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 the 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’
- Principle 7, ‘Accountability for the development, undertaking and reporting of research’
- Principle 8, ‘Promotion of responsible research practices’.

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 can take various forms, including research between and across research institutions, with research partners in industry and the government and not-for-profit sectors, as well as involving researchers from multiple countries.

Collaborative research can pose challenges for a range of reasons, including the specific methodologies and research practices that exist in different research institutions, international variations in regulatory and legal systems, institutional funding and organisational structures, and differing research cultures.

While research practices may differ between countries, researchers in receipt of Australian public funding are required to comply with the Code and should follow this guide even when conducting research outside Australia.¹

3. Responsibilities of institutions

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

3.1 Establish agreements for each collaboration

Institutions involved in a collaborative research project should ensure that an agreement is reached with all project partners prior to the commencement of the project. Such agreements must be

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¹ Researchers undertaking human research outside Australia that is supported by Australian public funding are also required to conform to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. See Chapter 4.8.
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 signed 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 must ensure that its researchers are aware of, and understand what has been agreed, and the governance framework – including laws, policies, and contractual arrangements – that underpin the project.

A number of specific issues need to be addressed prior to the commencement of the project for collaborative research to be effective. At a minimum, collaborative research agreements should address:

- 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 or in the management of potential breaches of the Code
- the use, management, sharing, and ownership of research data, source material, and intellectual property (including copyright and pre-existing intellectual property belonging to individual parties that is shared in the course of the collaborative research)
- access to research data, primary materials and other items that are retained at the end of the project, including any open access requirements
- 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
- the requirements for the disclosure and management of conflicts of interest
- the allocation of responsibilities in relation to ethics approvals 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)
- plans to commercialise research outputs and any entitlements to commercial returns, if any
- the designation of which party or parties are entitled to speak on behalf of the collaboration
- dispute resolution procedures
- 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.

Institutions should ensure that relevant administrators who are involved in developing research collaboration agreements engage effectively with research project leaders to ensure that the terms of the agreement are clearly understood and accepted by those researchers participating in the

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2 Institutions should seek to minimise unnecessary duplication of ethics review consistent with Chapter 5.3 of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.
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.

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.

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**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.

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### 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 Developing and monitoring 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.

In particular, research project leaders should be actively engaged in identifying issues relating to the project that should be addressed in an agreement, as well as monitoring the adherence to, and effectiveness of, the agreement throughout the course of the collaborative research project.

Research project leaders should ensure that all members of the project team understand 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 dissemination of research findings and the management of research data and primary materials.

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**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.

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#### 4.3 Conduct research responsibly and report suspected breaches

All researchers involved in collaborative research projects, including multi-national collaborations, must observe responsible research practices and must report any suspected deviations in

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accordance with the procedures that are established or deferred 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).

Breaches of the Code that are related to collaborative research (see also Section 2.1 of the Investigation Guide) include, but are not limited to:

- commencing a collaborative research project without ensuring appropriate governance arrangements are in place
- failure to report potential breaches of the Code to the relevant institution/s or as per the procedures set out in the agreement.

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.3

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 considered 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


United States Office of Research Integrity – Collaborative Research Guide
https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/rcradmin/topics/colscience/open.shtml