

A PRACTICAL GUIDE



A Practical Guide to Implementing Responsible Research Assessment at Research Funding Organizations is designed to support funders of all shapes and sizes to develop and implement responsible research assessment (RRA)-aligned approaches in their funding processes and workflows. Developed by DORA in collaboration with the Global Research Council RRA Working Group, Science Europe, and funders worldwide, it offers practical activities, tools, and examples to support implementation.

Conventional approaches to assessing research and researchers have often relied on the use of a narrow set of metrics, such as publication counts and citations. While useful in some contexts, output-metrics do not capture the full quality, breadth, and impact of scholarly work and therefore present only a partial view of performance and potential.

RRA responds to this by offering an approach built on three core principles: taking a holistic view of contributions and impact; valuing quality over quantity through broader more balanced indicators; and promoting equity¹. By aligning assessment practices with these principles, funders can help strengthen research quality, fairness, and societal impact.

The Guide provides guidance organized in 4 Chapters:

1. Introduction and rationale for RRA

The **rationale for RRA**, its goals and principles, and the importance of funders in driving reform in research assessment practices.

2. Key Activities for embedding RRA

The **key activities** that can provide the foundations for successful implementation of RRA at funding organizations.

3. Key Moments to implement RRA

The **moments and opportunities** to introduce RRA approaches during the research funding lifecycle.

4. Interconnections of RRA

The **interconnections of RRA** with core components of the research system, including research culture, open science, and research ethics and integrity.



DORA works to advance practical and robust approaches to research and researcher assessment globally.

This reference sheet introduces “A Practical Guide to Implementing Responsible Research Assessment at Research Funding Organizations”, which offers guidance and tips for funders seeking to reform their assessment practices.



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¹Curry, S., de Rijcke, S., Hatch, A., Pillay, D. (Gansen), van der Weijden, I., & Wilsdon, J. (2022). The changing role of funders in responsible research assessment: progress, obstacles and the way ahead (RoRI Working Paper No.3). Research on Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.13227914.V2>

KEY ACTIVITIES FOR EMBEDDING RRA



Responsible research assessment (RRA) is an approach built on three core principles: taking a holistic view of contributions and impact; valuing quality over quantity through broader more balanced indicators; and promoting equity¹.

We outline seven activities that can inform and enable RRA at funding organizations. The activities do not need to be followed in order and organizations should focus on the activities that are most appropriate to their needs and context.

1 Engaging the organization leadership

- Make the case for RRA, clearly explaining the benefits of RR and risks of not aligning

2 Developing a strategic vision for RRA

- Link RRA with your organization's mission and values
- Articulate the goals of RRA and how it will benefit the organization

3 Exploring the landscape for RRA

- Understand current internal practices of assessing researchers and research
- Find out what peer organizations (and national and international initiatives) are doing to enhance research assessment

4 Working with communities inside and outside the organization

- Engage staff across teams who are working on RRA-related activities
- Make opportunities for those outside the organization to contribute

5 Mobilizing resources for RRA

- Plan for the resources needed to support RRA interventions early
- Consider small pilot interventions before committing to larger-scale changes

6 Creating strong engagement and communication plans

- Involve communications experts to make sure messaging about RRA is clear and consistent
- Include concrete examples in messaging on RRA to show how it works in practice

7 Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing activities and interventions

- Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions
- Share analyses of what works and what doesn't both internally and externally



RESOURCE

[GRC RRA SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL](#) ↗

Use the tool to assess organizational readiness and opportunities for RRA².



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²Global Research Council Responsible Research Assessment Working Group (GRC RRA WG). GRC self-assessment tool. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.31455505>
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KEY MOMENTS

IN FUNDING AGENCY
RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

ESTABLISHING FUNDING PROGRAMS AND CALLS



How research funding organizations (RFOs) design and advertise their programs influences who applies, what is proposed, and how research quality is assessed. The considerations below offer practical entry points for embedding responsible research assessment (RRA) in funding programs and calls.

