Justice Facilitators Section 11: Restorative Justice Facilitator Standards of Training and Practice
Distinguishing Core and High-Risk/Sensitive Case Practices	Included in 1 doc	Separate section requiring additional skills and experience for facilitating high-risk or sensitive cases.	RJCO-12: Restorative Justice Facilitator Standards for High Risk Victim/Offender Dialogue

#### 4.2.2 Theme II: Standard Priorities across Guidelines

Codes in this theme are inclusive of all standards of practice (headings) across the documents and look at the priorities that each document has highlighted as what facilitators should know and be able to do in restorative justice processes. With the exception of the ATRC's document, the guidelines are organised with a heading for each standard or guideline followed by a definition and description of practical application.

Analysis within this theme stays at the heading level, with the intention of highlighting the choices that were made to promote certain values and skills as standards in facilitation. As such, there is likely some nuanced variability within and across standards that is not captured in the analysis. For example, while all documents contain a standard of confidentiality, there may be implicit differences in how guidelines approach the concept, with some guidelines recommending a higher level of anonymity than others. Furthermore, there are several unique standards that only appear in one or two documents, but the skills and knowledge areas are not necessarily absent from other documents, rather they may be included under other standards. For example, NODR is the only document that contains a separate standard for surrogates (Standard IV). However, Standard VI 'Quality of Process' of RJCO-12's guidelines states: 'If an offender is appropriate and the victim is unwilling or unable to attend but is willing for the conference to take place, the restorative justice facilitator should move forward with a conference with a surrogate representing the victim' (RJCO, 2012: 4). The FRHA's guidelines also refer to surrogates in their training topic 'Alternative Meeting Strategies': '[...] common examples [of alternative meeting strategies] include use of surrogates for parties who cannot, or do not wish to participate directly [...]' (2022: 15). The analysis highlights the fact that NODR chose to prioritise guidance on the use of surrogates as a separate standard, while the other entities chose to include the practice within other categories.

There is generally a high level of agreement across the standards included in the documents, particularly across broad, fundamental concepts such as consent and confidentiality. Where there is general consensus with some variability, the guidelines approach a common concept with a different sociocultural lens. For example, the concept of avoiding bias is approached in the RJCO-12 and NODR's guidelines as a standard of Impartiality (RJCO, 2012: 2; NODR, 2020: 4) or avoiding favouritism. The FRJA and RRA's guidelines approach this concept with an acknowledgment that implicit bias is impossible to completely avoid, therefore facilitators should work on self-awareness and empathy as a way to be in fair relationship with all participants, called 'Multipartiality' in the FRJA's guidelines (2022: 12), and 'Invested Facilitation' in the RRA's guidelines

(2022: 7–8). The RJCO-24's guidelines show change in this concept, characterising this value as 'Mutual Partiality and Bias' (2024: 6). The standards that have low frequency across guidelines tend to address more specific concepts or practices rather than broad concepts, such as the FRJA's standard 'Co-Facilitating' (2022: 13) and the NODR's standard 'Surrogates' (2020: 6), which are included in other guidelines, but not prioritised as separate standards.

It is important to note that the names in the codes do not necessarily align with the names of standards across documents. In several cases, standards that are conceptually consistent carry different names across guidelines. For example, the concept that all participants must have a choice in the process is identified in different guidelines as Participation and Self-Determination/Freedom of Choice, and as such is organised in this analysis by the unifying concept of consent, not by each individual standard.

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### Theme II: standard priorities across guidelines

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Code: close consensus, majority frequency

