

Texas A&M AgriLife Research Procedures

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PROCEDURE SUMMARY

The responsible and ethical conduct of research is critical for excellence as well as for maintaining public trust in research. It is the goal of Texas A&M AgriLife Research (AgriLife Research) to promote an environment of responsible conduct of research (RCR), and to ensure that individuals subject to federal responsible conduct in research requirements complete responsible conduct of research training.

The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidance on the minimum responsible conduct of research training requirements for compliance with federal requirements where individuals are supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and to establish institutional requirements for the training of students and postdoctoral researchers involved in AgriLife Research-related research, regardless of funding.

Click [here](#) to view **Definitions**.

PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.0 Background

1.1 Recipients of awards from the NSF, the USDA-NIFA, and the NIH are required to comply with specific requirements to ensure appropriate training in the responsible conduct of research as follows:

- 1.1.1. **NSF:** The 2007 America COMPETES Act directed the NSF to require that all funded students and postdoctoral researchers undergo training in the responsible conduct of research. The implementation of this requirement became effective with all NSF awards (including continuations) received on or after January 4, 2010. In January 2023, NSF updated its *Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide* to require that faculty and other senior personnel undergo training in the responsible conduct of research. All undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and senior personnel "who will be *supported* by NSF to conduct research" must complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) RCR training.
- 1.1.2. **USDA-NIFA:** USDA-NIFA mandates that program directors, faculty, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and any staff *participating* in the research project receive appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research. The requirement may be met by completing the CITI RCR training.
- 1.1.3. **NIH:** NIH requires that all Institutional Research Training Grants, Individual Fellowship Awards, Career Development Awards (institutional and individual), Research Education Grants, Dissertation Research Grants, or other grant programs with a training component include a plan for how the researcher will carry out instruction in responsible conduct of research. All trainees, fellows, participants, and scholars receiving support are required to complete a total of eight hours of RCR training. Instruction should include face-to-face discussions (online, such as CITI RCR training, can be a component, but is not sufficient). Substantial face-to-face discussion,

combination of didactic and small-group discussions (e.g., case studies), and participation of research training faculty members in instruction are highly encouraged, with a minimum of four hours of face-to-face training recommended. Instructions must be undertaken at least once during each career stage (undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, predoctoral, and postdoctoral), but no less than once every four years.

2.0 General

- 2.1 An institution-wide environment pertaining to responsible conduct of research requires researchers to have the knowledge, skills, and tools to allow them to be responsible for their research conduct. Knowledge areas depending on research focus may include topics such as authorship, plagiarism, peer review, human subjects protections, animal welfare, clinical practice, data acquisition, management, sharing and ownership, conflict of interest, collaborative research, export controls, research expenditures, research misconduct, conflict of commitment, safe research environments, foreign collaboration, data confidentiality, data security, and data analysis among others.
- 2.2 CITI RCR training covers many of the core research topics. The strengths of the CITI RCR training include providing individuals with broad exposure to important areas of ethics and serving as a good informational resource for future reference. Face-to-face training is meant to build and expand on the core research topics and fosters an environment for group discussion and interaction. Face-to-face training is designed to provide regular reminders of responsible research as well as to promote a deeper understanding of scholarly ethics so that individuals integrate ethical decision-making into daily scholarly activities. For those students unable to attend in-person face-to-face training, sessions utilizing interactive video conferencing platforms will be made available.
- 2.3 A catalogue of current training opportunities can be found at <https://vpr.tamu.edu/manage-research/responsible-conduct-of-research>.

3.0 General Responsibilities

- 3.1 The AgriLife Ethics and Compliance Office is responsible for providing and monitoring training through the online CITI Program. In addition, the Texas A&M University (University) Conflict of Interest and Responsible Conduct of Research Office provides workshops oriented towards undergraduate and graduate students, as well as postdoctoral researchers.
- 3.2 AgriLife Research is responsible for ensuring that students and postdoctoral researchers are compliant with the training requirements. The Principal Investigator (PI) supports the agency in this effort when the research is funded through PI-specific research grants.
- 3.3 The PI, with the support of AgriLife Research, is responsible for assisting the Ethics and Compliance Office in ensuring that students and postdoctoral researchers supported on their agency-related research projects are compliant with training requirements and that records are shared with the agency and the Ethics and Compliance Office as applicable.
- 3.4 Undergraduate students
 - 3.4.1 All undergraduate students who are participating in internally funded research, gift-funded research, or externally funded sponsored research must complete the CITI RCR training within 60 days from their initial involvement in the research activity unless required earlier.
- 3.5 Graduate students
 - 3.5.1 Internally funded research, gift-funded research, or participation in research activities: Graduate students participating in research funded internally or by research gifts (including all courses for which research is an integral element, such as honors thesis, master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation) must complete the CITI RCR training within 60 days from commencement of the research activity unless required earlier.