1 Setting funding priorities

- Align funding priorities with organizational values and goals
- Engage the intended funding beneficiaries in program design

2 Designing and advertising funding calls

- Advertise calls widely to reach diverse communities beyond established networks
- Set eligibility criteria that do not inadvertently narrow the applicant pool
- Provide sufficient guidance, time and support to enable high-quality applications

3 Designing application processes

- Provide guidance on the funding eligibility, assessment process, criteria for selection, and policies (e.g. AI use, data sharing, open access)
- Keep application processes proportionate. Use a staged process where this can reduce administrative burden, and only ask for the information that is needed at each stage
- Create application forms that provide space for applicants to share the diversity of their experience and achievements (e.g. using Narrative CVs)



RESOURCE

[USING NARRATIVE CVS ↗](#)

Discover DORA's factsheet on using narrative CV to reduce bias in funding decision making¹.



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¹Fritch, R., Hatch, A., Hazlett, H., & Vinkenburg, C. (2021). Using Narrative CVs: Process Optimization and bias mitigation. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.5799414>

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KEY MOMENTS

IN FUNDING AGENCY RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

MAKING FUNDING DECISIONS



Embedding responsible research assessment (RRA) principles in funding decision-making helps to ensure fairness and consistency, while strengthening the credibility of those decisions.

The following considerations can help to underpin RRA-aligned decision making.

1 Recruiting panels and committee members

- Recruit members with diverse expertise and perspectives
- Advertise roles openly to broaden participation beyond established networks
- Use transparent selection criteria, avoiding requirements that may exclude underrepresented groups

2 Providing reviewers' guidance and training

- Clearly define reviewer roles and responsibilities
- Provide guidance on how to interpret application materials (e.g. Narrative CVs)
- Specify any tools or metrics that should not be used (e.g. journal prestige, H-index)
- Provide training to help reviewers to recognize and mitigate bias

3 Designing RRA-aligned decision-making workflows

- Keep processes proportionate and transparent
- Use structured approaches for consistency (e.g. scoring systems, calibration)
- Test out, refine, and share the findings of new approaches

4 Sharing funding decisions with applicants and reviewers

- Provide timely and constructive feedback
- Recognize reviewer contributions and inform them of decisions
- Share summary data on applications and awards where possible



RESOURCE

BALANCED, BROAD, RESPONSIBLE:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR RESEARCH EVALUATORS ↗

Discover DORA's training video for research evaluators, created in partnership with FNR¹.



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¹DORA San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, & Fonds National de la Recherche. (2021). Balanced, broad, responsible: A practical guide for research evaluators. DORA. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15267022>

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IMPLEMENTING RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT AT RFOS:

KEY MOMENTS IN FUNDING AGENCY RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

SETTING GRANT TERMS AND CONDITIONS



Grant terms and conditions (T&Cs) reflect research funding organizations' (RFO) values and define the relationship between funder and grantee. T&Cs aligned with responsible research assessment (RRA) help to forge a partnership with grantees, rather than serving as compliance documents.

The following considerations can help to underpin RRA-aligned grant terms and conditions:



1 Creating grant terms and conditions

- Make T&Cs easy to access and understand (e.g., via website FAQs)
- Describe the organization's expectation of grantees in your T&Cs
- Enable flexibility in T&Cs to accommodate the changes to project and grantee circumstances

2 During the implementation and delivery of a grant

- Provide onboarding training for new grantees
- Make it easy for grantees to keep in touch and adhere to requirements
- Establish communication channels with grantees to uncover any issues early

3 When setting grant reporting requirements

- Define progress reporting expectations and timelines early so grantees can plan effectively
- Keep reporting proportionate: request only information that is needed and draw on existing sources where possible



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KEY MOMENTS

IN FUNDING AGENCY
RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

MONITORING AND EVALUATING GRANTS AND PROGRAMS



Responsible research assessment (RRA)-aligned monitoring and evaluation focuses on capturing information that matters, supporting learning and continuous improvement. The considerations below highlight practical ways to embed RRA in monitoring and evaluation (M&E):

1 Developing evaluation frameworks

- Define and communicate the goals and indicators of success of funding programs upfront
- Be proportionate: focus on what matters and take a balanced, broad view of outputs and outcomes
- Select progress and success indicators that are easy to capture and minimize the burden for both the organization and grantees

2 Monitoring funding data

- Track applications, awards, outputs, and impacts over time to identify trends
- Use benchmarks to provide context and interpret trends
- Share funding data as openly as possible, and in formats that make the data easy to use

3 Developing grant reporting requirements

- Keep reporting timely and proportionate
- Be clear about what information is needed and how it will be used
- Encourage reporting of all results, including null or negative findings

