Statement of Principles and Practices for Research Ethics, Integrity, and Culture in the Context of Rapid-Results Research

Preamble

The successful generation and dissemination of knowledge in science is predicated on the responsible and ethical conduct of research with attention to integrity. Ethical, responsible, and transparent research activity benefits funding agencies, researchers, governments, the global community, and the public trust in science. Principles, practices, and frameworks for ethical and responsible research conduct form the cornerstone of funding agency work and have been articulated by agencies, nations, and the Global Research Council[1].

However, as the scientific research community moves increasingly swiftly to address urgent and emergent global crises, there is a growing need to describe the ways in which these principles and practices operate in the context of rapid-results research. This Statement outlines eight principles and practices that frame the collective responsibility of funding agencies; researchers; public and private research organizations (both for- and non-profit); and national governments in ensuring the integrity of rapid-results research. This statement addresses all aspects of national and international research enterprises, from ideation to dissemination and commercialization, and has the potential to strengthen research outcomes. Two notions are fundamental across all eight principles. First, the need for rapid-results research must not lead to disregarding or eliminating any of the principles or practices. While rapid-results procedures may accelerate timelines, these practices and principles must remain at the core of the work. Second, considerations of equity and fairness must be paramount in operationalizing the principles and practices.

Principles and Practices

Norms and Cultures

Research agencies, researchers, and institutions must collaboratively establish norms and cultures that support individual and collective ethical research practice. This includes describing expectations for ethical individual conduct, promoting cultures and norms for ethical conduct within institutions, and contextualizing these norms and cultures across all types and facets of scientific research. Policies should incentivize and promote the adoption of positive norms and cultures as well as describing practices that reside outside the boundaries of such norms and the procedures for addressing actions inconsistent with them.

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[1] GRC statement of principles on peer/merit review (2018):
https://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/fileadmin//documents/GRC_Publications/Statement_of_Principles_on_Peer-Merit_Review_2018.pdf
GRC statement of principles on research integrity (2013):
https://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/fileadmin//documents/GRC_Publications/grc_statement_principles_research_integrity_FINAL.pdf

Integrity

Funding agencies should describe the ways in which research integrity is operationalized. In partnership with institutions and researchers, agencies should describe how honesty, accountability, professional courtesy, fairness, equity and inclusion, and good stewardship are reflected across all aspects of the scientific process, from proposal to funding to dissemination. While the pace of these operations may shift in the context of rapid-results research, these facets of integrity must be maintained.

Merit Review

Proposals for scientific research should be assessed in ways that are consistent with the GRC [Statement of Principles on Peer/Merit Review](#), which includes attention to expert assessment, impartiality, appropriateness, transparency, confidentiality, integrity and ethical considerations, and equity with respect to gender, diversity, and inclusion. In the context of rapid-results research, the merit review process is likely to be accelerated. Funding agencies should transparently establish guidelines that govern rapid-results merit review and consider ways to innovate processes to accelerate review during times of urgent need.

Mitigate Conflicts

Fully and transparently disclosing all relevant activities and information that bear on potential conflicts of interest and commitment is part of the broader set of researchers' responsibilities to ensure research integrity. If not carefully managed, conflicts of interest[2] and conflicts of commitment[3] can distort the research process. For researchers to fulfill their responsibility to disclose, funding agencies and institutions must make clear what information should be disclosed and how. Rapid-results research can increase the need for multilateral collaboration, which in turn can require additional attention to disclosing, understanding, and mitigating potential conflicts. Clarity and consistency on the part of funding agencies regarding disclosure requirements for rapid-results programs is essential.

Intellectual Property

Funding agencies should implement policies that protect the privacy of the proprietary and personal information and intellectual property contained in research proposals, review data, and post-award data to prevent inappropriate disclosure of non-public results or research misappropriation. Specific risks related to disclosure in rapid-results research include pressure to disseminate research findings, produce tangible products to address emergent time-sensitive threats, and the need for public-private partnerships to conduct scientific inquiry. Funding agencies should develop both general and specific guidelines related to information sharing and the need for peer review of findings to ensure public trustworthiness of science.

Principled Collaboration

A wide variety of collaborations – across institutions, between public and private entities, and across international borders – are critical to advance the frontiers of science as well as address

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[2] *Conflicts of interest* are defined as situations in which individuals or organizations have financial or other interests that may directly and significantly affect the design, conduct, reporting, or funding of research.

[3] *Conflicts of commitment* are defined as situations in which an individual accepts or incurs conflicting obligations between or among multiple employers or other entities.

emergent challenges in rapid-response research. Such collaboration is essential to the research ecosystem and should be encouraged particularly in rapid-results research contexts that frequently transcend borders. Funding agencies should facilitate the communication of expectations and standards for such collaborations, along with establishing the boundaries of improper interference in the conduct of sound research. Agencies and researchers should collaborate to guard against pressure that would constitute improper or undue influence from governmental authorities, private entities, or societal groups in all facets of the research process, such as funding studies contingent on a particular outcome or exerting direct influence on the merit review process.

Mitigate Integrity Risks

Funding agencies must establish processes both to incentivize appropriate research integrity and security policies and procedures and to administer consequences in response to violations of said policies. Included in this work is articulating the ways in which funding agencies share information regarding research integrity and security with research institutions and enforcement authorities. Addressing and remediating misconduct should scale appropriate to the violation, with dialogue and education favored for less severe cases. In addition, funding agencies can disseminate tools to assist the research community in the identification and mitigation of risks to research integrity, including proactive measures that would support accelerated funding timelines in the context of rapid-response research.

Training

Funding agencies, in collaboration with institutions, must develop standards for training related to the responsible and ethical conduct of research. Training content should address all aspects of the principles described in this document, including research ethics, security, and parameters for principled collaborations. Modules and content specific to rapid-results research contexts and the emergent global research landscape should be included.

Considerations

The GRC is well positioned to foster continued discussion and collaboration among participant research funding agencies to advance the principles and practices described in this document. In particular, there are four areas that have strong potential for participant agencies to share information and collaborate on the continued development of best practices. First, we encourage the *sharing of policies, procedures, and protocols* that funding agencies have used to frame rapid-results research programmes. Second, funding agencies should consider ways to *share information about researcher qualifications and commitments* with one another to support accelerated vetting of funding applicants and to foster stronger multilateral research collaborations. Third, funding agencies should develop *new international collaborations* to support the merit review process. In particular, such work could support pairing national funding agencies with relevant merit review expertise when the sources of such expertise may not be robust within the country. Finally, participant funding agencies may consider how to create and disseminate *shared training materials* to support rapid-results research with a specific focus on strengthening incentives to engage in ethical practice. Such training materials could advance conversations about how best to incentivize researchers and their institutions to support ethical research practices and report adverse events when they occur.