3.5.2 Externally funded research: graduate students participating in externally funded research must complete the CITI RCR training within 60 days following receipt of such support unless required earlier. In addition, each graduate student must complete four hours of face-to-face training within the first six months of his or her involvement in externally funded research unless required earlier.

3.6 Postdoctoral researchers must complete the CITI RCR training within 60 days of employment, regardless of their source of funding. In addition, each postdoctoral researcher must complete an additional four hours of face-to-face training within the first six months of his or her employment unless required earlier.

4.0 Supplemental Trainings

4.1 Supplemental trainings are intended to complement the core training offerings and should be customized based on the requirements of and/or applicability to the research to be undertaken by the students or postdoctoral researcher. It is important to note that some of the trainings, such as human subjects, laboratory and biosafety, and animal welfare, must be successfully completed prior to engaging in certain types of research activities.

5.0 Monitoring Requirements

5.1 The AgriLife Ethics and Compliance Office will work directly with students and postdoctoral researchers to ensure compliance with this procedure. The Ethics and Compliance Office will track online and workshop training completions and will send a report of these completions to each department, center or institute for review and appropriate action, if needed. The department, center or institute is responsible for updating the report, as needed, and returning the report to the Ethics and Compliance Office.

6.0 Enforcement

6.1 The AgriLife Director of Ethics and Compliance will work with the agency to resolve any issues of non-compliance. As necessary, the Institutional Official will be **authorized to suspend institutional research privileges for non-compliance** with federal, state, Texas A&M University System, and/or AgriLife Research rules, policies, and regulations. Any questions regarding exceptions and re-instatement of privileges must be sent in writing to the Institutional Official.

6.2 In order to promote compliance with this procedure, any student or postdoctoral researcher supported by external grant funds who fails to satisfactorily complete the required CITI RCR training within 60 days and/or the additional four-hour requirement of face-to-face training within the designated period shall be removed from the externally funded sponsored research project. Reinstatement on the project is strictly conditional on satisfactory completion of the training requirements detailed in this procedure.

RELATED STATUTES, POLICIES, OR REQUIREMENTS

[NIH Grants and Funding Notice Number NOT-OD-10-019](#)

[NIH FY 2022 Updated Guidance: Requirement for Instruction in the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

[NSF Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#)

[NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide](#)

[USDA-NIFA Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#)

[NIFA USDA Agency-Specific Terms And Conditions Effective May 14, 2022](#)

DEFINITIONS

Responsible Conduct of Research: Generally, the rules, regulations, and best practices established to guide research and scholarly activities in order to produce results that are honest, accurate, efficient, and objective.

Researcher: An individual/employee who conducts research, whether funded or unfunded. For the purposes of this procedure, this term includes, but is not limited to, undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers.

AgriLife Research-Related Research: Includes both internally and externally funded research activities.

Internally funded research: Research that is not funded via an agreement with a sponsor but is instead funded through internal sources. This type of research funding does not involve Sponsored Research Services in the administration of these research activities and includes competitively awarded internal proposal programs as well as other internal sources that may or may not be restricted to research.

Externally funded research:

- **Sponsored Research:** Funded activities, including cost-sharing, in which a formal agreement (e.g., a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement) is entered into by AgriLife Research and a sponsor or sponsors. These activities generally have a defined scope of work, require detailed financial accountability (e.g., detailed budget, regular financial reporting and audit, return of unexpended funds at end of project), and deliverables.
- **Research gifts:** Funding from an external sponsor (donor) who expects nothing of significant value in return, other than recognition and disposition of the gift in accordance with the donor's wishes. Gifts may be accompanied by an agreement that restricts the use of the funds to a particular purpose. Beyond that, no contractual requirements are imposed (beyond the requirements of responsible stewardship) and there are no "deliverables" to the donor (i.e., no rights to tangible or intellectual property). There is no formal fiscal accountability to the donor beyond periodic progress reports and summary reports of expenditures.

Principal Investigator: The individual responsible for the administrative and programmatic aspects of an AgriLife Research-related research project.

Face-to-Face Training: Training offered by the University's Division of Research which includes certain core research topics, as listed on the DOR website at <https://vpr.tamu.edu/manage-research/responsible-conduct-of-research>. These topics are viewed as essential components of RCR training and provide fundamental knowledge and, thereby, fostering an environment of research integrity.

Supplemental Training: Other face-to-face and/or online courses not included in the core training. Supplemental training includes fundamental knowledge geared towards a subset of research fields.

CONTACT OFFICE

Questions regarding this procedure should be referred to the Ethics and Compliance Office at 979-314-3442 or ethics-compliance@ag.tamu.edu.

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