Core concept	Frequency	Aligning standards	Examples from text
Confidentiality	Included in 6 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Respect for Privacy (RJCO-12)</li> <li>– Confidentiality (ATRC)</li> <li>– Confidentiality (NODR)</li> <li>– Respect for Privacy (RRA)</li> <li>– Confidentiality (FRJA)</li> <li>– Confidentiality (RJCO-24)</li> </ul>	'This must be a safe place to speak. It's very important to keep what is said here confidential between circle participants. What is said in the Circle stays in the Circle' (ATRC, 2019: 4).
Consent	Included in 4 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participation (RJCO-12)</li> <li>– Participation (NODR)</li> <li>– Participation/Naming and Addressing Harm (RRA)</li> <li>– Self-Determination/Freedom of Choice (FRJA)</li> <li>– Self-Determination (RJCO-24)</li> </ul>	'Voluntary participation means that the participants have come to and remain in the meeting by choice [...] All participants retain the choice to participate, even if one or more of them are incarcerated or acting in accordance with a court order' (NODR, 2020: 3).
Positive Environment	Included in 5 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Quality of the Process (RJCO-12)</li> <li>– Safety/Quality of the Process (NODR)</li> <li>– Creating an Inclusive Space/Setting and Inclusive Tone (RRA)</li> <li>– Do No Harm (FRJA)</li> <li>– Creating Space for Restorative Justice Practices (RJCO-24)</li> </ul>	'A facilitator's work is to help to repair harms, and therefore facilitators should do their best to ensure that no parties are worse off for having been involved in the restorative justice process. Facilitators need to be sufficiently sensitive to the priorities of the parties as well as their emotional and physical safety, mental fitness, and general ability to participate meaningfully in the process offered' (FRJA, 2022: 9).

(cont.)

**Theme II: standard priorities across guidelines**

**Code: close consensus, majority frequency**

Core concept	Frequency	Aligning standards	Examples from text
Capability	Included in 3 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competence (RJCO-12)</li> <li>- Competence (NODR)</li> <li>- Capability (FRJA)</li> </ul>	‘A restorative justice facilitator shall facilitate only when the facilitator has the necessary competence to assure a safe and restorative process and to satisfy the reasonable expectations of participants [...] Training, experience in restorative justice practices, skills, cultural understandings and other qualities are often necessary for restorative justice facilitator competence’ (RJCO, 2012: 3).
Conflict of Interest	Included in 4 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflict of Interest (RJCO-12)</li> <li>- Conflict of Interest (NODR)</li> <li>- Conflict of Interest, Roles, Relationships (FRJA)</li> <li>- Transparency of Interests (RJCO-24)</li> </ul>	‘A potential conflict of interest is any situation or relationship that might create the possibility, or appearance, of facilitator bias [...] and] conflicts with the principles of client self-determination and facilitator transparency [...] Facilitators should keep their role in check. They do not function as and should not play the role of attorney, therapist, counsellor, or any other professional role in relation to any party participating in the restorative process [...] There are many potential variations to this element, and each system and community will develop specific standards and practices’ (FRJA, 2022: 14).

**Code: consensus with variability, majority frequency**

Core concept	Frequency	Aligning standards	Examples from text
Bias	Included in 4 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impartiality (RJCO-12)</li> <li>- Impartiality (NODR)</li> <li>- Invested Facilitation (RRA)</li> <li>- Multipartiality (FRJA)</li> <li>- Mutual Partiality and Bias (RJCO-24)</li> </ul>	‘Impartiality means freedom from favoritism, bias or prejudice [...] a restorative justice facilitator shall not act with partiality or prejudice based on any participant’s personal characteristics, background, values and beliefs, or performance at a restorative justice process, or any other reason’ (NODR, 2020: 4).

(cont.)

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**Theme II: standard priorities across guidelines**

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**Code: consensus with variability, majority frequency**

Core concept	Frequency	Aligning standards	Examples from text
Transparency	Included in 3 docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Advertising and Solicitation (RJCO-12)</li> <li>– Transparency (FRJA)</li> </ul>	<p>‘Oppressive paradigms ask Facilitators to be impartial and neutral, however, RJ practices are human processes, and all RJ practitioners have implicit bias. It’s important we acknowledge our own identities and biases that we bring to each process [...] emphasizing care for all participants and extra care for LGB-TIQA2S+ folks because of the greater risk of harm’ (RRA, 2022: 7–8).</p> <p>‘Value: Practitioners uphold an atmosphere of mutual regard, respect, and desire for the full participation and well-being of all involved’ (RJCO, 2024: 6).</p> <p>‘A restorative justice facilitator shall be truthful and not misleading when advertising, soliciting or otherwise communicating the facilitator’s qualifications, experience, services, and fees. A restorative justice facilitator should not include any promises as to outcome in communications’ (RJCO, 2012: 4).</p> <p>‘Facilitators should be open and transparent with participants about the process and set expectations clearly. If the process involves any “side” conversations between the facilitators and individual participants, the other participants should be made aware of those conversations’ (FRJA, 2022: 11).</p>

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(cont.)

