



Challenges in Promoting RCR: Reflections from a Public Funder's Perspective

Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research

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**PANEL ON RESPONSIBLE
CONDUCT OF RESEARCH**

Why does RCR matter?

Research is an enterprise built on trust

Responsible conduct of research is the foundation for that trust

Elements of RCR

Responsible conduct of research has two components:

- Integrity of the research
- Integrity of the process

Integrity of the research



- Research conceived and conducted with rigour
- Data recorded and interpreted accurately
- Analysis and conclusions sound and verifiable

Integrity of the process

Researcher's conduct demonstrates:

- integrity with respect to treatment of all involved in the research
- compliance with legal, ethical and disciplinary norms

Departures from RCR

Examples of failure in the integrity of the research:

- Fabrication of data
- Falsification of results
- Errors in analysis of data

Departures from RCR

Examples of lack of integrity in the research process:

- Incorrect information on a grant application
- Inappropriate attribution
- Misuse of research funds
- Plagiarism
- Failure to obtain informed consent from human participants

Consequences of RCR breaches

Lack of scientific integrity:

Where the science lacks rigour or accuracy, this may lead to:

- loss of public trust in scientific findings
- diminished commitment to invest in research
- potential harm to the public

Consequences of RCR breaches

Lack of integrity in the research process:

Where a researcher has failed to treat others involved in the research appropriately, this may lead to:

- loss of trust by researchers in their colleagues and their institutions
- Loss of trust in the ability of institutions, funders and journals to adequately enforce RCR standards

RCR – a shared responsibility

Responsibility for maintaining the validity and integrity of the research enterprise is – and must be – shared, primarily among:

- researchers
- research institutions
- peer reviewers
- funders
- publishers

Public funders – a special responsibility

- To advance knowledge for the benefit of the public
- To allocate public funds responsibly
- To ensure that public funds are used for their intended purpose
- To ensure that the knowledge gained is shared.

Public funders – a special responsibility

- Consider how their own policies and practices for reviewing applications and awarding funds may or may not promote RCR
- Set clear standards for the conduct of research using public funds
- Establish a fair and timely process for the enforcement of those standards

Public funders: challenges



Challenges related to the funding process:

- Financial constraints
- Human resource constraints
- Political constraints

Challenges related to upholding RCR standards:

- Transparency vs privacy
- Repeat complainants
- Repeat offenders

Public funding processes and RCR

Is process for reviewing and awarding grants consistent with RCR? For example:

Are award decisions objective and based only on relevant and appropriate criteria?

Do peer reviewers have appropriate expertise?

Is confidentiality of peer review process understood and enforced?

Is conflict of interest properly avoided or managed?

Are the terms and conditions of applications clear? Does the funder offer assistance in understanding and completing the application process?

Is there a mechanism for applicants to appeal funding decisions?

Handling RCR allegations

- Are there clear guidelines on how to bring an allegation concerning breach of RCR?
- Is there a clear and fair process for assessing these complaints and addressing them?
- Is there an effective enforcement mechanism, so that breaches of RCR have consequences?

The transparency vs privacy challenge

Privacy interests

- complainants may be targeted as whistleblowers
- respondents may be wrongly or unfairly accused

Transparency interests

- funders and employers should know whether researchers have violated RCR guidelines

Where is the appropriate balance?

The repeat complainant challenge

- Not all allegations are well-founded
- Not all complainants are altruistic
- Allegations must be assessed for merit alone, but resources for investigation are limited

How to balance the requirement to pursue all allegations with the need to avoid misuse or abuse of public resources?

The repeat offender challenge



- Honest mistakes, as well as misconduct, may cause harm - to research record, to colleagues and to the public
- Repeated failure to live up to RCR standards may be more prevalent than misconduct

Rising to the challenge(s)

“Good stewardship of research on behalf of others”
- one of the main principles of the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity

Public funders have a special responsibility to be good stewards of research and of the public investment in research

Rising to the challenge(s)

This includes:

- Establishing clear guidelines for RCR
- Promoting their adoption by all researchers
- Implementing a fair and effective process for addressing allegations of irresponsible research practices

Rising to the challenge(s)

- Ensuring that policies and practices for the awarding of funds are consistent with RCR
- Critically examining these periodically to consider their impact (intended and unintended) on researchers

Conclusion

- Research is an enterprise built on trust
- Responsible conduct of research is the foundation of that trust, based on both sound science and ethical conduct
- All involved in the research enterprise share in the responsibility of supporting its solid foundation.

**THANK YOU!
MERCI!
OBRIGADA!**



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