Research Integrity Advisors

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.

This guide is intended to assist institutions to adhere to all principles of the Code, in particular:

• Principle 8, 'Promotion of responsible research practices', which requires institutions to 'Promote and foster a research culture and environment that supports the responsible conduct of research'

• Responsibility 6, which states that institutions are required to 'Identify and train Research Integrity Advisors who assist in the promotion and fostering of responsible research conduct and provide advice to those with concerns about potential breaches of the Code.'

This guide also provides practical guidance to assist Research Integrity Advisors (RIAs) in fulfilling their role, expanding on references to RIAs in the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of research* (the Investigation Guide).

It applies to all RIAs employed by, or affiliated with, 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 aims of this guide and attempts have been made to ensure that there are appropriate options for flexibility in its application.

2.   Role of RIAs

RIAs are nominated, trained and supported by institutions to promote the responsible conduct of research by providing advice on research practices and researcher responsibilities as well as advice to those with concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code. The Code sets out principles and responsibilities that both researchers and institutions are expected to follow when conducting research. Critical to this endeavour are the moral leadership and espoused values of the institution and the shared values and expectations of honesty and integrity that characterise an institution's leadership and culture. RIAs help the institution to promote this culture.

RIAs are people with research experience, analytical skills, empathy, good communication skills, knowledge and understanding of the institution's processes and the Code. They also will have familiarity with accepted research practices in general, and, where possible, practices that are discipline-specific.

RIAs provide impartial advice and guidance to those with questions about any aspect of responsible research practice. Anyone with a concern that a breach of the Code may have occurred and would like advice is encouraged to discuss the matter with any RIA before submitting a formal complaint.

3. Responsibilities of Institutions

This section provides guidance on the responsibilities that institutions have in relation to nominating, training and supporting RIAs.

3.1   Identify RIAs

Institutions are responsible for identifying and nominating RIAs or networks of RIAs.

Institutions should ensure that those appointed as RIAs:

- have a strong understanding of the Code and relevant institutional research and integrity processes
- model values of the Code
- have a demonstrated track record of adhering to responsible research conduct
- can provide advice on research integrity matters in a professional, discreet and sensitive manner
- have a strong understanding of related processes such as those for managing bullying and harassment
- are approachable and unbiased at all times.

> **Under the Code, institutions have the responsibility to:**
>
> R6   *Identify and train Research Integrity Advisors who assist in the promotion and fostering of responsible research conduct and provide advice to those with concerns about potential breaches of the Code.*

Institutions should ensure that the number, location and areas of expertise of RIAs that they appoint are adequate to support the institution and meet the needs of their researchers, staff and students. When identifying RIAs, institutions should ensure that they consider people from diverse backgrounds and at different career stages.

Where the relevant experience and expertise within institutions is limited, institutions may choose to come to a formal arrangement to utilise RIAs that are external to their organisation in order to provide general non-institution specific advice about responsible research practice. Where the institution is relatively small or is unable to support an RIA, a multi-institutional network of RIAs could be considered. However, in these instances, institutions should still identify someone within their institution to provide advice on specific institutional processes.

3.2   Make available information about RIAs

Institutions should look for ways to promote the role of RIAs and ensure that information about the availability and role of RIAs is readily accessible by staff and students. This information should include a list of RIAs and their contact details.

Where there is a network of RIAs within an institution, concerned parties should not be restricted to seeking advice from an RIA in their immediate area, for example their faculty or department, or on their campus.

3.3   Provide training and support to RIAs

Institutions must provide training opportunities to RIAs to:

- develop their existing knowledge of the Code and supporting guides and related internal policies
- outline their responsibilities and obligations as an RIA
- provide an overview of the institution's mechanism for receiving complaints about potential breaches of the Code
- familiarise them with the resources available to support them in their role
- address any questions or concerns they may have about the position
- offer refresher training or guidance on a regular basis.

> **Under the Code, institutions have responsibility to:**
>
> R4   *Provide ongoing training and education that promotes and supports responsible research conduct for all researchers and those in other relevant roles.*

Further training or guidance should be made available to RIAs when there are changes to their responsibilities, including updates to regulations, codes and guides, or changes to any relevant institutional processes.

Institutions should offer ongoing support and training to RIAs, including relevant resources (such as cultural awareness support; opportunities for networking with other RIAs; ready access to the full suite of relevant codes, statements, policies and procedures; advice regarding appropriate space for confidential discussions) and a point of contact for RIAs to discuss issues arising from their performance of the role.

3.4   Disclose interests and manage conflicts of interest appropriately

Institutions are required to provide guidance to RIAs on their obligations to disclose interests that may constitute a conflict of interest (COI) related to their role as RIAs, and to have processes in place to manage any COIs that arise.

COIs should be considered on a case-by-case basis. A COI is a situation in which an RIA has competing professional or private interests with the individual seeking advice, or in relation to the issue raised. Such competing interests could make it difficult for the RIA to fulfil their duties impartially and could improperly influence the performance of their official duties and responsibilities as an RIA. In instances where it could be reasonably perceived that an RIA's professional or private interests could improperly influence the performance of their duties, the RIA should err on the side of caution and follow their institution's processes on how to manage COIs that arise.

Examples of situations that may give rise to a conflict of interest include where the RIA has a financial interest in the matter, or where the RIA has a supervisory, working or personal relationship with anyone involved in the matter.