**Theme II: standard priorities across guidelines****Code: unique and low-frequency standards**

Standard	Frequency	Examples from text
Advancement of Restorative Justice Practices	Included in RJCO-12, NODR, RJCO-24	<p>'A restorative justice facilitator should act in a manner that advances the practice of restorative justice [...] by engaging in some or all of the following: (1) Fostering diversity within the field of restorative justice. (2) Striving to make restorative justice more accessible. (3) Participating in research when given the opportunity [...] (4) Participating in outreach and education efforts to assist the public in developing an improved understanding of, and appreciation for, restorative justice. (5) Assisting newer restorative justice facilitators through training, mentoring and networking' (RJCO, 2012: 5; NODR, 2020: 14).</p> <p>'Value: Strengthening relationships within practitioner communities and increasing understanding and support for restorative practices more broadly are key to advancing RJP's in Colorado' (RJCO, 2024: 14).</p>
Fees and Other Charges	Included in RJCO-12, NODR, RJCO-24	<p>'A restorative justice facilitator shall provide each participant and/or referring agency true and complete information about fees [...] shall not charge fees in a manner that impairs a facilitator's impartiality [...] should not enter into a fee agreement which is contingent upon the result or any outcomes of the restorative justice process' (RJCO, 2012: 5, NODR, 2020: 13).</p> <p>'Value: Financial support for RJ services plays a critical role in ensuring equitable and inclusive access for those seeking and providing RJ services' (RJCO, 2024: 13).</p>
Co-Facilitation	Included in FRJA, ATRC	<p>'Co-facilitating may be used for skill development, for creating a well-supported conference, and/or for extended safety and accountability. Often, one facilitator will guide the circle process, while the second takes detailed notes and supports the other facilitator by asking questions, tracking participants' non-verbal cues, stepping in to assist when needed, and sometimes taking the lead on drafting agreements' (FRJA, 2022: 13).</p>
Continued Education	Included in RRA	<p>'[...] in order to work competently and inclusively with LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, additional knowledge, resources, and skillsets are needed [...] Restorative Justice Facilitators are highly encouraged to regularly educate themselves on topics that may impact members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community' (followed by a list of example topics) (RRA, 2022: 9–10).</p>
Guidance for Surrogates	Included in NODR	<p>'A surrogate is a third party in the restorative process who stands in the place of one of the participants. A surrogate, however, shall not role play the missing person or act as an additional facilitator. Instead, the surrogate should participate and contribute the surrogate's own thoughts, feelings, and experiences' (NODR, 2020: 6).</p>

*(cont.)***Theme II: standard priorities across guidelines****Code: unique and low-frequency standards**

Standard	Frequency	Examples from text
Fidelity to Restorative Justice Values	RJCO-24	'Value: Knowledge of and fidelity to the values and principles of RJ lie at the heart of and guide all restorative practices' (RJCO, 2024: 8).
Trauma-Informed Practices	RJCO-24, FRJA	'Value: Practitioners understand how trauma impacts RJP's, including both their own trauma and the trauma of all who are involved in an RJP' (RJCO, 2024: 9).
Equitable Inclusion and Access	RJCO-24	'Value: Practitioners respect human diversity and support equitable inclusion and access to RJP's for all individuals and communities in Colorado, especially those that have historically been excluded or underserved' (RJCO, 2024: 11).
Harms Arising from Restorative Justice Processes	RJCO-24	'Value: Practitioners embody RJ values by seeking avenues of accountability and repair for any harms that occur within an RJ process' (RJCO, 2024: 15).

