



# Responsible Conduct of Research – The View from Canada

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**AAAS Workshop on Responsible Professional Practices**  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
February 16, 2012

**PANEL ON RESPONSIBLE  
CONDUCT OF RESEARCH**

# Outline of presentation

- Overview of Canadian landscape for responsible conduct of research
- Challenges: domestic and international
- The promise of education: false hope or best hope?

# Governance of RCR in Canada

- Based on policy, not regulatory authority; enforced through funding
- Institutions are eligible to receive and administer Agency funding on condition that they comply with and enforce Agency policies
  - Memorandum of Understanding on Roles and Responsibilities in the Management of Federal Grants and Awards (MOU)
- Researchers must follow Agency policies as a condition of funding (set out in application/funding agreement)

# RCR policy in Canada

1994: *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Integrity in Research and Scholarship* - common policy of the three federal research agencies :

- Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
- Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

## **Dec. 2011: *Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research***

- Revised and updated based on expert advice, public consultation

# RCR Framework: Objectives

- Ensure that funding decisions made by the Agencies are based on accurate and reliable information;
- Ensure public funds for research are used responsibly and in accordance with funding agreements;
- Promote and protect the quality, accuracy and reliability of research funded by the Agencies;
- Promote fairness in the conduct of research and the process for addressing allegations of policy breaches; and
- Promote transparency in instances of serious breaches

# RCR Framework: New Elements

- Clarifies the responsibilities of researchers
- Clarifies what constitutes a breach of agency policy
- Sets out timelines for inquiry and investigation into allegations of breach
- Outlines minimum requirements for institutional investigations
- Sets out measures for exceptional circumstances

# RCR Framework: **Scope**

- Each institution must develop and administer a policy to address allegations of policy breaches by its researchers
- These institutional policies must meet the minimum requirements set out in the Framework
- Institutional policies apply to all research conducted under the auspices or jurisdiction of the institution – regardless of source of funding
- Researchers who apply for or hold Agency funding must adhere to the RCR Framework

# RCR Framework: **Scope (cont'd)**

- So, researchers must comply with all Agency requirements (and legislation) applicable to their research
- These include, among others:
  - integrity policy
  - policy on ethical conduct of research involving humans,
  - animal care policies
  - financial guidelines on use of research funds

# Role of researchers

- Comply with Agency policies, from application for Agency funding through conduct of research and dissemination of results
- NEW: when applying for Agency funding, must sign Consent to Disclosure of Personal Information – allows for publication of personal information in the event of serious breach of Agency policy
- Take proactive steps to rectify any breach of Agency policy

# Role of institutions

- Adopt institutional policy to address allegations of policy breaches by researchers for all research conducted under its auspices or jurisdiction; policy must meet minimum requirements of Framework
- Ensure adherence to Framework by all researchers who apply for or hold Agency funding
- Address all allegations of breach of Framework through inquiry and, if necessary, formal investigation
- report to Agencies on outcome of inquiry/investigation within set timelines

# Role of Agencies

- Ensure institutions adhere to timelines for inquiries and investigations
- Have Advisory Panel on Responsible Conduct of Research consider reports from institutions, and recommend appropriate recourse
- Agency President determines recourse
- In cases of serious breach, publicly identify the person in breach, nature of the breach and person's place of employment

# Advisory Panel on Responsible Conduct of Research

- Volunteer, independent body responsible for providing a “coherent and uniform approach to promoting the responsible conduct of research and addressing allegations of breaches of Tri-Agency policies”
- Members appointed by Agency Presidents
  - Drawn from a range of disciplines and professional backgrounds, including institutional administrators
  - Experienced in addressing research integrity issues

# Advisory Panel – Mandate

Responsibilities include:

- Considering the findings in institutional reports and recommending recourse consistent with Framework
- Promoting RCR through education
- Providing advice to Agencies on RCR matters
- Reviewing Framework every five years
- Recommending revisions to Framework

# Challenges – domestic and international

Cultural challenge – is there international consensus on RCR best practices?

- With internationalization of student body and professorate, international issues are domestic, and domestic research teams are international
- New Framework drew on international norms and international guidance, but two stages to best practices: agreement (at all levels) on what they should be; and translating that consensus into practice

# Challenges – domestic and international

Governance challenge – a question of trust

- Responsibility for investigations
  - Framework requirement for external member with no institutional affiliation
- Greater transparency
  - Consent to Disclosure of Personal Information assures publicity for serious breaches

# Earning trust

Those charged with addressing RCR issues have two responsibilities:

- To earn the trust of researchers through the impartial implementation of clear and fair policies
- To earn the trust of the public through the demonstrably impartial implementation of clear and fair policies

# Earning trust – a step forward

- For researchers, new Framework provides clearer guidance on what is acceptable conduct
- Emphasis not on wrongdoing, but on responsible behaviour
- Harmonized approach, independent Panel promotes fairness and consistency
- For institutions: clearer procedures and timelines
- For public: greater transparency

# Effective governance

Lessons learned from human research ethics:

- Define founding principles
- Provide clear guidance
- Assist with interpretation and implementation
- Know your audience
- Provide education on the ground as well as online

# The promise of education

## False hope?

- Focus of RCR is the individual
- But RCR is as much about academic, professional and even societal culture and practice as it is about individual action
- Can education effect a culture shift?
- Are we allocating the human and material resources to make that possible?

# The promise of education

## Best hope?

- Education is not the only way to promote responsible conduct of research
- Other approaches include clear and consistent policies, clear lines of accountability, unambiguous sanctions for misconduct and greater transparency around RCR
- But education must be our best hope, because it is founded not on the threat of sanction but on confidence in the conduct of researchers

# Education options

- Modelling on education activities developed for ethical conduct of research involving humans, preliminary plans include:
  - Interactive tutorial
  - Regional workshops
  - Interpretation service
  - Webinars on key topics
- Open to adopting good educational tools, acting as clearinghouse for dialogue on best practices

Thank you



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