4 Progress reporting during grant delivery

- Use reporting to track progress and identify challenges that you can work with grantees to potentially resolve
- Only request information that you need
- Where possible, enable flexibility in reporting timelines to accommodate changes to project and grantee circumstances

5 Evaluating outputs and impact

- To support learning, share the findings of M&E as openly where possible
- Provide examples of how M&E has informed decision making
- To support continuous improvement, gather feedback on your M&E activity



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KEY MOMENTS

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COMMUNICATING AND ENGAGING WITH YOUR COMMUNITIES



Communicating clearly and engaging consistently with internal and external communities helps responsible research assessment (RRA) become part of a research funding organization's (RFOs) everyday practice and identity.

The considerations below highlight practical ways to align community communication and engagement with RRA.

1 Developing externally facing policies and position statements

- Develop a clear narrative about why RRA is important to your organization and its benefits
- Be consistent in how you talk about RRA across media and materials
- Align all policies and positions with the organization's approach to RRA

2 Internal communication about RRA

- Make opportunities for leaders to discuss the benefits of RRA with colleagues
- Build familiarity with RRA across the organization to embed into organization culture
- Create shared spaces for staff to ask questions and share experiences on RRA

3 Communication about your funding decisions and successes

- Explain how funded projects align with the organization's mission and values
- Share the diversity of grants and grantees that you have funded to provide examples and role models for others
- Take a balanced and broad approach to showcasing the relevance and impact of different kinds of research



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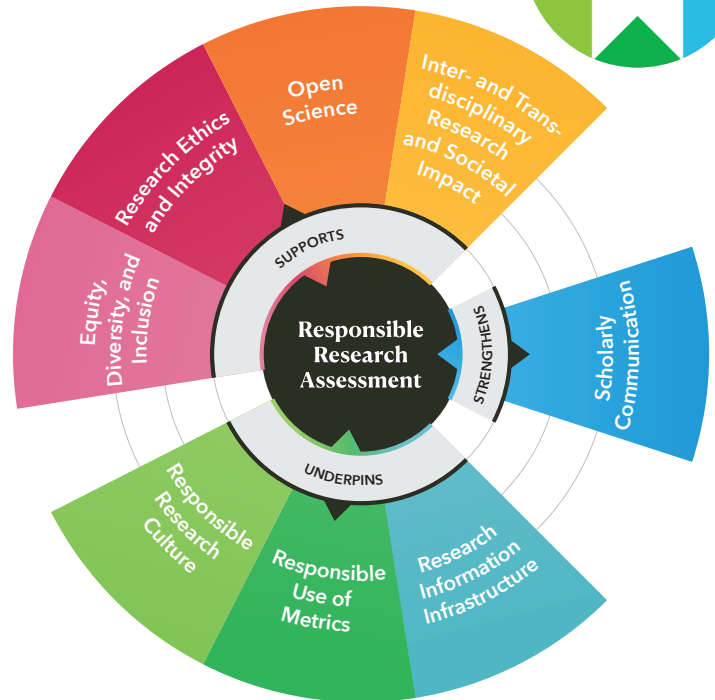
RRA AND ITS PLACE IN THE RESEARCH SYSTEM



Responsible research assessment (RRA) is closely linked to core components such as research culture, open science, research ethics and integrity, and societal impact. It acts as both a lever and an enabler, supporting progress across these areas, while also being shaped by them.

The infographic shows how RRA relates to core components of the research system that underpin, support, and strengthen it, and are, in turn, shaped and enabled by it.

Below, we highlight how implementing RRA contributes to each core component.



- 1. Responsible research culture** recognizes and incentivizes collaboration, integrity, and innovation.
- 2. Responsible use of metrics** balances and broadens approach to research assessment.
- 3. Research information infrastructure** makes diverse contributions discoverable and usable.
- 4. Equity, diversity, and inclusion** recognizes the diversity of contributions and career paths.
- 5. Research ethics and integrity** reduces perverse incentives, focuses on practices that deliver robust research.
- 6. Open science** rewards transparency and the sharing of data and research outputs.
- 7. Inter- and transdisciplinary research and societal impact** values work that crosses boundaries and delivers real-world benefits.
- 8. Scholarly communication** facilitates the sharing of research findings, maximizing the potential for use and reuse.



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