



Guideline for Promoting Research Integrity in Research Funding Organisations



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The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity identifies *reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability* as the foundational principles of research integrity (RI). To support researchers, who aspire to apply these principles in their work to deliver trustworthy research, a strong and constructive culture of integrity in research performing institutions (RPOs) is necessary. All stakeholders in the research system need to contribute to creating such an environment and to develop and disseminate practical guidelines on how the foundational principles of RI can be realised in day to day research activities. In this context Research Funding Organisations (RFOs), both public and private, are key actors in the research ecosystem and have a unique role in supporting a culture of RI. They can do this both through innovations in their working practices and by promoting appropriate policies and governance arrangements for RI in RPOs. Therefore, we encourage all RFOs to develop and implement a comprehensive Research Integrity Promotion Plan (RIPP). A RIPP addresses both internal organisation procedures and RFOs' expectations and relations with RPOs and the research community and underpins the RIPPs being developed by RPOs. A RIPP is aligned with both national and international regulations, and can be tailored to support the mission, disciplinary focus, local context, and organisational needs of the RFO. Drawing on a systematic literature review and consultations with researchers, research funders and policy makers, we identify six key topics that should be addressed in an RFO's RIPP. The topics capture (i) internal organisational issues – the RFO's internal RI policies and procedures (topics 1 to 4) and (ii) relations with the external world - what RFOs expect of the RPOs and researchers that they support (topics 5 and 6).

The main elements to be included in a Research Integrity Promotion Plan (RIPP):



1. Criteria and processes for assessing grant applications: Procedures for the assessment of grant applications and selection of awards should be fully transparent, for example by being publicly available. Assessment criteria should include high methodological and ethical standards and be in line with the principles outlined in the European Code of Conduct for RI as well as applicable national and institutional policies. As research funding becomes increasingly collaborative, agreements between RFOs to fund schemes that bridge organisations, disciplines, sectors and countries should be made publicly available and should include agreement on common (interdisciplinary) assessment criteria.



2. Declaration of interests: A Declaration of Interest (DoI) form should be completed by research grant applicants and *ad hoc* peer reviewers of research grant applications. An annual DoI should be completed by members of standing selection committees, and staff members of the RFO. The DoI should capture any financial, professional or other interest that might be seen to influence a decision or to be affected by the outcome of a decision. In addition, an RFO should state clearly that it does not accept any internal and external interference in the selection of grant applications, on its committee members, peer reviewers and staff, for example by political or commercial parties. A RIPP should also explain how it will prevent and sanction such interference.



3. Monitoring funded grants: The RFO should be transparent about the policies and processes used to monitor funded grants. In doing so,

the RFO may need to distinguish between how it monitors RPOs through audit and individual researchers or research groups through periodic reporting. Currently monitoring is often limited to expenditure of funding and progress against original scientific objectives in the grant agreement, with the possibility to make amendments if needed. To these should be added, at a minimum, compliance with good publication and dissemination practices, including, but not limited to standards for open science and FAIR data principles, and receipt of training in RI. These monitoring processes themselves should adhere to best practices of research assessment.



4. Dealing with internal breaches of research

integrity: The RFO should establish procedures to address potential breaches of RI standards by its own staff, committee members, and external peer reviewers. Such procedures could include the establishment of a whistle-blowing channel with appropriate protection mechanisms for both whistleblowers and those accused of misconduct, and the designation of responsibility within the RFO to handle such allegations, either to a dedicated ombudsperson, confidential counselor or an independent committee.



5. Expectations for Research Performing

Organisations: It is recommended that in research grant application forms RFOs add a section in which RPOs briefly describe their existing or emerging RIPP. The standards and requirements of such a RIPP are outlined in the [RPO guidelines developed in the SOIPs4RI study](#) and include compliance with RI codes of conduct, fair assessment procedures for hiring and promotion, proper RI training and education, appropriate support for supervision and mentoring, procedures for data management, research collaboration agreements, declaration of interests, and processes for investigating allegations of misconduct. Best practice examples can be found on the SOPs4RI website (www.sops4ri.eu).



6. Compliance with RI standards by

applicants: RFOs should require applicants to commit to adhere to the current regulations and codes of conduct for RI. While monitoring of compliance with such regulations is the responsibility of the applicants' employing institution (RPO), RFOs should be informed in a timely manner about potential breaches and the outcome of misconduct investigations associated with its funding. In extremis, if an RPO fails to address serious breaches of RI, the RFO should reserve the right to commission or conduct its own investigation. In their policies on misconduct RFOs should identify, and be transparent about, any additional sanctions they might apply in a case of proven misconduct.



Resources and Inspiration for Developing a RIPP

The SOPs4RI project will identify existing and co-create novel Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines relevant towards each of the topics presented in this document. These will be provided in an easily navigable toolbox that RFOs may be inspired from when developing policies, governance arrangements, facilities and procedures to be included in their RIPP (see <https://sops4ri.eu/toolbox/>). Inspirational cases of RFOs that have already implemented (parts of) a RIPP are also provided (see [here](#) under 'Inspirations'). Importantly, the tools will be diverse and be relevant across a large range of disciplines, institutional profiles, and countries. This enables RFOs to extract tools that meet their specific organisational needs.

About this Document

This Guideline for Promoting Research Integrity in Research Funding Organisations was developed by the SOPs4RI consortium. The six topics to be addressed in the organisational RIPP were identified on the basis of scoping reviews (see [here](#)), expert interviews (see [here](#)), and a Delphi survey study (see [here](#)). To examine disciplinary differences, 30 focus groups were also conducted across Europe (see [here](#)). All eleven topics emerging from the Delphi study are covered by the six items in the guideline, though some are combined or are part of the RIPP RPOs should have in place (for more information on this translation process, see [here](#)).

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