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Collaborative research

A guide supporting the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*

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1. Introduction

This guide supports the implementation of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code), which articulates the broad principles and responsibilities that underpin the responsible conduct of Australian research.

In particular, this guide is intended to assist institutions and researchers to adhere to relevant principles of the Code when they are engaged in collaborative research with other Australian and/or international researchers and research institutions, including:

- Principle 4, 'Fairness in the treatment of others', which requires researchers to treat fellow researchers and others involved in the research fairly and with respect.
- Principle 6, 'Recognition of the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be engaged in research that affects or is of particular significance to them'.
- Principle 7, 'Accountability for the development, undertaking and reporting of research'.
- Principle 8, 'Promotion of responsible research practices', which requires researchers to promote and foster a research culture and environment that supports the responsible conduct of research.

The Code and this guide apply to all research conducted under the auspices of Australian institutions. These institutions vary in size, maturity, experience, and organisational structure. They range from large and complex universities, to small privately funded institutes. Accordingly, it is acknowledged that different institutional policies and processes are capable of fulfilling the aim of this guide and attempts have been made to ensure that there are appropriate options for flexibility in its application.

2. Collaborative Research

Collaborative research between institutions can take various forms and include research partners in industry, the government and not-for-profit sectors, and researchers from multiple countries.

Collaborative research can pose a range of challenges, including the need to accommodate specific research methodologies and research practices that exist in different research institutions, variations in regulatory and legal systems, institutional funding arrangements and organisational structures, and differing research cultures. These challenges should not be seen as a barrier to collaborative research, but as elements to be managed through normal risk management processes.

While research practices may differ between countries, researchers supported by Australian public funding should follow this guide even when conducting research outside Australia.

3. Responsibilities of institutions

This section provides guidance for institutions to support their efforts in ensuring responsible research practices throughout collaborative research projects.

Guidance on enhancing safeguards against foreign interference is contained in the *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector*.

3.1 Establish agreements for each collaboration

Collaborative research involves a continuum of activities ranging in scale from simple discussions through to significant long-term partnerships. Researchers should exercise their judgment as to when a collaboration reaches the stage at which agreement to conduct collaborative research should be documented, with recognition of the risks in delaying the development of a formal collaborative agreement.

Institutions should clarify for researchers when the institution should be advised that a collaborative research project is being pursued and the process that researchers should use to provide this notification.

Under the Code, institutions have the responsibility to:

R1 Establish and maintain good governance and management practices for responsible research conduct.

Institutions that become involved in a collaborative research project that meets their threshold for notification should ensure that an agreement is reached with all project partners. Such agreements must be consistent with the principles of the Code, including honesty, transparency, fairness, respect, and accountability.

Agreements should be in writing and may take various forms, including a legal contract, an exchange of letters, or a research management plan agreed by all parties or representatives of all parties. Regardless of the nature of the agreement, each institution remains responsible for ensuring compliance with the Code, including an obligation to manage and investigate potential breaches of the Code.

An institution that is intending to participate in a collaborative research project should ensure that its researchers are aware of their obligations under the agreement and governance framework, including laws, policies, and contractual arrangements.

A number of specific issues need to be addressed prior to the commencement of the project for collaborative research to be effective. This may include undertaking appropriate due diligence inquiries into potential international research partners, informed by foreign interference risks. When developing collaborative research agreements the following should be considered:

- the expectations of each party in terms of definitions of roles and responsibilities, including the designation of the institution or individuals that will take the lead in reporting to funders, regulatory bodies and in the management of potential breaches of the Code
- governance of the project, including management of significant changes, such as partners leaving or joining the collaboration
- the use, management, sharing, and ownership of research data, primary materials, and intellectual property (including copyright and pre-existing intellectual property belonging to individual parties that is shared in the course of the collaborative research)
- where practical, the ongoing ownership, stewardship or control of research data and primary materials in the event a researcher or institution leaves the collaboration during the project
- access to other assets or items that are retained at the end of the project
- the requirements for the disclosure and management of conflicts of interest
- the allocation of responsibilities in relation to ethics and governance approval and safety clearances
- the management of confidentiality issues
- the protocols for authorship and acknowledgement of research outputs, including data outputs
- funding arrangements (with funding sources declared transparently)

