Open Free Science Inc

Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures

Policy owner	Open Free Science Inc (OFS)
Adopted	September 16, 2026
Effective	September 16, 2026
Research Integrity Officer (RIO)	Tingting Zhao, Director of Scientific Programs
Research Integrity contact	compliance@openfreescience.org
Alternate RIO	Disinterested director or qualified external individual designated by the Board
Institutional Deciding Official	Disinterested director or other qualified individual designated by the Board for the proceeding

1. Purpose

Open Free Science Inc (OFS) is committed to maintaining the integrity of research and responding appropriately to allegations of research misconduct. This policy establishes procedures for receiving, assessing, inquiring into, investigating, deciding, reporting, and maintaining records concerning allegations of research misconduct.

For research subject to Public Health Service (PHS) requirements, OFS will comply with 42 CFR Part 93, Public Health Service Policies on Research Misconduct. For activities subject to National Science Foundation (NSF) requirements, OFS will comply with 45 CFR Part 689, Research Misconduct, and applicable NSF award requirements. When an agency-specific requirement differs from this policy, OFS shall apply the applicable federal requirement.

2. Scope

This policy applies to research conducted, proposed, reported, or otherwise carried out under the auspices of OFS and to individuals participating in such activities, including employees, officers, investigators, consultants, collaborators, trainees, and other persons acting on behalf of OFS, as applicable.

For PHS-supported activities, this policy applies to the extent specified in 42 CFR Part 93, including applicable research, research training, applications for PHS support, and related research activities. For NSF-supported activities, this policy applies to activities within the scope of 45 CFR Part 689. OFS shall inform persons involved in covered research or applications of this policy and applicable responsibilities.

3. Definition of Research Misconduct

Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results, as those terms are defined by the applicable federal regulation. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

For a finding of research misconduct under PHS requirements, OFS must determine that there was a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community; the misconduct was committed intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly; and the allegation was proven by a preponderance of the evidence. OFS shall apply any additional or different standards required by an agency having jurisdiction over a particular matter.

4. Key Roles

Research Integrity Officer (RIO). The RIO administers this policy. Responsibilities may include receiving allegations, conducting or coordinating initial assessments, securing evidence, providing required notices, maintaining records, identifying qualified reviewers, coordinating inquiries and investigations, communicating with

federal agencies, and implementing institutional procedures. OFS initially designates Tingting Zhao, Director of Scientific Programs, as RIO.

Institutional Deciding Official (DO). When a formal institutional decision is required, a disinterested director or other qualified individual designated by the Board shall serve as Deciding Official. The DO shall review the applicable record and make the institutional determination within the authority assigned by this policy and applicable federal requirements.

Inquiry and Investigation Reviewers. OFS may appoint one or more qualified internal or external individuals to conduct an inquiry or investigation. Reviewers must possess appropriate expertise and must not have unresolved personal, professional, or financial conflicts relevant to the matter.

5. Conflicts of Interest and Recusal

No individual may administer, review, investigate, or make a decision concerning a research misconduct matter when that individual has an unresolved personal, professional, or financial conflict that could impair impartiality.

If the RIO is the respondent, complainant, has a conflict, or otherwise cannot act impartially, the matter shall be referred to an Alternate RIO, who shall be a disinterested OFS director or qualified independent external individual designated by the Board. If a Deciding Official is conflicted, the Board shall designate another disinterested individual. A respondent or complainant may identify potential conflicts involving proposed reviewers; OFS shall consider such concerns before appointments are finalized.

6. Reporting Allegations

Any person may report suspected research misconduct to the RIO at compliance@openfreescience.org or to another OFS officer or director designated to receive such reports. Reports may be made in writing or orally and may be made anonymously. OFS will consider anonymous allegations when sufficient information is available to assess the allegation and identify potential evidence.

If an allegation concerns the RIO, or the RIO otherwise has a conflict, the allegation should be submitted directly to the Alternate RIO or another disinterested OFS officer or director. OFS shall make an alternate reporting contact available upon request and, where appropriate, on its public research-compliance webpage.

An allegation should, when possible, identify the person or activity involved, describe the suspected fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, and identify relevant research records or other evidence. OFS will not require a complainant to prove research misconduct before an allegation is accepted for assessment.

7. Confidentiality and Protection Against Retaliation

OFS shall protect the confidentiality of respondents, complainants, witnesses, research subjects, research records, and other information to the extent required by law and applicable federal regulations. Information concerning a proceeding shall be disclosed only as permitted or required for conducting or overseeing the proceeding, protecting affected interests, or complying with law or federal requirements.