#### 4.2.3 Theme III: Approach to Cultural Responsiveness and Transformative Justice

This theme explores content across guidelines that addresses sociocultural factors that might impact how participants engage in restorative processes, and the systemic and institutional inequities that impact both restorative processes and the wider societal context in which restorative justice is being practiced. There are no standards of practice that exclusively focus on cultural sustainability or transformative justice across guidelines. Therefore, analysis looks at language within standards, framing and introductions, and training topics/standards that either explicitly name social injustices that can impact the restorative justice process, or implicitly allude to sociocultural factors. This theme is informed by literature on transformative justice, the implications of race, gender, socio-economic status, and ability on social concepts of harm and crime, and the impacts of these cultural factors on both individual instances and field-wide contexts of restorative justice (e.g. Davis, 2019; Goens-Bradley, 2020; Minow, 2022; Piepzna-Samarasinha & Dixon, 2020; Valandra, 2020).

**Theme III: approach to cultural responsiveness and transformative justice**

Code	Description	Included in	Examples from text
Cultural Responsiveness	Naming or referencing skills and knowledge pertaining to cultural practices, identities, and lived realities impacted by systemic power structures that impact how participants are able to show up in restorative processes.	RJCO-12: Restorative Justice Facilitator Standards: Impartiality, Competence, Advancement of Restorative Justice; Standard of Training: Cultural Awareness NODR: Impartiality, Surrogates, Advancing Restorative Justice RRA: All Standards FRJA: Multipartiality and Inclusion, Training Topics: Inter-cultural Awareness, Systems Training RJCO-24: Equitable Inclusion and Access	<p>‘Training and relative competency shall include: [...] Cultural Awareness (e.g. mental health, disability, cultural, language, race, sex, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity [...])’ (RJCO, 2012: 5–6).</p> <p>‘In the United States in particular, it’s important to consider the legacy of slavery and white supremacy including the institutional racism embedded in many systems and institutions. Facilitators should be aware of how this legacy, and those structures, affect how all parties show up to and throughout a restorative process’ (FRJA, 2022: 19).</p> <p>‘Cultural responsiveness embodies basic knowledge of and appreciation for the diverse cultural heritages, traditions, values, and customs present in a community or specific practice setting’ (RJCO, 2024: 11).</p>
Transformative Justice Lens	Naming or referencing awareness that interpersonal harm is situated within larger societal contexts.	ATRC: Introduction FRJA: Framing: Equity and Consent, Acknowledgements RJCO-24: Advancement of Restorative Justice Practices, Acknowledgements	<p>‘[...] about a hundred and fifty years ago we emerged from over four hundred years of state-sanctioned slavery and torture of non-white people, followed by decades of rampant organized terror and clear institutional barriers to equal participation and opportunity in society. While that terror may have become less obvious (Klan rallies and lynchings are easier to identify than persistent over-incarceration of people of color), and those barriers less visible, our legacy of white-supremacist violence deserves the attention of restorative practitioners’ (FRJA, 2022: 6).</p> <p>‘Opportunities will continue to increase for practitioners to explore and incorporate important values and practices found in frameworks such as Transformative Justice and generative approaches to conflict transformation’ (RJCO, 2024:17).</p>

(cont.)

**Theme III: approach to cultural responsiveness and transformative justice**

Code	Description	Included in	Examples from text
Acknowledging Indigenous Origins of Restorative Justice	Honouring the Indigenous roots of restorative justice practices.	ATRC: Introduction RRA: Introduction and Honoring, Current Context FRJA: Framing; Equity and Consent, Acknowledgements RJCO-24: Global Indigenous Practice Acknowledgement	<p>“[...] Same thing with the tribal court. That came in long before white people. The court brought everything out in the open, before the people. They talked to the person making trouble right in front of him. They just talk. As peaceful as they can. The Indian way is to have respect for one another. We gotta have that tribal court. It’s not there to throw anybody in jail or anything like that, but to make each other understand that there’s a good way out if we look at it.” – Traditional Chief Peter John Minto’ (ATRC, 2019: 1).</p> <p>‘[...] we acknowledge the Indigenous communities whose practices and ways of being have become the fruitful, nourishing roots of current Restorative Justice Practices. We support the use of Restorative Justice practices to address “The First and Second Harms,” the theft of Indigenous land and enslavement of Africans [...]’ (RRA, 2022: 1).</p> <p>‘With great reverence and respect, we acknowledge that the practice of Restorative Justice today is a gift from global Indigenous practices’ (RJCO, 2024: 1).</p>

