# Open Free Science Inc

## Responsible & Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR) Policy and Training Plan

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| **Policy owner** | Open Free Science Inc (OFS) |
| **Adopted** | September 16, 2026 |
| **Effective** | September 16, 2026 |
| **RECR Compliance Official** | Tingting Zhao, Director of Scientific Programs |
| **Compliance contact** | compliance@openfreescience.org |

### 1. Purpose

Open Free Science Inc (OFS) is committed to conducting and supporting research with rigor, integrity, transparency, respect, and responsible stewardship of research resources. This policy establishes OFS expectations for the responsible and ethical conduct of research and a role-based training plan appropriate to OFS as a research nonprofit whose activities may involve researchers, software engineers, data and computational personnel, community-engagement personnel, consultants, collaborators, and volunteers.

This policy is intended to support OFS compliance with applicable sponsor requirements, including the National Science Foundation (NSF) requirement that institutions maintain a plan for appropriate RECR training and oversight for covered NSF-supported personnel. It also establishes an institutional framework for responsible research practices relevant to NIH/PHS-supported activities. Where a specific award, funding opportunity, law, regulation, or sponsor policy imposes additional or different requirements, OFS will follow the applicable requirement.

### 2. Scope and Covered Individuals

This policy applies to OFS personnel and other individuals whose responsibilities materially involve the design, conduct, analysis, management, software implementation, documentation, dissemination, supervision, or reporting of research conducted under OFS auspices.

Covered individuals may include principal investigators, senior/key personnel, researchers, research scientists, research staff, and, depending on responsibilities, software engineers, data/computational personnel, community-engagement personnel, consultants, collaborators, and volunteers.

Participation in an OFS event, workshop, interview, advisory discussion, stakeholder activity, or community-engagement activity does not by itself make a person a covered researcher or require the full RECR curriculum. OFS will determine training requirements based on the individual's actual responsibilities and applicable sponsor requirements.

If OFS later supports undergraduate students, graduate students, or postdoctoral researchers in activities subject to NSF RECR requirements, those individuals will be included in the applicable training and oversight program.

### 3. Core Principles of Responsible Research

Individuals covered by this policy are expected to:

- Conduct research honestly, accurately, objectively, and with appropriate scientific rigor.
- Maintain research records sufficient to support the work, methods, analyses, and conclusions.
- Protect research data, confidential information, proprietary information, intellectual property, credentials, software repositories, and other research resources from inappropriate access, use, alteration, or disclosure.
- Give appropriate credit and attribution and avoid fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and other deceptive research practices.
- Disclose and appropriately manage financial or other conflicts as required by OFS policy and applicable sponsor requirements.
- Communicate limitations, uncertainty, corrections, and material errors responsibly.
- Treat colleagues, collaborators, contributors, research participants, and community members fairly and respectfully.
- Comply with applicable laws, regulations, award terms, OFS policies, data-use terms, licenses, and professional standards.

## 4. Research Rigor, Reproducibility, Data and Records

Researchers shall use methods appropriate to the research question, document material methodological and analytical decisions, preserve records needed to understand and verify the work, and avoid selective or misleading presentation of results. Research data and records shall be managed in accordance with applicable data-management and sharing plans, sponsor requirements, agreements, and OFS policies.

Where feasible and appropriate, computational workflows should support traceability and reproducibility through documentation of data sources, versions, processing steps, code, parameters, models, and material changes. Provenance should be maintained for evidence and community-contributed scientific information when provenance is relevant to interpretation or reuse.

## 5. Computational Research, Software and Artificial Intelligence

Because OFS research may involve scientific software, knowledge graphs, natural language processing, artificial intelligence, and other computational methods, responsible conduct includes appropriate validation, documentation, provenance, security, and human oversight of computational outputs.