OFS prohibits retaliation against complainants, witnesses, reviewers, or others who participate in good faith in a research misconduct proceeding. OFS shall take reasonable and practical steps to protect individuals who make good-faith allegations or cooperate with proceedings and, when appropriate, to restore the reputation of persons against whom allegations are not substantiated.

8. Initial Assessment

Upon receiving an allegation, the RIO or Alternate RIO shall promptly assess whether the allegation falls within this policy and whether it is sufficiently specific and credible to identify potential evidence of research misconduct. The assessment is not an inquiry or investigation and should not resolve whether misconduct occurred. If the allegation is outside OFS jurisdiction but appears to involve another institution or federal agency, OFS may refer the matter as appropriate.

9. Preservation and Sequestration of Evidence

OFS shall take appropriate steps to secure and preserve research records and other evidence necessary to evaluate an allegation. For PHS matters, OFS shall obtain custody of or otherwise secure applicable research records and evidence consistent with 42 CFR Part 93, including taking appropriate action before or at the time the respondent is notified when required. Additional evidence discovered during a proceeding shall also be secured as necessary. OFS shall maintain an inventory or other adequate documentation of sequestered evidence.

10. Inquiry

When the applicable criteria are met, OFS shall initiate an inquiry to conduct preliminary information gathering and fact-finding and determine whether an investigation is warranted. For a PHS matter, OFS shall make a good-faith effort to notify the respondent in writing at or before the beginning of the inquiry. The inquiry shall be objective and conducted by qualified, impartial persons. Its purpose is not to reach a final determination of research misconduct.

For proceedings governed by the current PHS regulation, OFS shall complete the inquiry, including the required report and opportunity for respondent comment, within 30 days after initiation unless ORI grants an extension or another provision of the regulation applies.

11. Inquiry Report and Decision

OFS shall prepare a written inquiry report containing the information required by the applicable federal regulations. For PHS matters, the report shall include the information required by 42 CFR Part 93, including relevant allegations, PHS support, inquiry participants and expertise, evidence considered and sequestered, procedural history, analyses, and the basis for determining whether an investigation is warranted.

The respondent shall receive the inquiry report and an opportunity to provide written comments as required by the PHS regulation. OFS shall consider and include the comments in the institutional record as required. The appropriate institutional official shall determine whether an investigation is warranted. If an investigation is warranted in a PHS matter, OFS shall provide ORI the required report and information and initiate the investigation within the applicable regulatory periods.

12. Investigation

An investigation is the formal development and examination of the factual record to determine whether research misconduct occurred and, if so, by whom and to what extent. For PHS matters, OFS shall begin the investigation within 30 days after determining that an investigation is warranted and shall notify ORI as required.

OFS shall:

- conduct a thorough, competent, objective, and fair investigation;
- use reviewers with appropriate scientific or technical expertise and no unresolved conflicts;
- examine relevant research records and evidence and pursue significant issues and leads relevant to the allegations;
- provide required notices to the respondent;
- interview the respondent, complainant, and other available persons with relevant information; and
- maintain an adequate institutional record.

For PHS investigations, required interviews shall be recorded and transcribed, and interviewees shall have the opportunity to review and correct transcripts as required by 42 CFR Part 93.

13. Investigation Report and Respondent Review

OFS shall prepare the written investigation report or reports required by the applicable federal rules. The report shall describe the allegations, applicable federal support, policies and procedures followed, evidence reviewed, findings, analysis, and other information required by the applicable agency. Before finalization, OFS shall provide the respondent with the draft investigation report and access to relevant evidence as required by applicable law and provide the required opportunity to submit comments. The final report shall address and include the respondent comments as required.

14. Institutional Decision

The Deciding Official shall review the investigation record and make OFS institutional determination concerning whether research misconduct occurred. The determination shall apply the evidentiary and substantive standards required by the applicable federal regulation. The Deciding Official may accept, reject, or modify conclusions or recommendations of an investigation committee when permitted by applicable requirements but shall document the basis for material differences. OFS may take appropriate administrative or corrective actions independently of a federal agency determination.

15. Time for Completion of Investigation

For PHS matters governed by 42 CFR Part 93, OFS shall complete all aspects of the investigation within 180 days after beginning the investigation, including required reports, respondent review, institutional decision, and transmission of the institutional record to ORI. If OFS cannot complete the proceeding within the applicable period, it shall seek an extension from ORI as required.

16. Notifications to ORI/PHS

OFS shall make all notifications and submissions required by 42 CFR Part 93. These include, as applicable, notification and submission following a determination that an investigation is warranted; notification associated with initiation of an investigation; submission of the final investigation report and institutional record; notifications concerning special circumstances requiring immediate federal attention; and other reports or information requested by ORI. OFS shall cooperate with ORI reviews and provide institutional records, policies, research records, and other materials required by law.