**4.2.4 Theme IV: Facilitator Discernment**

This theme explores the ways in which guidelines advise facilitators on approaching restorative justice with a critical lens to determine its suitability, as well as a personal awareness of the knowledge and skills required for each case of restorative justice. This theme attempts to surface some tensions and questions around the use and promotion of restorative justice: Is restorative justice always the right choice? When might it not be? What are the alternatives if restorative justice is deemed unsuitable? Can anyone facilitate restorative justice in all cases? Are there factors outside of the named skills and knowledge areas that might impact whether or not a facilitator feels that they can appropriately guide a restorative justice process? Additional issues implied in this theme have to do with individual versus collective discernment within restor-

ative justice; for example, several guidelines were created with the assumption that many facilitators using them will be working independently, and therefore would benefit from support in making these discernments as individuals, as opposed to members of an organisation that may have its own policies or collective processes for decision-making. Since there are no standards across guidelines that are dedicated to this concept, analysis includes language within themes for markers of discernment.

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#### Theme IV: facilitator discernment

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Code	Description	Included in	Examples from text
Determining Suitability for Restorative Justice Process	Responsibility of facilitators to assess specific contexts and factors to determine whether or not a restorative justice process would be a safe and effective option.	RJCO-12: Participation, Quality of the Process NODR: Participation, Safety RJCO-24: Creating Space for RJP's	'A restorative justice facilitator shall meet with each party individually to determine whether the case is appropriate for a restorative process' (NODR, 2020: 8).  'Assess potential participants' interest and readiness including whether, when, and within what framework they may want to consider engaging in an RJP' (RJCO, 2024: 2).
Self-Discernment of Qualifications	Responsibility of facilitators to be self-aware of qualifications, experiences, relationships and interests to determine whether or not they can adequately facilitate a restorative justice process.	RJCO-12: Impartiality, Conflicts of Interest, Competence, Quality of the Process NODR: Impartiality, Conflicts of Interest, Competence, Quality of the Process FRJA: Capability, Conflicts of Interest RJCO-24: Mutual Partiality and Bias	'It is important to know and respect your limits as a facilitator when contemplating taking on a case. A facilitator should only take a case if they have the necessary qualifications to handle any issues that are reasonably likely to arise in the case process' (FRJA, 2022: 10).  'Self-awareness and transparency are key to identifying factors or relationships that may raise hesitations for a practitioner – on their own or others' behalf – regarding their involvement in a particular restorative process' (RJCO, 2024: 7).

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## 5 Findings: International Entities

### 5.1 *Descriptive Overview*

Overall, guidelines created by international entities generally aligned with those created by US-based regional collectives in terms of scope and core

principles. Principles including consent, confidentiality, safety and non-discrimination, as well as facilitator skills such as avoiding conflicts of interest and partiality and monitoring the safety of participants are common across all guidelines. The data included from international entities also highlight points that are not present in, or are markedly distinct from, US-based guidelines. The guidance highlighted in the following data points is not necessarily absent from US-based documents, rather these themes may be implied rather than explicitly written. One exception is the last data point, Change Over Time. At the time of original analysis, Restorative Justice Colorado was working on, but had not published, its revised guidelines. Incorporating elements of change over time both from RJCO-24 and an international entity highlights some differences in how two different entities navigate incorporating change into their guidelines.