Covered individuals shall not present machine-generated, model-generated, or automatically extracted content as verified scientific evidence without appropriate review for the intended use. Material use of AI or automated tools in research shall follow applicable sponsor, publication, confidentiality, data-use, intellectual-property, and OFS requirements. Code, models, datasets, dependencies, and third-party components shall be used consistently with applicable licenses and access terms.

## 6. Authorship, Publication and Scientific Communication

Authorship and other forms of credit should reflect substantive contributions and applicable disciplinary or publication standards. Individuals shall not engage in plagiarism, inappropriate authorship practices, duplicate or misleading publication, or intentional misrepresentation of methods, results, contributions, or provenance. Material errors discovered after dissemination should be addressed through appropriate correction, clarification, retraction, or other action.

## 7. Peer Review, Confidentiality and Proprietary Information

Individuals participating in peer review or other confidential scientific evaluation shall protect confidential materials, avoid inappropriate use of nonpublic information, disclose conflicts when required, and conduct review objectively and respectfully. Proprietary information and intellectual property shall be protected from inappropriate disclosure or use.

## 8. Collaborative, Community-Based and Volunteer Research

OFS may conduct research with external institutions, community contributors, volunteers, software developers, domain experts, and other collaborators. Responsibilities for data, records, authorship/credit, confidentiality, intellectual property, publication, security, and research integrity should be clarified when appropriate to the activity.

Community contributors and volunteers whose work materially contributes to research shall receive training or orientation appropriate to their responsibilities. OFS may use contribution agreements, confidentiality terms, data-access conditions, repository rules, or other documented procedures when appropriate. External stakeholders who merely participate in interviews, workshops, or outreach activities are not automatically subject to OFS personnel training requirements.

## 9. Conflicts of Interest and Commitment

Covered individuals shall comply with applicable OFS conflict-of-interest requirements, including the OFS organizational Conflict of Interest Policy and, when applicable, the OFS Financial Conflict of Interest Policy for NIH/PHS-Funded Research. Compliance with this RECR policy does not replace disclosure or review required under those policies or under sponsor-specific requirements.

## 10. Intellectual Property, Licensing and Open Research

Covered individuals shall respect copyrights, patents, licenses, confidentiality obligations, data-use restrictions, contributor terms, and other intellectual-property rights. Open-source or open-data distribution does not eliminate obligations to verify that OFS has appropriate rights to distribute, modify, combine, or sublicense materials. Detailed ownership, licensing, invention, software, and contributor requirements may be established in separate OFS policies or agreements.

## 11. Mentoring, Supervision and Research Environment

OFS personnel who supervise or mentor researchers shall communicate expectations for responsible research, provide appropriate guidance and feedback, support accurate recordkeeping and research rigor, and foster an environment in which questions or concerns can be raised without retaliation. Mentor training and mentorship shall be included when required by NSF or another applicable sponsor. OFS will tailor mentor-related training to the responsibilities and structure of the project.

OFS expects a professional research environment free from harassment, bullying, retaliation, discrimination, and other conduct inconsistent with applicable law, award conditions, or OFS policy.

## 12. Human Subjects, Animals, Safety and Other Regulated Research

When OFS activities involve human subjects, vertebrate animals, biosafety, controlled or sensitive information, export controls, or other regulated research, individuals shall complete and comply with all additional approvals, training, and procedures required before beginning the covered activity. This RECR policy does not substitute for those specialized requirements.

## 13. Research Security and Information Protection

Covered individuals shall take reasonable steps to protect research information, computing resources, accounts, credentials, software repositories, and other research assets. Individuals shall follow applicable access controls, data-use restrictions, sponsor security requirements, and OFS information-security procedures, and shall promptly report suspected loss, compromise, unauthorized access, or inappropriate disclosure through the applicable OFS reporting channel. Detailed technical requirements may be established in a separate Research Data, Computing & Information Security Policy.

