



August 20, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

For many decades, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and institutions like yours have participated in productive partnerships that greatly advance biomedical science. Scientists at universities and academic medical centers, supported by NIH, have made seminal biomedical discoveries that have led to dramatic improvements in human health. The scientists whose work NIH is proud to help support come from all over this country and the world, bringing rich, diverse perspectives and backgrounds to the biomedical research enterprise.

The NIH-funded biomedical enterprise depends on a competitive system, which, to be successful, must be fair, transparent, and trustworthy.

Unfortunately, threats to the integrity of U.S. biomedical research exist. NIH is aware that some foreign entities have mounted systematic programs to influence NIH researchers and peer reviewers and to take advantage of the long tradition of trust, fairness, and excellence of NIH-supported research activities. This kind of inappropriate influence is not limited to biomedical research; it has been a significant issue for defense and energy research for some time. Three areas of concern have emerged:

1. Diversion of intellectual property (IP) in grant applications or produced by NIH-supported biomedical research to other entities, including other countries;
2. Sharing of confidential information on grant applications by NIH peer reviewers with others, including foreign entities, or otherwise attempting to influence funding decisions; and
3. Failure by some researchers working at NIH-funded institutions in the U.S. to disclose substantial resources from other organizations, including foreign governments, which threatens to distort decisions about the appropriate use of NIH funds.

NIH is working with other government agencies and the broader biomedical research community, including NIH-funded institutions and U.S. university professional organizations, to identify steps that can help mitigate these unacceptable breaches of trust and confidentiality that undermine the integrity of U.S. biomedical research.

These efforts will be supported by a working group of the Advisory Committee to the (NIH) Director that will tap experts in academic research and security to develop robust methods to:

1. Improve accurate reporting of all sources of research support, financial interests, and relevant affiliations;

2. Mitigate the risk to IP security while continuing NIH's long tradition of collaborations with foreign scientists and institutions; and
3. Explore additional steps to protect the integrity of peer review.

Concurrent with these efforts, we are using this opportunity to reach out to you for your help. We recently reminded the community¹ that applicants and awardees must disclose all forms of other support and financial interests, including support coming from foreign governments or other foreign entities. We therefore expect you to work with your faculty and with your administrative staff to make sure that, in accordance with the NIH Grants Policy Statement,² all applications and progress reports include all sources of research support, financial interests, and relevant affiliations.

In addition, in the weeks and months ahead you may be hearing from our Office of Extramural Research (OER) regarding grant administration or oversight questions or requests about specific applications, progress reports, policies, or personnel from, or affecting, your institution. We also expect and encourage your institution to notify us immediately upon identifying new information that affects your institution's applications or awards. Lastly, we encourage you to reach out to an FBI field office to schedule a briefing on this matter. We greatly appreciate your willingness to work closely with OER to address these ongoing concerns.

We thank you in advance for working with us on this serious matter. Should you have questions, please send them to grantsinfo@od.nih.gov.

Sincerely yours,



Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, NIH

¹ NOT-OD-18-160, Financial Conflict of Interest: Investigator Disclosures of Foreign Financial Interests (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-18-160.html>)

² <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/nihgps/index.htm>