



Discussion Paper for SUPER MoRRI Annual Event 2022

Responsible research funding futures

Financial investment in research and researchers is at the heart of debates about public support for R&I systems and their value for society. The role of research funding organisations (RFOs) is crucial in this regard. As the principal actors distributing competitive funds for science and innovation, RFOs confront a dynamic environment and a constant need to monitor performance and improve outcomes.

Right now, we could argue that research funders are in the hot seat, expected to straddle some critical demands and expectations, including:

- Identify and support the best research.
- Define or operationalise missions to fund research and innovation that will, in the medium and longer-term, contribute to addressing global challenges
- Respond to urgent knowledge-focused crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic
- Address doubts about the legitimacy and authority of science in the face of mounting evidence of the prevalence of questionable research practices (QRPs) and outright fraud
- Support an opening up of research culture to better reflect the diversity of society
- Adopt responsible assessment methods that minimise the use of reductionist metrics, undermine entrenched privilege, and reduce the influence of unconscious and other forms of bias in the awarding of research grants
- Respond to transformative policies and practices, such as open science

The RFO landscape is also increasingly heterogeneous. Large Research Councils and other types of national public funding agencies continue to be prominent and influential, often with strong links to

values of prestige and recognition in scientific communities. Private and public foundations of varying scales and funding objectives, some operating with global reach, are increasingly important actors who collaborate and learn from each other. The autonomy of these organisations to choose their funding targets and set criteria for funding is a crucial source of innovation.

In Europe, the influence of the European Commission's successive framework programmes for R&I funding cannot be underestimated, either. However, neither should we overlook the emerging role of public administrations at the regional level, which are also increasingly setting up and administering their research funding programmes. At this level, funders can more easily match their funding priorities to regional policies and strategies. More importantly, they often support applicants who narrowly missed cut-offs for highly competitive funding at European or national levels. This support can keep research careers alive.

Additionally, numerous initiatives are currently engaging with the challenge of responsible research assessment. The European Commission recently launched a [Report](#) and a [process](#) for an agreement on reforming research assessment, in which research funders are key stakeholders. Science Europe, representing 34 European funders, issued its [Recommendations](#) on research assessment based on consultation with its members and beyond. The Global Research Council group of funders, which has its working group on responsible research assessment, collaborated with the Research on Research Institute on a [Study](#) of the changing role of funders in responsible research assessment. These initiatives build on prior community-driven efforts to improve researchers' assessment, including [DORA](#) and the [Leiden Manifesto](#).

However, while it is important to consider the ways of implementing responsible research assessment processes are relevant, other relevant questions may be raised when shaping responsible funding futures:

- Which voices should be heard in framing research funding priorities?
- What expectations should funders have regarding the transparency and integrity of research methods funded by their grants?
- How can funding instruments be designed to value a broader range of contributions to science and society?
- Which stakeholders should contribute to the design and targeting of funding instruments?
- Should research funders mainly seek to shape research culture through internal processes and procedures, or should they also actively influence grantees and stakeholder organisations?
- Should research funders promote Open Science? How?

These challenges identified above and these questions can open up tensions between the perceived interests of funders' key political and scientific stakeholders, for example, between prioritising scientific excellence or societal impact or between using established forms of scientific reward and recognition and or experimenting with new approaches to valuing contributions to research and innovation.

Furthermore, while facing so many questions and possibilities in approaching responsible practices, funders are forced to prioritise their efforts based on available resources (financial, human, or infrastructure). Limitations call for strategic planning, cumulative prioritisation, and a necessary reflection: when should RFOs operate independently, and when should they focus on addressing gaps they might notice in the broader funding system?

In thinking about the potential for responsible funding futures, we need to be aware that there are no uniform solutions or answers. Every RFO is embedded in a unique set of authority relations with administrative and political actors, and also in stakeholder relations with scientific communities, public sector research organisations, industry, and more. RFOs, therefore, have different opportunities and barriers to advancing responsible funding.

Therefore, the key question for this forum goes beyond 'what is the vision for responsible research funding futures?' But also 'what does that vision look like for my organisation?'

TIME (CEST)	ACTIVITY
10:00 - 10:10	<i>Kick-off by Ralf Lindner (Super MoRRI)</i>
10:10 - 11:10	<i>Stephen Curry - San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment Marta Agostinho - EU-Life James Wilsdon - Research on Research Institute Sean Sapcariu - Luxemburg National Research Fund</i>
11:10 - 11:30	<i>Individual reflections during tea break</i>
11:30 - 12:15	<i>Moderated breakout groups about panellists' themes</i>
12:15 - 13:00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13:00 - 13:15	<i>Richard Woolley (Super MoRRI): Responsibility in Research Funding in Europe</i>
13:15 - 13:50	<i>Moderated discussions and reflections: What now?</i>
13:50 - 14:00	<i>Ingeborg Meijer (Super MoRRI): Outlook</i>

Link to the meeting: [Join Zoom Meeting](#) or dial in via [zoom.us](#) with following details:

Meeting ID: 692 2833 5232

Passcode: 6VuWU*7B