17. NSF-Supported Activities

For allegations involving NSF-supported activities, OFS shall comply with 45 CFR Part 689 and current NSF award requirements. OFS shall notify the NSF Office of Inspector General (OIG) as required, including when OFS determines that an allegation has substance and an investigation is warranted, and promptly when circumstances require immediate federal attention.

OFS shall provide NSF/OIG with reports, records, findings, and other information required under applicable NSF procedures. Where NSF permits OFS to conduct an institutional inquiry or investigation, OFS shall follow applicable NSF requirements and timelines rather than assuming that PHS-specific procedural deadlines govern the NSF matter.

18. Multiple Institutions and Subrecipients

When an allegation involves researchers or activities at more than one institution, OFS shall cooperate with the other institutions and applicable federal agencies to determine an appropriate approach to the proceeding. When OFS issues a subaward or otherwise conducts federally supported research with another organization, the written agreement should address responsibility for handling and reporting research misconduct when appropriate. OFS shall not use a subaward or collaborative arrangement to avoid its own responsibilities under applicable federal requirements.

19. Interim Administrative Actions

At any stage of a proceeding, OFS may take appropriate interim administrative actions to protect federal funds, research participants, research records, the integrity of the research process, or other affected interests. Such actions are administrative and do not constitute a finding of research misconduct. OFS shall notify the applicable federal agency immediately when circumstances requiring federal notification arise.

20. Corrective and Administrative Actions

When research misconduct is found, OFS may take appropriate actions consistent with the individual relationship with OFS and applicable law. Actions may include correction or retraction of research records or publications; removal from a project; modification of responsibilities; enhanced supervision; termination of an agreement or

appointment; recovery or restriction of funds; notification of affected parties; training requirements; or other appropriate measures. OFS shall make required notifications to sponsors, journals, collaborators, research participants, or others when appropriate and legally permitted.

21. Restoration of Reputation

When an allegation is not substantiated, OFS shall undertake reasonable and practical efforts, when appropriate and requested, to protect or restore the reputation of the respondent and others affected by the proceeding. OFS shall also undertake reasonable efforts to protect or restore the position and reputation of good-faith complainants, witnesses, and others who cooperate with the proceeding when appropriate.

22. Institutional Records and Records Retention

OFS shall create and maintain a complete institutional record of research misconduct proceedings as required by applicable federal regulations. The record may include allegations, assessment documentation, research records and other evidence, sequestration records, correspondence, notices, inquiry and investigation reports, interview recordings and transcripts, comments, decisions, agency communications, and administrative actions.

For PHS matters, OFS shall retain the institutional record for the period required by 42 CFR Part 93 and make the record available to ORI upon request. For NSF matters, OFS shall maintain and provide records as required by 45 CFR Part 689 and applicable NSF requirements.

23. Small-Organization Procedures and External Assistance

OFS recognizes that, because of its size, it may not always have sufficient internal personnel who possess the necessary expertise and independence to conduct a research misconduct proceeding. OFS may retain qualified external experts, investigators, counsel, research integrity professionals, or other independent persons to perform functions under this policy, provided OFS retains institutional responsibility for compliance.

For PHS matters, when OFS believes it is too small to conduct a proceeding adequately, OFS may use the small-organization process available under 42 CFR Part 93 and seek assistance from ORI as appropriate.

24. Cooperation with Federal Agencies

All OFS personnel subject to this policy shall cooperate with institutional research misconduct proceedings and with lawful oversight by ORI, NSF OIG, awarding agencies, and other authorized governmental authorities. OFS shall provide records and information required by applicable law and award conditions.

25. Relationship to Other OFS Policies

Research misconduct proceedings are distinct from financial conflict-of-interest review, organizational conflict-of-interest review, employment actions, authorship disputes, peer-review disagreements, data-management issues, and other institutional processes. An allegation or event may, however, require action under more than one OFS policy.

26. Administration and Amendment

The OFS Board of Directors adopts this policy and may amend it as necessary. The Research Integrity Officer shall periodically review applicable federal requirements and recommend revisions when necessary. Administrative forms, contact information, and procedures consistent with this policy may be updated without amending the policy unless Board action is otherwise required.

References

- 42 CFR Part 93 - Public Health Service Policies on Research Misconduct (current rule applicable to institutions beginning January 1, 2026).
- HHS Office of Research Integrity (ORI), Sample Policy & Procedures for Responding to Research Misconduct Allegations and current implementation guidance.
- 45 CFR Part 689 - Research Misconduct, National Science Foundation.

- NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide, Research Misconduct provisions, as applicable to the award.

Board Adoption

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