## 5.2 *Data Points*

### 5.2.1 Data Point 1: Indigenous Framing of Guidelines

This data point outlines a distinction in the way that Indigenous peoples are acknowledged in international (namely, the New Zealand Ministry of Justice, NZMJ) and US-based guidelines. Several US-based guidelines acknowledge the Indigenous roots of restorative justice in their framing and acknowledgements. However, with the exception of the ATRC, which was specifically designed for Indigenous practitioners, the guidelines make broad references to Indigenous roots of restorative practices rather than direct references to practices and principles that originate from Indigenous peoples. The NZMJ guidelines are framed by Māori principles and values, beginning the document with the Māori *whakatauki* (saying) ‘He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata; What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people’ (NZMJ, 2019: 2). The document opens by referencing Te Tiriti o Waitangi (in English, the Treaty of Waitangi), ‘an agreement of how Māori and the Government of New Zealand will work together and the respect they will show each other’ (NZMJ, 2019: 7), building its framework for practicing restorative justice from Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Te Reo Māori, the Māori language, is used in the list of core values that ground the document (NZMJ, 2019: 8–9).

### 5.2.2 Data Point 2: Naming Dissonance Inherent in Standardisation

While many guidelines acknowledge or refer to the complexities of restorative justice as a practice, the Victorian Association of Restorative Justice (VARJ) of Australia also names the tensions inherent in the standardisation of practice itself:

Drafting these standards and an accreditation scheme involves balancing sometimes competing considerations. For example, people must not be stigmatized by the process and the needs of offenders, victims, and of affected communities must all be also addressed. Standards must be supported by appropriate accountability in what are often relatively closed processes. In the field that is becoming increasingly professionalised, standards should be relatively informal and non-bureaucratic but clear in their intent and reporting arrangements. (VARJ, 2009: 5)

Notably, the guidelines name that restorative practices do not always lend themselves to being standardised, often being necessarily private and informal. This brings up an important issue in creating standards that balance providing support and accountability with respecting the emergent needs of participants within these processes to maintain autonomy, confidentiality and authentic relationships. While this tension is not explicitly referenced in US-based guidelines, the revised RJCO-24 guidelines indicate some acknowledgement of this complexity, replacing its original title of ‘Standards of Practice’ with ‘Practitioner Guidelines’ and changing its more directive-oriented language, using terms like ‘shall’ and ‘should’, with more values-based guiding language.

### 5.2.3 Data Point 3: Naming the Complexity of Victimization

All guidelines prioritise centring the party who was harmed, and several guidelines name common implications of being harmed, such as loss of feelings of safety and autonomy. However, the New Brunswick Restorative Justice Working Group (NBRJ) guidelines delve into the complexities of how the concept of victimhood is often constructed by society at large, and the characteristics imposed on those impacted by harm often do not recognise the complexities inherent in experiencing harm:

For practitioners and persons working with victims on the frontline, there exists an imagery of the ‘perfect victim of crime’, that – in an ideal world – should: Cooperate with authorities; Be from a certain economic bracket; Be upstanding citizens; Not suffer from addictions; Be either overly emotional, or not emotional at all [...] There is no perfect victim, and no clear-cut victim-perpetrator binary [...] Accounting for the diversity and complexities of each victim can help to better facilitate a Restorative Justice process, which can lead to more successful outcomes. (NBRJ, 2022: 9–10)

These guidelines acknowledge that some may struggle with addiction as a result of the trauma they experienced and may have at some point been involved with parties causing harm. The guidelines encourage facilitators to be mindful of the judgements that they may be making about harmed parties based on common assumptions.

#### 5.2.4 Data Point 4: Guidelines for Law Enforcement to Engage with Restorative Justice

The New Brunswick Restorative Justice Working Group (NBRJ) includes a position on how law enforcement should be supportive of restorative processes, including deprioritising traditional prosecution and defaulting to diversion and restorative processes in the cases involving youth:

Law enforcement agencies play a significant role in the Restorative Justice process [...] These individuals must first consider if there is sufficient evidence that an offence has been committed. If yes, then the use of Extrajudicial Measures (EJM) – which include taking no further action, verbal warnings, police cautions, or referral to a community program/agency – should be prioritized [...] The expectation of investigating officers is that they must always consider Diversion as the default, especially when investigating a youth file. (NBRJ, 2022: 26)

This guidance contextualises restorative justice processes within carceral systems and emphasises the importance of avoiding escalated carceral responses.