## 14. Training Requirements and Role-Based Plan

OFS shall provide or require RECR training appropriate to an individual's responsibilities and applicable sponsor requirements. The RECR Compliance Official will determine the applicable training category and may approve internal instruction, external courses, sponsor-provided resources, case discussions, or other appropriate methods.

| Category | Typical OFS roles | Minimum OFS approach |
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| Core RECR training | PI; senior/key personnel; researchers; research scientists; others materially responsible for designing, conducting, analyzing, supervising, or reporting research | Complete OFS-approved core RECR training before or early in covered research and complete refreshers as required by the sponsor or OFS. |
| Role-specific RECR orientation | Software engineers; data/computational personnel; community-engagement personnel; consultants; collaborators; volunteers whose work materially affects research | Training tailored to responsibilities, such as data integrity, provenance, confidentiality, secure computing, software/IP, attribution, research records, or reporting concerns. |
| Activity-specific training | Any person engaged in regulated or sponsor-specific activities | Complete additional training required for the activity or award, such as human-subject protections, data/security requirements, or sponsor-mandated RCR instruction. |
| Not routinely covered | Event attendees; interviewees; workshop participants; stakeholders; volunteers performing only non-research logistical tasks | No full RECR curriculum solely because of participation; provide targeted instructions when needed. |

NSF-supported personnel. For NSF awards, OFS shall maintain a plan for appropriate RECR training and oversight for the categories of personnel covered by current NSF requirements, including faculty-equivalent/senior/key personnel supported by NSF to conduct research and any covered students or postdoctoral researchers if OFS supports them. OFS training will include mentor training and mentorship as required by NSF.

NIH/PHS activities. OFS will provide responsible-research education and support appropriate to its activities. When an NIH funding mechanism, funding opportunity, or award specifically requires formal RCR instruction, OFS shall follow the applicable NIH requirements for format, subject matter, participation, duration, and frequency rather than treating this general OFS policy as a substitute for the sponsor-specific instruction plan.

## 15. Training Documentation and Oversight

The RECR Compliance Official is responsible for overseeing implementation of this policy, identifying covered individuals or coordinating those determinations with project leadership, approving appropriate training approaches, and maintaining or arranging maintenance of training records.

OFS shall retain sufficient documentation to verify required training, which may include the individual's name, role, project or award when applicable, training category, training provider/resource, completion date, certificate or acknowledgment when available, and required renewal or refresher date. Training records are internal compliance records and are not ordinarily posted publicly.

## 16. Reporting Questions and Concerns

Questions about this policy or responsible research practices may be directed to compliance@openfreescience.org. Suspected fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism shall be handled under the OFS Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures. Other concerns may be referred to the appropriate OFS policy or institutional process. OFS prohibits retaliation for good-faith reporting or participation in an applicable research-integrity process.

## 17. Relationship to Other OFS Policies

This policy complements, and does not replace, the OFS Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures, Financial Conflict of Interest Policy for NIH/PHS-Funded Research, organizational Conflict of Interest Policy, and other applicable research, data, computing, security, intellectual-property, personnel, or federal-award policies. Where multiple policies apply, OFS shall coordinate the applicable requirements.

## 18. Administration and Amendment

The OFS Board of Directors adopts this policy and may amend it as necessary. The RECR Compliance Official shall periodically review applicable sponsor requirements and recommend revisions when needed. Training materials, forms, curricula, contact information, and administrative procedures consistent with this policy may be updated without amending the policy unless Board action is otherwise required.

## References


- National Science Foundation, Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR), current policy and training requirements.
- NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide, Chapter IX.B, Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research, as applicable to the award.
- National Institutes of Health, Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR), current policy resources.
- NIH NOT-OD-10-019, Update on the Requirement for Instruction in the Responsible Conduct of Research, and NOT-OD-22-055, Updated Guidance: Requirement for Instruction in the Responsible Conduct of Research, when applicable to the funding mechanism.
- HHS Office of Research Integrity, resources on responsible conduct of research and research integrity.


## Board Adoption

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| Approved by | Board of Directors, Open Free Science Inc |
| Date | 09/16/2026 |
| Certification | Secretary: Ming Tang |