Where an institution is relatively small and a conflict of interest may be unavoidable, it may be useful to approach an RIA external to the organisation.

3.5   Manage confidentiality

Institutions are required to inform RIAs that they are obliged to report information that may be related to a potential breach of the Code. This includes the RIA's responsibility to inform anyone seeking their advice of that person's obligation to report a potential breach of the Code. There may be times when a person seeking advice from an RIA does not wish to report a potential breach themselves or does not wish the RIA to raise their concern with the institution.

Institutions should ensure that their RIAs are aware of the options that are available to them in fulfilling their reporting obligations, including the extent to which they will be able to keep information confidential and when they may have an obligation to report information that may be related to a potential breach of the Code.

Section 4.4 of this guide outlines the responsibilities of RIAs in relation to their reporting obligations and confidentiality requirements in greater detail.

4. Responsibilities of RIAs

RIAs should have a strong understanding of the Code, its supporting guides and their institution's policies and procedures relating to responsible research conduct.

In addition, RIAs are also required to have a demonstrated track record in adhering to and promoting responsible research practices.

This section provides guidance to assist RIAs in their role.

4.1 Provide advice on responsible research conduct

The role of the RIA is to provide guidance and advice to researchers and concerned parties on responsible research practices in accordance with the Code, its supporting guides and the institution's relevant processes and procedures.

> **Under the Code, researchers have the responsibility to:**
>
> R14 *Support a culture of responsible research conduct at their institution and in their field of practice.*

RIAs should promote responsible research conduct in a supportive, respectful and confidential environment in order to enable discussion of:

- responsible research practices as described in guidance provided by the Code and supporting guides
- concerns about potential breaches of the Code
- the process and information required for reporting a potential breach of the Code and other appropriate pathways to manage concerns that are not necessarily related to research integrity.

When RIAs respond to requests for advice they should:

- respond in a timely manner and/or advise when advice will be delayed whilst the RIA seeks further information or guidance either from the Research Integrity Office (RIO) (or equivalent) or other RIAs
- communicate clearly
- be impartial and provide unbiased advice
- not disclose details to anyone unless required by processes under the Code and/or institutional or other policies.

RIAs may also have a responsibility to assist with education and training as well as promote responsible research practice in their respective areas.

4.2   Engage in relevant training and support

RIAs must participate in induction and refresher training to develop and maintain their understanding of:

• the Code and supporting guides
• the processes and procedures contained within the Investigation Guide
• institutional processes and procedures
• their responsibilities as an RIA.

RIAs should seek support from the institution's RIO (or equivalent) as required.

4.3 Disclose interests and manage conflicts of interest

RIAs should appropriately disclose their interests to the concerned party. If the RIA and the concerned party perceive that there is a conflict of interest, the RIA may not engage in discussions with or provide advice to the concerned party on relevant matters. In this instance, the RIA should refer the concerned party to another RIA, where available, or seek advice on how to proceed from the institution's RIO (or equivalent).

If an RIA is unsure whether their interests constitute a conflict of interest, they should seek the advice of their institution's RIO (or equivalent) prior to engaging in any discussions with concerned parties.

There may be times where a conflict of interest only becomes apparent after initial or continued discussions. If this occurs, the RIA should stop providing advice and either hand over to another RIA or seek advice from the RIO, (or equivalent).

Examples of situations that may give rise to a conflict of interest include where the RIA has a financial interest in the matter, or where the RIA has a supervisory, working or personal relationship with anyone involved in the matter.

4.4 Reporting potential breaches of the Code

Consistent with the requirements of the Code for all those involved in research, RIAs have an obligation to report potential breaches of the Code to the RIO (or equivalent). This being the case, when the person seeking advice first approaches the RIA, the RIA should establish shared expectations from the outset about the extent to which the RIA will be able to keep information confidential and when they may have an obligation to report the matter. The person seeking advice can then decide whether to disclose details to the RIA, seek general advice only, or seek an alternative source of advice.

As part of their role in providing advice, the RIA may suggest that the person seeking advice provide documents to help the RIA understand the matter and whether it falls under the Code. Providing documents to the RIA is not part of the process of gathering evidence for any preliminary assessment of a potential breach required by the Code, which is conducted by the RIO (or equivalent).

Where the person seeking advice from the RIA wishes to report the matter, the RIA should support the reporting of potential breaches of the Code to the institutional RIO (or equivalent) in a timely manner and in accordance with the institution's documented process. Where a matter is reported, the RIA will not generally be involved in the institution's response other than as a witness or to provide testimony, where required (as per the Investigation Guide).

4.5 Record Keeping

RIAs should keep a record of all formal discussions and advice given. This will assist them to:

- provide consistent and informed follow up advice, where needed
- provide advice to the institution on any common or recurring issues
- respond to questions or concerns raised by their institution about the advice they have given in their role.

The RIA's records should be kept in a safe, secure location and disposed of in accordance with institutional record keeping policies.

The RIA's records of confidential discussions are not part of the investigation process. However, if a matter is referred to the RIO (or equivalent), these records may be required as evidence.

5. Additional Resources

Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018 (the Code)

Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Investigation Guide)

Guide to Authorship

Guide to Management of data and information in research

Guide to Peer review

Guide to Disclosure of interests and management of conflicts of interest

Guide to Supervision

Guide to Collaborative research

Guide to Publication and dissemination of research