- any plans to commercialise research outputs and any entitlements to commercial returns
- the designation of which party or parties are entitled to communicate on behalf of the collaboration
- dispute resolution procedures to facilitate the just, efficient, timely and cost effective resolution of any issues in dispute
- the procedures for managing and investigating potential breaches of the Code, including provisions for the disclosure, where necessary, of researchers' personal information to other collaborative institutions and, where relevant, funders, to facilitate the management and investigation of potential breaches of the Code.

Agreements should be reviewed periodically to ensure that provisions remain current.

3.2 Comply with applicable laws, policies and regulations

Institutions should ensure that collaborative research projects comply with all applicable laws, policies and regulations and any identified inconsistencies should be addressed.

Under the Code, institutions have the responsibility to:

R2 Identify and comply with relevant laws, regulations, guidelines and policies related to the conduct of research.

While agreements will take account of applicable laws, policies and regulations, national and/or international, they must require that researchers and participating institutions in receipt of Australian public funding comply with the Code.

4. Responsibilities of researchers

This section provides guidance for researchers to support their efforts in observing responsible research practices throughout the various phases of collaborative research projects.

4.1 Develop and monitor collaborative research agreements

Research project leaders should be engaged in the process of developing and monitoring agreements for their collaborative research projects. Other members of the project team and research administrators should be involved as appropriate.

Research project leaders should ensure that all members of the project team are made aware of the terms of the agreement.

4.2 Comply with multi-institutional agreements and relevant institutional policies

All researchers involved in collaborative research must be aware of, understand, and comply with all policies and written agreements affecting the project, particularly those relating to intellectual property, the publication and dissemination of research and the management of research data and primary materials.

Under the Code, researchers have the responsibility to:

R17 Comply with the relevant laws, regulations, disciplinary standards, ethics guidelines and institutional policies related to responsible research conduct. Ensure that appropriate approvals are obtained prior to the commencement of research, and that conditions of any approvals are adhered to during the course of research.

4.3 Conduct research responsibly and report potential breaches of the agreement

All researchers involved in collaborative research projects must observe responsible research practices and report any potential breaches of the agreement in accordance with the procedures that are established or referred to in the project agreement.

5. Breaches of the Code

Institutions should manage and investigate concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code in accordance with the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Investigation Guide).

When developing a collaborative research agreement, consideration should be given at the outset to how potential breaches of the Code will be investigated. Institutions should consider how preliminary assessments and investigations into potential breaches of the Code are to be conducted for multi-institutional collaborations on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration issues such as the lead institution, where the complaint was lodged, contractual arrangements, any applicable agreements and where the events occurred. If there is a potential breach of the Code, institutions should cooperate to ensure that only one investigation is conducted, which may include sharing relevant information. There should be clear communication between all parties throughout the investigation.¹

6. Definitions

Research Project Leader	Generally, an individual who has primary responsibility for the planning, design, approval and conduct of a research project from its conception through to its finalisation. For collaborative research involving researchers at more than one institution, one researcher from each participating institution may be designated a Research Project Leader.
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Additional Resources

- 3rd World Conference on Research Integrity – Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations
<https://wcrif.org/montreal-statement/file>
- Lowitja Institute – Researching Indigenous Health: A practical guide for researchers
<https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/resources/health-services-and-workforce/workforce/Researching-Indigenous-Health-Guide>
- OECD Global Science Forum – Investigating Research Misconduct Allegations in International Collaborative Research Projects: A Practical Guide
<http://www.oecd.org/science/sci-tech/42770261.pdf>
- United States Office of Research Integrity – Collaborative Research Guide
<https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/rcradmin/topics/colscience/open.shtml>
- University Foreign Interference Taskforce – Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector
<https://www.education.gov.au/ufit>

¹ For further information, see section 8.1 of the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, 2018.