#### 5.2.5 Data Point 5: Informal Restorative Processes

The Restorative Justice Council (RJC) of the UK includes a section on informal, or impromptu restorative justice processes, also called ‘on the spot’ or ‘street restorative justice’. Guidelines describe these as responses to in-the-moment conflicts, or incidents that may not warrant the formality of a planned restorative justice process:

Informal restorative processes are used in a variety of ways in circumstances where formal processes are inappropriate or disproportionate to the level of harm that has been caused [...] Practitioners using this type of restorative process will need to make an instant risk assessment using existing professional skills to judge whether the people involved in the incident are calm enough to engage in an informal process. (RJC, 2016: 28–29)

### 5.2.6 Data Point 6: Templates and Exemplars

The Restorative Justice Council (RJC) includes examples and templates of documents and artifacts included in a restorative justice process, including a risk assessment mitigation plan, conference structure checklist, outcome agreement, ground rules for circles, restorative justice practitioner supervision preparation checklist and supervision meeting action table, and victim contact letter. These templates include illustrative language from facilitators to get a sense of how they might use these documents. These templates are offered to RJC members to download for their own use.

### 5.2.7 Data Point 7: Guidelines Outlining Accreditation or Certification Requirements

Several guidelines reference or are connected to accreditation or certification in practicing restorative justice. VARJ's guidelines reference an accompanying accreditation scheme (not included in the document), noting that these documents are in response to Recommendation 64 of The Law Reform Committee of the Victorian Parliament (LRC): 'The Victorian Government in consultation with practitioners and the Victorian Association of Restorative Justice, should develop a list of core skills and attributes required by restorative justice practitioners' (VARJ, 2009: 4). Similarly, the NZMJ's framework 'is supported by training and accreditation of facilitators, and the contractual relationship between the Ministry of Justice and restorative justice providers' (NZMJ, 2019: 5). The RJC recommends accreditation for facilitators through National Occupational Standards. Once accredited, facilitators can receive benefits such as using the RJC logo on marketing materials, using the designation letters APRJC (Accredited Practitioner RJC) and access to RJC non-public materials (RJC, 2016: 37).

## 6 Conclusion

This exploration of restorative justice practice guidelines surfaced both consistent core values and standards in practice as well as the many nuanced and complex decisions that play a role in guiding practice. Decisions surrounding language and terminology, grounding and framing, continuing relevance in an evolving field, and centring equity and justice affect not only how individual practitioners might glean useful strategies for practice, but also how the field as a whole advances restorative justice practices in service of healing from, and prevention of, interpersonal harm. While our analysis showed that different guidelines are consistent in many ways, including emphasis on core values, responsibilities of practitioners and desired outcomes of restorat-

ive justice practices, it also highlighted the many ways in which guidelines are responsive to their unique contexts, resulting in many subtle, yet significant, differences between guidelines documents.

It is our position that this responsiveness is necessary and valuable in practice guidelines. The commitment to responding to unique contextual factors and community needs is a core facet of restorative justice that differentiates it from the mainstream punitive response to harm that often ignores both the context in which harm was caused as well as the specific needs that harm creates.

This paper focused on the products of the labour, insight and commitment of many individuals who engaged in intentional and iterative processes over time to create guidance that could effectively support practice and respond to the diverse needs of their local and regional communities. As our conceptual framing highlighted, best practices within a field are often identified over time based on desirable outcomes (Andrews, 2012, in Wu et al., 2023; Bretschneider et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2023). However, the implied hierarchy in the term 'best' practice surfaces tensions within a diverse field: 'best' for *whom*, and in what context? While the content of guidelines can give us a clear picture of the priorities of guidance, it cannot give us a clear sense of how those priorities were defined and carried out. Nor can it illuminate the complexities and tensions that creators navigate around balancing consistent best practices and responsiveness to context. While their extensive experience, care and commitment is already apparent in the guidelines they created, our knowledge of the expansive and complex experiences grounding the process of creating guidelines is incomplete without their own voices, stories and learnings. The second paper dives into the narratives of several of the practitioners, researchers and community members who had a role in creating the guidelines analysed in this paper. By learning from their experiences, we can better understand the support needed for communities to create practice guidelines that are consistent with restorative justice principles, responsive to the communities that use them and sustainable across time.

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